4.2.1 North American Context

In a competitive industrial environment, Canadian companies will need to invest in new technologies requiring a knowledgeable, highly skilled and flexible work force if they are to prosper. Greater access to high quality education and training programs for workers and managers, combined with innovation and new technologies, will help make Canada more competitive in the international marketplace.

The 1997 World Competitiveness Yearbook (Lausanne, Switzerland : International Institute for Management Development) ranks Canada first in terms of higher education enrolment, and fifth in terms of public expenditure on education, indicating that training is being increasingly recognised as a key element of Canada's ability to prosper in the new economy. However, the report does show that Canada trails other countries when comparing levels of corporate training. The report ranks Canada 17th in terms of in-company training, behind Ireland, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Progress is nonetheless being made, as indicated by studies reporting that the Canadian level of corporate training is increasing. A 1993 Conference Board of Canada survey of 275 large to medium sized organisations (David McIntyre, Training and Development 1993 : Policies, Practices and Expenditures, Ottawa : The Conference Board of Canada, 1994) indicates that spending on training in 1993 increased in both absolute and real terms. Average per capita training and development expenditures increased from $659 in 1992 to $849 in 1993. Almost 80 percent of responding organisations indicated that, adjusting for inflation, their training budgets had either remained constant or increased over the previous two years. A 1996 survey of 219 respondents (Jean-Pascal Souque, Focus on Competencies : Training and Development Practices, Expenditures and Trends, Ottawa : The Conference Board of Canada, 1996) reports that training budgets per employee had remained virtually constant since 1993. A large number of respondents (43 percent) expected their training expenditures to increase for the next fiscal year. The strongest signals indicating a readiness to increase commitment to training and development during 1997-98 come from the oil and gas, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, financial and services sectors.

The Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre's 1991 National Training Survey (Ottawa : CLMPC, February 1993) of more than 17 000 Canadian organisations reports that 70 percent of private sector organisations represented in the sample provided