

Adult Learning Act –Discussion Paper

September 10, 2010

Introduction

The Fall of 2011 marks the 10th anniversary of the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL). The past 10 years has seen numerous developments in the area of adult education and literacy. Some recent developments include the integration of employability and essential skills into adult learning programs and the availability of dual crediting for learners who want to work simultaneously on a high school diploma and certification as a continuing care assistant.

Accompanying these developments is an ongoing challenge to improve the literacy and essential skills of many Nova Scotians. From the 2009 Labour Force Survey, we know that approximately 140,000 Nova Scotians aged 25 years and older do not have a high school diploma, and many who do lose ground after they leave school because of limited learning opportunities in the workplace and the community. In addition, 72,000 Nova Scotians have Level I Literacy and 110,000 have Level II Literacy (International Adult Literacy Survey, 2003). This portion of the population has literacy skills lower than those necessary to participate fully in a knowledge-based economy.

We know these challenges are significant in light of what is ahead – when Nova Scotia’s population will be older, smaller and more urban. In addition, our labour productivity is lower than the national average, the majority of new jobs require post-secondary education and we are experiencing skill shortages, particularly in areas requiring college or apprenticeship training. As the province’s population continues to age, it is anticipated that by 2017 retirements from the workforce will exceed youth entrants to the workforce. In addition, marginalized groups such as Aboriginal Peoples, African Nova Scotians, women, immigrants and Persons with Disabilities continue to be underrepresented and/or underemployed in the workforce.

The importance of adult learning is recognized throughout Nova Scotia, Canada and the world. According to Statistics Canada, a 1% increase in our adult literacy scores is associated with an eventual 2.5% increase in labour productivity and a 1.5 % rise in GDP per capita (Coulombe and Tremblay, 2005).

According to the report *Addressing Canada's Literacy: A Cost Benefit Analysis* (Data Angel, 2009), there is considerable benefit to moving Nova Scotians to Level III literacy which is believed to be the minimum level of literacy required to participate in a knowledge-based economy.

The analysis projects that by moving the 72,000 adults in Nova Scotia from Level I to Level III literacy, we would expect the following long-term outcomes:

- Annual incidence of employment increases (up 7%)
- Increased average hourly wages (up \$2.26)
- Increased income tax revenue (up \$28 million)
- Reduction in EI recipients (10,000 less)

By moving the 110,000 adults in Nova Scotia from literacy Level II to Level III, we would expect the following long-term outcomes:

- Annual incidence of employment increases (up 7%)
- Increased average hourly wages (up \$0.96)
- Increased income tax revenue (up \$22 million)
- Reduction in welfare recipients (4,000 less)
- Reduction in EI recipients (4,000 less)

These statistics demonstrate the direct economic and social improvements for Nova Scotia as a result of investments in literacy. We also know that in addition to improving workforce productivity and individuals' employment opportunities, enhanced literacy skills have their own intrinsic value, leading to a greater sense of confidence and engagement in family, community and civic society. Increasing the general level of literacy and essential skills in Nova Scotia will promote the government's priority to make Nova Scotia a place where a culture of lifelong learning is supported by employers, communities and government; a province where every place is a learning place, and everyone a learner.

The Government's Business Plan and Throne Speech (Spring 2010) highlight initiatives to further adult learning. Further, in its 2010 Budget Address the government reiterated its commitment to the development of literacy and essential skills for Nova Scotians.

NSSAL represents a key part of the Nova Scotia adult learning system. The purpose of this Discussion Paper is to invite comment on proposed legislation that will formalize NSSAL's role on the eve of its 10th anniversary, reaffirm the Government's ongoing commitment to adult learning, and stimulate public awareness about the need for and capacity to improve our literacy levels and essential skills in Nova Scotia.

Background

Across Canada, provinces are taking various steps to meet the needs of adult learners. In Manitoba the *Adult Literacy Act* was passed in 2007 to establish the Manitoba Adult Literacy Program and to require the development of a literacy strategy. While there is no similar legislation in other provinces, there do exist various frameworks, strategies and programs to meet the needs of adult learners. For example, Alberta has developed a literacy framework (2008) setting out various strategies to improve literacy levels in that province.

Adult Learning in Nova Scotia

NSSAL is a provincial initiative within the Adult Education Division, Skills and Learning Branch, Department of Labour and Workforce Development, established in 2001. Its main function is to coordinate adult learning educational programs, policies, and services which enable adults, 19 years of age and over, to acquire the literacy/essentials skills, knowledge and/or high school credentials required for successful labour market transitions, access to further learning, and the accomplishment of other personal goals. NSSAL also administers the General Educational Development (GED) which is an international high school equivalency testing program for adults.

NSSAL provides program funding, resources, and adult learning program curricula, and works in partnership with program service delivery organizations such as the community learning organizations, Nova Scotia Community College, Université Sainte-Anne, and regional school boards. Its main goals include to:

- coordinate a continuum of tuition-free adult learning programs in English and French that meet the learning needs of adults from basic literacy to high school graduation
- improve accessibility to the Adult Learning Program within the province and ensure that the learning achieved is recognized and transferable among programs and provinces
- ensure the curriculum meets the needs of learners from diverse communities
- ensure that quality standards for adult learning program delivery are met and that these programs reflect exemplary adult learning principles
- provide adults with a recognized high school credential that will allow them to access further education, training and employment
- provide professional development and resources for those who deliver adult learning programs
- contribute to the development of a skilled, competitive workforce, healthy communities, and a vibrant economy and
- develop a strong, lifelong learning culture

In addition to NSSAL, the Adult Education Division coordinates the delivery of family and seniors' literacy programs in partnership with community learning organizations and other community partners.

Formalizing adult learning in legislation

The proposal to create an act related to adult learning, and in particular NSSAL, is based on the following goals:

- reaffirm the Government's ongoing commitment to adult learning
- formalize NSSAL in law
- address governance and accountability measures to regulate the quality and effectiveness of the adult learning system
- stimulate public awareness about the need for and capacity to improve our literacy levels and essential skills in Nova Scotia

The Department seeks to balance the objective of formalizing NSSAL's role in adult education in an act while also preserving relative flexibility for governance and accountability of the system.

Issues to be addressed in legislation

In addition to recognizing the good work being done by NSSAL, creating legislation is an opportunity to address ways to better the system. The following issues demonstrate this balanced approach that will be taken in the proposed legislation.

A. General

Issue: There is an identified need for a learning culture and system change in Nova Scotia. Individuals, employers, public sector organizations, and government all share responsibility to enhance awareness of the importance of learning, increase participation and success in learning, and provide more pathways for individuals to realize their learning and career goals.

Proposal: In order to support this change through a co-ordinated and consistent approach to adult learning, the Department proposes that the Act identify general principles related to adult learning. For example:

- Adult learning is recognized as a shared responsibility amongst learners and their families, educators, employers and employees, communities, and government
- Increasing levels of literacy contributes to increased labour force participation, improved health outcomes, reduced justice costs, increased parent/child participation in learning, higher participation in community, and social activities, and increased civic engagement
- Adult learning requires multi-faceted, holistic teaching approaches
- There is intrinsic value in and a sense of personal empowerment from learning

- The objective of adult education initiatives is to foster learning and contribute to a learning culture at home, at work and in community – every place is a learning place and everyone is a learner

Discussion Questions:

1. What adult learning principles do you recommend be included in the Act?
2. Why?

B. NSSAL formalized in legislation

Issue: The Canadian Policy Research Network Report *Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System* (June 2006) recommends provincial governments ensure there is an appropriate entity to co-ordinate the development and implementation of an adult education policy framework. For Nova Scotia's adult learning educational programs, policies, and services, NSSAL is that entity. The creation of an act provides an opportunity for the Nova Scotia government to formalize NSSAL's role, to reaffirm its commitment to adult learning, and to raise public awareness about the importance of literacy and essential skills development.

Proposal: The Department proposes including in the legislation a clause establishing NSSAL as the entity responsible for coordinating educational programs for adults who want to upgrade their literacy skills and/or earn their high school diploma.

Discussion Question:

1. What is your response to legislating NSSAL as the entity responsible for coordinating educational programs for adults who want to upgrade their literacy skills and/or earn their high school diploma?

C. Accountability

Issue: One purpose of legislation is to formalize accountability measures for the various stakeholders engaged in a government supported system. For NSSAL, the main players are adult learners, service delivery providers and government. Currently the various participants in the NSSAL system are held accountable through accountability measures including:

- Interim and final annual reports from service providers with statistics about student enrolment, including withdrawals and program completion
- Service providers reporting the number of students registered on their systems
- Student surveys
- Adult Education Coordinator site visits to monitor program implementation

Proposal: The Department proposes enhancing accountability measures within the adult learning system by identifying specific accountability measures for the Minister/Department, NSSAL, service providers, instructors and adult learners within the Act.

For example the Act may address:

- Requiring the Minister to table an Annual Report to the House of Assembly
- Defining learner roles and requirements, for example learner attendance and development of learning plans
- Requiring service providers to maintain records and report to the Department on topics such as learner progress, budget, financial statements, and other documents related to administration.

Discussion Questions:

1. What specific accountability measures do you recommend be included in the Act?
2. Why?

D. Governance, Quality, and Consistency

Issue: For the past 10 years, NSSAL has prided itself on providing quality programming to support adult learners. The creation of legislation is an opportunity to formalize governance, quality and consistency of the system.

Proposal: The Department proposes there will be governance provisions in the Act to formalize NSSAL's role, as well as address the governance of the various players: adult learners, instructors, service

providers, NSSAL, Director of the Department's Adult Education Division, and the Minister. For example the Act may address:

- Requirements for service providers to
 - follow approved curricula and service delivery standards
 - use approved resources
 - assess learner progress on an ongoing basis
- Minimum standards related to instructor qualifications/competencies
- Minimum hours of instruction for learners
- Forms of recognition for learners, such as diploma, level certificates, and recognition of prior learning (RPL)
- Program standards and curricula
- Monitoring and evaluating programs
- Eligibility for funding to deliver programs
- Programming targeted for under-represented groups

Discussion Questions:

1. In order to enhance consistence and quality, what governance provisions do you recommend be included in the Act for each of the players identified above?
2. Why?

E. Citizen and Stakeholder Engagement

Issue: Currently the Department's Adult Education Division staff hold NSSAL partner meetings to consult various stakeholders about topics including programs and policy development and other future direction.

Proposal: The Department is considering options to ensure ongoing citizen and stakeholder engagement.

Discussion Questions:

1. What process(s) would you recommend for ongoing input from citizens and stakeholders to address program and policy development, and other future direction for NSSAL?
2. Who do you recommend be engaged in this process?
3. What, if any, recommendations do you have about the topics for inclusion in this process?

F. What will be addressed in the future?

As set out above, the Department is considering various topics to be addressed in the Act. It is noted that the specific substance of some topics, for example curricula development, program standards, minimum hours of instruction, and the like will be the subject of further consultation as the Department develops its approach to these areas.

How to participate

If you are interested in responding to this paper with your comments, ideas and suggestions, please contact the Adult Education Division of the Department of Labour and Workforce Development by:

- Faxing a letter to Adult Education at (902) 424-1171
- Emailing to Adult Education at CIRTWISM@gov.ns.ca
- Writing to us at:

Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development

Adult Education Division

Department of Labour & Workforce Development

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This Discussion Paper is available on our website at: <http://www.gov.ns.ca/lwd/>.

In order for us to fully consider your comments, please contact us by October 14.

Please note that our summary of the feedback we receive may list the names of individuals and groups who make comments or submissions. Unless comments are marked confidential, we will assume respondents agree to the Department quoting from or referring to comments made.

Respondents should be aware that the Nova Scotia *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* may require us to release information contained in submissions. Therefore, you should not include the names of other parties (such as the names of other adult learners, service providers or instructors) or

any other information from which other parties could be identified, unless their permission has first been obtained. Further, if you, as an individual, want to make a submission or provide comments and you do not want your name and personal information to be made public, you should not include your name or other information, such as an address, by which you could be identified in the main body of the submission.

Thank you for taking the time to participate. Should you have any questions please contact:

Suzanne Cirtwill, Research Assistant, Adult Education Division, Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development at 424-3820 or CIRTWISM@gov.ns.ca

