

Summary of ABC Life Literacy Canada's submission to the Digital Economy Strategy Consultation

July 2010

ABC Life Literacy Canada applauds the Government for undertaking the digital economy consultation in the context of the rapidly changing economic environment and workplace for Canadians. Our submission focuses on the low literacy and numeracy skills of many Canadians – our core areas of knowledge and focus – and our concerns about how this is correlated to low levels of skill and comfort with the digital economy, a reality acknowledged in the consultation paper. We believe that without addressing one, it will be difficult to improve the other.

In the view of ABC Life Literacy Canada, integrating the needs of those Canadians who require assistance in improving their basic literacy and essential skills into the skills component of a digital economy strategy needs to be an important priority. In so doing, the government will make great strides in addressing the challenge of up-skilling Canadians to embrace the opportunity of the digital economy. This will help to ensure that these individuals have the skills and knowledge to contribute to the productivity of our economy.

Recommendations and response

We believe one of the most significant challenges facing the Government of Canada in developing a digital economy strategy will be the need to address the needs of the 42% of Canadians who have low levels of literacy and essential skills; without improving this basic foundation, these Canadians will not be in a position to up-skill and adapt to the changing demands of the workplace, our economy and country.

There is no 'one size fits all' solution to improving digital skills for Canadians. We urge the Government of Canada to ensure its strategy builds on strategic partnerships and collaborations that are responsive to the circumstances of Canada's various jurisdictions, businesses, existing community infrastructure, the workplace and individuals. Many mechanisms are already in place to build on:

- The federal-provincial Labour Market Agreements and Labour Market Development Agreements (LMAs and LMDAs) need to be renewed and strengthened to reflect the priorities of the digital economy skills transformation.
- Embedding literacy, numeracy and essential skills into a suite of programs to address digital skills has the potential for far-reaching effective results. Federal investment will be required to execute such a strategy effectively.
- A digital skills strategy can, and should, build on the strength and capacity of existing community-based literacy agencies. Such programs will need to be adequately invested in.

We also urge the federal government to ensure that clear language be a central element of the communications strategy around the digital economy strategy.

About ABC Life Literacy Canada

ABC Life Literacy Canada is a non-profit organization that inspires Canadians to increase their literacy skills. We mobilize business, government and communities to support lifelong learning and achieve our goals through leadership in programs, communications and partnerships. ABC Life Literacy Canada envisions a Canada where everyone has the skills they need to live a fully engaged life.