



**SERVICES TO BUSINESSES
PROVIDED BY THE EDUCATION NETWORK:
TOWARDS IMPROVED ACCESS
TO COLLECTIVE RESOURCES**

BRIEF TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, RECREATION AND SPORTS

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SUMMARY

The continuous updating of knowledge and skills throughout life plays a central role in an individual's ability to adapt to change. The development of human resources in the workplace is key to this ongoing process, and both the education and employment and training networks have an important responsibility in this regard. Faced with this challenge, and given that adult participation in continuous learning lags behind in Québec, the Conseil deemed it opportune to devote a brief to the education network's response to the needs of businesses and their employees in this area.

In its Brief, *Les services offerts aux entreprises par le réseau de l'éducation : pour un meilleur accès aux ressources collectives*, the Conseil considers this response using a three-fold perspective: an outline of frameworks, a review of the current situation, and an outlook including recommendations to guide the complementary role of the education network in further developing workforce skills in Québec. In preparing the Brief, the Conseil conducted a review of literature to trace the history of services offered by institutions in the education network, and collected various data to learn more and gain a better understanding of how these services are currently meeting the needs of businesses and their employees in the area of continuous learning.

The Conseil observed several inconsistencies between objectives formulated in legal frameworks and the current state of services available to businesses. In examining the delivery of these services, however, it was clear that institutions in the education network are very much present and involved in continuous learning, and have invested considerable effort in this area to deliver a relevant response to the needs of businesses and their employees. That being said, services to businesses in most educational institutions are found on the periphery of regular programs, and this often leads to tensions within these institutions. Stress can also be seen between players in the education and employment and training networks. Collaboration varies from one place to the next, and permanent partnerships are often difficult to establish.

In light of these observations, the Conseil proposes five key approaches to guide initiatives and presents recommendations to both the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport and education players. Before presenting these approaches and recommendations, the Conseil wishes to emphasize that as the offer of continuous learning to businesses and their employees is found at the crossroads of the public and the private, any decision that frames the organization of programs or activities in this regard ultimately rests on the reconciliation of individual and collective interests, with the underlying intent to open up access to continuous learning services for a greater number of businesses (regardless of size) and for a greater number of individuals (regardless of position or status). In this Brief, the Conseil argues that the twin offers of services to businesses and continuous learning to the workforce need to be considered from the

broader perspective of collective benefits, and this calls for the participation of public players, including institutions in the education network.

Approach 1: Asserting a Clear Definition and Promoting a Better Understanding of the Mandate of Institutions in the Education Network

For the Conseil, current legal frameworks do not sufficiently address the offer of services to businesses. Laws do not explicitly define these services nor stipulate specific mandates for educational institutions in this area. School boards and CÉGEPs are not obliged by law to guarantee a response to the needs of businesses; however they do have the jurisdiction to do so. These institutions, with the support of various government programs, have built valuable expertise in this field, and now offer a wide range of services. For their part, universities integrate training courses for professional development within their regular programs leading to certification (attestation, diploma, certificate or degree), in compliance with funding regulations. They also offer—in response to the demands of businesses or organizations, including professional associations—individual training courses for professionals to upgrade their skills. In short, recognition of services to businesses provided by the education system is somewhat paradoxical in nature: While great importance is given to the value of continuous learning in the workforce, legal frameworks are considerably more vague as to educational institutions' role in their response to the needs of businesses. The Conseil therefore recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport to more clearly assert the mandate of the education network in the area of services to businesses and promote a better understanding of it.

Approach 2: Maintaining the Offer of Services to Businesses By Ensuring the Appropriate Resources

During the Conseil's dialogue with education players, several of the latter raised the issue of appropriate funding of services to businesses, emphasizing that the conditions in which they exercise their mandate often make it a challenge to maintain these services. Indeed, despite being part of an educational institution and partners with the education network, these services do not always benefit from the necessary support. In fact, many education players must frequently work within the confines of limited access to resources in their respective institutions: While services to businesses are available, they often operate with a scaled-down staff, and are susceptible to market conditions such as fluctuations in demand, private funding and government support programs. In such a context, the delivery of services to businesses becomes vulnerable, and must manage with a reduced ability to maintain these services and ensure access to publicly-funded resources in the education network. Moreover, continuity of services to businesses demands that resources be available and allocated in a timely fashion in order to develop and maintain

the expertise of these services. The Conseil therefore recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport to allocate the appropriate resources to maintain the offer of services to businesses.

Approach 3: Maximizing the Institutional Spinoffs of Services to Businesses Within Each Institution in the Education Network

Ties between services to businesses and their respective institutions are not well supported, raising the question of the benefits of this relationship. Indeed, better internal synergies could produce positive spin-offs in the educational initiatives of each institution. However, due to constraints that affect their timely response to the specific needs of their clients, services to businesses are often required to work alone. Institutional forums are practically non-existent, and the transfer of expertise from services to businesses to the regular education sector seldom occurs. The challenge of bringing these two sectors together is considerable, given their respective operational constraints and organizational culture. Yet partnership remains possible despite these limitations, provided additional effort is invested toward this end. To maximize institutional spinoffs, the Conseil recommends to institutions in the education network to include in their strategic plans specific provisions on the offer of services to businesses. Moreover, it recommends these institutions encourage forums for the sharing of professional expertise between services to businesses and the regular education sector. It also recommends exploring new mechanisms that promote an optimal deployment of resources and personnel in educational institutions.

Approach 4: Forging Stronger Ties and Sharing Expertise in the Education Network for an Optimal Delivery of Services to Businesses

The Conseil has noted two contrasting trends in the organization of services to businesses: on the one hand, a forging of partnerships between these services and on the other, a strong competition among institutions in the training market. From a review of research findings in this area, it appears that the second trend is more prevalent. Nevertheless, forging stronger collaborative ties (both between institutions at the same level of instruction and between those at different levels) and strengthening those already in place remain both short- and long-term goals for the education network, as this could foster greater accessibility to training and intrinsically strengthen the delivery of services to businesses and organizations. The sharing of expertise may take on different forms, and it is the responsibility of institutions in the education network to agree upon the type of partnership. The Conseil therefore recommends to institutions in the education network to agree upon the optimal use of their respective areas of expertise and adjust the network's delivery of services accordingly to a given region.

Approach 5: Supporting Partnership Between Public Players In Promoting a Culture of Continuous Learning

For the Conseil, strong partnerships between the education and the employment and training networks continues to be a major challenge, particularly for school boards and colleges. For its part, the Government of Québec has redoubled its efforts in recent years to promote a culture of continuous learning in the workplace. It implemented mechanisms to formalize training practices, providing businesses with tools that better consider the constraints of their organizations. Employers can now draw on a wide range of services made available to them by both the private and public sectors in addition to their own internal resources to optimally develop their human resources. Yet the gamut of employees' continuous learning needs remains wide, making it crucial for public bodies to reaffirm the importance of national, regional, local and sectoral partnership in establishing complementary areas of expertise between public players and the education and employment and training networks. To this end, the Conseil recommends to the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport, in tandem with the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity and in collaboration with the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail, to support partnership between the education and employment and training networks in the delivery of services to business.

In conclusion, the Conseil deems it important that the response to the needs of businesses and their employees be recognized and seen as an integral part of the mission of educational institutions, and that the appropriate resources be allocated to this end. It thus invites all institutions in the education and employment and training networks to forge stronger partnerships and work towards building a true culture of continuous learning, one that ensures services that meet the needs of both the individual and the workforce in today's world of rapidly-evolving knowledge and skills.

The complete text of the brief: **Les services offerts aux entreprises par le réseau de l'éducation : pour un meilleur accès aux ressources collectives** (in French) is available on the web site of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (www.cse.gouv.qc.ca); it is also possible to request a copy by telephone at (418) 643-3851.