

First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project (FIMESIP)

Case Study:

NORTHERN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION (NABE) PROGRAM CASE STUDY REPORT

Yukon College, Yukon



Canada

This project is funded by the
Government of Canada's Office
of Literacy and Essential Skills



About the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project (FIMESIP)

The Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) in partnership with Employment and Social Development Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami developed a comprehensive inventory of Essential Skills initiatives aimed at First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The *First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES Inventory Project's (FIMESIP)* goal is to better understand the state of practice with respect to Essential Skills initiatives tailored to First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth and adults living in diverse communities throughout Canada and to share these insights and lessons learned with a larger community of practice. Through FIMESIP, we have identified factors ("markers" of promising practice) that contribute to the initiatives success. **The markers, inventory, case studies and evaluation toolkit are available at: www.fimesip.ca.**

CCDF gratefully acknowledges the support of the Steering Committee and Working Group of FIMESIP:

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FIMESIP Case Study: Northern Adult Basic Education (NABE) Yukon College, Yukon

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The FIMESIP project was funded by Employment and Social Development Canada.



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Social Development Canada

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Développement social Canada

Acknowledgements

CCDF gratefully acknowledges: Tosh Southwick (Director of First Nation Initiatives and Academic and Skill Development, School of Academic and Skill Development: Yukon College), Erica Bourdon (Instructor/Coordinator, ABE, School of Academic and Skill Development: Yukon College), Brad Martin (Chair, School of Community Education and Development: Yukon College), Eldo Enns (Instructor, Dawson City Tr'ondëk Hätr'unohtän Zho Campus :Yukon College), Lue Maxwell Coordinator (Dawson City Tr'ondëk Hätr'unohtän Zho Campus: Yukon College), Spruce Gerberding (Instructor/Journeyman Carpenter, Trades Exploration Program, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nations: Dawson City), John Mitchell (Project Coordinator/ Community Liaison, Trades Exploration Program, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nations: Dawson City), Gabe Ellis (Event Coordinator, NABE Symposium, School of Academic and Skill Development, Former Coordinator/Instructor, Pelly Crossing Hets'edän Kú' Campus: Yukon College), and John Robinson (Hotel Division Manager, Northern Vision Development LP, Whitehorse for talking the time to talk with us about this initiative.

About the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)

CCDF is a non-profit organization that works to advance career services and the capacity of the profession to respond with empathy and skill to their clients and stakeholders in an ever-changing work environment. CCDF is a nationally and internationally recognized leader in the field of career development and works on a range of projects and specializes in areas of:

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Overview

Northern Adult Basic Education (NABE) program is a pan-territorial initiative funded by the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor). CanNor is providing the Yukon with over \$4.2 million over five years (2011 – 2016) to enhance adult basic education programming. Yukon's NABE program is delivered by Yukon College through the School of Academic and Skill Development and the School of Community Education and Development and programming takes place at the College's Community Campuses throughout the territory.

The initiative is meant to help working-age adult Northerners in Yukon communities acquire the Essential Skills (ES) and occupational skills needed to participate in the labour market. Yukon College works in partnership with relevant stakeholders in the Yukon, including First Nations governments, local non-government organizations (NGOs), literacy service providers and employers to introduce training that is relevant and accessible to local community employment needs and builds needed skill sets with participants. The Yukon College NABE program model offers a new approach to partnership building, sustainability, capacity building and curriculum development that embeds ES into occupation-specific training.

Each of the 14 First Nations communities involved in the NABE program is represented on Yukon College's President's Advisory Council on First Nations Initiatives (PACFN). This high profile council plays an important role by providing strategic direction to Yukon College and assisting it with its goal of increasing the effectiveness of programs and services. It also helps to support Yukon First Nations strengthen capacity by building training programs – the infrastructure and human resources – for delivery in communities. PACFN played a leadership role in the development of Yukon College's NABE program model, identifying education/training priorities based on social and economic needs of their communities and creating a framework for the program. The framework outlined five key areas of program concentration (see Methodology/Approach).

Highlighting these five key areas, NABE staff began working with local communities to develop course ideas. The College worked in partnership with First Nations Education Directors, local Community Campus staff and the Community Campus Committee (CCC) – a volunteer advisory body made up of community members. The College hosted a number of community events/consultations to talk about what the NABE program could offer and how it could help to meet the

community's education/training and employment needs. Once the training/employment needs of the community were identified, relevant industry, education and First Nations partners were invited to participate in the development and delivery of community-based programming through in-kind and financial contributions.

Community-based course delivery began in the Fall of 2012 and over 12 programs have been developed and over 19 courses delivered to date. The overall goal and measure of success at the end of the five-year program is to see Yukon students move into advanced education and employment and to see a decrease in the number of citizens, particularly young men, relying on social assistance.

To ensure that the training is sustained beyond the five year funding commitment from CanNor, NABE has secured local funding partners, increased the professional capacity of local community members and staff and will gradually transfer responsibility to Community Campus staff for the continued development and delivery of community-based programming.

Essential Skills Focus

“What we have done is integrate the nine ES using a topic or subject of interest to the local community that meets their needs to increase those transferable skills,”

Tosh Southwick, Director of First Nations Initiatives,
School of Academic and Skill Development,
Yukon College

All nine [ES](#) are integrated throughout NABE program curriculum. Learners receive focused, hands-on instruction in those ES associated with the specific Trade or occupation for which they are being trained. In the Dawson NABE program, Numeracy is taught both in the classroom and on the work-site as it applies to Trades such as carpentry and plumbing. In the Pelly Crossing NABE program, Reading Text and Document Use skills are developed through the use of authentic workplace materials used by Heavy Equipment Operators working in mining.

One Instructor noted that, for students to be engaged in the course, they have to be able to see how the learning is related to their life/career goals and how the learning directly relates to tasks in the workplace. “It's always impressed me how much better people learn if there is an immediate application,” Eldo Enns, Dawson Campus Instructor.

While Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs delivered by Yukon College in the past were teaching many of the same skills, Instructors were not aware of formally referring to them as ES. NABE, with its focus on ES training, has helped to build on and enhance the teaching of these types of skills. Rather being taught as a standalone course, such as a math course, ES are taught through a relevant subject matter focus (Heavy Equipment Operation, Multimedia, etc.). Instructors state that this approach has strengthening learner engagement and retention.

Objectives

The purpose of NABE is to help working-age adult Northerners acquire basic education skills needed to participate in and/or access additional training to enter the labour market. The five-year funding program is intended to increase the capacity of Yukon College's community campuses across the territory to deliver improved adult basic education in their local communities and to help meet the needs of adults who are lacking basic education, including workplace ES.

There are other key objectives related to the Yukon's College NABE program. Tosh Southwick stated that it is important the program meets the needs of all First Nations partners in a respectful and collaborative way and that the program help First Nations people on the road to self-determination by "giving them knowledge and empowering them with skills."

According to Southwick, another important goal is to support program sustainably by building both community and college capacity and creating resources and a program framework that will remain after funding has ended. The College hopes to transfer their NABE programming to communities across the Yukon and to share their models with other NABE programs across the Northern territories. "Whatever we are doing needs to leave a legacy," Southwick says.

In terms of participant outcomes, the program's goals are to:

- Demonstrate improvement in workplace ES and safety awareness;
- Perform job-related tasks in work placements, volunteer placements and/or specific programs;
- Solve workplace Numeracy problems using basic mathematics and science skills;
- Demonstrate effective literacy skills through Reading Text, Writing and Oral Communication;

- Create and organize a vocational and/or personal portfolio; and,
- Demonstrate increased confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Promising Practice (Keys to Success)

Methodology/Approach

"The NABE program is a model of partnership... our role is not to decide or push or make assumptions on what the community needs. We are there in a partnership role to assist the community,"

Tosh Southwick

The Yukon College NABE model for program development was built on the foundation of a true partnership with First Nations communities. Southwick states that traditionally academic institutions tell the community what they need educationally, what is being offered and what the learning is going to look like. NABE allowed Yukon College the resources to take a more collaborative approach. The College was there as a partner to ask the First Nations communities what they needed, specifically around ABE and to work with the First Nations communities from the beginning to develop the NABE initiative based on those needs.

Consultations began with the PACFN. Priority areas identified through these consultations were to:

- Include Life Skills in ABE programming;
- Create a student success course that deals with individual learning barriers;
- Have additional skills training for employment that reflect the local labour market and interests of the community;
- Review and revise some college preparation programming to enhance community access and student retention; and,
- Provide culturally relevant assessments.

Based on these priority areas, five key areas of project concentration were outlined:

- Assessment and Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR);
- Life Skills;
- Case Management;
- Skills for Employment; and,
- College Preparation.

NABE then partnered directly with local communities. Staff from NABE and the School of Community Education and Development (the School responsible for community campuses) held community-based consultations in each of the 14 communities meeting with local First Nations representatives, Community Campus staff and the Community Campus Committee to assess their needs. Highlighting the five key program areas, NABE staff began working with local communities in developing course ideas. “When the idea comes from the community, something magical happens. The entire community gets involved....the entire community is behind the participants,” Tosh Southwick.

With these key areas in mind, each of the 14 communities identified needed training programs and Community Campus Coordinators submitted program proposals to NABE and the School of Community Education and Development. Potential programs needed to be new, reflect the priority areas outlined by PACFNI, be linked to ES, lead to real jobs, be feasible and come within budget.

In the first year of the initiative, eight community-based programs were selected for creation and delivery. While NABE provided up to 70% of the funding, Community Campus Coordinators needed to create partnerships within the community to support the remaining costs. The Community Campuses and their community members rose to the challenge. Currently, local programming represents a variety of partners: local First Nations governments, local businesses, industry, NGOs, territorial government agencies and other educational institutions. These partnerships provide a range of supports including: financial and in-kind contributions, on-the-job training, authentic workplace materials, training delivery sites, training equipment, drug and alcohol assessments, work search services and participants’ transportation and meals.

Southwick states that the key to engaging and getting partner buy-in is taking a balanced and flexible approach to partnerships. There is no prescribed set of roles or responsibilities for community or industry partners. “We didn’t go to industry with a preconceived: ‘you need to submit this much’ ...It was more like this is the project we’ve got; we’re looking to see if you want to partner and how.... It is about allowing partners to come in where they think they can.” These local partnerships are a fundamental component of the NABE program model and are crucial to program sustainability and capacity building.

Through the NABE program, local Community Campus staff are gaining experience and being provided profession development in program planning, partnership development, community capacity building, fundraising, ES facilitation, curriculum development, proposal writing and budgeting. Over the next few years, NABE

will gradually decrease its percentage of core funding to community-based programs as local Community Campuses and their partners take on more of the financial responsibility for the delivery of local programming, with NABE providing materials and curricula.

A critical part of the community-based programming is community capacity building. In Dawson’s Trades Exploration Program, participants are training in carpentry, plumbing and electrical by building two additional community cabins on Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nations land. These cabins are used freely by Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nations members as a place of retreat on the land. The First Nations partners are providing the on-site training facility, the building materials and the two on-site Trades’ Instructors. One of the Trades Instructors is an expert retired journeyman, who is mentoring the younger Trades Instructors who will then continue on as a trainer with the First Nations and the College. Participants in the program will have an opportunity to continue learning new skills and possibly be hired to complete another future project. One of these future projects is the conversion of a Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nations non-operational fish plant to a meat handling and cold storage facility for First Nations hunters and families.

“We [Yukon College] have worked hard to say we are going to put our money in places where we can build up resources that will still be there after this funding is gone. ... When we talk about building capacity across the college, it only makes sense that we put it in the communities as well,”

Tosh Southwick.

Structure of the Program

The NABE initiative supports the delivery of a variety of programs taking place in rural/remote First Nations communities throughout the Yukon Territory. The programs share certain characteristics: they are community-based, all involve partnerships, embed ES into the curriculum, include the development of life skills and provide direct links to employment. However each program is unique to the labour market and learning needs of their specific community. In 2012, six communities ran courses ranging from ES for Multimedia careers to ES for Cultural Arts careers. Today, every Community Campus, with the exception of one, has had at least one NABE-sponsored program. It is hoped that this intake level continues.

Information about programming is sent out from the PACFN to all 14 First Nations communities and through the Community Campuses. Given that programs are run on-site in the community and involve community partners, promotion is done through word-of-mouth, posters, community networks and announcements at community events. In many communities, First Nations participants are recruited, screened and referred to programming in collaboration with local First Nations employment services.

Typically courses run between 6-25 weeks and include up to 12 students. Classroom time is combined with work-site training. In Dawson's 12-week Trades Exploration Program, participants spend the first three weeks in the classroom learning life skills and Applied Math and earn their occupation certificates in First Aid, WHIMS, etc. The next nine weeks are spent on a work-site learning Trade skills and applying their ES to real job tasks with one-day a week back in the classroom for further Trades related instruction. The program is structured this way so, if a participant is unable to complete the entire program he/she would leave with some basic skills, some information on Trades careers and industry-related tickets and certificates.

While core funding from NABE helps to support a percentage of the program budget, it is necessary to find other partners to assist with the costs associated with delivery of the community program. One Campus Coordinator stated that core funding was essential in helping to gain partner buy-in and leveraging financial contributions. "This NABE funding really encouraged the partnership funding," said Gabe Ellis, NABE ES Instructor.

Through existing networks and strong community relationships, the Campus Coordinator/Instructor establishes partnerships with local First Nations, employers and other relevant associations, institutions and organizations needed to ensure the delivery of the various components of the program. In Pelly Crossing, a community of about 300, the Heavy Equipment Operator (HEO) Program involved 10 different partnerships in the delivery of a \$300,000 (in-cash and in-kind contribution) training program. Partners included Yukon College, the University of Alaska who supplied Instructors and Selkirk First Nations who were financial contributors. Other partners included Capstone Mining-Minto, Yukon Mine Training Association, Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, Yukon Workers Compensation Board, Yukon Alcohol and Drugs Services, Pelly Construction and the Pelly/Carmacks Training Fund. The diversity of partnerships, such as those for the Pelly Crossing NABE program, allows small remote hamlets to bring advanced occupational training that has resulted in employment for members of these communities.

Content of the Program

The NABE program is based on community need and participant interest. ES are embedded in curriculum that is relevant and of interest to the learner.

Skills for Employment: HEO is an example of one of the NABE programs that has been developed for the Selkirk First Nations community in Pelly Crossing. The course is offered over 15 weeks and divided into two main parts: 175 hours of ES instruction and 175 hours of hands-on equipment use in a mining work-site. The ES are integrated into course materials and through diverse teaching strategies. For example, in the HEO training program students use new technologies such as iPads to complete Trades-related math lessons and in-class course activities. Students receive Life Skills training (e.g., time management, home safety, team building, financial literacy, family and personal wellness, confidence-building, goal Setting and assessing barriers) as well as training in a variety of appropriate Trade-specific certifications (e.g. WHMIS Training, First Aid, Transport of Dangerous Goods and Confined Space).

The approach to students is holistic, taking into account their life experience and family life. Student well-being a priority during training. Campus staff and community partners attempt to ensure that any personal challenges that may interfere with the student's success are addressed. Students are given living allowances throughout the training and, in some communities, they are supplied with housing. One-to-one support is built into program time where students can discuss any issues they have with program staff. Transportation to the program is supplied to ensure students attend and are on time.

Before NABE programs start, the students are asked to identify any barriers that would get in the way of their learning. Community Campus staff work with students to address these personal needs and, as a result of these discussions in the Pelly Crossing program, students have access to morning transportation and are provided with healthy breakfast options when they arrive.

Delivery of the Program

One of the keys to the success of NABE is the delivery of programming on-site in the community.

Historically, participants would have to leave their community and families, travelling to Whitehorse or further south to receive occupational training. For the most part, advanced Trades or technical training is too expensive to bring to remote Northern

communities and, if required, a physical training mobile unit is provided. Having training in the community means participants are able to access more training opportunities while receiving the support and resources from community partners, friends and family they need to sustain commitment.

In the case of the Pelly Crossing HEO program, the community insisted that the program provide the best in technical training and be delivered on-site. As a result, program students were able to train on the latest technologically-advanced equipment including a multi-million dollar CAT simulator with experienced Instructors right in their own community. Community members were so invested in the program they would visit the training site to talk to and encourage students.

Local employers/industry also benefit from partnering with these on-site training programs. In the North, there is a shortage of skilled workers. Because of this, many local employers have to pay to fly in skilled workers from other parts of Canada -- a costly and, often, short-term solution to their labour force needs. Hiring locally allows employers to know who they are hiring, what training they have received. This reduces employee turnaround. By sponsoring the training and hiring locally, employers are investing directly in the community. And, having these employers as partners in the NABE program means participants have direct links to the workplace, often providing students real job opportunities once they graduate from the program. One week after completion of the HEO program, five of the 10 students were hired: four as HEO at the local mine and one as an Instructor at the local Community Campus.

Programs are not only community-centred, but also learner-centred. They often target “high risk” students who have not experienced much success with traditional schooling. Student engagement is a priority and staff use Indigenous learning principles such as experiential, hands-on, skills application instruction. “Marrying ES with hands-on skills is key... Folks can see the real financial and career pay-off of learning.” Gabe Ellis

“This program has good instructors. They can connect with everyone. They are able to get you listening and talking.”

Participant, Trades Exploration Program,
Dawson Community Campus.

One of the keys to success in the NABE program is the Community Campus staff. In many cases, a single community

campus staff plays numerous roles: he/she provides instruction, offers student services, acts as student advisors, builds community partnerships, liaises and communicates with the community on an on-going basis, develops curriculum, writes proposals and creates budgets. As community members, he/she are visible and accessible to the broader community. Many have lived in the local community for years and have strong long-term relationships with community members and an intimate understanding of the community’s and their students’ educational needs. While learner-centred, Instructors present as casual and very approachable. They self-describe as both “warm and demanding” and note that having a trusting, respectful relationship with their students is at the heart of their teaching.

Community Campus ES Instructors are ABE professionals and are required to have a Bachelor of Education and 5-10 years’ of ABE instruction experience. Some also have additional training in Guiding Circles (an Aboriginal career development program), program advising and curriculum development. In addition, a number of ES Instructors have obtained the Douglas College certification as ES Facilitators. Trades Skills Instructors are required to have apprenticeship journeyman certification, 5-10 years’ of Trades work experience and some experience teaching adults.

As Southwick relates, “Our Community Campus staff are some of the most creative and motivating staff... they’re our inspiration and we really lean on them because they are the ones that are out there and have those close connections with the communities.”

Outcomes of the Program

An external consultant has recently been contracted to begin developing an assessment model which will be integrated into the initiative and each course delivery.

Currently, each program tracks the measureable outcomes required by their funders including, registration, attendance and completion rates. This tracking has shown that, from the beginning of course delivery in 2012 to the end of 2013, a total of 71 students have participated in programming with an 80% completion rate.

Students’ skill attainment is also assessed through task rubrics, pre and post-ES testing such as TOWES, earning of occupational certifications, on-site training and in-class tests. In addition,

participants are contacted three months after completing the program to see if they have obtained employment or enrolled in further training or education.

Beyond the measurable objectives that funders have set out, the program has:

- Empowered students;
- Offered a creative method of learning that is inclusive of every type of learner;
- Built participant confidence and self-esteem;
- Enhanced communication skills;
- Strengthened and created new community and employer partnerships;
- Built community capacity;
- Built capacity at the community campus level;
- Introduced new programming and training opportunities to rural/remote and fly-in communities;
- Created a transferable framework for the development and delivery of integrated ES training;
- Created program training curriculum and resources; and,
- Increased community spirit.

“Our funders essentially want to see high numbers of registration, who got the jobs and high completion rates; that’s all we need to deliver to funders and we do that. But, through those numbers on a piece of paper you can’t see the students’ smiles and dreams come true.”

Gabe Ellis, Instructor, Pelly Crossing Community Campus

Transferability

The NABE program has built a model of collaboration and partnership that has been applied and adapted to meet the needs of communities across the Yukon. In addition, it has established a framework for ES training and created curriculum and materials for a variety of skills training programs. These models and resources are meant to be transferable, shared between Yukon College Community Campuses as well as other NABE initiatives in Nunavut and Northwest Territories.

“The idea isn’t for this just to be a one-off. We want to build some sustainability. When we look to the model, what we produce at the end of it is a framework we can give to our partners [Nunavut Arctic College and Aurora College] and say, “Here’s a framework that you can use and modify for each one of your communities”.

Southwick.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

The key lessons learned are:

- **Patience and timing are required:** Program scheduling needs to be flexible and responsive to the community’s needs and schedules (e.g., Don’t plan programming in March when participants have a real chance of being hired in April);
- **Communication:** There must be a clear understanding of the project goals, objectives, funding requirements and responsibilities between all community partners. Partners need to come together on a regular basis to discuss challenges and how to work together to overcome them. This can be accomplished through regular face-to-face meetings or through email correspondence;
- **Create a community of practice:** Facilitate ways to generate discussion between staff in different communities and share curriculum and methods of evaluation;
- **Demands of the program are rigorous (but, in a good way):** Initially, there was a steep learning curve amongst campus staff in each of the communities. NABE introduced a new approach to curriculum development, budgeting, reporting and evaluation that the local campuses had not previously encountered. Campus staff needed proper training and support to implement the program and time to do advance planning to help ensure project success;
- **The right instructor means everything:** Instructors need to have high levels of subject expertise and the ability to build rapport with students and community members. Instructors need to know their students and meet them where they are. Having a consistent instructor helps to build and maintain these relationships;
- **Community buy-in is essential:** You need the support and buy-in from the First Nations community and employers for the program to be successful and meet its goals;

- **Evaluation:** Ensure that an evaluation framework to capture both qualitative and quantitative data is developed and implemented at the outset of the program. Collecting data based on the funders' requirements is the bare minimum. Data should be collected that will show the full range of success indicators and build an evidence-base for the program.
- **Funding:** There are numerous funding sources, each with their own criteria. Meeting multiple funding criteria (often conflicting) can be extremely time-consuming for staff and leave students without sufficient financial support to pursue or complete training. Funding bodies need to be more flexible or uniform in policy and/or criteria requirements.

Benefits

“Programs like this are critical to the future of the people who most need it... the people the education system has failed the most. This is the kind of program that is starting to address that.”

Eldo Enns, Instructor,
Dawson Community Campus

The benefits of the NABE initiative include:

- **Participants:**
 - Increased training opportunities in their community;
 - Increased employment and long-term career opportunities in their community;
 - Enhanced ES;
 - Occupational-related certification;
 - Career exploration opportunities;
 - Transferable skills development;
 - Life skills development;
 - Increased self-confidence and self-efficacy;
 - Increased coping skills and resiliency; and,
 - Belief in self and in their future success.
- **Communities/Families:**
 - Decision-making in local educational and training programs;
 - Increased community capacity;
 - Increased and expanded training and employment opportunities for community members; and,
 - A network of local public/private partnerships to build sustainability of this programming.

- **Employers:**
 - Increased partnership opportunities that have the potential to build their business and allow them to have access to a well-trained labour force from the communities in which they operate;
 - Increased participation in the decisions that guide local education and training programs; and,
 - Participation in training programs tailored to their occupational needs.
- **Educators**
 - Professional development for Community Campus staff;
 - Increased connections between community campuses and the creation of a community of practice;
 - Opportunity to deliver new types of educational/training programs;
 - Development of new curriculum and resources; and,
 - Transferable model of partnership building and ES-integrated curriculum.

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Resources

TOWES Assessment Tools: <http://www.towes.com/en/products--services/towes-assessments/towes-assessments>

HRSDC Essential Skill Assessment Tool: <http://www.edsc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/les/tools/index.shtml>