



**March 23, 2006**

***Towards more flexibility in upgrading levels of education:***  
A new training and upgrading initiative

**The problematic**

The Cree Mineral Exploration Board (the CMEB) is committed to creating training opportunities to further its mission of developing mineral exploration and activities in Eeyou Istchee. These opportunities include training and job assistance programs. In order to assist the people of Eeyou Istchee, the CMEB keeps up with developments in the mining industry and its employment needs. Through its training and job assistance programs, the CMEB aims to assist people with employment in the mining industry and ensure that the content and standards of training continue to meet the needs for employment.

Employment in the mining industry in the region is still in the exploration sector, but the need for qualified open pit and underground miners and mining site operations is fast approaching. The mining industry recognizes and accepts its responsibility to facilitate raising skill levels of its workforce. Unfortunately, some qualifications required by workers are beyond the abilities of the CMEB and the industry to provide. Admission requirements for training in mineral extraction and mining site operation include Secondary School Diploma or have at least Secondary III level courses. Many of our people do not meet these requirements. Due to this fact, a primary need is for people to upgrade their education level and obtain their Secondary School Diploma. This is a prerequisite for people to access specialized training and to become professionals in the mining industry and in the geosciences. Access to learning is a cornerstone to efforts for promoting more and better jobs for the Cree people in general.

The CMEB has created training courses which include upgrading through the integration of workplace and off-the-job training components. Upgrading education levels is included in the off-the-job part of the course. The CMEB will require collaboration from the Cree School Board in delivering these components. These courses are open to people from all Cree communities, both members of the present mineral exploration workforce and people seeking employment in the industry.

Work in the mineral exploration and mining industry is seasonal, with workers recalled to the workplace after periods of exploration inactivity. The periods of inactivity are usually during spring ice break-up and fall freeze-up and between phases of exploration. The



training needs of workers in the mining industry are discontinuous and often difficult to anticipate by the very nature of seasonal work.

The Cree School Board allows people to upgrade their education level and skills through the Continuing Education program (SABTUAN). The CSB program has set entry and exit date from August to April. The rigid entry/exit dates of the CSB Continuing Education program as it stands causes time flow problems for people employed in the mining industry and as a consequence, these workers cannot upgrade their education.

The CMEB can buy the distance education (SOFAD) books from school board other than the CSB, but the CMEB would like the collaboration of the CSB to purchase the SOFAD books and officially record exam scores/grades to ensure that students obtain recognized qualifications.

## **General solution**

Training systems must adapt to changing forms of work organization and respond to social objectives. There has to be wider opportunities for people to acquire new or to upgrade existing skills and knowledge to meet changing demands of the labour markets.

CSB needs to implement a system or program which will open widespread opportunities for adults, whether employed or not, to increase or upgrade their education, skills and knowledge at any time. This program will respond to new imperatives and offer flexible, demand driven ways of acquiring skills and competencies.

The CMEB proposes that the CSB adapts the upgrading program into a flexible learning system able to offer modular courses on open entry/exit schedules all year round. By increasing flexibility in training and general upgrading provision, the CSB, as a training provider, will improve the relevance of education and training systems and will have a training concept and delivery mode based on the needs of an important part of the population pool.

The CMEB also urges the CSB to establish partnerships and collaborative arrangements between different actors, including the CMEB, to promote and deliver flexible system of learning.

### **Centre-based flexible learning**

Flexible learning is the delivery of a predetermined study program to a group of individuals usually on a single site, in a manner that provides options regarding time, content and speed of progress. This mode of delivery provides a responsive approach to the learning needs of particular labour market groups and offers solutions for continued learning.



In flexible training, programs are task based instead of time based; they are designed in the form of interchangeable modules, sequence and time.

By placing more emphasis on flexibility, training systems will respond effectively to many current demands for skill development, specifically:

- Diversifying ways of and for acquiring recognized qualifications, increasing learning opportunities for people unable to use conventional methods of education and training, and optimizing available training potential;
- Arranging training programs which match concrete employment needs.

Flexible delivery of learning is characterized by:

- Flexibility in entry and points of exit;
- Access to appropriate learning resources;
- Appropriate learner support systems.
- Curriculum designs such that students can obtain their Secondary School Diploma.

The immediate benefits of flexible learning systems are:

- Time efficiency;
- Self-paced learning, providing for individual learning differences;
- Flexible access to training resources;
- Consistency of quality of materials and instruction;
- Standardization of training outcomes.

Flexible centre-based learning systems provide access to study materials, a space in which to study and tutorial support. Such systems serve a particular locality. Students can upgrade at times convenient for them, study without the distractions of home or work, socialize with others studying similar subjects, obtain immediate advice on study problems from generalist tutors who can help a wide variety of students.

### **The CSB**

SABTUAN uses the SOFAD process for general upgrading. In addition, the appropriate performance indicators are already in place. The SOFAD books have exams that are recognized by the MEQ (MELS – Ministère de l'Éducation, loisir et sport). This process is well suited to a flexible learning system. The courses are in modular form; each module being a book. The modular organization of training is based on the principle of giving the trainee the ability to carry out a certain competence and the possibility of accumulating skills and knowledge until he/she receives a recognized qualification. The time factor is of secondary importance.

The CSB could sell the SOFAD books to the CMEB as need arises for mineral exploration/mining workers in all communities.



Consequences to CSB:

- Teaching staff;
- Availability of space, time and resources for the increase in adult part-time students.

In order to implement a flexible delivery of learning/training, the CSB needs adequate numbers of skilled staff to plan, manage and implement flexible delivery approaches. The CSB can collaborate with partners (such as the CMEB) to this effect.

The CMEB and the Cree Nation of Mistissini (Economic Development Department) have submitted projects to the Cree Human Resources Department for funding to deliver upgrading through a system of flexible learning. If these projects are approved for funding, money will be available to cover the cost of providing additional teachers and purchasing SOFAD books.

## **Conclusion**

Education and initial training provide people with a foundation of employability, continuous training and upgrading of education level and skills gives them the means to maintain it over their working lives. The demand for improvement of skills and work-related competencies is an objective of both employers aiming at raising productivity and competitiveness, and of employees seeking employment security, better career prospects and higher wages. In order to assist both employers and workers in the mining and mineral exploration employment zones, the Cree Mineral Exploration Board and the Cree Nation of Mistissini have developed training and upgrading courses.

The Continuing Education program (SABTUAN) of the Cree School Board is the best institution for the delivery of education upgrading, but the set entry/exit dates and limited timeframe limits access to its services for the mining/mineral exploration workforce and prevents workers from upgrading their education level and skills. To try to solve these problems, the CMEB proposes that SABTUAN adopts a centre-based flexible learning system with an open entry/exit approach.

A flexible learning system will solve time or scheduling problems facing workers. This system will allow for continuity of study during off work periods and workers will be able to progressively reach higher levels in general subjects to obtain recognized qualifications (Secondary School Diploma) while continuing to manage employment commitments. By satisfying the training needs of members of the community and its workforce, the internal training potential of SABTUAN will also be optimized.