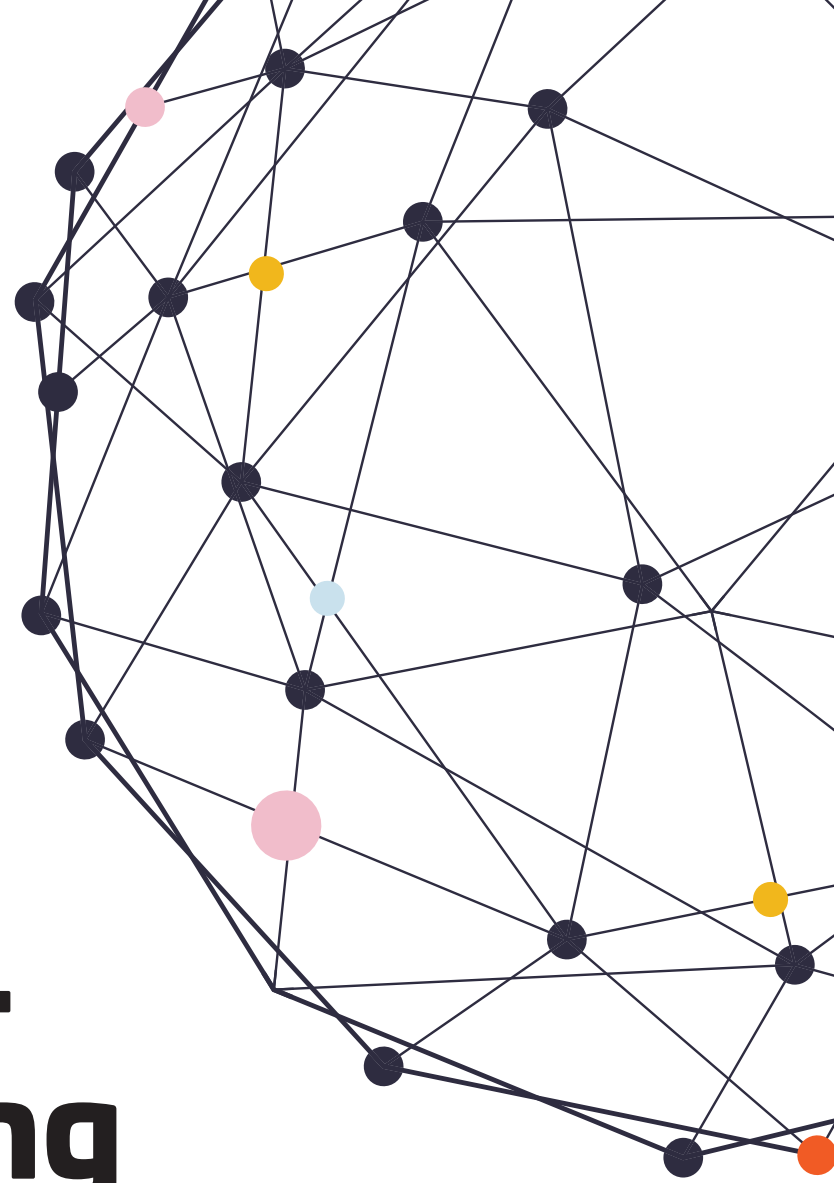




Employment and
Social Development Canada

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Canada – A Learning Nation

**A Skilled, Agile Workforce
Ready to Shape the Future**

Future Skills Council
November 2020

Canada 

**Canada – A Learning Nation: a Skilled, Agile Workforce
Ready to Shape the Future**

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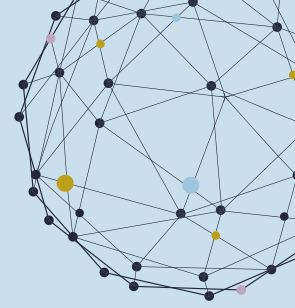
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Future Skills Council Members

Denise Amyot	President and CEO, Colleges and Institutes Canada
Jeremy Auger	Chief Strategy Officer, D2L
Judy Fairburn	Board Director, Calgary Economic Development
Thierry Karsenti	Ph.D., Canada Research Chair on Technology and Education, University of Montréal
Amanda Kilabuk	Executive Director, Tungasuvvingat Inuit
Lisa Langevin	Director, Equity and Engagement, Industry Training Authority
Mike Luff	National Representative, Canadian Labour Congress
Dr. Alexander (Sandy) MacDonald	President and CEO, Holland College
Gladys Okine Ahovi	Executive Lead, Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity
Melissa Sariffodeen	CEO and Co-Founder, Canada Learning Code
Kerry Smith	Senior Director, Manitoba Métis Federation
Dana Spurrell	Assistant Deputy Minister, Workforce Development, Labour and Immigration, Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Provincial/Territorial Co-Chair of the Forum of Labour Market Ministers Senior Officials Table
David Ticoll	Chair, National Stakeholder Advisory Panel, Labour Market Information Council
Valerie Walker	CEO, Business + Higher Education Roundtable
Rachel Wernick	Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Skills and Employment Branch, Employment and Social Development Canada, Government of Canada

Former Future Skills Council Members who contributed to this report

Dr. Paulette Tremblay former CEO, Assembly of First Nations

Michelle Snow Assistant Deputy Minister, Workforce Development, Labour and Immigration, Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and former Provincial/Territorial Co-Chair, Forum of Labour Market Ministers Senior Officials Table



Executive Summary

In a context of rapid and unprecedented change, no single individual or organization can predict the future. As the Future Skills Advisory Council to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, we were given the mandate to look beyond the here and now. To imagine how transformative changes will shape a Canada that will be different from our past and present. Our task is to bring forward advice on emerging workforce and skills issues and trends that will better position jobseekers, workers and employers to seize opportunities into the future.

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has triggered an economic crisis of epic proportions. It has accelerated the scope and pace of change beyond what any of us could have anticipated. In addition, it has brought to the forefront the systemic barriers that many people continue to face such as Black and other racialized individuals, Indigenous Peoples, women, and persons with disabilities. It is driving questions about how we will build back stronger and ensure that recovery will address systemic discrimination and instill diversity, inclusivity and equity by design. Now more than ever – we must be forward thinking, open to doing things differently and we must be nimble and agile and act quickly to adapt and adjust.

During the pandemic, we have seen people and organizations across sectors rally and work together like never before – focused on the common good. As we accelerate momentum to reanimate and rebuild the economy locally, regionally and nationally, we will need to maintain our resolve. We will need to stand together and ensure that we leave no one behind. This is a turning point for our country and we are all called to action to shape a brighter future by working together.

Our Vision for Canada: A Learning Nation

In the face of change, we have seen Canada show its character as a learning nation. Public, private, labour and not-for-profit organizations have risen to the challenge to pivot quickly to meet rapidly shifting needs and demands. This reinforces for us that, as we imagine a future that will be different in innumerable ways, Canada must continue to build a learning nation.

Canada's diverse population includes First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples, official language duality and regional differences. A learning nation as we see it, is people who share a common understanding that to achieve prosperity for individuals, households and communities, we must prioritize learning throughout our lives. It is integral in a context of rapid and continuous change and flux to ensure economic competitiveness and sustainability.

We envision a Canada in which people can access the right information at the right time to make informed decisions. Where learning is accessible and new approaches are deployed to meet changing demands. Where skills are valued and recognized because workers demonstrate competency and proficiency to get the job done. As a learning nation, individuals are well supported to achieve their personal goals and potential. Lastly, we envision Canada showcasing breakout leadership in which we seize emerging opportunities by fostering inclusivity to drive innovation.

The report outlines five key priorities for building a learning nation, including specific recommendations for action:

Priority 1 **Helping Canadians make informed choices**

Provide access to relevant, reliable and timely labour market information and tools so that all Canadians can make informed learning and training decisions

Priority 2 **Equality of opportunity for lifelong learning**

Promote, enable and support learning throughout Canadians' lives, in particular by removing structural and systemic barriers to participation

Priority 3 **Skills development to support Indigenous self-determination**

Enable First Nation, Inuit and Métis learning and skills development based on a commitment to reconciliation and self-determination

Priority 4 **New and innovative approaches to skills development and validation**

Promote, enable and validate skills development and training in all their diverse forms

Priority 5 **Skills development for sustainable futures**

Develop a skilled workforce capable of adopting new technologies and business models while ensuring the well-being of communities and society



Each of us alone cannot achieve this vision. We will need to work together to ensure that everyone has access to the tools, resources and supports needed to move forward. Some of the recommendations emphasize where Canada can build on approaches that are already generating strong results. Others take clear aim at areas where there is a need for new ways of thinking and doing right now, to address fundamental barriers to success for many people.






Preface

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to engage as Council members with people from different sectors, geographic and demographic diversity, subject matter expertise and lived experiences. This diversity of perspectives is reflected in both the membership of the Council, the people we engage with on an ongoing basis, and the content of this report.

It is not an easy task to identify trends and priorities of pan-Canadian significance. The opportunities and challenges presented to Canada are as diverse as the people we meet. Workers in the oil and gas sector are worried, more than ever, about their future and how they will develop the skills needed for good quality jobs to support their families. The same applies to workers in sectors undergoing significant adjustments, such as people whose families have lived for generations along coastlines and want to continue to make their living out on the water. Workers in social and caregiving sectors providing vital services to vulnerable populations are concerned about the sustainability of work conditions and opportunities for development and growth in their professions. And Indigenous leaders, entrepreneurs, and workers are carving a new path forward through self-determination to seize new opportunities in growth sectors.

As we engaged across the country, and met as a Council to share what we were hearing, recurring themes emerged that cut across sectors, demographics, and geography. What we heard as the most pressing areas for action now, to enable us to take advantage of emerging opportunities over the next ten years, has shaped the priorities that are presented in this report.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the situation and accelerated the need to act more quickly. It has shown how those from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups have been disproportionately affected by the public health and economic crisis. There is a need in Canada to redesign and restructure systems in ways that recognize and address the unique needs of Black and Indigenous peoples, women and persons with disabilities. Action on these priorities will ensure Canada has a workforce that is ready to benefit from the future economy and the future of work.



In this way, the diverse perspectives and recommendations in this report will inform priorities set by the Government of Canada. However, while the Government of Canada can demonstrate leadership on the priorities and recommendations we have made, it cannot, and should not, do it alone. To best prepare Canadians to make smooth transitions into the future of work in the coming decade, we will all need to do our part – including employers of all sectors and sizes, labour, education and training providers, not-for-profit organizations and all levels of government. As a Council, we recognize that we must play a leadership role in mobilizing action. This will be our focus going forward – to help broker connections across sectors around identified priorities and to generate solutions to take action.

We offer Canadians, governments and organizations nationwide this report to consider how we can start to improve our economic prospects into the next ten years. We have highlighted what we can do to ensure we have a skilled workforce by strengthening Canada as a learning nation for the benefit of all.



Introduction


Disruptive Global Change Can Mean Opportunities for Canadians

We live in a complex global environment characterized by rapid technological innovation, climate change and unforeseen events. Unanticipated and unprecedented changes require us to adapt quickly, to think and do things differently, and to be nimble and responsive. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided us with many highly visible examples. From new protocols introduced into public health practices requiring workers to adapt quickly for their health and safety and for the care of their patients. Small businesses needing to deploy new business lines and practices to survive. Governments needing to introduce new public services with ease and agility at a pace never imagined possible before.

This presents both opportunities and challenges for employers, jobseekers and workers. As tasks change, jobs require more and different skills than in years past. The very nature of work and learning is evolving. This is why this report sets out a vision for Canada as a learning nation – to foster a skilled, agile workforce ready to shape the future.

Canadians recognize these fundamental shifts. They want the skills and capacities necessary to make the most of new opportunities and to adapt to change, and they want to be treated fairly as labour market participants. While all countries face these challenges, Canada is well placed to show global leadership in adapting to change and in closing gaps rather than allowing them to widen.

- People in Canada are well educated, and we have a skilled labour force – even if we need to do much more to get ready for the changes ahead.
- A variety of supports are in place to help people adapt to workplace and skill changes – even if they need to be rethought to respond to new realities.
- We recognize and value this country’s diversity – even if there are many gaps to close for those who face systemic and other barriers to inclusion and success.
- The commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is creating a shared path forward – while recognizing the enduring legacy of colonization.



Since the beginning of our work as the Future Skills Council, we have considered the big questions about how best to open doors to skills and learning for everyone in this country. We have analyzed the issues that we believe to be most important for moving forward in the weeks and months ahead and over the next ten years – and given the speed of change, there is no time to waste.

Canada and Canadians Can Succeed – By Taking Action Now

In addition to extensive engagement, the priorities and recommendations in this report are informed by evidence and analysis from across governments, from experts and from other bodies, including the Advisory Council on Economic Growth. We analyzed foresight models for changing world of work and examined research on skills and learning from Canadian and international sources.

We engaged with our networks and experts both domestically and internationally to seek perspectives on how innovation is affecting communities and people in different ways across the country. That feedback, and our experiences, have confirmed for us that there are many good ideas out there. We do not need to re-invent the wheel. There are organizations across all sectors that have innovative ideas, including agile entrepreneurial solutions, on ways to tackle important challenges, as well as proven practices we can scale up. But we also recognize that there is much more to do in some areas.

Moving forward, every sector in Canada has a role to play – no single organization or institution has all the solutions and we must work together across all sectors to succeed and to ensure all benefit.

This report puts forward a shared vision for how to make Canada a learning nation, backed up by concrete areas where action should be taken across sectors. We look forward to playing our role in working with partners across Canada to realize this vision.

A network diagram consisting of several nodes (circles) connected by lines. The nodes are colored in dark blue, orange, and yellow. One node is a large yellow circle, while others are smaller. The lines connect these nodes in a web-like structure.

Priority 1

Provide access to relevant, reliable and timely labour market information and tools so that all Canadians can make informed learning and training decisions

Imagine Canada in 10 years, when every Canadian has easy access to high-quality information about jobs, skills and learning opportunities that is personalized to their specific situation. The parents of a 15-year-old in Nunavut, the 45-year-old Toronto worker who just moved to Canada, the Sherbrooke employer looking to grow their business and the Red Deer college administrator who wants to offer programs that help students get jobs quickly. Each can easily find the right data and tools to help them reach goals that are as individual as they are.

Canadians need reliable, timely and accessible labour market information (LMI) to make workplace, training, career and employment decisions based on sound evidence. Valuable work is already taking place to improve LMI to meet current and emerging demands – but data quality is just the start. There is an opportunity to use the same technologies that are reshaping workplaces to improve the quality, relevance and accessibility of LMI. How do we use the best data collection, aggregation and analysis techniques to capture and interpret information and bring it together? How do we get the best evidence on emerging and future skill needs to guide informed actions by all stakeholders? Answering these questions will help get LMI in line with the change curve reshaping jobs, skills and learning.

The best LMI is only of value when people can find and use it easily. Canada is not there yet. It is essential to create tools that organize LMI in user-oriented ways, so people can find precisely what they want as simply as possible – without information overload. LMI users have varying needs and ways in which they use information. Be it jobseekers doing a job search or exploring career changes through to skills training providers modifying programs to keep up with changing on-the-job expectations. Just as different actors, including service providers and other institutions, must ask what users want – the right technologies must be used to ensure that LMI tools make it simple for anyone to get customized content tailored to their specific situations.

Recommendations

1.1 Leverage innovative technologies to ensure all Canadians can access and navigate learning and training options

World class LMI will require tools that are recognized globally for helping people, training providers and organizations make informed choices about learning and work. Those tools must be responsive to users no matter where they are, no matter what barriers they may face. They must provide individuals, employers and training providers with the right information, credible and relevant, at the right time, when they need to make career and job decisions. This implies tools that can provide evidence-based foresight on the future prospects of specific occupations and skills. Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic reinforce the need for such tools in helping individuals and organizations make informed decisions. These tools could track potentially impacted occupations, skills transition profiling, rapid deployment capability for employment shocks and evidence-based priority setting for upskilling programs.

We need to leverage data science, artificial intelligence and other new technologies to aggregate and analyze large data sets. These advances have tremendous potential to structure and deliver LMI that meets the diverse needs of Canadians, employers and training providers. Looking forward, LMI tools would make it easy for people to enter information on their skills, experience, interests, goals and personal characteristics. These tools would then generate personalized, credible pathways for learning, skills development and employment opportunities. Everyone would be able to make the most of changing opportunities throughout their working lives. This would be possible as all Canadians would have ready access to, among other things, information on available jobs and their skill requirements, compensation, training options, tax credits, as well as access to government programs and services.

Delivering these results will demand full attention to the user experience. Recent years have seen significant growth in behavioural insights and methodologies that personalize technologies and make them truly responsive. Success will not only involve new tools and technology, we can also draw on the wealth of expertise held by Canada's career counselling professionals.

Action Area In Summary

- **Automate personalized training plans:** Leverage innovative technologies to create a platform that makes it easier for individuals to generate personalized training plans that link jobs and skills profiles to training options and related supports.

1.2 Produce quality information on the skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow

The essence of a future-focused approach to labour market information is the information itself. People are asking if LMI is giving us what we need to understand and act on skills gaps and mismatches that continue to emerge in a changing economy. We have heard from many employers about skills they need, but cannot find, to drive an innovation economy. LMI needs to shift from a focus on occupations, tasks and credentials to a more comprehensive focus that includes the skills required to be successful as jobs continue to change. LMI needs to have an increased focus on the specific skills required to be successful at work given that things can differ from one work setting to the next.

Supported by the Labour Market Information Council, governments and information providers are responding to demands from jobseekers, workers and employers to provide a more skills-focused approach. There is potential for further action, including through the Future Skills Centre, to test new models with technology experts who can contribute to building a platform for collecting, analyzing and disseminating labour market information with a focus on in demand skills. Leading-edge information-gathering, aggregation and analytics technologies could be used to accelerate the production and quality of this information necessary for individuals to make informed decisions.

Industry, employers as well as education and training providers and career counselling professionals, will need to be actively involved. Just as they are driving new demands in the workplace based on innovations being generated, adopted and scaled enterprise-wide, they have to be at the table helping to define their business needs and skills requirements. Labour has long played a strong intermediary role and can continue to be a broker in helping to build bridges between defining workplace demands and skills development. Through a dedicated, collaborative effort, there is every reason that Canada can generate LMI innovations that are world class.

Employers also tell us they need workers with foundational skills such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, creativity and problem solving in occupations across all sectors of the economy. They see these skills as integral for productivity and well-functioning workplaces. Some organizations have been

using or adapting the federal government’s Essential Skills Framework (currently being renewed) to describe these transferable skills. There is also increasing recognition that social and emotional skills will be important in workplaces being reshaped by new technologies and tools. While some call these “soft skills”, we see them as durable skills that are central to helping people pivot, transition and succeed from one opportunity to the next, even if they are among the hardest skills to develop proficiency in. LMI needs to develop consistent, evidence-based, measurable definitions for the various transferable skills. Government, working with all sectors, could lead efforts to establish a framework to name, define and promote these skills. This will set a base for assessment and skills development approaches that help Canadians adapt to changing workplace demands and make smoother transitions into new opportunities.

Action Area In Summary

- **Increase skills focus in collection, analysis and dissemination of labour market information (LMI):** Leverage leading-edge technologies to generate LMI that has a greater emphasis on skills profiles related to new and emerging job opportunities.
- **Strengthen stakeholder engagement in LMI design and production:** Encourage and support greater participation of industry, employers, career counselling professionals and labour in clarifying evolving information needs and emerging skills requirements.
- **Establish a common framework for transferable skills:** Governments, working with all sectors, could lead efforts to establish a framework to name, define and promote the skills people need to seize emerging opportunities across most occupations and sectors (e.g.: problem solving, communication, etc.). Collaboration amongst governments could be supported through the Forum of Labour Market Ministers.

1.3 Disseminate skills information to those who develop and provide training and advice to Canadians

Education and training providers, employment and career counselling professionals, and workforce development professionals are fundamental contributors to a learning nation. They need access to quality skills and labour market information to develop curriculum and to provide advice to students, parents, jobseekers and workers about education and training options. These organizations and individuals are increasingly expected to create new programs and services to stay at the forefront of changing labour markets, while at the same time ensuring that existing programs keep up. These efforts require significant investments, including in innovative technologies. Reliable, timely LMI is critical to guiding how they provide quality programs and services that support individuals to make successful career and skills development choices. In addition to designing and implementing new programs, education and training providers need to contribute not only to the production of LMI through skills assessment and development but also to the dissemination of LMI to the users who need it.

Building on our previous recommendations, we encourage all governments, the Labour Market Information Council, Future Skills Centre and other partners, such as Statistics Canada, to strengthen their shared work. Their collaboration should notably focus on disseminating labour market and skills information that is relevant and easily accessible to education, training and counselling providers. This will allow these professionals to plan and run programs and services in line with shifting skills demands. Umbrella organizations such as industry and sector associations also play a key role and need the resources and supports to help translate labour market information into discrete, easy to use products that meet the needs of their respective constituencies. Collaborative discussions among colleges, polytechnics, universities, other training providers and employers are advantageous for the development of learning and training that meet changing labour market needs. More robust mechanisms for these exchanges could be established to support strategic thinking around medium and long-term trends related to sector growth and evolution, technology implementation, and the supply and demand for skills.

Action Area In Summary

- **Enable Canadians to make informed skills related decisions:** Leverage innovative technologies to create accessible information resources for jobseekers, workers, employers, career counselling professionals and government officials to make informed decisions about careers, skills acquisition, workforce development and economic development.
- **Improve dissemination of labour market information:** Increase focus on disseminating relevant, timely and accessible LMI, particularly skills information, to education, training and counselling providers.
- **Create content tailored to different audiences:** Translate LMI into easy to use products that are value-added for different groups (e.g.: students, job seekers, education and training providers, employment counselors, employers, parents, etc.).





Priority 2

Promote, enable and support learning throughout Canadians' lives, in particular by removing structural and systemic barriers to participation

Imagine Canada in 10 years, when all Canadians are able to set their learning and work goals with confidence. The Halifax youth leaving the foster care system, the Windsor assembly line worker who wants a promotion, the employer in the Beauce region who needs to attract and keep skilled workers and a territorial community agency serving people with disabilities. Each can easily find and pursue what they need for their distinct learning, skills and employment priorities.

Canada is not a land of “one size fits all” solutions. We are far too diverse for that kind of approach. Today, we see that diversity in the widely different tools and opportunities that individuals can bring to a changing work and skills environment. While many of us may be able to seize opportunities as our economy and workplaces change, others are affected by situations and challenges in our daily lives that weigh on our ability to respond effectively to change. Unforeseen events, such as the COVID-19 crisis, can exacerbate these challenges and create new ones, making it more difficult for some Canadians to access the labour market as they would want and need to. The evidence is clear that many groups are under-represented in growth occupations and have faced discrimination in their pursuits of opportunities and attempts to make use of existing programs, services and supports. A strong and prosperous Canada is one that demands and actively seeks to disassemble structural and systemic barriers, including overt discrimination and unconscious bias, to ensure that Canada lives up to its espoused values of a just and inclusive society.

We are seeing increasing changes as our economy and technology evolve to generate more “gig economy jobs” where work is more fluid and new working arrangements develop alongside traditional long-term employer employee relationships. These changes in working arrangements allow Canadians to find flexible work schedules that correspond to their needs. But, at the same time, we need to ensure that these arrangements do not exacerbate the existing gaps or create new gaps in terms of labour market outcomes.

The evidence is also showing that organizations that embrace diversity, be it geographic, demographic, inter-disciplinary teams, lived experience, etc. all strengthen the performance of an organization. To be competitive in global marketplaces, Canada has huge strength to draw from by embracing our diversity – this benefits individuals, communities and our nation.

To become a learning nation – ready to make the most of future developments and positioned to adapt to rapid change – governments, employers, labour, education and training providers, non-profit organizations and other partners need to be alert to barriers to workplace success for individuals. A future-focused approach to learning and skills challenges must include full commitment to tapping into the potential of the diversity in our labour market. According to a recent survey, 98% of Canadians agree that access to lifelong learning at all ages is important.¹ We need more substantial efforts to bring down barriers to lifelong learning and success, so everyone has full and fair access to those opportunities at all stages of their working lives, no matter who and where they are.

Recommendations

2.1 Improve targeted supports for under-represented groups to develop skills needed to succeed

Not all of us see room for ourselves in Canada's world of work. The evidence points to different labour market results for members of specific groups in Canadian society. Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, and Black and other racialized individuals continue to be under-represented in the labour market or demonstrate the presence of employment and skills development barriers.² While we focus specifically on the representation, skills and employment issues relating to Indigenous Peoples under the next priority, the points below are also broadly relevant to them in the context of the shared challenges in building a learning nation.

- Racialized individuals make up a disproportionate share of the working poor. For example, 63% of Toronto's working poor are racialized. In addition, working immigrants tend to do less well economically than the non-immigrant population.³ University educated recent immigrants have an employment rate of 71.5% compared to 90.1% for their Canadian-born counterparts.
- Persons with disabilities face systemic and structural barriers to labour market participation. In 2017, about 59% of working-age adults with disabilities were employed compared to around 80% of those without disabilities, even as technologies that enable workplaces to be adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities create new opportunities.⁴
- Certain jobs have a marked predominance by gender. For example, women disproportionately hold the service sector and administrative jobs, such as cashiers and clerical, that are now being automated at a rapid pace. Men still hold a disproportionate share of skilled trade occupations, which are both well paid and expected to be in demand well into the foreseeable future. Men with a high school diploma or less are more likely to be overrepresented in sectors at risk of decline. For example, between 2000 and 2015, due to the decline of the manufacturing sector, there has been a reduction of full-time employment rates and real wages for men, especially less educated ones.⁵

- Youth are seeing relatively fewer of the lower-skilled jobs that provide entry-level work experience. Gaps between the skills they may be gaining through post-secondary education and the jobs they get after graduation raise questions about the return on their investments.

In response, our Council recommends that employment and skills development programs, services and supports be explicitly designed to be inclusive and address the distinct barriers and circumstances of under-represented groups. These programs, services and supports should also link them more clearly with skills and work most likely to be in demand. As new ways of working are introduced, employers and education and training institutions should be proactive in their approaches to supporting workers and learners to develop the skills needed into the future and to support transitions into new opportunities. Governments, education and training institutions and employers could work collaboratively to identify how to support recruitment, training and retention of under-represented groups. This could include inclusive skills development initiatives tailored to meet the specific circumstances of distinct groups.

The untapped potential of Canadians who face barriers now holds the opportunity for employers to meet their skills needs while benefitting from a more diverse workforce and inclusive workplace. We recommend that employers emulate the Canadian companies and institutions that go beyond diversity in hiring. They do so by adopting proactive approaches to inclusion and workforce engagement that bring down systemic barriers in their own skills development, promotional and succession planning practices. Our Council believes that employers will benefit from using the best practices of others. With these practices, employers could attract a broader pool of qualified job candidates and increase opportunities for their existing employees from under-represented groups to build the skills to get ahead.

Social, employment and skills development programming, whether by governments, employers, labour, or education and training institutions, are not the only vehicles for breaking down discrimination and other barriers. For example, we believe broader economic development programming by governments requires a future-focused approach that improves representation and builds skills among individuals from under-represented groups. This requires more than just an effort to make workplaces more diverse and representative of their larger communities. It requires a commitment to active inclusion and engagement of everyone.

Action Area In Summary

- **Apply user-centred design:** Design employment and skills development programs, services and supports to address the distinct barriers and circumstances of under-represented groups.
- **Focus on promising job prospects:** Support workers and jobseekers to develop the skills needed for the work most likely to be in demand and support transitions into new opportunities.
- **Replicate best practices:** Incorporate targeted skills development approaches for distinct groups (e.g.: persons with disabilities, newcomers, etc.) into onboarding new recruits, talent management and succession planning.
- **Take an enterprise-wide approach to inclusion:** Diversity in workforce recruitment, retention and development starts with commitment to active inclusion and engagement of everyone in all business practices.

2.2 Remove structural and systemic barriers to skills development to set up Canadians to succeed in the future economy

The barriers that people face in gaining skills and getting jobs can be systemic ones, in addition to the ones we just described. The evidence indicates that many Canadians are not actively looking for work because they are more focused on immediate challenges like housing, food and caregiving. Our Council sees two comprehensive ways to bring down systemic barriers keeping people out of the working world.

The first is for governments and education and training institutions to modernize work-focused programs. One element will be to include access to “wrap-around supports.” These are the supports such as daycare and transportation assistance that help individuals overcome some of the practical challenges they face when they want to develop skills and get jobs. The current approach to employment benefits also needs to change. The COVID-19 crisis has made the need for a shift in approaches when designing employment benefits even more crucial. As Canadians are affected by the pandemic in a multitude of ways, employment benefits and programs need

to adapt and provide supports that meet the varying needs of Canadians. In our next recommendation, we will discuss the need for benefits that are portable, flexible and not tied to specific jobs or employers so people can work and learn at the same time more easily.

The second way to bring down systemic barriers to work and learning is to address geographic barriers. Individuals in rural, remote and Northern communities often enjoy fewer local employment choices. Impacts on work and learning are even greater when a major local industry or employer is under stress. However, as work by Policy Horizons in the Canadian context has made clear, the internet has brought new options that enable people to connect with work and new markets, even in the smallest communities. Those technologies also play a major enabling role in leading-edge education and training programs that enable people to learn at their own pace and to use tools such as videoconferencing.⁶ But that can only happen when people and their communities have full access to a modern digital infrastructure, just as they fully expect they will have access to electrical power or other foundations of modern life. They need broadband and telecommunications access to build jobs and expand economic choices. We believe that governments and industry should commit to ensuring that every Canadian has access to high-speed internet and reliable telecommunications on the fastest timetable possible. All Canadians and every community deserve full access to the technologies that are already fundamental to employment, business growth and learning.

Action Area In Summary

- **Modernize work-focused programs:** For individuals with limited income security, provide “wrap-around supports” (e.g.: housing allowance, childcare, etc.) along with employment and skills programming.
- **Address geographic barriers:** Ensure that every Canadian has access to high-speed internet and reliable telecommunications on the fastest timetable possible.

2.3 Create enabling conditions for individuals to take control of their own learning

Many Canadian workers who face skills challenges are not able to access programs and services, as they are not designed for those who are working full-time. Without a greater emphasis on enabling people to learn while they work, millions are at constant risk of losing jobs and not being able to quickly gain comparable ones because they lack the most current skills.

Many people are well aware that jobs are changing, as are skill needs. They have seen well-established business models and entire companies disappear quickly – just as new ones emerge rapidly. Many want to pursue learning for the future or to improve their skills for their current jobs but do not know where to start. Even if they have the labour market information to identify careers that may match their strengths and experience, they may be stymied by an inability to balance today’s work and life commitments with the time and resources needed to prepare for tomorrow’s new jobs.

A critical future-focused challenge is how Canada builds a culture that informs, inspires and empowers individuals to take ownership of their learning so they are ready for change. Many Canadians want to learn in the workplace, rather than pursuing classroom learning outside of work hours. To promote more employer-sponsored training, Canada needs to find solutions that recognize the cost and operational challenges facing employers in building the skills of their employees for the future, when they also face competitive cost pressures in the workplace.

Our Council sees some ideas that merit deeper attention to build a new learning culture. One way will be for the Government of Canada to work with interested provinces and territories as well as business and labour organizations on modernization of labour legislation for learning needs. The specific focus should be on building a consistent framework of standards for how individuals can take time from work to participate in training and other skills development activities, while reflecting and respecting employer needs. This legislated change could take into account the growing use of e-learning in addition to traditional classroom and workplace learning.

We also believe that governments should examine a broader range of fiscal tools that could be used to support individuals in taking action to improve their own skills in the context of making Canada a learning nation. We believe the Government has made a good first step in encouraging working people to participate in training and skills development through the Canada Training Benefit and much more is possible. Governments should examine other tools that encourage individuals to improve their own skills. Increased tax deductions and other fiscal tools as well as tuition rebates and other forms of funding can be structured to reduce the up-front financial barriers that can make it challenging for people to pursue learning. In all of this, we believe policy makers should target Canadians with lower incomes and those in more precarious work who want to build the skills that will enable them to stay employed and increase their incomes.

Action Area In Summary

- **Modernize labour legislation to support lifelong learning:**

The federal government could work with interested provinces and territories, as well as business and labour organizations, to establish a consistent framework of standards for how individuals can take time from work to participate in training and other skills development activities.

- **Use broader range of fiscal tools to support training and skills**

development: Increase tax deductions, tuition rebates and other forms of funding to reduce up-front financial barriers. Focus on helping Canadians with lower incomes and those in more precarious work situations.



Priority 3

Enable First Nation, Inuit and Métis learning and skills development based on a commitment to reconciliation and self-determination

Imagine Canada in 10 years when Indigenous self-determination supports equal opportunity to learn, work and thrive. First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples determine, develop and advance their unique priorities to ensure their people have the education, skills and employment required to support Indigenous economic reconciliation and prosperous and resilient communities.

Despite progress, Indigenous Peoples do not enjoy the full benefits of Canada's economy. The gap between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people with respect to many outcomes such as employment, education and housing endures. Through approaches and actions based on reconciliation and respect for treaty and inherent rights and traditional knowledge, a new environment for skills, learning and employment is beginning to take shape. A full place for First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples in a future skills strategy to build Canada as a learning nation is key to success. This will enable Indigenous individuals to meet their personal goals while strengthening their cultures, communities and economies.

Indigenous governments, communities and businesses are already moving on opportunities to drive their own economic growth and establishing the skills priorities to help achieve their goals. Those priorities and the unique needs of communities will set the course for programs, services and supports through distinction-based approaches. Adopting these approaches will ensure Indigenous Peoples benefit fully from that growth, including through engagement that supports individuals in building skills and careers of their choosing.

Our Council sees self-determination as integral to all efforts related to First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples. Non-Indigenous education and training providers, private sector, labour, non-profit organizations and governments will need to explore and identify ways to co-develop initiatives with Indigenous governments and partners. This will include integrating Indigenous knowledge and culturally sensitive practices into policies, programs and services.

Recommendations

3.1 Reinforce First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples' approaches for designing, replicating and scaling culturally appropriate practices into skills development and learning programs for individuals and for businesses

While there is much room for improvement, inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in learning, skills development and employment is growing. Increasing Indigenous enrollment in post-secondary education is one example. Another is rising employment rates, which were above 80% for First Nation, Inuit and Métis degree holders, and among Métis with college diplomas or apprenticeship certificates

in 2016.⁷ However, the gap in high school attainment persists as 26% of Indigenous Peoples aged 24 to 64 have no high school diploma, more than double the rate for non-Indigenous people.⁸

We engaged and collaborated with Indigenous organizations and individuals. This process identified ways in which governments, education and training providers, labour, private sector and non-profit organizations could offer supports further in line with First Nation, Inuit and Métis priorities. For example, further collaboration could ensure that Indigenous Peoples have the culturally appropriate supports to succeed in post-secondary programs and certifications. This could help foster a climate that would support higher Indigenous secondary school completion rates. To make the transitions from education to work smoother, Indigenous students have recommended mentorships for post-secondary and secondary level students.⁹ Our Council recognizes that the way forward on these and other ideas will be a collaborative process in which non-Indigenous organizations work in partnership with First Nation, Inuit and Métis governments and organizations. These efforts could build on past and existing collaboration between Indigenous communities, employers and post-secondary institutions to meet local training and employment needs.

Action Area In Summary

- **Embrace the philosophy of “nothing about us without us”:** Ensure Indigenous Peoples, governments and organizations are at the centre of designing, developing and implementing culturally appropriate supports to strengthen success in post-secondary programs and certifications.
- **Provide mentorships for post-secondary and secondary level students:** Ensure that Indigenous students have access to mentorship resources to help them navigate challenges and celebrate successes.
- **Foster working partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations:** Adopt collaborative, co-development approaches to meet local training and employment needs that enable Indigenous Peoples to be full partners in success.

3.2 Co-develop measures in collaboration with First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples, communities and governments to increase their recruitment, development and retention in growth sectors

With the Indigenous share of Canada's workforce rapidly increasing, especially in western and northern Canada, stronger action is needed to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are fully engaged in the economic opportunities and job growth in the years ahead. Indigenous governments and representative organizations have recognized some fundamental steps that need to be taken as they co-develop strategies with partners such as governments and learning institutions.¹⁰

A clear emphasis on building skills leading to sustainable jobs in areas where there are signs of growth is critical. This future skills focus is likely to emphasize sectors such as the science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, creative industries and eco-tourism. It could build on well-established success in the skilled trades, health professions, and child and seniors care. Innovation and technology are modernizing these services, and jobseekers and workers will need the skills to meet shifting on-the-job expectations. With different opportunities emerging in different regions, such as new jobs in Canada's ocean sector or agricultural innovations in the Prairies, communities will identify and determine which occupations and sectors to focus on to support sustained employment in response to their unique needs and context.

Economic development strategies in Indigenous communities often include a focus on fostering entrepreneurship and local business growth. This draws on both the resources and revenues that a community controls through its own self-determination and own sourced revenue streams and the opportunities created by leveraging innovations such as online sales of Indigenous art and cultural products. We can anticipate growing attention to building the management and operations skills that are needed to run successful businesses that create jobs in First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. There will also likely be interest in peer-to-peer learning models that make it easier for people who want to commercialize business ideas and adopt technologies to strengthen organizational performance to learn from their already-successful counterparts in other Indigenous communities.

Increasing Indigenous employment and skills will require full engagement in the larger economy as well as opportunities from growth within their communities. This will be an important consideration in increasing employment of Indigenous Peoples in urban centres and in benefitting from the jobs, skills and benefits arising from new and growing economic activities near Indigenous communities. In practice, we expect that this will require partners such as private sector, labour, education and training providers, non-profit organizations and governments to work with Indigenous governments and the organizations representing Indigenous Peoples and their partners to co-create effective skills development activities linked to employment opportunities. It will require clear commitment to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing as employers and education and training providers gain the inter-cultural competency necessary for effective strategies to recruit, develop and retain Indigenous workers and students at all levels of their organizations. This should be an important emphasis in urban Indigenous employment and skills strategies.

Action Area In Summary

- **Focus on growth areas:** Place a clear emphasis on building skills leading to sustainable jobs in areas of growth.
- **Invest in skills development of Indigenous entrepreneurs:** Support Indigenous Peoples to develop the skills needed to start-up, grow and run successful businesses that create jobs in First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. Place emphasis on peer-to-peer learning with successful counterparts in other Indigenous communities.
- **Co-create skills initiatives:** Establish partnerships for the co-creation of effective skills initiatives that improve recruitment, development and retention of Indigenous workers at all levels of organizations.

3.3 Accelerate broadband access to all rural, northern and remote communities, with a particular emphasis on First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities

Almost 40% of Indigenous Peoples live in rural and remote communities. Under Priority #2, our Council underlined that improved broadband access is essential to future skills and employment opportunities for everyone in rural and remote communities. This is equally true for the Indigenous jobseekers and workers who need ready access to labour market information and innovative skills development tools. For Indigenous community business development, employers must have the broadband to connect with customers, governments, financial institutions and more. This access issue has to be resolved if Indigenous Peoples are to be able to implement successful community-based skills, employment and economic development strategies.

We know that governments are pursuing strategies to establish or upgrade broadband access services in underserved areas of Canada.¹¹ The Government should prioritize access for First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities in those efforts.

Action Area In Summary

- **Close the digital divide:** As governments and industry pursue strategies to establish or upgrade broadband and telecommunications access in underserved areas of Canada, prioritize First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities.





Priority 4

Promote, enable and validate skills development and training in all their diverse forms

Imagine Canada in 10 years, when every Canadian benefits from a wide array of skills development programs and learning opportunities and gets consistent recognition of the skills they have gained throughout their lives – no matter where they learned them, no matter how. The immigrant in Prince Rupert building communication skills to prepare for a local job, the Moncton machine operator going online for expertise with a new automated process, the apprentice job-shadowing another electrician in a northern Manitoba Métis community. Each has many ways to learn and be officially recognized for what they know and can do.

To commit to lifelong learning, we need to move past the thinking that our skills are locked into place by the time we are in our 20s. We need to fully appreciate that everyone learns on and off the job in formal and informal ways throughout their working lives. A future-focused approach to building a learning culture will expand opportunities to more Canadians and rethink how we develop and recognize skills through new and customized approaches.

There is growing demand for change. Jobseekers, workers and employers want more choices when it comes to learning and more personalized paths to skills development. We anticipate that greater involvement of jobseekers, workers and employers will drive education and training providers to create more flexible structures for learning. It is critical that tools and processes be established that will make it easy for individuals and organizations to assess the comparability of skills gained, no matter where they came from and no matter what approaches were used to develop them.

Recommendations

4.1 Develop and expand access to nimble training models that respond to individual and employer needs

Workplaces throughout Canada are witnessing the introduction of disruptive technologies and innovation that are bringing deep change. The old approaches to training do not always meet the needs of rapidly evolving workplaces, which is driving demand for more customized, just-in-time training solutions that are more responsive to these changes. We see a great deal of value in the work of the Future Skills Centre. It supports the prototyping, testing and validation of effective approaches in collaboration with industry, labour, education and training providers, non-profit organizations, governments, the Labour Market Information Council and other organizations.

An important outcome from this collaboration could be labour market information initiatives that identify those skills where demand is increasing the fastest but where training and education providers are struggling to keep pace. The result of this collaboration could include a fast track mechanism for program accreditation that could shorten the time to bring new programs to market to meet this rising demand. We support the expansion of tailored short-term training to meet

workplace demands such as micro-credentials that can be combined to recognize broader skills acquired over time. In line with our previous recommendations to make skills development more flexible and designed to bring down barriers, we want to see experiments in personalized, flexible and online training options. These training options enable workers to learn at their own pace and employers to balance learning needs with operational demands.

Having said that, we want to avoid needlessly “reinventing the wheel” and this is where Canada can be a world leader. For example, we could further examine lessons learned from the experiences of colleges, institutes and non-traditional training providers in working with employers to address upskilling and reskilling needs. We could look at, for example modular programs with flexible entry dates and adult skills upgrading with continuous intake. There is a clear value in the federal government working with partners to find out what works in terms of nimble, innovative, effective training approaches and then enabling others to adapt those good ideas to their own workplaces. When proven practices are identified, there needs to be resources to support rapid deployment and scaling. This will go a long way to resolving the age-old problem facing many workplaces, particularly smaller ones, which lack the resources to track and apply the innovations that may be very helpful to them.



Action Area In Summary

- **Develop more customized, short-term training supported by micro credentials:** Foster the creation of tailored short-term training to meet workplace demands through micro credentials that can be combined to capture skills acquired over time.
- **Encourage rigorous experimentation:** Experiment with personalized, flexible and online training options that enable workers to learn at their own pace, while employers balance learning needs with operational demands.
- **Replicate promising practices:** Draw from lessons learned from education and training providers in working with employers and unions to address upskilling and reskilling needs such as modular programs with flexible entry dates and adult skills upgrading with continuous intake.
- **Scale-up proven practices:** Make resources available to support rapid deployment and scaling of innovative and effective training approaches identified through reliable evidence, to enable others to adapt those good ideas to their own workplaces.

4.2 Expand experiential learning and on-the-job training, especially to support the upskilling and reskilling of Canadian workers

The Council believes that experiential training and learning on the job will be a much more significant element of many future training models as Canada becomes a learning nation. While these models already exist, employers in Canada need to make much more use of experiential training and learning for jobseekers and workers at all stages of their careers. For example, new technologies such as simulations, augmented reality and virtual reality can help individuals to develop confidence

and competency in cost-effective ways for employers. Those learning tools can be designed to align with the kinds of standardized skill definitions, validation and certification approaches we have already described.

The use of learning technologies in the workplace should help the many smaller employers who find it a challenge to integrate learning into work on their own. They will need the active engagement of organizations that understand their business needs and that foster connections with education and training providers with innovative answers that apply new learning technologies efficiently. More generally, we want to see much greater collaboration between employers and education and training providers to integrate learning into work, and work into learning, including through many of the actions that we recommend throughout these pages. There are lessons that we can apply from the experiences of other countries and recent events.

Employers and unions have a central role to play in experiential learning and on-the-job training. It is not possible without their active involvement. Balancing meeting operational demands with release time for workers has long been a challenge. However, long-term business viability, growth and sustainability are put at risk without continual workforce assessment to support ongoing skills development. Leading-edge companies and organizations already recognize the competitive advantages gained through the value proposition of continually investing in upskilling and reskilling their workforce. As a learning nation, this needs to become the new norm for all.

Action Area In Summary

- **Foster more on-the-job training:** Employers need to make much more use of experiential training and learning for jobseekers and workers at all stages of their careers.
- **Use technology to support workforce skills development:** Leverage new technologies such as simulations, augmented reality and virtual reality to help individuals to develop confidence and competency in cost-effective ways.
- **Encourage more collaboration:** Employers and education and training providers need to work more closely to integrate learning into work, and work into learning, to support workers in meeting rapidly changing job demands.

4.3 Establish approaches for recognizing skills acquired through diverse forms of learning and training that could be adapted and used across Canada

It is important to recognize that skills are developed in many different ways, not just in classrooms. This means that we need systems that enable competencies to be assessed, regardless of where and how the learning may have taken place.

There is potential to create a single skills recognition platform that would map the skills acquired so individuals in the labour market can move seamlessly across programs and institutions. This would help in making training pathways transparent and easy to navigate for learners, with broadly shared recognition systems that employers, learners and training providers can use to make efficient use of their time and resources. This not only supports individuals transitioning into a new job, but could also help address other issues such as confirming the skills and employment credentials of people who move to Canada.

Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) is another well-established model to build on. We recommend that the federal, provincial and territorial governments do much more to expand the value of PLAR and its use by employers. Through consistent, credible definitions of skills, complemented by easily-applied tools, employers, training providers and individuals can assess a person's skills in a credible and reliable manner. In addition, PLAR could address the needs of groups that are not fully represented in Canada's workplaces and help bring down barriers to employment. Canadians seeking PLAR could benefit from similar financial supports that are already available to post-secondary students. New technologies such as artificial intelligence could be leveraged to enable ongoing improvement of both skill definitions and the means of assessing and acquiring them. The use of technologies for learning is even more relevant considering the recent global health crisis. The crisis not only accelerated the spread and demand for online training but also created the opportunity for further development of new learning tools expanding opportunities beyond in-person classrooms.



Action Area In Summary

- **Leverage technology for skills recognition and navigating training:**
Create a digital skills recognition platform that would map skills acquired in training and education programs and offer more seamless training pathways across programs and institutions.
- **Expand application of prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR):** Increase the development of robust skills assessment tools beginning with leveraging the potential of PLAR and encouraging broader employer use of reliable assessment tools.





Priority 5

Develop a skilled workforce capable of adopting new technologies and business models while ensuring the well-being of communities and society

Imagine Canada in 10 years, when all our employers, large and small, across all sectors, are widely seizing global market opportunities driven by fundamental shifts toward sustainability and through new technology. It has become easy for them to invest in the skills of their people to deliver even more results for their communities. The large Ontario company using artificial intelligence for improved customer services, the New Brunswick fish plant worker using automated processes to meet global customer expectations, the small British Columbia community looking at solar energy as a sole source to power its economic development.

Each is able to look forward with confidence.

The quality of life that Canadians enjoy is built on the foundations of a strong economy that offers benefits to all of us. As the Advisory Council on Economic Growth has pointed out, Canada can generate more of the good jobs and growth that we need in our communities by capitalizing on the changes sweeping the global economy. Just as Canadian businesses can do a better job of scaling up and commercializing innovations, it is critical to invest in the skills and knowledge of people who are in the workforce, or who want to join it. Both will enable businesses to foster the economic growth that contributes to the well-being of communities and our environment and that benefits all sectors including our diverse and vibrant non-profit organizations.

Employers are at the centre of this effort because they primarily determine how their workplaces will adapt to change. They make the strategic decisions on how to position their operations for growth in an era of turbulent change, even as they see ways that governments and other stakeholders also can be part of solutions. We have identified through our own collaborative engagement three areas that will define the Canada of the future – and that will require engagement across sectors.

Recommendations

5.1 Expand both sectoral-skills and community-based strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises and non-profit organizations

Canada's smallest employers face some of the economy's biggest challenges – especially when change is everywhere they look. However, those employers often lack the resources needed to look beyond today's demands to see tomorrow's opportunities. While it is not possible to resolve all challenges faced by SMEs, it is valuable to act where that can be done effectively and efficiently given their importance in every Canadian community. Of Canada's 1.18 million businesses, 98% employ fewer than 100 people and almost three-quarters have fewer than nine people. It's also important to recognize the contribution of the non-profit sector to Canada's economy. In 2017, almost 2,400,000 Canadians were employed in the public and non-profit sectors, ranging from local charities to major hospitals, universities and chambers of commerce.¹²

One long-standing focus has been to encourage business start-ups, often as part of community economic development strategies. There are many activities in place already to assist smaller employers to build basic business skills, secure funding and connect with professional services. There is proven value in initiatives such as skills development clinics, incubators and accelerators, although these need to be made more accessible to smaller communities.

Our Council also sees a need to support growth in rural, remote and Northern communities across Canada. We already identified the need to ensure access to high-speed internet in those communities as a fundamental building block for the economic growth that will enable people to stay in their communities and attract new residents. More broadly, governments, labour, education and training providers need to go beyond traditional approaches to support employers in specific sectors of our economy to deal with skills development priorities. Mechanisms and tools are needed for SMEs to link with reputable training providers. Financial supports and guidance resources are needed to help with needs assessments and workforce training plans. Consistent with our recommendations under priorities #2 and #3, we advocate a special focus on the needs of employers and workers from under-represented and disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous Peoples. We need to ensure they have full access to opportunities in a changing economy, regardless of the size or location of the employer.

Efforts to grow local SMEs through community economic development activities need to support Canada as a learning nation. There should be strong linkages between the skills that young people acquire and opportunities in their communities, especially among SMEs. Strategies for economic growth should also target newcomers who have the required specialized skills, to attract them to the community and enable them to enhance those skills so they stay and prosper. A future-oriented approach will draw on best practices where communities have successfully met both employer and worker needs by taking action on recruitment, retention and skills development.

○ Action Area In Summary

- **Make complementary investments:** To reap broader benefits from incubator and accelerator initiatives, support complementary workforce development strategies with a particular focus on employers in smaller communities and those from disadvantaged and under-represented groups.
- **Simplify training solutions for SMEs:** Put mechanisms and tools in place that make it easier for SMEs to link with reputable training providers and help them to offset some of the up-front costs such as needs assessments and workforce training plans.
- **Reinforce community-based approaches:** Support workforce development strategies and implement action plans as part of broader community economic development efforts that help community members develop skills for emerging in demand jobs into the future.

5.2 Develop and expand access to training for digital skills and emerging technologies in particular artificial intelligence

Investments in technology are driving workplace change throughout the economy. They are creating new jobs with new skills and reshaping established occupations. Automation also reduces demand for labour in various settings. Artificial intelligence, a class of technologies that are able to learn on their own, will be especially transformative over the coming decade.

Current, in demand digital skills are increasingly critical to workers' success in the context of these changes. The recent pandemic showed that digital skills are essential to ensure organizations across all sectors can continue to operate applying new business models. For some, this entails expertise in the design, development and sophisticated uses of digital technologies. For nearly everyone, digital skill needs centre on interacting effectively with workplace technologies and adapting to changes that result from the digitization of work activities and business processes. These changes entail a variety of digital skill sets and levels of sophistication.

In this context, skilling for technology applies to many business leaders as well as to their employees. SME leaders in particular often lack the knowledge, confidence or time to embark on investments in new technologies and employee upskilling. They may benefit from support in implementing new technology in their workplaces, including training for management and workers that is crucial to success. During the recent health crisis, SMEs were particularly affected, which shows the importance of focusing support on smaller businesses to help them better prepare for this kind of unexpected situations. Assistance to help offset the costs of digital skills development would build on provincial and territorial investments in formal education and community programming. Cybersecurity is a good example of a priority in this respect. It is an important issue that often requires digital skills development beyond the capacity of small employers. Governments, education and training providers, labour, non-profit organizations and innovative private sector suppliers can take action to assist SME employers in building cybersecurity skills across the organization. All organizations would benefit from a centre of expertise on cybersecurity that can provide user-friendly assistance and up-to-date information, training and resources.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has already begun to make significant impacts on workplaces, skills needs and learning requirements. This new class of powerful technologies learns from experience to assess data, predict events and make decisions. It brings unprecedented changes to the “what and how” of innovation. There is evidence of exponential growth in demand for AI skills in many sectors of the Canadian economy, as employers invest in AI-based improvements to products and services, productivity and customer service. This has led to changes to jobs and skills requirements. AI-based innovations have already replaced some tasks and jobs, augmented others and led to entirely new ones. As a learning nation, Canada needs to treat AI as a growth opportunity and invest in both cutting-edge AI expertise and AI literacy for all Canadians. We must also understand and address the impacts of AI on jobs, emerging and declining skills needs, and the public interest along with concrete actions such as workforce transition strategies.

Our Council believes that Canada is well positioned to assess and address the workplace impacts of AI. AI is already drawing policy attention through initiatives like the Advisory Council on Artificial Intelligence appointed by the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. We need to expand on such initiatives to build leadership skills in all organizations. This would ensure that decision-makers

understand the capabilities and limitations of AI and how to maximize the benefits while minimizing the risks and downsides. This includes understanding ethical governance, bias mitigation, skills development, workforce impact management, and other AI related priorities. It is equally, if not more essential, that students, workers, and other labour market participants – indeed all Canadians – understand the basics of AI and its implications for them. AI and data science concepts, personal and societal implications – and, as appropriate, skills – should be integrated into all education programs, in all disciplines and fields, and at all levels from K-12 through to post-secondary and adult education. As part of this set of initiatives, we need to identify how AI skills development can help under-represented groups remove workplace and labour market barriers.



Action Area In Summary

- **Invest in digital skills:** Offset the costs for SME employers and employees to develop the digital skills needed to lead to the adoption of new technologies and business practices.
- **Strengthen cybersecurity skills:** Create a centre of expertise on workplace cybersecurity that can provide reliable, user-friendly assistance and up-to-date information, training and resources to all employers to support ongoing workforce skills development to emerging threats.
- **Integrate AI into workforce development planning:** Build business leaders skills regarding AI implications for organizational success and workforce development.
- **AI knowledge at all ages and stages:** Integrate AI and data science knowledge and skills, including personal and societal implications, into all education programs, in all disciplines and fields, and at all levels, from K-12 through to post-secondary and adult education.

5.3 **Develop skills strategies to support Canada's successful transition to a low carbon emissions economy**

Canadians, like people around the world, are increasingly concerned about climate change and the sustainability of our environment. There is growing demand for low carbon energy sources. As a global energy leader, Canada is committed to action in this area and is acting to leverage new opportunities for jobs and growth in alternate forms of energy production. Canada is also identifying how best to assist the resource-based communities that are dealing with disruption already.

Our Council has taken a longer-term view of this shift in line with our mandate. While recognizing the seriousness of the immediate situation, we have asked about the approaches to skills and learning that are most likely to be successful over the next ten years or more. These approaches also need to be most likely to be flexible enough to adapt to a changing energy environment along the way.

As a starting point, we note that there are great opportunities taking shape. The start of a transition to a low carbon emissions economy is already stimulating innovation in a range of fields. There will be advances in both clean technologies and in processes to reduce carbon emissions from the traditional sources that will continue to be part of our energy mix. These will mean new highly skilled jobs in Canada to create, improve, implement and export these technologies.

The strategy for Canada has to encompass elements where action can have the greatest impact. Labour market information and forecasting, combined with well-informed industry scenarios, is a first step. It is not enough to say that new jobs will be available in general terms when workers and people want to know which kinds of jobs are most likely, what skills will be required for them and where those jobs will be created. This detailed analysis will help the many communities that want to position themselves for this change. Some will be seeking long-range paths forward, particularly if they perceive a risk to existing energy sector jobs or those in related fields. They want to be ready to support highly skilled workers who may be looking for new places to use their skills and who may need support in adding new skills. The same is true for communities that see themselves as potential homes for new alternate energy employment and investments.

A second area for attention will be the development of local action plans by governments and other public, private, labour and non-profit organizations that integrate skills development into workforce transitions. We expect this to involve adapting and replicating successful models to enable workers to be ready to succeed no matter what form the changes take in many cases. Emphasis should be placed on action. Efforts need to go beyond planning and include focus on strengthening the capacity of organizations to work together in new and different ways. Dealing with this shift requires new thinking and approaches that initiate and implement cross-sectoral collaboration more quickly.



Action Area In Summary

- **Create local opportunity prospectus:** Generate analysis on new and emerging jobs related to a lower carbon emissions economy, what skills will be required and where jobs are likely to be created to help communities better position themselves to seize emerging opportunities.
- **Fortify community-based action:** Foster collaboration among communities, governments, private sector, labour, education and training providers and non-profit organizations to develop and implement local action plans to support effective workforce transition strategies to a lower carbon emissions economy.



Conclusion

Our Council was given an important set of challenges to consider. We know that Canadian workplaces will change a great deal in the years ahead because of a broad range of economic, social and technological forces. We know that all labour market stakeholders in Canada will be affected by those changes and can only benefit from understanding the most likely directions of that change. In this all, one direction is already clear: Canada needs to become a learning nation where people build, improve and add to their skills throughout their lives.

A learning nation will be one that is able to think in new ways about the pivotal issues facing the Canadian economy – nationally and regionally; what that means for job prospects; and how to support people to develop the skills needed to succeed. It will enable us to bring fresh insights to efforts to open doors to work for everyone and breaking down barriers facing individuals in groups that have been traditionally under-represented in our workplaces. It will drive new approaches to the information, tools, services and supports that Canadians turn to so they can understand the skills they need now to get the jobs of tomorrow. It will demonstrate how Canada's commitment to reconciliation and respect for treaty and inherent rights becomes translated into skills, learning and employment programs and services rooted in self-determination and ownership of First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Building a learning nation takes time. The good news is that Canada has a strong base to work from, even with the significant work ahead of us all. In that spirit, we look forward to the responses to our observations and recommendations. Each of our members will be raising awareness about the priorities identified and championing the recommendations made in our own networks and more broadly. We will spark a nationwide conversation on what it will take to make Canada a learning nation, where all Canadians are able to thrive in a changing economy.

Above all, each member of our Council will challenge people to identify how our own individual sectors can take action on these issues – both within our own scope and through active collaboration with all other sectors to achieve results that make a difference. We will help to drive thinking on how best to convert good ideas into effective innovations; how best to turn today's good examples of innovation into tomorrow's common practices; and, how to spark creative thinking to tackle the challenges that we have yet to solve and to propel us forward.



We have identified ambitious priorities based on some critical shared challenges. As a nation, we cannot afford to be passive in the face of rapid change. Canada is faced with an urgent economic and social imperative to take action. To drive strong national, regional and local economies that underpin prosperous communities and a high quality of life in Canada, we need to be agile, innovative and forward leaning. Change is now, change will continue. Equipping Canadians with skills for the future will ensure everyone can contribute and benefit.

We are all in this together. We can each do our part and take on the compelling challenge to make Canada a learning nation.



Endnotes

- ¹ **Source:** EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC. (submitted to Colleges and Institutes Canada). (2019). *Survey of Canadians' Perceptions of Post-Secondary Education, Retraining and Lifelong Learning*. <https://www.collegesinstitutes.ca/file/ekos-survey-canadians-perceptions-of-post-secondary-education/>
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