

Attraction of labour:

D. Addressing the Carbon Footprint of Ontario's Post-Secondary Institutions

Submitted by: Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, Belleville Chamber of Commerce, 1000 Islands Gananoque Chamber of Commerce, and Quinte West Chamber of Commerce

Issue

As Ontario's businesses and industry move toward a carbon-neutral future, the province will need to train the next generation of workers and entrepreneurs with the skills to work and innovate within a zero-carbon environment.

Background

Renewable energy technology – from battery technology, solar power and smart grids to tall mass timber construction and smart buildings – is evolving quickly, affecting the trades in utilities, construction, automotive, truck and heavy equipment servicing, and maintenance occupations.

College vocational education, including the trades, is central to building, managing and maintaining clean energy systems, net-zero structures, affordable, clean, safe and efficient transportation options, including zero-emission vehicles and charging or fueling stations, public transit, and strategic trade corridors, including roads, bridges, rail, and airports.

In an effort to support Ontario's transition to a zero-carbon economy, Ontario's public colleges will be a critical player.

Ontario's post-secondary institutions can promote carbon zero initiatives both by retrofitting existing facilities to reduce their carbon footprint and investing in technology. And, as colleges develop clear paths to carbon-free heating and cooling, they provide unparalleled opportunities for local businesses and organizations to follow suit. Local businesses can also work with college researchers on zero carbon products and services and, with by retrofitting colleges to house zero carbon infrastructure, Ontario's SMEs can innovate in spaces that are carbon-neutral.

Seneca's Centre for Innovation, Technology and Entrepreneurship (CITE) is a 274,000 square foot building that brings applied research and commercialization, specialized training and student and business-led entrepreneurial activities under one roof. The building is LEED Gold certified and incorporates the latest technology to reduce its carbon footprint which includes 438 solar panels @ 375W per panel at full sunshine on its roof.

Another example is the Joyce Centre for Partnership and Innovation at Mohawk College in Hamilton, is at 96,000 square feet the city's first zero-carbon institutional building which produces onsite, or procures carbon-free, renewable energy in an amount sufficient to offset the annual carbon emissions associated with operations.

Most Ontario colleges were established 50 years ago and many of their 700 buildings are aging, preventing these institutions from housing the technology needed to train the next generation of workers. This aging

infrastructure also has a substantial environmental footprint that will need to be addressed as industries work to move to a carbon net-zero status and align with on-going initiatives to cut greenhouse gasses.

By training the next generation of workers in modernized facilities with green technology, Ontario can help establish the foundation required to implement a zero-carbon economy.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Ontario Government to:

1. Assess the cost and resource requirements to replace training facilities in Ontario's post-secondary institutions with infrastructure that is modernized to train graduates and SMEs to implement a zero-carbon economy.
2. Work with the federal government to advocate for funding to support retrofitting initiatives to promote carbon-zero facilities in Ontario's post-secondary institutions.

D. Addressing Ontario's Skills Gap at the Secondary School Level

Submitted by: The Timmins Chamber of Commerce. Co-sponsored by the Huron Chamber of Commerce – Goderich, Central and North Huron, the Newmarket and Vaughan Chamber, the North Bay and District Chamber of Commerce, and the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce.

Issue

Widespread concerns have been expressed over the potential supply of workers in the trades. Currently, Ontario is facing a skills gap as the number of young tradespersons has dropped and fewer still are enrolling in college programs to replace an aging workforce.¹³⁶ With stigmas surrounding trades work and fewer secondary schools offering skilled workshop programs, Ontario is in need of a service skills strategy to promote career pathways in the skilled trades.

Background

Employing just over 925,000, the trades industry is one of Ontario's largest employers.¹³⁷ In the next few years, it is estimated that 60,000 workers will be required to replace those retiring, who will take essential technical, supervisory, and management skills with them. Furthermore, an additional 75,000 workers will be needed to fill positions related to new projects.¹³⁸ The construction and maintenance industry will also need to hire, train, and retain almost 103,900 additional workers as just over 90,000 of Ontario's current construction labour force are expected to retire.¹³⁹

Available work in support services levelled out in 2017, and unemployment rates in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction returned to historically low levels in 2017.¹⁴⁰ There will be a 47 percent gap for technical occupations, 56 percent for supervisors and foremen, 18 percent for skilled trades and 10 percent for production workers. The industry will need to hire roughly 18,000 people in these occupations from 2018 to 2027, but is only expected to secure 8,500 new entrants, leaving a total gap of 9,500 – meaning about half of all vacancies will go unfilled.¹⁴¹

However, enrollment trends are exacerbating this issue: Ontario's colleges are seeing a decline in enrollment in the trades as only 26 percent of young adults are considering a career in the skilled trades.¹⁴² There are stigmas that present barriers when attracting youth to the trades- the perception that the sector offers limited opportunities for learning, growth and social mobility impacts their decisions in choosing career pathways in

the trades. Having long been perpetuated by parents, students are still adhering to a “university-first” culture much to the detriment of Ontario’s economic requirements. Ontario needs tradespeople who can build, repair and maintain its infrastructure and systems.^{143 144}

Furthermore, enrolment in undergraduate mining engineering programs dropped 12 per cent between 2015 and 2016 – the largest decline of all engineering programs. The evidence shows that there are skills gaps in important areas of the economy, owing largely to changes to the province’s industrial and technological profile. Moreover, given longer-term demographic trends, skills gaps will widen and labour shortages will continue to emerge.

That skills gap comes at a significant cost for Ontario, costing the provincial economy up to \$24.3 billion in forgone GDP and \$3.7 billion in provincial tax revenues- a result of too many young Ontarians being encouraged to pursue a university education over a career in the skilled trades.¹⁴⁵

The province cannot afford a failure to maximize its human capital potential through insufficient or poorly aligned training and education. Even with Ontarians’ high level of post-secondary education, more is needed, along with better efforts to align skills development with skills requirements and encourage secondary school students to choose career pathways in the skilled trades. Failure to take action on skills gaps will have enormous impacts on the economy, firm performance, and economic well-being.

Historically, the Province has provided support to employers with internships for hiring secondary student through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund internship programs which was efficient in encouraging employers to help individuals build skills.¹⁴⁶

Ontario needs to act proactively to mitigate future labour market pressures. Generating new interest in the trades in Ontario is crucial, as an aging workforce looks to retirement.

Recommendations

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce urges the Government of Ontario to:

1. Develop and implement strategies and initiatives that enhance exposure to the trades at the secondary school level.
2. Work with Ontario’s employer community and post-secondary institutions to determine and promote in-demand skilled trades to secondary schools.
3. Develop trades camps for youth in partnership with secondary schools and local colleges to further enhance exposure to the trades.
4. Provide financial assistance and insurance for employers who take secondary school students on trades-related placements.

Improving International Student Retention Through Post-graduation Work Permits

Description:

Retention of international students is critical as a source of skilled labour across Canada. International students represent an underutilized resource that we must engage and retain to fill current gaps in the labour market.

We must make Canadian work experience accessible to international students. All private post-secondary institutions with a Designated Learning Institution number should be eligible for Post Graduate Work Permits as are their public counterparts.

Background:

The average age of Canada's workforce is rapidly increasing. Statistics Canada data shows that the number of Canadian residents aged 55 and older represented 25 per cent of the working age (15-64) cohort in the 1990s. That increased to 30 per cent by 2007, 36 per cent by 2016 and is forecast to reach 40 per cent by 2026. This has profound impact on the availability of labour to fuel the Canadian economy.

As of Q4, 2021, Canada recorded 915,545 job vacancies. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) data shows 621,565 study permits were issued in 2021, up almost 17.7 per cent from the 528,190 in 2020.

In addition, COVID-19 has caused untold hardship on Canadian businesses across all sectors. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the "Hardest Hit Sectors". The hospitality, tourism, and entertainment operators that have managed to survive the ups and downs of the pandemic are now all facing the same issue: trying to recruit from a labour pool that has migrated to other industries. The threat of an uncertain future coupled with government programs designed to facilitate this migration have left these hardest hit employers with a non-existent labour pool to draw from. This results in businesses who are unable to fill current vacancies leaving them ill-equipped to mount a post-pandemic recovery.

Characteristically representative of the challenges across the "Hardest Hit Sectors" at large, while total employment in Canada returned to pre-pandemic levels in September, 2021, restaurants alone still haven't recovered at least 200,000 of the 800,000+ workers they had to let go in the spring of 2020. One in 4 workers in the food industry have migrated away leaving a massive gap in the talent pool.

A September, 2021 report from the Business Development Bank of Canada found 55% of Canadian entrepreneurs were having trouble hiring the talent they needed to fill vacancies, limiting their growth. In the same May, 2021 survey, 64% of Canadian entrepreneurs said they were forced to limit the growth of their business, missing out on opportunities, because of the lack of workers.

The two most pressing reasons cited in the BDC survey for the failure to recruit new talent are: a lack of candidates (45%), and a lack of required hard or soft skills (44%). Both of these issues can be resolved by expanding temporary employability programs to international graduates of all provincially approved diploma, advanced diploma, certificate and postgraduation certificate programs at Canadian post-secondary institutions through the Post-Graduation Work Permit program.

Federal regulations defining Post-Graduation Work Permit eligible programs and institutions render many international graduates of Canadian post-secondary institutions and programs ineligible to apply for a Post-Graduation Work Permit, even if counterparts in equivalent programs at other institutions would qualify. This is true even for international graduates who have been vetted by the Canadian student visa application process and who are studying at Canadian post-secondary institutions that have been vetted through the Designated Learning Institution (DLI) program.

The Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWPP) allows students who have graduated from eligible DLIs to obtain an open work permit to gain valuable Canadian work experience. Skilled Canadian work experience in National Occupational Classification (NOC) skill type 0 or skill level A or B that is gained through the PGWPP helps graduates qualify for permanent residence in Canada through the Canadian experience class within Express Entry.

Tying Industry Needs to Education:

International students are needed to fill the workforce shortage many industries are facing today but both full-time and part-time international students are currently excluded from being able to access the PGWPP.

The training needs of industry can be filled by public and private post-secondary institutions, but there are limitations. For example, BC public post-secondary institutions require their curriculum to be approved by the BC Government, which could take many years, while private institutions can create programs that quickly satisfy industry needs.

Rural areas in Canada do not have the same public post-secondary institutional investments as urban cities. In these rural areas, private institutions can fill that gap, and offer training and programs that will help build and expand the rural economy. International students need incentives to go and live in rural areas. While programs exist to incentivize immigrants to make rural parts of Canada their home, the lack of educational access and programs that support that access deter people from settling in those areas.

Recommendations:

That the Government of Canada:

1. Enable international graduates of any post-secondary programs to qualify for a Post- Graduation Work Permit, where:
 - a. The Institution is qualified as a Designated Learning Institution (DLI) for the purposes of Canadian student visas, AND
 - b. Program attributes meet or exceed established IRCC thresholds for a Post-Graduation Work Permit, AND
 - c. The program is designed to train students into a field with persistent unfilled vacancies, AND d. The credential conferred is an associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree, or diploma or advanced diploma, certificate, or postgraduate certificate as defined by the province in which the institution operates.

Strengthening The Pathway To Post- graduate Employment For International

Description:

Canada's future prosperity and strong economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic depends on access to a highly skilled, adaptable workforce.

Background:

Canada's need to attract skilled talent pre-dates the pandemic. As our population ages and our labour force shrinks, immigration will increasingly be key to our future prosperity. There are now over 1,000,000 job vacancies across Canada, and international students are well-positioned to play a critical role in addressing this labour shortage.

At all levels of study, international students bring new perspectives, ideas, and valuable human connections abroad. As students, they contribute \$21.6 billion to the Canadian economy annually - more than exports of auto parts, lumber or aircraft. The presence of international students in Canada also sustained 218,000 jobs for Canadians. This is a significant economic contribution— and one that is felt right across the country.

In 2021, more than 622,000 international students studied in Canada across all levels, sparking new ideas, strengthening innovation and building people-to-people ties that are crucial to international trade and the global economy. As most international students are young, have Canadian educational qualifications and in-demand labour skills, and are proficient in at least one of our official languages, they are often ideal candidates for permanent residency. In fact, nearly 54,000 former students became permanent residents in Canada in 2018.

As graduates, many become highly skilled individuals contributing to local Canadian communities or return home with an appreciation for what Canada has to offer as a society and business partner. A recent Statistics Canada survey also showed that international students are a growing source of labour for the Canadian economy that extends well beyond their periods of study. The study shows that Post-Graduate Work Permit (PGWP) holders saw significant income increases between 2008 and 2018 and almost 75% of all PGWP holders became permanent residents within 5 years of receiving their permit

However, the global competition for talent is increasingly fierce. As borders are reopening around the world, international students have more choice than even just two years ago. Other countries - our competitors - have recognized the contribution that international students make to their campuses and communities and are boosting immigration measures and other supports to expand their recruitment efforts. While our international brand remains strong, Canada will have to work even harder to secure the world's brightest minds.

Canada's universities remain firmly committed to providing high-quality education to both domestic and international students. They provide a broad range of on-campus support services available to help international students integrate into their new communities, including language training, immigration consulting, housing, mental health counselling and mentorship programs. They also work in close partnership with the business community to provide pathways for students to participate in work-integrated learning, begin building their careers and strengthening

their professional networks in Canada. This productive collaboration helps strengthen Canada's global brand as a study destination and helps ensure international students have a positive learning and living experience in Canada. The federal government can play a greater role in scaling up these efforts to ensure all international students are supported through their studies and fully equipped to transition to Canada's workforce after graduation.

Canada's universities are also actively collaborating with the business community to provide work integrated learning opportunities, including co-op placements, internships and other industry- university student workplace partnerships. These partnerships are critical to ensuring students graduate with job ready skills and employers are able to identify and recruit talent. However, international students remain ineligible for many federally-funded employment and skills programs, including Canada Summer Jobs, the Innovative Work-Integrated Learning Initiative and the Canada Work Placement Program. International students are also disadvantaged with respect to coop work opportunities as a result of the requirement to apply for coop work permits which often face lengthy processing times.

Recommendations:

That the Government of Canada:

1. Work with Canada's universities and the business community to strengthen Canada's global brand as a study destination.
2. Work with Canada's universities and the business community to support programming that helps international students integrate into their new communities and set them up for long-term career success.
3. Work with Canada's universities and the business community to identify new measures and programming to strengthen the pathway to post-graduate employment for international students, including expanding access to federally funded work-integrated learning programs, streamlining coop work permit processing, and supporting industry efforts to hire international graduates.

