

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Problem

The provincial government projects there will be 1,004,000 job openings in B.C. over the next ten years. In a world of rapidly developing technologies, shifting employee expectations and demographics, and steep international competition for talent, B.C. must attract and retain the talent it needs to meet this staggering number of job openings across all sectors.

Vancouver is a top-tier lifestyle city with a dynamic economy. The surrounding natural beauty and cultural vibrancy of our city make this region an incredible place to live. But we know too many businesses and people are falling behind. We are up against significant challenges to ensure we have the right talent mix to meet future labour market needs.

Businesses Continue to Face Labour Market Challenges. In September 2022, data from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's Business Data Lab¹ revealed that difficulty recruiting (40%) and retaining (34%) talent continued to impact Vancouver businesses across every sector, with a slight uptick when compared with the previous quarter.

- **And certain sectors are worse than others.** In the health and social assistance sector, the number of vacant positions in Canada rose 90.9% (+65,000) in the first quarter of 2022. According to the B.C. restaurant association, the restaurant industry faced a deficit of nearly 35,000 workers.² In B.C., 10 to 12% of truck driver positions are currently vacant.³

These Current Labour Market Challenges are Costing Businesses. Labour market mismatches are posing multifaceted challenges to businesses on staffing, costs, sales, and client experience. According to BDC, 45% of businesses faced higher labour costs, while 44% experienced a decline in sales and 43% had to pay higher operating costs as a result of hiring challenges in 2022.⁴

- In another B.C.-focused report, The Conference Board of Canada estimated that skills deficits have already cost B.C. up to \$4.7 billion in foregone GDP and \$616 million in tax revenues, as a result of many British Columbians not having the right skills to contribute to the economy.⁵

We Need More Talent. The B.C. Labour Market Outlook reveals a significant gap in supply, suggesting there are 83,000 job openings that will still need to be filled over the next 10 years after accounting for new immigrants and other newcomers to the labour force. It is clear that the time is now to consider how our province will be meeting these labour market needs in the decade to come.

1. Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. (September 23, 2022). Inflation, labour challenges stifling growth in Metro Vancouver. <https://www.boardoftrade.com/news/55-news/2022/2273-inflation-labour-challenges-stifling-growth-in-metro-vancouver>

2. CBC. (May 19, 2022). Worker shortage leaves B.C.'s restaurant industry hungry for employees. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/worker-shortage-leaves-b-c-s-restaurant-industry-hungry-for-employees-1.6458931>

3. CFJC Today. (January 28, 2022). BC Trucking Association grapples with driver shortage. <https://cfjctoday.com/2022/01/28/bc-trucking-association-grapples-with-driver-shortage/>

4. BDC. (October 2022). Inflation, Labour Shortages and Supply Challenges Embrace Productivity to Thrive in the Current Context. https://www.bdc.ca/globalassets/digizuite/37962-bdc-embrace-productivity-study-1022-st.pdf?utm_campaign=AUTO-STUDY-Productivity--2022-EN&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua

5. The Conference Board of Canada. (February 2015). Skills for Success: Developing Skills for a Prosperous B.C. <https://adm.viu.ca/sites/default/files/skills-for-success-developing-skills-for-a-prosperous-bc-conference-board-of-canada.pdf>

The Report

The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade (GBVOT) has compiled this report based on several months of research and ongoing conversations with its over 5,000 members and engagement with government and community partners to put forward a bold and robust plan forward for meeting B.C.'s short, medium and long-term labour market needs.

The recommendations proposed in this report put forward the following vision for the future of Vancouver and B.C.'s workforce, where:

- We have a data-driven plan for meeting short, medium, and long-term labour market needs in each sector and policies and programs that reflect this. Government invests in and makes the best use of all sources of talent, and education and job opportunities are encouraged for underrepresented groups.
- People of all ages and backgrounds have the digital skills they need to remain competitive in the workforce, move forward in their careers without leaving the region, and keep up with new trends in digitization and technology.
- Everyone feels included in the growth economy. Newcomers to Vancouver are able to successfully integrate into the labour force, and Indigenous People, people of colour, gender diverse peoples and people with disabilities feel safe and welcome in all workplaces.

This path ahead will require the ongoing collaboration and creative thinking of industry, non-profits, and government. We are excited to get started.

The Way Forward

We centre the recommendations in this report around three main themes for solving B.C.'s workforce shortages and skills gaps and planning for the labour market needs of tomorrow. The three themes are as follows:

Immediate Action

As short-term labour market challenges continue to negatively impact businesses, it is time to make sure we're maximizing labour force participation here in B.C. as soon as possible. By making sure the labour market is equitable and accessible to all, we can see B.C. become a place where the skills and talents of all residents are fully utilized, and everyone feels welcomed and included in the workplace.

To meet today's pressing labour market challenges, this section of the report focuses on accelerating the inclusion of newcomers, people with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and other groups that have historically been marginalized or barred from fully participating in civic life. While this will help rectify current business challenges, diverse workplaces also lead to more productivity and innovation by making the full use of individuals' strengths and talents.

Digital First

Few jobs have escaped the reach of digitalization. From agriculture to engineering, digital tools have assumed a core role in the way people work. Computer literacy is a prerequisite for nearly every job in our economy, while platforms and applications tailored to specific industries and job functions are proliferating. We are living through a time of explosive new technologies and programs evolving at a rapid rate. In the next 5-10 years, what digital skills and competencies will be required to succeed in province's workforce?

Unlike the ubiquity of the internet, each sector will have their own specific needs in terms of digital skills and competencies. In the same way tools like WordPress and Canva became synonymous with roles in web development, marketing and communications, future skills training will need to support careers in AI, the metaverse and quantum computing. As we evaluate the future of the labour market in British Columbia, skills training programs and post-secondary education will need to evolve to serve the needs and interests of prospective and current students, recent graduates, and employers across all sectors.

We are calling on B.C. to commit to being a national leader in creating opportunities for British Columbians to receive the digital, new, and emerging skills that their current jobs and sectors require. Having a more skilled workforce with up-to-date skills will make British Columbian businesses more prosperous, efficient, and productive, while making sure British Columbians can remain competitive in the workforce and achieve their career goals.

Reshaping How We Generate Talent

To keep pace with the province's economic growth and meet future projected job openings, B.C. will need a comprehensive roadmap to ensure British Columbians have information and training opportunities that align with job opportunities in the region. Solving the acute and ongoing labour gap will require innovative, multipronged solutions from all levels of government.

Fortunately, we do have a number of factors on our side. We have a world class post-secondary system, and successful companies looking to fill vacancies with talented British Columbians. Government needs to be a catalyst, guiding British Columbians into skills training and career opportunities that both meet the future workforce needs of the province and help British Columbians reach their full potential.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate Action

Canada's Immigration System as a Tool to Address Labour Challenges

We encourage the provincial government to:

1. Work with professional associations/bodies to demand faster recognition of credentials, especially in high-demand occupations.
 - a. Consider a "credential fast pass" system, that would sign mutual recognition agreements (or significantly shorter timelines) with jurisdictions that have comparable training.
 - b. Consider a co-op model or other ways newcomers can work in their sector while going through the foreign credential recognition process.
2. Remove registration requirements for out-of-province healthcare workers and work with professional associations to drive faster recognition of foreign credentials, especially in high-demand occupations.
3. Work to reduce processing delays in B.C. for employer registration for a Temporary Foreign Worker to be completed within three business days.
4. Continue supporting immigrant settlement services and ensure that newcomers feel welcomed and equipped to enter into and succeed in the labour market.

We further encourage the federal government to:

1. Continue policies that help skilled immigrants in high-demand sectors to come and stay in Canada and accelerating processing for occupations identified as 'in-demand', targeted to National Occupational Classification (NOC) codes.
2. Ensure IRCC processing times fall into the original 6-7 month timeline.
3. Expand the Provincial Nominee Program and increase the total number of available nominations.
4. Extend or remove the IELTS-General English language test expiration period of 2 years.
5. Convene post-secondary institutions and the provinces to discuss international student growth and prioritize growth in areas of economic need.
6. In tandem with federal immigration targets, create a parallel housing plan to ensure that Canadians and newcomers have access to affordable housing, particularly in Canadian cities.
7. Follow the UK, New Zealand and other jurisdictions to refine work experiences for individuals under the age of 35, including extending the validity period to 3 years and considering lifting caps.

Support Indigenous Partnerships

We encourage the provincial government to:

1. Consider an Office for Indigenous Employment that brings together post-secondary institutions, the Indigenous Employment Service Agencies, and all other organizations in the sector that could be a one-stop shop for Indigenous individuals seeking employment and employers seeking to hire.
2. Play a convening role by helping to connect businesses with Indigenous communities to promote training and hiring opportunities for Indigenous Peoples across B.C.
3. Provide funding or support for Indigenous communities to create a workforce plan, to map out where their community residents have skills and are employed or where there are opportunities to address unmet skills needs.

Promote Inclusive Hiring

We encourage the provincial government to:

1. Continue to invest in disability employment services and programs that provide employability and occupational skills and job mentorship for people with disabilities. Explore opportunities for creating government incentives for businesses to hire people with disabilities.
2. Create and share resources for businesses to learn about and establish more equitable hiring processes.
3. Invest in resources for businesses to learn about the value of diversity and neurodiversity, and deploy skills training and tools needed for neurodiversity in the workplace.
4. Provide support for businesses to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace.

Support Work-Integrated Learning

We encourage the provincial government to:

1. Continue to invest in experiential learning opportunities, including co-ops and work-integrated learning programs to help businesses access career-ready talent and to promote inclusive economic growth throughout B.C.
2. Explore ways for increasing work-integrated learning opportunities in other sectors/industries that currently have little uptake in these programs, including through increasing employer awareness of existing programs and opportunities.
3. Address the limited capacity of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to facilitate experiential learning opportunities by leveraging existing networks.
4. Focus on quality work-integrated learning opportunities by incentivizing post-secondary institutions to prioritize high-quality, high-impact and longer placements when possible.
5. Work with the business and post-secondary sector to establish the best methods for tracking and evaluating the success of experiential learning opportunities in B.C. One metric that could be tracked is how many students end up finding longer term employment with the company that hired them as a work-integrated

learning student. Find unique ways of telling these stories as a way of promoting work-integrated learning uptake by companies.

6. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, provide resources for employers to provide safe and welcoming environments for all employees, including work-integrated learning students, especially underrepresented populations like Indigenous Peoples, LGBT+ peoples, people with disabilities, etc.

Digital First

Focus on Digital Skills and Digitization

We encourage the provincial government to think big on digital skills through:

1. Create a Digital Skills Index for B.C. that ranks workplace digital skills readiness across all age groups, setting a goal for B.C. to be the top province for digital skills in Canada.
2. Commit to releasing a report every three years, with accompanying recommendations on B.C.'s digital skills. The report should include data on young people, mid-career professionals, unions, and how each group is faring on digital skills. In this report, outline jobs most at risk of automation with actionable recommendations to upskill and reskill those affected by automation for different industries.
3. Offer incentives for mid-career professionals to expand their digital skills and remain competitive in the labour market.
4. Set goals and provide assistance for SMEs to sell online and measure the digital intensity of British Columbia's SMEs.

Incentives and Supports for Skills Training and Lifelong Learning

We ask the provincial government to:

1. Implement creative ways to incentivize businesses (especially small- and medium-sized businesses) to offer skills training programs, including microcredentials, to their employees, as well as support for students to pursue training opportunities.
2. Implement ways to incentivize post-secondary institutions to partner with industry to provide training opportunities for mid-career learners.
3. Aim for B.C. to be a world leader in lifelong learning and flexibility and accessibility to the public post-secondary system throughout one's lifetime. Think creatively about what post-secondary education can mean, and how our post-secondary education system can be accessed from high school to retirement age.
4. Ensure that government policies, procedures and funding models are flexible and adapt to new ways of

creating post-secondary programming, especially the Student Aid BC program.

5. Continue to eliminate barriers to accessing post-secondary education for underrepresented students, including Indigenous students, racialized students, students with disabilities and students from rural communities.

Digital-Minded Government Leadership

We ask all levels of government to:

1. Aspire to transform with a digital-minded leadership for all government operations, including permitting and licensing.

Support for the Development of Microcredentials

We encourage the provincial government to:

1. In collaboration with post-secondary institutions and the private sector, increase the number of microcredential programs offered, with a focus on in-demand occupations and digital skills, to reduce the skills gap and provide more opportunities for British Columbians.
2. Implement ways to provide incentives for employers to offer microcredential programs to their employees as well as support for students to pursue them.

We encourage the federal government to:

1. Fund flexible curricula including microcredentials in secondary and post-secondary schools.
2. Explore the idea of creating a B.C. industry-government-post-secondary working group (similar to the national Business + Higher Education Roundtable) to meet regularly to ensure that secondary and post-secondary programs are relevant and meeting the needs of the labour market.

Promote Industry Partnerships with Post-Secondary Institutions

We encourage the provincial government to:

1. Work with industry partners and associations to help connect post-secondary institutions with industry partners to develop and update programs to meet the needs of employers. As mentioned in the previous section, this could be achieved through a formal working group featuring representatives from government, industry and the post-secondary sector.

Ensure Sufficient Labour Supply across the Entire Supply Chain

To ensure the trades powering our supply chains are well staffed, we recommend the federal government:

1. Establish a Pan-Canadian credential recognition approach for all sectors, including trucking.
2. Build on the momentum of the Canadian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) and labour mobility provisions, alongside provinces and accreditation bodies, to remove any remaining barriers to cross-provincial mutual accreditation.
3. Revise tax policy and incentives to support the acceleration of technology adoption.
4. Urgently adopt the recommendations in the Final Report of the National Supply Chain Task Force related to labour shortages in the transportation sector.

We recommend the provincial government:

1. Subsidize trucking businesses and interested workers for the cost of truck driver training courses.
2. Develop new skills training support for key occupations including truck drivers to support new entrants.

Reshaping How We Generate Talent

Use Data to Inform Skills Training Investments and Decisions

We recommend the provincial government:

1. Intentionally use the B.C. Labour Market Outlook data to inform the design of extra skilling, reskilling, and training policies and programs, and communicate how these data are influencing policy decisions.
2. Use data from the B.C. Labour Market Outlook to populate a dashboard that is updated in real time, and can be used by students, teachers and guidance counsellors, and employers in order to see up-to-date data on sector-specific, current and future labour market needs in the province.
3. Consult with the business community to ensure the B.C. Labour Market Outlook is well used and well understood by businesses in B.C.
4. Identify unique ways of sharing the B.C. labour market data with prospective post-secondary students and British Columbians looking to re-enter the labour market or change careers, so that British Columbians can be aware of which sectors will be hiring in the years to come.

Review and Respond to Graduate Experiences

We encourage the provincial government to:

1. Create a B.C. industry-government-post-secondary education roundtable to focus on the future of the labour market.
2. Identify ways for the business community to provide input on the BC Student Outcomes survey questions and be better informed of the results.
3. Consider ways of surveying employers to determine how satisfied employers are with the preparedness of recent B.C. graduates, as is done in Ontario.
4. Communicate how the BC Student Outcomes surveys are impacting policy decision making with respect to the future of post-secondary education in the province.

We also call on the federal government to:

1. Review and revise the National Occupation Classification (NOC) codes more regularly to better reflect the needs and true state of the labour market.

Support the Transition to Clean Jobs

We recommend the provincial and federal government:

1. Provide support for businesses and workers transitioning to clean technologies.

We recommend the provincial government:

1. Invest in skills training programs for workers to adapt to clean technologies.
2. Promote information about the labour market opportunities available in the green economy.

Expand High School Partnerships

We recommend the provincial government:

1. Support high school laddering programs that benefit younger populations, in areas of particular importance to the B.C. economy. For example, we would recommend expanding/piloting high school programs in areas focused in coding, cybersecurity, nursing, and mass timber.
2. Explore opportunities to accelerate apprenticeships and provide trades training to high school students. This may include exploring new ideas like creating high schools focused on one particular job area (like the Maritime High School or Aviation High School in the State of Washington).
3. Provide resources for high school career counsellors to showcase the full breadth of jobs available to British Columbians, including promoting the value of jobs in trades, tourism, etc.

4. Invest in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) education early, especially for underrepresented groups in STEAM (Indigenous students and students of color, LGBT+ students, women and rural students). A focus on STEAM should be supported in both formal school curriculum, as well as in informal places of learning like science museums and planetariums.
5. Provide multi-year funding to not-for-profit organizations that offer skills development programs as it allows long-term planning and strategic support for complex and elaborate industry initiatives.

Assessment on Literacy and Numeracy

We recommend the provincial government:

1. Conduct an assessment and action plan as needed to ensure British Columbian students are not falling behind nationally and globally as it pertains to numeracy and literacy.
2. Provide long term, stable funding for community literacy programs to provide more and flexible options for learners, working learners and parents.

Accelerate Government Program Approvals

We call on the provincial government to:

1. Identify ways of expediting government post-secondary program approvals, especially in areas related to emerging sectors.