



Employment Challenges for Youth in a Changing Economy



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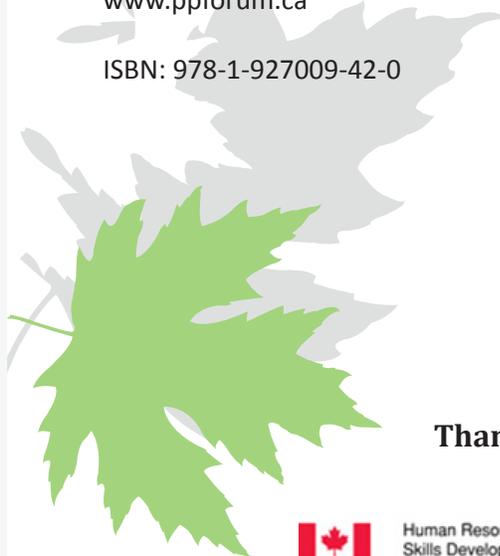
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Executive Summary

The onset of economic downturn in late 2008 and early 2009 has had a varied effect on the Canadian economy. While much has been made about Canada's relatively stable performance during this time, persistently high levels of youth unemployment since the downturn reveal that for a large number of Canadian youth, the impacts of recession have been deeply felt. Panelists and participants at the symposium *Employment Challenges for Youth in a Changing Economy* pointed to a need to uncover what the specific impacts of downturn have been, why high youth unemployment rates persist, and what can be done by policymakers, the private sector, and academic and community institutions to help youth realize their full potential.

Recent job numbers for July 2012 indicate an unemployment rate for youth (ages of 15 – 24) of 14.3%, nearly double that of the general population.¹ While this is favourable over the recession's peak unemployment rate of 16.9% for youth,² it suggests there has been minimal improvement to the situation faced by younger job seekers.

The immediate effects of high youth unemployment are a cause for concern, and even more so are the broader social consequences that may arise if this problem persists. Long-term scarring, in the form of depressed wages and limited opportunities for advancement, threatens the career paths of youth across Canada. As the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development warned in June 2012, the long-term prospects for youth will continue to decline if action is not taken to improve the job situation.

To ensure the quality of life and opportunity for a new generation, we must face this issue head on. As demonstrated at this symposium by over 100 participants, from governments, universities, colleges, polytechnics, community organizations, and the private sector, there is a will to act, collaboratively and immediately.

A number of key areas offer promise for improving this situation. Opportunities in Canada are projected to grow in specific sectors over the next ten years, offering a significant source of employment for youth. This Insights Report focuses on these areas in particular, reflecting insights into the opportunities for action, best practices and promising approaches discussed at the symposium:

- Co-ops, apprenticeships, and internships
- Multiple Pathways to Prosperity
- Collaborative Approaches
- Career Development Services and Mentorship
- Connecting Over New Tools

The specific actions that follow suggest ways that we can collectively create the conditions that will allow youth to realise their full potential. The success of these activities will rest on our ability to mobilize all sectors to lead in their own unique way. This symposium represented a significant step forward on the path to collaborative action to address the challenges of youth employment in a changing economy.



Introduction

On March 27, 2012, Canada's Public Policy Forum and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada convened *Employment Challenges for Youth in a Changing Economy*. This one-day symposium convened experts from across Canada and abroad to discuss actionable strategies for addressing the post-economic downturn that faces Canada's youth. Over 100 participants from the educational, private, non-profit and public sectors participated in the symposium.

The symposium had four objectives:

- Explore the labour market situation of Canadian youth and their differential employment outcomes;
- Provide multi-sectoral perspectives on factors driving the poor integration of youth into a changing and uncertain labour market;
- Discuss the approaches suggested to address this situation, focusing on how and by whom this action will be led;
- Provide insights into the possibilities for multi-stakeholder approaches to this situation.

This report provides a background to the challenges facing youth today in light of the recent economic downturn. Following this overview, best practices and promising approaches from regional, national, and international perspectives are outlined. The report concludes with suggestions from panelists and participants for action and collaboration among Canada's educational, private, non-profit and public sectors.

Youth perspectives were incorporated throughout the day, through short videos preceding each panel. These perspectives are incorporated in text boxes throughout this report.

For a full overview of the day as well as a list of participants, please see the appendix.

Background: Youth Employment Today

The data for youth unemployment during the height of the economic downturn indicate that youth today face the greatest challenge finding work of any single age category. In July 2009, the average unemployment rate for all age groups hit an 11-year high of 8.6%.³ At the same time, the unemployment rate for youth (15-24) and students⁴ hit highs of 16.4% and 20.9%, respectively.⁵ The impact has also been sustained over time: the unemployment rate for youth remains almost double that of the general population, standing at 14.3% and 7.3% for youth and all Canadians, respectively.⁶ These statistics form the basis of concerns that youth are not getting the opportunities they need to build a stable and lasting career.

From a global perspective, Canadian youth face challenges similar to their peers around the world, experiencing higher unemployment rates than the general population. In some countries, the impact of the recession on youth has been especially severe, notably in countries such as Spain and Greece, where youth unemployment levels reached as high as 46.4% and 44.4% in 2011, respectively, compared with 19.4% and 15.8% for the general population.⁷ Although Canadian youth are faring comparatively better than some of their peers, the fact is that as of May 2012 the unemployment rate for ages 15-24 was nearly double that of the national average, indicating that there is a need for coordinated action to better address the challenges and propose solutions.

Table 1: Youth (15 to 24) Unemployment Rates Pre-Downturn and Post-Downturn⁸

Countries	Pre-Downturn (2007)	Post-Downturn (2010)
Canada	11.2%	14.8%
US	10.5%	18.4%
UK	14.4%	19.1%
AUS	9.4%	11.5%

To get a complete picture of the issue, it is important to look at the specific ways in which youth have been impacted. Prior to the economic downturn, 43% of the 6.8 million youth in Canada were enrolled in full-time education, 44% had completed their transition into the labour market and 13.3% were neither employed or in education.⁹

Following the downturn, a variety of impacts on youth have been identified, including:

- Delayed transition to the labour market by youth preparing to graduate;
- Unemployment;
- Decision to return to school;
- Decision to leave school due to insufficient income to support studies; and
- Further detachment on the part of those not currently in the labour force, based on poor prospects.¹⁰

Based on a significant and growing body of literature surrounding the challenges facing youth today, two distinct groups have been identified. These distinctions necessitate important policy considerations based on diverse needs and to an extent, varying challenges:

“I’m working contracts...I’m with an employment agency...they’re sort of giving me temporary jobs here and there...I’m working this job for one day. I have another job on Tuesday, for one day.”

Poorly Integrated New Entrants (PINEs): these youth “often have qualifications, but not the adequate skills to secure a stable job and they frequently go back and forth between temporary jobs, unemployment and/or inactivity, even during periods of strong economic growth.”¹¹

Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET): these youth “simply do not make it in the labour market. They often lack a diploma, come from an immigrant/minority background and/or live in disadvantaged/rural/remote areas.”¹⁰

While these groups of youth face different challenges and varying levels of opportunity, the impacts of poor or limited/non-existent integration can result in similar outcomes for

both. Failure to secure adequate employment following the completion of education or the decision to enter the labour market has been noted by some experts as having a lasting impact on the individual’s ability to advance professionally. This phenomenon, referred to as long-term “scarring,” is suggested to be one of the greatest risks posed by un/underemployment. The impacts of scarring can include persistent difficulty in finding employment and lower earnings relative to one’s peer group.¹² This places long-term pressure on that individual’s economic prospects – for example, it is estimated that it can take up to 10 years to make up for lost earnings that come as a result of accepting a job below one’s qualification level.¹³

“I have a job as a waiter at an upscale restaurant...I do have experience in that industry, and that’s been very helpful...of course, with an undergraduate degree I feel a lot more overqualified for working in that kind of environment.”

It was against this backdrop that participants convened to discuss the challenges and opportunities to increase opportunities for youth facing a difficult labour market. The following section provides more detailed perspectives on the challenges faced by youth, from the perspective of governments, academic institutions, community organizations, and youth themselves.

Contextualizing the Challenges: Youth Employment Today

Dr. Kellie Leitch, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development opened the symposium with remarks reflecting on the challenges facing youth today, with emphasis on the growing labour shortages and skills mismatch in the Canadian labour market. Increased global competition, a robust resources sector, and new technologies are some of the major forces rapidly re-shaping today's economy.

I'm having a lot of debate with myself about what's my value in the workforce, how much is an education worth, should I have done a master's degree, should I have just, straight out of high school, stayed working at the major Canadian bank where I was, and you know, maybe right now, I would be making twice as much money, in a high level job, not doing something I love, not necessarily doing something I'm proud of...but, I'll be employed"

These transformative forces are creating a need for new skills and competencies, a reality that Canadians are now confronting. However, the pace of change is driving growing labour shortages and skills mismatches, as institutions and individuals alike struggle to adapt to these new economic realities. For example, the growth experienced in the resources sector is driving a need for skilled labour that currently is not being met. One proposed way to close the skills gap is to mobilize data around current and projected labour and skills needs in order to create better alignment between academic institutions, training organizations, governments and the private sector. This could be done through the creation of a database of skills for employers, employees, governments and academic institutions to draw information about the labour market from.

A closely related challenge is the lack of awareness among youth about the numerous (and growing) opportunities that do exist in today's labour market. Channeling figures about current and anticipated opportunities to youth is a way to increase youth employment, by highlighting the range of opportunities that exist outside of what is sometimes communicated to youth in more traditional environments. For example, greater information could be used to help youth draw the link between their desired education path and the jobs directly available (or, working backwards from an employment goal and helping youth to create a tailored path by which to achieve it). This will obviously take coordinated efforts on the part of educators, the private sector, and governments, but this could be realized through a number of efforts ranging from media campaigns to greater counseling support in schools.

In a dynamic economy there is also a need on the part of youth to be flexible and adaptive to an evolving labour market. This could mean being prepared to seek opportunities for skills upgrading, or to learn new skills based on changing demand. For example, it was noted that many youth are turning to college programs after the completion of bachelor's degrees. Further, flexibility could also mean greater labour mobility among today's youth. While part of this issue rests on the willingness of employees to move to where work is, it may also necessitate policy changes, for example in the case of apprenticeship rules, which are governed by provincial certification systems.



Multi-stakeholder Perspectives: Supply Side

Following Dr. Leitch’s remarks, panelists from Polytechnics Canada, le Centre d’études et de recherches sur les transitions et l’apprentissage, and YMCA Canada offered insights into the major shifts in the labour market and youth development.

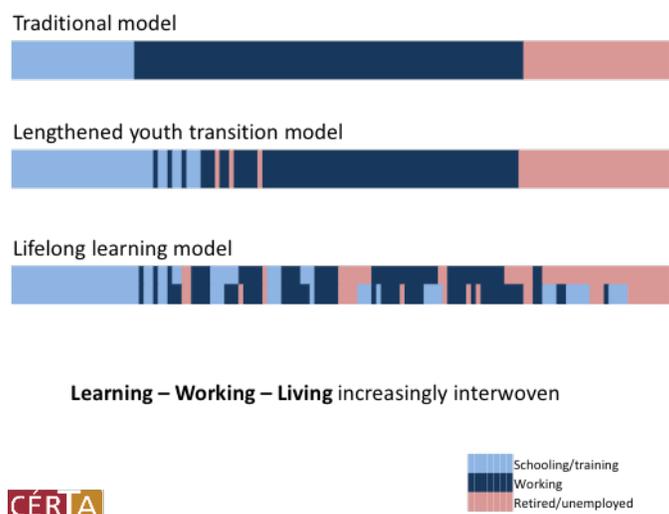
Some of the themes explored from the supply side perspective of this relationship include:

- Early intervention: preparing youth using flexible learning environments and lifelong learning approaches; and
- Developing multiple pathways to success.

Early Intervention, Flexible Learning Environments and Lifelong Learning

It was suggested that many issues related to youth transitions flow from existing approaches to youth development and learning.¹³ Panelists focused on the need to develop lifelong learning as a core concept in our education system, and in society more generally, suggesting that educators should look for ways to create environments that engage children and youth in the development of a long-term path to career success. It was noted that youth (and educators and adults alike) must “learn to learn;” they must be encouraged to approach learning as something that happens at all stages of life, in all environments. The need to move away from a linear life-course model (“learn – work – live”) to one based on embracing life-long learning is depicted visually below.

Fig. 1: Changing Life Course Models:



Viewing early acquisition of skills and qualifications as part of a life-long process of learning and development could create help to create flexible and adaptive individuals, which is increasingly valued in today’s competitive labour market. One way suggested to do this is through the development of more flexible learning environments that embrace the different ways that children and youth learn, and encourage the development of unique talents and interests.

A flexible learning environment is one that:

- targets risk takers and poor school performers at a younger age;
- motivates youth and encourage school completion;
- identifies alternative learning opportunities such as VET and work experience;
- builds aspirations by communicating the range of opportunities available to youth; and,
- provides opportunities for alternative skills development, for those whose needs are not met by traditional education, at a young age.

Developing Multiple Pathways to Success

Building on the notion that we need to broaden our understanding of learning and of life-course models, the idea that there is one preferred “pathway” to employment is proving to be a concept that is far too simplistic in today’s economy. The “single pathway” approach is reflective of a cultural bias that sometimes exists within educational institutions and suggests that a university or college degree is the single most important path to prosperity for youth today. Instead, we should look for ways to orient our system towards flexible approaches to learning, career planning, and eventually, transition into the labour market.

A more constructive approach could be built out of recognition that there are multiple pathways to success, and each individual can achieve success by taking his or her own path. This means that instead of stressing one single credential system, the emphasis is placed on gaining *skills* and *training* suited to the individual’s talents and interests. For example, research presented during the afternoon panel highlighted a number of countries that emphasize the importance of vocational education training, whether through school or through a combination of school and

Multi-stakeholder Perspectives: Demand Side

apprenticeship opportunities. It was also suggested that in many of these countries, the school-to-work transition is smoother.

In Canada, this will be particularly important as policymakers strive to overcome a shortage of skilled workers, which is expected to grow as jobs in the resources sector drive up the need for skilled trades.

“What I experience in my job search is a lot of competition, very unequal opportunities I’d say, and the economic downturn makes employers a lot more hesitant to hire new, untrained graduates.”

Estimates from one panelist suggest that 650,000 skilled workers will be needed over the next ten years in Alberta alone. At the same time, employers expressed concern about the dual challenges presented by an aging workforce and increased difficulty attracting youth to jobs in skilled trades. Greater focus on VET policies could be a way to expose youth to opportunities in the skilled trades at an early age, which could increase the numbers of youth who pursue jobs in the skilled trades.

Perspectives from the demand side of the relationship were represented by employers from Citi Canada, a major financial institution employing a large workforce at a range of skills levels; Fusion Learning Inc., a small employer providing professional services; and Skills Canada, a national nonprofit that represents employers seeking to engage youth in careers in the skilled trades.

Some of the themes explored from the demand side perspective of this relationship include:

- A growing skills mismatch;
- The need to enhance the soft skills of youth; and
- Identifying and providing opportunities for ongoing training.

Skills Mismatch

The overarching dynamic of a post-economic downturn environment has dramatically altered the profile of job-seekers. Whereas in periods of growth employers faced competition for employees, today’s economic dynamics have driven a shift in the makeup of the job market towards a greater number of candidates with a range of profiles, many of whom have high levels of education and job experience. From this perspective, it was suggested that private sector employers need to be cognizant of the long-term potential of younger candidates and new graduates, seeking ways to engage youth with limited experience, so that they can gain the experience they need to succeed.

Beyond the growing competition for jobs in some sectors, there is an equally large gap growing in the skilled trades sector in Canada. A number of factors are driving this gap, including current and anticipated losses of employees as the baby boom generation reaches the age of retirement; difficulty in attracting youth to opportunities in the skilled trades; and impediments to the mobility of skilled tradespersons.

Further, this skills mismatch is particularly acute in certain sectors and regions. For example, the growth in Canada’s resources sector is creating a large demand for skilled labour in Alberta and Saskatchewan. This suggests more needs to be done to attract youth to skilled labour, but also to allow for the recognition of certification and training in one province as an apprentice, which may differ from the standards in another province.



Soft Skills and Working with Gen Y

Employers articulated the need to enhance the soft skills of youth as they transition to the labour force. Oral and written communications, professionalism, and critical thinking were all identified as key skills that must be developed in youth to ensure their success in the workplace. While some of these skills are elements of core curricula, there is a growing gap between what is expected in the workplace and what is being developed in youth in formal education.

Beyond these core competencies, participants discussed the need to prepare youth for the actual transition from education to work by providing them with adequate career development services in advance of their entrance into the labour market. Speakers and participants noted that many youth are unaware of how to conduct a job search and to market themselves to potential employers. Preparing youth for their job search could include providing opportunities to develop interview skills, where to look for jobs, and also how to adapt to a new organizational culture once a job has been secured.

Finally, it was noted that there is a need for employers to examine their own perceptions and interactions with a new generation of youth, commonly referred to as Gen Y. These youth have a completely different experience of the world: they are tech-savvy, having grown up with the internet, personal computers, and smart phones; they are confident and achievement-oriented; and, they are often comfortable challenging traditional hierarchical structures. For some employers, this can create a perception that Gen Y employees are entitled or lack a strong work ethic. However, as highlighted by one private sector panelist, the onus is on employers to understand what motivates these employees, and how their talents can be uncovered. Some ways for employers to unlock the passion of Gen Y include being open to new ideas, providing face time to employees to demonstrate they are listened to and valued, and demonstrating that with hard work come opportunities to advance by being willing to promote them to higher level positions.

Responsibility for Ongoing Training

The need for ongoing training and regular skills upgrading, as discussed above, is becoming a central component of today's economy. The question of who is responsible for providing ongoing training opportunities was discussed, especially in light of the emphasis throughout the day on lifelong learning and skills development.

Private sector leaders acknowledged the importance of ongoing training and skills development within the workplace. Speakers noted that while there are many organizations providing these opportunities, as a whole the private sector could help to make this a priority for their employees.



Insights: Best Practices, Promising Approaches

While the challenges above are clearly being experienced across Canada, similar dynamics can be found internationally. As attention to the issue of youth employment has risen, so too have a number of efforts and initiatives to address this challenge begun to emerge.

Canadian and international perspectives were engaged to identify some of these best practices and promising approaches. Participants' views were incorporated throughout the day through roundtable discussions, as well as during discussion periods following each panel. The following section reflects the key themes discussed during the luncheon keynote, afternoon panels and roundtable engagement session.

“Earn while you learn”: Co-op, apprenticeships, and internships

Providing youth with opportunities to gain experience while they are learning and before they enter the labour market full-time was identified as a significant best practice both domestically and internationally. Youth who have gained pre-employment experience through part-time and summer work experiences, co-op placements, internships, and apprenticeships are better prepared for the labour market, and have the additional bonus of being more attractive to prospective employers because they already have work experience.

One way to encourage greater participation in pre-employment on-the-job training is through more widespread use of apprenticeships. Expanding our typical approach to apprenticeship (or co-op/internship) to be relevant to any education or career path can lead to greater human capital development, and in turn greater productivity. In Germany, for example, approximately two-thirds of youth are engaged in an apprenticeship activity. This is driven by a more expansive view of apprenticeship and a focus on craft and human capital development through experience. While Canadian jurisdictions must be allowed the flexibility to create the policies and programs suited to local circumstances, it was suggested that it is important to consider developing a coordinated national approach to apprenticeship training.

Other countries that support greater opportunities for youth to combine education and on-the-job training include Belgium, Denmark, and Sweden. In Belgium, youth have access to 47 training centres in Flanders, where vocational education and training opportunities are offered based on local labour market needs. These programs offer youth

paid part-time work three days of the week, with training centre programs to be taken the other two days of the week. 96% of participants are reported to have found full-time employment within six months of completion.¹⁶ In Denmark, the Jobstarter program offers funding to create traineeships, to support companies with no previous experience in training employees. These projects are coordinated by regional offices and implemented by trade chambers, local and regional bodies, education providers and employers.¹⁷ Finally, in Sweden, workplace learning implemented collaboratively by educational institutions and the private sector is done on a project by project basis, where two or three “learners” are assigned to companies who can provide training in running a business. This allows employees to leverage the creativity of students and potentially recruit new employees over time, while students develop business acumen and key competencies.¹⁸

Canadian best practices can be seen in programs like Career Edge, which matches recent graduates with 6-12 month paid internships. Career Edge Organization is a non-profit service provider that connects businesses from a range of sectors with qualified graduates, internationally qualified professionals, and graduates with disabilities. Since 1996 they have helped launch the careers of over 10,700 graduates, and have done so sustainably by funding their organization through employer-paid program delivery fees. Programs such as this, which provide recent graduates with internship opportunities, help bridge youth as they move from student to employee.

Another alternative model of skills development discussed at the symposium is the award-winning BladeRunners program, which was created in order to provide skills and training opportunities to disadvantaged youth. Started in 1994, the program eventually resulted in a Labour Market Agreement signed with the Governments of Canada and British Columbia in 2008. This agreement guarantees funding for training initiatives ranging from employment services to skills development, to direct work experience. This may include work experience through job placements and project-based job creation, integrated projects for youth at-risk, persons with disabilities or non-EI-eligible workers who have been laid off, or training offered by the employer either in the workplace or off-site. Through BladeRunners, a number of at-risk youth have been given skills training (often leading to apprenticeships and the acquisition of certified skills and trades qualifications) and access to meaningful employment, as well as 24/7 support to ease the transition to the labour market. This has also benefited employers by providing them a supply of trained, reliable labour.

Multiple Pathways to Prosperity

Vocational education and training is increasingly considered an important mechanism through which the growing skills gap could be addressed. The need to provide youth a greater variety of educational and skills development opportunities is a growing focus of policymakers and practitioners alike.

“At the core of it all, I’ve realized that if I want to make it in this economy, and if I want to have an engaging and challenging job, I’m going to need to educate myself and train myself. As much as you train yourself and go through all these steps, there is no guarantee at the end of the day, which is really discouraging.”

A leading VET initiative is the project led by the Harvard Graduate School of Education: *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. This project undertook a comparative analysis of the American education system contrasted with a number of international systems, concluding ultimately that an over-emphasis on the four-year bachelor’s degree was putting American students at a disadvantage. Instead, focusing on rigorous academic systems coupled with multiple pathways incorporating applied and technical education was seen to better enhance the success of youth by providing them with numerous opportunities to follow.

For the United States, the recommendations of this report have been positively received and are currently being developed for implementation by a number of states, including Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The frameworks being developed include:

- Greater support from employers for workplace learning and transitions;
- The development of multiple clear pathways, including structures, timelines, costs and requirements;
- Career development resources provided at an early stage and sustained throughout education; and
- Local and regional information centres to provide support and resources to the development of pathways.¹⁹

Europe also leads in the development and application of VET systems, with strong results. For example, research led by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) suggests that graduates of general programs are more likely to experience prolonged periods of unemployment than their peers who graduate from VET programs.²⁰ In Europe, VET systems in 33 countries are coordinated under the Copenhagen Process, established in 2002 to strengthen VET systems. Policy objectives and common measures are renewed on an annual basis, and country progress is monitored by the EU. In addition to external validation and quality monitoring, the VET system is further strengthened by collaboration and dialogue with the private sector; enhanced opportunities for teacher training; and mobility for students to take part in vocational training in different EU countries.²¹

Canada could follow this model in a number of ways, where the ultimate goal would be to create a collaborative, supportive environment with stakeholders connecting their efforts at local, regional, and even national levels to enhance the number and range of opportunities available to youth. This system would allow for greater individualization of the “path to prosperity” that young people find themselves on. Some opportunities to develop and promote multiple pathways include:

- The development of resources (e.g. career charting and educational charting) that offer youth multiple pathways through volunteer, work, and study opportunities;
- Enhanced support for VET-based education systems;
- Greater support in our guidance systems and educational institutions, in the form of counselors trained on the implementation of a multiple pathways approach; and
- Increased employer involvement in education and skills development.

A Collaborative Approach

The importance of a more collaborative approach was stressed throughout the day. An emerging best practice in the area of collaborative service delivery was articulated in a presentation on the use of Social Impact Bonds (SIBs) by the UK Government. SIBs are a contract between the UK Government and a private service delivery organization, where payment is based on the achievement of a defined social outcome. Government investment is leveraged to attract private sector support, allowing risk to be spread across the government and private investors.

It was noted that a number of key factors are important in the development of a social impact bond market. These include: the ability to define a desired outcome (and to attach a dollar figure to it); the development of new partnerships; and final, a successful procurement model. Currently there is a promising policy discussion emerging in Canada around the potential use of Social Impact Bonds, which could offer way to enhance collaborative approaches to improving the employment prospects of youth.

Another example of a best practice in the area of collaborative program development and delivery is BUSINESSEUROPE, an organization dedicated to coordinating and representing the interests of over 20 million companies from 35 countries. BUSINESSEUROPE facilitates the exchange of information between schools, companies, teachers and trainers, while also ensuring its' members interests are represented to European institutions. BUSINESSEUROPE advocates for the dual system as a way to combine theory and practice, provide opportunities for youth to “earn while you learn,” increase the employability of apprentices, and facilitate a smoother transition to the labour market.²²

Career Development Services and Mentorship

While skills and education are the foundation needed to enter the labour force, there is a growing awareness of the need to provide youth with the career development services that, starting at an early age, will help youth visualize, plan for, and eventually make the transition to employment and succeed throughout a career. An important component of both VET and traditional educational systems, career development services can help break down the tendency to over-emphasize traditional education paths by exposing youth to the range of opportunities that exist in skilled trades and other fields.

Beyond long-term planning, career development services are useful resources for youth as they enter into the transition period that accompanies completion of education. From the job search perspective, many youth today are simply unaware of the challenge that can come with completing education and moving into the job world. Career skills such as resume and cover letter writing, interviewing skills, and securing references and follow up are essential, and must be incorporated into education systems in a more effective manner. Developing greater capacity among guidance counselors and teachers was identified as a potential action area for promoting the skills needed to successfully transition to work.

Finally, career development services and mentors are useful ways to educate youth on the emotional and inter-personal competencies that create success in the workplace, such as analytical thinking, ability to work collaboratively and independently, adaptability and initiative. Community organizations, educators, and guidance counselors are all specific resources that could be tapped into for this purpose. For example, the BladeRunners program, which provide round-the-clock support to trainees, demonstrates the value of career development support and mentorship. In addition to providing program participants with skills upgrading and training opportunities, the BladeRunners model provides mentorship and support through BladeRunners coordinators. These resources were created as a way to assist at-risk youth, who were experiencing problems outside of regular work hours. In order to improve the chances of success for this program, the need for social support was identified, and has since become an important component of the model as a whole.

Connect over new tools, channels

A final insight about supporting youth today is that action needs to be taken in meaningful and engaging ways. Reaching out to youth where they are – on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media – is one of the best ways to reach even the most difficult to engage youth. Today's youth look for and receive their information in different ways, and employers and other stakeholders must be sensitive to that.

Initiatives will enhance their potential for success if they can leverage new tools to spread information and create interactive online spaces for students to engage in a dialogue about the challenges they are facing and the

Opportunities for Action

opportunities that they seek. One recommendation that came up repeatedly throughout the day was the need for a database of skills, which governments, employers, youth and academic institutions could draw from for information. While many of these organizations offer their own online resources, there is an opportunity to develop web-based portals and social media apps collaboratively with employers, governments and non-profits. Creating a single hub or database could be a useful resource for youth to find information on a range of topics such as skills, training, and labour force statistics.

Skills Canada is an example of an organization that has made a significant effort to reach out to youth using social media, including Youtube and Twitter. Beyond this, their organizational mission of preparing youth for opportunities in skilled trades and technology is conducted collaboratively with private sector partners, and uses a hands-on approach to learning. National and international competitions, as well as an annual awareness week provide key opportunities to reach youth and provide them with opportunities to experiment with careers in skilled trades and technology.

The insights shared during the Symposium point to a number of opportunities for action to support youth as they develop skills and competencies, prepare for the transition to the labour market, and grow into the leaders of tomorrow. Participants agreed that collaborative action in particular can be leveraged into new initiatives at all levels – locally, regionally, and nationally. It was suggested that governments have a key role to play in acting as the facilitator of collaborative efforts, engaging partners from the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and academic institutions.

Some specific opportunities that were suggested by symposium participants include:

- **Implementing programs and initiatives reflective of the new paradigms of life-long learning and multiple pathways:** This includes exploring new ways of teaching and learning, including the use of Vocational Education and Training, as well as training opportunities for youth and individuals already in their career.
- **Greater mentorship to develop individualized approaches for youth:** Enhance the capacity of guidance counselors, mentors and teachers to work with youth to develop the skills and talents that reflect their strengths and can lead to careers.
- **Coordinating data and information sharing among the private sector, governments, academic institutes and community organizations to:**
 - Identify the skills needed and opportunities available in a short, medium, and long-term sense.
 - Develop and deliver educational and skills programs that match the needs of the labour market in an engaging way.
 - Prepare youth better for the transition to work by developing the soft skills and inter-personal competencies that underpin success in the workplace.



Beyond the need for collaborative action in the areas above, participants suggested the following opportunities for action from each sector:

Policy Makers/Public Sector

- **Explore and expand the apprenticeship model:** examine and address structural flaws in logic. Treat apprentices as learners instead of as employees.
- **Encourage and incentivize collaboration and integration among the university and college sectors:** allow for improved credit recognition to enable simpler transfers and transitions between post-secondary institutions.
- **Develop opportunities for vocational education and training:** provide opportunities in curriculum at the elementary and secondary level for students to experiment with tactile skills and vocational education, channeling non-traditional learners into differentiated learning environments.

Private Sector

- **Consider opportunities for mentorship and guidance:** work with youth at pre-employment stage, as well as on-the-job, to help them develop and grow into successful employees
- **Work with employees to identify opportunities for skills upgrading:** be a part of the lifelong learning process by building a supportive environment with opportunities to upgrade or learn new skills

Academic Sector

- **Re-examine the post-secondary experience:** Flexibility, and relevance should be key drivers of the post-secondary environment.
- **Collaborate:** with other academic institutions, and with the private sector, to provide engaging opportunities for skills development, job-training, and cross-pollination of competencies. Improve cooperation between institutions and sectors of post-secondary system.
- **Explore opportunities for vocational training:** It was suggested that you can be a knowledge worker even with “vocational training,” and that this should be incorporated into universities as much as it is in other post-secondary institutions.

- **Accelerate opportunities for skills development:** Focus on new programs that accelerate completion of credentials, especially for students returning to post-secondary or completing a post-graduate credential.

Nonprofit and Community Sector

- **Promote youth development:** provide opportunities for informal learning and youth development through extra-curricular activities.
- **Encourage awareness:** share information with youth about the diversity of opportunities available to youth.
- **Provide mentorship and guidance:** Leverage the skills and strengths of leaders to support and mentor youth as they face major life choices.

Closing Remarks

Ian Shugart, Deputy Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada provided closing remarks to the symposium. He noted that while many of the numbers, causes, and factors that contribute to this issue are well-known, it is worth re-stating the importance of this issue. Addressing these challenges is not only important for today's youth, it is also essential for ensuring the health of the Canadian economy; beyond that, these challenges threaten the health of our communities and our social structures, and if left unaddressed could do so for decades to come.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada is clearly concerned with this issue, yet as the Deputy noted, there is also concern across the Government of Canada. Important linkages exist across departments; therefore addressing this challenge is a priority for the government as a whole. Further, to be able to create robust policy responses, the Department is looking to what the contribution of various other sectors can be, and how collaborative solutions can be developed. He noted that addressing these challenges will likely require a range of responses, applied in a variety of ways simultaneously. While these are challenging times for policy development, innovation and collaboration will be essential for success.

Conclusion

The employment challenges facing youth are increasingly pressing, and the implications of not responding should be of concern to policymakers, the private sector and academic institutions across Canada. As noted by the OECD in the *Employment Outlook 2012*²³, there is a legitimate threat of long-term career scarring if nothing is done to improve the employment prospects of youth immediately. Failure to act today could mean the erosion of the foundation for a thriving Canadian society tomorrow.

Employment Challenges for Youth in a Changing Economy was convened in order to identify what action can be taken. Over 100 participants from the private, non-profit, academic and public sectors participated in this dialogue, with significant representation from different Canadian regions. Speakers and participants from abroad allowed for global perspectives from governments, international organizations and academic institutions to feature prominently.

The desire to identify and lead coordinated, collaborative action is evident in the outcomes from the panel presentations, keynote addresses, and roundtable engagement sessions. The symposium points to a number of areas for action, including specific recommendations for collaboration (on program delivery, skills and training initiatives, and our education system) as well as distinct areas for all stakeholders to lead action (from providing greater mentorship, to developing individualized paths for youth). There is an opportunity to coordinate strategies on these challenges, to leverage the many best practices and case studies highlighted from both within Canada and abroad.

Most importantly, this symposium demonstrated the commitment of all sectors to act now to secure the future of today's youth. The recommendations found in this report should form the basis of a coordinated plan that allows leaders across Canada to champion the future of youth.



Agenda

March 27th, 2012

8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Ottawa Convention Centre

The conference will strive to achieve the following objectives:

- Explore the labour market situation of Canadian youth and their differential employment outcomes
- Provide multiple perspectives (youth, employers, academia, policy) on factors driving the poor integration of youth into a changing and uncertain labour market
- Understand the potential of a multi-stakeholder approach (youth, employers, academia and policy) for addressing the poor integration of youth into a changing and uncertain labour market
- Discuss the current and emerging employment challenges facing youth in Canada and the best policy and program responses to meet them

8:00 a.m.

Registration and Refreshments

8:30 a.m.

Welcome Remarks

David Mitchell, President and CEO, Public Policy Forum

8:40 a.m.

Opening Address

Kellie Leitch, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour

9:00 a.m.

Multi-stakeholder perspectives: *The Supply Side*

This session will feature stakeholder perspectives on the challenges surrounding youth employment in Canada in a changing and uncertain labour market, focusing on how educational institutions are aligning with new labour market needs. It will also examine these new realities from the youth perspective and discuss the on-the-ground challenges from a service delivery perspective.

- Moderator: Allen Sutherland, Assistant Deputy Minister, Learning Branch, HRSDC
- Nobina Robinson, Chief Executive Officer, Polytechnics Canada
- Sylvain Bourdon, University of Sherbrooke
- Laura Palmer Korn, Sr. Vice President, Federation Strategy, YMCA Canada

10:00 a.m.

Health Break

10:15 a.m.

Multi-stakeholder perspectives: *The Demand Side*

The focus of this session will be on how employers view the emerging challenges and opportunities of hiring and retaining youth.

- Moderator: Mark Hopkins, Director General, Strategic Policy and Research, HRSDC
- Shaun Thorson, Chief Executive Officer, Skills/Compétences Canada
- Kevin Higgins, President, Fusion Learning Inc.
- Andrew Noel, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Citi Canada ICG Operations and Technology

11:15 a.m.	<p>Roundtable discussion</p>
12:00 p.m.	<p>Lunch and Keynote Address</p> <p>William C. Symonds, Director, Pathways to Prosperity Project Harvard Graduate School of Education</p>
1:15 p.m.	<p>Promising solutions: What effective practices exist to support youth employment?</p> <p><i>This session will showcase successful labour market programs to support youth transitions and how these lessons can be applied to inform optimal policy responses.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderator: Ron Parker, Associate Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada • Jan Hendeliowitz, Senior Advisor, Ministry of Employment, Denmark • Pascaline Descy, Head of Area, Research and Policy Analysis, CEDEFOP • Donnalee Bell, Senior Consultant, Canadian Career Development Foundation
2:15 p.m.	<p>Health Break</p>
2:30 p.m.	<p>Innovative approaches: Partnerships for improving youth employment</p> <p><i>This session will explore how stakeholders can work together in new ways to support effective labour market transitions for youth. How can government enable other social actors (citizens, businesses, charities) to work together to develop innovative ways to support young people? What is the potential for strengthening partnerships with the private sector, for example, in support of interventions for disadvantaged youth?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderator: Frank Vermaeten, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Skills and Employment Branch, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada • Tracy Hughes, Innovation Fund Programme, Department for Work and Pensions, United Kingdom • Marc Molgat, Director of the School of Social Work, University of Ottawa • Vivian Prokop, Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Youth Business Foundation
3:30 p.m.	<p>Plenary discussion on partnerships for improving youth employment</p> <p>Moderator: Paul Ledwell, Executive Vice-President, Public Policy Forum</p>
4:15 p.m.	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <p>Ian Shugart, Deputy Minister, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada</p>
4:30 p.m.	<p>Adjourn</p>

Participant List

March 27th, 2012

8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Ottawa Convention Centre

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1 Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, July 2012. Available online at www.statcan.gc.ca

2 Ibid.

3 Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, July 2009. Available online at www.statcan.gc.ca

4 From May to August, the Labour Force Survey collects labour market information about young people aged 15 to 24 who were attending school full time in March and intend to return to school full time in the fall.

5 Ibid.

6 Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, May 2012. Available online at www.statcan.gc.ca

7 Eurostat, European Commission. Unemployment rate by gender and age, 2006-2011. Available online at <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>

8 OECD, 31 August 2011: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/unemp-yth-table-2011-1-en>

9 OECD (2009b): Tackling the Job Crisis – the Labour Market and Social Policy Response: Helping Youth to Get a Firm Foothold in the Labour Market, Paris.

10 HRSDC, March 2012, *Employment Challenges for Canadian Youth in a Changing Economy: A Backgrounder*

11 OECD (2010). *Off to a Good Start? Jobs for Youth*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264096127-en>

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Oreopoulos, Philip, Till von Wachter and Andrew Heisz, 2006. "The Short- and Long-Term Career Effects of Graduating in a Recession: Hysteresis and Heterogeneity in the Market for College Graduates," NBER Working Papers 12159, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc.

15 Viewing these issues through the lens of *youth development* forces us to take a step back and regard how we are approaching and nurturing the development of children, teens and young adults to deliver lasting social and personal change. In the words of one panelist, this means an end to the view that children are simply "small adults" and a long-term approach based on the needs of youth based on their developmental stage:

- Ages 0-5: transition to school, foundation of numeracy and literacy
- Ages 6-12: acquisition of skills and confidence; informal learning opportunities become key contributors to development;
- Ages 12-24: major phase of development of the teen/young adult brain; key transitions from primary to high school, to post-secondary, and to work

16 Pascaline Descy, CEDEFOP. "Employment Challenges for Youth – Situation, prospects, and initiatives in Europe." Presentation available online: <http://www.ppforum.ca/sites/default/files/Pascaline%20Descy.pdf>

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

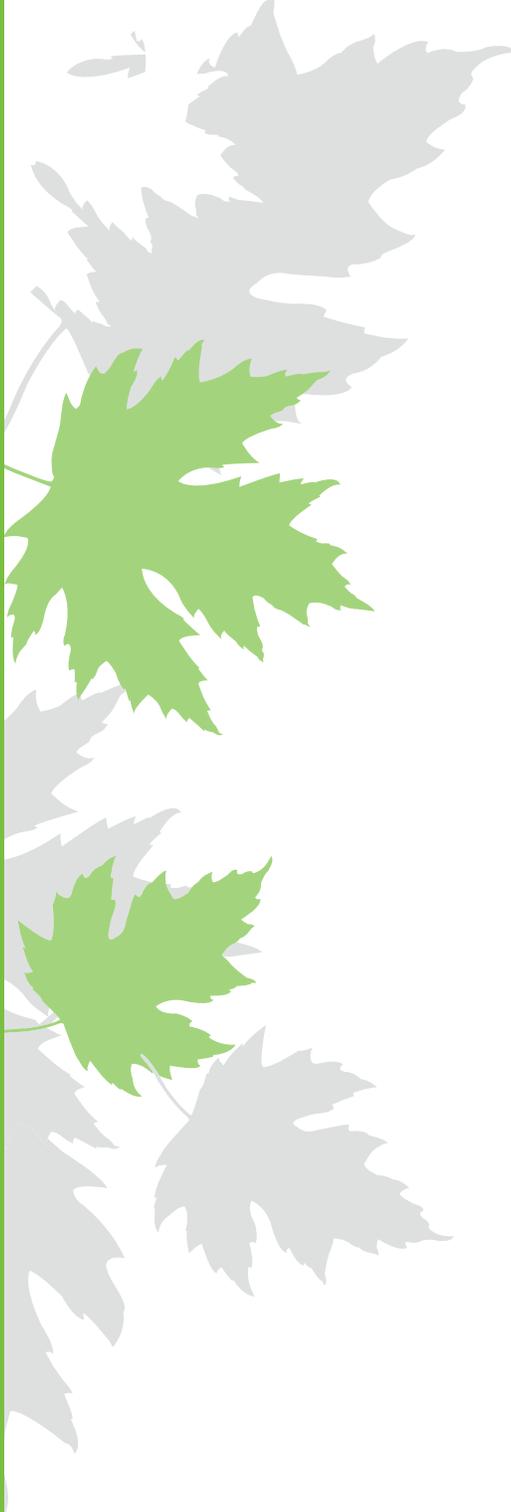
19 Harvard Graduate School of Education. *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. February 2011.

20 Pascaline Descy, CEDEFOP. "Employment Challenges for Youth – Situation, prospects, and initiatives in Europe." Presentation available online: <http://www.ppforum.ca/sites/default/files/Pascaline%20Descy.pdf>

21 European Commission. Education and Training: Vocational Education and Training website: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/vet_en.htm

22 Pascaline Descy, CEDEFOP. "Employment Challenges for Youth – Situation, prospects, and initiatives in Europe." Presentation available online: <http://www.ppforum.ca/sites/default/files/Pascaline%20Descy.pdf>

23 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *OECD Employment Outlook 2012*. Available online: www.oecd.org



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