

“Strengthening Our Skills to Succeed”



**Skills Task Force Update Forum
May 20, 2009**

FORUM REPORT

“Strengthening Our Skills to Succeed”

Skills Task Force Update Forum

St. John’s, NL

May 20, 2009

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Skills Task Force Overview

In 2006, government announced its intention to create a Skills Task Force (STF). The Skills Task Force would identify future workforce skills requirements, assess the ability of the workforce to meet these needs, and identify strategies that could help to satisfy industry demands, particularly for large-scale development projects.

The Skills Task Force was created in March, 2006 by then Minister of Education, the Honourable Joan Burke and brought together key players with the expertise needed to assess and identify skill requirements, anticipate skill gaps, and determine necessary responses from our province's post-secondary and labour market programs. Released in May 2007, *All the Skills to Succeed* included 50 recommendations for government, business, industry, labour and education. The report stressed the need for a coordinated response to labour market needs.

To ensure the successful implementation of the Skills Task Force action plan the Provincial Government then established an Industry Coordinating Committee (ICC). Eleven individuals were appointed representing business, labour, industry, education, the Provincial Government and non-governmental agencies.

The ICC was charged with building on the work of the Skills Task Force and overseeing the implementation of the 50 recommendations outlined in the STF report. Each organization represented on the Industry Coordinating Committee was also represented on the task force. They have an in-depth knowledge of what the task force heard, and what was recommended. Their mandate is to coordinate an action plan and follow through with implementation. They will also explore additional measures to make sure government is not overlooking any opportunity to effectively build our labour market.

The following individuals are currently members of the ICC:

Provincial Government

Bob Ridgley - MHA, St. John's North, chair of the ICC

Rachelle Cochrane - Department of Education

Business

Bob Marshall - Vale Inco, Newfoundland and Labrador Ltd.

Heather Bruce-Veitch - Iron Ore Company of Canada

Labour

Gus Doyle - United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners

Margie Hancock - Public Service Alliance of Canada

Post-Secondary Institutions

Corinne Dunne - College of the North Atlantic

Kay LeMessurier - Private Training

Non-Governmental Agencies

Deborah Armstrong - Regional Council, Rural Secretariat

Daphne Hart - Women in Resource Development Committee

Student Representation

Daniel Smith - Canadian Federation of Students

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Conference Synopsis

“Strengthening Our Skills to Succeed” was the theme of the first annual Skills Task Force update forum held at the Sheraton Hotel Newfoundland in St. John’s on May 20, 2009. This event was sponsored by the Department of Education in partnership with the Industry Coordinating Committee. With over 110 participants from a wide range of sectors, the forum provided a robust channel for communication and dialogue.

The Honourable Darin King, Minister of Education, officially opened the forum and highlighted the province’s significant progress in addressing skilled labour shortages since the release of the Skills Task Force report. Bob Ridgley, M.H.A. for St. John’s North District and chair of the ICC was host for the event.

A presentation was delivered by the provincial Department of Finance on a revised labour supply and demand outlook for major projects. The Department of Education provided an overview of provincial government initiatives to address skilled labour shortages and resulting outcomes. Jerry Byrne, CEO of DF Barnes Group of St. John’s, provided a key-note address during the luncheon focused on the strategic role human resources plays in increasing organizational effectiveness and competitiveness at the local and international level.

The forum also featured an expert industry panel including Margaret Allan of Husky Energy, Paul Harrington of Nalcor (Lower Churchill Project) and Wayne Scott of Vale Inco who provided information and insight on what industry is doing in terms of the task force recommendations, particularly in light of the changing economic conditions.

To ensure effective group discussions and create the opportunity for people to network, it was decided that a self-selection method would be used. During the registration process each delegate selected one of the seven themes outlined in the Skills Task Force update that was of particular relevance to them. They were then placed in a group targeted with discussing and exploring this theme further.

The seven themes were:

- Changing Attitudes and Opening Doors
- Improving Access, Performance and Outcome
- Improving Apprenticeship Programs and Journey person Opportunities
- Support Access for Under-Represented Groups
- Retaining and Recruiting Skilled Workers
- Assessing and Responding to Industry Needs
- Ensuring Strong Partnerships

These sessions allowed participants to discuss progress, opportunities and challenges in relation to these themes, as well as actions government and organizations could pursue in response.

The first annual Skills Task Force update forum allowed for the exchange of expertise and experience between key stakeholders within the province. It represented a diverse group of individuals whose expertise and dedication to addressing the skilled labour shortages help guarantee a bright future for Newfoundland and Labrador. The ICC expects to produce an equally dynamic and productive experience for next year’s update forum.

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Setting the Scene

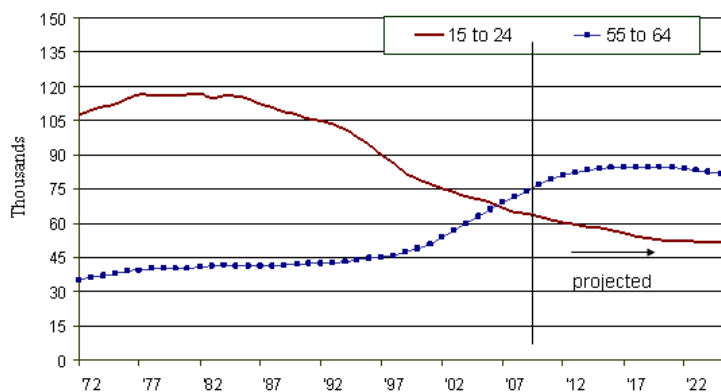
Ken Hicks, manager of modeling and technical analysis with the Economics and Statistics Branch, Department of Finance, presented a comprehensive overview of projected skilled labour requirements for major projects and provided a provincial labour market overview.

GREYING WORKFORCE

By 2011, one-sixth of baby boomers in Canada will be at least 61 years of age. An aging workforce is not unique to Canada but what distinguishes our country is the relatively large size of the baby boom generation. In addition there are fewer youth entering the labour force. In 2001, Newfoundland and Labrador had an average of 1.4 potential new labour force entrants aged 15-24 for every person aged 55-64. Twenty years ago this ratio was 2.6. This, combined with declining birth rates, has pushed the median age of the Newfoundland and Labrador's and Canadian labour force. The median age of the Canadian labour force has increased from 37.1 years in 1991, to 41.2 years in 2006.

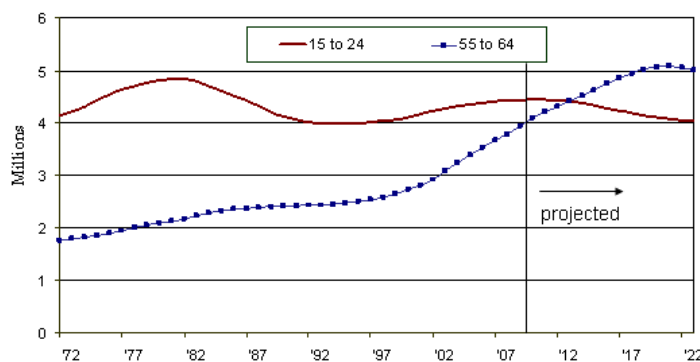
Table 3: Potential Labour Force Entrants vs. Potential Retirees in Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada.

Potential Labour Force Entrants vs. Potential Retirees, NL



Source: Statistics Canada

Potential Labour Force Entrants vs. Potential Retirees, Canada



Source: Statistics Canada

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NEWFOUNDLAND

Since the release of the Skills Task Force report, the labour supply and demand for major projects has taken an outward shift in Newfoundland and Labrador’s labour market. Initially, the total expected demand for workers in all skill areas was to peak in 2011(see table 1), requiring a large number of workers for these projects. This would have resulted in a number of large-scale projects competing for limited workers with certain skilled sets. As a result of the recession, a shift has occurred and peak labour demand is now estimated at 2014/2015. It was stressed that relief from labour pressures are temporary and that continued efforts towards developing a skilled workforce are needed.

Table 1: Potential Major Project Employment – Scenario 1

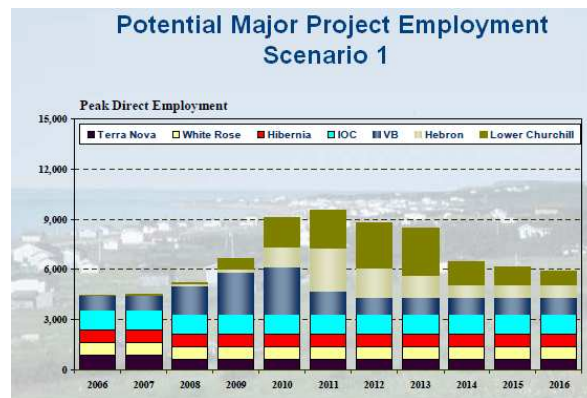
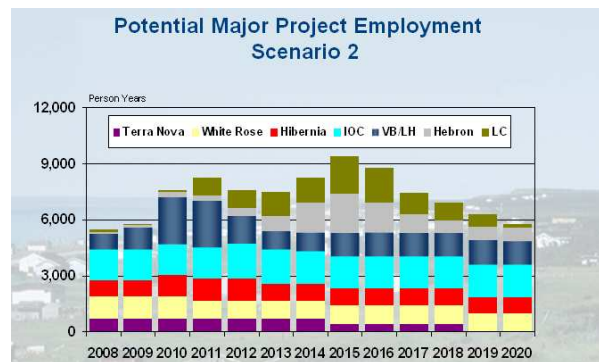


Table 2: Potential Major Project Employment – Scenario 1 Revised



LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

In summary, Mr. Hicks indicated that considerable gains in developing a skilled workforce have been made but that we must continue to build on that growth. The economic recession has granted a small amount of temporary relief, however provincial labour shortages still loom and diligence is needed to address future challenges and projected shortfalls.

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**WHAT WE HEARD:
BREAK OUT SESSIONS**

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What We Heard

This section provides an overview of feedback that was received through forum roundtables and feedback forms that were presented to forum participants. There were several themes that emerged through the analysis of the feedback and they are identified in the following pages. It should be noted that included in this section are a number of suggestions made by participants that are not necessarily the views of government. Further analysis may be required to assist government in determining what is feasible and achievable in setting its strategic priorities.

Changing Attitudes and Opening Doors

CHALLENGE

In Newfoundland and Labrador, as in other provinces, the skilled trades are often perceived as second-choice or even “last-resort” career options with little potential for advancement. One contributing factor to this attitude is the lack of knowledge about the career choices available, particularly among youth. Another is out-of-date ideas about these jobs and the salaries they pay, and about the opportunities that now exist in this and other provinces.

Insufficient career planning is one reason that many youth do not participate in post-secondary training. Information and guidance about skilled trades and technical professions help to influence the way people, particularly youth, think about careers in skilled trades. Raising awareness of the value of these careers among the general public, and facilitating access to information, especially within the K-12 school system, about opportunities and educational requirements will help dispel long-standing myths and open doors of opportunity to youth in the province.

ACTIONS TO DATE

The province’s commitment to changing attitudes and opening doors was discussed and applauded by forum participants. It was stated by one participant that the face of career development within the K-12 school system has “undergone a transformation” and a “definite change of attitude towards skilled trades has occurred.”

The discussions, in reference to initiatives undertaken, revolved around the:

- Success of the *Futures in Skilled Trades and Technology* program, not only for its promotion of skilled trades, but possibly for the decreased rate of early school leavers within the province.
- Career resource professionals within the K-12 system
- Better dissemination of labour market information
- Career resource centres within the communities
- Teacher Ambassador Program
- Hebron Benefits Agreement

It was agreed that these initiatives show a high level of commitment towards promoting growth in our labour force by changing attitudes and opening doors to skilled trades and technology professions. It was felt by the majority of participants that these measures have improved educational opportunities, increased labour force participation, and helped people become better connected to in-demand industries.

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FUTURE ACTIONS IDENTIFIED

Participants were asked to suggest new initiatives they felt could facilitate a change in attitude towards the skilled trades. For ease of reference, participants broke down the target audiences into three categories:

1. Parents
2. Educators
3. Employers

The following is a summary of their suggestions:

Parents

- Develop a web site focused on parents
- Distribute information about skilled trades through monthly bills, such as hydro, electricity, phone, etc.
- Feature “proud” parents as champions discussing their child’s skilled trade career during career days and home-shows
- Send the “skilled trade message” home with children to stimulate parent interest
- Send information/mail-outs within report cards or other school information
- Influence the content of mainstream entertainment to feature skilled trades at work (e.g., reality shows)
- Develop a traveling road show for fairs/trade shows, etc., to attract parents to the booths through hands-on activities with the intent of exposing them to other skilled trade career information

Educators

- Introduce career path training into bachelor of education programs so that all teachers are aware of skilled trade occupations
- Increase the number of Red Seal teachers within the *Futures in Skilled Trades and Technology* program.
- Develop a web site with specific information for educators

Employers

- Engage employers to provide resources to promote their trades and the importance of training
- Develop a web site as a hiring tool that connects employers and skilled trades people
- Develop an employer toolkit to inform employers about the steps to take to hire and retain apprentices; needs to be employer specific
- Develop a tax incentive, wage subsidy, or some financial benefit for supporting apprentices
- Develop a recognition program of businesses that support apprentices
- Develop and promote employee sharing by several businesses
- Employers should develop a bursary program to help cover the costs of training
- Comparability among employers and institutions to validate the effectiveness of training courses

Improving Access, Performance and Outcomes

CHALLENGE

Many students and adult workers have different learning needs and face a variety of barriers that can limit their participation in occupations and training opportunities. These include financial, physical, social, learning and geographical barriers.

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Particular problems have been identified in mathematics, as well as in basic literacy and numeracy. New approaches are required to deliver training when and where it is most needed, by the most appropriate means available. In addition, better recognition of skills many workers already possess is necessary. A significant number of workers are classified as unskilled because their existing proficiencies have not been properly assessed. Proper assessment and recognition of prior learning and qualifications will assist in certifying workers.

ACTIONS TO DATE

In achieving these goals stakeholders were satisfied with the initiatives that have been implemented. Much of the discussion revolved around the:

- Excellence in Mathematics Strategy
- Skilled trades, math curriculum
- Tuition freeze and interest free loans
- Expanding workplace education opportunities
- Career information officers within the K-12 system
- Development of the strategic adult literacy plan

All believed these were positive steps in addressing the strategic targets outlined in the Skilled Task Force action plan and should continue. It was referenced that tracking of outcomes and dissemination of information would further solidify and engage key stakeholders.

Participants then turned their attention to addressing strategic directions for the future.

FUTURE ACTIONS IDENTIFIED

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

It was agreed that progress had been made in the application of this tool but efforts must be made to improve the degree to which prior learning is recognized; recognition still seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

Essential Skills

Participants indicated that apprentices often lack essential skills. Educators and others noted that low levels of educational attainment, literacy and basic skills remain a significant barrier.

- Awareness of the lack of essential skills of apprenticeship is inadequately promoted due to a lack of resources.
- There are funding gaps for literacy and Adult Basic Education training;
- Establish an Essential Skills Steering Committee. The success of essential skills projects will be in the strength and collaboration of key stakeholders within Newfoundland and Labrador. Partner organizations should be drawn from employers, employer associations (e.g., Chambers of Commerce), trade unions, union associations, and learning providers. The potential benefits of essential skills programs in the workplace for employers and workers will be communicated to all stakeholders and understood in advance.

Distance Learning:

It was stated by several forum participants that expansion of distance education opportunities in the skilled trades would be desirable. This medium would allow for the delivery of quality programs and services to all students regardless of their location.

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Other noteworthy observations and suggestions from participants included:

- A call for free post-secondary education
- Industry –continue to increase apprenticeship placements
- Continue/expand secondary school recruitment
- Integrate career development within the K-12 system curriculum wide
- Expand promotion to include other skilled labour opportunities (e.g., agriculture).
- Begin targeted recruitment earlier within the K-12 system in Grade 7

Improving Apprenticeship Programs and Journeyperson Opportunities

CHALLENGE

Training and certification of apprentices that achieve a nationally recognized level of expertise is essential to ensuring a reliable supply of qualified skilled workers. To improve apprenticeship programs and opportunities for journeypersons, the Skills Task Force recommended actions enhancing these programs to ensure they could be completed efficiently and successfully.

The recommendations included:

- Providing a more seamless transition to apprenticeship programs from high school
- Providing alternative delivery means, times and locations for trades training programs
- Advancing the quality and consistency of academic programs for skilled trade occupations
- Increasing opportunities for apprentices to gain work experience
- Improving the completion rate of apprentices
- Enhancing certification of certified journeypersons to meet industry needs

ACTIONS TO DATE

Forum participants were very pleased with government’s commitment to and progress in streamlining and improving the training and certification of apprentices and journeypersons. It was felt that the apprenticeship system has become more flexible and responsive and better meets client and industry needs. They referenced the value of the: *Futures in Skilled Trades and Technology* program in changing and molding attitudes towards skilled trades amongst youth; modification of the apprentice to journeyperson ratio to enable employer’s to hire a subsequent apprentice, if their current MOU is with a final year apprentice; development of block exams and study guides to assist apprentices in achieving their certifications; increased participation of women in skilled trades; development of distance education modules; and the Alberta Hours Transfer Agreement.

FUTURE ACTIONS IDENTIFIED

When discussing future directions participants identified potential challenges within the existing system.

These included:

- Employers, because of a lack of journeypersons, are only able to hire a limited number of apprentices. This in turn limits access to required training for apprentices. It was suggested that the apprentice/journeyperson ratio be further modified to allow for two apprentices per journeyperson regardless of the apprentice’s year of training.
- There is no available matching service to bring employers and apprentices together.

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- Despite a looming labour shortage, many trades still only secure seasonal work within the province. The lure of Alberta is still imminent.
- Lack of essential skills is a contributing factor in apprentices having to repeat technical training, and journeypersons having difficulty passing Inter-Provincial Red Seal exams.
- The use of PLAR has increased but still not fully utilized as a human resource planning strategy.
- Long term employment is still a question in apprentice’s minds. What will occur after the peak employment period?

Future Strategies

When asked what key strategies should be adopted to address the identified barriers the following proposed solutions were tabled:

- Continue with the efforts to promote trades among youth.
- Continue with the efforts to promote trades among underrepresented groups.
- Encourage apprentices to stay at the same firm upon completion of training.
- Address barriers that make apprenticeship training costly. This could include scholarships for apprentices, tax incentives and wage subsidies to companies who hire apprentices.
- Create efficient ways to match apprentices and employers.
- Create flexible conditions on duration of apprenticeship contracts.
- Further ease the apprentice to journeyperson ratio.
- Expand in-class training availability and pathways available (e.g., Quebec’s skilled based apprenticeship model).
- Create a communication plan for rural areas and Labrador.
- Increase attention to older workers and those who are non EI eligible.
- Increase funding for companies who would like to provide essential skills training.
- Create and utilize technology for communication and dissemination of occupational labour market information.
- Support, retrain and retain people already in the workforce.
- Streamline and fast-track foreign credential recognition.

Supporting Access for Under-Represented Groups

CHALLENGE

Under-represented or under-utilized groups in this province constitute a valuable but often untapped source of skilled labour. These include women, Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, displaced workers, low-skilled and older workers. It is imperative that support and opportunities be provided to these potential workers to increase the skill, strength and diversity of our workforce.

ACTIONS TO DATE

A substantial amount of work has been initiated to increase participation of under-represented and under-utilized groups. Stakeholders indicated they were very satisfied with the promotion and creation of opportunities to facilitate equal opportunities for residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. When discussing work to date, forum participants referenced the following initiatives as templates for success:

- *Jump Start Your Life* campaign - Designed to encourage participation of women in *the Future in Skilled Trades* program. Currently, females represent 25.41% of program registrations, with a goal of a 50% participation rate.
- Design and implementation of the *Steps Toward Employment and Personal Success* (STEPS) program

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- Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TLOW)
- Bridging the Gap (BTG) program launched in pilot stage to link the labour requirements of expanding firms in rural communities with marginalized workers through the integration of essential skills development with workplace-based training processes.
- Targeted Wage Subsidy provides workplace accommodations and technology internships.
- Creation of the Disability Policy Office
- Labour Market Agreement for People with Disabilities (LMAPD)
- Development of the Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy
- Hebron benefits agreement

FUTURE ACTIONS IDENTIFIED

Aboriginals and New Canadians

Stakeholders representing aboriginal people and new Canadians stated that a lack of understanding of the apprenticeship system and process, more limited knowledge of and/or ability to promote themselves to employers, and an inability to meet the math and English requirements are barriers to their participation. Comments were provided that some of the evaluation methods used do not necessarily evaluate the individual's competency in specific areas. Key to addressing this challenge was the need for efficient communication systems and strong partnerships that allow the dissemination of critical information.

Forum participants who work with new Canadians stated that some individuals who may be highly skilled in specific trades, but may lack the basic English skills become frustrated with the process and will choose to accept positions in other occupational areas. There are supports to assist with English as a second language training, but more support to organizations who help to find matching employers and provide other supports is required.

Representatives of aboriginal communities indicated that limited access to technical/vocational training in rural communities or on reserves, a lack of qualified journeypersons in their communities to provide apprenticeship opportunities, and the limited social supports available for aboriginal students who must leave their communities to access training are inhibiting this population from engaging fully in the apprenticeship system. It was acknowledged that recent expansions to College of the North Atlantic in Labrador will be beneficial, but it was requested that development and utilization of alternative means of targeted programming be explored (e.g., online training). It was also suggested that a student planning process for under-represented groups be initiated. Individualized program planning for students could foster success for traditionally under-represented learners. Additionally, some argued for under-represented group representation in instructional and program design.

Women

It was acknowledged by stakeholders that great strides have been made in promoting and recruiting women into non-traditional occupations, however it was indicated that this process should not be a “one shot deal.” Continued promotion of opportunities for women and tackling existing bias in the trades at both the school and employer levels must continue in order to ensure the elimination of barriers to participation.

Other specific recommendations included:

- Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership program—Cost subsidy for training
- Enhance selection process for Alberta Centennial Scholarships
- Develop specific programming for under-utilized groups
- Professional development for educators on delivery of gender equity and diversity initiatives
- Enhance communication with stakeholders in Labrador
- LMAPD should liaise directly with industry to ensure the needs of persons with disabilities are being met

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- Continue to encourage and support industry in developing policies for under-represented groups
- TIOW should partner with industry in addition to community groups
- Recruit older workers as mentors
- Work more closely with labour to open access
- Work with major contractors in resource sectors to establish programming that provides experiential learning and apprenticeships
- Possibly provide additional financial incentive to smaller employers to provide work experience and apprenticeship positions

Retaining and Recruiting Skilled Workers

CHALLENGE

Strong competition from other provinces for skilled workers, particularly from Alberta, where unemployment rates are the lowest in North America and wages are the highest in Canada, is causing difficulty for many Newfoundland and Labrador employers. One of the most significant issues is wages. In many cases, Newfoundland and Labrador employers are unable to offer salaries and benefits comparable to western competitors. For many workers, stable and steady employment is essential if they are to remain in this province; however, seasonality of many jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador contributes to a lack of continued employment. These are difficult issues that must be considered in order to retain new graduates, our existing workforce and to attract former and new workers to the province.

ACTIONS TO DATE

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has engaged in extensive work to encourage skilled trades and technical professionals to remain and return to the province. Forum stakeholders indicated that progress has been made and dedicated resources must be continued into the future.

Much of the discussion around current initiatives focused on the development of the Youth Attraction and Retention strategy, tuition freeze, elimination of interest on student loans, increased infrastructure spending for Memorial University and College of the North Atlantic, and the Graduate Employment Program. It was agreed that these initiatives enhanced the development of our young people and the growth and development of the province.

FUTURE ACTIONS IDENTIFIED

Recruiting

When discussing future directions focus remained on promotion, working collaboratively to ensure retention, and streamlining and utilizing immigration.

Promotion

In their discussions, the majority of participants agreed that a coordinated marketing strategy that highlighted the standard of living within the province and the associated benefits would be beneficial. Specific examples of benefits presented include:

- Lower personal income taxes
- Family support infrastructure (e.g., daycares, schools, hospitals)
- Clean air, healthy living and access to unequalled natural beauty

It was suggested that this promotion could occur through a national/international campaign or via a network of ambassadors. Numerous stakeholders emphasized that promotion and recruitment should be provincially-focused with a broad-base approach that would include all industries.

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Participants also stressed continued promotion of opportunities in the apprenticeable trades to students and to their parents based on local industry needs. Enhancing the promotion of trades must go beyond the physical classroom and the equipment it contains. It extends to the workplace and to having industry involved in providing hands-on presentations, demonstrations and exposure to the realities of today's labour market. It was agreed that industry's involvement is essential to demonstrate not only the realities of the workplace but also to provide students who are considering a trade the knowledge and skills they need to make sound educational and career decisions.

Retention

Poaching and retention go hand-in-hand; without a good retention strategy, companies are vulnerable to having other companies hire their employees. According to forum participants, a good retention strategy includes competitive wages and benefits, a positive work environment, opportunities for growth within the organization, job satisfaction and continual training. In order for businesses to effectively compete in Newfoundland and Labrador's growing economy, they must be able to attract and retain skilled workers to fill job vacancies and drive productivity. As with all industries, poaching also takes place because of salary. Since employers are less able to pay apprentices/journeypersons higher wages, poaching can easily happen when apprentices receive a competitive offer from another employer. In many cases these employers are located outside of the province. It was stated that employers must focus on developing a good retention strategy in order to retain and attract skilled trades workers and apprentices. This could be accomplished through a partnership with government and other industry. The end result would be a recruitment and retention toolkit that could be used across all sectors.

Immigration

Immigration is a potential solution to the skilled trades shortage and may help to bridge the skills gap within Newfoundland and Labrador. However, recent trends from Statistics Canada indicate that most immigrants settle in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, with Newfoundland and Labrador having one of the lowest retention rates in Canada.

To address the low retention rate of immigrants within the province, stakeholders identified and discussed potential solutions. These included:

- Creating and enhancing strong community-based settlement supports to help retain newcomers;
- Increase funding for organizations that offer coordinated and comprehensive language assessment and training services; and,
- Better recognition of international credentials to ensure full participation in the workplace and retention.

It was suggested by several participants that development of a new service delivery model should be explored. It should emphasize shared responsibility for settlement outcomes and would empower immigrants to make their own decisions. The new model should be flexible, responsive, and easy to navigate. It would include:

- Pre-arrival information, orientation and planning services;
- Connections to appropriate community services; and,
- Specialized language and employment services.

Assessing and Responding to Industry Needs

CHALLENGE

Many industries are facing increasing demands for skilled workers to keep pace with new technologies and to remain competitive, yet they are having difficulty finding and keeping the skilled workers they need. While skill shortages exist in all regions, specific sectors are facing unique skill challenges due to increased competition from other provinces, a rapidly aging workforce and training-related issues. Development of specific mechanisms to anticipate future demands and identification of gaps are necessary to ensure that resources are in place to meet needs when identified.

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ACTIONS TO DATE

In responding to industry needs, all sectors have created stronger partnerships through advisory committees and other means. This is ensuring that the proper skill sets are developed to address future needs and opportunities. Stakeholder dialogue regarding initiatives undertaken revolved around the following:

- Agreement with the Government of Alberta to ensure apprenticeship hours logged in that province can be applied to their apprenticeship program in Newfoundland and Labrador
- Hiring of apprentices in government and its agencies to ensure they acquire apprenticeship experience to complete their programs
- Distance learning courses under development for advanced training in construction and industrial electrician
- Development of block examinations to support quality programming, provide better examination supports to apprentices, and provide better apprenticeship assessment processes to allow more individuals to access apprenticeship
- Contract with the Industrial Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, to increase female representation in skilled trades
- Modification of the 1:1 apprentice/journeyperson ratio
- Nalcor– Partnership with industry associations to identify specific skills needs areas within industry
- Union schools

FUTURE ACTIONS IDENTIFIED

In addition to the substantial efforts invested in forging new partnerships forum participants identified areas that require further action, these included:

Government

- Compulsory certification for trades and technology programs
- Better communication of existing training programs
- Recognize institutional training experience as apprenticeship experience
- Expand focus of Skills Task Force to look at skills gaps for mega projects in the technology field

Industry

- Work with the federal government to use funds to continue employees' wages for advanced level of training
- Provide funding to training institutions for upgrading equipment and program needs
- Provide professional development opportunities for instructors to maintain skills currency

Labour

- Improve certification in trade unions to match certificate of qualifications issued by government

Training Institutions

- Recruitment and retention of qualified instructors
- Continue to address capacity at individual campuses

Ensuring Strong Partnerships

CHALLENGE

Because Newfoundland and Labrador has a small population with limited financial resources living in a vast geographical area, working together is a necessity. A solid partnership among industry, training institutions, labour, government and the many others is an essential foundation for any successful strategy.

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ACTIONS TO DATE

It was agreed that since the release of the Skills Task Force report there has been an increase in collaborative partnerships. Positive discussions were focused around increased opportunities for faculty professional development and greater networking among industry, faculty and students. In addition, the changes to the provincial apprenticeship registration system were applauded and the Steps for Success Program, co-ordinated by CME in partnership with the Random North Development Association, was referenced as an example of effective collaboration. The commitment of some employers and companies to hiring women apprentices was commended.

Other discussions revolved around the following:

1. Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership—federal government program aimed at sustaining employment for Aboriginal people
2. Labour Market Agreement for People with Disabilities

FUTURE ACTIONS IDENTIFIED

Addressing the skilled labour shortages in the province requires a concerted effort by all stakeholders. Forum participants indicated that a wide range of perspectives are required to understand local needs and identify solutions, which can be translated into innovative policy development and action.

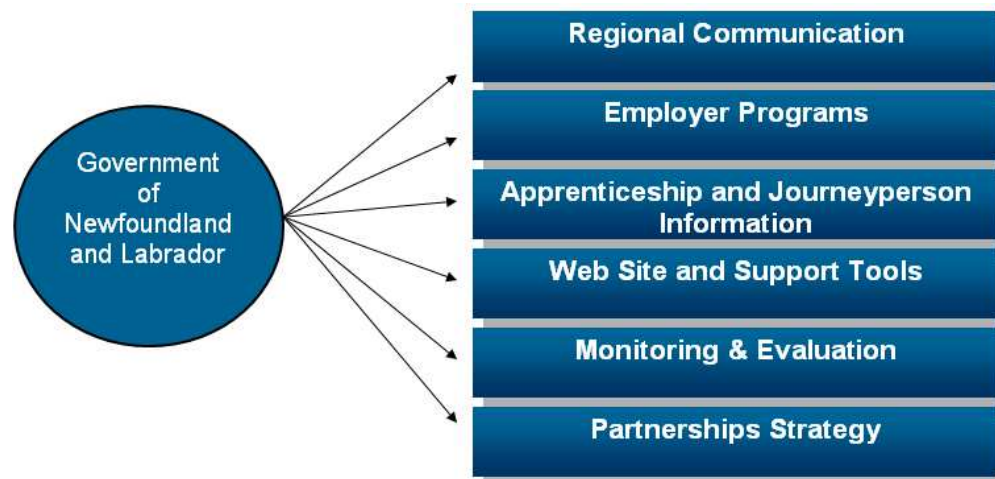
Participants felt that an annual forum would facilitate information sharing and ensure the roles of stakeholders were fully understood within the changing climate of the provincial labour market and consequent structural reforms. Many participants felt it was imperative that stakeholder contribution can be strengthened so that they can participate fully in the structures and initiatives being developed.

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Summary

The overarching objective of the Skills Task Force update forum was to tap into the rich collection of assembled delegates to review the initiatives implemented under the Skills Task Force action plan and to begin mapping a strategic path into the future. Participants contributed their experiences, perspectives, and recommendations on a variety of issues and themes.

In summarizing the conference feedback one common thread emerged—virtually all participants highlighted the need for a central point of contact to coordinate/disseminate information and facilitate collaboration. It was agreed that the Industry Coordinating Committee and the Department of Education should continue in this role and expand upon their mandate. Responsibilities would include: development of a Skills Task Force website and support tools; regional communication plans; timely, strategic information for employers and apprentices/journeypersons; coordination of employer programs; development of a partnerships strategy; and, monitoring and evaluation of all initiatives.



In addition, key themes emerged throughout the forum:

1. Need to increase a sense of urgency for action among stakeholders
2. Continue to increase awareness and promotion of technology careers among young people and those who influence them (e.g., parents, teachers, peers)
3. Develop and make available technology-specific labour market information
4. Enhance curriculum and flexible program delivery of apprenticeship programs and post-secondary education related to skilled trades careers
5. Improve foreign credential recognition and utilize the talents of immigrants
6. Continue to increase access to retraining, updating and lifelong learning among technology workers

In addressing these future challenges collaboration will be key. It is important that government, post-secondary institutions, unions, sector councils and industry work together to effect change and amplify results. The success of the first annual Skills Task Force update forum illustrates the successful collaboration of stakeholders and their dedication to building a qualified and skilled workforce.