POLYTECHNICSCANADA

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR CANADIAN YOUTH

Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA)

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Summary of Recommendations

Experiential Learning

1. Create a single point of entry for employers and students to access all federally-funded experiential learning programs.
2. Adopt a broad definition of experiential learning that includes learning typologies beyond the traditional co-op model.
3. Leverage existing investments in infrastructure and Innovation Superclusters to expand experiential learning placements and apprenticeships.
4. Grow the number of employers offering experiential learning placements by directing federal supports to a greater diversity of employers across a broader range of sectors.
5. Invest in improved data on experiential learning placements and outcomes.

Youth Employment Strategy (YES)

1. Extend YES programming to all employers and deliver programming through a single federal department.
2. Extend YES programming eligibility to recent post-secondary graduates.
3. Embrace parity of esteem in the skilled trades by treating apprenticeship as an equally valuable post-secondary education pathway in YES programming.

About Polytechnics Canada and Experiential Learning

Polytechnics Canada is a national association of Canada's leading colleges, polytechnics, and institutes of technology.[1] Employment is the mandate and the mission of our institutions – as a result, our institutions are each leaders in the delivery of a broad range of experiential learning opportunities, across all typologies[2], and have strong relationships with industry associations and employers of all sizes, across all sectors, in key economic regions of the country.

[1] For reasons of space, "polytechnics" refers to publicly-funded colleges, institutes of technology and applied learning, as well as polytechnic institutes, depending upon each provincial designation. "Polytechnics" are differentiated from universities and community colleges by their degree-granting status, and by their alignment with industry and employer needs for skills and innovation outcomes. Members of Polytechnics Canada are the leading, large, research-intensive institutions of applied education in the country.

[2] Experiential learning includes: field placements, internships, co-ops, professional practice, and applied research. Further, Polytechnics Canada considers apprenticeship, where learning occurs 80 percent on the job, and 20 percent in-class (effectively work-*based* learning), to be a distinct form of experiential learning, but one that should be included in all policy interventions involving experiential learning.

Therefore, our members each hold a significant stake in improving Canada's experiential learning landscape, since they understand that experiential learning leads to strong employment outcomes for learners – the majority of which are youth.

In any discussion surrounding the improvement of experiential learning, polytechnics should be considered leaders in delivery, and their models should be carefully considered by policymakers who seek scalable solutions.

Polytechnics Canada key data points: students, experiential learning, and outcomes – 2015/16[3]

- **13** institutions • **230,000** full-time students • **98,000** part-time students • **48,000** apprentices
- **1,000** program advisory committees comprised of industry representatives to assist in curriculum development and connecting students to experiential learning opportunities
- **12,000** students engaged in applied research projects • **2,200** companies served
- **13,000** apprentices who completed their final level of training and were eligible to challenge for certification
- **77,500** graduates, with an overall average graduate employment rate of **87%**
- An element of experiential learning in: **70%** of 4-year bachelor degree programs • **70%** of graduate certificate programs
- **15%** of Polytechnics Canada's students have previously completed a university degree, demonstrating a strong demand for this type of employment-based and "finishing" education.

National Vision

The challenge of youth unemployment in Canada is well-documented (although the challenge of underemployment is less so). To improve employment outcomes for youth, focused policy interventions are no doubt required, and a sharp focus on experiential learning is one that Polytechnics Canada endorses wholly.

We suggest that by acting on the recommendations highlighted within this submission, overall employment outcomes for youth will be improved. Our recommendations do, however, require the support and buy-in from three broad groups: the federal government, employers, and all post-secondary institutions.

[3] Each year, the members of Polytechnics Canada submit, from their Institutional Research Offices, verifiable data on students, programs, experiential learning and outcomes. These data are aggregated and reported by Polytechnics Canada.

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Outcomes if Polytechnics Canada's recommendations were implemented:

1. Ease of employer engagement in experiential learning.
2. Increased number of experiential learning placements for students and recent graduates.
3. Ease of access to experiential learning opportunities for students.
4. Robust data that allows for more efficient program delivery.
5. Parity of esteem promoted across all post-secondary credentials, including apprenticeship.

Recommendations: Experiential Learning

1. **Create a single point of entry for employers and students to access all federally-funded experiential learning programs.**

   - Consolidating program information and resources into a single portal will reduce transaction costs for employers and enhance program accessibility and uptake for students.

2. **Adopt a broad definition of experiential learning that includes learning typologies beyond the traditional co-op model.**

   - Experiential learning is often narrowcast simply as co-op. In order to utilize and scale all experiential learning opportunities offered by polytechnics, colleges, and universities, the definition must explicitly include a broader set of typologies, such as field experience, internships, professional practice, and applied research projects for industry.

3. **Leverage existing investments in infrastructure and Innovation Superclusters to expand experiential learning placements and apprenticeships.**

   - Significant investments committed in Budgets 2016 and 2017 (and those committed in future budgets) should be leveraged in a way that amplifies impact, by including experiential learning opportunities where possible. Specifically, the creation of experiential learning opportunities should be supported by recipients of new investments in:

     i. Infrastructure, and;
     ii. The Innovation Superclusters initiative.

4. **Grow the number of employers offering experiential learning placements by directing federal supports to a greater diversity of employers across a broader range of sectors.**

   - Experiential learning opportunities funded by the federal government should be available to a diversity of employer types and sizes, across a range of sectors and industries.

   - Presently, employers receiving wage subsidies tend to be large firms benefiting from industry association support. Due to issues of capacity, many of Canada's SMEs[4] are unable to take on the administrative and/or financial burden of applying for government-funded experiential learning opportunities or paying the employee's salary – thus, a significant portion of potential providers is missed.

   - Further, federal investments should support relevant experiences across a variety of industries and sectors, and that build diversified skills. Current federal programs are hyper-focused on STEM+B (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, and Business). Examples of these programs include the Student Work-Integrated Learning Program, Mitacs, and IRAP's Youth Employment Program.

5. **Invest in improved data on experiential learning placements and outcomes.**

   - Collect and deliver better data, specifically related to skills and experiential learning, and the talent needed for the Canadian labour market. This can be achieved by:

     i. Directing Statistics Canada to add additional questions to the National Graduate Survey (NGS) in order to capture better data on a broader spectrum of experiential learning opportunities and outcomes, and;
     ii. Creating a Skills in-Demand Survey in order to better align experiential learning placements with employer demand for skills.

Recommendations: Youth Employment Strategy

1. **Extend YES programming to all employers and deliver programming through a single federal department.**

   - The current delivery of YES – boutique programs across 11 federal departments – is restrictive and antiquated. YES experiential learning opportunities should be open to all employers, and administered by one department, through one window.

2. **Extend YES programming to recent graduates.**

   - As recent graduates often face challenges in successfully integrating to the labour market, YES work placement programming should be extended to individuals who have

[4] As of December 2015, the Canadian economy totalled 1.17 million employer businesses. Of these, 1.14 million (97.9 percent) were small businesses and 21,415 (1.8 percent) were medium-sized businesses. A small business has 1 to 99 paid employees. A medium-sized business has 100 to 499 paid employees.

recently completed their studies.

3. **Embrace parity of esteem in the skilled trades by treating apprenticeship as an equally valuable post-secondary education pathway.**

   - A renewed YES should embrace the logic of "parity of esteem" across all forms of post-secondary education, and work to break the societal bias that perpetuates the hierarchy of credentials that often undervalues apprenticeship as a viable career option. In particular, the employment prospects of apprentices should be a federal priority, given looming retirement numbers in the skilled trades professions.