

# Human Capital Centre

## 2021 WORK PLAN

### Skills, competencies and workforce development

The acceleration of workplace digitization combined with the disruptions caused by COVID-19 have added a powerful urgency to the work of the Human Capital Centre for 2021. Skills, competencies and new methodologies designed to rapidly reskill and upskill the workforce are more important than ever.

This year we will add to our body of work on competencies and workforce development and, if funding permits, enter into some new areas of study. The Human Capital Centre is on top of many of the latest solutions to workplace transition, especially for mid-career workers displaced by the massive changes experienced in recent years.

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#### POLICY GOAL

### Building the skills and competencies Canada needs

Canada has moved from an economy defined by jobs to one defined by skills. Employers hire bundles of competencies – the skills and related knowledge and aptitudes – required to accomplish the tasks in their workplaces. Some people are hired for short-term contract (gig) work, others for work in longer-lasting, but ever-changing jobs. We examine some of the ways to define and organize skills and competencies to make the process of matching people with jobs and jobs with people more efficient.

→ In 2017, we published *Matchup: A case for pan-Canadian competency frameworks*. Since then, we have learned a lot about the desired

architecture for these frameworks, and in 2021 we will publish a follow-up to *Matchup*. This new work will outline the structure and function required for useful frameworks and offer ideas on how to engage employers to ensure they are accurate, relevant and useful tools to better match people with jobs.

→ A critical aspect of investment attraction is a workforce with the right combination of skills. What would it take to make a skilled workforce guarantee part of a strategy to attract the investment of a large employer? An adaptive pathway to connect labour market information, investment attraction and available training is the answer. It has worked in Kentucky. We will provide examples from other jurisdictions and show how competency frameworks help government, post-secondary institutions and employers match today's workforce to tomorrow's jobs. We will convene government, post-secondary institutions and economic development organizations at a James A. Richardson Discovery Roundtable to elicit feedback as we undertake this work.

#### Other work

→ The federal government has developed a new framework of the most in-demand skills that drive workplace success. Some of the so-called soft skills are now included. To be most useful to employers and individuals, further research on measurement of these *Skills for Success* is required. We are part of a team involved in this ongoing research.

#### If funding permits

Canada has more than 170,000 charitable and nonprofit organizations which account for about 10 per cent of GDP and employ more than two million workers. With an emphasis on Alberta, we will build competency frameworks and look at capacity issues related to competencies for a variety of sub-sectors of this vital pillar of the economy.

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## POLICY GOAL

# Effective and efficient workforce development

The days when a person prepared once for a career that lasted a lifetime are long over. Now, it is important to upgrade skills and competencies throughout a lifetime. While education goes well beyond workforce development, the Human Capital Centre is focused on how educational institutions can make sure that they prepare people for the workforce. In 2021, we will look at various facets of post-secondary education including how new approaches to work-integrated learning (WIL) and apprenticeship prepare jobseekers for early career opportunities as well as those in mid-career and beyond.

- Our 2015 report on apprenticeship, *Building Blocks: Modular credentials for Canada's trades* discussed the need to recognize the modular, stackable competencies of apprentices as they progress towards journey person status. In 2021, we will update this report as a lot has happened in the intervening years. One exciting development is the growing interest in expanding apprenticeship beyond the trades. We see this as not just an early career pathway but as one way to help mid-career displaced workers to rapidly reskill for jobs in new fields.
- Provincial and federal governments have recognized the desirability of having WIL experiences for every student in post-secondary education. The federal government has invested almost a billion dollars in this approach. Some provinces have mandated, or recommended strongly, that every new program incorporate WIL into its programming. We will examine ways to assist faculty, students and employers to work together to ensure that WIL becomes universal. There are ways to do this that go beyond co-ops and internships.
- Micro credentials are touted as one way to ensure that new hires have the exact skills that employers need. We will discuss the work that must go into the development of micro credentials and ways to ensure that employers

can recognize the specific micro credentials that meet their needs. We will use examples from our work in an ongoing Future Skills Centre project, led by Bow Valley College (BVC).

- While the workforce issues of the West can feel personal, much of the world experiences similar problems and have developed solutions that are useful here. Talent Pipeline Management (TPM), a brainchild of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, is one solution that assists employers to define their exact needs and then develops the learning pathways to build a talent pipeline. The BVC project uses TPM as the first step in every pilot. We will discuss how TPM, and other technology-based innovations can help ensure that post-secondary institutions in Canada better meet labour market needs.
- Our investigation into employment outcomes of STEM graduates will continue in 2021. While STEM enrolment has drastically increased over the last decade, the evidence suggests that there is a mismatch between graduates and the requirements of available STEM jobs. We will examine the numbers and look at potential solutions.
- Modular, stackable chunks of learning that can be rapidly developed and micro credentialed would be useful to both workers and employers in the gig economy. Our short paper will discuss this concept as it applies to some technology-based careers.

## Other work

Young people have been leaving Calgary. Students at Mount Royal University have examined this phenomenon and have thought of some innovative solutions to keep youth here. We are part of a group that advises on this work.

## *If funding permits*

The exodus of young people may not just be a Calgary problem. If funding permits, we will take a closer look at the numbers across the West to determine if the problem is real, what this might mean for the western economy in the future and how stakeholders can work together to make staying in the province more attractive for young people.