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Building Tomorrow's Workforce: Students in Today's Workplace

"The bottom line is that when students make a successful transition from school to work, it's good for all of us – our society, our economy, our workplaces, and most of all, our students," states Don Jackson, Chair of the Provincial Partnership Council.

Recognizing that student work experience is critical for the future economic success of Ontario, The Toronto Board of Trade, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario have partnered with the Provincial Partnership Council to raise awareness about the need for work experiences for high school students.

The Provincial Partnership Council (PPC) is an employer-based volunteer council of business leaders. Through its province-wide campaign, *Passport to Prosperity*, the PPC works together with the Ontario Learning Partnership Group of local business-education councils and training boards, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to find more employers

willing to offer work experience opportunities to high school students.

"It is essential that our young people are exposed to a wide variety of career options through school-work experiences, to ensure that their natural aptitudes are best applied and that their dreams and ambitions are fulfilled," says Ian Cunningham, Senior Vice President, Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

There are over 700,000 high school students in Ontario. Ontario's high school program calls for all school boards to offer school-work programs to all interested students. There is an urgent need to increase the number of employers involved.

"It is vital that business address the needs of tomorrow's workforce today," says Elyse Allan, President and CEO of the Toronto Board of Trade. "A combination of classroom learning and workplace experience is an ideal way to ensure that students make an informed choice about their career, and enter the workforce ready to hit the ground running and contribute in a meaningful way."

Student Work Experiences Range from One Day to Long-Term

Employers can offer a range of work experiences to fit their scheduling requirements. Experiences range from short-term events to having a student on board for a whole semester.

The scope of short-term involvement varies from hours to one day. Employers can get involved by participating in career talks, career fairs/career days and workplace/industry tours.

Short-term work experiences are ideal for exposing students to a wide sampling of career options. "Under the *Passport to Prosperity* initiative, we are involved in a number of short-term work initiatives. We are involved in giving career talks to student groups; we participate in career fairs where we provide students with information about careers in the industry," says Dave Santi, H.R Development Manager at Dofasco.

Medium term involvement ranges from one day to four weeks. Employers can allow students to observe a workplace or "job shadow." Employers can also serve as mentors or collaborate with students on projects to solve real workplace problems.

A longer-term level of involvement varies from 110 to 440 hours over several months of the school year.

These activities include: cooperative education, school-work transitions and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program.

"It's always a really good experience for us, and the student. In general, the student gets to see what the real world is all about," says Chef Daniel Schick, Executive Chef at Le Royal Meridien King Edward Hotel. Chef Daniel Schick prefers to take students on longer term, through the co-op education program.



Chef Daniel Schick (left) watches over co-op student, Amanda Robitaille (right) as she puts the finishing touches on a dessert. Robitaille did her high school co-op placement at Le Royal Meridien King Edward Hotel and went on to pursue an apprenticeship in culinary arts.

"It's great. It's an incredible program. I'm a huge, huge believer in that sort of thing."

Liza Fromer,
City TV's
Breakfast
Television
giving her
thoughts on
*Passport to
Prosperity*

Giving Students Work Experience Helps Close the Looming Skills Gap

Employers are encouraged to offer students work experience to help create a skilled, work-ready pool of future employees.

Giving Ontario students work experience will help ensure they are knowledgeable about career options and prepared to seek the necessary training.

Canada has an aging population as well as a relatively low birth rate, according to Statistics Canada. This will mean a shrinking pool of skilled workers. It is estimated that by 2011, the main workforce feeder group will increase by less than one per cent per year and by 2016, will be decreasing by over 10 per cent a year. During this time, the demand for skilled labour will continue to grow.

"The feeder group, which is composed of those aged 15 to 19 years old, is going to be slowly decreasing. It is critical that more employers get involved in giving high school students work experiences, in order to sustain the pool of skilled workers," notes Len Crispino, President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

"The main steps that businesses can take to ease the shortage of skills involve some form of cooperation with the education community," according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) from an April 2003 survey on labour availability. They also found "more than half of businesses see improving their communication with the education community as a solution that would go a long way toward reducing the shortage of labour."

A study released last August by the Canadian Labour and Business Centre confirms the urgency to train our future workforce. The study found that the lack of a skilled labour force is top-of-mind for business leaders and that concern is rising. Results indicate that in 2002, 57 per cent of public sector managers and 48 per cent of private sector managers "consider the skill shortages issue as a serious problem." It also found that one of the top five barriers in addressing labour shortages is the lack of qualified new graduates.

A key part of the solution is to find opportunities to bring students into the workplace.

"Our students have been an invaluable addition to our workplace. Not only are they very capable and energetic, they provide an opportunity for our staff to develop new leadership and mentoring skills. The 12 to 15 students we take per semester truly brighten up our days."

**Tom Flanagan,
President and
COO, BMO
InvestorLine**



Giving students the opportunities to explore different career options will help ensure a work-ready pool of employees for the future of Ontario.



Facts Reveal the Urgent Need for More Employers

- **At the close of 2002, one in two businesses – 49.6 per cent – indicated they are concerned with the shortage of qualified labour. (Canadian Federation of Independent Business Survey April 2003, as indicated on website)**
- **Labour shortages have persisted for small and medium sized enterprises even during periods of high unemployment. (Canadian Federation of Independent Business Survey April 2003, as indicated on website)**
- **The Toronto region will face labour shortages across all occupations and skill groups by the end of the decade. (Toronto Labour Force Readiness Plan, 2003)**

Employers, Business-Education Councils, and Educators Join Forces to Benefit Students

It takes more than one partner to create a successful work experience for students. Together, employers, business-education councils and schools bring work experience opportunities to high school students by giving them access to information on a variety of career options. Each partner plays an important role in connecting the student and the employer.

Employers

Employers involved in offering work experience opportunities demonstrate the culture and work ethic required of a successful and responsible employee. There is no obligation for employers to pay students, however, some employers choose to compensate students for after-school or summer work and some offer an honorarium.

Business-Education Councils

Business-education councils and local training boards have ongoing relationships with employers and schools in their communities. They work to increase the number of work experience opportunities available to local students by connecting interested employers with local high schools.

Educators

Educators, the bridge between the employer and the student, work to create a successful work experience for both the student and the employer. The educators counsel and screen students to ensure that they have the maturity, interest, skills and knowledge required in a work placement. They also monitor students in the workplace to ensure maximum benefit from the experience.

What Do Students Have to Say About Work Experiences?

"It's quite a feeling you get that you're actually participating in something really serious," Chris Stephenson says of his experience at Toronto Arts for Youth. Student Chris Elliot describes his experience with Innovative Entertainment Inc. as "the time of my life".

Not only do students gain valuable exposure through work experiences, they are also motivated to stay in school and benefit from the exposure to successful role models and mentors. Students experience what the working world is really like, which in turn, better prepares them to make the transition from high school to work, apprenticeship, college and university.

Students can gain workplace experience essential for future job searches. With this first-hand knowledge, students may be more willing to pursue careers in sectors experiencing shortages.



"There is so much opportunity within this company. As long as you do a good job, you'll go places," said Richard Hudson (above) a Canadian Tire student employee.

Student Benefits

- ☑ Students are motivated to stay in school
- ☑ Students gain confidence, skills and on-the-job experience
- ☑ Students explore a number of career options
- ☑ Connection with business can bring the curriculum to life
- ☑ In the workplace, students are exposed to successful role models and mentors
- ☑ Students build a network of potential future employers and reference sources
- ☑ Students gain workplace experience essential for future job searches
- ☑ With first-hand knowledge, students may be more willing to pursue careers in sectors experiencing shortages

Benefiting the Economy, Our Communities and Our Students

By engaging students in work experiences, there are multiple benefits for the economy, our communities and our students. It is critical for Ontario to pursue opportunities to enhance its workforce.

"When investigating investment opportunities, one of the first things foreign companies look at is the availability of a strong trained workforce. That is a major competitive edge for us," states Len Crispino, President and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

"The return on investment for us is really bringing the students along and investing in them. It's been a very good program for us," Tom Flanagan, President and COO of BMO InvestorLine comments.

During an interview on Global Television's *Moneywise*, Len Crispino states, "we need to get more and more employers involved in being part of the solution."

By engaging students in a work experience opportunity, an organization demonstrates a commitment to its community, which fosters a stable economy.

"It's a great program. Let's hope it's adopted across the country."

Larry Stout, CTV Newsnet

More Information about the *Passport to Prosperity* Partners

- **The Provincial Partnership Council (PPC)**, chaired by Donald K. Jackson, is comprised of key leaders from private, public and voluntary sectors, representing various regions across the province.
- **Toronto Board of Trade** is the champion of a competitive and vibrant Toronto. It is Canada's largest local chamber of commerce, with over 9,000 members throughout Toronto and the surrounding area.
Website: www.bot.com
- **Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario and its Chapters** is the not-for-profit association focused on innovations, issues and ideas that inspire leading human resources management.
Website: www.hrpa.org
- **Ontario Chamber of Commerce** represents over 57,000 businesses through 156 local Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade, and has been the voice of business in Ontario since 1911.
Website: www.occ.on.ca

Make the Connection – Get Involved

There are a number of ways to get additional information and find key local contacts when planning work experiences for students.

- Contact the **Ministry of Education** or the **Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities** at 1-800-387-5514 for the name of a key contact in your school board, or check the *Passport to Prosperity* website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/passport
- Contact the **Ontario Learning Partnership Group** (a consortium of business-education councils across the province, with a network of relationships with employers and schools) for more information about programs in your community. Call 1-888-672-7996 or check out their website at www.olpg.on.ca



Above: While getting valuable work experience, students also contribute to their communities.

For more information regarding 'Building Tomorrow's Workforce: Students in Today's Workplace', a forum in which employers gathered to discuss strategies for offering youth work experiences, please visit the webcast at www.olpg.on.ca.