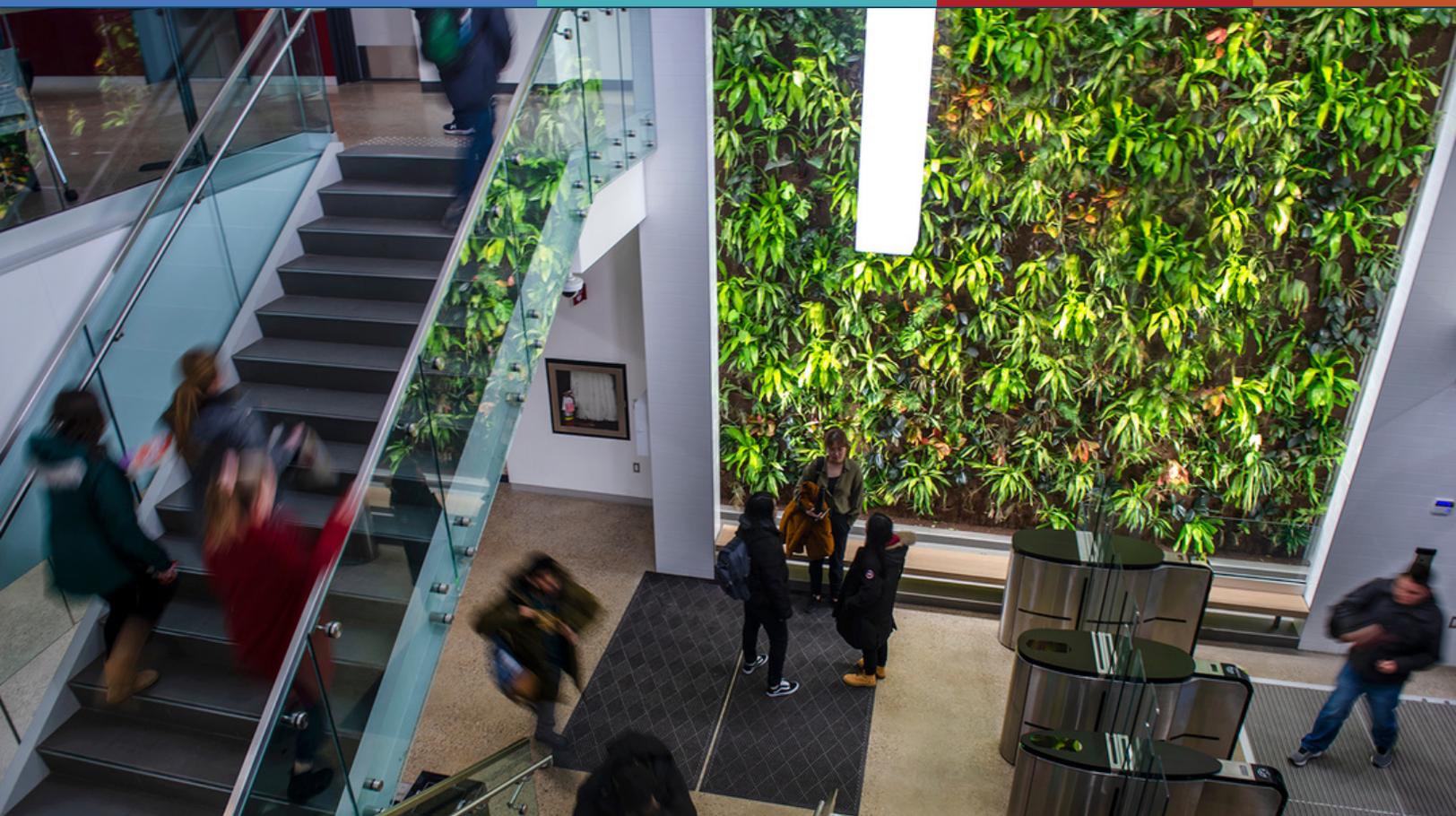


Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2022 Federal Budget

August 2021



Recommendations

Increase access, navigation and support for lifelong learning

- Consider fiscal measures that enable Canadians to access the upskilling and reskilling required for labour market recovery
- Modify existing supports to increase awareness and uptake
- Invest in the collection, analysis and dissemination of labour market information about jobs, skills and training opportunities

Make investments in post-secondary infrastructure a part of Canada's long-term growth and development plan

- Launch a recurring federal post-secondary infrastructure program
- Better integrate experiential learning into federally supported infrastructure projects

Support a robust and inclusive economic recovery

- Establish an employer-educator advisory group to support the smooth labour market integration of newcomers
- Maximize retention of international students
- Create a dedicated fund within NSERC to address the innovation needs of businesses owned or operated by underrepresented groups

Introduction

Over the past year, countless workers and businesses have seen the nature of their work change against a backdrop that included a host of existing challenges – an aging population, climate change, accelerated technological advancement and a pressing need for Indigenous reconciliation. Given the compounding effects of these trends, Budget 2022 represents an opportunity to set an ambitious vision for the future. Canada's polytechnics are well positioned to be partners in achieving such a vision.

Distinct within the post-secondary ecosystem, polytechnics offer applied, industry-aligned programming with real-world experience built in. Institutions offer a breadth and diversity of credentials, including four-year degrees, diplomas, advanced diplomas, graduate certificates and apprenticeships in the skilled trades. Moreover, they are community hubs, enriching the people, businesses and regions they serve. From [vaccination clinics on campus](#), [micro-credentials for those delivering the COVID-19 vaccine](#) and [free online training for the broader healthcare workforce](#), polytechnics have been responsive allies throughout the pandemic.

As the federal government looks beyond COVID-19, Canada's polytechnics offer solutions in several key areas:

- Developing the skilled graduates needed in priority and high-growth sectors like health, ICT, advanced manufacturing and cleantech
- Providing upskilling and reskilling to a diverse population of learners looking to reset or advance in their careers
- Assisting companies, non-profit organizations and entrepreneurs to maximize their innovation potential

We are pleased to offer our recommendations for how the federal government can best put these assets to work as it seeks to build a stronger, greener Canada.

Recommendation: Increase access, navigation and support for lifelong learning

As public health measures ease and emergency supports wind down, government priorities must shift to equipping individuals with the tools to succeed in a post-pandemic labour market. Education and training stand to play an important part: lifelong learning must become a new normal.

Lifelong learning is not only critical to recovery, it is essential to creating a resilient workforce. Polytechnics collectively offer more than 17,000 continuing education, professional development and corporate training opportunities. Significant capacity exists across the polytechnic sector to upskill and reskill in growth areas like artificial intelligence, project management and business leadership.

Tools like training vouchers, tuition rebates and upfront grants can support individuals that need just-in-time training and face barriers to access. These supports must be designed in a way that broadens access beyond existing skills programs.

Additional financial supports for lifelong learning should:

- Increase the number of Canadians who can access lifelong learning
- Support individuals with immediate workforce development needs, including Canada Emergency Response Benefit recipients, displaced workers and those working in the sectors most impacted by the pandemic
- Mitigate the barrier to entry posed by upfront costs

While new fiscal tools will expand access, more can be done to maximize programs intended to enable lifelong learning. For example, the Canada Training Benefit needs to be more visible to the population. The accumulated value of the benefit should be readily apparent to Canadians, along with navigation to training options and providers.

While the training benefit offsets the cost of courses, consideration should be given to expanding eligible expenses. In a post-pandemic labour market, innovative approaches to skills assessment and validation will help employers and individuals understand skills gaps, informing efficient education and training pathways.

Changes to the Canada Training Benefit should:

- Increase program awareness and boost overall participation in lifelong learning
- Broaden eligible expenses to include the development of an individual's skills roadmap

There is a longstanding recognition of the need for reliable, timely and accessible labour market information. The Labour Market Information Council, Future Skills Centre, industry associations and individual post-secondary institutions are making incredible strides. Now is the time to scale, link and integrate these initiatives.

Better connecting supply- and demand-side labour market information will provide users with information about the skills in demand, but also help identify where training is available, at what cost, duration and delivery method. Ideally, labour market information is easy to find and use. Government, industry and training providers, as well as career counselling professionals, must be actively involved.

Additional and sustained investments in skills-based labour market information and dissemination will:

- Connect Canadians with the training they need over their lifetime
- Consolidate fragmented platforms to improve navigation
- Amplify the impact of skills and workforce development investments by increasing awareness
- Equip training providers with up-to-date insights about labour market gaps, ensuring programs remain relevant over time

Recommendation: Make investments in post-secondary infrastructure a part of Canada's long-term growth and development plan

Canada's physical, digital and social infrastructure are essential to building back better. While infrastructure investments have direct economic impacts, they also enable green, digital and inclusive communities.

This is why investments in post-secondary infrastructure should be part of Canada's long-term growth and development plan. In two previous post-secondary infrastructure programs, the case was clear: institutions made climate-friendly improvements to green their facilities and minimize energy consumption; they enhanced research facilities that, in the case of polytechnics, continue to support business transformations through applied research; they built dynamic new spaces for Canada's talent pipeline.

Traditional infrastructure is often built with an eye to what has worked in the past, but post-secondary infrastructure provides a glimpse of the future. Ideally, post-secondary infrastructure keeps pace with industry needs, exposes learners to the latest tools, technologies and labs, and ensures graduates enter the job market with the skills required for an evolving country and its priorities.

Programs like the 2016 Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund illustrate that on-campus infrastructure investments are an [effective means of improving research and training capacity, enabling student recruitment and facilitating collaboration and networking with industry partners](#). The need for such upgrades is consistent and long-term.

In today's context, Canada's post-secondary institutions must redefine campus requirements and respond to new health and safety expectations. Demand for digital and green infrastructure has increased, as has the necessity for retrofits. The current infrastructure gap at Canada's polytechnics is estimated at more than \$4 billion.

A recurring post-secondary infrastructure program will allow institutions to:

- Invest in the hardware, software and cybersecurity required to deliver industry-aligned education
- Support green transformations that both develop a green talent pipeline and inspire business adoption of new technologies and approaches
- Expedite retrofits and deferred maintenance projects that address long-term health and safety requirements and enable institutions to rethink how campus spaces are utilized
- Establish cultural and community hubs
- Plan their long-term investments with greater certainty

In addition to providing credential programs, polytechnics are the primary technical training providers of Canada's skilled tradespeople. Today's apprentices are the workforce responsible for building, maintaining and repairing Canada's infrastructure. Beyond developing an understanding and appreciation of green skills, these workers implement and embed them in our communities.

With more than \$180 billion committed under the *Investing in Canada Plan*, the federal government is well positioned to amplify this investment by unlocking experiential learning opportunities for students and apprentices.

Doing so will:

- Improve apprenticeship progression by providing employment opportunities to Canada's apprentices, technicians and technologists
- Support the path to certification for skilled tradespeople

Recommendation: Support a robust and inclusive economic recovery

Though polytechnics are equitable and inclusive places to study and work, building a truly inclusive recovery will require a Team Canada effort. In addition to shifting travel, visa and quarantine requirements, international students face hurdles to experiential education in Canada. Underrepresented business owners and entrepreneurs have faced disproportionate revenue losses. While there are calls to expand immigration targets, new Canadians have long faced challenges to labour market integration. In all cases, polytechnics are well positioned to help.

As Canada's requirement for immigration grows, it is in the country's interest to make the labour market integration of newcomers much more efficient. Better coordination between government, educational institutions and industry is essential.

Over the last several years, business-education collaborations have had promising results when it comes to addressing labour market challenges. Work-integrated learning is an excellent example – better preparing youth and students for the workforce while they are still in school. A similar strategy is required for the labour market integration of newcomers to Canada. This effort must include shared objectives, activities and outcomes, drawing on the expertise and experience of those offering industry-aligned education.

As Canada considers its immigration targets and processes, an employer-education advisory group would:

- Inform immigration policies to ensure they align with Canada's skills needs
- Ensure smooth labour market transitions for newcomers
- Identify innovative approaches to recognize experience and validate skills gained in an immigrant's country of origin

Since 2008, about [two-thirds of new permanent residents have been selected](#) from among those already residing in Canada. International students are an increasingly crucial element of Canada's immigration strategy, making it more important than ever to ensure they have the tools to succeed.

The first priority is to ensure international students have every opportunity to gain meaningful and relevant Canadian work experience during their programs. This stands to prepare them for long-term labour market success by building employer networks and establishing ties that support immigration. To accomplish this goal, international students should be eligible for support under federally funded work-integrated learning programs.

Another policy change for consideration relates to Post-Graduate Work Permit. Given that international students are an increasing proportion of those pursuing industry-aligned credentials at Canada's polytechnics, we propose an extension on work permits in sectors and occupations that are experiencing critical skills shortages.

These adjustments would:

- Establish smoother pathways to permanent residency for international students
- Contribute to Canada's competitiveness as a study destination at a time when international students say the ability to work is critical to their decision about where to study

Polytechnics support business innovation primarily through applied research, with services such as product development, process design, technology adoption and proof of concept. Though institutions develop areas of specialty based on industry in their region, applied research is responsive by nature. Prospective partners identify a business or societal need, then polytechnics pull in faculty expertise and student support to respond to those requirements.

Underrepresented business owners and entrepreneurs, including women, Indigenous peoples and visible minorities, have been significantly impacted during the pandemic, with [one-third expecting decreased demand in the second quarter of 2021](#). [One in six businesses owned by visible minorities expect to decrease the prices of goods and services they offer](#), compared to one in ten private sector businesses overall. A recent survey found that [Indigenous business owners were far less likely to find the help they needed during the pandemic](#).

These numbers illustrate an urgent need for targeted investments related to business innovation, commercialization and growth. Building on current federal programs and initiatives, a dedicated innovation fund would further help companies grow their market share, enter new markets and improve outputs.

This ensures a more inclusive recovery by:

- Targeting underrepresented business owners and entrepreneurs most impacted by the pandemic

About Us

At Polytechnics Canada, we are proud promoters of the polytechnic education model, which offers advanced programming across the knowledge spectrum in direct response to industry needs. Our mission is policy advocacy for federal action in areas that reflect the critical role members play in enhancing Canada's productivity and innovation.

