

Ontario faces labour shortage of 360,000 people

One of the immediate challenges facing Ontario's re-elected Liberal government will be addressing the looming skills shortage.

A recent report from the Conference Board of Canada says the province's labour market pressures will intensify after 2010. The problem will leave Ontario with a shortfall of more than 360,000 skilled people by 2025.

"We are threatened with an escalating shortage of trained people in a wide range of areas, from manufacturing to business to social services," said Barbara Taylor, the chair of the colleges' committee of presidents.

The colleges are part of a coalition of business, education and labour leaders seeking to raise public awareness of the issue. The coalition recently released the Conference Board report at a news conference in Toronto.

Although public attention is currently focused on layoffs in the auto plants and the forestry sector, the approaching skills shortage can't be ignored. The challenge is due to demographics – the baby boomer generation will soon be retiring, and Ontario has a slowing population growth, which means



A group of experts have come together to form Ontario's Workforce Shortage Coalition. The members of the coalition are calling on Ontario to develop a comprehensive skills strategy. Photo: Northern College

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 president, Canadore College

there won't be sufficient numbers of people available to fill the positions. Even with strong immigration levels, there is the threat

of a significant skills shortage.

The Conference Board report predicts Ontario will be short 190,000 skilled employees in 13 years' time. That will grow to more than 360,000 by 2025 and more than 560,000 by 2030.

"Despite efforts to date, Ontario is still facing a labour shortage of crisis proportions," said Len Crispino, the president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

Province needs comprehensive strategy: McGuinty

Ontario needs to have a comprehensive strategy to ensure it is producing the highly educated workforce that employers require, says Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty.

In a recent letter to Colleges Ontario, the premier said everyone in the province must be able to reach their full potential. He said his government will continue to invest in postsecondary education.

"Ontario has one of the best education systems in the world – one that we are very proud of – and Ontario Liberals agree that

we need a comprehensive strategy to ensure our province continues to produce a highly educated workforce," McGuinty said.

"Education has always been a top priority for Ontario Liberals: we know it is our economic advantage and the key to our province's prosperity."



McGuinty's comments were in response to a questionnaire sent during the election campaign regarding the approaching skills shortage and the province's need for greater numbers of college graduates. During the election, the colleges released a six-point plan to ensure Ontario is able to address the skills shortage issue.

The plan called for Ontario to commit to increased postsecondary attainment rates, increases in the number of employees receiving training or retraining, the removal of barriers for foreign-trained immigrants, improved transferability of postsecondary credits, improved marketing and promotion of skills education, and improved college funding.

Pushing the boundaries of science

In 2003, Andrew Crow, a senior research assistant and lab manager for Canadian Blood Services at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto, achieved the kind of medical research breakthrough most science professionals dream about.

After years of studying Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura (ITP), a rare autoimmune disease that destroys blood platelets and interferes with blood clotting, Crow and his supervisor, Dr. Alan Lazarus, managed to create a synthetic drug to treat ITP patients.

"We now have a safe product of which we can make unlimited quantities in the lab to treat not only people with ITP, but with a number of other autoimmune diseases," says Crow, whose findings were published in *Nature*.

Crow doesn't have a master's degree or PhD in science; rather, his considerable laboratory skills stem from the intense, practical training he received in the mid '80s through Seneca College's Biological Research Technology program.



Now called Biotechnology Technologist (Research), the three-year program covers the scientific methods, experimental techniques and research equipment used in the life sciences. Areas of study include immunology, virology and cell biology.

Today, Crow chooses his own research projects, assists with grants, manages the lab and supervises postdoctoral students. He also writes research papers, applies for patents and designs medical experiments – tasks usually reserved for researchers with more extensive academic credentials.

"The academic training I received at college made me want to think about being more than just a technician," he says. "Without that training, I wouldn't be where I am today."

College enrolment up six per cent

First-year enrolment at Ontario's 24 colleges has jumped six per cent this year, with more than 94,000 people enrolling in first-year programs.

"This record enrolment indicates that more and more people are realizing the benefits of the career-focused education and training provided at Ontario's 24 colleges," said Linda Franklin, president and CEO of Colleges Ontario.

Franklin said almost 60 per cent of first-year postsecondary students in Ontario attend college, compared with just over 40 per cent who enter university. Like universities, which are expecting a five per cent enrolment increase this year, colleges are facing tremendous cost pressures as a result of this surge in enrolment.

Ontario's colleges currently serve 51 per cent more students than in 1989-90, but receive 29

per cent less operating funding per student in constant dollars.

"The growing demand for college education is putting huge cost pressures on the system and constraining the ability of colleges to maintain or improve their programs and facilities," Franklin said.

Franklin added that while the enrolment growth at colleges is a positive sign, Ontario will need to see even more people enrolling in colleges in the years ahead to meet the province's labour market needs.

Fast facts about Ontario colleges and their students

- Sixty per cent of first-year postsecondary students in Ontario are enrolled at a college
- Colleges have 200,000 full-time and 300,000 part-time learners
- Ninety per cent of college graduates find employment within six months of graduation
- Ontario's college offer more than 600 different programs and a range of credentials, including two- and three-year diplomas, bachelor's degrees and one-year certificates
- Several colleges offer joint college-university programs allowing students to earn both a college diploma and a university degree
- Colleges offer 85 per cent of the in-school training for apprenticeships
- Colleges operate in 200 communities in Ontario.

New dates for colleges' conference

Although the Colleges Ontario conference is traditionally held in the third week of February, the dates for the 2008 conference have been moved to Feb. 10 and 11.

The change in timing is to avoid the newly announced statutory holiday in February. The 2008 conference will take place in London and will be hosted by Fanshawe College.

Top marks for nursing program

A collaborative program that combines the best of nursing education at McMaster University, Mohawk College and Conestoga College has earned the highest level of accreditation possible from the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN). The Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree program and its curriculum, offered by a consortium of the three schools, has earned a seven-year accreditation from the association.

Fashion on display

Three galleries of apparel from the Seneca College Fashion Resource Centre were on display at the Toronto Eaton Centre this month as part of the centre's 30-year anniversary celebration.

The apparel display was part of a retrospective on fashion. The Eaton Centre also showed 37 fashion design sketches by Seneca students and alumni.

Getting published

Cynthia Good, the former president and publisher of Penguin Canada, will lead a November workshop at Humber College that explains how writers get published. The Nov. 15 workshop will cover such topics as the factors that attract editors to certain manuscripts, and the advantages and disadvantages of literary agents.

Colleges Ontario awards

The deadline is quickly approaching for colleges to submit nominations for the 2008 Colleges Ontario Awards. All nominations must be submitted by Nov. 1. For more information visit www.collegesontario.org.

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