



# KERRY JOTHEN

## Training doesn't measure up to international benchmarks

There has been a lot of talk lately about the need for Canadian companies to increase innovation and productivity to ensure economic prosperity. A key factor in supporting international competitiveness is having a highly skilled workforce and an effective industrial training and qualifications system.

The recently released World Economic Forum's *Global Competitiveness Report 2004-2005* found that Canada fell from 12th last year to 15th in 2004. The country was sixth in 1998.

One of the key factors in this measure is acquisition and use of human capital. In its 2004 training and development outlook, the **Conference Board of Canada** reports that Canadian employers continue to under-invest in learning, suggesting that there "is no doubt that continued under-investment in learning will adversely affect our productivity and competitiveness."

This is supported by such statistics as total training expenditures per employee, where Canadian organizations trail their counterparts in the U.S., Europe, Asia and the Pacific.

Canada's industry training stacks up poorly against many industrialized countries. For example, with a population about 40 per cent the size of ours, Australia has an apprenticeship training volume three times as high as Canada's.

A review of industry training systems in several other jurisdictions found that, with the exception of Alberta, Canadian industry training systems fall well short of the training participation rates among other industrialized countries.

A review of Australia and New Zealand – among other countries – shows higher apprenticeship participation rates, higher completion rates and more credentials issued,

more youth participation, a broader range of sectors and occupations, greater industry involvement and qualitative advantages over Canadian industry training.

Most successful industry training systems in the world have been introducing reforms as part of broader economic competitiveness strategies.

Some common successful apprenticeship reforms in other countries are:

- more industry driven/led involvement and ownership;
- modularized training programs and curricula;
- competency-based assessment and training instead of traditional time-based evaluation of learning;
- apprenticeships in new, emerging industries and occupations;
- new apprenticeship models that are more inclusive and flexible, facilitating access to disadvantaged labour force groups and small businesses;
- increased efforts to start apprenticeships in high school;
- flexible delivery of training to minimize time away from work and home;
- national vocational standards frameworks that integrate vocational and higher education qualifications;
- performance-based financial incentives for employers;
- more community and industry-based third-party delivery of industry training services.

The good news is that while industry training in B.C. and the rest of Canada is below these international standards, strong industry involvement, more flexible training programs, new programs for emerging industries and occupations, competency-based training

are part of the strategic direction of the B.C. government and of the mandate of the new **BC Industry Training Authority**.

We need a government and a change agent that have the foresight and fortitude to make real change in our trades training system.

We need industries and employers to step up to the plate – the quid pro quo of a new training model is that with more flexible, relevant and accessible training, employers and employees will more fully participate in training and providing worker credentials.

Success in B.C. will be contingent on how effective the province is in pursuing a "two-track" approach to increasing the quantity and quality of industry training:

- 1) Improving existing apprenticeship training programs for industries that need traditional trades skills;
- 2) Increasing training in industries currently not being served by traditional programs.

Reviewing selected Canadian and international jurisdictions shows Canadian apprenticeship systems lag far behind those in many other countries in terms of expanding beyond the traditional model and narrow group of sectors and occupations traditionally served by apprenticeship.

B.C. can learn from Alberta in terms of how to update and expand industry training in those trades and industries that constitute BCITA's "traditional" track. From other countries, BCITA can learn from and apply innovations related to the "new" track. ♦

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**Canadian employers continue to under-invest in learning**