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 Director of Finance and Administration

Current reports in the Human Capital Initiative:

[Willing and Able: The Problem of Skills Shortages in Western Canada](#)  
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[Increasing Western Canadian Immigration](#)

[A History of Immigration in Canada](#)  
[Working Towards Parity: Recommendations of the Aboriginal Human Capital Strategies Initiative](#)

[Encouraging Success: Ensuring Aboriginal Youth Stay in School](#)

[Achieving Potential: Towards Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Aboriginal People](#)

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Human Capital Initiative

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Canadian training systems don't measure up to international standards

BY KERRY JOTHEN  
 GUEST COLUMNIST

*Editor's note: To open debate on skills training, Canada West invited Kerry Jochen, CEO of Human Capital Strategies, to give his perspective on the situation in Canada.*

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 (we were 6th 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 such 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% the size of ours, Australia has an apprenticeship training volume three times as high as Canada's. Efforts are being made by provinces like BC and Ontario to change this, but relentless attention and commitment to real reform by governments and industries is essential.

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. The chart below, based on available labour force and training statistics of the last few years (labour force/trainee numbers in parentheses), demonstrates this.



While there are interesting trends and models in continental European countries (e.g. Austria, Germany and Switzerland in particular), the cultures and traditions in these "dual" systems are so strongly embedded in the institutional context and framework of those countries that it is difficult to transplant more than specific program elements.

However, of greater relevance are jurisdictions which have newer systems and undergone recent changes such as Ireland and New Zealand which are similar in population size to BC, and Australia which is similar in size to Canada.

A review of Australia and New Zealand—among other countries—show 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 which 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 BC 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 BC 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 credentialing.

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

- 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.

Many successful jurisdictions (e.g. Australia, New Zealand) openly and proudly pursue this approach through a combination of traditional apprenticeships and "new" or "modern" apprenticeships or traineeships. Even Ontario reflects this through its two pieces of trades training legislation.

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

BC and the ITA are well-positioned to turn around BC's industry training system to reach the long term goal of a world-class training model and, more importantly, a highly skilled and adaptable workforce.

*Kerry Jochen is CEO of Human Capital Strategies, a strategic human resources consultancy. He was formerly Chair of the 2010 Human Resources Planning Committee and CEO of the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission.*



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Canada West Foundation is pleased to announce our latest venture: Dialogues magazine. Our first issue, which looks at Natural Capital, will be mailed December 15. Canada West has invited experts from industry, politics and the environmental movement to give their perspective on what we consider to be **The Next Big Idea**.