

B.C. is wasting pool of potential workers

SKILLS SHORTAGE: Conference told many underutilized

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B.C.'s so-called skills shortage should really be called "skills wastage," according to a new labour-market analyst.

With an estimated 350,000 unrecognized immigrant credentials across the country — of which at least 10 per cent are in B.C. — labour analyst Kerry Jothen says it's critical to streamline the credential-recognition system quickly.

"We're talking about a lot of people who are underutilized," adds Jothen, president and CEO of Human Capital Strategies, a human-resources planning and development company based in Victoria.

With a looming skills and labour shortage facing B.C., Jothen was joined by four panelists at the Vancouver Board of Trade's Greater Vancouver Leadership Summit Friday to discuss the problem.

In addition to immigrants, women and people with disabilities, aboriginals were also identified as under-employed and a

potential source of labour. Collectively, they account for 60 per cent of the Canadian workforce, or 10 million people.

Roslyn Kunin, president of Roslyn Kunin & Assoc. and the former chairwoman of the Vancouver stock exchange, says the "urgent need" for labour goes well beyond Olympic construction.

The greatest demand for labour is actually in health care, followed by trades and technical workers, Kunin says.

"We have a major project list in B.C. and all the Olympic projects — as important as they are — have shrunk into a small component of the overall demand for workers." Kunin says it's almost too late to begin training people for Olympic construction projects, because training itself takes at least four years. But it would help to change attitudes about trades and technical workers, she adds.

"You can make lots of money in trades. It's not the low-wage sector. The low-wage sector is someone who comes out with a B.A. and no specific training."

According to the Business Council of B.C., while 73 per cent of job openings in B.C. between 2001 and 2011 will require training beyond high school, just 29 per cent will require a university degree.

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