

Supporting Canadian Students' Transition to Employment Through Work Placements

If Canada is to successfully tackle its skills gap and ensure its economic growth, we have to give special attention to the largest cohort of labour force entrants each year: young people.

Across the country, there is a growing sense that Canada needs to better align its education and training systems to labour market needs. One practical way to improve that alignment is through work-integrated learning such as co-op programs, internships and field placements during post-secondary education. Work placements provide the skills students need to rapidly integrate into today's labour market.

In the 2014 report *A Battle We Can't Afford to Lose: Getting Young Canadians from Education to Employment*, the Canadian Chamber explored the role of work-integrated learning. The report summarized the findings from recent research as follows:

- Work-integrated learning (WIL) includes co-op and internship programs, among other workplace training programs
- WIL benefits students by allowing them to gain experience before entering the workforce and by contributing to their career education
- WIL facilitates the recruitment process for employers and is associated with productivity gains
- Not enough employers, especially smaller firms and organizations, take sufficient advantage of WIL.

In a report based on a survey over 3,300 employers in Ontario in 2012, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario found that:

- Participation in WIL helps students transition into the workforce, with employers preferring to hire graduates with WIL experience
- Students benefit financially from participating in WIL programs
- Financial supports may help to facilitate employer participation in postsecondary WIL programs.

Meanwhile, according to the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education, whose members include 79 post-secondary institutions, educators cannot meet the high demand for placements by students and are always seeking more employers to become engaged.

While financial supports are not the only strategy to encourage employer participation, they are an important tool for government to recognize and encourage the valuable role of work placements during students' educational experience. Currently, Ontario and Manitoba offer refundable tax credits to employers who hire co-op students in paid placements.

Recommendation

That the federal government provide financial incentives to employers to offer paid work-integrated learning placements to students during post-secondary education, giving special consideration to small and medium-sized businesses and to those who have not previously offered work placements.