



## Four Policy Pillars for Prosperity

### Pillar II: Improve Access to a Skilled Workforce

#### ACC Position

The ACC supports efforts to reduce the gap between unemployed and vacant job openings by improving skills development and attracting skilled labour.

#### Issue

The Atlantic provincial economies share several characteristics that make full employment challenging. A widely dispersed, highly rural population, several key industries that provide only seasonal employment (e.g., fisheries, agriculture, tourism), and low levels of literacy and numeracy result in employment gaps at low and high skilled levels.

#### Why it is important

Full employment is both an indicator and a driver of a vibrant economy. Under full employment conditions, employers compete for available resources, driving income gains and increased productivity. By reducing the resources lost to attracting employees, businesses can increase production, improve profitability and pay more taxes that in turn, fund public services.

#### Retain our Youth

An essential prerequisite of prosperity is that the youngest of our workforce see opportunity to work and live in their home province. For many years, the youth of our region have looked to Western Canada for their first jobs which quickly has translated into an aging and shrinking Atlantic Canadian workforce. The statistics are stark, and it is essential future generations of Atlantic Canadians view the region as the home of opportunity and an exceptional quality of life. As noted in the Ivany Report, the region must stem the rate of youth outmigration by providing them aware with opportunities to create a prosperous life in Atlantic Canada.

The crux of the issue is offsetting the siren call of a booming western economy. We need to understand and communicate who is being successful in our region and why. And we need to get this message to our children at an early age to put the question of whether to stay or go west in a realistic context.

#### Attract and retain immigrants and foreign students

In some jurisdictions with growing populations, it may be possible to find a sufficient pool of skilled workers to fill both low and highly skilled job requirement. The Atlantic Canadian reality is different. A combination of low immigrant quotas and policies that limit the ability of foreign students to make a connection to the local workforce are contributing to the inability of businesses to find qualified applicants. These potential employees from other countries represent a significant lost opportunity to fuel economic growth.

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Our region needs to establish effective collaborations between government, business, and communities. We need to establish ourselves as welcoming, not just friendly. There needs to be a commitment by all parties to identify potential immigrants, ensure they are aware of the unique nature of Atlantic Canada's lifestyle and provide settlement resources that will allow them to attach to both rural and urban communities.

It is critical that governments adopt policies to allow foreign student to connect with local businesses. Atlantic universities annually welcome about 14,000 students from other countries. Progressive programs like Nova Scotia's Study and Stay career guidance initiative needs to be supported by more accommodating work placement regulations.

A long-term solution is also required to ensure adequate human resources to staff low-skilled and seasonal employment opportunities. Agriculture and processing industries have demonstrated challenges finding employees locally and rely on the access to temporary foreign workers. Governments need to work together to create fair and predictable regulations governing temporary workers and pathways to immigration.

### Entrepreneurship Training

Growing economies are traditionally characterized by active innovation and business start-ups. As the world undergoes rapid technological advances, the opportunities to create new businesses are available in virtually every city and town. Students need to hear this message and understand how to pursue new opportunities at the earliest opportunity.

It is critical schools increase the emphasis on acquiring entrepreneurial skills and de-mystify the process of creating your own employment. This learning needs to be mainstreamed at an early age by communicating local examples of successful young entrepreneurs and how they conceived and established their businesses.

It is important that schools at all levels provide training and awareness of resources that support new business creation as small businesses are the primary employer across the entire region.

### Skills Development

Due to advances in technology, the modern workplace demands a higher level of skills and independence. Workers must be either bring technical skills to their place of employment or be able to self-teach competency in operating technology and applying them to work processes.

Recent data indicates some improvements are being made, but the building blocks of opportunity and prosperity require that public schools guarantee students early competence in reading, math and computing skills. This basic knowledge is a necessary determinant of whether our children will progress to higher learning or be prepared to operate in a workplace that demands the ability to read and solve problems independently.

The greatest and most obvious answer to the vacancy-employment gap is improving access to labour market information to ensure our students can access and acquire the skills that are going to be relevant to employers, now and in the future. Governments need to mine employment data more deeply to identify regional deficiencies in access to skilled labour.

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## Recommendations

The Atlantic Chamber of Commerce recommends that provincial governments:

### **Increase the workforce through youth retention**

- Work with communities to identify, communicate and prepare youth for opportunities in Atlantic Canada.

### **Increase the workforce through immigration and retention of foreign students**

- Continue to expand and improve immigration programs like AIP, PNP and TFW.
- Expand access to resources that encourage settlement and attachment in communities of all sizes.

### **Increase the level of entrepreneurship training in public schools**

- Communicate, at an early age, examples of successful entrepreneurs in the local economy.
- Ensure availability of practical entrepreneurship training at all levels of educations.

### **Improve Skills Training**

- Continue focus on ensuring mastery of reading, math and technology at an early age.
- Improve connections between labour market information and workplace skills acquisition.

## Key Messages

### **Youth Retention**

- Young Atlantic Canadians need to be aware of opportunities in their local communities
- We need to consult with our young leaders in establishing community economic development plans

### **Attraction and Retention of Immigrants**

- Atlantic Canada needs to grow its population, we can't do this without inviting and welcoming immigrants.
- Currently we have many temporary seasonal positions that are difficult to fill, but could be if rules around temporary foreign workers were relaxed.
- More than 14,000 foreign students are studying here every year. We must make every effort to convince them to stay.

### **Entrepreneurship Training**

- Our future depends on innovation and small business creation.
- Population trends indicate a huge wave of entrepreneurs approaching retirement, we need a new entrepreneurial class to replace them.

### **Training**

- Provinces must continue regular student assessments - you can't improve what you don't measure
- Business productivity is being affected by low literacy and numeracy rates.