

Future Skills Summit

Insights Summary

February 22 – 24, 2022



The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead.

The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada.

If you would like to learn more about this report and other skills research from FSC, visit us at fsc-ccf.ca or contact info@fsc-ccf.ca.

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A Message From the Hosts

By Dr. Susan Black and Pedro Barata

“The Canadian dream is alive.”

These words from our keynote speaker, Mohamad Fakhri, were felt in each of the questions, ideas, and discussions of the Future Skills Summit, as we came together to shape the next steps of skills development as a pillar of Canada’s vision for shared prosperity.

As we reflect on the first national event of the Future Skills Centre (FSC), we want to express our gratitude to all participants who convened to make the summit such a success.

Over the three days of the virtual summit, more than 1,700 participants and 55 speakers, representing every province and territory, joined live to listen, share, and engage. Our speakers brought new perspectives, pushed us to think outside the box, and shared many stark reminders about the importance of our actions and decisions as we move into the era of post-pandemic recovery.

How we approach Canada’s pandemic comeback is top of mind. Skills, as discussed extensively throughout the event, are a critical element of our economic rebound. Committing to upskilling, finding new ways to recognize skills, and placing a premium on skills training will help us move forward and thrive collectively.

The decisions we make and the paths we forge together will be critical to our recovery in the years to come. We must think about skills differently today to support the prosperity of tomorrow—to support job transitions for those who have been displaced because of changes in our economy and to foster labour market recovery to create a strong Canada.

A strong Canada, however, requires an immediate and innovative response to the climate crisis. Though the connection can sometimes be invisible, climate action and skills are intrinsically linked. We need to support Canadians’ development of green skills to ensure businesses have workers with the abilities to operate green tools and technologies and the know-how to innovate and inform best practices. Supporting this development means incorporating green-skills training in post-secondary education, designing and delivering upskilling and retraining programs for mid-career workers in industries undergoing a transition to the green economy, and—perhaps most importantly—fostering a sense of respect, curiosity, and empathy for the planet in our youth.

As discussed throughout the summit, creating a world for the leaders of tomorrow to succeed is up to us. We need to equip them with the skills, tools, and inspiration to tackle one of humanity's greatest challenges yet: climate change. And in the race against the climate crisis, no one can be left behind.

This principle comes back to one of our central focuses as a centre: diversity and inclusion. It's what makes us strong, and it's what can help us overcome some of our most challenging obstacles. However, we need to do more. We need to implement inclusive approaches to skills training to ensure equitable access, and we need to motivate and support businesses to build diverse workforces. In doing so, we can create better socio-economic outcomes for vulnerable populations.

Understanding and embracing our differences will help us develop equitable and inclusive solutions for all Canadians in the future of work. To break down the walls of regional disparities and to seek reconciliation with the Indigenous peoples of this land, we must use strategies and approaches that put diversity and inclusion at the forefront of our decision-making. Equity must be in everything we do.

Thank you for coming together to exchange ideas—to learn how we can move from discussion to action. Tomorrow's Canada will be based on what we do today.



Dr. Susan Black

Chief Executive Officer
The Conference Board of Canada



Pedro Barata

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Key Take-Aways

- To solve talent gaps and labour shortages, we need better labour market information. We need good data to inform good decision-making.
- The existing model of career services—which mainly supports workers only when they are unemployed—needs to transform into a system of lifelong learning and support.
- Digital skills and green skills are priorities. But we can't talk about these skills without acknowledging the critical role of social and emotional skills.
- Inclusion is central to post-pandemic recovery, as vulnerable populations continue to face disproportionately large economic challenges.
- We need to create a world where young people are supported to take on tomorrow's biggest challenges, like climate change and digital disruption.
- Resilience is essential for all Canadians. We need to teach it informally and formally and embody it in everything we do to be able to take on the challenges and uncertainty of the future.

What We Heard

In February 2022, The Conference Board of Canada presented the Future Skills Centre's first national summit. The virtual summit hosted more than 1,700 participants and 55 speakers. It included plenaries, fireside chats, panel discussions, and ActionLabs that profiled key learnings from ongoing Future Skills Centre projects. Here, we summarize the learnings from the summit, including the following:

- **insights:** insights and ideas gleaned from the keynote, panels, and fireside chats
- **impactful solutions:** impactful solutions profiled in the ActionLabs sessions
- **next steps:** key Future Skills Centre activities that will drive systems change in Canada's skills ecosystem

Insights

Insights help drive change. The 2022 FSC summit brought together skills ecosystem leaders to share how we can help Canadians, including current and future job-seekers, employers, policy-makers, service providers, educators, and researchers. Across the sessions, three main themes emerged:

- an inclusive and strong recovery
- responsive career pathways
- skills for the future



An Inclusive and Strong Recovery

The solutions are in skills. However, to help people learn and obtain the skills needed to solve problems and take on our toughest challenges, we need to reflect deeply on our Canadian values. While our past is not perfect, Canadians share many values that are integral tools for change and impact. By harnessing values like kindness, resilience, and inclusivity, we arm ourselves with the mindset to drive impact in the skills ecosystem and beyond.

Inclusion Must Be in Everything We Do

As we turn our minds to post-pandemic recovery, we must acknowledge that certain Canadians and certain regions (particularly rural and remote areas) have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Women, newcomers to Canada, racialized minorities, people with disabilities, and those without access to reliable Internet services face greater barriers to recovery and financial strains. In sum, those who were struggling before the pandemic are struggling more now.

Inclusion must be central to all recovery approaches. Every level of society needs to discuss how to support all Canadians, especially those who continue to be marginalized. The role of employment is also particularly precarious, because access to skills and training is limited and should be an area of focus. Though we're all responsible for supporting those who have been hardest hit by the pandemic, we must continue to hold our leaders to account. Our leaders—the decision-makers, the policy-makers—have incredible abilities to create systems and standards to uplift all Canadians and facilitate an inclusive approach to recovery.

Start With Youth

Our young people are the future. They will be the ones leading us through transformations unseen by any other generation. We need innovative and creative minds to see problems in novel ways so that we can tackle them differently. Children entering school in 2022 will no longer be able to see resources as limitless. They will need to value sustainability, well-being, and common prosperity. In the face of an increasingly complex, uncertain, and volatile world, the curricula and systems we develop to support youth must evolve to encourage the growth of strong, curious minds.

While evolving education and skills training for youth must be led by our government, we can do much at the individual level to support and empower young Canadians. Mentorship, community groups, and even connections with neighbours are essential to giving youth the knowledge and agency they need to develop the talent for our future workforce.

Resilience

Everyone benefits from resilience. We need the ability to face adversity with strength, grace, and hope as we face social and economic disruptions like climate change and automation. Resilient workers and learners will be able both to adapt quickly to change and to grasp new opportunities as they arise, mitigating the impacts of economic disruption on themselves and forging a path for the next generation of workers.

Responsive Career Pathways

A central challenge for Canadians is finding ways to foster and support career pathways that meet the labour market needs of today *and* tomorrow. This balance is tricky, as rapidly changing and new and emergent technologies continue to influence the world of work. We must not only find solutions for our current talent gaps but also prepare for upcoming challenges and changes in our economy.

The Great Resignation

On the heels of the pandemic, many Canadians are re-evaluating their careers and employment situations, contributing to what's been coined “the Great Resignation” or “the Great Re-evaluation.” This phenomenon is happening in tandem with rapid change and global transformation caused by changing demographics, technology, and the climate crisis. We are experiencing compounded change, which creates considerable uncertainty—especially for those most vulnerable in our society, who were the hardest hit by the pandemic.

Economic recovery from the pandemic is contingent on helping Canadians navigate various career paths. We need to support policy-makers and practitioners to strengthen programming through data and rapid learning, which will improve outcomes for Canada's workforce. In particular, we should focus on workers who face barriers to reaching their economic potential.

Better Labour Market Information for Better Outcomes

Labour market information (LMI) must be improved, especially when it comes to skills. We need common understanding and language around skills to give us greater insights into gaps in training, the needs of employers, and the needs of job-seekers.

We must better understand how automation impacts careers, particularly for vulnerable populations. Many high-tech jobs continue to go unfilled, suggesting a mismatch between the skills required to implement these new technologies and the skills that current workers have. Across Canada, we see misalignment of skills and jobs, shortages of skilled workers, and lost opportunities for business growth. These challenges are particularly acute in rural communities.

Misalignment of skills and jobs significantly impacts a critical element of Canada's economy: small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It affects productivity and competitiveness, preventing organizations and people from reaching their highest potential.

Rethinking Career Services

The 19 million working Canadians need more support. Many of them face unprecedented challenges in navigating a rapidly changing labour market. Career services for these workers are set up as a “fail first” model—we will service you, but not until you're unemployed and in crisis. Once people are unemployed, the system responds by telling them to take the first job available. This approach doesn't help us build hope and resilience, nor does it give workers time to identify a desirable or impactful career pathway.

High-quality, proactive career guidance must be delivered early and consider the whole person, including individual skills, goals, and needs. This process can help workers build resilience, prepare for change, and become lifelong learners.

Skills for the Future

The rapid and unprecedented changes of the pandemic pushed us outside of our comfort zones. The pandemic changed how we work, teach, and learn—but the unabated pace of technological advancement will continue to challenge us. Understanding the skills we need for future success will be necessary for a strong pandemic recovery and to remain productive and competitive on the world stage. Digital skills, green skills, and social and emotional skills are notable priorities.

Digital Skills

Our ability to navigate the pandemic with such great success is largely thanks to Canadians' digital skills. Indeed, our rapid pivot to virtual life continues to be a cornerstone of recovery. But while the pandemic increased our use of digital tools, it also introduced many new tools and practices that require specific skills. We must be ready to adapt quickly to new tools and technologies brought about by the speed of technological change. For Canadians to leverage these technologies, we need to create and provide upskilling and reskilling through a variety of means (e.g., microcredentials).

While the technical element of digital skills is important, tackling digital skills is also about mindset, especially among adult learners. Encouraging Canadians to adopt a mentality of lifelong learning is essential and will help them embrace and employ technology.

Green Skills

We need a green-skills revolution in Canada to reach net-zero emissions, but we're not prepared. Even with an ambitious and well-articulated climate policy rooted in sound economics, like carbon pricing and innovative approaches to regulation, we're not ready. We're missing a key element: people with green skills.

Skills are central to our net-zero strategy. We need millions of Canadians skilled in the technologies and systems required to tackle climate change—which means creating and implementing training systems and programs.

To accomplish this task, we need to:

- map out Canada's green-skills gaps and opportunities;
- allocate more funding to proactive strategies for retraining workers in all sectors that will be impacted by climate change;
- revise immigration strategy to ensure Canada attracts, recruits, and integrates newcomers with the right skills and ambitions for green-collar jobs;
- create accessible pathways for green skills, training, and careers through work-integrated learning, upskilling, and reskilling programs.

This is a huge undertaking, so everyone needs to be on board. We must draw on all talent, without discrimination, including women, Indigenous people, and youth. And we have to act now.

Social and Emotional Skills

When we talk about tackling these incredibly tough challenges—like post-pandemic recovery, the climate crisis, and keeping up with constant digital transformation—we often talk about technical skills or tactics.

However, the problems we're facing as a country and a globe are complex. They don't fit perfectly into a formula, and variables are in constant flux. While technical skills and know-how are undoubtedly essential, our social and emotional skills—such as problem-solving, communication, active listening, and collaboration—are key to successfully navigating these challenges. Social and emotional skills are particularly connected to digital and green skills. Curiosity, creativity, resilience, empathy, and our ability to work together and learn from one another are paramount to learning and adapting to the rapid changes in technology and sustainability practices.



Impactful Solutions

The 2022 FSC summit included six ActionLabs sessions. In these sessions, we heard from 12 organizations leading innovative projects—all supported by the Future Skills Centre—that identify in-demand skills and test new methods of delivering training. These presentations highlighted the best practices already making an impact in the labour market, giving participants clear, actionable, and evidence-based solutions. Across the ActionLabs, seven main solutions emerged:

1. Make learning accessible.
2. Put people at the centre.
3. Use inclusion to drive success.
4. Provide wraparound supports.
5. Respond to employers' skills needs.
6. Support women through child care.
7. Rethink training needs.

Make Learning Accessible

We need systems that make it convenient for people to get the skills and training they need to address labour shortages. These systems could involve finding more efficient ways to acknowledge newcomers' international credentials or creating rapid upskilling programs to help youth fill high-tech jobs quickly and easily. Retraining employees also requires a skills-based approach in areas such as leadership training.

Put People at the Centre

A truly responsive skills ecosystem puts people first. It recognizes that all people, whether newcomers to Canada or mid-career workers, are at different places in their career journeys and have different needs and goals. No standard process for skills development exists—there are shared solutions and challenges. Understanding the context at the local and regional levels is important in developing implementation processes that meet unique issues while drawing on strengths and assets in every sector, market, and community. From there, we can develop customized plans. SMEs also require a tailored approach.



Use Inclusion to Drive Success

To solve talent shortages and fill labour gaps, we need to include those who typically face barriers to education and discrimination in the workforce. Vulnerable populations—women, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, racialized minorities, and marginalized youth, for example—too often can't obtain economic success because the systems don't support, consider, or include them. We need to motivate employers and leaders to put diversity and inclusion first. We also need to create training and education systems that support the success of vulnerable populations in the workforce.

Provide Wraparound Supports

To help an individual succeed in developing skills and staying in the labour market, we must consider the person as a whole. We should look at the skills training that can lead them to employment opportunities. But we should also consider what will help them succeed in all aspects of life—such as support in writing resumés, access to transit, social integration, and mental health support.

Respond to Employers' Skills Needs

We need to better understand the skills needs of employers, industries, and sectors. In doing so, we can create tailored, efficient, and targeted approaches to training. These approaches can help fill labour shortages and skills gaps. Further, they can reduce barriers to employment for job-seekers by providing Canadians with more learning opportunities, such as through flexible, job-specific training and microcredentials.

Support Women Through Child Care

We can't wait any longer to make affordable, flexible, and comprehensive child care available for all Canadian families. Mothers disproportionately provide care for their children during early years. We need to support them in this care and make going back to work when they're ready an easy choice for them.

To provide this support, we need more early childhood educators (ECEs). Growing the ECE pool means developing training opportunities for these workers, incentivizing them with respectful and reasonable wages, and—as a society—rethinking how we recognize ECEs. They are doing some of the most important work in our country: helping to raise our children during the most impactful developmental years of their lives.

Rethink Training Needs

In recent decades, employers in many industries have strongly emphasized that workers require a post-secondary education. Receiving a post-secondary education, such as a four-year degree, involves a large amount of time and resources. With technology moving so quickly and the talent shortages of green and high-tech skills becoming increasingly dire, we need to create and support targeted and accessible learning for people of all levels to meet their individual and their employers' needs.

Discover the ActionLabs

Tourism Hospitality Emergency Recovery (THER)

In its first phase, THER was launched as an agile pilot project to help displaced workers in the tourism and hospitality sector navigate an uncertain future. Now, it has become a national effort with a focus on supporting hospitality and tourism businesses in developing sector-based workforce recovery planning.

EDGE UP: Energy to Digital Growth Education and Upskilling Project

Launched in 2019, EDGE UP and its partners have collaborated in designing, implementing, and evaluating a digital upskilling pilot project with the objective of transitioning displaced mid-career workers in the Calgary energy sector to high-growth technology opportunities.



In Motion & Momentum+ (IM&M+): Building Resilience, Hope, and Sustainable Futures

IM&M+ aims to break long-term cycles of dependence on social assistance for service recipients getting ready to re-enter the labour market. Community-based agencies work with participants to provide coaching and support in moving positively toward their employment, educational, and personal development goals.

Newcomer Inclusion in Quebec Small to Medium Enterprises

This project investigates the manufacturing sector to identify and improve immigrant workers' onboarding experiences in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) outside of large gateway cities. Manufacturing SMEs in smaller communities are experiencing a worker shortage, despite the large pool of immigrant workers that is available but underutilized.

Futureproofing the Food and Beverage Processing Workforce

Working directly with employers, this project is developing the first systematic testing of a broad learning and recognition framework (FPSC LRF) for the food and beverage processing industry. This project aims to ensure that the workforce develops and adapts to meet the industry's ever-changing needs as it grows, engages new technology, and innovates in response to labour market challenges.

ADaPT: Digital Competencies

ADaPT (Advanced Digital and Professional Training) creates new training opportunities for digital roles for graduates who are not in science, technology, engineering, and math; internationally educated professionals; and high-potential workers without traditional credentials. In expanding the current ADaPT model across Canadian communities, this project works to improve career pathways and address challenges that under-represented groups are facing.

Unleashing Learning Management Systems

This project leverages technology to help curate and develop online content and tools that will support training and skills development for small and medium-sized enterprises across Canada, fostering more inclusive workplaces.

Virtual Recruitment & Assessment for the Unionized Construction Industry

Using research, behavioural insights, and social and digital marketing, this project is developing a recruitment strategy to reach new audiences and support the recruitment of under-represented populations into the unionized construction industry.

FAST: Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent

Piloted as a pre-arrival program, FAST is an online occupation-specific skills assessment and development platform that is designed to help newcomers to Canada overcome barriers, including the lack of recognition of their international work credentials and the absence of work experience in Canada.

Upskilling Canadian Youth for In-Demand Tech Careers

This initiative provides Canadians aged 18 to 29 with professional and technical skills training, direct job placement, and five years of post-hire services, including mentorship and continuing education for advancing their careers. In its second phase, a hybrid approach will be expanded to provide virtual skills training and remote work opportunities to Indigenous, francophone, and Northern communities.

Material Handling 4.0: Building Pathways to Employment for Disadvantaged Groups

The supply chain sector is shifting the way it moves, stores, distributes, and disposes of materials and products. Material Handling 4.0 merges training, individualized student support, and practical work experience to help new material handlers transition into job opportunities within the supply chain sector.

What Works for Work? Employment Integration in Youth Service Hubs Across Canada

Now expanded across Canada, this program helps young people who face barriers to entry into the job market because of mental health challenges. The team provides evidence-based support and works with employers to integrate employment specialists into the mental health services team to help young people find, get, and maintain meaningful employment.



Wrap-Up

Next Steps for Driving Skills Ecosystem Change

- We must **come together** to share, learn, and motivate one another to help develop the Canadian skills ecosystem. FSC is organizing a series of events for 2023 to dig deeper into the prominent themes and discussions that emerged during the first national FSC summit.
- FSC works with LMI experts and partners to provide data, tools, and resources that can help the ecosystem understand changing skills needs and shape evidence-based responses. We will continue to make large **investments in LMI** to create tools (e.g., [OpportuNext](#)) and insights that will help all Canadians.
- We need to **test new and innovative approaches** to foster breakthrough solutions in skills development. FSC will keep supporting these approaches through projects like our [Innovation Lab](#), in which FSC collaborates with partners to develop disruptive solutions and take risks to better understand what works and what doesn't when it comes to skills development.
- An inclusive recovery requires **regional representation** – all Canadians need to be seen and heard in our work. To better support Canada's francophone community, FSC recently launched a partnership with Commission des partenaires du marché du travail to strengthen skills development research and programs in Quebec. We're exploring more potential partnerships to support regional engagement.



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- Check out the FSC blog [Skills Central](#).
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Future Skills Summit 2022: Insights Summary Heather McIntosh

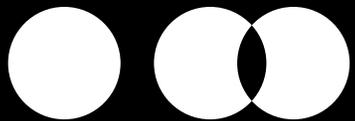
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