THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

BUSINESS + HIGHER EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE

GETTING REAL ABOUT GOING GREEN: WHY CANADA'S CLIMATE TRANSITION IS A TALENT CHALLENGE

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Canada's path to a net-zero economy won't be paved by policy or technology alone. It will depend on a workforce that's green ready: adaptable, climate-literate, and prepared to solve problems we've never seen before. But right now, the talent pipeline is too narrow, too siloed, and too disconnected from the future it's meant to serve.

At BHER, we've partnered with 1,300+ employers and supported more than 8,400 work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities in the green economy to date. Our members and partners are building real-time solutions to Canada's green workforce challenges. Here's what we're learning – here's what comes next:

WHAT'S HOLDING US BACK

Green skills aren't embedded across disciplines.

Climate change is a transdisciplinary challenge, but post-secondary programs rarely treat it that way. Sustainability education is still largely siloed within environmental science or STEM programs. Yet the green transition needs every sector – finance, health, construction, policy, just to name a few – to be climate-literate.

Green career awareness is low.

Too many young people don't know what green jobs exist, what skills they require, or how to find them. The perception persists that green jobs are rare, elite, or far removed from their field. Meanwhile, employers struggle to find emerging talent in a fast-changing labour market.

Institutions are stretched too thin.

Canada does not collect timely, consistent post-secondary outcomes data at a national level. This limits the ability to link educational pathways to labour market success and stalls informed policymaking. Countries like the U.S. and Australia offer better models for data-driven reform.

There's a mismatch between curricula and labour market demands.

Most green jobs require some form of post-secondary training. But colleges, polytechnics, and universities lack the agility, capacity, funding, and cross-campus coordination to rapidly scale green curriculum or respond to labour demand. The result? Missed opportunities, underprepared graduates, and employers left wanting and waiting.

LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Treat green skills as foundational, not niche.

Green skills aren't just for the clean energy sector – they're for everyone. Climate literacy, systems thinking, and sustainability problem-solving should be core learning outcomes in every program, not just STEM. Embedding green literacy across disciplines creates a workforce that's ready to adapt.

Build interdisciplinary systems, not one-off pilots.

Programs like Université Laval's *Chantiers d'avenir* and Queen's University's QVENT initiative bring students from diverse fields together to tackle real climate problems. These aren't extracurricular: they're built into the curriculum. Institutions that invest in centralized, interdisciplinary green learning models make it easier for employers to engage and students to access.

Think of green WIL as infrastructure.

WIL is one of Canada's strongest tools for building job-ready talent. But green WIL needs to scale, and fast. It can't be a patchwork of pilot programs. It needs to be supported, coordinated, and treated as core infrastructure that moves students into the future of work.

Make employer engagement frictionless.

SMEs and startups are driving green innovation, but they need help navigating post-secondary systems. Regional intermediaries and campus-based WIL offices must be empowered to act as one-stop-shops. Employers shouldn't have to decipher who to talk to or how to participate. Participation should feel like collaboration, not compliance.

BUILDING CANADA'S GREEN TALENT ECOSYSTEM: THE PATH FORWARD

Canada's green economy needs a talent plan. That plan should include:

- Federal and provincial/territorial commitments to support green WIL infrastructure and talent development.
- Post-secondary frameworks that embed green skills as core learning outcomes in every credential and institutional commitments to cross-campus curriculum development.
- Employer-facing incentives that reward green hiring, green upskilling, and co-creation of talent pathways.

We're well past the question of whether green jobs are coming. They're here. The challenge now is whether our systems can equip people to lead them. We'll need every institution, every employer, and every student pulling in the same direction.

The green transition isn't just a climate project – it's a talent project. And Canada won't get to net zero without building the workforce that will power it.

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