

## **Learning to Earning | Higher Education and the Changing Job Market Session Summaries**

**Civic Ballroom  
Sheraton Centre Toronto  
123 Queen Street West, Toronto, M5H 2M9**

*Thanks to Ian Hartlen and Adrian Philp, recent graduates from the Master of Public Policy Program at the University of Toronto, for their work in summarizing the conference.*

### **Day One | Thursday, November 1, 2012**

#### **Session 1A | Forecasting tomorrow's skill needs and labour market returns**

***Facilitator: Mary Catharine Lennon, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario***

***Duncan Cass-Beggs and Andrew Bell, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada***

Which skills will best equip for success in the future? This is the question we need to answer, but doing so requires us to define what exactly we mean by it. By success we not only refer to the labour market but also to society and personal life in general.

What are the skills that we actually need? Thinking about this will allow us to measure the effectiveness of our education and training choices. It will also assist in a number of other policy areas, such as immigration.

The task therefore, will be of thinking through which skills we need and aligning the various policy areas in Canada to reflect this.

The emphasis needs to be on skills for future prosperity. It is no longer as simple as saying "we need more skills," but is rather a question of which skills.

So how do we identify which skills? The best way is to analyze trends in labour market outcomes. We can clearly see that there exists a long-term trend of rising earning advantages for university graduates as well as greater job opportunities in general.

The way forward is therefore to gather a stronger evidence base for skills. We need to move beyond credentials and experience as proxies for skills. We can do this in higher education by attempting to identify the intended skill sets of various degree programs, measuring the proficiency that students acquire in these areas and tracking which skills sets link to the best results.

Ultimately, we must collaborate across institutions to find what skills are most needed and discuss how to accurately measure them.

***Joniada Milla, University of Guelph***

***University Quality and Labour Market Outcomes of Canadian Youth***

Why are labour market returns on higher education important? There are three main reasons:

- Measuring returns by degree program can be an important screening instrument for employers
- Returns can provide insight on the proper career choices for prospective students, aiding both universities and students in the “matching” process
- Measuring returns is vital for university resource allocation

***Paul Jarvey, Higher Education Strategy Associates***

***Education vs. the Labour Market Futurism in Higher Education***

There are a set of competing visions when it comes to higher education:

First, there is the outcome-oriented model. Emphasizing labour market supply and demand and technical appropriateness, this vision sees higher education as serving a distinct economic purpose and focusses on how adequately prepared students are for the labour market.

In contrast, there is the experience-oriented model. Here, the focus is on the long-term adaptability that education will provide, favouring the production of a generalist skill set over specific technical aptitudes.

These two visions tend to be advanced by people in two different sectors of society. Moreover, these paradigms are also tied to how a nation as a whole is faring economically. No surprise that the first outlook is most common in times of economic bust, while during booms, attitudes become much more sympathetic to the second model of education.

However, how can we attempt to resolve this paradigm conflict? The student perspective can provide fruitful insights.

Drawing data from the monthly MyCanEd panel, a mixed qualitative and quantitative instrument, we found some interesting results. Most students think they are already in the right place academically, and polled high when asked whether they thought their program was the “best” possible choice for them.

The findings suggest that students do have a sense of their vocational calling and personal goals. In sum, the student perspective interestingly integrates elements from both higher education rhetorics.