



Construction Industry Training Network's
Construction Sector Consultations

Final Engagement Report

January 2016

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1. Introduction

1.1. Context

British Columbia's construction industry is broad and diverse and the issues facing it are complex. They involve many sectors, all levels of government and multiple government departments.

The Construction Industry Training Network (CITN) is a not-for profit registered in B.C. in 2014 that consists of contractors, associations, unions, and training institutes. The purpose of the CITN is to address well-documented construction industry workforce and training challenges. It does so through initiatives that:

- Support effective recruitment, training and retention of construction workers and managers;
- Promote British Columbia's construction industry as a rewarding career;
- Ensure that industry training is effective and demonstrably high-quality;
- Provide timely information to stakeholders on key workforce and labour issues; and,
- Identify emerging or other strategic issues that affect the B.C. construction industry¹.

Within this context, the CITN identified a number of pressing labour market challenges in 2015 (see Table 1) that limit the ability to develop projects in B.C. Following discussions with the Province of British Columbia's Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, the Ministry agreed to support CITN in engaging with the construction sector to validate these challenges, and identify others faced by the industry, through the Labour Market Partnerships Program (LMPP). The purpose of doing so is to develop a solid understanding of the labour market challenges facing the construction sector; prioritize the issues, and, in subsequent LMPP phases (see Figure 1), address the identified issues.

Table 1. Labour market issues identified by the CITN

- 1 **Reduced / limited mobility** of some workers due to poor management of their qualifications and credentials.
- 2 Smaller employers face challenges recruiting through **government programs**.
- 3 Training/trainers are often of uncertain/unproven **quality**.
- 4 Labour market growth/development is impeded without overall **construction sector vision, goals, strategy and targets**.
- 5 Mismatches between the **training needed, and training available**.

1.2. Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to describe labour market issues facing the B.C. construction sector as identified during consultations held from September to December 2015, and lay

¹ Additional information is available at: www.trainingnetwork.ca

the foundation for research, strategy development and implementation to address these issues within the context of the LMPP.

1.3. Methodology

This report is based on:

- Regional consultations in the Lower Mainland, Prince George, Kamloops and Victoria (participant lists are in Annex 1).
- One-on-one interviews conducted with a cross-section of the B.C. construction sector (list of interviewees is in Annex 2).

Through the consultations and interviews, the CITN sought input that is representative of the sector as a whole by engaging:

- diverse regions of the province;
- different sizes of organizations;
- First Nations;
- men and women; and,
- varying industry sub-sectors.

The consultations and interviews sought both to validate (or discount) labour market issues identified by the CITN prior to the consultations (Table 1) and identify other labour market issues that limited participants' ability to build high-quality projects.

Following each regional consultation, key points were summarized and shared with participants.

1.4 Scope

The focus of the consultations included *all construction sector workers*, including trades that can be apprenticed (e.g. electricians, welders and plumbers), those that cannot (e.g. forklift operator, project managers), and those that can either be apprenticed, or practice without a ticket (e.g. carpenters). The conclusions and recommendations (Section 4, below) focus on issues that can be tackled primarily by industry.



Figure 1: Phases of the Labour Market Partnership Program. Source: Province of BC

2. Overarching themes

The consultations and interviews identified both inter-connected and overarching themes, and more specific issues that affect particular groups or regions; this section describes the former.

2.1 Supply and retention issues

Overall, there is a lack of skilled construction workers in B.C. The industry is characterized not by the presence of adequate numbers of highly-skilled workers who move fluidly between projects to meet needs, but by chronic shortages of certain types of workers and “poaching” of workers. Poaching disadvantages smaller employers and smaller communities in particular as they typically cannot offer the same wages as “mega-projects” such as LNG plants, Site C, or projects outside of British Columbia. These issues do not affect all regions and industry sub-sectors equally, as described in more detail in Section 3. However, a general theme is a shortage of versatile workers who can perform a variety of tasks within their area of competence.

Root causes are complex and connected, and include:

- demographic changes in the industry such as increasing retirements;
- a lack of new entrants to the industry and retention of entrants in the industry. This can be attributed in part to poor perceptions of the sector; generational changes affecting expectations on the part of younger people: and, in some cases, low wages and restrictive collective agreements that act as a disincentive for younger people to stay in the sector;
- the increasing complexity of the size of construction projects in B.C.; and,
- wage disparities between smaller towns and projects, and large projects, towards which many workers gravitate.

The lack of skilled workers, paradoxically, may inhibit training on the part of some employers. This is because smaller employers in particular find that they train workers only to lose them to large, higher-paying projects.

2.2 Skills and training

Numerous specific challenges were identified in skills and training. For example:

- *Rigidity* is apparent in the many parts of the skills and training system. Particular challenges were identified with (a) the requirement that all apprentices leave the job site for classroom training, which can impede project completion and act as a disincentive for smaller employers in particular to hire apprentices; and, (b) the lack of any form of cooperative industry mechanism that allows employers to facilitate training across organizations.
- *Information gaps* in which information on training availability is not readily available in an efficient manner to employers and employees. The challenge was not universal, although addressing it was generally seen as a very positive “no regrets” approach.
- *The quality of non-regulated training* (e.g. First Aid, Confined Spaces, Fall Arrest) is uneven and uncertain in many regions and sub-sectors. While there are many trainers available, employers have no evidence-based way of determining trainer effectiveness, completion rates or specific course outcomes.
- *Gaps* are apparent between what workers are certified to do, and what they actually can do. Particular challenges were noted in the apprenticeship program, where auditing and verification is limited to determining hours completed rather than whether apprentices’ skills actually match their qualifications. An outcome is that employers may not know precisely what employees can actually do based on certifications.
- *Training emphasis*. Closely related to the challenge of *Gaps*, above, on-the-job training was often seen as being equally or more important than classroom work in terms of producing competent workers, but without sufficient corresponding emphasis in either industry or government training activities. It was noted that colleges are only responsible for classroom training, which represents a fraction of overall worker training. A related challenge is that academic training includes requirements that may preclude high-potential entrants who are skilled but who, due to cultural issues, learning disabilities or challenged backgrounds, cannot pass academic aspects of particular certifications. Progressive credentialing exams that are either pass or fail may pose particular challenges in this regard.
- *Specialization* is often a competitive necessity, but there is trend towards workers who are overly-specialized and have a very narrow understanding of the construction sector and even their own trade. This can manifest itself as workers who:
 - may be qualified as a plumber or electrician, but for practical purposes, can only do certain aspects of the job; and/or,
 - do not understand projects in holistic or systemic terms, which reduces the versatility and mobility and makes them less suitable for smaller companies, which require “all-rounders.”
- *Availability of training* is very uneven. In some sub-sectors there are relatively few issues; in certain regions, there are severe and chronic issues, as discussed in Section 3.

- *Estimating* was identified as a construction management role that can be hard to fill in B.C. In some jurisdictions, there is a clear training trajectory for the role; in B.C., there is not, and this may contribute to the supply challenges.

Potential solutions include: greater flexibility in the delivery of apprenticeship training, partnerships between companies to facilitate better worker training; a portal that provides information on all available training; remedial support to help high-potential people from disadvantaged educational (or other) backgrounds get required certifications; the ITA auditing employers to ensure apprentices are receiving the requisite training/experience as they progress through the various levels of their apprenticeship; and the development of a system by which the quality and effectiveness of non-regulated training can be determined.

2.3 Perceptions of the industry

Perceptions of the construction industry are often very negative and inaccurate on the part of potential entrants, parents, teachers, and career counselors. In particular:

- Construction and trades are often seen as a second-rate job or career choice suitable for people with low skills and intelligence;
- Construction is often perceived to involve only “shovels and dirt”, or be “dirty and unsafe.” The facets that demand great skill and technological aptitude are poorly understood;
- Construction is often seen as a short-term or stop-gap job; possibilities for a career, and career progression, are not recognized.

These poor perceptions can both inhibit new entrants, or increase attrition as new entrants leave the sector to find “a real job.”

Potential solutions include evidence-based education and outreach to potential entrants, parents, teachers, and career counselors. This should reach potential entrants at a young age. During the Victoria consultation, participants suggested greater collaboration between the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training and the Ministry of Education to promote training.

Finally, trades and the construction sector have been seen historically as a “man’s world.” Participants noted the need to re-align that perception to modern realities. This could occur *inter alia* by highlighting examples of women with successful careers in the sector, and promoting programs such as the Women in Trades Training initiative (WITT) in high schools. These programs are available at Camosun College, Okanagan College, BCIT and other post-secondary institutions.

2.4 Worker mobility

As noted, the B.C. construction sector is often characterized by the lack of adequate numbers of highly-skilled workers who can move fluidly between projects to meet needs.

There are numerous contributing factors, including:

- *Personal and family reasons* that make workers unwilling to move where the jobs are. Interestingly, in the Lower Mainland it was noted that people did not want to leave to move to remote Northern communities; in Prince George, it was noted that people did not want to leave their Northern communities to go to the Lower Mainland;
- *Lack of centralized information* regarding both workers who are between jobs and available for employment; and job openings.
- *Expectations of pay and working conditions* that may get inflated in Alberta or on large projects and then cannot be met in smaller communities with different economic conditions;
- *Limited portability of some accreditations* across provincial boundaries. In some cases, there is a lack of training universality even within B.C., for example, for Fall Arrest, First Aid and Scaffolding.
- *Obtaining and tracking of tickets and certifications* (e.g. First Aid, Fall Arrest, Confined Spaces) can pose mobility challenges. As employees move between companies, tickets and certifications are often lost, and there are no sector-wide or universal tracking options.

A potential solution is the development of a central, industry-led website that contains information on the availability of both jobs and workers seeking employment, as well as a portal to track tickets and certifications. The latter is seen as more relevant to non-apprenticeship trades to avoid duplication with existing government programs. Another potential solution is greater standardization of basic worker requirements (e.g. First Aid, Construction Safety Training System, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, Fall Arrest).

2.5 Accessibility of government programs

Overall, government programs such as the Canada-BC Job Grant, the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, and to some extent apprenticeship grants, are seen to make an insufficiently valuable contribution to labour market supply challenges. More specifically:

- *Administrative burdens* to access the programs are seen as excessive and out of proportion to the benefits received. The programs were often characterized as “more trouble than they are worth.” As a consequence, some employers, particularly smaller ones, simply do not use them;
- *Awareness of programs* that support employee supply is limited in some areas. The provincial Accelerated Credit Enrolment in Industry Training was cited as one example;
- *The timeframes* to receive support are often too long relative to the duration of construction projects, particularly in the case of the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. This means that some employers will not use it. Other lengthy delays are reported in receiving notification of acceptance into a program. For example, it was noted that it can take 8 to 12 weeks to access a WorkBC program, by which time

potential employees have been forced by personal circumstance to move on to other jobs. Timeframes for accessing government programs are reported to compare unfavourably with jurisdictions such as Australia;

- *Administrative support and cooperation* on the part of government is perceived to be lacking. Specifically, employers report that in some programs, if there is a single error on the part of the applicant then the government counterpart will terminate the entire application rather than try to resolve the issue.
- *The Training Tax Credit* is not well known or understood, and is challenging to access.

Potential solutions include providing more useful and useable information on government programs to both employees and employers to reduce the burden of interactions with government; and developing a specialized industry capacity to support companies, particularly smaller ones, in their interactions with government.

2.6 Training: quality, standards, credentials and information

Several training-related challenges, as well as potential solutions, were identified during the consultation period:

- *The quality of the trainers and training* offered in some regions is difficult for employers to determine unless they have direct personal experience with the trainer. Furthermore, training quality can vary greatly, particularly for non-regulated training such as First Aid, Fall Arrest, and Confined Spaces. Some employers find trainers and training through regulators or associations, but note that there are many such organizations and they can be difficult to navigate. These challenges can diminish skills development. The issue is less prevalent in communities like Prince George where due to the smaller scales trainers are “known quantities,” and more prevalent in larger centres. A potential role was identified for CITN to assure the quality of training. Suggestions included the CITN providing a Better Business Bureau-type of seal of approval, or managing a rating system such as YELP, Kayak, Trivago or Rate my Professor that consolidates and aggregates training provider information and provides rating information.
- *Non-apprentice training information* is not consolidated in any coherent way. There was strong agreement overall that a single portal containing all training information (e.g. upcoming training by topic, region, date and other search criteria) would be an effective and streamlined way for employers and employees to access training.
- *Management of the tickets and credentials of workers* was not universally identified as an issue. It is clearly less of an issue in regulated trades. However, the highly mobile nature in many facets of the construction industry does appear to create an inherent risk that tickets and credentials will be challenging to manage. Furthermore, some respondents clearly do find the loss of tickets and credentials to be a highly preventable inefficiency and irritant, and expressed support for a mechanism that could manage documents.

- *In-house training* can be an effective solution for many employers and employees. However, the Canada-BC Job Grant explicitly requires third-party training, which may be less effective, less tailored and relevant, and more costly.

2.7 Overall industry strategy and forum

In some consultations, employers felt that views and interests are already well-represented by existing associations, and that major issues affecting the entire industry can be adequately addressed by these organizations. Other participants indicated that it would be valuable to have:

- a single, unified voice when approaching government, large potential clients and potentially other groups (e.g. investors) on labour market issues;
- a mechanism or forum for the construction industry as a whole to come together and determine needs, and strategies to address challenges, for example collaboration across numerous organizations to ensure a holistic approach to training.

Stated potential benefits of the mechanism include saved time and resources on the part of both government and industry and greater cohesion and a sense of belonging amongst workers.

3. Additional themes: regional, size, gender

This section highlights additional, noteworthy themes related to region, organization size and gender.

3.1 Regional issues

The Prince George consultation revealed specific regional challenges. Consultation participants almost universally emphasized the low accessibility of training in the region for anything beyond a level 1 apprenticeship, for example. This limits the numbers of trained journeymen and the ability of people to get additional tickets, and often forces apprentices to travel to the Lower Mainland or even Alberta to get training. This raises costs and can be daunting for many people from smaller communities. One of the reasons stated for the low training accessibility is the small size of employers in the region, which means that training classes are not filled consistently and are subsequently cancelled.

Some respondents indicated that these challenges are common to most communities that are distant from the province's largest cities.

Vancouver Island participants noted a lack of particular basic training types such as Construction Safety Officer and a corresponding need to travel to the Lower Mainland, which increases costs.

3.2 Organization Size

Smaller employers comprise the majority of B.C.'s construction industry. They also tend to be predominant in Northern communities. The organizations generally have low administrative capacity and are therefore more impacted by challenges in accessing government programs than larger companies. For example, smaller employers:

- Have less capacity to navigate government labour market programs and therefore benefit less from them;
- Are less able to cope than larger counterparts with apprentices leaving for classroom training at the same time. This may be a disincentive to hiring apprentices;
- Are often less able to compete with the wages offered by large or mega-projects and thus are more often the target of "poaching" of trained employees. This may be a disincentive to invest in training.

3.3 Gender

Overall, the construction industry is still dominated by men, which may exacerbate supply challenges as a sizeable proportion of the population is not represented in the industry.

Issues such as the lack of training options in remote communities, and the corresponding need to travel to the Lower Mainland or Alberta, poses particular challenges and disincentives to women with responsibility for children. It was also noted that many younger women do not have positive perceptions of a career in the trades, instead seeing it as "grunt work" or "dirty", as noted above.

3.4 Smaller communities

Respondents from smaller communities noted that they have difficulty competing with larger projects that may offer workers substantially higher salaries. The wage differential also makes recruiting in smaller communities challenging.

4. Conclusions, areas recommended for action under the LMPP, and governance

4.1 Conclusions and areas recommended for action under the LMPP

Numerous labour market challenges were identified during the interviews and consultations. Some of the issues are structural and do not lend themselves to any short-term solution; for example, the cyclical nature of the construction industry in British Columbia or the challenges that smaller communities have in competing with the wages offered by large projects. Others issues should be addressed by industry, for example the delivery of certain training programs.

The 6 issues below are ones on which substantial emphasis was placed during interviews and consultations. There is a high degree of industry consensus on addressing these in the near-term under the LMPP. They are also issues to which there are public policy and public interest components that both require the engagement of non-industry partners, and warrant support from government. Therefore, they are recommended by industry as the topics to be addressed in the next phases of the LMPP program.

1. **Government Labour Market Programs.** These were almost universally identified as inadequate in terms of resolving labour market issues. Specific issues that could be addressed include:

To what extent could a specialized, industry mechanism help employers navigate government programs? What are other models for such a mechanism, what have they achieved, and how?

2. **Negative perceptions of the construction industry.** This was almost universally recognized as a substantial challenge to increasing workforce supply. Specific issues that could be addressed include:

What is the evidence for a correlation between negative perceptions of the industry and supply challenges? What types of interventions have proven effective in both changing the perception of the industry, and increasing supply? Under what circumstances could they work in B.C.?

3. **Quality of non-regulated training.** This issue was not a challenge for all respondents, but those who did report this as an issue found it to be a substantial one. Furthermore, this could be an issue with fairly straightforward solutions. Issues that that could be addressed include:

What are possible models to systematically determine and communicate the effectiveness of non-regulated training and trainers? What are the pros and cons of crowd-sourced models (e.g. models based on Trivago or Rate my Prof) and centralized models (e.g. Better Business Bureau)? What are the legal and liability issues?

4. **The supply and mobility of sufficiently skilled and versatile workers.** This challenge manifests itself in different ways according to region and sub-sector, but is widespread. Although it is a multi-factorial issue with no single solution, there may be practical measures that could help to address this challenge. Issues that could be addressed include:

What sort of industry collaboration could foster the better and continuous training of workers, for the benefit of the entire industry? Have such models been tried in other jurisdictions and/or sectors, and if so, what were the results? Under what conditions could such a model work in B.C.?

What sort of mechanisms have proven most useful in helping workers who are between jobs find their next employer, and why?

What are the labour market impacts on smaller communities when a large project is launched in the same region? If negative, how can these impacts be mitigated?

5. **Worker credentials.** The degree of concern expressed about this issue varied substantially according to region and sub-sector. It may be possible to pilot a model for a particular region or large project. Issues that could be addressed include:

For which skill sets/trades is the management of credentials most challenging? Is the mobility of workforce the key variable in poor credential management? What sort of information management mechanisms have worked well elsewhere? Under what conditions could a mechanism be piloted in B.C.?

6. **Overarching industry forum.** The degree of concern expressed about this issue varied substantially. Nevertheless, there were clear suggestions that such a mechanism could increase efficiency and effectiveness within the construction sector, both in terms of researching and formulating strategies/positions on overarching topics, and representing them to others. Furthermore, an industry forum could support issues such as worker versatility, noted in issue 4, above. Issues that could be addressed include:

What mechanisms exist in other jurisdictions? What results have they achieved, and why? What lessons are applicable to, for example, fledgling mechanisms such as the CITN?

4.2 Governance and confirmed leadership

During the consultations, numerous participants expressed interest in involvement in future LMPP and/or CITN activities. All of these people have been contacted by the CITN, and options discussed to engage them.

Other participants, often those representing smaller companies, indicated that while they are very interested in seeing solutions to the identified issues, they do not have capacity to take an active role. This group would therefore be ‘consumers’ or beneficiaries of activities under the LMPP rather than active participants.

No need was identified during the consultation to create any new governance mechanisms beyond what already exists under the CITN, which, as noted, represents 85 percent of the industry and has defined structures.

Therefore, governance over all activities related to the LMPP will be within the existing CITN structure, with the CITN Executive taking overall responsibility for future collaboration

under the LMPP; and the Steering, Training and Education, Issues and Research, and Stakeholder Engagement Committees taking on more specific roles.

Confirmed leadership roles within these structures and for future LMPP collaboration would be as follows:

- **Executive Group and Steering Committee (CITN Executive):** Ian Gibson, the Gisborne Group, Philip Hochstein and Catherine Loiacono, the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association, Todd Cumiskey, Canada West Construction Union; Rob Bradbury, Pacific Vocational College, Jack Davidson, B.C. Roadbuilders and Heavy Construction Association, Neil Moody, Canadian Home Builders' Association of BC
- **Issues and Research Committee Chairs:** Jack Davidson, B.C. Roadbuilders and Heavy Construction Association, Rob Bradbury, Pacific Vocational College
- **Stakeholder Engagement Committee Chairs:** Neil Moody, Canadian Home Builders' Association of BC; Jack Davidson, B.C. Roadbuilders and Heavy Construction Association, Philip Hochstein, Independent Contractors and Businesses Association, Catherine Loiacono, Independent Contractors and Businesses Association.
- **Training and Education Committee Chairs:** Todd Cumiskey, Canada West Construction Union, Sabine Just, Independent Contractors and Businesses Association.

Tasks will be divided between the Committees as determined by the CITN Executive.

Annex 1: Group discussion participants

<p><u>Lower Mainland</u> Rob Bradbury, Pacific Vocational College Lise Colbourne, Beedie Development Barb Cox, Retro Specialty Contractors Steven Diebolt, Status Electrical Steve Drummond, Capilano Highway Services Dwayne Edwards, Division 15 Mechanical Keith Falardeau, Status Electrical Isabelle Hourigan, Aerotek Eric Jensen, Beedie Development Liam Kelly, William Kelly & Sons Dr. Lindsay Langill, Thompson Rivers University Wayne Marsden, PCL Construction Doug McLaren, Skillsource Kevin Mierau, Mierau Contractors Neal Rempel, Berts Electric Brian Ristich, Beedie Development Debbie Russell, Nechako Northcoast John Ryan, Nechako Northcoast Jaclyn Sharpe, Aerotek Paul Simpson, Jacob Bros Brad Stevensen, Unitech Construction Management Dana Taylor, Mechanical Contractors Association of BC</p>	<p><u>Prince George</u> Rikki Beaudet, Northern Gateway Karin Clark, Lakewood Electric Dave Eddy, Belledune Homes Cameron Leslie, All West Glass John MacMillian, College of New Caledonia Terri McConnachie, Canadian Home Builders' Association of BC, Northern BC Chris Morgan, R. Radloff & Associates John Reed, College of New Caledonia William Phang, Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association Angela Thomson, Allrite Heating Maureen Vollet, Forbes Industrial Contractors Tim Whitwick, Allrite Heating</p>
<p><u>Kamloops</u> Deb Chicoine, Wrabel Brothers Construction Rose Choy, Canadian Home Builders' Association of BC, Central Interior Lisa Fuller, KGHM Ajax Mining Dwayne Geiger, Thompson Rivers University Mike Hansen, Interior Heavy Equipment School Rob LeMire, Cypress Insurance Brokers (CHBA CI board member) Jeff Mann, K&C's Construction and Renovations Don McNiven, McNiven Masonry Margot Middleton, Middleton Petroleum Larry Nelson, Interior Roads Al Norgaard, Norgaard Ready-Mix Ltd. Daryl Paige, Acres Enterprises Jason Paige, Acres Enterprises Helen Poss, Industry Training Authority Clorinda Saskamoose, Aboriginal Training and Employment Centre (Shuswap Nation)</p>	<p><u>Victoria</u> Al van Akker, Camosun College Glen Barker, BA Blacktop Randi Beatty, Nechako Northcoast Ron Bickford, Rob-Ron Construction Jason Block, Kiewit Skip Bridge, Bridge Systems David Currie, Cormode & Dickson Construction Jack Davidson, BC Road Builders and Heavy Construction Association Wayne Davis, Award Builders Stephen Duck, Yellowhead Road and Bridge Neil Galloway, Hub City/Lafarge Rick Gill, Mainroad John Gordon, Camosun College Curtis Harold, Ralmax Group of Companies Shaun Henneberry, Henneberry Electric Mike Jacobs, Emil Anderson Construction Darcy Kray, Durwest Construction Jessie Magee-Chalmers, Vancouver Island University Jordy McNolty, Yellowhead Road and Bridge Christine Miller, F.A.S.T. Ltd. Carl Novak, Durwest Construction Kent Porter, JPW Road and Bridge Frank Rizzardo, Emcon Services Alex Rueben, Industrial Marine Training and Applied Research Centre Debbie Russell, Nechako Northcoast Peter Schultze, Peter Schultze Construction Richard Shipway, Ledcor Carl Teubert, Winvan Paving Josh Towsley, Ralmax Group of Companies Stan Weismiller, Winvan Paving Joe Wrobel, JPW Road and Bridge Melissa Zimmerman, Ralmax Group of Companies</p>

Annex 2: Interviews

Ron Chambers, Chambers Electric
Larry Clay, Clay Construction
Melissa Cupa, Kindred Construction
Pete Durrad, LMS Group
Katy Fairley, Kinetic Construction
Patti Faulconbridge, Knappett Projects
Vivian Fehr, Jomi Construction
Corinna Francis, Emcon Services
Henry Goldbeck, Goldbeck Recruiting
Lorrie Gowen, Northwest Community College
Greg Hubbard, LMS Group
Leonard Jackson, Stk'emplupsemc te Secwepemc Nation
Tim Kasten, Thompson Rivers University
Kim Knox, Inland Glass & Aluminum
Steve Lux, Brighter Mechanical
Margot Middleton, Middleton Petroleum Services
Ghislain Morin, Terus Construction
Steve Perizzolo, NRG Electric
Sandra Price, Jasper Constructors
Gavin Rasmussen, K&C's Construction and Renovations
Frank Rossi, College of New Caledonia
Debbie Russell, Nechako Northcoast
John Ryan, Nechako Northcoast
Tammy Smyth, Emcon Services
Graham Thomas, Western Integrated Electrical
Joe Wrobel, JPW Road and Bridge

Annex 3:

Key Points from Lower Mainland consultation, October 16 2015

Supply issues

- There is a lack of qualified skilled construction workers in B.C. Poaching of workers between companies rather than having an available supply of new workers is common.
- Matching supply and demand can be challenging for some employers.
- Workers need to enter construction at an earlier age; by the time they are in their mid-20s many can no longer afford to be an apprentice.
- Retirements, combined with the challenge of recruiting young people, exacerbate supply issues.
- A trend towards increasing project complexity also tightens the supply of labour.

Skills

- The overall skill set of workers needs to be elevated in many construction sub-sectors. Many workers have credentials without the corresponding skills, possibly as a result of trainers setting the bar too low or workers getting insufficient on-the-job training.
- Construction projects are a 'system' and apprentices need a holistic understanding. However, in a response to competitive pressures in the industry, narrow specialist contractors have evolved. These contractors focus on one or two aspects of the entire trade and their workers as a result become specialized in those facets of the work. Sometimes even within this specialist environment, the workers are not completely knowledgeable in that limited area. Without more mobility between employers, workers could become too specialized in narrow areas.
- Mentoring and training within companies for apprentices varies in quality and rigor.
- Flexibility is needed in the delivery of the apprenticeship training. Currently (a) it is "one-size fits all" and (b) apprentices all leave the job site for training at the same time, which can impede project completion.
- More partnerships between companies are required to facilitate better worker training e.g. a worker could be moved between organizations to enhance their skills.
- New industry and skills-related information is available all the time; the industry needs a way to act on and integrate this information.
- Some apprentices report being unable to find suitable courses.
- There are opportunities to professionalize the construction industry and have workers go well beyond the minimum required training.

Retention

- Retaining construction workers is challenging, and attrition rates are high in many construction sub-sectors.

- Younger workers will leave construction in search of “a real job” as they do not perceive that it offers them a viable career path.
- Younger construction workers can ‘get stuck’ with limited prospects for career progress, which may induce them to leave.
- The construction sector as a whole does a poor job of explaining what a construction career could involve or lead to.
- Some younger workers with University degrees want to go straight into senior management without first learning about the industry.
- Having university educated construction workers can be a benefit as it creates a pool of people qualified for complex project management.
- Attrition rates vary across construction industry sub-sectors.

Perceptions of construction industry

- Poor/inaccurate perceptions of the construction industry contributes to/exacerbates supply challenges.
- Parents and grandparents can contribute to low supply and poor retention rates by dissuading younger people from joining the industry and/or remaining in it in the long term.
- Options for construction careers should be introduced in high school curriculum.
- Younger workers prefer to talk about careers in construction rather than a “job in trades”. The industry must do a better job explaining that construction is an entry point into many career paths.

Mobility

- People in the Lower Mainland do not always want to give up their communities and networks to move to northern B.C. where many of the jobs are located. People in smaller B.C. towns do not always want to move to the Lower Mainland where the costs of living are much higher but without a commensurate change in pay.
- Many employers are looking for either entry-level or journeymen workers but nothing in between, which creates mobility challenges for some workers.
- Workers returning from Alberta, even if they came from B.C. originally, have expectations that are out of line with B.C. realities.
- There are interprovincial barriers to the portability of accreditations; training requirements present barriers to mobility in that new training can often be required even though the substantive difference in curriculum is negligible.

Government programs (e.g. Canada-BC Jobs Grant, Temporary Foreign Worker Program, Apprenticeship Grants)

- *General.* Government programs can provide useful incentives but are very challenging to deal with or access. Some employers would rather not use them at all to avoid delays and red tape. In some programs, if there is a single error on the part of the applicant then the government counterpart will terminate the entire application rather than try to

resolve the issue. The timeframes are often too long and out of step with private sector decision making. Government programs also need more marketing. Tax incentives to encourage the employment of apprentices are not effective in encouraging employers to hire apprentices. Applying for the tax credits is very complicated.

- *Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW)*. Workers recruited through this process can be very costly. The timeframes are challenging; in some cases, the process to get workers takes longer than the entire construction project. This compares unfavourably with jurisdictions such as Australia. Furthermore, the workers themselves can only wait for a finite period and may take other offers. It may be harder to bring over mechanical and electrical trades than carpentry, for example. Certain trades do not transfer well between countries.
- *Canada-BC Jobs Grant*. It is much easier for firms with large HR departments to access this grant.
- *Apprenticeship tax credit*. This tax credit can be challenging to access.
- *Possible CITN roles*. A group or an organization is needed to help companies access the government programs, and facilitate the process of working through the process of getting that funding. A valuable role for CITN would be to have staff develop expertise in government construction programs so that they can assist employers in navigating programs.

Training quality and standards

- Anyone can say they are a trainer, and there are many available. However, unless employers have personal experience with the trainer it is very tough to discern the trainer/training quality, which can vary enormously. Some companies find trainers and training through regulators such as the BC Safety Authority, or through organizations such as the ICBA. However, there are many regulators and organizations and not all are easy to navigate.
- A useful role for the CITN would be to assure training quality, for example, through a Better Business Bureau-type of seal of approval. Also, a user rating system such as YELP/Kayak/Trivago that consolidates/aggregates training information and provides rating information would be helpful.

Consolidation of training information

- A single online portal to provide employers and employees with training information would be helpful, particularly if it were linked with a quality assurance program (above).

Overall industry strategy and forum

- There is no single organization to give feedback to the government. A single construction sector forum would save time and money for government and the construction sector.
- There is a need for a longer-term mechanism for the construction industry as a whole to come together and determine needs.

Credentials management

- A portal through which employees can manage their own credentials instead of relying on employers to do it would be very valuable.

Next steps

- There is substantial interest amongst group members in getting involved with the JTST project and CITN more generally.

Annex 4:

Key Points from Prince George consultation, November 13 2015

Supply issues

- Finding skilled journeymen is a challenge across many industry sub-sectors including sheet metal, electrical and plumbing.
- Workers with well-rounded, multi-faceted skills are required by the region's predominantly smaller employers but are hard to find.
- Workers are mostly going into higher-paid trades, which can exacerbate supply challenges.

Skills

- Accessibility of training is poor for anything beyond a level 1 apprentice. This limits the number of trained journeymen, and the ability of people to get additional tickets.
- Apprentices often need to travel to the Lower Mainland or in some cases Alberta to get training because there is inadequate space in the North. This increases costs, can be daunting for people from smaller communities, and poses particular logistical challenges for women with family responsibilities.
- The limited level of accessible training results from: Prince George's isolated location; a lack of coordination and collaboration between training institutions; and competition between training institutions.
- Ticketed employees who have worked in Vancouver and then move to Prince George are often specialized in a very narrow range of functions. This can make them unsuitable for the local market, where the smaller scale requires versatile employees who can undertake a broad range of tasks in their trade.
- In several sub-sectors, employees lack basic life skills and knowledge such as math and English to perform their jobs effectively. Pre-screening and remedial support should be required to help people get their ticket.
- Training programs often require that several people leave job sites at the same time; for smaller companies that comprise the bulk of the Prince George market, this can mean the halt of all operations, which is a disincentive for them to train. More frequent/staggered training could alleviate this challenge.
- Larger training classes tend to get cancelled in Prince George as they cannot get filled. More and smaller classes are more appropriate in the region but are often unavailable. This means that people must travel to Vancouver and incur additional expenses. Combining/coordinating marketing and delivery of programs could help to fill classes and ensure that they do not get cancelled.
- People with excellent skills but limited formal schooling get screened out of many training programs and/or cannot pass the formal exams, which contributes to supply challenges.

Retention

- Retention is challenging in sub-sectors that do not pay well. Employees will often leave as soon as a better option is available elsewhere; they have no perceived incentive to stay.
- Employers are concerned that the eventual construction of LNG plants will worsen supply challenges in Prince George and area.
- Lower wages in the homebuilding sector make it difficult to attract/retain people.

Perceptions of construction industry

- The trades are often perceived negatively. There is a sense that people go into it because they are not intelligent enough to go to University. This contributes to supply challenges.
- There is no perceived or well-understood trajectory or career path from being a worker to an employer, supervisor, inspector or other endpoint. This contributes to supply challenges.
- Some participants felt that the ITA could further enhance its role in creating a positive perception of the construction industry.

Mobility

- There are major supply challenges in Prince George, yet it can be difficult to attract people to the region.
- There is a lack of support for in-bound immigrant workers.
- Remedial support and ESL would help people in getting Canadian tickets.

Government programs (e.g. Canada Jobs Grant, Temporary Foreign Worker program, Apprenticeship Grants)

- Awareness of the availability of many programs that can support employee supply (Canada-BC Jobs Grant, Temporary Foreign Workers Program, apprenticeship program) is limited.
- Accessing many government programs (Canada-BC Jobs Grant, Temporary Foreign Workers program, apprentice program) is very challenging for employers in the region. Difficulties include: unacceptably long delays in getting accepted into programs and/or receiving approvals, and being unable to reach government staff when support is required. Government programs are also difficult for many employees to access. These challenges may be more acute in Prince George and the North where predominantly smaller employers do not have capacity to navigate government bureaucracy.
- The Apprentice Training Tax Credit is not well known or understood and is challenging to access.
- More (useable) information on government programs should be readily available to employees because employees do not have capacity to manage the interactions with government.

- WorkBC programs take 8-12 weeks to access. This is too long for many potential workers due to family/financial reasons and they give up or move on to other occupations.

Training quality and standards

- Training quality and standards are an issue for some employers in the region. In Prince George and the region given its small size, networks are tight and often trainers are well-known to employers.
- In-house training can be an effective solution for many employers and employees, however, the Canada Job Grant explicitly requires third-party training, which may be less effective and tailored, and more costly.

Consolidation of training information

- Consolidating training information was thought to be a useful strategy to partially address the training/supply challenges noted above.

Overall industry strategy and forum

- Generally speaking, existing institutions were perceived to be sufficient to address overarching or strategic-level issues.

Credentials management

- A lack of proper credential management is expensive for employers, who have to retrain workers who cannot produce documentation for past training.
- Different worksites may require different variations of the same training, which adds complexity and inefficiency.
- There is no way to track apprentices through their training and no auditing to know if they have completed all required training for which they have received credit.
- A site or portal to manage credentials could be a helpful tool for Prince George employees and employers.

“Northern reality”

- Business is different in Northern B.C.: distances are long, winters are harsh, companies are smaller and resources are fewer, all of which means that initiatives can take longer. Effective programs/initiatives must take account of this.

Next steps

- Attendees will more likely be consumers of CITN services rather than its architects given the smaller size of companies and corresponding lack of capacity.

Annex 5:

Key Points from Kamloops consultation, November 23 2015

Supply, Hiring and Mobility

- If you need a worker, who can you call to get resumes? It would be good to have a place where employers can go to get information on people looking for work.
- Mobility between employers is important, but isn't as important as ensuring that the worker actually has the skills he says or the credential says he has.
- Companies spend too little time on the hiring process. The current approach is to try the person out and see if he has the skills. There is also little reference checking.

Skills, Training and Apprenticeships

- Training needs to plug into the industry. On-the-job training is much more beneficial than being in a classroom. People need to get their hands dirty instead of just watching a presentation.
- It would be better to see government dollars going toward mentorship programs instead of training institutions. People with "attitude, aptitude and work ethic" are more valuable on the job site, and companies are more likely to invest in that type of individual. It would be beneficial to have a way to screen whether an employee has that attitude etc. prior to hiring, and was suggested that this screening be done by public or private training institutions.
- Becoming a journeyman after an apprenticeship doesn't always mean the employee has the ability to be a full journeyman. Experience is needed to validate the qualifications.
- Currently, the system of validating apprentice experience is the number of hours they have completed. That doesn't always translate to actual relevant experience.
- The apprenticeship system currently includes several exams. When speaking to a faculty member of the carpentry program at TRU, he noted that there is no practical component to the exam, meaning he has had to fail students who were technically proficient because they weren't able to pass a written test.
- It was suggested that there be a system similar to the driver licensing system (Class 7 you can drive a normal car, Class 2 a bus, etc.) Someone can come out of their carpentry apprenticeship as a journeyman framer for example, while another is a journeyman concrete former. This will assist employers in ascertaining what the potential employee's skills are prior to hire and whether their skills suit the position.
- The need for a rating system for trainers was raised multiple times. It would be beneficial for there to be information available regarding the trainer's competency, what their pass/fail rates are, and criteria for what exactly the course outcomes will be.
- A suggestion was raised to re-evaluate the co-op model of trades training.
- The quality control of trainers is done by word of mouth, especially in smaller towns where there are fewer providers.
- There needs to be an industry-wide approach. Currently each training institution has a sector advisory group, which can be cumbersome and a duplication of efforts.

Retention and Staffing

- Other industries such as mining and forestry will poach construction employees rather than invest in their own training.
- One of the issues companies have with retention is the pay scale difference between private and public companies.
- Getting employees to show up consistently was another issue raised by the group. Self-proclaimed “seasonal workers” will tell an employer that he or she will work for a certain time, will be gone for X months, and then expects to return to the job. This ties into the perception of the construction industry as temporary work, as noted below.
- Any incentives for employees should include a component of “skin the game” so as not to institutionalize a free-ride mentality.
- It can be hard to find supervisors. Because of the increasing requirements of WorkSafe BC and the imposed liability on supervisors, individuals don’t want to fill that role even if they are compensated more.
- The quality of workers begins at the top. Instead of looking only at the people coming into the industry, we should be looking at the people at the top as well.

Perceptions of construction industry

- The perception of the construction industry as a job instead of a career is an issue. Multiple attendees noted that some see it as temporary and that they’ll do it for a little while before they go into a “real job.”
- More information needs to be available on what a career path in construction looks like.
- Young people have more options for careers than they ever did before. Construction has to be made more interesting and more “sexy” in a way.
- Education on the trades has to start in schools, both elementary and secondary. Career counsellors generally don’t suggest a career in trades because they see it as career-limiting.
- Younger people are not as financially literate as they need to be. A construction career can be similar to that of a teacher: nine months of work with 12 months-worth of pay. It can be hard for young people to understand that it’s equivalent and not the same as “seasonal work.”
- Many people come to construction as a second or third choice; they have worked elsewhere but come to the trades as a “last resort” of sorts.

First Nations groups

- First Nations groups could be a source of workers but they can require more training and patience. This is difficult in the high-pressure construction industry.
- Training specifically for First Nations groups would be beneficial. Some have different needs or interests compared to other groups.

Government programs (e.g. Canada Jobs Grant, Temporary Foreign Worker program, Apprenticeship Grants)

- Government programs can be too complex for employers to deal with. An example was raised of forms being changed all the time, so when an employer submits an

application they are told that the form has changed and they need to go back and start the process over.

- Programs can take up too much time and the return may not be worthwhile.
- Accessing government programs can be a full-time job for an HR person. In smaller companies, it's often the owner or spouse who acts as the HR person in addition to many other roles.
- It can be too hard to find out what programs and grants are available for employers and workers, and how people can access those programs and grants.
- The ACE-IT program is not as well-known in the construction industry as it could be.
- The pace of the construction industry is too quick; government programs tend to move too slowly to adequately serve the industry.
- Government tax credits to hire apprentices don't influence hiring decisions.
- There is frustration with the TFW program being essentially shut down, especially in the north.

Consolidation of information

- A place to house the resumes and credentials of an employee would be very beneficial to the industry.

Overall industry strategy and forum

- Workers want to "belong." There needs to be a strategy in the industry to create an environment that allows people to feel they belong in the industry.

Credentials management

- A database for logging training (safety training mentioned specifically) would be helpful, especially if it involved a system that notifies the employer when a certification is set to expire.
- There is no proper credential recognition between jurisdictions. Training acceptable in one jurisdiction is not acceptable in another. A suggestion was made that workers be trained to the highest possible standard so that they can transfer between jurisdictions if necessary.

Road Maintenance

- Several attendees were specifically in this part of the industry, and noted some particular challenges. These included the fact that it's stable work but that people will leave for higher wages elsewhere, that the workforce is aging (average age is 57) and few young people are coming in, and it can be hard to find local people to employ despite a lot of the work being done in smaller communities.
- Another issue raised was that apprenticeship programs are not suitable for the industry. For example, bridgeworks is tied to a pile driving apprenticeship, but many elements of that apprenticeship are not relevant to the work actually being done.
- Many companies in that aspect of the industry are large enough to employ their own trainer.
- Some attendees felt that this layer of the industry is being missed, and that it's seen as unskilled labour or grunt work.

Next steps

- Attendees want to know what is being done now, not six years from now. Results need to happen quickly in this fast-moving industry.
- Many attendees expressed interest in working with the CITN in some capacity going forward.
- It was suggested that the CITN speaks to employees to find out what some of their issues are in the industry. We could then bring employers and employees together to discuss what can be done to work on those issues.

Annex 6:

Key Points from Victoria consultation, December 04 2015

Supply issues

- Mega-projects and the cyclical nature of construction both affect supply. When the economy or large projects 'boom,' supply becomes very tight. Small towns with lower wages cannot compete and their workforces may be "gutted."
- Generational issues affect supply. Younger workers may be less willing to put in the hours necessary for certain jobs, feel less compelled to stay with an employer over the long term, or have different expectations about the workplace than did older generations. Younger workers, and in particular young apprentices, may also not make enough money to support a family, which increases attrition. These issues are all of increasing importance as the workforce ages.
- Some workers are highly competent but may not be able to pass the academic portion of their training due to challenged educational backgrounds; this can limit supply.

Skills

- The construction sector has an increase in workers who are very specialized, and a decrease in 'all-rounders' who can perform varied tasks. This can result in "more people doing less work", which can increase business costs.
- The Industry Training Authority has adequately structured curriculum for each classroom component of apprenticeship training. During the practical component, some apprentices focus on the narrow range of tasks at which they excel. The acquisition of these skills needs to be recognized fully.
- The ITA appears to place emphasis on "big trades" such as carpentry, electrical and plumbing; information on apprenticeships in other trades is lacking. Pile-driving was cited as a trade that is vital, but, because of the small numbers of workers involved, is often neglected.
- The cycle of apprenticeships can mean that all apprentices leave a project at the same time. Many companies are therefore hesitant to let their apprentices leave because they need them to work.

Retention

- A key issue is retention of the workers that companies have trained. Employees can be trained for years at employers' costs, but once they are trained they are easily poached by a big project that pays more money. This may disproportionately affect smaller companies, which cannot afford to take apprentices that they will lose to bigger companies that pay more. Vancouver Island may be a target of employee 'poaching'.
- The wait list for required apprenticeship courses can be extremely long, which may contribute to attrition.

- Restrictive/inflexible collective agreements that favour older workers can have the effect of forcing younger workers out of the industry as they cannot afford to rely on piecemeal shift work.

Perceptions of construction industry

- Jobs in construction are often seen as third rate choices that are suitable mostly for less intelligent people as they consist of 'grunt' work. These poor/incomplete/inaccurate perceptions on the part of young people, teachers and counselors can inhibit new entrants to the sector. A career path map that shows potential trajectories is required. The role of technology in construction needs to be emphasized to dispel the notion that the sector involved only 'shovels and dirt.' Awareness-raising amongst students, educators and counselors needs to start early in schools.
- Women are under-represented in the construction sector. Their role and potential in the sector needs to be recognized and promoted.
- The Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training should explore options with the Education Ministry for greater integration of the trades agenda into the education plan.
- The provincial government sometimes advertises wages for trades. When these figures are inflated, workers question why they are making less.
- People seek training for jobs that are being advertised or promoted currently; when they graduate several years later, the same jobs may no longer be available.

Mobility

- Obtaining and tracking of tickets and certifications (e.g. First Aid, Fall Arrest, Confined Spaces) poses mobility challenges. As employees move between companies, tickets and certifications are lost often and there are no sector-wide or universal tracking options.
 - A portal may be one solution to this situation. Another may be putting the onus on the employee, not employer, to pay for training. This would require (a) that training be incentivized by a tax refund that allows the cost of training to be declared as a deductible employment expense and (b) industry standardization of basic worker requirements (e.g. First Aid, CSTS09/WHMIS, Fall Arrest).

Government programs (e.g. Canada Jobs Grant, Temporary Foreign Worker program, Apprenticeship Grants)

- Accessing government programs can be more trouble than it is worth as companies may have to put in more effort and hours than the money received warrants.
- The Temporary Foreign Workers Program is too slow for many needs. It also does not fill jobs on a long-term basis and therefore does not represent a structural solution to supply challenges. As a result, many employers use the program only out of desperation. Some participants noted that they would prefer to see permanent new residents instead of temporary foreign workers.

- The Canada-BC Job Grant administration, while not difficult in a technical sense, is too challenging and burdensome from an administrative perspective for many smaller employers to use.

Training quality and standards

- Not all trainers are qualified to teach. However, at present employers can only rely on past experience or lists of trainers that offer no sense of trainer quality. This can diminish skills development. A standardized system is required to determine and communicate which trainers are most effective.

Consolidation of training information

- A single portal with all training information would be more effective and streamlined for employers and employees than at present.

Overall industry strategy and forum

- The construction industry needs a single, unified voice when approaching government, large potential clients and potentially other groups (e.g. investors).

Island-specific issues

- Required courses are not always available on the Island, and not all employers can afford the time and money to send workers to the Mainland for training. For example, there is no Construction Safety Officer training available on the Island, despite the need.

Next steps

- There have been many construction sector consultations, but with limited practical result. The CITN consultations need to break this tradition and yield practical outcomes.
- Several participants would like to continue to be involved with the CITN and provided their contact information to staff.