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# Building Responsive Career Pathways in a Post-Pandemic World

**A Roadmap for Change**

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# Acknowledgements

## About the Authors

**Sandra McKenzie** has extensive government experience in the fields of workforce development, adult education, economic development, and policy and strategic planning. She has served the Province of Nova Scotia as Deputy Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, Deputy Minister of Labour and Advanced Education, and Acting Deputy Minister of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism.

After concluding a rewarding career with the public service, she is very pleased to have launched two companies: McKenzie Consulting, a Management and Strategy focused business; and, The Forge Institute, a partnership dedicated to thought leadership for positive change. Sandra serves on several volunteer Boards, all focused on creating stronger communities.

Sandra lives in Waverley, Nova Scotia, with her husband and many pets. She is visited regularly by her three children who are out making the world a better place.

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Tannis lives in Port Moody. She recently sent her only daughter off to university in California and enjoys the companionship of her dog, Luna.

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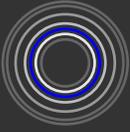
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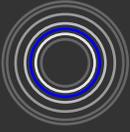
## About Blueprint

[Blueprint](#) was founded on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. We work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. Our vision is a social policy ecosystem where evidence is used to improve lives, build better systems and policies and drive social change. Our team brings together a multidisciplinary group of professionals with diverse capabilities in policy research, data analysis, design, evaluation, implementation and knowledge mobilization. As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

## About The Future Skills Centre

[The Future Skills Centre](#) is a forward-looking organization that prototypes, tests and measures new and innovative approaches to skills development and training. It is passionate about building a resilient learning nation, backed by an agile and responsive skills ecosystem that equips everyone with the skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing economy and share in Canada's prosperity.

As a Pan-Canadian organization, FSC works with partners across the country to understand how global trends affect the economy, and to identify what skills working-age adults need to thrive within an ever-evolving environment. FSC is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program and was founded as a partnership between Ryerson University, Blueprint and the Conference Board of Canada.



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## Executive Summary

In Canada, as with the rest of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic disordered business and labour markets profoundly. Data shows that the most vulnerable in society were the hardest hit and are expected to experience the longest recovery. Both short-term actions and longer-term planning and strategies are needed to help the workforce recover and adapt to new realities. A key part of any plan is the development of responsive [career pathways](#)<sup>1</sup> that serve all Canadians.

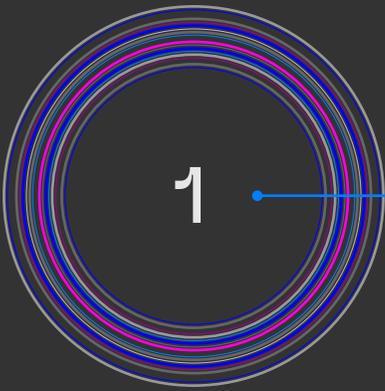
As part of the [Future Skills Centre's \(FSC\) Responsive Career Pathways initiative](#), this paper draws on insights from the Responsive Career Pathways roundtables and from current research to review the readiness of career and employment services in Canada to engage in transformational change. The paper underscores the accelerated need for high quality career and [employment services](#) as a result of the pandemic, and it provides potential ways forward to strengthen Canada's career and employment systems.

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<sup>1</sup> Hyperlinked terms throughout the paper connect to the Glossary.

## I Key Findings

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>The pandemic has fundamentally altered the Canadian workforce and economy.</p>       | <p>The challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic include expanding inequity, an increasing number of displaced workers that need bridges to employment, a population that is unsure of growth sector opportunities or how to prepare for them, and businesses that will require advice and support to upskill their current employees and define their future workforce needs.</p>                 |
| <p>Canada's employment systems already faced challenges.</p>                            | <p>Canada's <a href="#">career guidance</a> systems are fragmented and need strengthening. This has led to a national <a href="#">career development</a> model that is mostly reactionary ("fail first") and accessed when people find themselves in a state of crisis. This leaves individuals and businesses at a disadvantage, especially compared to countries with a more comprehensive approach.</p> |
| <p>Policy and system level changes are needed.</p>                                      | <p>Developing a shared vision, mandate and operating framework for responsive career pathways and collaborating with employers are key elements for policy and system level change. However, it is crucial that such changes prioritize cultural awareness and inclusion.</p>  |
| <p>Enabling infrastructure must be strengthened.</p>                                    | <p>To advance responsive career pathways, infrastructural support is needed. This includes improved access to <a href="#">labour market information</a>, investment in developing practitioner capacity and consistent integration of career guidance into K-12 and post-secondary education.</p>  |
| <p>Collaboration and transformation are key to building responsive career pathways.</p> | <p>Federal, provincial and territorial leadership is needed to address the challenges of the existing fragmentary system of career and employment services. Every domain, from K-12 education to businesses and employers, will play key roles in creating a national framework for coherent, accessible and inclusive career pathways.</p>  |



1



Introduction



## Introduction

In Canada, as with the rest of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic disordered business and labour markets quickly and profoundly. Many workers had their hours reduced, were laid off or permanently lost their jobs. Others had to quickly adjust to working from home as offices closed. Essential workers continued to work in hospitals, grocery stores and warehouses, under new protocols to reduce the spread of the virus. The social and economic impacts of the shutdown were rapid, unevenly experienced and highly disruptive.

Data shows that the most vulnerable in society, core-aged women in low-wage jobs, marginalized populations and youth, were the hardest hit and are expected to experience the longest recovery. For these groups, differences in the ability to work from home not only contributed to higher earnings inequality but also highlighted the deep impact of the digital divide.

This paper is one contribution to the Future Skills Centre's (FSC) Responsive Career Pathways initiative, and it underscores the accelerated need for high quality career and employment services in Canada as a result of the pandemic. It draws on current research and insights from participants of the Responsive Career Pathways roundtable series to provide an analysis of Canadian career and employment services.

It is hoped that the resourcefulness, flexibility and adaptability that were demonstrated in the constructive response to the pandemic can also be harnessed to adapt the workforce to new realities. The accelerated changes in the economy and associated workforce challenges require approaches that focus on both short-term recovery actions and longer-term planning and strategy. Key to that effort will be the development of responsive career pathways that serve all Canadians across their lifespan, including the displaced and currently unemployed, current workers who need upskilling and reskilling, future graduates mapping their opportunities, businesses rebuilding their workforce and growth sectors seeking a skilled workforce.

Educational institutions and workforce development service providers will be called on to help individuals and employers navigate what, for many, will be uncertain times. One challenge is that these institutions and service providers were struggling to meet needs before the pandemic and will be hard pressed to meet the increased demands of individuals and employers as we move forward.

In their 2017 report, the Advisory Council on Economic Growth highlighted the importance of developing a comprehensive skills plan for working Canadians, and argued that this should be the focus of government, employers, educational institutions and workers. Central to their recommendations is the need to raise awareness among Canadians that they will need to continuously upgrade their skills if they are to remain competitive in a changing labour market. The report provides a key recommendation to advance this work, centred on transforming government employment centres into career and training hubs that will serve not only unemployed Canadians, but also working adults looking to retrain and employers offering [career pathing](#) for employees (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2017).

Echoing the Advisory Council's call to action, the FSC has identified responsive career pathways as one of four key pillars in its [Strategic Plan \(2020–2023\)](#). This paper reviews the readiness of career and employment services in Canada to transform into hubs of hands-on career and training guidance, and it provides a roadmap for change for the FSC to consider. Key milestones that could guide progress include the alignment of partners around a shared mission, policy and system level changes and infrastructural development to build responsive career pathways.

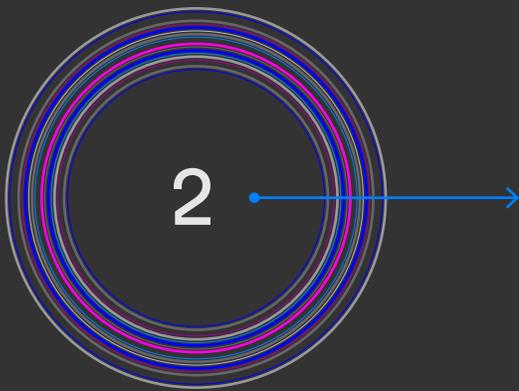
The prosperity of our economy is inextricably linked to the quality of our workforce. High-quality career and training guidance is linked to better informed decision-making, higher workforce participation, lower unemployment, skills that are better aligned to opportunities and higher career satisfaction. This is good for the individual, but even better for society through improved mental health, gains to the tax/transfer system, higher productivity and lower unemployment.

A recent OECD (2021) report notes that:

**The world of work is changing.** Digitalisation, globalisation, and population ageing are having a profound impact on the type and quality of jobs that are available and the skills required to perform them. The extent to which individuals, firms and economies can reap the benefits of these changes will depend critically on the ability of individuals to maintain and acquire relevant skills and adapt to a changing labour market over their working careers.

Career guidance for adults is a fundamental policy lever to motivate adults to train and to help address the challenges brought about by rapidly changing skill needs. Such services are particularly important amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, as many adults have lost jobs and require assistance navigating their career options in the changed labour market.

Canada is significantly behind in addressing career pathways, especially in comparison to Europe. This paper underscores the need for high quality career and employment services that will advance responsive career pathways, and how that need has been accelerated as a result of the pandemic.



The Need for  
Transformation:  
2030 has Arrived  
Ahead of Schedule



# The Need for Transformation: 2030 has Arrived Ahead of Schedule

In 2017, the OECD, the Advisory Council on Economic Growth and other think tanks were predicting significant labour market transition over a decade, warning that an expected 10 to 12% of the workforce would face job loss and need to retrain if they were to find new positions (Advisory Council on Economic Growth, 2017).

That was the prediction even before COVID-19 brought permanent change to the economy and workforce. The challenge Canada now faces is that existing trends in remote work, e-commerce and automation were accelerated by the pandemic, and as a result, up to 25% more workers than previously estimated will potentially need to switch occupations (McKinsey Global Institute, 2021).

Effectively, the workforce is emerging from the pandemic in 2021 and the economy is emerging in 2030.

Accelerated impacts include:

The pandemic disproportionately impacted already vulnerable populations.

- The latest Labour Force Survey (Statistics Canada, May 2021) shows that the reported unemployment rate, 8.2%, masks a precipitous drop in labour force participation for **youth and core-age women**. The adjusted rate is 10.7%.
- The number of **people unemployed for 27 weeks** or more is 478,000, a 166.8% increase compared with the pre-pandemic level in February 2020.
- **Student** employment is behind 2019 in all categories except healthcare and social assistance. Student employment rates are lower for females and visible minorities.
- **Youth** employment fell in all categories but most acutely for young women and visible minorities.
- A long-term gap in employment persists among core-aged **visible minorities**.
- Unemployment has increased among **older Canadians, particularly women**.
- The employment rate for **Indigenous women** remains furthest below the pre-pandemic level.

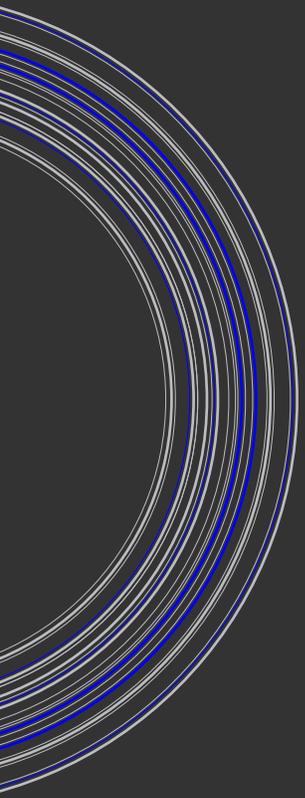
## 2030 Has Arrived Ahead of Schedule

In 2017, Canada's Economic Council noted, "We estimate that by 2030, automation and changes in existing occupations could threaten the jobs of more than 10 percent of Canadian workers unless they acquire new skills. Canada's skills development infrastructure is simply not equipped to meet the challenges that lie ahead."

In 2017, we still had some time...

Then the pandemic hit. A Forbes article predicted: "Coronavirus will force companies to speed up their plans to replace jobs with automation, according to a report published by analyst company Forrester. In its report, Forrester notes that many companies are set to invest more in automation than in rehiring in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, corroborating earlier reports that had claimed many businesses were already planning to accelerate their automation strategies" (Chandler, 2020).

The time to act is now.



Conscious, careful cultural competence and anti-discrimination work is required not only to make career guidance services useful, but also to combat bias.

## The pandemic accelerated the fourth Industrial Revolution and impacted low-wage jobs.

- **The shift to hybrid and remote work will impact service jobs.** A study by the McKinsey Global Institute (2021) predicts 20–25% of workers in advanced economies could work from home three to five days a week, mainly in the computer-based office work arena. That is four to five times the level anticipated before the pandemic and may reduce demand for mass transit, restaurants and retail in urban centres. The remote work trend also highlighted disparities for individuals and families who cannot afford internet services and upgraded devices, further marginalizing already vulnerable populations.
- **The growth in the share of e-commerce will impact low-wage jobs.** The “delivery economy” grew two to five times faster in 2020 than before the pandemic. This trend is disrupting jobs in travel and leisure and hastening the decline of low-wage jobs in brick-and-mortar stores and restaurants, while increasing jobs in distribution centres and last-mile delivery.
- **Accelerated adoption of automation and AI will impact manufacturing jobs.** Companies have enlisted automation and AI to cope with COVID-19 disruptions, putting more robots in manufacturing plants and warehouses and adding self-service customer kiosks and service robots in customer interaction arenas. This trend has accelerated pre-pandemic predictions of the impact of automation and robotics on low-wage positions.

## The pandemic further exposed the polarization of the economy and growth of inequality.

- **The middle class is shrinking.** The share of mid-skilled jobs in Canada has continuously declined since 1990. While the share of high-skilled jobs increased during this period, the share of low-skilled jobs remained flat (Public Policy Forum, 2021). This has created a squeeze where more people are competing for low-skilled jobs without clear pathways to the higher-skilled tier. Concern about this polarization is reflected in the Federal Government’s commitment to invest in people and grow the middle class (Government of Canada, Sept 11, 2018).
- **Without mitigation, innovation is linked to inequality.** The rise of innovation has been linked to a historic rise in income and wealth inequality (Naudé & Nagler, 2016). The ICT revolution triggered a higher demand for skilled labour, resulting in more investments in education and, thus, a growing supply of skilled workers with good wages. At the same time, technology has also reduced medium-skilled jobs, causing job polarization, wherein the demand for high- and low-skilled workers increased, while the demand for medium-skilled workers decreased, resulting in a wage gap.

### Continued Stagnation or a New Horizon?

“The 21st century will see a rising tide of new technologies, some of which are now emerging and some of which will surprise us. If those technologies deploy into the labor institutions of today that were designed for the last century, we will see familiar results: stagnating opportunity for the majority of workers accompanied by vast rewards for a fortunate minority” Autor, et al., 2020, p. 76).

A recent MIT report stressed the need to address economic and workforce polarization, noting:

**We must first invest in workers and their skills, bringing to bear the full weight of modern teaching methods and training technology, as well as new institutions, to help them drive the jobs of the future.** Simultaneously, we must improve the systems that employ them, the laws that protect and support them, and the jobs that we are training them to do. And we need to continue innovating, both in the institutional structures of our labor markets and in the technologies and new industries that create new jobs. We possess the skills, resources, and innovative capacity to create many possible futures. Just as the majority of today's jobs had yet to be invented a century ago, much of the work of the 21st century has yet to be invented today. The challenge and the opportunity of the present is to build the work of the future. (Autor et al., 2020)

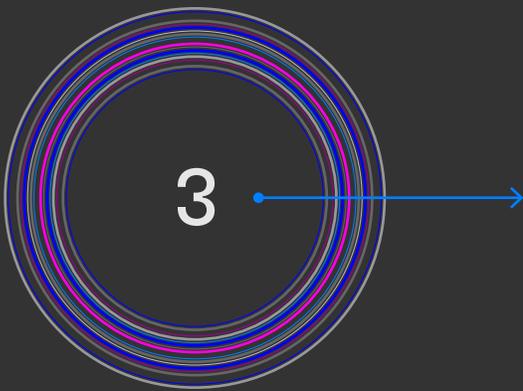
Responsive career pathways that are connected, accessible and inclusive can lead to improved employment and income opportunities and more equitable societal outcomes.

### **The pandemic has accelerated the skilled labour shortage in Canada's growth sectors.**

- **Skilled workers are needed.** Beginning in 2017, Industry Canada led the development of Economic Strategy Tables as a new model for collaboration between industry and government, focused on turning Canadian economic strengths into global advantages. The Economic Strategy Tables diagnostic review was undertaken prior to the pandemic and will require a re-check moving forward, but assuming their findings hold, they are highly informative (Government of Canada, Nov 16, 2018):
  - Labour is as an area of great concern: looking ahead, automation strategies to reduce the use of low-skilled labour will be important to increasing productivity.
  - There is a shortage of software development talent in Canada and globally, across all levels including mid-level and senior-level. This lack of talent will constrain growth of Canada's digital industries.
- **Wages and working conditions will be an issue.** Critical economic sectors in Canada were already concerned about labour market shortages before the pandemic, and these concerns will have increased during it. A World Economic Forum report uses the notion of a "reservation wage" — the minimum wage that a worker requires in order to participate in the labour market — to provide some insight into the underlying causes of such worker shortages (Letzing, 2021). There are early indications that wages in a number of sectors in Canada are not meeting the threshold to attract people to apply. This points to the importance of sorting true worker shortages from wages and working condition (reservation wage) issues as part of longer-term solutions in the post-pandemic recovery.

### **Accrued Impact**

The accrued impact of these challenges is expanding inequity, an increasing number of displaced workers that need bridges to employment, a population that is unaware of growth sector opportunities or how to prepare for them and businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), that will require advice and support to upskill their current employees and define their future workforce needs.



3

Responsive Career  
Pathways Roundtables:  
Voices of Experience



## Responsive Career Pathways Roundtables: Voices of Experience

As previously noted, the FSC has made high-quality, responsive career pathways a strategic priority to ensure workers have the advice and skills they need to make well-informed choices in a rapidly changing labour market. To advance this work, FSC and Blueprint convened the Responsive Career Pathways roundtables, which included three themes: System Coherency, Delivery Capacity and User Experience. The objective was to discuss how careers services are organized, managed and delivered in Canada and to identify what we can do to ensure Canadians have the advice, guidance, developmental experiences and skills they need to make well-informed choices in an ever-changing and complex world. A total of fifty-five informants participated over five roundtables, including a wide array of service providers, practitioners, funders (federal and provincial), educators (K-12 and post-secondary), employers, employer associations and career development associations.

The roundtables were recorded, and detailed summaries were produced from each session. Several key themes emerged from these discussions that highlight the need for transformation in Canada's career and employment systems:

**Canada's approach to career guidance is complicated, fragmented, mostly reactionary ("fail first") and does not serve individuals or the economy well.** In its current state, career services are disconnected, difficult to navigate and are primarily accessed when people find themselves in a state of crisis. The impacts of this lack of cohesion include:

- A lack of a coordinated response to address displaced workers;
- Widening disparities and growing unemployment among youth, BIPOC and women;
- Currently employed workers facing lay-offs with limited guidance to re-skill and pivot to other occupations/sectors;
- Restricted access to career and employment services for the general population;
- No clear leadership to address Canada's mounting workforce issues. Most efforts to address the disconnects involve circular conversations between stakeholders;
- Individuals and businesses are left at a disadvantage compared to countries with a more comprehensive approach.

**Business and Industry are integral partners in delivering responsive career pathways, but also need services themselves.** Currently employers face a number of challenges for upskilling their workforces, and institutional training providers often struggle to be nimble and responsive to current needs. Furthermore, many businesses do not have the capacity, or in some cases the willingness, to identify and provide appropriate training for their workforce. Especially in small businesses, employers need support to describe the skillsets they are looking for and to make decisions about training. These limitations contribute to:

- Displaced workers;
- Bad hires;
- Limited re-skilling and upskilling for the existing workforce;
- Productivity loss;
- Constrained growth sectors;
- Stagnating wages.

**Canada has weakly professionalized career service delivery capacity in every domain.** There is uneven capacity across the country to deliver high-quality career and employment services. Funding for professional development for career practitioners is limited or non-existent, while at the same time expectations for skills and expertise in a number of different areas are being continually raised. Outside of Québec, there are no entry requirements to become a career practitioner in Canada. As a result:

- The career development workforce has insufficient skill to meet current and future service demands;
- There is a wide-spread lack of the practitioner skills needed to address the rapid arrival of micro-credentials, skill and competency mapping and gap-training. This is compounded by a general lack of awareness of growth sectors and national workforce requirements.

**Access to, and understanding of, LMI continues to be an issue.** LMI remains opaque to many Canadians, who have trouble using it even if they do know about it. LMI use is further complicated by a lack of common language around skills and labour market data, nor is there a single place in Canada to link LMI platforms. These limitations mean that:

- Canadians are unaware of, or under-informed about, growth sectors and opportunities;
- Students make career decisions in the absence of good, cohesive information;
- Practitioners are not sufficiently trained in the use of LMI to guide [clients](#);
- It is difficult to reach agreement on labour market conditions;
- There are perceptions over whether job vacancies reflect true shortages or are the result of wages and working conditions;
- There are mismatches in labour market training and job opportunities;
- Conversations on improving LMI quality and dissemination tend to be repetitive or circular.

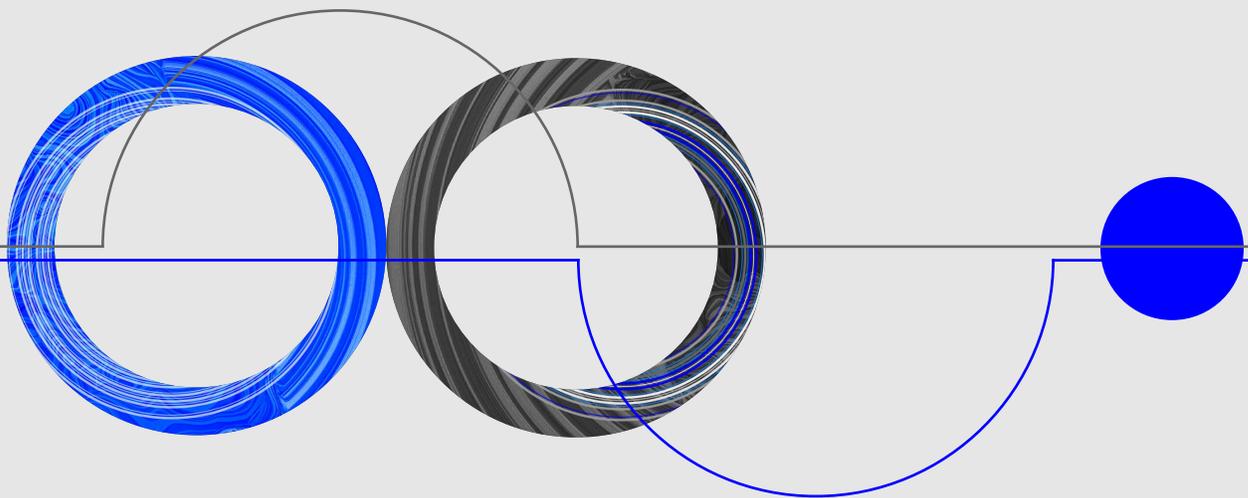
### **Responsive career pathways have to include K-12 and Post-Secondary Education (PSE) Systems.**

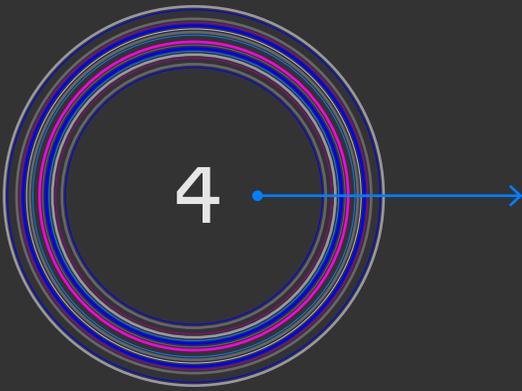
Currently, K-12 and PSE systems have limited capacity and efficiency to prepare and guide students on career pathways. Career development and guidance is considered an add-on service at both levels. Overall, these limitations mean that:

- The lack of capacity in the education space contributes to a general lack of career awareness in the general population, so efforts for adults are essentially remedial;
- Few students gain access to high-quality career guidance;
- A prevalence of mental health issues can be linked to youth feeling lost;
- Marginalized students in need of services and supports are the least likely to receive them;
- Youth who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) have limited access to career and employment services and supports due to eligibility criteria;
- Increasing PSE attrition rates can be linked to lack of quality career guidance, particularly for students who find themselves in the wrong program.

**The pandemic has deeply impacted marginalized communities.** While the effects of the pandemic have been far-reaching, with long-term unemployment growing by over 166% during this period, it has been youth, students (particularly women), core-aged women employed in low-wage jobs, visible minorities, older workers (particularly women) and Indigenous people (particularly women) who have been most deeply impacted. This disproportionate impact is seen in:

- Employment scarring for the most barriered, with recovery possibly a decade or more away;
- Generational poverty, with the lack of quality career services contributing to marginalized youth making career decisions heavily influenced by their socio-economic situation, with implications for social mobility and equity.





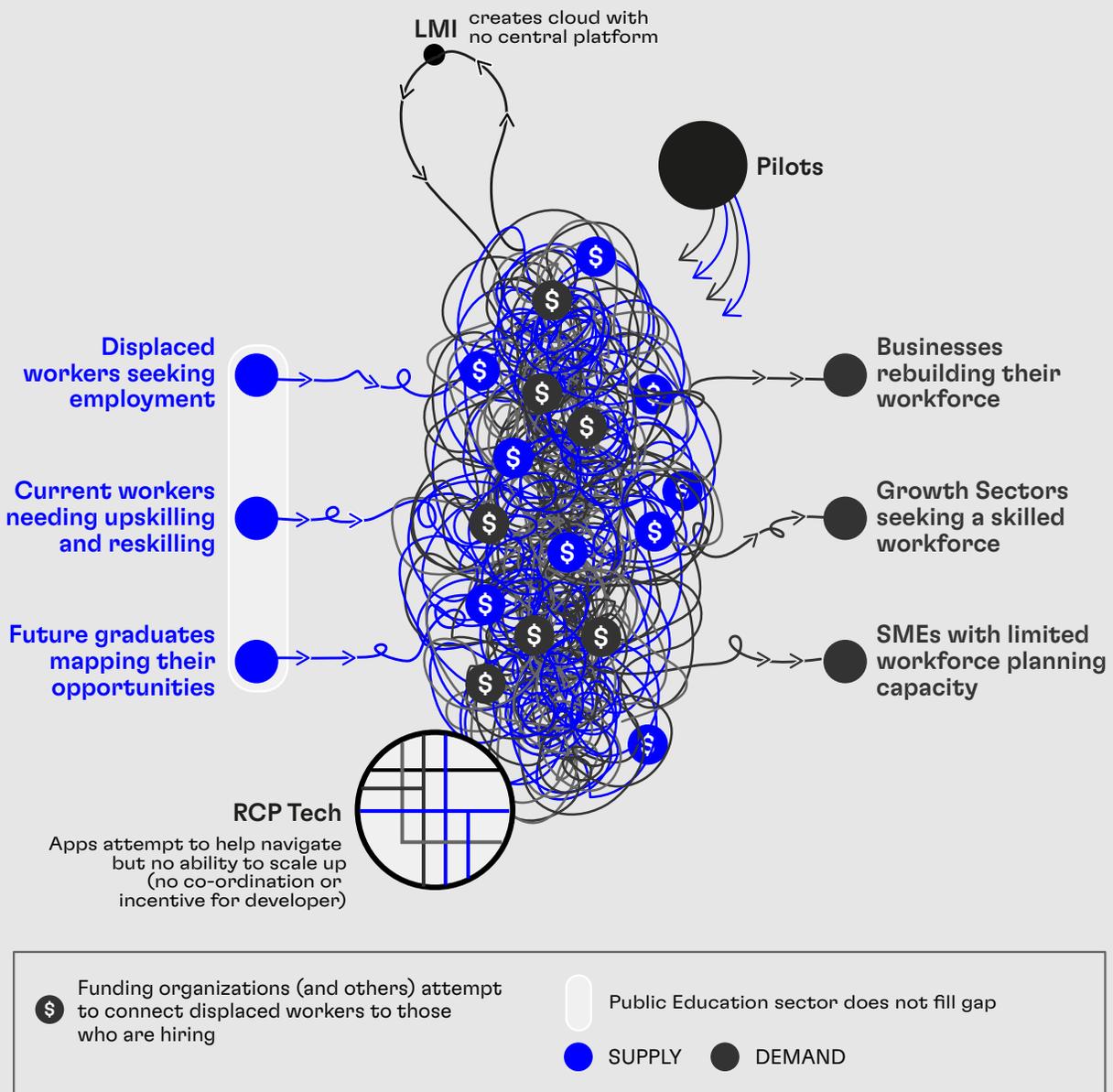
# Challenges for Addressing Change in Career and Employment Services



# Challenges for Addressing Change in Career and Employment Services

Canada's current career and employment services model has many varied inputs, including a diversity of actors and stakeholders with unique needs, and multiple types of tools. However, the lack of a consistent organizing structure leads to confusion and inefficiency, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1:**  
**Tangled Threads: The Case for Building Connected, Accessible and Inclusive Career and Employment Services for Canada**



Advancing Canada's capacity to support workforce development, through high-quality career guidance and employment services available to everyone across their lifespan, is key to achieving economic and social prosperity. There are a number of key challenges in Canada's existing model that must be addressed in order to provide such support, several of which were highlighted by participants in the roundtables, as discussed above:

**A shared, comprehensive vision for career and employment services between the federal, provincial and territorial governments is needed.** The lack of a unifying approach across jurisdictions deeply impacts economic and social development across the country.

**Employment services must move away from a crisis-based model of service delivery.** Without a proactive model for preparing Canadians for career development, services will have limited access, uneven programming and be disconnected from [wraparound supports](#).

**An enabling operational framework to meaningfully action the findings and recommendations of multi-stakeholder efforts must be established.** Without a clear sense of how to implement changes, research efforts will not be effective.

**A strong networked environment to scale successful pilot projects and best practices is necessary.** Robust connections across all levels are needed to ensure promising developments do not slip through the cracks.

**Information channels, particularly around LMI, need to be more strongly connected and of a sufficient size to incentivize scalable career services tools.** There is currently no central portal for relevant LMI or skills and training information, which is a barrier for easily expanding the reach of career services tools.

**Education and training institutions, employment service providers and business and industry need to be much more prepared for the seismic shift in credentialling.** Major changes are underway in education and skills training, and all sectors must be ready to adapt.

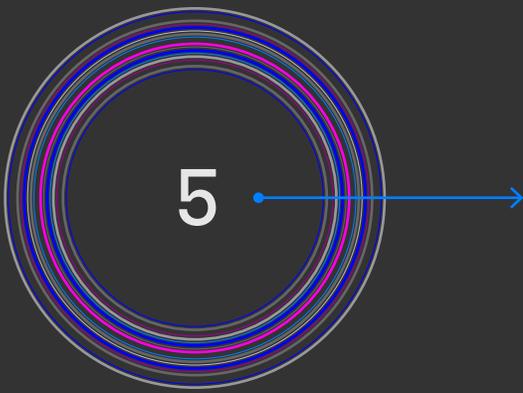
**There must be a pipeline to develop and deliver talent aligned to growth sector opportunities.** The skills and talents of Canadians must be channeled to be relevant to business and industry needs.

**All domains (K–12, PSE, community providers and business and industry) need strong organization to deliver better career guidance outcomes.** Preparation across all sectors is crucial for establishing consistent and connected support.

**Service delivery practitioners in every domain must be professionalized.** Well-defined and consistent standards are needed to ensure high-quality career and employment services.

**Canadians need clear, current information on workforce trends and demands and need to know where to find it.** Accurate, accessible, up-to-date data is essential for helping Canadians make good decisions about training and career development.

**There must be robust and deliberate effort to assist the most disadvantaged populations.** The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the disproportionate impact of economic downturn on already marginalized populations, and the limited on-ramps back to employment that exist to help them.



# Transformation of Career and Employment Services: A Call to Action



# Transformation of Career and Employment Services: A Call to Action

The research undertaken for this paper, the insights gathered through the Responsive Career Pathways roundtables and a review of post-pandemic economic data all reflect the findings of a recent OECD report (2021). The report notes:

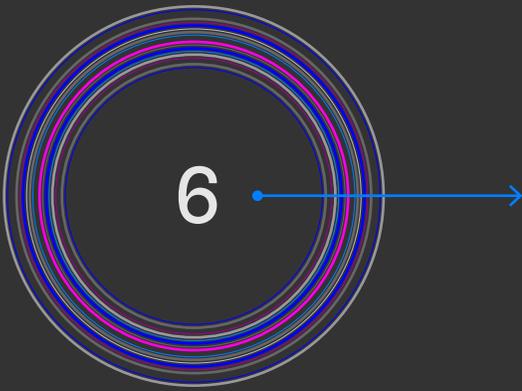
**The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of career guidance services as many adults have lost their jobs and require assistance identifying suitable career options in a labour market that has changed profoundly. The pandemic has had an impact on both the supply and demand for skills. On the supply side, low-skilled adults have been disproportionately represented among those who lost their jobs. Many will need to upskill or retrain to find work. On the demand side, the crisis is likely to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies and automation, increasing demand for high-level skills. Career guidance can facilitate re-employment by identifying new job opportunities and proposing relevant training.**

The bottom line is, we are at a crossroad: we can continue to direct efforts into the tangled wires of the existing system, hoping for a better result, or we can seize the moment, develop a collaborative mission, untangle the wires, test, pilot and scale a responsive career pathways model, leading to:

- Career conscious Canadians
- An educated, skilled, adaptable workforce
- Balanced supply and demand
- Proactive workforce development for growth sectors
- Proactive and responsive education and training systems

## From tangled to coherent, connected and accessible

- **Collaboration is crucial.** Federal, provincial and territorial leadership is required to build a shared vision to provide all Canadians with access to responsive career pathways. This effort will require improvements at the systems level and capacity-building at the service delivery level. Every domain, K-12, PSE, community-based service providers, business, employers and government will play key roles.
- **Transformation is imperative.** We must transform the complicated, fragmented and disconnected collection of career and employment services and supports into a national framework for coherent, connected, accessible and inclusive career pathways which are built collaboratively and take a life-span approach.



Considerations  
Moving Forward



# Considerations Moving Forward

Building responsive career pathways in Canada will require widespread changes that are both systemic and infrastructural in nature. The FSC can play a unique role in this important work as a convenor of key stakeholders who can imagine, design and align a roadmap for change and pilot and evaluate methods to bring a new career and employment services model to life.

## I Policy Framework and System Level Changes

Changes are needed at the policy and system levels to build responsive career pathways. Key considerations include:

**Shared vision, mission and mandate.** The importance of responsive career pathways for all Canadians can be elevated as a foundational step towards individual, economic and social well-being and prosperity.

- **International models:** A recent OECD report (2021) provides a detailed overview of effective governance mechanisms to deliver responsive career pathways. The report details operating models from a number of jurisdictions that are instructive for Canada, such as Germany, which also has a shared responsibility model for the provision of education and employment services.
  - Germany adopted legislation in 2018 (*Law on improvement of qualifications opportunities*) to expand the legal mandate of the Federal Employment Agency to provide career guidance services to all citizens, whether they are employed, unemployed, in education or training or looking for continuing education. Before expanding services at the national level, Germany first implemented pilots in selected regions to better understand the types of additional resources that would be needed.
- **Canadian models:** Canada has other federal / provincial / territorial partnerships which can serve as models for a comprehensive career guidance collaboration, most notably the provision of healthcare services: while the provincial and territorial governments are responsible for the management, organization and delivery of healthcare services for their residents, the federal government is responsible for setting and administering national standards and providing funding support along with undertaking some other health-related functions. This collaborative effort means that Canadians can expect a core set of services no matter where they live without paying out-of-pocket. Alignment is achieved by requiring provincial and territorial healthcare insurance plans to meet the standards described in the Canada Health Act. This model could provide a template for partnerships to deliver responsive career pathways in Canada.

**Operating framework.** The key components of an effective operating framework for responsive career pathways could include initiatives like:

- **Mapping pathways to expand [Labour Market Transfer Agreements \(LMTAs\)](#).** Canada already has the bones of an operating framework to build responsive career pathways, in the form of LMTAs, and a delivery network of employment service centres, which can be reimaged to serve a broader swath of Canadians. Canada's Employment Centres can be transformed: as the Advisory Council

on Economic Growth (2017) explains, service centres already serve as critical points of access for unemployed or vulnerable Canadians, and along with that mandate, they could, and should, serve as hubs for career and training guidance to working Canadians, and to employers looking to deploy new employee-training programs.

- **Identifying core career and employment services.** Key to the expansion of LMTAs to include a broader swath of Canadians is an effort to identify a core set of services for Canadians no matter where they live. This echoes the Medicare approach, which delineates core services in all provinces and territories as part of Canada's publicly funded healthcare system.
- **Leveraging the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM).** This is the forum where the various levels of government collaborate to ensure Canada has a skilled, adaptable and inclusive workforce, and works to advance the competitiveness of the Canadian economy. It would be an important partner in any responsive career pathways initiative to ensure coordination and sustainable funding models.
- **Integrating services to in-school youth.** Participants in the Responsive Career Pathways roundtables noted that, in addition to serving employed Canadians and businesses, Employment Centres should also serve in-school youth and others who do not meet existing eligibility criteria. Providing Canadian youth and their families with access to high-quality career information and guidance is a game changer for building a culture of career-conscious Canadians, achieving balanced supply and demand by making sure youth know where the opportunities are as they make course choices, and for future-proofing Canada's social and economic prosperity.

**Cultural Awareness and Inclusion.** Roundtable participants in all five sessions underscored the importance of building responsive career pathways that are culturally aware and inclusive. This effort was necessary before the pandemic and the need has only been amplified with the impact on marginalized communities over the last 18 months. Methods could include:

- **Developing models to train practitioners in inclusive practices.** Under the LMTAs, signatories agree to principles that include support for underrepresented groups, however participants noted that service providers are under-staffed and under-trained to carry out this work and LMTAs do not provide funding for professional development and training. Program and service providers are currently ill-prepared to address complex issues like employment scarring, generational poverty, deep distrust and barriers to entry. Meaningful change will be rooted in a commitment to inclusion and upskilling service providers to make the intention a reality.
- **Researching / Piloting / Evaluating.** The detailed work of creating an implementation plan to build more inclusive career pathways requires additional research, model development and piloting. There are pocketed examples of service providers that have a solid foundation in culturally aware and inclusive practices which would provide an excellent opportunity for further testing and learning.

Collaboration with employers and sector organizations. The FSC could help support the testing and evaluating of effective working models between employers, sector organizations and career and employment service providers. Efforts could include:

- **Aligning growth sector forums with responsive career pathways.** As noted earlier, Canada's Economic Strategy Tables have identified access to a skilled workforce as an area of concern. Directly aligning growth sectors with a fully realized model for responsive career pathways would be an effective way to connect demand with supply. Investing in pilots to align efforts would inform the development of a national model.
- **Developing models to anticipate and proactively mitigate labour market disruptions.** One strategy could be creating effective transition models which link career and employment service providers to sectors and employers prior to lay-offs, and offer opportunities to reprofile workers to new workforce demands with current employers or new employment opportunities.
- **Advancing career / employment / HR services and supports for small business.** Piloting services to clusters of businesses could include workforce assessments, development of plans to upskill existing workers, hiring and onboarding support and management training.

## I Enabling Infrastructure

Along with the systemic and policy-level changes outlined above, developing infrastructural support will also be necessary to advance responsive career pathways. Key aspects in that development include:

**LMI infrastructure.** Information channels, specifically around LMI, need to be developed to provide people and career practitioners with relevant, accessible data that will inform their training and career choices. There is an opportunity to support this work through:

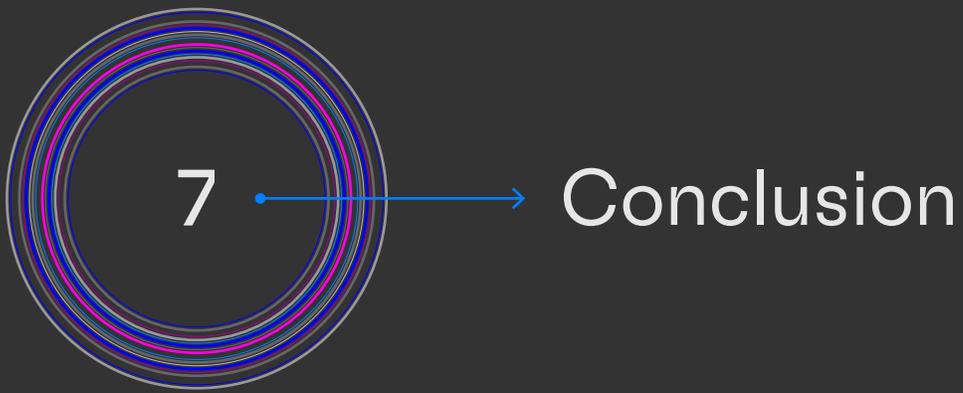
- **Building on the FSC partnership with the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC) to improve access to LMI.** The LMIC Operational Plan 2021–2022 highlights a plan to facilitate access to LMI by developing and testing an open, cloud-based data repository in partnership with the FSC. The data will be shared so that relevant actors can tailor it to best meet the needs of Canadians (LMIC, 2020). Such a repository could offer users one entry point to sources of consistent, accurate, up-to-date and unbiased LMI. Designed well, it could be easy-to-use and customizable based on user need. A single portal could also reduce redundancy and duplication, making better use of limited resources. It would not have to replace existing LMI websites; instead, the portal could pull data from existing sites and databases.
  - Marketing the open, cloud-based data repository to citizens, practitioners, educators and business and industry would address many of the LMI challenges which have been flagged for decades.
  - The repository could also allow individuals to develop and house skills passports, and create a marketplace to scale innovative career tools.
- **Learning from the Health Infoways model.** The Canada Health Infoway houses data and research and serves as a collaboration platform for communities of interest. The Infoway encourages collaboration with stakeholders, improves access, addresses challenges, scales innovation, provides direct citizen access to the platform and improves practitioner services delivery. This model could provide guidance for how LMI infrastructure could be made more effective and accessible.

**The career and employment services workforce.** A large body of research, reinforced through the Responsive Career Pathways roundtables, shows that improving practitioner capacity to deliver high-quality career and employment services will dramatically improve the career services landscape in Canada at every level:

- **Scaling up professional development for career practitioners.** New approaches to reach, educate and connect [career development practitioners](#) are required to effectively professionalize the workforce. Five provinces in Canada have already developed professional certifications linked to the Canadian Standards & Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners (Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario), however the overall lack of support for professional certifications has resulted in a low uptake by practitioners as there are limited resources to support the effort. These provinces could provide willing pilot sites to scale their work.

- **Learning from previous efforts to professionalize a pan-Canadian workforce.** The federal government worked with provinces and territories to undertake an Early Childhood Educator workforce development plan to ensure that early learning and childcare programs have qualified staff who provide supportive environments, contributing to positive outcomes for children and families. A similar effort could be explored through the [Workforce Transfer Agreements](#) to support the professionalization of the career practitioner workforce.
- **Developing a “home” to oversee competency certification.** As the Career Development Professional Certification Competency Profile is published, a body will be required to oversee the standards and work with jurisdictions to facilitate the accompanying certification. The establishment of such a body is critical for the long-term professionalization of the sector.
- **Exploring short-term delivery models and methods to upskill practitioners.** There is good scope to work with practitioner leaders to develop [micro-credentials](#) for career practitioners in effective practice and emerging tools such as skills mapping. Potential credentials could focus on:
  - Inclusion practices such as anti-racism and anti-oppression training;
  - Strengthening mental health awareness practices and skills in partnership with mental health organizations;
  - Effectively using, interpreting and mediating interpretation of LMI;
  - Improving practice skills for delivering services through digital spaces.

**K-12 and PSE.** Although the FSC’s Responsive Career Pathways initiative was envisioned and designed to primarily address the skill development needs of the adult population, the role of K-12 and PSE in the responsive career pathways continuum is reinforced repeatedly in literature, economic forums and by all career delivery partners. There is general consensus that career guidance is seen as an “add-on” service in both the secondary and post-secondary systems. This is an area for more research, deep thinking and experimentation.





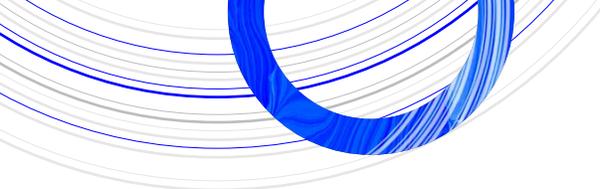
# Conclusion

## I From Tangled to Designed

The FSC is focused on strengthening Canada's skills development ecosystem so that Canadians can look to a future of meaningful and relevant lifelong learning opportunities. As part of that initiative, this paper drew on insights from the Responsive Career Pathways roundtables and from current research to review the readiness of career and employment services in Canada to engage in the transformational change required to establish responsive career pathways. It found that there is an accelerated need for high quality career and employment services as a result of the pandemic. The FSC is well positioned to broker the partnerships and support the projects that will lead to the development of coherent, connected, accessible and inclusive career pathways for all Canadians.

## I Key Findings

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| <b>The pandemic has fundamentally altered the Canadian workforce and economy.</b>       | The challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic include expanding inequity, an increasing number of displaced workers that need bridges to employment, a population that is unsure of growth sector opportunities or how to prepare for them and businesses that will require advice and support to upskill their current employees and define their future workforce needs. |
| <b>Canada's employment systems already faced challenges.</b>                            | Canada's career guidance systems are fragmented and need strengthening. This has led to a national career development model that is mostly reactionary ("fail first") and accessed when people find themselves in a state of crisis. This leaves individuals and businesses at a disadvantage, especially compared to countries with a more comprehensive approach.                |
| <b>Policy and system level changes are needed.</b>                                      | Developing a shared vision, mandate and operating framework for responsive career pathways and collaborating with employers are key elements for policy and system level change. However, it is crucial that such changes prioritize cultural awareness and inclusion.   |
| <b>Enabling infrastructure must be strengthened.</b>                                    | To advance responsive career pathways, infrastructural support is needed. This includes improved access to LMI; investment in developing practitioner capacity; and consistent integration of career guidance into K-12 and post-secondary level education.  |
| <b>Collaboration and transformation are key to building responsive career pathways.</b> | Federal, provincial and territorial leadership is needed to address the challenges of the existing fragmentary system of career and employment services. Every domain, from K-12 education to businesses and employers, will play key roles in creating a national framework for coherent, accessible and inclusive career pathways.   |



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