

# HIGHLIGHTS from JUNE 19th ROUNDTABLE



**Technology  
Careers...  
it's TIME!**

Applied Science  
Technologists & Technicians  
of British Columbia



# Roundtable on Technology Skills Shortage: Industry Takes Action

JUNE 19. 2007

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# Roundtable on Technology Skills Shortage: Industry Takes Action

## Roundtable HIGHLIGHTS

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## Roundtable on Technology Skills Shortage: Industry Takes Action

### Executive Summary

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Thirty-five senior industry representatives from construction, engineering, manufacturing, resource, technology and other companies joined the Honourable Colin Hansen, Minister of Economic Development and staff of the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC to identify priorities and solutions for addressing an increasing shortage of technology workers in British Columbia.

ASTTBC Executive Director John Leech, indicated that this Roundtable is an industry “call to action” and the result of a two-year process started in 2005 through the identification of challenges and priorities at ASTTBC’s *Building Careers in Technology* conference, where he made a commitment for ASTTBC to take leadership with others to tackle the issues before it is too late.

Chaired by Josh Blair, Senior Vice-President of HR Strategy and Business Support, TELUS and supported by Kerry Jothen, CEO of Human Capital Strategies and ASTTBC staff, the Roundtable started with a discussion on the technology skills shortage to identify: the #1 issue; the top 3 priorities; actions or solutions to be taken by industry and the #1 action to be taken by Government.

The key themes among the responses from participants were: *Increasing a sense of urgency for action among stakeholders and increasing awareness and promotion of technology careers among young people and those who influence them (e.g. parents, teachers, peers). Reforming curriculum and flexible program delivery of education and post-secondary education related to technology careers and increasing access to retraining, updating and lifelong learning among technology workers and workers in other careers.*

Honourable Colin Hansen, Minister of Economic Development provided keynote remarks, including:

- ❖ BC has recorded the lowest unemployment rates ever earlier this year, has created 370,000 next new jobs since 2001, and major projects in BC total \$124B compared to \$47B in 2001.
- ❖ One thing that threatens our continued economic growth is labour shortages – even with utilizing all 650,000 expected high school students by 2015, we’ll be short by more than 350,000 workers
- ❖ We really need partnerships – government in a supportive role (not lead); we need more flexibility in the workplace including access for Aboriginal people, accommodation for persons with disabilities, etc.
- ❖ 2010 Winter Games would be a great opportunity for ASTTBC to showcase technician and technologists success stories and careers.

Participants were asked to identify priority actions and solutions for the Technology Skills Action Plan. The #1 priority was clearly the need to *increase awareness and promote technology careers among young people* and others. Other priorities included: *Creating and making better use of technology occupational labour market information and supporting, retraining and retaining people already in the workforce. Adopting changes and innovative approaches and programs in the K-12 and Post-Secondary systems and making better use of immigrants, streamlining and fast-tracking foreign credential recognition* was quite topical.

Josh Blair thanked participants for their active participation and reiterated his and TELUS’ commitment to support the Technology Skills Action Plan and subsequent actions to bring it to life.

The immediate next steps will be:

- ❖ Distribution of a draft Technology Skills HR Strategy for feedback later this summer;
- ❖ The October 31 Technology Skills Shortage Roundtable at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue.

John Leech closed the day by thanking Josh, Kerry and all the industry participants for their valuable contribution and expressed hope that they and others will keep involved in the next steps of implementing the Action Plan and a long-term Technology Skills HR Strategy. Lastly, John implored industry leaders to stay involved to ensure that employers step up to the plate in participating in short and long term technology skills strategies,

# Roundtable on Technology Skills Shortage: Industry Takes Action

## Roundtable Highlights

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### 1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS & PURPOSE

**JOHN LEECH, ASCT CAE**

**Executive Director, Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC (ASTTBC)**

John welcomed 35 industry participants to the Roundtable and thanked them for taking time out of their busy schedules to attend this important event. John also welcomed the Minister of Economic Development, the Honourable Colin Hansen, who is attending for the first two hours of the morning meeting.

John indicated that this Roundtable and the Technology Skills Action Plan are the result of a two-year process started in 2005 through ASTTBC's *Building Careers in Technology* conference, where he heard of the problems and made a commitment for ASTTBC to take leadership with others to raise awareness and tackle the technology skills shortage issues. John added the following:

- ❖ We are facing a crisis in the making – a critical shortage of these technologists, technicians and technical specialists – which will only get worse without pre-emptive action.
- ❖ BC needs the participation of industry leaders and stakeholder representatives willing to invest the time, money and effort needed to build and implement a comprehensive broad strategic plan and supporting infrastructure required to ensure that BC employers have a sufficient supply of qualified technology workers well into the future.
- ❖ The time for action is now, particularly by industry leaders. Therefore, ASTTBC, in partnership with TELUS, has prepared a ten-point Technology Skills Action Plan and held this roundtable to engage industry leaders on what needs to be done to address the critical shortage of technology workers.

John introduced Josh Blair, Senior Vice-President of HR Strategy and Business Support, TELUS, the moderator of today's Roundtable.

**JOSH BLAIR**

**Senior Vice-President of HR Strategy and Business Support, TELUS**

Josh Blair explained that TELUS is pursuing two ways to compete: through technology and people. TELUS currently has 500 technologists and technicians. He attended the 2005 ASTTBC conference and realized that this is a real priority for TELUS and many other companies and industries.

More recently, Josh participated in a February, 2007 Canadian Council of Technologists and Technicians National Roundtable. This BC Roundtable is a good follow up to the national work, and presents an opportunity for ASTTBC and industry leaders to work together on a common challenge – the technology skills shortage.

Josh clarified that this Roundtable will focus on technologists, technicians and technical specialists, as well as the broader technology workforce. He introduced Kerry Jothen, CEO of Human Capital Strategies, who is assisting ASTTBC on its technology careers agenda.

**KERRY JOTHEN****Chief Executive Officer, Human Capital Strategies**

Kerry provided a brief summary of feedback to date on the Technology Skills Action Plan. ASTTBC can make a printed copy of this feedback available to anyone requesting it.

## **2. DISCUSSION: KEY ISSUES & SOLUTIONS REGARDING THE TECHNOLOGY SKILLS SHORTAGE**

To start the discussion off, Josh asked participants to consider the following questions regarding the technology skills shortage:

- ❖ What is the #1 issue?
- ❖ What should be the top 3 priorities?
- ❖ What actions or solutions should be added to the Technology Skills Action Plan?
- ❖ What is the #1 action to be taken by Government regarding these issues and priorities?

**The key themes among the responses to these questions from participants were:**

- 1. Increasing a sense of urgency for action among stakeholders**
- 2. Increasing awareness and promotion of technology careers among young people and those who influence them (e.g. parents, teachers, peers);**
- 3. Developing and making available technology-specific labour market information;**
- 4. Reforming curriculum and flexible program delivery of education and post-secondary education related to technology careers;**
- 5. Improving foreign credential recognition and making better use of the talents of immigrants; and,**
- 6. Increasing access to retraining, updating and lifelong learning among technology workers and workers in other careers.**

More specific examples of comments under these themes and others follow:

### **Urgency, Awareness and Promotion**

- ❖ We need to win the “hearts and minds” of young people
- ❖ Lack of info/awareness...be more complete e.g.: The 3<sup>rd</sup> option
- ❖ They need to see the education and career pathway (e.g. the DVD-*The Third Option*, has at least 40 of the jobs were in technology; the video is available at Rogers video for a two-day rental); just chasing kids isn't enough – there aren't enough of them and everyone's chasing them.
- ❖ Bring attention to problem
  - ... create a sense of urgency (Government/stakeholders)
  - ... strategy to move forward on raising awareness, solving critical issues
- ❖ Direction needed at HIGH SCHOOL... careers in technology/engineering
- ❖ Use the ACE-IT program, also use Junior Achievement
- ❖ A lot of existing programs exist that we could leverage. Example science fairs etc. we could do more, hiring a person and developing a provincewide program (unknown).
- ❖ Elementary. High School
  - Parent/Counselors
  - Students: retain on graduating
- ❖ Science-Tech
  - ‘fun’ > ‘career’
  - Champions to deliver the message

- ❖ Simplify message...must communicate/connect with students/parents
- ❖ Needs to be perceived as 'COOL' ... could stimulate interest in tech career
- ❖ Broader message
- ❖ Shifting media focus
  - Educating media

### **Education/Post-Secondary Education Changes**

- ❖ Curriculum developed to meet supply/demand
- ❖ Leadership in Education
  - Awareness
  - Math + sciences
  - Funding
  - Innovation – a must do
- ❖ Access to training...
  - New entrants
  - Continuing education
  - Lifelong learning
  - Cost of education/training
  - Perceived 'barriers'
- ❖ Mid-career people need support from Post Secondary Education (PSE)
- ❖ Use technology for PSE and lifelong learning
- ❖ Address policy obstacle in PSE in terms of how lifelong learning is not funded
- ❖ Co-op education: reinforce education with hands-on experience
- ❖ On-site visits/exposure to workplace/career opportunities...for HS students to find out preference

### **Immigrants**

- ❖ Foreign-trained... language, writing skills
- ❖ Supply: Immigration
  - Landed with professional credentials... tap into skill sets + assist with registration/integration
  - Matching skill sets with demand for labour
  - ESL... include technical language
  - Coaches, mentors...
- ❖ Retaining foreign-trained within 'team'... long-term (How to handle/assure?) to avoid 'firm or job hopping'
- ❖ Give information in source countries
- ❖ Connect with immigrant serving agencies (there are 400 across BC)

### **Retraining/Updating**

- ❖ Re-education/Re-training (new skills/'next' career)
- ❖ 'Support' for techs/engineers wishing to advance knowledge + skills: How/What?
- ❖ How to better utilize best/average techs' skills on the job
  - utilize English majors to do writing of proposals.
  - Pulling people to do work that traditionally has been done by engineers or techs.
  - We need to embrace new technologies and highly leverage our current techs
- ❖ Maybe focus on the utilization of techs in our business; rethink the model and how we utilize the professions
- ❖ We have a rich source of talent internally; they can see what the techs do and become interested and can move from there to a science or engineering role – it's critical to capture the ability of our current resources.

### **Demographics**

- ❖ Some employers indicated 55% or more of their workforces are about to retire
- ❖ 'Grey Power'... how to engage those who want to work

- ❖ Competency regardless of age

**Working Together**

- ❖ Work together as a team (technologists/technicians and engineers); collaboration of ASTTBC and APEGBC
- ❖ Partnerships essential
- ❖ Mobility
- ❖ Transferability
- ❖ Don't reinvent the wheel – learn from other successful programs

**Recruiting/Supply Sources**

- ❖ Demand for trained people is global (shifting demographics)
- ❖ Attracting people from other regions (outside BC)
- ❖ Supply - internal (BC), external (world), retaining competitive edge
- ❖ Increasing 'local' supply: education and on the job

**Other**

- ❖ The solution resides with us, not government
- ❖ Economic diversification requires skilled workers, new skills/knowledge
- ❖ TILMA: International Trade... short listing of firms needs to be clarified
- ❖ Technologists and technicians can be better used to increase productivity
- ❖ Support the recommendations/projects being developed within the "People Pillar" of the Provincial Technology Strategy
- ❖ We need to look broader than "technologists and technicians" – should be at all technology occupations

Josh summed up the discussion with a few points:

- ❖ Broad based, narrow-cast promotion
- ❖ Young people, mid-career workers, and "grey power"
- ❖ Look at how PSE is delivered
- ❖ Leverage global labour markets
- ❖ Learn from the trades on increasing awareness and visibility
- ❖ Partnerships and government are important

### **3. REMARKS BY HONOURABLE COLIN HANSEN, MINISTER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**THE HONOURABLE COLIN HANSEN  
Minister of Economic Development**

After listening to the preceding discussion, the Minister thanked ASTTBC for being invited and expressed interest in being at this Roundtable. Below are the highlights of his remarks:

- ❖ BC has recorded the lowest unemployment rates EVER
- ❖ BC has created 370,000 new jobs since 2001. That's a 20% increase and double China's job creation rate
- ❖ Major projects totaling \$124B compared to \$47B in 2001
- ❖ He clarified, in response to a question, that engineering companies can still short list under TILMA (Alberta-BC Trade Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement) as long as its done in a way that it is not discriminatory toward Alberta businesses; TILMA will eventually lead to automatic credential recognition between signatory provinces

- ❖ One thing that threatens our continued economic growth is labour shortages – even with utilizing all 650,000 expected high school students by 2015, we’d be short by more than 350,000 workers when we look at growth of 1 million job openings by then
- ❖ WorkBC has been created to work with industry and others to respond to these challenges – it has five strategic areas
- ❖ His Ministry held a workshop with all regulatory bodies yesterday on how to speed up the foreign credentialing process – “*we are making \$500,000 available to help regulators achieve this*”
- ❖ We really need partnerships – government in a supportive role (not lead); we need more flexibility in the workplace including access for Aboriginal people, accommodation for persons with disabilities, etc.
- ❖ How are we looking at educating our technicians and technologists of the future – ASTTBC should look at this
- ❖ We don’t need more bricks and mortar – we need things like online learning – trades training is leading the way on this – what better group than ASTTBC to do this for technology education
- ❖ 2010 Winter Games will allow BC to showcase all of its strengths – a springboard – this would be a great opportunity for ASTTBC to showcase technician and technologists success stories and careers

#### **4. CONCLUDING REMARKS BY MINISTER HANSEN**

##### **THE HONOURABLE COLIN HANSEN**

Prior to departing the Roundtable, the Minister provided the following concluding remarks:

- ❖ Interprovincial immigration – during 1995-2000, we lost 50,000 people; in the last 4 years we have gained 20,000
- ❖ A lot of employers are not aware of the growing, successful BC Provincial Nominee Program
- ❖ I have had discussions with federal Minister Monte Solberg and am hopeful he will follow up on his commitment to streamline the temporary worker permit process; I also want to work with him on facilitating the transition from work permit to landed immigrant status via the Provincial Nominee Program
- ❖ I am interested in learning more from you about impediments to post-secondary education flexibility/responsiveness

The Minister thanked John, ASTTBC and all industry participants for the useful Roundtable, and he looks forward to hearing about the next steps, including working with his Ministry and others.

##### **JOHN LEECH**

John thanked the Minister and Mark Gillis of the Ministry of Economic Development for their contribution to the meeting and making the time to attend for longer than anticipated. He committed to connecting with them on the progress regarding today’s Roundtable and the Technology Skills Action Plan.

#### **5. DISCUSSION: ACTION PLAN AND ROUNDTABLE REMARKS**

Josh went around the table and asked each participant to identify priority actions and solutions vis-à-vis the Technology Skills Action Plan. A short summary of the key points and common themes is below.

The #1 priority was clearly the need to increase awareness and promote technology careers among young people and others. This priority was reflected in the following examples of comments:

- ❖ Technologist and technician careers are INVISIBLE
- ❖ Raise profile of technology careers; they aren't that cool to youth – they don't know what engineers/techs do; create excitement so that “it's cool to be a technologist and there's plenty of opportunities; we use 100 technologists all in a support role; technologists and technicians are squeezed between engineers and trade (focus on earnings) – need to change the image problem
- ❖ Promotion is happening across sectors – how do we get ours to stand out
- ❖ Get business/industry/entrepreneurs into schools; long term solutions have to start now; teachers are important to profile
- ❖ Need to promote in high schools that “science is fun”
- ❖ Put out the message that technology careers are cool and why: fantastic projects and products, huge career opportunities, young generation are big picture thinkers now – interested in sustainability; this is about creating a sustainable future for the labour market, BC, Canada, the world
- ❖ How to make our industry attractive; get message into schools at a younger age; how to make the people pie big, not take from one another
- ❖ Need to understand the Gen X and Y differences and reflect in promotion
- ❖ Raising profile of people now working – save the ‘good news’... dispel the ‘myth’/‘unknown’ (real world experiences)
- ❖ Encourage interest in math + sciences... ‘no fear’
- ❖ Get the message out – industry leaders describing opportunities to young people and others
- ❖ Educate – Inform – Promote... ‘EIP’... as integrated effort
- ❖ Promote a technology culture; promote technologists and technicians as part of a broader strategy and set of careers; don't duplicate, focus on gaps
- ❖ Instant gratification; get paid right away in the trades and see something built right away; in technology careers, one has to make an investment in education first; tech careers need its own version of Mike Holmes

A related priority was creating and making better use of technology occupational labour market information:

- ❖ LMI – estimate of supply and demand – translate into awareness to youth, counselors and parents; use technology (e.g. DVD) to talk to theme; don't use “old” presenters
- ❖ Better information... on all technology careers

Certain changes, approaches and programs in the K-12 and Post-Secondary systems were also a priority:

- ❖ High school curriculum... breaking the ‘mould’
- ❖ PSE institutions don't talk to one another
- ❖ Apprenticeships and co-ops are liked by youth because they are hands on
- ❖ Lack of relevance of high school course to students' career interests; they are more informed on career options but are not getting advice (i.e. overwhelmed with information); motivated by instant gratification; two extreme options typically – vocation path or university
- ❖ In Alberta, industry has made a huge investment in PSE through equipment in labs, etc.; high school curriculum is too rigid
- ❖ Scared off by cost of PSE education – need more industry co-op models so the student learns and earns income
- ❖ Education/information/promotion all in one strategy; industry direct input into PSE curriculum; support current and potential workers 50-60% of graduates are working in a different field than in which they've been trained for
- ❖ Not just a university degree, that's a mindset we need to change – show it's not the only way to be cool; also 2<sup>nd</sup> career people; productivity – how can we use technologists and technicians to

improve it; redeploying laid off workers in other parts of BC (e.g. Air Canada layoffs of mechanics)

Making better use of immigrants and streamlining and fast-tracking foreign credential recognition was quite topical:

- ❖ Core standards/transferability of foreign-trained techs... e.g. BCIT, offshore education/educators
- ❖ Immigration - remove barriers
  - expedite integration
- ❖ Better qualified foreign workers – tremendous opportunity for BCIT to partner with source countries to equip them with Canadian skills before coming to Canada
- ❖ More immediate solutions now; accreditation process for foreign workers needs to be fast-tracked

Another priority for action was people already in the workforce:

- ❖ Retainable people with skills (long term)... evolution/retraining
- ❖ Immediate vs. long term; it is possible to do Math and do a tech career; financial barriers to 26-27 year olds who finally focus on a career; problem with the way Math and Science are taught in high school; whole range of technologies to choose from; students are looking for professionals that allow them to progress
- ❖ People changing career paths
  - Voluntarily
  - Let go/downsizing
- ❖ Supply-demand – need for more retraining opportunities and flexibility of delivery (e.g. part-time, online, etc.)

Other comments referred to the context and constant change, etc.:

- ❖ The challenge of incredible, rapid changes in technology (future skills and careers) and educating parents
- ❖ The need for a flexible employment environment (re retention)
- ❖ Disconnect (remove) between technology + engineering
- ❖ Maximizing the ROI of technology education and careers
- ❖ Need to do a cost-benefit analysis of technology careers and strategy
- ❖ Need a broad scope in terms of types of technology careers, not just technologists and technicians

## 6. WRAP UP & NEXT STEPS

### JOSH BLAIR

Josh thanked participants for their active participation. He noted the need to create some type of technology leadership body following the event. Josh summarized the key priorities arising from the roundtable discussion as follows:

- ❖ Awareness and promotion of technology careers (including establishing a sense of urgency);
- ❖ The need for a post-secondary education strategy;
- ❖ Streamlining and increasing foreign credential recognition of internationally trained workers;
- ❖ The need for all stakeholders to partner and collaborate; and,
- ❖ Industry involvement and action in the above four areas.

Josh reiterated his and TELUS' commitment to continuing to support the Technology Skills Action Plan and subsequent actions to bring it to life.

**JOHN LEECH**

John thanked Josh for his contribution and TELUS for its co-sponsorship of the Roundtable and their continuing support and participation.

John also thanked all industry participants for their valuable contribution and expressed hope that they and others will keep involved in the next steps of implementing the Action Plan and a long-term Technology Skills HR Strategy. He also urged the BC Technology Industries Association to help ASTTBC ensure a broadened, integrated strategy for technology careers.

The immediate next steps will be:

- ❖ Distribution of a Roundtable meeting summary within a few weeks;
- ❖ Distribution of a draft Technology Skills HR Strategy for feedback later this summer;
- ❖ The October 31 Technology Skills Shortage Roundtable at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue.

John also mentioned ASTTBC will be launching “TechPRO” – a website with profiles of technologists and technicians – and “TechACTion.” The latter initiative will be a promotional media campaign with Black Press and the Vancouver Sun, and ASTTBC is looking for more partners.

Lastly, John encouraged industry leaders to stay involved to ensure that employers step up to the plate in participating in short and long term technology skills strategies.

**Roundtable Attendees**

Aplin & Martin Consultants Ltd.	P.J. (Phil) Cunnington, PEng	Engineering Manager
Associated Engineering	Kerry Rudd, PEng	President and CEO
ASTTBC	John Leech, ASCT, CAE	Executive Director
Ballard Power	Pete Stickler	VP Human Resources
BC Chamber of Commerce	Daren Hancott, PhD	Chair
BC Construction Association	Manley McLachlan	President - CEO
BC Hydro	Sukh Salh	Recruitment Manager
BC Innovation Council	Matthew Watson	Chief Executive Officer
BCTIA	Rob Cruickshank	President
Business Council of British Columbia	Ed Wong	Vice President - Education Partnerships
Cascade Aerospace	Don Lundquist	Director of Human Resources
CH2M HILL Canada Ltd.	Tamara Lord, CHRP	Staff Planning Manager
Consulting Engineers of British Columbia	Glenn Martin	Executive Director
Forsite	John Drew, RPF (Partner)	President and General Manager
Fransen Engineering Ltd.	Harold Boer, ASCT	Manager, Projects & Business Development
Golder Associates Ltd.	Richard Butler, PEng	Senior Principal
Independent Contractors & Businesses Association of BC	Philip Hochstein	President
Human Capital Strategies	Kerry Jothen	President and CEO
MacDonald, Dettwiler and Associates Ltd.	Bob Campbell, PEng	Vice President, Strategic Initiatives
McElhanney	Chris Newcomb, PEng	President
Metro Testing Laboratories	Harry Watson, CTech	President
Ministry of Economic Development	Hon. Colin Hansen	Minister of Economic Development
Ministry of Economic Development	Marc Andrew	Executive Assistant to the Minister
Ministry of Economic Development	MarK Gillis	Director, Labour Market Development Branch
Morrow Environmental	Chris Lach, PEng, MBA	Regional Manager
Omicron Building Solutions	Tim Loo, PEng, PE, CP	Principal
Read Jones Christofferson	Renato Camporese, PEng, StructEng	Principal
Stantec, Inc	Alan Hartley, MAIBC, MRAIC	Senior Principal
TELUS	Josh Blair, PEng	Senior Vice President - HR Strategy & Business Support
Triangle Resources Incorporated	R.A.(Al) Gorley, RPF	President
UMA Engineering Ltd.	Francois Morton	Vice President
Urban Systems	Kirk McIntosh, CTech	Senior Design Technician
Vancouver Board of Trade	Bernard Magnan, CMC, CMA	Incoming Asst Managing Director and Chief Economist
VANOC	Ward Chapin	Chief Information Officer
Westmar Consultants Inc.	Stanley Cowdell, PEng	President
	Ralph Turfus	
ASTTBC	Cindy Aitken	Manager, Events
ASTTBC	Wendy Lawson, BBA	Manager, Marketing
ASTTBC	Richard Mayer, ASCT	Manager, Corporate Identity
Black Press	Melissa Copeland	National Account Manager
Black Press	Jeff Nagel	Technology Reporter

**For additional information...**

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