



CONESTOGA
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CONESTOGA COLLEGE'S VISION FOR PANDEMIC RECOVERY IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

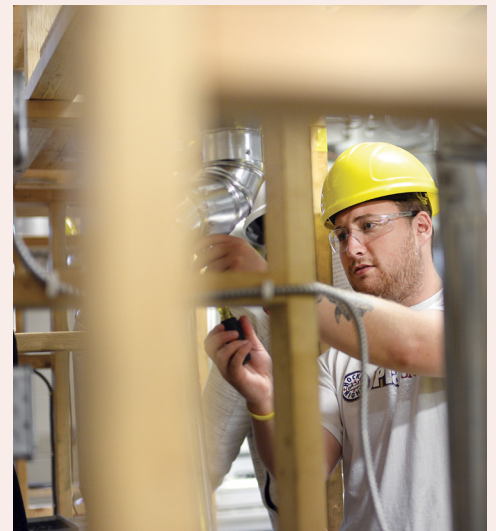
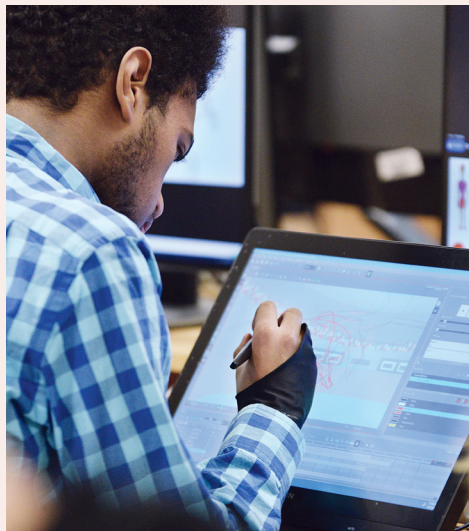


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning (Conestoga) is pleased to submit our vision for growth in Southwestern Ontario. We look forward to working in close collaboration with the Government of Ontario, municipalities, post-secondary institutions, and local employers to create opportunities to build the talent and workforce that supports continued economic growth and prosperity for Ontario.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and its economic impacts, were felt across the country and Ontario. The Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo (KCW) region was no exception. Like the rest of Ontario, the KCW region needs to turn its attention to the economic recovery from the pandemic. This means establishing policies at the municipal, regional, and – importantly – provincial level to enable recovery and unlock economic growth beyond just simply relaxing public health restrictions and re-opening the economy.

However, the KCW region's role in Ontario's recovery goes beyond its own borders. This

region, and the Toronto-Waterloo corridor more generally, have been a driver of Ontario's economic engine for the better part of two decades. The region has consistently experienced above average job growth in the past as it routinely fosters the growth of new tech companies. With the right policies put in place, the KCW region can lead Ontario's recovery once again, create good paying jobs, and – partly thanks to work-from-home capabilities – benefit the whole of the Southwestern Ontario region and beyond.

In this paper, we evaluate the KCW region's impressive economic recovery from the 2008/2009 recession compared to its neighbours and how, when fostered properly, the KCW region can drive growth across the whole of Southwestern Ontario. Using this history, we apply the economic lessons from the pandemic to conclude that provincial investments and policy changes in the KCW region can once again kickstart the province's economic recovery and create well-paying, lasting jobs across the Southwest.

Those investments and policy changes centre around the need for additional education and training, which Conestoga is perfectly situated to deliver because of its deep ties to the community and its track record of continued success. Those investments include:



Creating a phased approach to three-year bachelor's degrees and applied master's degrees that would allow workers to become certified and graduate quicker in the fields that are most in-demand in the region.



Investing \$26 million in Conestoga's proposed Skilled Trades Training Centre in Cambridge to create 322,000 square feet of dedicated classroom and learning space to help close the skilled trades gap in the region.



Establishing a creative industries hub in the KCW region to support the burgeoning film, media, and arts industries with locally trained talent.

Lessons from the 2008/09 Recession

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact was both sharper and deeper than the 08/09 recession though much shorter than previous recessions

To fully appreciate the region's ability to lead the economic recovery, it is worth taking a look back at the last significant recession in Ontario and the region's emergence from it. The 2008/2009 recession was admittedly a different type of recession than the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Waterloo Region lost 16,500 jobs at the height of the pandemic compared to only 5,700 jobs in the 08-09 recession.¹ Despite that large number, the unemployment rate in Waterloo Region was comparable over the two recessions as the COVID-19 pandemic saw an average 9.6% unemployment rate in the region compared to a 9.7% rate in 08/09. It is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic's impact was both sharper and deeper than the 08/09 recession though much shorter than previous recessions, depending on the sector.² However, the experience in KCW differs from elsewhere, as did its recovery.

Following the 08/09 recession, KCW did exceptionally well relative to its peers. By the time the 2016 census was held, employment in the region was 64.3% compared to a provincial average of 59.9%.³ Two out of every three people over 15 years of age in the region



were employed. The professional, scientific, and technical services industries boomed, growing by almost 35% between 2008 and 2016, including employing the third-highest proportion of computer and information systems professionals in Canada.⁴ The number of individuals without a high school diploma dropped while the number with a college certificate or diploma in the region increased by nearly 25%. Graduates living in Waterloo were among the most likely in the country to have studied a STEM subject (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) that was not only in high demand, but also led to well-paying careers and business creation.⁵

1. Brown, D. (2021). Waterloo region lost 3 times more jobs in 1st year of COVID than during 2009 recession. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/waterloo-region-job-losses-2020-1.5986016>

2. Bharti, B. (20210). Business Cycle Council declares end of COVID-19 recession, says recovery is ongoing. Retrieved from <https://financialpost.com/news/economy/business-cycle-council-declares-end-of-covid-19-recession-says-recovery-is-ongoing>

3. Region of Waterloo. (2016). Census Bulletin Employment and Education. Retrieved from <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/regional-government/resources/Census/Census-Bulletin-9-Employment-and-Education-ACCESS.pdf>

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

It should be noted that this experience was not shared across the province. Other than Toronto and Ottawa – which benefit from the location of the nation's major and capital markets– only the Guelph, Oshawa, and KCW census metropolitan areas (CMAs) experienced job creation rates above the national average.⁶ In fact, each of these three CMAs saw employment increases of approximately 10% between 2008 and 2016 compared to a national average of only 5.8%.⁷ Their unemployment rates also were below their pre-recession levels, something that no other CMA outside of Toronto or Ottawa could claim.⁸ Lastly, both the KCW and Guelph CMAs outpaced the entire province, including Toronto and Ottawa, on employment income growth, meaning people were not only employed at a higher rate but were also making more money than workers elsewhere.⁹ Higher wages in these areas result in higher tax revenue collected by

the province - revenue that can be used to offset economic concerns in other CMAs experiencing below average employment rates and a prolonged economic recovery.

In nearby CMAs, the situation was much bleaker. By the time the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Northern Ontario still hadn't returned to pre-08/09 recession levels of employment.¹⁰ The same could be said up until 2015 for Southwestern Ontario and Eastern Ontario.¹¹ The Sudbury CMA, for example, had negative job growth between 2008 and 2018, meaning fewer people were employed in the region a decade on from the recession than prior.¹² Results in the rest of Southwestern Ontario were similar, with London seeing a 1% decline in employment between 2008 and 2016 and Sarnia seeing a dramatic 20.7% decline.¹³ The unemployment

6. Lafleur, S. (2017). Uneven recovery: much of Ontario still hasn't fully recovered from the 2008 recession. Retrieved from <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/uneven-recovery-much-of-ontario-still-hasnt-fully-recovered-from-the-2008-recession.pdf> iv.

7. Ibid., 12.

8. Ibid., 13.

9. Ibid., 16.

10. Keown, M. K. (2020). Toronto and Ottawa get the jobs, Sudbury none. Retrieved from <https://www.thesudburystar.com/news/local-news/toronto-and-ottawa-get-the-jobs-sudbury-none>

11. Fraser Institute. (2017). Employment in northern Ontario below pre-recession levels. Retrieved from <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/blogs/employment-in-northern-ontario-below-pre-recession-levels>

12. Keown, M. K. (2020). Toronto and Ottawa get the jobs, Sudbury none. Retrieved from <https://www.thesudburystar.com/news/local-news/toronto-and-ottawa-get-the-jobs-sudbury-none>

rate in every CMA in Southwestern Ontario other than Leamington trailed the provincial average and every CMA in Southwestern Ontario saw per-capita employment income grow less rapidly than the provincial average.¹⁴

Essentially, many areas in Southwestern Ontario simply did not recover from the 08/09 recession. Meanwhile, the KCW region and its surrounding CMAs had the opposite experience, serving as a primary driver of Ontario's economic recovery along with Toronto and Ottawa following the last recession. Given that work-from-home technology has now permeated a number of sectors, allowing economic benefit to travel even farther from the office than in 2008/09, it is clear that the province should look to KCW to lead Southwestern Ontario's economic recovery once again.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Southwestern Ontario

Before diving into examples of the policy solutions that the provincial government could bring to the table, it is important to evaluate the context around the COVID-19-caused recession and how it differs from 08/09. Doing so will allow for better solutions and a more immediate recovery.

First, the COVID-19 recession came in waves, in conjunction with waves of the pandemic. Though the pandemic arguably became more serious as waves went on due to variants and faster rates of spread, the largest economic shock was at the immediate onset of the pandemic when governments, businesses, and citizens alike did not know how serious a threat the COVID-19 virus was. During the first wave of the pandemic, the economy was hit hard. In early 2020, the unemployment rate in KCW

escalated from 5.5% in February to 10.3% in May, a 4.8% increase in three months.¹⁵ A similar picture played out across Ontario with nearby CMAs such as Brantford, London, and Guelph experiencing unemployment rate increases between February and May of 6.6%, 6.8%, and 7.8%, respectively.¹⁶

Over the next several months, public health restrictions eased and tightened, sending unemployment on a similar up-and-down trajectory. However, during this time a few interesting trends emerged. Many businesses transitioned to full-time work-from-home setups in order to keep operating safely. Those businesses were primarily in industries that were already technology-reliant. Even in the worst period of the pandemic, economically speaking, the KCW region gained 3,200 jobs in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector.¹⁷ This sector, which already employed almost 9% of the region's population, proved that it was relatively impervious to the economic impacts of public health restrictions and lockdowns. Of course, this is a key lesson for the recovery of the region and Southwestern Ontario as these companies have had limited capital interruptions and are better poised to make future investments in growth than those recovering from prolonged economic hardship. Only Ottawa and Toronto had a higher proportion of their population employed in this professional services cluster and are coincidentally the only CMAs ahead of the KCW region in growth since 2008, partly due to their ability to transcend recessions including the COVID-19 recession.¹⁸

13. Lafleur, S. (2017). Uneven recovery: much of Ontario still hasn't fully recovered from the 2008 recession. Retrieved from <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/uneven-recovery-much-of-ontario-still-hasnt-fully-recovered-from-the-2008-recession.pdf>. 18.

14. Ibid., 19 and 20.

15. Financial Accountability Office of Ontario. (2020). Ontario's Regional Labour Markets During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved from <https://www.fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/labour-market-06-2020#CMA-KCW>

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.



“Businesses who are experiencing stable or accelerated growth will drive short term job and wealth creation. These companies are most likely to absorb office vacancies in the short term. Collectively, these jobs can provide much needed consumer spending to support businesses who’ve been negatively impacted the most.” – Make it Kitchener Recovery Plan

Some of those sectors in the KCW region that experienced more difficult economic times at the onset of the pandemic include the general services sector which lost 5,400 jobs, another 4,200 jobs lost in the accommodation and food services sector, and another 2,600 in wholesale and retail trade.¹⁹ Though there were job losses in almost every sector early on, these areas in particular still have not properly recovered at the time of writing.²⁰ Conversely, the manufacturing sector across Ontario has fully recovered from the Spring 2020 job recession.²¹ As of July 2021, only Brantford, Thunder Bay, and Peterborough had lower unemployment rates than the KCW region, though each of those are smaller communities with a lower participation rate. In fact, across the entire province, the employment rate of more than 68% in KCW only trails three cities, one being Ottawa.²² Furthermore, the KCW region is struggling to find workers. At an April 2021 job fair hosted by local tech-driven employment hub Communitech, organizers noted that local companies had 2,777 job openings ready to be filled.²³

Though these statistics may lead one to conclude that KCW is well on its way to recovery compared to other parts of the province, the key takeaway is in fact a different one. Given KCW’s strong economic recovery post-recession, both in 08/09 and in the midst of COVID-19, it stands to reason that KCW, along with places like Toronto and Ottawa, forms the engine that drives the provincial economy. Though the government should prioritize diversifying the economy in the long-term, the only way to get the levels of economic growth and employment needed to generate the tax revenue to stimulate underperforming economies throughout the Southwestern Ontario region is to provide support for the industries that are ready to grow. That means removing regulatory barriers, making financial investments where warranted, and using local partners – such as a strong regional college like Conestoga – to unlock that growth potential.

19. Ibid.

20. City of Kitchener. (2021). MIKRecovery: Lift Up The Most. Retrieved from https://www.makeitkitchener.ca/mik-2-recovery-framework-final-draft-high-res-pdf?utm_source=kitchenertoday.com&utm_campaign=kitchenertoday.com&utm_medium=referral, 4.

21. Statistics Canada. (2021). Labour Force Survey, July 2021. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210806/dq210806a-eng.htm>

22. Statistics Canada. (2021). Table 7: Labour force characteristics by census metropolitan area, three-month moving average, seasonally adjusted. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210806/t007a-eng.htm>

23. Crowley, Kevin. (2021). Tech Jobs Abound, Yet Talent Shortages Persist. Retrieved from <http://news.communitech.ca/tech-jobs-abound-yet-talent-shortages-persist/>

Regional Context – Conestoga

If regional growth, increased employment, and economic activity are the goals, utilizing the college system, and in particular Conestoga in KCW, is the most viable path forward. A recent economic study of the region's employment base found that Conestoga is responsible for educating or training at least 48% of the local workforce in the Region (defined as Waterloo Region, Guelph, and Stratford).²⁴ When continuing education and corporate training courses are included, the number rises from 48% to 54.6%.²⁵ The 73,874 graduates of Conestoga in the region make up nearly 14% of the entire adult population in the area, including more than 3,500 local business owners and another 1,700 business owners elsewhere in the province.²⁶

These graduates are employed and generating economic activity across Southwestern Ontario, thereby making the case for ongoing investment in the college to support the area's continued growth. If the region observed is broadened to include the catchment area (rural parts) surrounding Waterloo Region and the Counties of Huron, Perth, and Wellington, the total number of Conestoga graduates in the area rises to more than 82,500.²⁷ This level of local employment has remained consistent for a number of years and the local Conestoga-derived workforce contributes more than \$2.3 billion every year into the Ontario economy. Province-wide, that number increases to more than \$3.4 billion.²⁸

Given that studies have shown most students do not travel further than 80 kilometre to attend college, it is logical to assume that these graduates not only chose to live in the region but are also likely from the region as well, with the obvious exception of international students.²⁹ Therefore, if the government is looking to foster economic growth in Southwestern Ontario, it should do so in the region that has pent up employment capacity, a strong history of recovery from economic shocks, the ability to lift up neighbouring jurisdictions, and a strong history of both recruiting local students and helping them integrate into the local economy. Put succinctly, a proper economic recovery plan for Southwestern Ontario should primarily focus on using the KCW region, and specifically Conestoga, as the region's catalyst for growth.

It is also worth noting Conestoga's growing presence in areas surrounding the KCW region such as Brantford and Milton, where the college has been able to respond to rapidly growing and evolving local workforce needs. For example, according to census data, Milton grew by 30.5% between 2011 and 2016.³⁰ Labour market research shows substantial projected growth in Milton for a wide range of professions by 2028, such as a 34% increase for registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses and a 35% increase for data administrators.³¹ A large proportion of Milton's current and future workforce needs reflect the specific skills

24. Smith, L. (2017). Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning Adapting for Prosperity II 2016 Update. Retrieved from N/A, 5.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid and Ibid., 6.

27. Ibid., 11.

28. Ibid., 6.

29. Frenette, M. (2004). Access to College and University: Does Distance Matter? Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23546088_Access_to_College_and_University_Does_Distance_Matter, 427-443.

30. Statistics Canada. (2016). Census Profile, 2016 Census. Milton, Town [Census subdivision], Ontario and Halton, Regional municipality [Census division], Ontario. Retrieved from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=3524009&Geo2=CD&Code2=3524&SearchText=milton&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0>

31. Phelps, Connie, Hay, Fraser, and McRae, Sam. (2020). Demographic Profile & Labour Market Report. Retrieved from N/A.

and knowledge acquired through college programming, reinforcing the importance of Conestoga establishing a local college campus to provide opportunities for area employers to access the talent they need to sustain and build their businesses. Conestoga brings a track record of adapting to evolving workforce needs by drawing on the expertise and insights of local employers to develop and refine programming. Program Advisory Committees, comprised of leaders in their fields, also play a key role

in development and review processes for all full-time programs. Conestoga's continued expansion in rapidly growing areas such as Brantford and Milton can be expected to generate similar types of economic activity to what has been seen in KCW. Therefore, Conestoga's vision for growth in Southwestern Ontario also considers these rapidly growing areas to maximize the impacts of regional investments.

WHY CONESTOGA?



Conestoga is a leader in career-focused education and applied research, supporting industry and community partners in their efforts to innovate, enhance productivity, and remain competitive in an increasingly complex global economy. Serving a growing network of dynamic communities across Southwestern Ontario, the college has an outstanding track record of working with its partners to meet workforce needs now and into the future, while providing opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds and circumstances to adapt, develop new skills, and build successful careers. Conestoga's vision is to be a recognized leader in applied learning and research that enables student success in meeting workforce demands.

Conestoga is among Ontario's fastest-growing colleges and has an established presence in Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Brantford, Guelph, Ingersoll, and Stratford, with plans to establish a full campus in Milton soon. Each campus delivers programming targeted to meet the needs of the communities it serves. Some of Conestoga's strengths include:

- Ranked among Canada's top research colleges supporting industry, workforce, and community innovation needs while providing opportunities for students to develop entrepreneurial skills and career-readiness.
- Established strengths in engineering and technology-related programming, from

foundational programming to Ontario's only college-based engineering degrees accredited by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB), the same accreditation sought by university engineering programs.

- Strong industry and community partnerships, including established relationships with major employers such as Toyota and Linamar.
- Nimble program development and approval processes that provide the agility to quickly respond to changing industry needs.
- Comprehensive range of career-focused programming developed with input from almost 1,000 industry and community leaders through Program Advisory Committees.
- Established leadership in the delivery of trades and apprenticeship programming across an array of disciplines that can help address existing shortages and support major companies in their efforts to grow and stay competitive.
- Long history of successful collaboration and outreach initiatives with local school boards for the delivery of Dual Credit, the School College Work Initiative, and related programming.
- Commitment to accessible programming and pathways that allow all learners to achieve their potential.

Building upon these strengths, Conestoga brings a track record of preparing employment-ready graduates. In 2019-2020, Conestoga's graduation rate was 77%, 7% higher than the provincial average.³² Not only are Conestoga's students graduating at a higher rate, but they are also putting their credentials to good use. The most recent provincial key performance

indicator data show that more than 88% of graduates obtained employment within six months of graduation.³³ Almost 87% of students indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied that their program was providing skills and knowledge that would help them achieve their career goals.³⁴ These strong outcomes are reflective of Conestoga's commitment to excellence and continuous improvement in programming, facilities, and student experience.

Conestoga's growth in recent years is another indicator of its ability to meet local needs of the community. The Cambridge campus opened in 2011 is home to Conestoga's School of Engineering, Trades & Technology – featuring Ontario's only college-based accredited engineering degrees as well as the Institute for Food Processing Technology, uniquely designed to meet the needs of the food and beverage manufacturing industry. In 2016, Conestoga initiated the major expansion and renovation of its Waterloo Campus, creating an additional 150,000 square feet of classroom, lab, and student space. The renovated campus includes state-of-the-art culinary and hospitality labs, a newly expanded and student-run restaurant open to the public, and technology-enabled classrooms. Additionally, the campus includes a Welcome Centre that provides access to programming and services for full and part-time students, newcomers to Canada, and individuals seeking career counselling or job search support. In 2018, Conestoga expanded programming in Brantford. Initiatives included renovating a childcare centre to create a learning space for ECE students and a partnership with Six Nations for childcare services. Conestoga also leases space in Brant County to provide opportunities for trades and related programs, such as heavy equipment

32. Colleges Ontario. (2020). Key Performance Indicators. Retrieved from https://cdn.agilitycms.com/colleges-ontario/documents-library/document-files/2018-19%20KPI%20results_20190920202722_0.pdf

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

operators and electrical and automotive programs that train local students for high demand jobs. Finally, in 2021, the Ontario Government supported Conestoga's proposal to develop a state-of-the-art fully integrated Milton campus through a multi-phased approach to development.

Conestoga now serves more than 50,000 learners each year. The college supports learners from all backgrounds, including youth, local and international university graduates, the

unemployed or underemployed, newcomers to Canada, and those from traditionally underserved populations. Conestoga supports these groups by providing the skills and knowledge that help them launch successful futures and contribute to the well-being and prosperity of their communities. Bringing this employment-ready approach to help drive local economies is integral to Conestoga's vision for growth in Ontario.

The following proposal outlines innovative programming solutions that, with the government's support, Conestoga is ready to spearhead in order to drive continued growth and prosperity in Ontario. These include:



A Phased Approach to Three-Year Bachelor's Degrees and Applied Master's Degrees



Establishing a Creative Industries Hub in Waterloo Region



Developing a Skilled Trades Training Centre in Cambridge



A PHASED APPROACH TO THREE-YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREES AND APPLIED MASTER'S DEGREES

Ontario is the only province with a distinct credential title and provincial learning outcome standard for three-year post-secondary programs. Whereas students in Ontario are awarded an advanced diploma for completing a three-year college program, most post-secondary institutions around the world award degrees. Furthermore, other provinces award an advanced diploma for what in Ontario would be a graduate certificate program.³⁵ In October 2012, Colleges Ontario, the umbrella organization representing the province's 24 public colleges, advocated for three-year baccalaureate degrees "in areas of study in demand by students, industry, communities and the economy."³⁶ A supporting study looked at 12 advanced diplomas and found that they met or with minor changes could meet the Ontario Qualifications Framework's degree standards for a bachelor's degree.³⁷ Given the alignment between advanced diploma programming and degrees, there was always a strong argument to be made for authorizing colleges to award three-year bachelor's degrees. COVID-19 has shown just what a missed opportunity this was for Ontario.

The recent economic crisis has caused more than one million job losses in Ontario – for some, these losses were permanent as digital transformation was accelerated in workplaces and some jobs became obsolete.³⁸ Workers needed to rapidly reskill and upskill themselves, and companies urgently needed specialized

skills in high priority sectors such as healthcare and tech. Access to specialized three-year bachelor's and master's degrees could provide young workers with the qualifications and employment-ready skills to meet these workforce needs, much quicker than the existing traditional routes of combining theoretical degrees with applied post-graduate programming and experiential learning opportunities. Three-year bachelor's degrees or master's degrees could integrate all these elements together.

In July 2021, Conestoga conducted an alumni survey to gauge alumni support and demand for three-year bachelor's degrees and degrees in general. Responses were received from 1,038 Conestoga graduates who completed a diploma or advanced diploma since 2015 – of whom 93% currently work in Ontario. The findings demonstrate the preference for degree qualifications, with more than half of respondents (52%) feeling that it is "important" or "very important" for a job applicant to have a degree for an entry level position in their industry/sector. Degree qualifications also play a role in worker advancement, as they can be perceived as stronger qualifications when determining promotions and raises. Nearly two-thirds (61%) of respondents feel that employees in their industry/sector "sometimes" or "often" face barriers to advancement if they do not have a bachelor's degree.³⁹

35. Skolnik, M. L. (2020). Ontario Colleges in a Comparative Perspective. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344446083_Skolnik_Michael_L_2020_Ontario_Colleges_in_a_Comparative_Perspective_Toronto_Centre_for_the_Study_of_Canadian_and_International_Higher_Education_OISE-University_of_Toronto

36. Colleges Ontario. (2012). Empowering Ontario: transforming higher education in the 21st century. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED573968.pdf>

37. Skolnik, M. L. (2020). Ontario Colleges in a Comparative Perspective. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344446083_Skolnik_Michael_L_2020_Ontario_Colleges_in_a_Comparative_Perspective_Toronto_Centre_for_the_Study_of_Canadian_and_International_Higher_Education_OISE-University_of_Toronto

38. Declerq Katherine. (2020). More than one million jobs lost in Ontario since pandemic was declared. Retrieved from <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/more-than-one-million-jobs-lost-in-ontario-since-pandemic-was-declared-1.4970777>

39. Conestoga. (2021). Alumni Survey – 3 Year Degrees. Retrieved from N/A.



A greater insight was regarding the extent that students will pursue further education to secure a degree qualification. One in five of respondents had pursued a bachelor's degree since they graduated from college, one in six plan to pursue one in the future, and one in four are considering the option.⁴⁰ Three-year bachelor's degrees can have a considerable impact on these statistics, as students may not feel the need to pursue another bachelor's degree and take time away from the workforce. Alternatively, this can also give students greater options to pursue master's degrees. Allowing colleges to provide master's degrees to diploma or degree holders creates further opportunities for workers to specialize in applied study areas that respond to specific workforce demands in their local area.

Colleges are well distributed across the province and increasingly attract local students who may

face geographic, financial, or other barriers to university education. This allows for colleges collectively to have broad geographic reach. A program that provides local students with a degree while getting them into the workforce faster can address a key unmet need for many of these students. Furthermore, Conestoga's strong community networks enable it to respond rapidly to local economic and labour force needs. Employers and Ontario's economy also stand to immensely benefit from three-year bachelor's and master's degrees for college students. Colleges Ontario's 2019-2020 pre-budget submission emphasized that at a minimum, eliminating the caps or limits on the number of degree programs that a college can provide improves the employer's ability to hire for the right skillset at the time needed.⁴¹

40. Ibid.

41. Colleges Ontario. (2020). The Future of Work in Ontario: Ontario colleges' submission for the 2020 Ontario Budget. Retrieved from https://cdn.agilitycms.com/colleges-ontario/documents-library/document-files/2020%20pre-budget%20submission_20200127145829_0.pdf

From an employer perspective, a three-year applied studies diploma is more valuable than a three-year liberal arts degree, but biases around nomenclature can often exclude diploma-holders from being considered for roles. Students with degrees in specialized, applied areas of study are highly attractive to employers, particularly as industries in the Waterloo-Toronto corridor have an increasing demand for specialized skills amid widespread labour shortages.

According to a recent report by Communitech, the number of tech-job postings on Indeed Canada increased by 30% since before the pandemic, with Waterloo Region seeing a larger percentage increase than Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver.⁴² Yet, tech employers are facing a shortage of qualified workers, mostly because talent is lost to the U.S. A study revealed that there are 59% more graduates from Canadian universities in the U.S. working in roles to commercialize technology than there are in roles to create technology.⁴³ Ontario must grow the supply of qualified workers to meet the needs of the tech sector: Conestoga can play a significant role in building a robust talent pipeline for the sector across the Waterloo Region and beyond.

“On any given day, there are more than 18,000 vacant jobs in the Kitchener-Waterloo-Barrie region,” said Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development. “Those are paycheques waiting to be collected. But the workers aren’t there. My mission is to bridge that skills gap in Kitchener-Waterloo and throughout the province.”
– Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development

The health-care sector in the KCW region is another priority area for Conestoga. Health was the most represented employment sector (18%) in the recent alumni survey on three-year degrees.⁴⁴ A large percentage of the region’s health-care workers are Conestoga graduates, which include: nurses, paramedics, personal support workers (PSWs), respiratory therapists, technicians, and administrators. The college has established relationships with major health-care employers including hospitals, long-term care homes, home and community care providers, Local Health Integration Networks, Ontario Health Teams and public health authorities, and serves as a preferred trainer across the region and beyond, with employers often coming to Conestoga to support re-skilling and up-skilling their workforce. Conestoga also continues to innovate health-care education and recently introduced a unique, ONSITE (Ontario Sites for Integrated Training and Experiential learning) training model for PSWs. Through degree offerings, Conestoga can rapidly train a greater number of health-care professionals to meet critical care needs in specialized areas. College degree offerings are also more attractive to international students seeking Canadian recognition for their foreign-healthcare credentials.

Conestoga can address these labour needs and others through three-year bachelor’s degrees in specialized areas such as IT, health care, and business administration. Furthermore, master’s degrees in specialized practical areas including supply chain, occupational health and safety, and nursing allow students to develop expertise in specific areas of interest, while gaining skills that can be immediately applied at work. Conestoga is well-positioned to spearhead this initiative given established strengths in

42. Crowley, Kevin. (2021). Tech Jobs Abound, Yet Talent Shortages Persist. Retrieved from <http://news.communitech.ca/tech-jobs-abound-yet-talent-shortages-persist/>

43. Ibid.

44. Conestoga. (2021). Alumni Survey – 3 Year Degrees. Retrieved from N/A.



the delivery of career-focused education and training in highly technical fields.

Opportunities also exist to support students with advanced diplomas in upgrading to degrees through micro-credential offerings. Currently, micro-credentials are short-term courses that provide training in specific skills to help unemployed people and others quickly qualify for new careers. The Ontario government has already supported the expansion of micro-credentials within its recent budgets. In the 2020 Ontario Budget, the province invested \$59.5 million over the next three years to further establish micro-credentials as a key component of Ontario's internationally recognized post-secondary sector.⁴⁵ In the 2021 Ontario Budget, Ontario expanded the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) to include nearly 600 micro-credential offerings.⁴⁶ Providing colleges

with the flexibility to deliver a diverse suite of programming – such as diplomas, advanced diplomas, three-year bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, and micro-credentials – will allow for programming more tailored to regional and employer needs.

Conestoga will work closely with post-secondary partners in taking a phased approach to three-year bachelor's and master's degrees. This will provide opportunities for consultation with employers and community stakeholders and ensure programming is expanded based on best practices and lessons learned. It will also provide opportunities – such as through an accelerated program or stackable micro-credentials – for those who have already graduated with advanced diplomas to obtain degree status.

45. Government of Ontario. (2021). Ontario Expands Financial Assistance to Include Micro-credentials. Retrieved from <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/60792/ontario-expands-financial-assistance-to-include-micro-credentials>

46. Ibid.



ESTABLISHING A CREATIVE INDUSTRIES HUB IN KITCHENER AND CAMBRIDGE

A recent environmental scan conducted by the Ontario government demonstrates that the province plays a key role in Canada's cultural industries sector. It has the largest sector in the country, accounting for nearly half of all cultural industries GDP in Canada. Most employers are small or micro enterprises and employ permanent employees, self-employed entrepreneurs, and contract workers or freelancers. One of the key challenges of the sector is attracting highly skilled workers in technical, creative, leadership, and production management areas. While Canada's skills gaps continue to be filled internationally, the sector has significant potential for job creation in Ontario and is a critical component of Ontario's growth and prosperity.⁴⁷ These challenges were only exacerbated by the pandemic.

In a TeleTownhall in April 2020, Minister Lisa MacLeod shared that approximately 350,000 jobs in Ontario's culture sector had been lost to the pandemic, creating an estimated \$17.5 billion drop in economic impact to Ontario's economy.⁴⁸

The City of Kitchener and the City of Cambridge are two key drivers of Ontario's culture sector, which includes the creative industries. Kitchener and Cambridge are committed to growing their creative sectors and are engaging with Conestoga to develop and expand programming and facilities within the regions. Kitchener aims to become a recognized leader

in digital media and Cambridge is seeking to build upon their existing strengths as a centre for film-making.

The City of Kitchener has made a series of investments into the creative sector over the past five years. In 2016, ArtsBuild Ontario, in partnership with the Accelerator Centre and the City of Kitchener, announced the opening of 44 Gaukel – a new creative space in Downtown Kitchener that provides affordable rehearsal and office space for local artists and tech startups with hardware lab space. The Accelerator Centre builds and scales sustainable, globally competitive technology firms and together with ArtsBuild, aims to foster cross-sectoral partnerships in this creative community. ArtsBuild also launched SpaceFinder Waterloo Region – a free online tool for artists to search for space, and for spaces to promote their rentals; much like an Air BnB for artists.⁴⁹ The creative hub is intended to facilitate “collisions” across different sectors and support a variety of disciplines such as theatre, music production, broadcasting, illustration, graphic design, and industrial design, among others. There is also an emphasis on integrating these elements with the tech sector in the Kitchener area.⁵⁰

“The transition from STEM to STEAM [Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math] is key,” said Kitchener Mayor Berry Urbanovic, focusing on the importance of art's integration into all sectors of innovation.

47. Government of Ontario. (2019). Sector profile: cultural industries. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/document/environmental-scan-culture-sector-ontario-culture-strategy-background-document/sector-profile-cultural-industries>

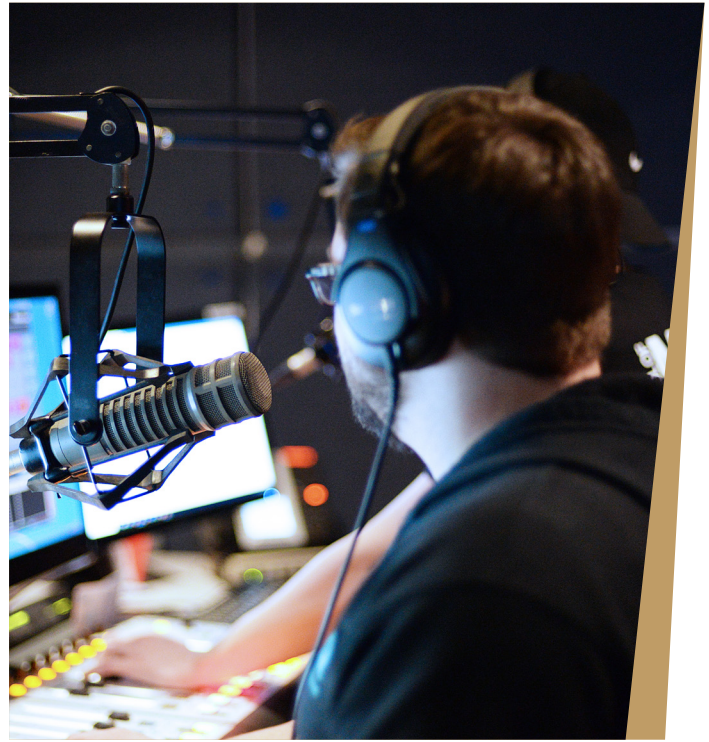
48. Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries: Minister MacLeod's Multi-Sector TeleTownhall Minutes, Thursday, April 23rd 2020.

49. ArtsBuild Ontario. (2016). Arts and technology collide in Downtown Kitchener with the opening of 44 Gaukel and the launch of SpaceFinder Waterloo Region. Retrieved from <https://www.artsbuildontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Media-Release-Arts-and-technology-collide-in-Downtown-Kitchener.pdf>

50. Jackson, Bill. (2018). Kitchener creative hub set up to cause 'collisions'. Retrieved from https://www.kitchenerpost.ca/news-story/8636895-kitchener-creative-hub-set-up-to-cause-collisions-/?li_source=li&li_medium=mobile_ymbii&li_pl=9be55f5e-23d9-4632-a50c-9b60fb3783f7&li_tr=mobile_ymbii

The City of Cambridge also has a record of supporting the film industry by welcoming film productions of all sizes. The City is registered with Ontario Creates, which provides promotional resources and other services to help production companies select Ontario sites for their film projects. In 2019 alone, the film industry generated an estimated economic impact of \$1.25 million for the municipality.⁵¹ The City was also one of five finalists for the “Outstanding Film Commission/Office” Location Managers Guild International Awards 2019 – the first-ever Canadian office to have received a nomination for this prestigious award.⁵²

The pandemic has impacted Kitchener and Cambridge’s creative sectors in different ways. In *Make It Kitchener Recovery: Lift Up the Most*, Kitchener’s COVID-19 economic recovery framework, the City highlights that the top challenge for its community was how COVID-19 impacted the in-person service economy, including professional artists and musicians. Businesses were consulted and identified that the City can provide support by “continuing to provide training and resources which support pivoting and adaptation” and “support commercial landlords in attracting new businesses to vacant space.”⁵³ Creative spaces like 44 Gaukel, coupled with training programming from Conestoga, can address these needs. Kitchener will also be moving forward to partner with organizations to provide grants to support arts, culture, and creative professionals.⁵⁴ Interestingly, Cambridge’s film industry saw growth during the pandemic, due in part to the health and safety protocols implemented on film sets. The City shared that since 2019, they’ve seen a 74% increase in filming projects and 143% increase in days of filming.⁵⁵



Fostering growth of the creative sector within both municipalities will be key to driving accelerated growth in Ontario’s economy. Conestoga is the right training partner for Kitchener and Cambridge, with its existing presence in the region as well as its well-established School of Creative Industries, which offers a wide range of programs to set students on the right path toward building exciting careers in the creative economy. These cutting-edge programs provide students with hands-on and applied learning educational opportunities and prepare them for an exciting future in the dynamic world of creative industries. These experiences can be further enriched through the proposed three-year bachelor’s and applied master’s degrees.

With the Ontario government’s support, Conestoga can play a key role in driving growth in the KCW region as well as building Ontario’s creative sector.

51. City of Cambridge. (2019). 2019 Annual Report. Retrieved from https://www.cambridge.ca/en/learn-about/resources/annualreport/2019-Annual-Financial-Report-Full_SIGNED_SECURED.pdf

52. Ibid.

53. City of Kitchener. (2021). MIKRecovery: Lift Up The Most. Retrieved from https://www.makeitkitchener.ca/mik-2-recovery-framework-final-draft-high-res-.pdf?utm_source=kitchenertoday.com&utm_campaign=kitchenertoday.com&utm_medium=referral

54. Ibid.

55. Gill, Divya. (2021). City of Cambridge has many film productions in place this summer. Retrieved from <https://www.kitchenertoday.com/local-news/city-of-cambridge-has-many-film-productions-in-place-this-summer-3908055>



ADDRESSING SKILLED TRADES WORKFORCE NEEDS



At a recent press conference, Ontario's Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development noted that Ontario is facing a shortage of 22,000 skilled trade workers in the construction industry in the next few years.⁵⁶ He went on to add that Ontario had some 200,000 unfilled jobs prior to the pandemic and that one in three journeypersons across the province is 55 years of age or older.⁵⁷

Construction planning firm BuildForce estimates that roughly 250,000 skilled tradespeople will retire nationwide between 2019 and 2029.⁵⁸ Even when new workers and apprentices are factored into the equation, BuildForce still predicts an overall shortage of nearly 82,000 workers.⁵⁹ The major construction company Ellis Don predicts a similar future, estimating a 100,000 person shortage over the next decade.⁶⁰

56. Shreve, E. (2021). Ontario vows to send recruiters to high schools to promote skilled trades. Retrieved from <https://torontosun.com/news/provincial/ontario-vows-to-send-recruiters-to-high-schools-to-promote-skilled-trades>

57. Ibid.

58. Human Resources Professionals Association. (2016). Strengthening Ontario's Workforce for the Jobs of Tomorrow. Retrieved from <https://hrpa.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2020/10/Strengthening-Ontarios-Workforce-for-the-Jobs-of-Tomorrow.pdf>, 14.

59. Varga, C. (2021). Construction industry fears a skilled-trades shortage. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/industry-news/property-report/article-construction-industry-fears-a-skilled-trades-shortage/>

60. Ibid.

In essence, at the time when Ontario's economy needs skilled workers the most, it is facing a massive shortage of trained talent.

To address this shortage, the province will need to explore creative solutions that will greatly increase the number of entrants into the skilled trades. One such option is the creation of skilled trades training centres, such as the new Conestoga facility currently under development in Cambridge with a planned Phase 1 opening scheduled for Fall 2022. This skilled trades training centre will be run by Conestoga and feature formal partnerships with private sector employers.

Built on a 41-acre site, the new campus will serve as the province's largest, most comprehensive skilled trades training facility. Phase 1 includes a 322,000 sq ft modern facility that will help to raise the profile of the skilled trades and attract a broader, more diverse student population. Additional facilities will be developed on the site in future phases. This development will modernize apprenticeship and skilled trades training through the consolidation and expansion of the full complement of trades programs at a single skilled trades campus location.

Conestoga is currently the largest trades college in the province. This new model for trades education and training has the potential to dramatically and rapidly increase the number of skilled trades workers to meet Ontario's urgent needs and could be extended to include the establishment of centres in other Conestoga locations such as Milton and Brantford.

To date, the college has committed \$77M in funds to the new Skilled Trades Campus

for lands and building, renovations and equipment. The total investment required for the completion of Phase 1, to be completed by September 2022, is \$110M. Conestoga anticipates \$5M to \$10M in private sector contributions and is seeking additional funding opportunities from federal and provincial governments.

This investment would accelerate the development of a world-class training centre that would serve as a showcase for skilled trades careers in Canada, with innovative programming targeted to meet current and future workforce needs. Partnering directly with Conestoga would allow students preparing for skilled trades careers to access campus facilities and workshops, world-class faculty, and comprehensive student support infrastructure such as job placement services.

This opportunity is rare given the central location and the proximity to workers in Southwestern Ontario, the GTA, or the traditional KW region. The expected growth in the area in both housing and transit will also create additional local demand for thousands of new skilled trades workers. If coupled with three-year bachelor's degrees, Conestoga has the potential to create a significant advantage for Ontario's employers who are currently struggling to find qualified individuals. Conestoga can also build on its extensive connections with local employers – including being the primary collegiate connection for Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada – to continue to train, source, and ultimately employ talent throughout Southwestern and Central Ontario.

CONCLUSION



By allowing a phased-in approach to three-year bachelor's degrees and applied master's degrees, investing in the Skilled Trades Training Centre proposal in Cambridge, and helping to establish a creative industries hub in Kitchener and Cambridge, the Ontario government will effectively accelerate the economic recovery of the KCW region from the COVID-19 pandemic. As history has shown, this will also accelerate the recovery in surrounding areas and across Southwestern Ontario, ensuring that the broader region does not experience another prolonged economic recovery similar to that of 2008/2009.

These investments would send a strong signal to the KCW region, and Southwestern Ontario more generally, that the government is doing everything it can to ensure that the area returns to economic prosperity as quickly as

possible by enabling lasting, well-paying jobs. Given the COVID-19 pandemic's potentially permanent impact on work-from-home trends, business closures, and technology dependence, investments in the KCW region with its vibrant professional, scientific, and technical sectors is a tried and tested way to accelerate economic growth.

However, in order to ensure that economic growth, the Ontario government cannot do it alone. It will need strong local partners with infrastructure in these communities to help train, educate, promote, and foster the talent needed for tomorrow's economy. Conestoga College stands ready to take on that challenge with the Ontario government to ensure a strong Southwestern Ontario and strong KCW region for decades to come.



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