

Canada lags behind U.S. in providing job training

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Canadian workers are less likely to get a chance to upgrade their skills than their counterparts in the U.S. and other countries, according to a report released today.

Fewer than 30 per cent of adult workers in Canada participate in job-related education and training, compared to 45 per cent in the U.S., 35 per cent in Britain, and 45 per cent in several Scandinavian countries, according to a report by **Canadian Policy Research Networks**, a non-profit think-tank in Ottawa.

As a percentage of their overall payroll, U.S. firms spend about 50 per cent more on training than do Canadian firms, according to the report, which was commissioned by the Canadian Council on Learning and was based on a review of international and Canadian research.

"There is clearly evidence that Canadian employers are not investing as much (in training) as many other wealthy countries are," said Ron Saunders, the think-tank's work network director. But the reasons for that, and the solutions, aren't as clear, he said in an interview yesterday.

The report warns that skills shortages that are a problem now will get worse in the future as the baby boom generation retires, putting increased pressure on remaining workers to be well-trained and productive.

That demographic shift, coupled with the demands of the knowledge economy, mean the need to invest more in the workforce skills has never been greater, the report argues.

Employers may hesitate to spend on training because of cost or work time lost while the employee isn't on the job. Some also worry that those who get training will be "poached" by competitors, according to the report, written by Mark Goldberg.

The report doesn't offer solutions, but lists some ideas it hopes will spark discussion at a Nov. 9 meeting of business, labour and government officials on the topic, said Mr. Saunders.

Among the ideas up for discussion are providing tax credits, which could be scaled to provide greater incentives to smaller businesses; a training fund with support from business and government; a national training "levy," and paid training leave, perhaps funded through employment insurance.

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