

# Intelligence MEMOS



From: Alejandro Adem  
To: Canadians Concerned About Skills Development  
Date: February 20, 2019  
Re: **FUTURE SKILLS, FUTURE WORK**

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We hear a lot about technological innovation and the disruption it brings. This usually includes ominous predictions of new technologies replacing workers in many jobs.

But we hear much less about how Canada's most indispensable resource—its people—can rise to the challenges of tomorrow's job market. Mobilizing knowledge and people, enabling one to lift the other, is the key to riding the global wave of technological disruption and ensuring Canada's continued economic success and prosperity.

This realization motivated the work of the Advisory Council on Economic Growth, that resulted Ottawa's 2017 commitment of \$225 million over four years and \$75 million annually thereafter to establish a Future Skills Centre.

This was a direct response to the council's warning that Canada's "skills development infrastructure is simply not equipped to meet the challenges that lie ahead." To fix this, the council urged updating our K–12 and post-secondary education systems to better prepare those entering the workforce, adapting safety nets to better support those leaving it, and creating a "third pillar" that focuses on adults working today, enabling them to keep working tomorrow.

The new Future Skills Centre is intended to complement work already underway by the Labour Market Information Council, Statistics Canada, and the many not-for-profit and other organizations now studying the skills needs of Canada's changing labour market. It has the potential to support partnerships to find innovative new ways to teach and maintain skills, better understand what skills employers need, reach underrepresented groups, identify best practices, measure outcomes, and share results with governments, stakeholders, employers and, not least, Canadians.

The centre's success depends upon its commitment to a breadth of collaboration that does not come naturally to an area of public policy that is extraordinarily fragmented and siloed across every axis.

But the foundations are already in place. Canada's universities have been operating co-op programs for years, colleges excel at hands-on learning, and Mitacs has been bridging academia and industry to provide graduates with valuable work-integrated learning opportunities for 20 years. The new Future Skills Centre need not re-invent the wheel. But overcoming barriers to collaboration and winning buy-in across the system will, in large part, determine its success.

A lot is at stake. The advisory council warned that more than 10 percent of existing jobs in Canada are at high risk of being eliminated by 2030 due to automation and other labour market changes. Of those jobs that remain, a recent RBC report determined that half will require significant skill recalibration. Adding further complexity, the C.D. Howe Institute [has determined](#) that these changes will affect regions and provinces very differently, presenting unique challenges to different parts of the country. This will compound existing and long-standing problems, like Canada's steady increase in precarious employment since 2000 and the near doubling of Canada's long-term unemployment over the past decade.

Yet this does not mean that people are becoming obsolete. Even accounting for foreseeable technological disruption in the labour market, people will remain indispensable in jobs requiring complex thinking and problem-solving, conceptual interpretation and analysis, human communication, machine operation and programming, business and personal services, and tasks involving manual dexterity.

The moral of the story is that with technological disruption comes opportunity. But taking advantage of this opportunity requires new skills. We need foresight to know what skills will be needed, ingenuity to develop smart new ways to teach these skills to working Canadians of all ages, and collaboration to make sure we achieve the results we want in the most effective way possible.

Ottawa's decision to create the Future Skills Centre, supported by a substantial multi-year funding commitment, is a hopeful sign of its recognition that skilled workers and job-ready knowledge producers are vital to Canada's future success.

And by finding ways to include underrepresented groups in skills and training opportunities, we can help ensure that Canadians are empowered to reach their full potential in the labour force.

By enabling working Canadians to make informed decisions and develop needed future skills, we can empower them to continue to lead industrious and fulfilling lives, even in the context of a rapidly evolving labour market.

*Alejandro Adem is CEO and Scientific Director of Mitacs, a not-for-profit organization that fosters growth and innovation in Canada. He is also a Professor of Mathematics at the University of British Columbia.*

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