

## **Canada: Centres of Excellence in New Brunswick**

*Engaging employers in the funding and virtual delivery of information and experiential learning opportunities in strategically important economic sectors*

In the Canadian province of New Brunswick, the provincial government works with employers to help primary and secondary school students to understand, and prepare for, employment opportunities in areas of strategic economic importance. In what is a largely rural province, the strategy is driven by a desire to encourage and enable students to stay in the province after graduation and to address skills shortages. The approach is co-financed by employers in the province.

Under the umbrella of [Future New Brunswick](#), the education department in the province has created four Centres of Excellence focused on priority economic areas identified by the province: health, energy, digital learning and entrepreneurship.

Each centre is designed to bring together key partners from government, community, employment and education to oversee activity. Centres will engage larger employers, industry and professional associations, including chambers of commerce to help reflect the voices of smaller enterprises. The Centre acts as an intermediary to connect schools with the economic community. Dedicated Centre staff present employers with a menu of virtual and experiential learning options for engaging with schools, with employers offering funding or in-kind support. Student opportunities relate to three primary areas. *Career guidance* in schools is enriched through greater access to employee volunteers who provide career talks (whether in person, online or through video recording) about their work. Schools also gain new access to workplace visits and mentoring opportunities. Secondly, employers are encouraged to support *work-related learning*, helping to bring learning to life by provision of real-world examples and the involvement of volunteer staff in classroom-based subject learning. Within this approach, the Centres are designed to enhance teacher knowledge about current practice in these sectors and encourage them to better reflect career opportunities in the content they cover. Finally, *experiential learning* is enabled through work placements and other virtual opportunities.

In Canada, students in the final two years of upper secondary education have the option of enrolling in courses that reflect a vocational-focus alongside their more traditional academic studies. These 'cooperative education' programmes (of up to 360 hours duration) involve considerable work-based learning which gives students the opportunity to begin training and certification in an industry of interest within a learning environment that encourages reflective practice. Around one in ten of final year students take a cooperative education programme, earning credit for their high school diploma.

The focus of [cooperative education](#) varies across the two years:

Career Exploration 110 is an experiential course that offers a sequence of activities aimed at furthering the career skill development of youth in grades 11/12. Students explore personal characteristics, assess various career options, have the opportunity to engage in two unique work placements and learn about themselves and about the world of work.

Cooperative Education 120 is an experiential course that offers youth in grades 11/12 the opportunity to engage in a work placement in a chosen area of career interest. A detailed

workplace skills learning plan is developed to support a focused learning experience in the workplace

Mentorship Virtual Coop 120 is a highly personalized course that provides equitable access to experts by virtually connecting motivated, career aspirational students to subject specific mentors. The course provides students an in-depth, self-guided framework to fully explore their career path. Student and mentor meet weekly and the mentor provides real-world perspective and guidance on their role. Meetings are guided by the student and are scheduled on the availability of the mentor.

Enhanced Coops combine regular coop placements with additional training and certification in areas like health care and early childhood education. Students complete a more reflective study of a particular area with additional coursework and support from skilled instructors in the field. Students earn industry recognized credentials to further enhance the value of their learning.

The Centres of Excellence work with District Experiential Learning Co-ordinators, placed in the four Anglophone school districts, to make it easier for schools to source high quality placements for 'coop' students interested in the four priority economic areas.

It is the ambition of the province that Centres will ultimately be fully financed by employers. The programme addresses the concerns of employers in securing their talent pipeline while providing enriching learning opportunities for students exploring various pathways and interests. This partnership assists students in understanding the employment opportunities available in the province, and the need for pathways to enable smooth transitions into them. The Centres amplify labour market needs, helping students gain a better understanding of, and higher quality pathways into, strategically important areas of long-term anticipated job demand.