

Workforce Development Amendments

2025 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Ann Millner

LONG TITLE**General Description:**

This bill establishes a statewide talent portal for high-demand jobs and creates a cooperative education program.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- creates a statewide talent portal for high-demand jobs in Utah;
- defines high-demand jobs based on growth rate, wages, and societal impact;
- requires a platform that connects Utah employers with qualified candidates from higher education institutions;
- mandates mobile access to the talent portal;
- requires integration with state labor market data and workforce systems;
- establishes regular updates of high-demand job categories based on market trends;
- creates requirements for data analytics and employer verification systems;
- requires annual reporting on portal metrics and outcomes;
- establishes a cooperative education pilot program in the life sciences sector;
- creates a partnership between five Utah universities and the life sciences trade association;
- requires participating employers to provide full-time paid cooperative education work experiences;
- establishes a dual mentorship structure with academic and industry advisors;
- creates a framework for granting academic credit for cooperative education experiences;
- requires development of an electronic management system for program administration;
- establishes data collection and analysis requirements for program evaluation;
- mandates annual reporting on program effectiveness and workforce impact;
- establishes liability and risk management protocols for participating institutions; and
- makes technical changes.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

This bill appropriates \$500,000 in operating and capital budgets for fiscal year 2026, all of which is from the Income Tax Fund.

Other Special Clauses:

This bill provides a special effective date.

Utah Code Sections Affected:

ENACTS:

53B-37-101, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53B-37-102, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53B-37-103, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53B-37-104, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53B-37-105, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53B-37-106, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53B-37-107, Utah Code Annotated 1953

53B-37-108, Utah Code Annotated 1953

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:

Section 1. Section **53B-37-101** is enacted to read:

CHAPTER 37. Workforce

Part 1. Talent Connect

53B-37-101 . Title.

(1) This chapter is known as "Workforce."

(2) This part is known as "Talent Connect."

Section 2. Section **53B-37-102** is enacted to read:

53B-37-102 . Definitions.

As used in this chapter:

(1) "Co-op employee" means a student who participates in a cooperative education program and is employed by a participating cooperative education employer.

(2) "Cooperative education employer" means a business or organization participating in the cooperative education program that provides structured work opportunities for students.

(3) "Cooperative education program" or "co-op" means a structured educational program that integrates academic learning with full-time paid work experience aligned with the student's academic discipline and career goals.

(4) "High-demand job" means an occupation or position that:

(a) has a higher than average projected growth rate in Utah;

(b) offers wages at or above the state median wage;

(c) follows star ranking criteria established by the Department of Workforce Services;
and

(d) considers occupations that have a high societal demand and impact.

(5) "Participating institution" means the following institutions of higher education:

(a) Weber State University;

(b) University of Utah;

(c) Utah State University;

(d) Utah Tech University; and

(e) Utah Valley University.

(6) "Recent graduate" means a graduate of a program or degree within a year of completion.

(7) "Talent portal" means the Utah High-Demand Talent Portal created in Section 53B-37-103.

(8) "Talent Ready Utah" means the program within the Utah System of Higher Education established in Section 53B-34-103.

Section 3. Section **53B-37-103** is enacted to read:

53B-37-103 . Utah High-Demand Talent Portal -- Creation -- Purpose.

(1) There is created the Utah High-Demand Talent Portal.

(2) The purpose of the talent portal is to:

(a) connect Utah employers with qualified, trained, and educated talent from higher education institutions;

(b) provide students within the Utah System of Higher Education with high-demand and high-wage employment opportunities;

(c) connect recent graduate job seekers with high-demand employment opportunities in Utah;

(d) provide a platform to post high-demand job openings;

(e) highlight skills and qualifications needed for high-demand jobs;

(f) integrate with workforce development, work-based learning;

(g) support career pathway development and promote long-term workforce alignment;
and

(h) utilize matchmaking software strategies to intuitively match employers with students across the Utah System of Higher Education.

Section 4. Section **53B-37-104** is enacted to read:

53B-37-104 . Talent portal requirements -- Administration -- Labor market data integration.

99 (1) The talent portal shall:

- 100 (a) focus on industries and occupations identified as high-demand in collaboration with
- 101 Talent Ready Utah, the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, and the
- 102 Department of Workforce Services and in coordination with state labor market data;
- 103 (b) provide an intuitive, user-friendly interface for job seekers and employers;
- 104 (c) include robust search, filtering, and geolocation options;
- 105 (d) offer mobile-optimized access;
- 106 (e) allow users to create profiles and upload resumes;
- 107 (f) integrate with relevant training, credentialing, and educational resources;
- 108 (g) connect prospective talent to industry requirements for posted high-demand jobs;
- 109 (h) highlight internships, apprenticeships, and career pathway opportunities;
- 110 (i) provide data analytics to employers on job listing performance;
- 111 (j) implement security measures to protect user data and verify employer listings; and
- 112 (k) be accessible to users with disabilities in compliance with the Americans with
- 113 Disabilities Act.

114 (2) In accordance with Subsection (3), the talent portal administrator shall:

- 115 (a) partner with:
- 116 (i) Talent Ready Utah;
- 117 (ii) the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity;
- 118 (iii) the Department of Workforce Services;
- 119 (iv) industry associations; and
- 120 (v) employers to enhance talent portal offerings;
- 121 (b) partner with the State Tax Commission to reconcile that employers registering to
- 122 utilize the talent portal are businesses registered to do business in the state of Utah
- 123 and are in good standing;
- 124 (c) conduct targeted outreach to promote the talent portal to:
- 125 (i) institutions of higher education within the Utah System of Higher Education;
- 126 (ii) students; and
- 127 (iii) Utah employers;
- 128 (d) regularly collect and analyze user feedback to improve the talent portal; and
- 129 (e) provide annual reports on talent portal performance metrics, including:
- 130 (i) usage statistics;
- 131 (ii) placement rates; and
- 132 (iii) user demographics.

(3) The talent portal administrator shall:

(a) utilize current labor market data to inform job listings, industry focus, and emerging opportunities;

(b) update high-demand job categories at least annually based on projected growth, wage data, and workforce needs; and

(c) provide labor market insights to users, including salary ranges, career growth trends, and skill requirements.

(4) The talent portal administrator shall ensure that the talent portal has the ability to dynamically adjust to reflect changes in labor market trends and high-demand occupations.

Section 5. Section 53B-37-105 is enacted to read:

53B-37-105 . Cooperative Education Program -- Creation -- Purpose.

(1) There is created a cooperative education program within the Utah System of Higher Education.

(2) The purpose of the co-op is to:

(a) provide students with structured, credit-bearing cooperative education opportunities that align with academic disciplines, program accreditation requirements, and career outcomes while maintaining full-time student status;

(b) foster partnerships between higher education institutions and employers to offer valuable employment opportunities;

(c) establish clear roles and responsibilities for participating institutions and employers; and

(d) maintain accountability and program effectiveness through regular evaluation.

Section 6. Section 53B-37-106 is enacted to read:

53B-37-106 . Cooperative education program -- Requirements -- Administration and oversight.

(1) The following entities shall collaborate to create and implement the co-op:

(a) the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education;

(b) a life-sciences trade association that the Talent, Education, and Industry Alignment Board created in Section 53B-34-102 selects;

(c) Weber State University;

(d) University of Utah;

(e) Utah State University;

(f) Utah Tech University;

(g) Utah Valley University; and

(h) Talent Ready Utah established in Section 53B-34-103.

(2) The entities listed in Subsection (1) shall collaborate to:

(a) establish program requirements and standards for cooperative education experiences that:

(i) occur during a student's third or fourth academic year;

(ii) equivalent to two continuous academic terms; and

(iii) align with degree requirements and career pathways;

(b) develop the policies for academic credit recognition;

(c) create program evaluation metrics; and

(d) maintain oversight of program implementation.

(3) In accordance with the program components described under Subsection (2), a participating institution shall:

(a) establish admission criteria for the cooperative education program;

(b) create preparatory workshop that address:

(i) career development;

(ii) professional skill building;

(iii) workplace communication; and

(iv) employment preparation;

(c) develop procedures for:

(i) program orientation;

(ii) academic progress monitoring;

(iii) experience documentation; and

(iv) performance evaluation;

(d) assign a cooperative education advisor who will:

(i) provide regular guidance;

(ii) monitor academic alignment;

(iii) coordinate with workplace mentors; and

(iv) assess learning outcomes; and

(e) maintain records of:

(i) placement details;

(ii) student progress;

(iii) completed evaluations; and

(iv) program outcomes.

- (4) The life-sciences trade association described in Subsection (1) shall:
- (a) identify and recruit qualified employers from the life-sciences trade association's membership;
 - (b) communicate industry needs to participating institutions;
 - (c) facilitate employer participation in co-op development; and
 - (d) promote co-op opportunities within the life sciences sector.
- (5) The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education shall establish employment standards that require participating employers to:
- (a) provide compensation that:
 - (i) meets or exceeds minimum wage requirements; and
 - (ii) reflects industry standards for the position;
 - (b) schedule work hours that:
 - (i) total at least 32 hours per week; and
 - (ii) accommodate academic requirements; and
 - (c) maintain compliance with:
 - (i) federal employment laws;
 - (ii) state employment laws; and
 - (iii) program participation requirements.
- (6) A cooperative education employer shall:
- (a) submit to the relevant participating institution:
 - (i) detailed position descriptions;
 - (ii) work location information;
 - (iii) scheduling requirements; and
 - (iv) supervisor contact details;
 - (b) provide structured workplace experiences for a cooperative education employee that:
 - (i) align with academic programs;
 - (ii) develop professional skills;
 - (iii) include regular supervision; and
 - (iv) offer meaningful work assignments;
 - (c) assign qualified workplace mentors for a cooperative education employee who will:
 - (i) provide professional guidance;
 - (ii) monitor work performance;
 - (iii) coordinate with academic advisors; and
 - (iv) complete required evaluations; and

(d) conduct regular evaluations and monitoring as directed by the participating institution in consultation with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

Section 7. Section **53B-37-107** is enacted to read:

53B-37-107 . Cooperative education program -- Liability and risk management.

(1)(a) The Utah System of Higher Education and participating institutions are not liable for any act, omission, or conduct of cooperative education employees or cooperative education employers.

(b) A cooperative education employer shall indemnify and hold harmless all participating institutions against claims arising from co-op placements.

(2) The Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education shall:

(a) establish procedures for:

(i) program administration;

(ii) risk management;

(iii) issue resolution; and

(iv) early termination protocols; and

(b) develop policies regarding:

(i) liability coverage;

(ii) workplace safety;

(iii) co-op performance standards; and

(iv) professional conduct requirements for a cooperative education employee.

(3) A participating institution shall:

(a) maintain documentation systems for:

(i) placement agreements;

(ii) performance reports;

(iii) incident records; and

(iv) program evaluations; and

(b) implement procedures for:

(i) issue resolution;

(ii) performance intervention;

(iii) placement modification; and

(iv) program termination.

(4) A cooperative education employer shall:

(a) maintain appropriate insurance coverage;

(b) in accordance with Subsection (1), indemnify participating institutions against claims

arising from cooperative education placements;

(c) regarding a cooperative education employee, notify the relevant participating institution of:

(i) performance concerns;

(ii) policy violations;

(iii) workplace incidents; and

(iv) proposed terminations; and

(d) regarding a cooperative education employee, document and report to the relevant participating institution:

(i) workplace injuries;

(ii) safety incidents;

(iii) policy violations; and

(iv) program departures.

Section 8. Section **53B-37-108** is enacted to read:

53B-37-108 . Cooperative education program -- Evaluation and reporting

(1) No later than September 15 of each year, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, in collaboration with the entities described in Subsection 53B-37-106(1), shall prepare an annual report for submission to:

(a) the Talent, Education, and Industry Alignment Board created in Section 53B-34-102;

(b) the Utah Board of Higher Education; and

(c) the Education Interim Committee and the Economic Development and Workforce Services Interim Committee.

(2) The annual report described in Subsection (1) shall:

(a) include:

(i) the number of student placements and cooperative education employers;

(ii) student and cooperative education employer feedback;

(iii) key workforce impact metrics; and

(iv) recommendations for additional on-going resources to scale cooperative education program offerings; and

(b) provide analysis on the co-op's effectiveness in:

(i) enhancing student career readiness;

(ii) addressing Utah workforce needs and retention; and

(iii) improving competency validation practices based on cooperative education employers' input.

