

## Skills For BC Question Summaries (Q1 – Q5)

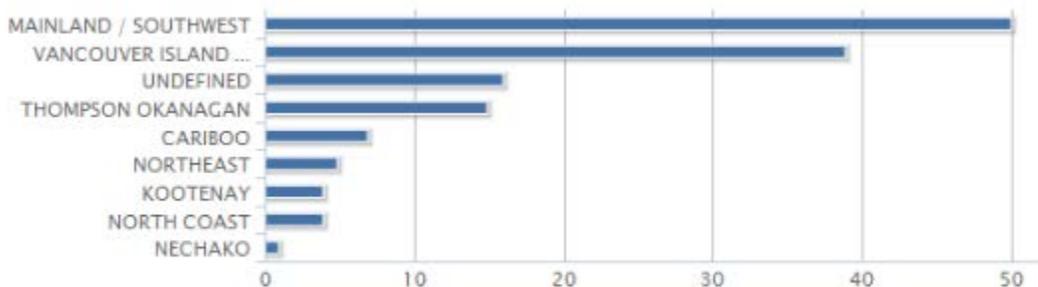
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On November 1st, Premier Clark began the process of asking British Columbians to help address five key challenges to building British Columbia's workforce. The Skills For BC conversation had two goals: 1) to raise awareness of our opportunities and 2) explore ideas that can make a difference for our collective success. This report summarizes all comments received from British Columbians on the topic between November 1 and December 13, 2012.

# Question 1: How can British Columbia's young people build a successful trades or technical career & be first in line for BC jobs?

## Participation

The conversation saw participation from all regions of the province, with approximately sixty percent from the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. A total of 145 comments (including entries from moderators and elected officials) are part of the conversation.



## What you've said

The discussion has been very comprehensive, identifying both problems and solutions to the challenge laid down by the Premier.

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Top categories of conversation include:



### What you've said

The discussion has been very comprehensive, identifying both problems and solutions to the challenge laid down by the Premier. Top categories of conversation include:

- ***Rethinking trades and technical education in elementary and high school.*** Many participants believe that university educated teachers may have a tendency to push students towards pursuing degrees rather than trades. Others talked about ways to fast track qualified trades people towards getting teaching qualification. There were also many participants who talked about the importance of improving school facilities and equipment so that students get a modern experience of trades and technical careers with modern tools.
- ***Doing more to connect industry and schools to give students hands on experience in trades and technical careers.*** Specific suggestions included doing more to connect schools and students to economic information and employers, building on local successes like Project Heavy Duty in the Peace River region or Trades Exploration course at Claremont School on Vancouver Island, and encouraging 'road shows' where young people can learn from employers and each other about the opportunities. One interesting idea was setting up training and orientation when there is a large major project happening in the community.
- ***Questions about BC's competitiveness in terms of wages and cost of living.*** Many participants pointed out that opportunities for skilled trades and technical workers in Alberta and Saskatchewan offer higher wages. How this gap could be addressed is unclear.
- ***Working with employers to encourage more investments in workplace training, recognizing the pressures businesses face—especially small businesses.*** Participants discussed the challenge of being a new apprentice, and struggling to find employers to support them. Others spoke from the perspective of small business owners and senior trades people, discussing the challenging tradeoffs between getting the work done, investing in people, and retaining them in a highly competitive marketplace. Solutions focused on creating incentives for employers through tax benefits.
- ***Creating paths for people to transition into trades or technical careers, no matter their age or background.*** Many participants who are in their 20s and 30s talked about how

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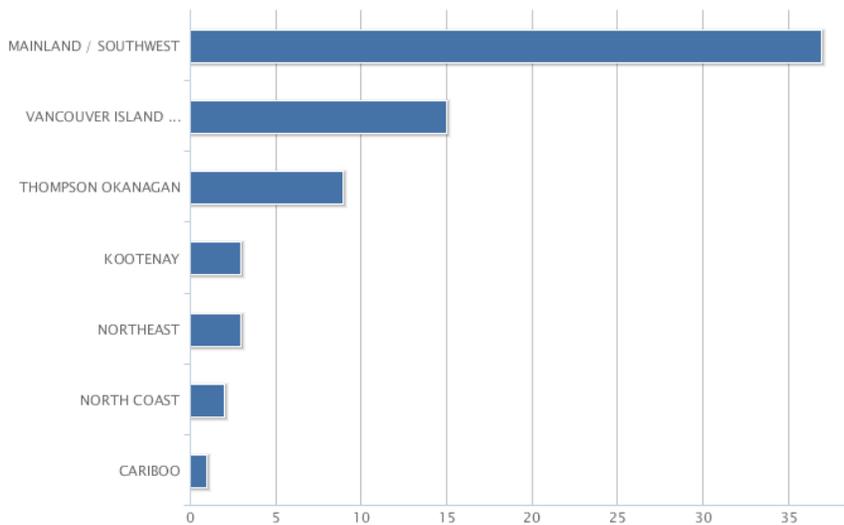
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they are keen to take advantage of the opportunities in the trades and technical fields, but are challenged to make a career change. Others, in their 40s and 50s, also expressed interest in transitions. Opportunities to create job share programs and targeted training initiatives, opportunities to challenge formal credential processes, and finding ways to enhance benefit programs to support people in making career changes were ideas submitted.

## Q2. What can we as parents and schools do to change people’s perceptions of skilled trade and technical careers?

### Participation

The conversation has seen participation from all regions of the province, with approximately sixty percent from the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island. A total of 87 comments (including entries from moderators and elected officials) are part of the conversation.



There have been 29,462 site visits since this engagement began on November 1<sup>st</sup>, and visitors are staying more than 5 minutes which indicates a high level of interest in the content of the discussion. During the period this question was open, more than 16,000 visitors came to the site, and stayed for an average of 5 minutes, 40 seconds.

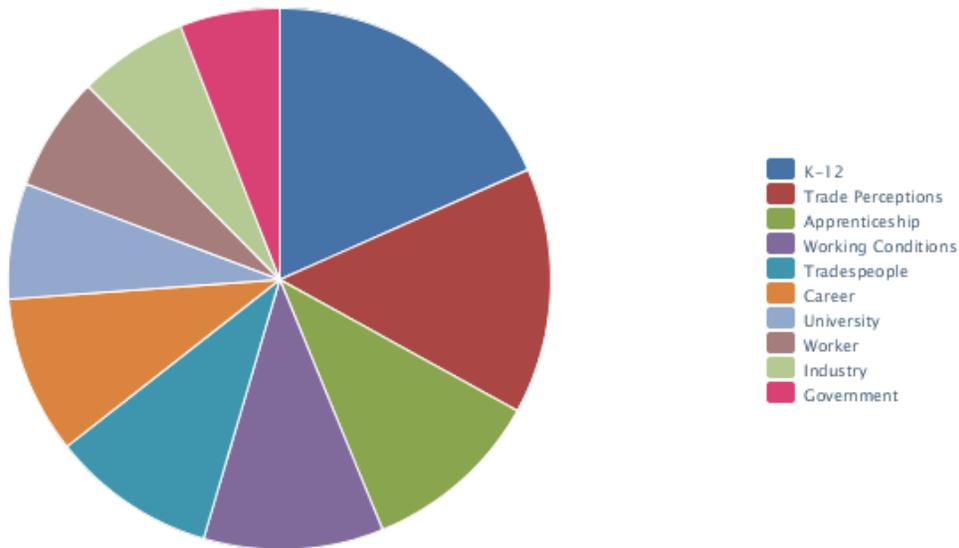
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### What you've said

Similar to question one, we continue to hear about the need changes to the education and apprenticeship systems as well more trades awareness for youth in younger grades, continued support for dual-credit and ACE-IT, and the need for updated equipment in schools. We also saw for the first time some negative comments related to the challenges of working in the construction industry. The discussion has been very comprehensive, identifying both problems and solutions to the challenge laid down by the Premier.

Generally, top categories of conversation for question 2 include:



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And more specifically:

### **What do participants say is the problem?**

- University is still seen as a ‘higher’ calling than trades careers.
- Educators are typically university educated, not trades educated. There is a subconscious ‘nudging’ towards university education by both parents and teachers.
- Trades and technical careers have an image problem: they’re defined by images of people in dirty coveralls, not clean, high-tech environments.
- Some tradespeople tell stories about how they find their working conditions challenging, or the reality of being an apprentice a letdown—they say it can be hard to get employers to take on inexperienced people, the work can be unstable, and there can be unscrupulous employers. These stories can undo the positive perception that those promoting trades and technical careers promote.

### **What do participants think could change perceptions?**

- A positive experience with trades of different kinds in schools, from early grades onwards—many suggestions we heard in our first discussion resurfaced, including improving equipment and facilities and holding field trips to local trades businesses.
- Knowledge of expected openings, and comparative wage and benefits for different jobs among young people, parents and teachers. Participants felt that more needs to be done to shed light on the opportunities in trades and technical fields, particularly on how trades and technical pay as much or more than ‘white collar’ professions.
- Revisiting major labour market programs and immigration strategies to create more opportunities for Aboriginal and other local workers. Specific ideas included expanding Employment Insurance benefits to allow apprentices to receive EI while doing coursework or during job transitions, becoming more restrictive in the numbers of skilled workers immigrating to Canada, and connecting more effectively with Aboriginal communities to understand their needs.
- Positive marketing of trades that confront conventional images. Specific ideas included building a campaign around some attention grabbing trades careers, like race car or helicopter mechanics, that also showcase the skill, ingenuity and prestige that come with a trades or technical career.
- Consciousness of a university bias from parents and teachers—encouraging a mindset that helps parents and young people recognize their aptitudes. Specific ideas included professional level aptitude testing, resources for parents that help them recognize and talk to their children about how their aptitudes could connect with a trades career, opportunities for parents and children to tour training facilities like BCIT, and suggestions about community resources like Scouting that can help young people develop those skills.
- Host more direct conversation between business leadership, career counselors and young people. Specific ideas resembled suggestions from our first discussion, including industry led information sessions and connecting young people with people working in the trades, through guest speakers or ‘road shows’.

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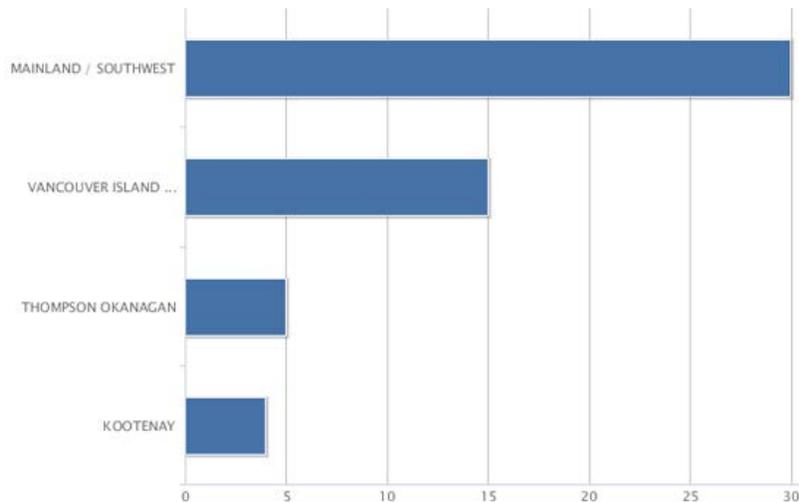
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- Focusing on reducing barriers to entering the trades beyond skills training, especially challenging life circumstances such as disabilities, child care, low self esteem, etc.
- More young apprentices telling stories of success, including getting work at an attractive wage.

### Q3. What advice would you give on exploring alternative routes to a trades career?

#### Participation

The question received sixty five responses, and has seen participation from Vancouver Island, Vancouver/Southcoast, Thompson Okanagan and the Kootenays.



Data on site visits and average time on site indicates a high level of interest in the content of the discussion. There have been 40 000 visits to [www.bcjobsplan.ca](http://www.bcjobsplan.ca) since the beginning of the Skills for BC conversation, and users have spent an average of five minutes each on site.

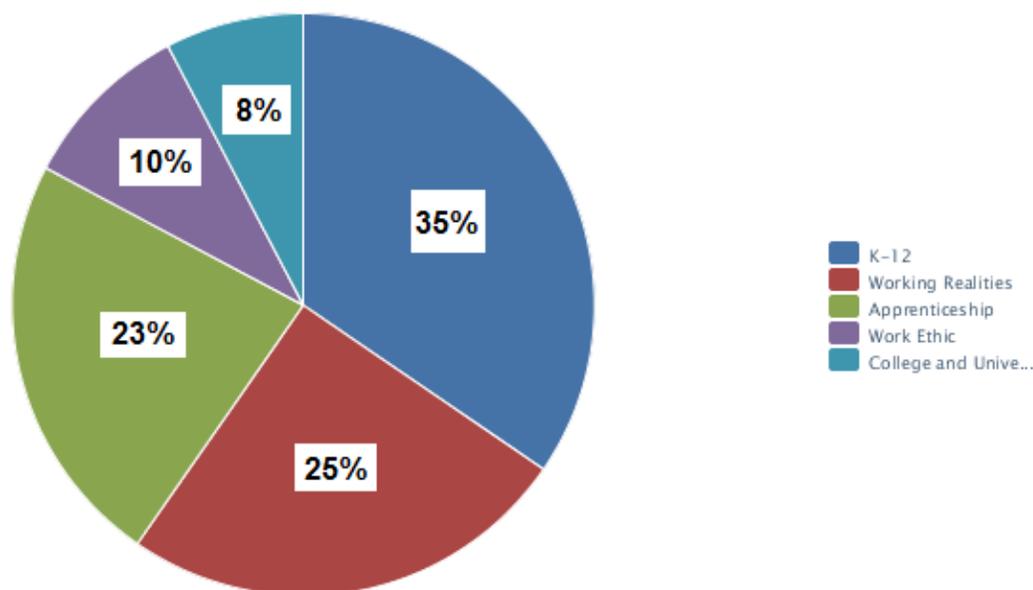
#### What you've said

We heard a number of stories and ideas in response to question three. Some suggestions echoed previous conversations about better ways of introducing trades and technical skills to young people in elementary and high school (including and especially the importance of the ACE-IT program). We also heard more about the need for educational institutions and industry to collaborate more effectively.

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Generally, top categories of conversation for question 3 include:



The journey that participants described through their comments focused on the moments of inspiration to make the choice to pursue a trade, the hard work and values necessary to succeed, and the systems of support that can help guide inspired people (younger or older) to get the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the future. Participants also talked about the realities of work—they stressed the importance of knowing your rights as an employee, and also discussed the pressure on employers to compete in global market place, and the role that foreign workers have in dealing with that pressure.

These key themes are described in more detail below:

- Inspiration—building a house, running a first weld, seeing a wage for the first time, supporting a family, gaining, sharing and applying knowledge that helps people were just a few moments described by participants as inspirations to pursue a trade. Some participants talked about how they had gained multiple Red Seal qualifications as their needs changed and new opportunities came their way.
- Hard work and values—participants stressed the need for continuous learning, converting hobbies to a career, working your way up the ladder and pursuing passion and opportunity. As one contributor, Clint, put it: “We crusty old timers have worked very hard to be successful in our chosen careers. We are not going to give you a career, we want you to earn and learn and make it YOUR career. Remember, your first choice may not be the one you finish with.”
- Systems of support—participants talked about multiple ways for young people to find their way to the trades, including expanding ACE IT , improving linkages between the

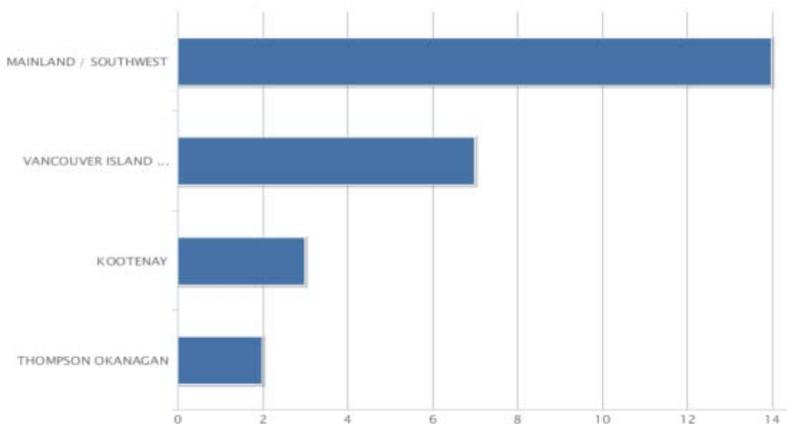
business community, community colleges and employers, and introducing new kinds of programs in high school that allow students to explore different hands-on trades experiences. Other participants discussed ways to encourage workers with existing knowledge from other fields to be recognized for that knowledge. Others discussed the role that industry can play in making employment connections and in ensuring training fits with the needs of the profession.

- Realities of work—several participants talked about the difficulties that some young workers encounter in finding work early in their career. Others discussed the challenge posed by employers who may take advantage of young workers who aren't aware of their rights, or are motivated to pursue low cost rather than skilled labour. There were other important points made about the risks and limits employers (particularly small business) face in supporting their employees with onsite training, and the role that foreign workers play in remaining competitive.

### **Q4. How can BC communities and businesses get ready to seize the opportunities coming from liquefied natural gas (LNG)?**

#### **Participation**

The question received 32 responses, and has seen participation from Vancouver/Southcoast, Vancouver Island, the Kootenays and Thompson Okanagan.



Data on site visits and average time on site indicates a high level of interest in the content of the discussion. There have been 40 000 visits to [www.bcjobsplan.ca](http://www.bcjobsplan.ca) since the beginning of the Skills for BC conversation, and users have spent an average of five minutes each on site.

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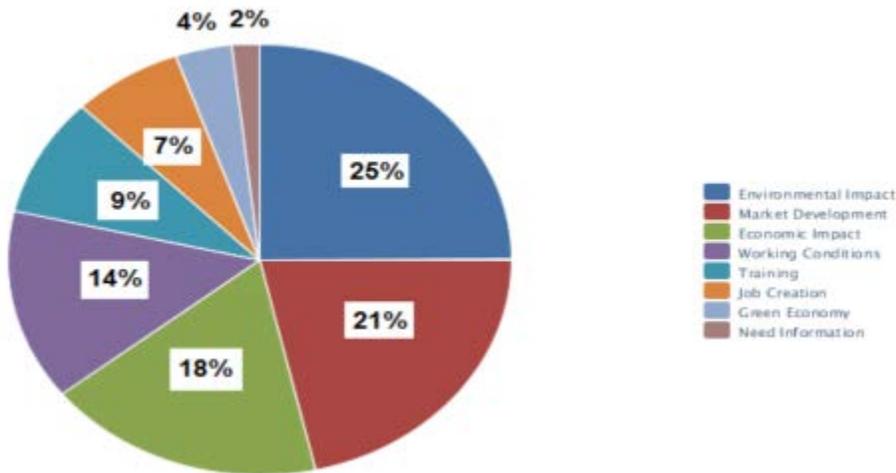
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### What you've said

Participants focused on the challenges and opportunities of liquefied natural gas for B.C..

Key challenges included concerns about the environmental impact of extraction techniques like fracking, GHGs, and potential spills. There were also concerns expressed about the maturity of LNG markets, and whether current proposals will turn into real jobs.

Generally, top categories of conversation for question 4 include:



Opportunities focused on the new kinds of jobs created by LNG and ways of mitigating environmental risks. Participants also talked about the importance of stimulating market demand through supporting LNG powered vehicles and infrastructure as well as good market development in Asia. Some participants also wanted to talk about economic opportunity without LNG development, putting a focus on developing a 'green economy' in British Columbia.

There were asks for more information about LNG. Some participants wanted to know more about what kinds of jobs would be available. Others wanted better ways to assess claims about the environmental risks of LNG development.

There were also calls for improved workforce planning as well as funding for education that supports LNG oriented careers, and incentives for employers to train existing workers to seize the opportunities.

Some specific ideas identified through the conversation included:

- Increasing the number of natural gas stations available in BC, to support vehicles powered by natural gas

- Extending tax credits to families supporting individuals who are being training in LNG related skill sets
- Investigating carbon dioxide waste capture to reduce the climate impact of LNG production

### **Q5. How can employers deal with the upcoming skills shortage?**

#### **What you've said**

Most of the discussion in question five focused on the preparing for the skill shortage through both employee and employer training.

For employees, many participants talked about the difficulty they encounter in finding work in the early stages of their career, say, in the first or second year of apprenticeship. They also talked about how gaps in income during these early stages—often caused by either finding work or going back to school for training—which make pursuing an apprentice unaffordable. To deal with this challenge, some participants recommended reducing the cost of apprenticeship programs, or expanding benefit programs like Employment Insurance to help apprentices maintain an income during 'down' periods. Others recommended creating 'apprenticeship counsellor' positions to support trainees and yet others talked about finding ways to encourage existing employees to learn new skills for themselves.

From an employers' perspective, participants discussed a number of programs or incentives that would improve the situation. Challenges to employers include the costs and risks that go along with training and the possibility of investing in an employee that leaves. Some identified an issue being that size of most BC companies are small and do not have full-fledged training programs supporting the managers and supervisors so training doesn't get done, or doesn't get done well. One respondent felt that post-secondary institutions and conventional apprenticeship programs cannot help companies with niche training needs – so companies need to be able to find a way to train themselves, effectively and quickly.

To answer this challenge, many participants referenced how tax credits for hiring new workers or training existing workers could drive more businesses to make those investments. Other participants focused on specific elements that would remove the costs associated with training, such as 'just in time' video learning delivered through smartphones. Employers could also strike different kinds of agreements with employees that ask for commitments to the organization for a period of time in exchange for the employer paying for training costs on prorated basis over that same period.

Workforce planning was also a focus for participants. Many participants were concerned that some employers might be surprised by retirements or skills gaps. They felt that if employers understood their workforce well, they would be more inclined to create developmental

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opportunities for new apprentices, and would perhaps be less dependent on hiring foreign workers.

Another key theme focused on recognizing people with skill who may not have an official qualification—“people with talent, but no paper”, as one participant put it. There was concern that we may not have a skill shortage, but instead a ‘credential shortage’. Red seal challenge programs were put forward as a strong solution to dealing with this important challenge.

Participants also focused on training space and support. Some participants called for more training spaces to become available, expansion of training facilities, higher numbers of ‘accredited’ post secondary institutions, and improved conditions for trades instructors. Others talked about novel ways of making better use of existing space, like in high schools or dormant industrial space. As in other parts of the discussion, there were calls for supports to include workers in their 30s and 40s who may want to access training, and calls to include the disabled community in ensuring they have access to programs. For the first time in this discussion, we heard about the importance of childcare to enable people to pursue a skills and the need for communities to support foreign workers when they come to BC.

Finally, there were also calls for better data and information about available occupations and a suggestion for making better connections between labour market information and schools; there was also a discussion about the need to measure employment success of different models and programs and was an idea to create marketing to show the career path of an experienced skills trades person and demonstrate the amazing development opportunities that are possible.

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### Appendix: Final Web Site Analytics from Nov 1 – Dec 13<sup>th</sup>

BC Jobs Plan Website	Nov 1 – Nov 8	Nov 8 – Nov 15	Nov 15 - Nov 22	Nov 22 - Nov 29	Nov 29 - Dec 6	Dec7 - Dec 13	Total
<i>Visits</i>	11,530	8,282	9,650	12,091	6,918	3,826	52,297
<i>Average Time on Site</i>	4:57	5:43	5:35	5:19	4:49	5:49	5:18
<a href="#">Q1</a>	121	24	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	145 Comments
<a href="#">Q2</a>	N/A	72	15	N/A	N/A	N/A	87 Comments
<a href="#">Q3</a>	N/A	10	40	15	N/A	N/A	65 Comments
<a href="#">Q4</a>	N/A	N/A	11	21	N/A	N/A	32 Comments
<a href="#">Q5</a>	N/A	N/A	N/A	19	49	18	86 Comments
<b>Total comments</b>	<b>121 Comments this week</b>	<b>106 Comments this week</b>	<b>66 Comments this week</b>	<b>55 Comments this week</b>	<b>49 comments this week</b>	<b>18 comments this week</b>	<b>417 Total Comments to Date</b>