NORTHERN ONTARIO
WORKFORCE PLANNING

employerone
SURVEY

Northern Ontario

2015 employerone Survey Results

EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO

Northern Ontario

employerone Survey 2015

Prepared By:
Northern Ontario Workforce Planning (NOWP)

NOWP: Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation; Far Northeast Training Board; North Superior Workforce Planning Board; Northwest Training & Adjustment Board; The Labour Market Group; Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin

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Northern Ontario *employerone* survey results 2015

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Executive Summary

Various organizations and economic analysts use labour market information to examine national and provincial workforce trends and make projections about the future. While good labour market information is critical to our understanding of current and projected workforce needs, it is difficult to find local, regional and district level data, particularly for northern Ontario.

As there is no good mechanism to gather information directly from employers, in 2014, the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) asked all six Northern Ontario Workforce Planning (NOWP) boards to conduct a survey of northern employers about their human resources needs.

In 2014, 548 employers completed the employerone survey. In 2015, NOWP boards reduced the number of survey questions asked in an effort to increase the employer response rate. 829 employers completed the 2015 survey, and just over three-quarters of them were new employers (had not completed the 2014 survey). It is important to note that many more employers started but did not complete the survey and their response to specific questions has been included in the results.

Overall, respondents to the 2015 survey represent approximately 18% of all employed residents in northern Ontario; in other words, when combined, they represent 62,456 employees. Most of these respondents also fall into the SME (small and medium-sized enterprises) category however several larger employers also completed the survey this past year.

Perhaps what is most interesting about the results is that the overall perspective of employer respondents on a number of issues such as top competencies, recruitment methods, reason for hiring and education credentials for specific occupations did not change from 2014 to 2015. Here is a snapshot of what employers said in 2015:

- **separations:** 934 companies reported 6,255 separations or a turnover rate of 10.0% in the previous 12 months; with 41% of employees (2,567) quitting their job and 14% (859) retiring;

- **hiring:** 685 employers reported hiring 11,706 people in the previous 12 months; one quarter of those were for full time positions (2,919), 29% were contract positions (3,356) and 29% were part-time positions (3,357);

- **projected hires:** employers are less optimistic about their plans to hire over the next 12 months; projected number of hires are less than one half of hiring in the previous 12 months at 5,407;

- **high frequency hiring occupations:** *Labourer* (979); *Student Intern* (543); *Faculty* (551); *Food and Beverage Servers* (358); *Personal Support Worker* (243); *Admin Support/Clerical* (238);

- **area of recruitment and availability of qualified workers:** 602 employers targeted their recruitment efforts within their district however 654 employers said that the availability of qualified workers is fair and 21% reported poor;

- **recruitment methods:** word of mouth and personal contacts/networks/referrals continue to be the most frequently reported method of recruitment followed by online job boards then a company's own website;

- **training:** 73% of employers provide ongoing support for employee training and education, however most want educated and experienced employees; 49% said they offer experiential learning opportunities for job seekers and students; and

- **top 3 competencies for current/future workforce:** work ethic (dedication, dependability); customer service skills; and self motivation/work with little or no supervision.

As noted, surveys such as employerone help provide insights into the needs of employers in northern Ontario. While employers continue to hire, challenges continue to exist on a number of fronts with the skills they are looking for, their perceived quality of available workers and the preparedness of the current and future workforce. At this time, it is critical for us to step back and look at ways to better align what employers require with the skills that are currently being taught in order to enhance the development, growth and sustainability of the current and future workforce in northern Ontario.

Introduction

Good labour market information is essential as various stakeholders use the data to guide their work. Obtaining local-specific data however can be challenging without additional research. Some industries such as manufacturing, forestry, tourism and mining have taken it upon themselves to identify current and future workforce needs within their own industry; but this information is not readily available, local or consistent across all industries.

In 2014, the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) provided funding to all six Northern Ontario Workforce Planning (NOWP) boards to pilot an online employer survey. This survey was designed to collect information annually from local employers on HR issues such as labour turnover, hard-to-fill positions, recruitment difficulties, current and future skill shortages, as well as issues in training and education practices.

The long term objective of this initiative was to develop a mechanism to collect information in a coordinated, timely and standardized way in order to gain an understanding of the demand side of the labour market. The ultimate goal: to better support local industries with the training and recruitment of their current and future workforce.

Six workforce planning boards from across northern Ontario which form Northern Ontario Workforce Planning conducted the employerone survey in their local catchment area in 2014 and a shortened version of this survey in 2015. Each local board completed individual reports based on their local results. This report combines all of the 2015 data to create a picture of employer responses from across all of northern Ontario. Comparisons to the 2014 survey results are made where possible and appropriate.

Survey Methodology

As a result of feedback by employers and others about the length of the 2014 employerone survey, NOWP boards reviewed the survey instrument and shortened it considerably for the 2015 survey. All six NOWP boards uploaded the survey using *Fluid Survey* to collect employer responses.

Each NOWP board posted a link to the 2015 employerone survey on their website. The survey was open from August 1st and closed on November 30th, 2015 and employers were asked to consider hires and separations during the previous 12 months and hires for the next 12 months.

Various other strategies were also used to reach employers including: media releases, personalized emails, employer site visits, one-on-one interviews, attending employer-related events, business-targeted mailing, follow-up reminder emails, etc. Participating business organizations and agencies also provided support by: asking their employer contacts to complete the survey, posting the survey link on their website, including information about the survey in their newsletters and distributing the survey at their local functions.

Limitations

Despite various outreach efforts and a shortened survey in 2015, it was still challenging to get employers to respond. Interestingly, 78% of the employers who did respond said they had not responded to the 2014 survey; in other words the 2015 employerone survey was completed by a different cohort of employers. This can be seen as both positive and negative. While more repeat employer respondents might have helped establish a relationship and pattern of workforce-related perspectives, new employers added to the pool of respondents.

Additionally, not all employers who started the survey completed the survey however there was an increase in the number of larger employers. While it would have been ideal to have all employers who started the survey complete it, a number of employers did. Some of this may be a reflection of the kinds of questions being asked, the length of the survey, the relevance of the questions and/or the interest of the employer.

Findings

Respondent Profiles:

A total of 1161 employers started the 2015 employerone survey and 829 completed the entire survey. 225 respondents indicated that they had been part of the survey last year (22% of this year's respondents), when 725 employers had participated. Findings in this report include responses by all employers who answered the question. In other words, while 829 completed the entire survey, other employers may have still answered some of the questions.

The following is a breakdown of respondents by district (N=957). It should be noted that the District of Sudbury includes Greater Sudbury which is within the district. Many of the respondents from this area did not distinguish the two in their responses.

ALGOMA	COCHRANE	KENORA	MANITOULIN	NIPISSING	PARRY SOUND	RAINY RIVER	SUDBURY	THUNDER BAY	TIMISKAMING	OTHER
190	165	64	25	146	75	18	118	121	34	1

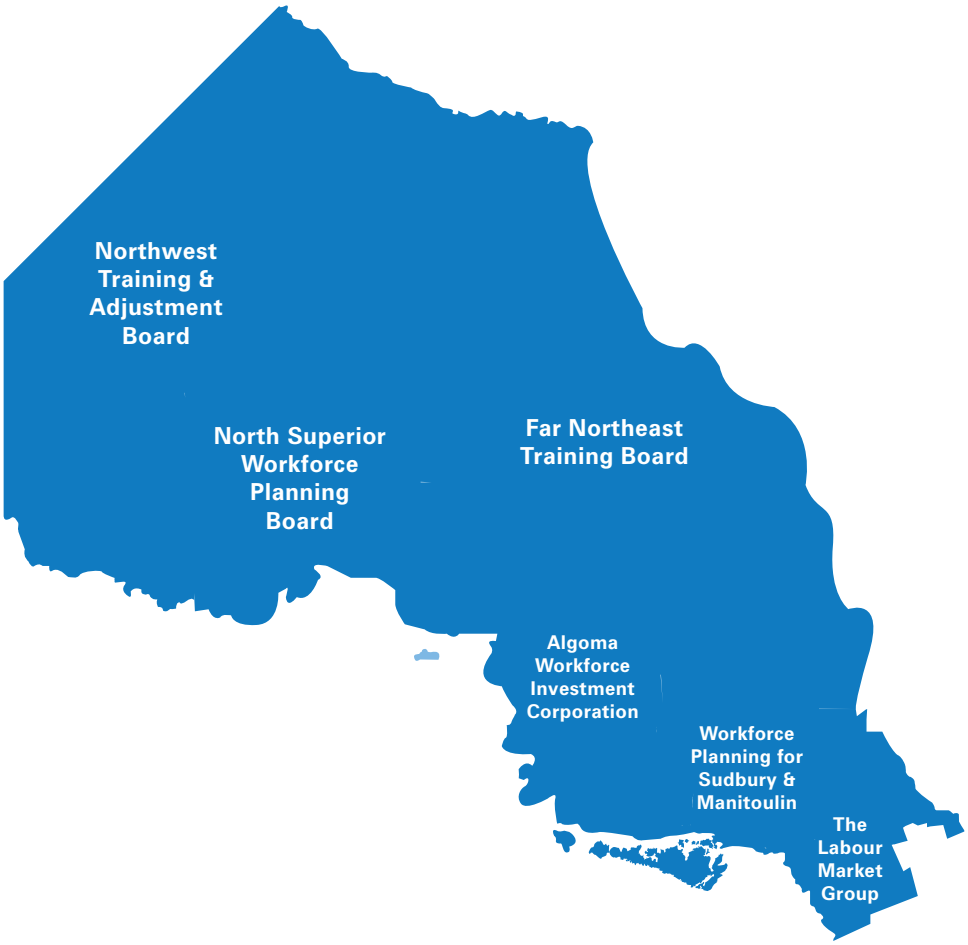


Illustration 1 provides the breakdown of respondents by industry and compares the percentage distribution with the distribution of businesses with employees across Northern Ontario in June 2015.

The colour-coding for the survey results highlights where the survey percentage share is much greater (green) or much lower (blue) than the actual distribution (that is, plus or minus 2% points).

ILLUSTRATION 1: NUMBER AND PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS BY INDUSTRY

INDUSTRY	NUMBER	PERCENT	ACTUAL
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting	20	2.1%	3.6%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil & Gas Extraction	29	3.0%	0.7%
Utilities	3	0.3%	0.4%
Construction	87	9.1%	12.4%
Manufacturing	39	4.1%	3.2%
Wholesale Trade	9	0.9%	3.8%
Retail Trade	135	14.2%	15.7%
Transportation & Warehousing	32	3.4%	4.3%
Information & Cultural Industries	17	1.8%	1.0%
Finance & Insurance	51	5.4%	3.0%
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	14	1.5%	4.1%
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	64	6.7%	6.8%
Management of Companies & Enterprises	5	0.5%	0.5%
Administration & Support, Waste Management	11	1.2%	3.9%
Educational Services	43	4.5%	1.3%
Healthcare & Social Services	109	11.5%	11.8%
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	34	3.6%	2.0%
Accommodation & Food Services	64	6.7%	9.5%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	132	13.9%	10.5%
Public Administration	53	5.6%	1.5%
TOTAL	**951**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**

Actual figures are from Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Counts, June 2015

Overall, the distribution of survey respondents more or less matches the actual distribution of employers in the North, with some variations. The greatest over-representation in this sample is found among employers in *Public Administration* and *Other Services*, and the largest under-representation is among employers in *Wholesale Trade* and *Construction.*

The distribution of respondents by number of employees shows a far greater proportion of respondents with a larger number of employees compared to the actual figures, particularly among those firms with 20 or more employees (illustration 2).

ILLUSTRATION 2: PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS BY NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES COMPARED TO ACTUAL PERCENTAGE

	1-4 EMPLOYEES	5-19 EMPLOYEES	20-99 EMPLOYEES	100+ EMPLOYEES
Survey	26%	41%	23%	11%
Actual	48%	37%	13%	2%

Actual figures are from Statistics Canada's Canadian Business Counts, June 2015

According to Statistics Canada, in June 2015, there were 22,314 establishments with employees in Northern Ontario. 4% of them participated in the 2015 employerone survey, and almost one in five (19%) of those firms had over 100 employees as noted in illustration 3.

ILLUSTRATION 3: SURVEY RESPONDENTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL ESTABLISHMENTS WITH EMPLOYEES IN EACH CATEGORY

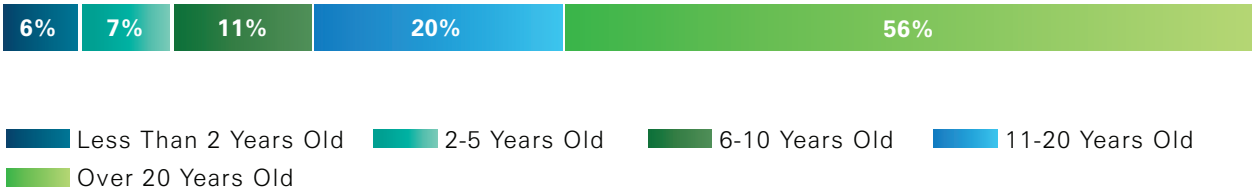
1-4 EMPLOYEES	5-19 EMPLOYEES	20-99 EMPLOYEES	100+ EMPLOYEES	TOTAL
2%	5%	8%	19%	4%

Overall, survey respondents represented 62,456 employees. Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey reports that in 2015, there were 345,500 residents employed in Northern Ontario. This means that survey respondents accounted for 18% of all employed residents. The larger proportion of employees covered by the survey was the result of an increase in larger employers completing the survey.

According to respondents, around 60% of these jobs were full-time, 21% were part-time, 10% were contract, and 9% were seasonal. Additionally, around 14% of all jobs were filled by youth under the age of 25 and 18% of jobs were filled by adults aged 55 years or older.

Interestingly, survey respondents tended to represent older, more established firms; three-quarters were over 10 years old and more than half (56%) were over 20 years old.

ILLUSTRATION 4: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF COMPANIES BY AGE OF ESTABLISHMENT (N=880)



Separations Over The Last 12 Months

Illustration 5 presents data on separations by type of occupation and type of separation. Of the 934 employers that provided an answer to this question, 59% reported a separation in the past year. 6,255 separations were reported, resulting in an annual turnover rate of 10.0%. Illustration 6 provides these same figures as a percentage distribution, in order to make comparisons between the categories easier.

ILLUSTRATION 5: NUMBER OF SEPARATIONS, BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY AND REASON FOR SEPARATION

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES	QUITS	RETIREMENTS	TEMPORARY LAYOFFS	PERMANENT LAYOFFS	DISMISSALS	OTHER	TOTAL
Managers & Executives	122	102	16	31	61	22	**354**
Professionals	306	112	6	23	36	71	**554**
Technical	75	52	15	17	24	25	**208**
Trades	100	82	114	18	22	14	**350**
Apprentices	22	0	11	4	6	8	**51**
Sales & Marketing	52	25	14	51	11	20	**173**
Admin & Clerical	190	114	29	41	30	61	**465**
Production Worker	543	132	436	95	122	143	**1471**
Service Worker	655	103	198	105	156	84	**1301**
Other	502	137	212	133	108	236	**1328**
TOTAL	**2567**	**859**	**1051**	**518**	**576**	**684**	**6255**

ILLUSTRATION 6: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF SEPARATIONS, BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY AND REASON FOR SEPARATION

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES	QUITS	RETIREMENTS	TEMPORARY LAYOFFS	PERMANENT LAYOFFS	DISMISSALS	OTHER	2015 TOTAL
Managers & Executives	2%	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%	**6%**
Professionals	5%	2%	0%	0%	1%	1%	**9%**
Technical	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	**3%**
Trades	2%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	**6%**
Apprentices	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	**1%**
Sales & Marketing	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	**3%**
Admin & Clerical	3%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	**7%**
Production Worker	9%	2%	7%	2%	2%	2%	**24%**
Service Worker	11%	2%	3%	2%	3%	1%	**21%**
Other	8%	2%	3%	2%	2%	4%	**21%**
TOTAL	**41%**	**14%**	**17%**	**8%**	**9%**	**11%**	**100%**

Overall, *quits* are by far the largest reason for a separation, followed by *temporary lay-offs* which are a more distant second reason. One in seven (14%) separations are due to *retirement* and one in eleven (9%) are reported as *dismissals*. While *production workers* account for the largest proportion of separations, they are as likely to *quit* as they experience a *permanent* or *temporary lay-off*. *Service workers* on the other hand, are more likely to *quit*.

Hiring Over The Last 12 Months

Illustration 7 lists the figures for total hires over the previous 12 months, by occupational category and by type of employment. The shaded green column lists the numbers for separations in the same period. Overall, there were 11,706 hires over the last 12 months reported by respondents answering this question, which is considerably more than the 6,255 separations over this same period. 685 employers reported hiring last year which is notably higher than the 555 employers who reported separations. All of this suggests that last year, hires outpaced separations across Northern Ontario.

However, on closer inspection the picture looks somewhat less rosy. For one, only a quarter of these jobs are full-time permanent. There are more part-time and contract hires than there are full-time hires. Secondly, for many occupational categories the difference between the number of hires and the number of separations is so great that one has to wonder if the same criteria were used to count separations. The very large number of contract hires or part-time hires in some categories raises the question of whether the ending of a contract was counted as a separation, or whether there was constant replacement of part-time workers whose separations were not similarly counted. These numerical discrepancies suggest that a more nuanced way of asking about separations may be in order, for example, asking whether separations included contract or seasonal workers.

ILLUSTRATION 7: TOTAL NUMBER OF HIRES, COMPARED TO TOTAL NUMBER OF SEPARATIONS

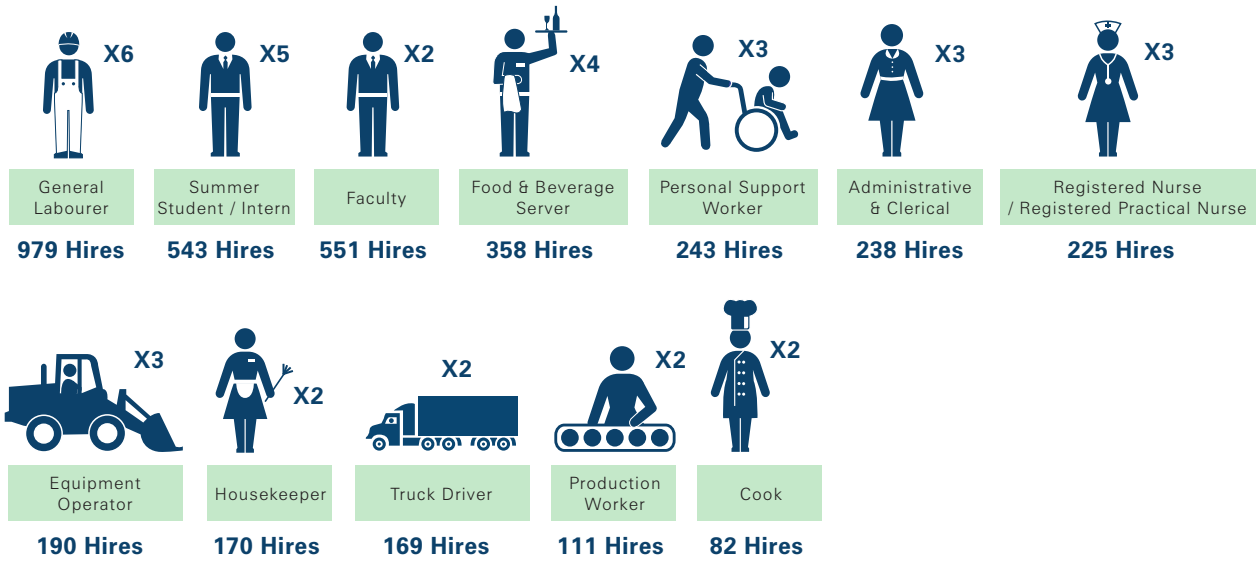
OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME	CONTRACT	SEASONAL	TOTAL	SEPARATIONS
Managers & Executives	235	21	15	4	**275**	**354**
Professionals	271	691	316	24	**1302**	**554**
Technical	157	152	242	93	**644**	**208**
Trades	160	64	1316	57	**1597**	**350**
Apprentices	91	10	7	30	**138**	**51**
Sales & Marketing	118	62	15	41	**236**	**173**
Admin & Clerical	254	158	205	27	**644**	**465**
Production Worker	707	270	140	477	**1594**	**1471**
Service Worker	520	1268	390	453	**2631**	**1301**
Other	406	661	710	868	**2645**	**1328**
TOTAL	**2919**	**3357**	**3356**	**2074**	**11706**	**6255**

High Frequency Hiring Occupations

There were hundreds of different occupations named among these high frequency hiring occupations, but in many instances, the number of hires was only one or two. There were a number of occupations that had both a high number of hires and which appeared more than once on the top ten lists of frequent hires for each of the six NOWP board areas. Illustration 8 lists the top twelve most frequently hired occupations, indicating the number of hires represented by these occupations and the number of times they appeared on a top ten list.

ILLUSTRATION 8: LARGEST NUMBER OF HIRES AMONG HIGH FREQUENCY HIRING OCCUPATIONS

The following occupations made the top ten list multiple times.



Hard To Recruit Occupations

Employers were further asked whether any of these high frequency hires were hard to fill. Half of employers (51%) who identified high frequency hires said yes. Illustration 9 shows the proportion of employers claiming difficulties in hiring for high frequency hiring positions by the specific reasons for their difficulties.

ILLUSTRATION 9: REASONS FOR WHICH IT IS HARD TO RECRUIT AND THE PROPORTION OF EMPLOYERS CITING THAT REASON

REASONS	PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS
Applicants not meeting qualification requirements (education level / credentials)	57%
Applicants not meeting skills requirements	56%
Not enough applicants	51%
Applicants not meeting work experience requirements	40%
Applicants not meeting motivation, attitude, or interpersonal abilities requirements	37%
Inability to compete with other employers due to lack of pay and benefits	24%
No local qualified applicants	23%
Inability to compete with other employers due to nature of work (seasonal, shift work, irregular hours, job content)	16%
Inability to compete with other employers due to remote location / poor public transit	14%
No applicants at all	12%
Applicants not meeting language requirements	7%
Other	7%
Inability to compete with other employers due to lack of promotion opportunities	4%
Inability to assess a foreign educational qualification or credential	1%

For those employers who said that these high frequency positions were hard to fill, half cited the following major recruitment challenges:

- Applicants do not meet the educational qualifications;
- Applicants do not meet the skills qualifications; and
- There are not enough applicants.

Two other issues also rate higher on their concern list:

- Applicants do not meet the work experience requirements; and
- Applicants do not possess the motivation, attitude, or interpersonal abilities.

Recruitment Methods

Respondents were asked to indicate what mechanisms they used to recruit job candidates, for any hiring. Answers were provided by 662 respondents and the percentage citing each recruitment method is listed in Illustration 10. (The total responses add up to more than 100% because many employers cited more than one method of recruitment.)

ILLUSTRATION 10: FREQUENCY OF USE OF RECRUITMENT METHODS (NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 662)

RECRUITMENT METHODS	FREQUENCY OF USE
Word of mouth / personal contacts / referrals / informal networks	70%
Online job boards / postings	55%
Company's own website	39%
Newspaper ads	33%
Government employment centres or websites	30%
Unsolicited resumés	24%
On-site job signs or posters	23%
Non-government or community employment service centres or websites	16%
On-site recruitment at schools, colleges, or universities	14%
Job fairs	10%
Trade or professional association publications / websites	9%
Other	9%
Executive search companies or temporary help agencies	5%

By far, word-of-mouth remains the most common method of recruiting job candidates, relied upon by seven out of ten employers. The next most frequently used strategy is on-line job boards, used by over half of employers (55%). After that, the usage diminishes, but the next three methods are relied on by close to a third of employers: the company's own website; newspaper ads; and government employment centres or websites.

Availability of Qualified Workers

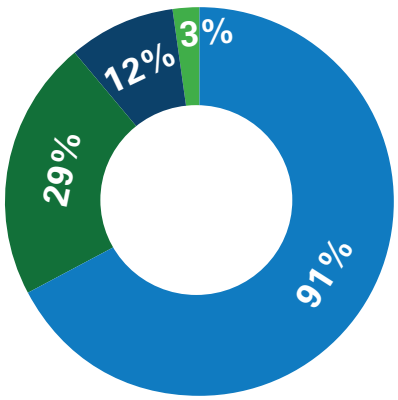
Northern employers have a lukewarm opinion about the availability of qualified workers in their local district. Of the 654 responses, 41% said "Fair" and 21% replied "Poor." If one assigned a numerical value to each choice, where "3" = Excellent, "2" = Good, "1" = Fair, and "0" = Poor, then added up the scores and divided by the total number of responses, the average figure would be 1.21, only somewhat higher than Fair (1.0).

ILLUSTRATION 11: RATING THE AVAILABILITY OF QUALIFIED WORKERS IN YOUR DISTRICT (N=654)

Recruitment Areas

Respondents were asked to indicate the areas their recruitment efforts targeted. Illustration 12 illustrates the number and percentage of employers who selected each of the recruitment area options.

ILLUSTRATION 12: GEOGRAPHIC TARGET AREAS FOR JOB RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES (N=659)



- Within the local district (N=602)
- Within Ontario (N=193)
- Within Canada (N=81)
- Internationally (N=18)

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of employers recruit within their local district (91%). What is surprising is that 9% would say they do not. Almost a third (29%) say they extend their recruitment to the province, and another 12% indicate that their recruitment extends across Canada. Only 3% say they direct recruitment efforts internationally. (The percentages add up to more than 100% because some employers listed more than one option.)

Free Employment Service Agency Assistance For a Specific Demographic Group

Most employers are unlikely to receive employment services from an agency providing assistance on behalf of a particular demographic group. Of the respondents who provided a response to this question, three-quarters (76%) said they received no such assistance. Among those who do receive such assistance, most do so with respect to youth, and then the numbers fall off considerably for other population groups as follows:

- 19% received assistance from an agency assisting youth (15-24 years of age)
- 6% received assistance from an agency serving Aboriginals
- 4% received assistance from an agency serving persons with disabilities
- 4% received assistance from an agency serving older workers (55 years and older)
- 3% received assistance from an agency serving immigrants or visible minorities

Use of a Paid Recruitment Agency

The use of a paid recruitment agency was relatively low. Of 669 employers who answered this question, only 5.4% (36 employers) indicated that they used a paid recruitment agency.

Hiring Plans For the Next 12 Months

60% of respondents indicated that they planned on hiring over the next 12 months. The projected number of hires for the coming year is considerably lower than last year's hires, slightly less than half.

Illustration 13 shows the number of projected job hires over the next 12 months, by occupational category and by employment type (blue cells), and compares the figures to the reported hires over the past year (green cells) (from Illustration 7).

In many categories, the ratio between the projected hires and the number of hires last year matches the overall difference, that is, the projected hires is half that of past hires. In three occupations, Trades, Apprentices and to a lesser extent Production Worker, the gap is much less (in Trades it is virtually non-existent). But in many other categories, the difference is considerably more than double: Part-time Workers, Professionals, Service Workers and Other.

There is no obvious pattern here that might provide some insight into the significant gap between projected hires and past hires. It might be that employers are pessimistic about the coming year and/or cautious about projected hiring decisions. Given the importance of hiring, it warrants monitoring employment patterns to ascertain which way the hiring is trending. This will be an important aspect to consider for the 2016 employerone survey.

ILLUSTRATION 13: PROJECTED NUMBER OF HIRES IN COMING YEAR, COMPARED TO HIRES IN PAST YEAR

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME	CONTRACT	SEASONAL	TOTAL PROJECTED HIRINGS	HIRINGS PAST YEAR
Managers & Executives	107	13	8	7	**135**	**275**
Professionals	147	114	211	12	**484**	**1302**
Technical	100	21	171	18	**310**	**644**
Trades	199	24	1206	95	**1524**	**1597**
Apprentices	66	9	3	33	**111**	**138**
Sales & Marketing	61	36	4	30	**131**	**236**
Admin & Clerical	127	69	40	14	**250**	**644**
Production Worker	401	125	1	399	**926**	**1594**
Service Worker	282	244	74	186	**786**	**2631**
Other	190	112	128	320	**750**	**2645**
PROJECTED HIRINGS	**1680**	**767**	**1846**	**1114**	**5407**	**11706**
HIRINGS PAST YEAR	**2919**	**3357**	**3356**	**2074**	**11706**	

Reason For Expected Hiring

Employers were asked why they expected to have job openings (Illustration 14). The large number of responses in the *Other* and *N/A* categories suggest that more choices need to be provided for this question. Likely options include separations, parental/maternity leave and seasonal hires.

Otherwise, it is clear that *Expansion/Restructuring* is the reason for far more hires than *Retirements*, and *Technological Change* is rarely identified as a reason for hiring. It is important to observe that historically, *Technological Change* often results in *dismissal* rather than a hiring.

ILLUSTRATION 14: REASON FOR THE EXPECTED HIRING

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES	RETIREMENTS	EXPANSION / RESTRUCTURING	TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE	OTHER	N/A	TOTAL
Managers & Executives	44	41	1	34	37	**157**
Professionals	17	34	1	19	36	**107**
Technical	15	36	4	10	40	**105**
Trades	26	41	1	21	38	**127**
Apprentices	5	26	0	13	46	**90**
Sales & Marketing	9	30	1	30	37	**107**
Admin & Clerical	24	55	1	36	35	**151**
Production Worker	13	26	0	38	40	**117**
Service Worker	21	50	0	53	42	**166**
Other	13	21	1	69	31	**135**
TOTAL	**187**	**360**	**10**	**323**	**382**	**1262**

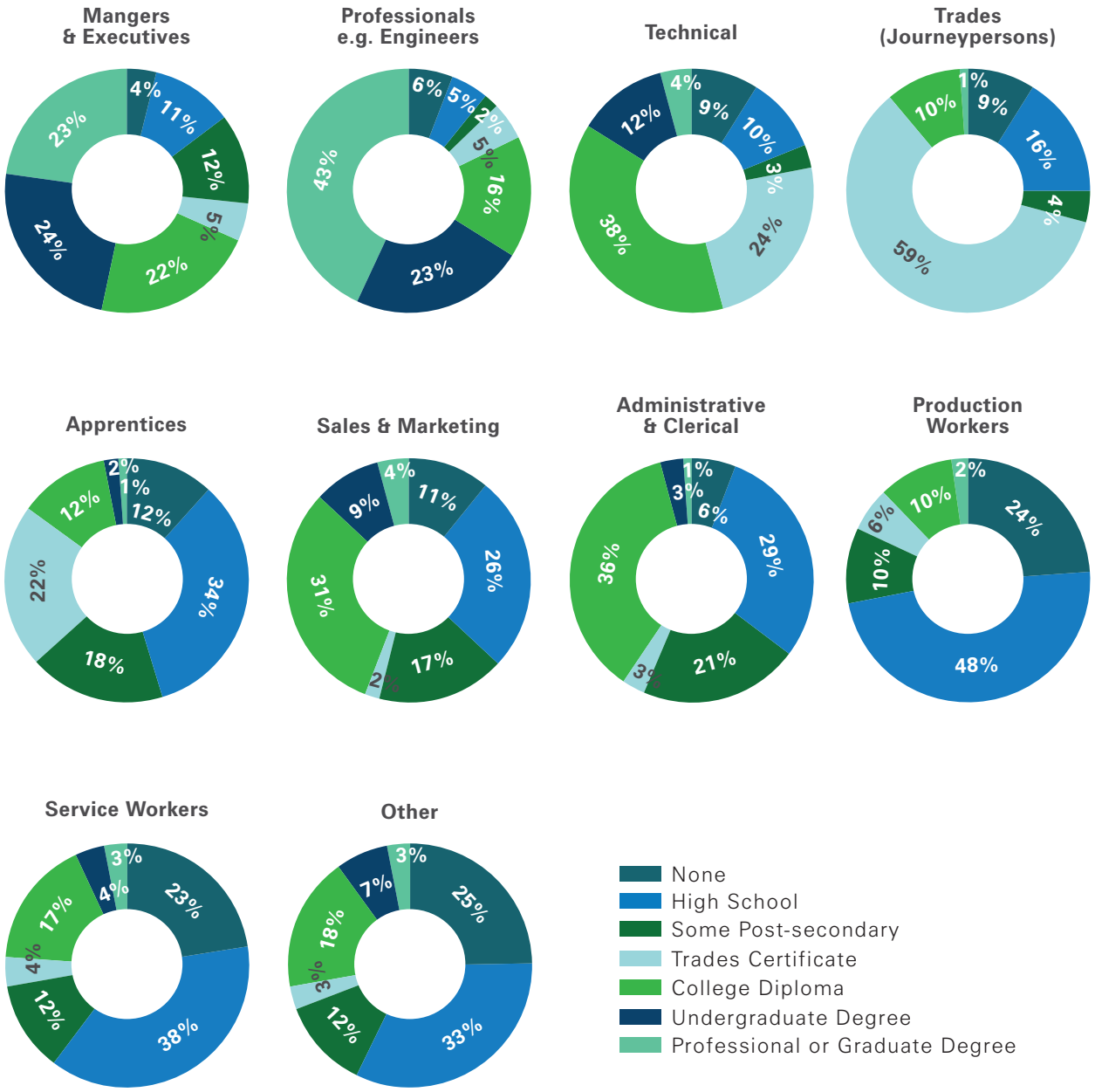
Level of Education By Occupational Category

Employers were asked to list the minimum educational attainment requirements for the broad occupational categories.

Illustration 15 lists the percentage distribution of the responses by each occupation. For certain occupations, one specific designation is the clear choice: 59% of employers expect a *Tradesperson* to have a trades' certificate; no certificate or a high school diploma is often sufficient for a *Production Worker*, a *Service Worker* or a worker in the *Other* category. By and large, *Managers* are expected to have a college diploma or higher, and an undergraduate degree or higher for *Professionals*, with 43% of respondents expecting a professional degree.

Overall, and perhaps surprisingly, a high school diploma still counts as the minimum requirement for many occupations, but a college diploma has more currency for higher level occupations. The trend is illustrated by the visual representation of the increasing educational requirements as one goes from lower skilled positions to higher skilled positions.

ILLUSTRATION 15: MINIMUM EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES



Top 3 Competencies

Illustration 16 tabulates the scoring of all respondents who identified the top three competencies that their employees needed to possess, both for their current as well as future workforce.

ILLUSTRATION 16: NECESSARY COMPETENCIES, CURRENT AND FUTURE WORKFORCE, ALL JOBS AND HARD-TO-FILL JOBS

COMPETENCIES	CURRENT	FUTURE
Work ethic, dedication, & dependability	440	349
Customer service skills	399	294
Self-motivated / ability to work with little or no supervision	350	282
Communication skills (both oral & written)	334	260
Teamwork / interpersonal skills	292	227
Professionalism	224	173
Problem solving, reasoning, & creativity	217	200
Technical skills	211	163
Willingness to learn	202	189
Time management or organizational skills	158	131
Computer literacy skills	158	126
Analytical / research skills	72	60

By a considerable margin, the two top competencies employers seek in their workforce are:

- Work ethic, dedication, dependability
- Customer service skills

A second tier of desired competencies are:

- Self-motivated/ability to work with little or no supervision
- Communication skills (both oral and written)
- Teamwork/interpersonal skills

It is noteworthy that technical skills end up in the lower third of the list of desired competencies. Analytical/research skills are last on the list, and quite a remote last. It is also noteworthy that while employers identify these top competencies, their job vacancy postings and HR requirements often cite 3-5 years experience before a candidate will even be considered for a job. As a result, the top competencies that employers are identifying are often out of sync with other requirements.

Training / Education

Employers were asked whether they were able to provide or support ongoing training and education opportunities for their employees over the last year, and a significant majority (73%) said yes.

Among employers who cited significant barriers to training (164 employers), illustration 17 lists the proportion of those employers who identified the following challenges that impede training. The figures add to more than 100% because some employers identified more than one barrier.

ILLUSTRATION 17: CHALLENGES/BARRIERS TO EMPLOYEES RECEIVING TRAINING OR EDUCATION (N=164)

CHALLENGES & BARRIERS	PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS
Cost	76%
Distance to travel to facility	35%
Loss of productivity during training time	34%
Lack of awareness of existing training programs	27%
Relevant training is not offered locally	25%
Lack of awareness of training support programs	19%
Losing trained employees to other businesses	15%
Other	9%
Lack of awareness of legislated training	6%

It should be emphasized that the majority of employers do train, and the majority do not cite any barriers to training. For those who so name a barrier, the vast majority of them do not provide training (20% of all employers who responded to this question). It is also worth noting that the fear of having trained employees "poached" by competitors does not rank highly in this survey even among those employers who cite barriers to training.

Respondents were further asked in what specific ways they supported training or education for their employees. Illustration 18 identifies the percentage of employers engaged in training who provided each of the following supports. The figures add to more than 100% because some employers identified more than one support – in fact, half of employers (52%) provided more than one support.

ILLUSTRATION 18: PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS PROVIDING SUPPORTS

METHOD OF SUPPORT	PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS
Fund it (fully or partially)	74%
Offer flexibility in work schedule	48%
Supply information on career advancement	24%
Using government hiring & training incentives	21%
Other	16%

Employers offer very concrete forms of support, either through funding the training (in whole or in part) or by providing flexibility in the work schedule, as opposed to simply providing information. Some employers also use/rely on government hiring and training incentives. The "Other" category noted likely involves in-house training, including internal professional development opportunities.

By far the most common training is on-the-job training. Illustration 19 lists each method by percentage of employers who undertook training. Once again, the figures add to more than 100% because some employers identified more than one training method. In addition to on-the-job training, half of employers rely on their industry or professional association, as well as peer-to-peer training. Reliance on training through a college (24%) or university (11%) is low and this may be in part due to cost, availability and closeness in proximity to post-secondary institutions that offer occupation specific training, especially for employers and their employees in northern Ontario.

ILLUSTRATIONS 19: METHOD OR SOURCE OF TRAINING / EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYEES

METHOD OF TRAINING	PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS
On the job	77%
Industry or professional association	50%
Peer to peer	43%
Distance / online education	36%
College (including continuing studies)	24%
University (including continuing studies)	11%
Other	10%

Workplace-relevant Training to Students & Future Workers

Of the 803 employers who responded to this question, just under half (49%) said they did not provide any workplace-relevant training to students or future workers. Of the 412 who answered yes, two-thirds of them provided more than one experience as illustrated in illustration 20. Illustration 21 takes the numbers in illustration 20 and expresses them as a percentage of all employers answering this question.

ILLUSTRATION 20: NUMBER OF WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES CITED (N=803)

STUDENTS & FUTURE WORKERS	PAID CO-OP	UNPAID CO-OP	PAID INTERNSHIP	UNPAID INTERNSHIP	APPRENTICE
High school student	43	214	15	12	30
College student	62	108	70	41	70
University student	45	65	80	47	20
Job seeker	17	24	37	11	39

ILLUSTRATION 21: PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYERS PROVIDING WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE OPPORTUNITIES

STUDENTS & FUTURE WORKERS	PAID CO-OP	UNPAID CO-OP	PAID INTERNSHIP	UNPAID INTERNSHIP	APPRENTICE
High school student	5%	27%	2%	2%	4%
College student	8%	13%	9%	5%	9%
University student	6%	8%	10%	6%	3%
Job seeker	2%	3%	5%	1%	5%

Summary Comments

The current and future workforce needs of employers are driven by their industry and are dictated by a range of other factors, some of which are global and national in nature, and some of which are local. As northern Ontario is heavily reliant on the resource sector (and related industries), global factors may be an underlying cause for the reduced number of projected employment opportunities over the next 12 months. However, when carefully examining the survey responses of employers from northern Ontario, it is clear that global issues may only be part of this story.

Perhaps the bigger story here is that while many employers provide training to their current workforce, most employers have high expectations about the level of experience, skills, training and quality of their prospective/future workforce. To compound matters, according to survey respondents, 62% also said that they feel that the availability of qualified workers in their local/district area is fair to poor.

What does this tell us? It may be telling us several things. First it may be telling us is that the current expectations of employers and the skills that are being taught are out of alignment. A recent Conference Board of Canada report supports this notion of misalignment; in other words that except for highly skilled professional occupations, there is a misalignment between the education system (what is being taught) and employment (what employers want and need).

Second, many employers want and expect experienced employees, yet very few are willing to provide workplace relevant experiences to students and job-seekers as evidenced by the survey results. If employers don't provide the training to students and job seekers to help them gain the experience needed, then who will?

Next, is it possible that employers have set the bar too high? In other words, even though few employers provide experiential opportunities, they still want and expect full trained and experienced workers. Could this contribute to their perspective on the availability or lack of availability of qualified workers?

Last, while not unexpected, it is interesting to note that when employers identify top competencies in their workforce, they are looking for qualities that embody the personal characteristics of the worker and not necessarily their technical expertise. Qualities such as work ethic, dependability, dedication, customer service skills, and ability to work independently are high on their list of top competencies. This speaks volumes about what employers are expecting. But it also begs the question: whose job is to teach these basic and essential skills that employers are looking for? This appears to be a much larger societal issue that we need to pay attention to and in short, address.

As noted, all of these point to a much bigger story in terms of how we are growing and developing our current and future workforce. It also tells us that something is clearly out of alignment. Again, it is important to step back to hear what employers are saying and to look at strategies to better align education with employment and employment with education. While academic learning is the cornerstone of a good paying job, it may be time to get back to the basics and find better ways to prepare students and job-seekers for employment now and into the future.

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