



2015-2016

employerone Survey Results Algoma District



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Executive Summary

The Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation (AWiC) is Algoma's Workforce Planning Board. We conduct research, disseminate information and convene stakeholders to address workforce development trends, gaps and opportunities in the Algoma region.

The employer survey was implemented to provide community stakeholders in Algoma valuable insights into the demand-side of the region's labour market. It was designed to collect information from local employers on a range of labour issues, such as labour turnover, hard-to-fill positions, recruitment difficulties, current and future skill shortages, as well as any issues in training and education practices.

Current, accurate and more importantly, local labour market information is key to making evidence-based decisions in our Local Board area. Information gathered from the pilot and this 2nd round of surveys will help: inform partnership initiatives; increase networking opportunities and collaboration with employers; increase attention to workforce challenges being experienced; and provide local LMI for economic developers, educators/trainers, job-seekers, Employment Ontario service providers and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU).

Overall, respondents to the 2015 survey represent approximately 12% of all employed residents in Algoma; in other words, when combined, they represent 4,800 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:** 98 employers reported 577 separations or a turnover rate of 12.1% in the previous 12 months; 39% (227) were temporary layoffs and 24% (139) were due to employees quitting their job.
- **hiring:** 118 employers reported hiring 656 people in the previous 12 months; one third of those were for full time positions (213).
- **comparing hiring and separations:** There were significantly more separations of managers and executives than hires, which points to a trend of attrition. Similarly trades also experienced significantly lower hires compared to separations. Since these separations were the result of temporary lay-offs, this points to the impacts of an economic slowdown in trades related sectors.

- **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 304.
- **area of recruitment and availability of qualified workers:** 93% of employers targeted their recruitment efforts within their district however 45% of employers said that the availability of qualified workers is *fair* and 17% 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:** 70% 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 Algoma.

Survey Methodology

As a result of feedback by employers and others about the length of the 2014 employerone survey, AWiC, along with the other Workforce Planning Boards in Northern Ontario, reviewed the survey instrument and shortened it considerably for the 2015 survey. All six Workforce Planning Boards uploaded the survey using Fluid Survey to collect employer responses.

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 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 organization (such as local Chambers of Commerce) 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, 72% of the employers who did respond said they had not responded to the 2014 survey; in other words the 2015 employer 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 (186 started vs. 148 completed). 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.

Profile of Respondents

In total, 186 employers participated in the survey and 148 completed it, with a variable number of respondents for each question. 53 respondents indicated that they had been part of the survey last year, when 168 employers had participated.

Respondents reflected a range of industries. Table 1 provides the breakdown of respondents by industry and compares the percentage distribution with the distribution of businesses in the AWIC area (Algoma District) in June 2015. The colour-coding for the survey results highlights where the survey percentage share is much greater (green) or much lower (red) than the actual distribution.

Table 1: Number and percent of respondents by Industry

INDUSTRY	NUMBER	PERCENT	ACTUAL
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2	1.1%	2.9%
Mining, Quarrying and Oil and Gas Extraction	3	1.6%	0.3%
Utilities	0	0.0%	0.5%
Construction	16	8.6%	12.6%
Manufacturing	5	2.7%	3.2%
Wholesale Trade	0	0.0%	2.9%
Retail Trade	35	18.8%	16.6%
Transportation and Warehousing	5	2.7%	3.5%
Information and Cultural Industries	1	0.5%	0.9%
Finance and Insurance	14	7.5%	3.2%
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	2	1.1%	4.3%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	13	7.0%	7.1%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0	0.0%	0.5%
Administration and Support, Waste Management	2	1.1%	4.3%
Educational Services	5	2.7%	1.0%
Healthcare and Social Assistance	20	10.8%	11.8%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	8	4.3%	2.0%
Accommodation and Food Services	10	5.4%	9.7%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	34	18.4%	11.6%
Public Administration	10	5.4%	1.4%
TOTAL	186	100.0%	100.0%

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

There are a few imbalances when it comes to the distribution of respondents by industry, but there are certainly more instances where the survey distribution is quite close to the actual distribution of firms by industry in the study area. Also, in a number of cases, the imbalances are with respect to a smaller industry (e.g. Wholesale Trade or Administration and Support).

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 20-99 employees.

Table 2: Percent of respondents by number of employees compared to actual percentage

	1-4 employees	5-19 employees	20-99 employees	100+ employees
Survey	30%	41%	24%	5%
Actual	47%	38%	12%	3%

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

Overall, the respondents represented 4,770 employees. In the 2011 National Household Survey, Algoma District accounted for 43,435 jobs. Since 2011 there has been a slight decline in the number of jobs, therefore the respondents in the survey are evidently responsible for a considerable chunk of local employment, approximately 11-12% of all jobs.

According to the respondents, approximately 57% of these jobs were full-time, 25% were part-time, and 4% were contract jobs. Seasonal jobs accounted for 10% of jobs.

Approximately 16% of all jobs were filled by youth under the age of 25 years old, and 29% of the jobs were filled by adults aged 55 years or older.

In Table 3 the survey respondents largely represent older firms, most of which were over 10 years old. In fact, more than half (55%) are over 20 years old.

Table 3: Age of company

Less than 2 years old	Between 2 and 5 years old	Between 6 and 10 years old	Between 11 and 20 years old	Over 20 years old
10	15	16	36	95

The remainder of the analysis will illustrate the substantive responses.

Did your organization experience any separations over the last 12 months?

179 companies provided an answer regarding whether they had experienced a separation in the previous year. Of these, 55% reported a separation in the past year. The total separations amounted to 577 jobs, resulting in an annual turnover rate of 12.1%.

Table 4 presents the data on separations by type of occupation and by type of separation.

(Note: One adjustment was made to the raw numbers: the retirement number for managers had totaled 85, however 75 had come from one employer, who had a total staff of 40. A judgment call was made that this entry was a typo, and the figure was reduced to 7 instead of 75. The results, in terms of proportion of separations among managers and the proportion of retirements, fit more closely the pattern from last year and from other Northern boards.)

Table 4: Number of separations, by occupational category and reason for separation

	Quit	Retirement	Temp Lay-off	Perm Lay-off	Dismissal	Other	TOTAL
Managers & Executives	9	17	2	15	6	11	60
Professionals	3	5	0	0	0	1	9
Technical	7	16	2	3	3	2	33
Trades	8	1	29	2	1	0	41
Apprentices	4	0	4	1	1	0	10
Sales & Marketing	4	2	0	0	0	6	12
Admin & Clerical	5	11	2	9	2	4	33
Production Worker	16	1	2	0	17	0	36
Service Worker	61	14	48	14	10	6	153
Other	22	16	138	3	3	8	190
TOTAL	139	83	227	47	43	38	577

Table 5 presents these same figures as a percentage distribution, in order to make comparisons between the categories easier.

Overall, Temporary Lay-offs were the largest category of separations, and Temporary Lay-offs among Other occupations accounted for 24% of all separations. Of those 138 lay-offs, 105 were the result of one employer, and so this figure should be qualified slightly.

Otherwise, Quits accounted for 24% of separations, and Retirements were the third largest category, representing 14% of separations.

Service Workers are slightly more likely to quit than be laid off, trades experience mostly separations due to temporary lay-offs, while (perhaps a little surprisingly) Production Workers experienced virtually no lay-offs, either temporary or permanent (the employerone survey was conducted in the Fall of 2015).

Table 5: Percentage distribution of separations, by occupational category and reason for separation

	Quit	Retirement	Temp Lay-off	Perm Lay-off	Dismissal	Other	2015 TOTAL
Managers & Executives	2%	3%	0%	3%	1%	2%	10%
Professionals	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Technical	1%	3%	0%	1%	1%	0%	6%
Trades	1%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	7%
Apprentices	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Sales & Marketing	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%
Admin & Clerical	1%	2%	0%	2%	0%	1%	6%
Production Worker	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	6%
Service Worker	11%	2%	8%	2%	2%	1%	27%
Other	4%	3%	24%	1%	1%	1%	33%
2015 TOTAL	24%	14%	39%	8%	8%	7%	100%

Did your organization hire anyone over the last 12 months?

Table 6 lists the figures for total hires over the previous 12 months, by occupational categories and by type of employment. The column shaded green list the numbers for separations in the same period.

Overall, there were 656 hires over the last 12 months, somewhat higher than the 577 separations over the same period. 118 employers reported hiring last year, 69% of the respondents to this question, considerably more than the 98 employers who reported separations, all of which suggests hires did indeed outpace separations last year.

When comparing the hires and the separations by occupational category, most of the categories have a rough balance between hires and separations, with an overall uptick in employment, notably among production workers and service workers. Perhaps the one category which raises an eyebrow is that for managers and executives: 60 separations last year and only 24 hires. Are employers really making do with fewer managers and executives? Perhaps the data here is highlighting a trend towards attrition where positions that are vacated are not being replaced. It should also be noted that there is a significant discrepancy number of hires in Trades compared to separations. Since most of the separations were the result of temporary lay-offs, this suggests a slowdown in trades related sectors.

Slightly over one in three (36.4%) of the hires involved the re-hiring of previously laid-off workers. (However, half of these re-hires are the consequence of one employer’s seasonal re-hires.)

Table 6: Total number of hires, comparison to total number of separations

	Full-time	Part-time	Contract	Seasonal	TOTAL	SEPARATIONS
Managers & Executives	19	3	0	2	24	60
Professionals	11	1	9	6	27	9
Technical	19	1	3	7	30	33
Trades	6	1	0	1	8	41
Apprentices	7	1	0	1	9	10
Sales & Marketing	6	4	2	4	16	12
Admin & Clerical	25	5	7	6	43	33
Production Worker	9	42	0	25	76	36
Service Worker	92	50	18	52	212	153
Other	19	17	24	151	211	190
TOTAL	213	125	63	255	656	577

In the last 12 months, please list the occupations (up to 3) for which you hired the most employees.

There were approximately 120 different occupations named and among these high frequency hiring occupations the number of hires was only one or two (for example, 63 occupations were a single hire). Table 7 lists the 10 occupations with at least 10 new hires and lists their share of all high frequency hires. These 10 occupations accounted for half (50%) of the 472 frequent hires.

Table 7: Occupations with largest share of all high frequency hires

OCCUPATION	NUMBER	OCCUPATION	NUMBER
General Labourer	13%	Hostess/Host	3%
Support Operator	9%	Food & Beverage Server	3%
Housekeeping	8%	Housing Support Worker	3%
Administrative/Clerical	4%	Bus Driver	2%
Golf Course Employees	4%	Janitor/Custodian	2%

Employers were further asked whether any of these high frequency hires were hard to fill. Close to half (45%) who identified high frequency hires indicated yes. Table 8 lists the top five reasons cited and compares these results to the top five reasons cited for the same question in last year's survey. The top five reasons are the same, only the ranking is different.

Table 8: Top five reasons cited for difficulty in hiring for high frequency hires, 2015 and 2014

2015	2014
Applicants not meeting qualifications (education level/credentials)	Not enough applicants
Applicants not meeting skills requirements	Applicants not meeting qualification requirements (education level / credentials)
Not enough applicants	Applicants not meeting skills requirements
Applicants not meeting work experience requirements	Applicants not meeting motivation, attitude, or interpersonal skills requirements
Applicants not meeting motivation, attitude, or interpersonal abilities	Applicants not meeting work experience requirements

Table 9 shows the proportion of employers claiming difficulties in hiring for high frequency hiring positions by the specific reasons for their difficulties.

Table 9: Reasons for which it is hard to recruit and the proportion of employers citing that reason

REASON	PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS
Applicants not meeting qualifications (education level/credentials)	57%
Applicants not meeting skills requirements	54%
Not enough applicants	48%
Applicants not meeting work experience	37%
Applicants not meeting motivation, attitude, or interpersonal abilities	30%
No local qualified applicants	26%
Inability to compete with other employers due to pay and benefits	20%
No applicants at all	15%
Inability to compete with other employers due to nature of work (seasonal, shift work, irregular hours, job content)	13%
Inability to compete with other employers due to remote location/poor public transit	13%
Inability to compete with other employers due to promotion opportunities	11%
Other	7%
Applicants not meeting language requirements	4%
Inability to compete with other employers due to lack of promotion opportunities	2%

What recruitment methods were used to find job candidates?

Respondents were asked to indicate what mechanisms they used to recruit job candidates, for any hiring. Answers were provided by 105 respondents and the percentage citing each recruitment method is listed in Table 10. (The total responses add up to more than 100% because many employers cited more than one method of recruitment.)

Table 10: Frequency of use of recruitment methods (Number of respondents: 105)

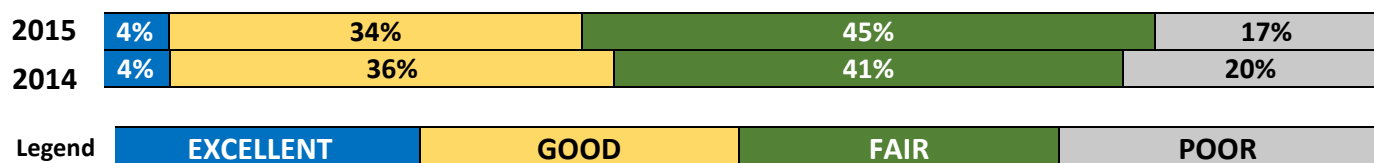
Recruitment method	Frequency of use
Word of Mouth / Personal Contacts / Referrals / Informal Networks	76%
Online Job Boards / Postings	49%
Company's Own Website	36%
Government Employment Centres or Websites	33%
Unsolicited Resumes	31%
Newspaper Ads	28%
On-Site Job Signs or Posters	24%
Non-Government or Community Employment Service Centres or Websites	17%
On-site Recruitment At Schools, Colleges, or Universities	10%
Job Fairs	7%
Trade or Professional Association Publications	6%
Other	6%
Executive Search Companies or Temporary Help Agencies	4%

In terms of frequency of use by employers, the top two methods were the same as last year's results. It has been a common perception that word-of-mouth is the most frequently relied upon method of recruitment, however it is noteworthy that the on-line channels (on-line job boards, company's own website, government employment centres or websites) have grown in usage to fill out the top four rankings.

How do you rate the availability of qualified workers in Algoma District?

Employers had an indifferent opinion about the availability of qualified workers in Algoma District. Of the 104 responses, 45% said "Fair" and 17% 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 1.24, somewhat higher than Fair (1.0), and exactly equal to last year's score. Overall, the proportion of those who viewed the availability as "Fair" increased, with a slight decline among those choosing either "Good" or "Poor".

Diagram 1: Rating the availability of availability of qualified workers in Algoma (N=104)



Which of the following geographic areas were targeted for recruitment?

Respondents were asked to indicate the areas their recruitment efforts targeted. Table 11 lists the responses by number of employers selecting each option, together with the percentage of respondents choosing each of the options.

Table 11: Geographic target areas for job recruitment activities (N=105)

	WITHIN ALGOMA DISTRICT	WITHIN THE PROVINCE	WITHIN CANADA	INTERNATIONALLY
Number	98	30	9	2
Percent	93%	29%	9%	2%

Most of the recruitment effort of employers is focused on the District of Algoma, with considerable outreach extending to the province as well. A limited amount of recruitment extends to Canada, and very little internationally. Perhaps what is surprising is that 7% of the respondents who replied claimed that they do not recruit within Algoma District. (The percentages add up to more than 100% because some employers listed more than one option.)

Did you receive any assistance from a free employment service agency representing one of the following groups when recruiting for these occupations?

Employers were less likely 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, 78% said they received no such assistance. Apart from help in securing youth job candidates (which represented a considerable minority) and, to a lesser extent, Aboriginals, reliance on such assistance amounted only to a small proportion of survey respondents, as follows (some employers received assistance in relation to more than one category):

- 19% of respondents indicated they received employment services from an agency assisting youth (15-24 years of age)
- 7% received assistance from an agency serving Aboriginals
- 5% received assistance from an agency serving immigrants or visible minorities
- 4% received assistance from an agency serving persons with disabilities
- 4% received assistance from an agency serving older workers (55 years and older)

Did you use a paid recruitment agency?

Only one employer indicated that they used a paid recruitment agency, while 104 said they had not, resulting in 1.0% of those responding to the question confirming that they used a paid recruitment agency (this figure is lower than the 4% response in last year's survey).

Do you plan on hiring anyone over the next 12 months? In what occupational categories? What is the reason for the job opening?

Roughly half (52%) respondents indicated that they planned on hiring over the next 12 months, very similar to the hiring intentions in last year's survey (56%). The projected number of hires is considerably lower than last year's hires – the same pattern was evident last year (projected hires being considerably less than actual hires in that year, although the difference is slightly greater this year).

Table 12 shows the number of expected job hires over the next 12 months, by occupational category and by employment type (red cells), and compares the figures to the reported hires over the past year (blue cells) (from Table 6), and the same figures reported from last year's survey (green cells).

Several observations:

- The projected hires amount to roughly half of the actual hires, and that proportion is roughly similar across full-time, part-time, contract and seasonal hires, although the full-time hires are a larger share than the non-full-time hires;
- There is a considerable difference between actual hires and projected hires in two occupational categories, namely Service Workers and the Other category; one employer that had cited 105 seasonal hires in the Other category last year did not include this same number in the projected hires – that appears to be an oversight;
- All things considered, it would warrant further inquiry to determine if employers actually are more pessimistic about the coming year or if they are simply exercising a high level of caution in not projecting future hiring.

Table 12: Projected number of hires in coming year, compared to hires in past year

	Full-time	Part-time	Contract	Seasonal	TOTAL PROJECTED	PAST YEAR HIRINGS	2014 PROJECTED	2014 ACTUAL HIRINGS
Managers & Executives	13	1	1	2	17	24	19	23
Professionals	7	2	4	0	13	27	16	118
Technical	11	0	1	0	12	30	13	37
Trades	17	0	0	2	19	8	19	46
Apprentices	7	0	0	0	7	9	12	27
Sales & Marketing	5	1	2	3	11	16	40	63
Admin & Clerical	7	6	1	3	17	43	21	69
Production Worker	6	26	0	21	53	76	35	57
Service Worker	41	13	12	64	130	212	133	153
Other	5	11	2	7	25	211	46	56
PROJECTED HIRINGS	119	60	23	102	304	656	354	649
HIRINGS PAST YEAR	213	125	63	255	656			

Table 13 showcases reasons for the expected hiring. Employers were asked why they expected to have job openings (Table 13). Last year, many more employers chose the response “N/A” for each occupational category. If one excludes the “N/A” responses from the calculations for each year, the proportions choosing the other responses are relatively similar, as follows:

Table 13: Reason for the expected hiring

	Managers and Executives	Professionals	Technical	Trades (Journey person)	Apprentices	Sales and Marketing	Administrative /Clerical	Production Workers	Service Workers	Other	TOTAL	2014 TOTAL
Retirements	5	1	0	0	0	2	4	0	3	2	17	28
Expansion/Restructuring	6	5	5	5	3	4	8	1	6	2	45	64
Technological Change	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Other	5	1	0	2	1	6	5	4	16	5	45	39
N/A	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	21	209
TOTAL	19	10	7	9	7	14	19	7	27	11	130	340

Table 14 illustrates the percentage of employers choosing reasons for expected hiring in 2014 and 2015. In the Other category, frequent responses included seasonal hires (9 employers), hires to replace separations (7 employers) and maternity/parental leave (3 employers).

Table 14: Percent choosing reason for expected hiring, 2014 and 2015

	2014	2015
Retirements	21%	16%
Expansion/Restructuring	49%	41%
Technological Change	0%	2%
Other	30%	41%

What is the minimum level of education required for new hires in the various occupational categories?

Employers were asked to list the minimum educational attainment requirements for the broad occupational categories. Table 15 lists the percentage distribution of the responses by each occupation.

Table 15: Minimum educational requirements by occupational categories

	NONE	HIGH SCHOOL	SOME POST-SECONDARY	TRADES CERTIFICATE	COLLEGE DIPLOMA	UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE	PROFESSIONAL OR GRADUATE DEGREE
Managers and Executives	5%	16%	12%	2%	21%	19%	25%
Professionals (eg: Engineers)	8%	4%	2%	4%	8%	26%	48%
Technical	9%	17%	0%	20%	37%	15%	2%
Trades (Journeyman)	8%	16%	10%	55%	10%	0%	2%
Apprentices	15%	46%	10%	21%	8%	0%	0%
Sales and Marketing	12%	28%	12%	2%	31%	8%	8%
Administrative and Clerical	8%	34%	21%	3%	33%	3%	0%
Production Workers	30%	41%	15%	0%	15%	0%	0%
Service Workers	25%	42%	10%	5%	12%	3%	2%
Other	13%	45%	10%	3%	16%	3%	10%

In Table 15, the dark blue cells indicate values of over 15%, and the green shaded cells indicate values of 35% or more. For certain occupations, one specific designation is the clear choice: 55% 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 48% 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.

Please select the top 3 competencies for most of your employees

Table 16 arranges 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.

Table 16: Necessary competencies, current and future workforces, all jobs and hard-to-fill jobs (N=153)

Competency	Current	Future
Work ethic, dedication, dependability	92	66
Customer service skills	83	59
Communication skills (both oral and written)	74	51
Self-motivated/ability to work with little or no supervision	72	54
Teamwork/interpersonal skills	60	44
Problem solving, reasoning, creativity	59	45
Technical skills	48	32
Professionalism	48	33
Computer literacy skills	46	34
Willingness to learn	46	41
Time management or organizational skills	42	31
Analytical/research skills	19	11

These competencies are listed in order of the total number of times they were named for current workers, although the ranking for future workers varies only a little. Work ethic and customer service skills are cited the most, with communication skills and self-motivation rounding out the top tier of skills. Technical skills and computer literacy skills are among the middle-ranking cluster of required skills.

Last year’s survey produced exactly the same top four, with only a difference in the ranking, as follows: customer service skills; communications skills; work ethic and self-motivated.

Training for incumbent workers

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 (70%) said yes.

Among employers who cited significant barriers to training (39 employers, of whom 37 did not provide training), Table 17 lists the proportion of those employers who identified the following challenges impeding training. The figures add to more than 100% because some employers identified more than one barrier.

Table 17: Challenges/barriers to employees receiving training or education

Cost	74%
Distance to travel to facility	49%
Loss of productivity during training time	41%
Relevant training is not offered locally (Algoma District)	28%
Awareness of existing training programs	23%
Awareness of training support programs	21%
Losing trained employees to other businesses	18%
Other	10%
Awareness of legislated training	5%

Cost was by far the biggest barrier for these employers. This finding needs to be seen in context: 155 employers answered this question, many of whom provided training. All of the 29 who cited cost as a barrier did not provide training, and in total they represent about one in five (19%) of all those who answered this question. That is, cost is the major reason for not providing training, and around 20% of employers in this survey expressed this view.

Geography was also a big issue: half (49%) said that the distance to travel to a training/education facility was a barrier, and almost a third (28%) said that the relevant training was not offered in Algoma District.

A concern often heard in discussions regarding the lack of training is the poaching of trained workers by other employers. However, this concern was cited by 18% of those employers who did not engage in training (which comes out to around 5% of all employers responding to this question).

Respondents were further asked in what specific ways they supported training or education for their employees. Table 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, more than half (56%) of employers provided more than one support.

Table 18: Percent of employers providing supports

Fund it (fully or partially)	80%
Offer flexibility in work schedule	46%
Supply information on career advancement	23%
Using government hiring and training incentives	21%
Other	18%

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. There is a fair bit of reliance on government hiring and training incentives. The “Other” category primarily involved on-the-job/in-house training, including internal professional development programs.

In terms of the sources or delivery methods for the training or education, by far the most common is on-the-job training. Table 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, around half of employers rely on their industry or professional association, as well as via peer-to-peer. Reliance on training through a college is lower, and rather minimal in the case of a university.

Table 19: Method or source of training/education for employees

On the job	77%
Industry or professional association	57%
Peer-to-Peer	46%
Distance/online education	41%
College (including continuing studies)	19%
University (including continuing studies)	11%
Other	7%

Do you provide any workplace-relevant training to students and future workers?

In terms of providing any workplace-relevant training to students or future workers, six out of ten (61%) respondents said they did not. Of the remaining, the type of training and whether it was paid or unpaid varied, as Table 20 illustrates. Of employers who offered such experiences, four out of ten (39%) offered more than one such opportunity to students or job seekers.

Table 20: Percentage of employers providing workplace experience opportunities (N=106)

	Paid co-op	Unpaid co-op	Paid internship	Unpaid internship	Apprentice
High school student	4%	24%	3%	1%	5%
College student	5%	6%	6%	6%	4%
University student	3%	4%	7%	9%	1%
Job seeker	2%	2%	4%	1%	3%

Almost three out of ten employers (4% + 24%) provide co-op placements for high school students, the vast majority of them unpaid placements. Otherwise, the proportions offering work experience opportunities is small, but where they do offer a co-op or internship placements, other than for high school students, there is roughly a fifty-fifty chance that it will be paid.

Overall, fewer of such opportunities are provided to the ordinary job seeker, but in the case of internships, 80% are paid rather than unpaid.

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. Algoma faces many challenges economically as global markets for steel and oil have had negative impacts on local manufacturing and provincially funded sectors such as healthcare, education and public administration are constrained by fiscal restraint.

At the same time, Algoma has an aging population and workforce, which means more people will be exiting the workforce than are entering it in the coming years.

Against this backdrop, we can see some trends in the employer one data that relate to these economic and demographic factors:

- Most separations in Manager, Technical and Admin occupations are due to retirements.
- Separations in Management level occupations were almost 3 times higher than hiring over the past year. This suggests attrition related to a slowdown in the local economy as the positions are not being replaced.
- Separations in Trade related occupations were 5 times higher than hiring over the past year. Since most of the separations were attributed to temporary lay-offs, this points to a downturn in local manufacturing.

Of course the positive aspect of an aging workforce and increased retirements is that it should open up opportunities for those entering the workforce. The challenge here, as shown in the survey results, 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% of employer respondents 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 we look into the near future we will see impacts of economic factors on the workforce, which may mean changes in the levels of employment in various sectors and the type of work that is available. In sectors and occupations where hiring is projected, 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.

