

Understanding the Skills Gap in Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth counties

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS



FEBRUARY 2014

Acknowledgements from Gemma Mendez-Smith, Executive Director

As the economy of Ontario continues to change along with national and global impacts so too does the Four County Region. It is important to know, with some degree of certainty, what assets and liabilities are present as we fashion a workforce and economic development strategy that keeps the region progressing to the future. This Skills Gap Study was commissioned by the Four County Labour Market Planning Board and its community partners as an update to the 2005 reports completed for Bruce Grey and Huron Perth.

The information in this report will provide recommendations to set guideposts that will keep us on track to building a successful, vibrant and sustainable future.

This study was completed by Harry Cummings, Don Murray and Shannon McIntyre of Harry Cummings and Associates.

Special thanks to the study committee; Rose Austin, Dave Barrett, Meredith Bowers, Debbie Davidson, Barb Fisher, Paul Nichol, Alyson Nyiri, and Kristin Sainsbury for their time and commitment to the study.

Thanks to the administration at our 4 district school boards and the leadership at the 24 participating high schools that supported this study without whom we would not have an insight from our future workforce.

Many thanks to the survey team for their hard work and dedication to getting the answers; Inem Chahal, Mark Ferguson, Carolyn Robertson, Elena Christy, Monika Kokoszka, Bakhtawar Khan, Anna Chow, Alberto Salguero, Shawn Filson, and Mary Ellen Wales.

Much gratitude to all of the employees, employers and high school students of Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth counties who responded to a survey or participated in a focus group or interview. Your input will help us with our future planning goals.

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Executive Summary



The need for timely and accurate labour market information is critical in the development of a healthy and sustainable labour market. Decisions regarding labour market planning, programming and resource allocation are all based on the labour market information that helps to describe the overall context in which we work and live.

The primary undertaking of this study was to examine the existing labour force from three perspectives:

1. The existing labour as seen by employees;
2. The future labour force requirements as seen by employers and key informants; and,
3. The future labour force skills and plans as seen by high school students.

From this we attempted to identify labour pool gaps critical to the sustainability and growth of the economies of Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth counties.

The Four County Labour Market Planning Board, and its partners, have completed this study as an update for the labour market skills gap studies that were completed in Bruce and Grey as well as Huron and Perth in 2005.

Data for this report were derived from five major sources:

- Statistics Canada databases
- Three original surveys designed and administered to employees, employers and Grade 12 students in the Four County Region
- Focus groups with employers and economic development stakeholders in the Four County Region

Methods

The *labour market profile* was compiled using data from the 2006 Statistics Canada National Census (Census) and the 2011 Statistics Canada National Household Survey (NHS). To illustrate the various population and labour features of the Four County Region tables were prepared from the analyses of Census and NHS data. The profile features comparisons between the four counties and the Province of Ontario.

The *high school survey* was administered to Grade 12 students in the Four County Region. The main topics covered by the questionnaire focused on the current academic achievements of students, their involvement in extracurricular activities, their involvement in volunteer activities, their involvement in part-time and summer work activities, their involvement in school co-op programs, their level of skills, their plans for future education and training, and their plans for a future career.

The *employee survey* was conducted via telephone with the general population of the Four County Region. Eligibility for the survey was restricted to individuals who met the follow criteria: resident of either Bruce, Grey, Huron or Perth County, over 16 years of age, and not retired. The aim of the survey was to determine the particular levels of work experience, education and skills possessed by the residents of the area, as well as information on mobility, household activities and job satisfaction.

The *employer survey* was used to gather labour market information at the county level for Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth counties. The objective was to survey as many as 50 businesses per county using a mixed method approach where at least 10 major employers were to be interviewed by phone. The balance participated in an online electronic version of the survey for each county. The list of candidate businesses was developed in consultation with the steering committee. Businesses were selected that represented a variety of industry sectors including businesses that were major employers in the county. Key informant interviews were also conducted with representatives from the education, health and agriculture sectors to ensure that these important employment sectors were captured in the final analysis.

Response Rate and Respondent Profile

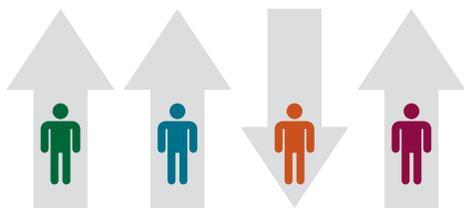
A total of 1390 valid surveys were returned for the *high school survey* for an overall response rate of 75%. The survey had 698 (51.1%) responses from female students and 668 (48.9%) responses from male students. In all but Bruce County there was a higher proportion of female students than male.

The *employee survey* generated 1207 completed surveys, which provides a confidence level of 95% with a $\pm 6\%$ confidence interval. The survey aimed to have a 50:50 male to female ratio. The Four County Region had 594 male respondents (49.2%) and 613 female respondents (50.8%).

The *employer survey* had 204 respondents located in the Four County Region. In addition, interviews were completed with the four local school boards, the four local Federations of Agriculture and the four local health care corporations.

Findings

The *labour market profile* was helpful in articulating a broad picture of the Four County Region:



Between 2006 and 2011, three of the four counties experienced a slight population increase. Huron County experienced a slight decrease.



The average household income in the Four County Region in 2011 varied between \$70,736 for Grey County to \$83,516 for Bruce County, the Ontario average household income was \$85,772.

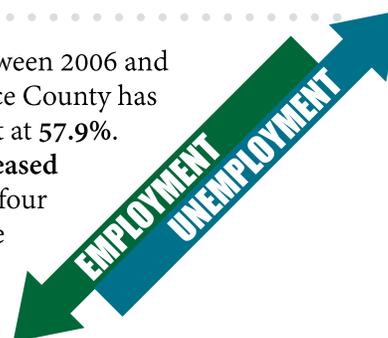


The average personal income in Grey, Huron and Perth counties was approximately \$7000 less than the average personal income for Bruce County.

47.3 YEARS

The Four County Region has a higher median age than the province, Grey County has the oldest population with a median age of 47.3.

The **employment rate fell** between 2006 and 2011 in all four counties, Bruce County has the lowest rate of employment at 57.9%. The **unemployment rate increased** between 2006 and 2011 in all four counties, Grey County has the highest with an unemployment rate of 7.4%.



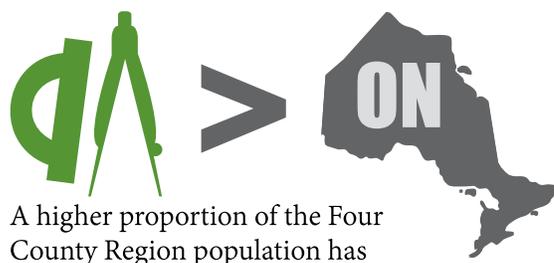
The top five industries by employment in 2011 in the Four County Region were:

- 01** Health Care and Social Assistance
- 02** Retail Trade
- 03** Manufacturing
- 04** Construction
- 05** Agriculture

Utilities was particularly high in Bruce County.



A smaller proportion of people in the Four County Region have completed high school and gone on to complete higher levels of formal education compared to Ontario.



A higher proportion of the Four County Region population has completed an apprenticeship or trade program compared to the province.

The *high school survey* found that:



In general, female students have higher levels of achievement in the core subjects of English, math and science.

**44.8
HOURS**

A large portion of students have volunteered in the last year, spending on average 44.8 hours a year.



Males participating in co-op were most likely to be involved in Agriculture, Construction or Other services which include repair and maintenance and automotive repair.



Females participating in co-op were most likely to be involved in Health Care and Social Assistance and Educational Services.

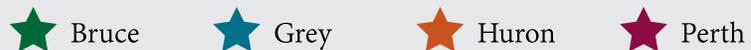


In reference to elective courses, males are more likely to be enrolled in technology courses while females are more likely to be engaged in the arts.



Students are very much engaged in extra-curricular activities, particularly sports and/or physical activity.

The most common part-time and summer employment activities for Grade 12 students:



Wholesale and Retail Trade
★ ★ ★ ★



Accommodation and Food Services
★ ★ ★ ★



Arts, Entertainment, Recreation
★ ★ ★ ★



Construction and/or
Specialty Trade Contractor
★ ★ ★ ★



Agriculture
★ ★ ★ ★



Other services (includes maintenance,
auto repair, personal services)
★ ★ ★ ★



Males score themselves the highest in analytical, decision making and problem solving, teamwork skills and physical or hands on skills.



Females have scored themselves the highest in social or interpersonal skills, reading and teamwork.

 **93%**

Approximately 93% of students expect to finish high school and continue onto post-secondary school or apprenticeship program.

The top industry categories that male students expect to be employed include:



- 01** Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
- 02** Construction and/or Specialty Trade Contractor
- 03** Arts, Entertainment, Recreation



Males are much more likely to enroll in a trade, vocational or apprenticeship than females.

The top industry categories that female students expect to be employed include:



- 01** Health Care and Social Assistance
- 02** Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
- 03** Arts, Entertainment, Recreation

The majority (55.3%) of students in the Four County Region intend to leave their communities as they pursue a career.

55.3%



Selected findings from the *employee survey* are as follows:



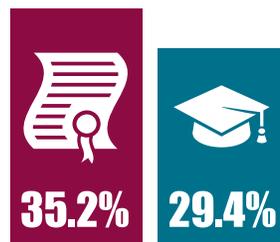
Almost 90% of the Four County Region respondents were employed in the last 52 weeks at time of survey.



Approximately 16.1% of respondents from the Region held two jobs in the last year at time of survey.



More than 80% of respondents' primary employment was full-time, this varied from 76% in Grey County to 84% in Bruce County.



Approximately 35.2% reported college or a speciality school as their highest completed education, followed by 29.4% reporting high school as their highest completed education.

The top five occupations held in the Four County Region were:

- 01** Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations
- 02** Sales and service
- 03** Business, finance and administrative occupations
- 04** Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services
- 05** Management

The top skills in the Four County Region, as reported by employees were:



Reading



Verbal Communication



Teamwork



Critical Thinking or Problem Solving



Social or Interpersonal

60%

Almost 60% of respondents did *not* participate in any training in the last year.

83.6%



In the next year, 83.6% of the respondents believe they will be in the same job.

The skills cited as weak among the Four County employees were:

Database

Information Technology

Spreadsheets



17%

17% of respondents believe they are underemployed (*working less than 30 hours per week, not by choice; when wages, productivity or other job qualities are substandard relative to skill and education level*).

Over 5% believe they will be retired in one year.

ONE YEAR



26.3% of respondents believe they will be retired in five years.

FIVE YEARS

The *employer survey* and interviews with the education, health and agriculture sector specific representatives yielded the following findings:



The median number of years in operation in the Four County Region ranged from 20 to 30 years.



A large majority of the businesses surveyed across the region have 30 employees or less.

≤ 30

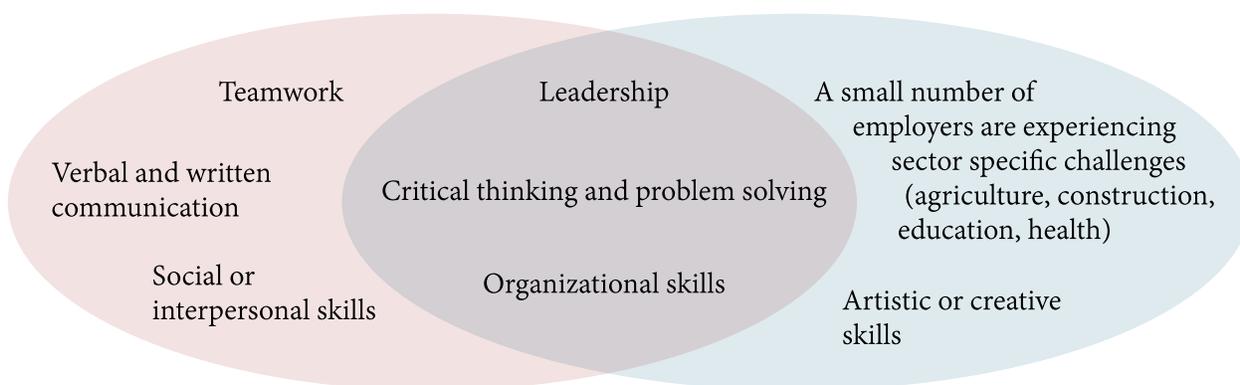


Roughly 7% employ more than 200 people.

≥ 200

Employers from the Four County Region are looking for the following occupations skills:

Employers are having the most difficulty finding employees who have the following occupational skills:



The skilled trades or skilled professionals positions are most difficult to fill in all four counties.

Apprenticeship opportunities vary across the region, 60% of Bruce County employers surveyed offer apprenticeships, while only 32% in Perth County offer apprenticeships.



Most companies offer a variety of occupational training to their employees on a regular basis including:



Health and safety



Employee retraining



Apprenticeship programs



Classroom or vocational training

Recommendations



Given the rapid pace of change in the regional job market stakeholders including businesses, educators and community partners need to review and assess their strategies, programs and services to ensure they better reflect and address the new reality.

The following recommendations are a compilation of the recommendations made based on the findings of the various research components for each of the four counties involved in the study - Bruce, Grey, Huron and Perth. These recommendations are intended to inform the decision making process for all relevant stakeholders in the Four County Region working with labour market issues.

Employers/Businesses

Employers and business owners set the pace at which career decisions are made for the local workforce. They are also able to build strong connections to help with workforce attraction.

- 1. It is recommended that employers become more engaged in providing workplace training opportunities including co-op, apprenticeships and job shadowing for the local labour force.*
- 2. It is recommended that employers invest in ongoing training in the workplace by providing flexible hours to accommodate employee training.*
- 3. It is recommended that employers collaborate with other businesses with similar skill requirements to provide necessary training (i.e. Health and Safety, sector specific training) to employees at a lower cost.*
- 4. It is recommended that employers engage their workforce in training and mentoring to fill vacant positions and to ensure transfer of institutional knowledge among generations.*
- 5. It is recommended that employers collaborate with community partners to highlight local career options and build an attraction strategy to aid in succession planning.*
- 6. It is recommended that employers increase exposure to local job opportunities thereby creating a pipeline of employees to fill future demand.*
- 7. It is recommended that employers participate in a spousal employment program to help keep and attract skilled professionals in the Four County Region.*

Educators

Educators (High Schools, Colleges, Universities, Private Career Colleges, Technical Delivery Agencies, etc.) are able to build the skills of the future and current workforce to ensure they meet the demands of the local labour market.

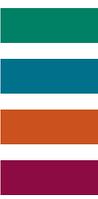
- 1. It is recommended that guidance counsellors and those teaching the Grade 10 Careers Studies (GLC2O) in high schools share information on the current local labour market and trends to ensure youth understand the dynamics of the local labour market to make sound education and career decisions.*
- 2. It is recommended that the education sector make use of resources available through community partners including the Four County Labour Market Planning Board, local Economic Development agencies, local Community Futures Development Corporations and employment and training service providers.*
- 3. It is recommended that educators collaborate with community providers and parents to develop the soft skills in youth required by employers. These skills are not limited to but include; work ethic, leadership, teamwork, adaptability, organizational, problem solving and computer literacy.*
- 4. It is recommended that colleges offer more flexibility in training to accommodate continuous learning opportunities for all ages.*
- 5. It is recommended that guidance counsellors work with employers and community partners to promote the diversity of education and job opportunities in the area to students, not just college or university career paths.*
- 6. It is recommended that educators collaborate with employers to build an attraction strategy for students who leave for post-secondary opportunities. Local high schools should develop a strategy to connect with alumni to maintain the relationship between graduates of the Four County Region and the local job market. This would include events to connect with youth when they return for holidays and vacation, newsletters and social media.*
- 7. It is recommended that educators highlight the apprenticeship opportunities to local youth, especially to females.*
- 8. It is recommended that educators incorporate business courses to help the workforce understand leadership and management in business.*
- 9. It is recommended that educators collaborate with community partners to track Grade 12 graduates through post-secondary education and those who enter the workplace directly. The students' field of work, field of study, place of study and place of residence could be tracked to maintain a database of the upcoming labour market skills, education and aspirations.*
- 10. It is recommended that educators development a stronger partnership with businesses to develop a career program that connect students with companies in the community.*

Community Partners

Community partners (Workforce Planning Board, Employment and Training Service Providers, Adult Learning Centres, Community Futures Development Corporations, County/Municipal Economic Development Services, Small Business Enterprise Centres, etc.) are the link between job seekers, business and education. It is important that they are involved in the strategies for workforce development.

- 1. It is recommended that the Four County Labour Market Planning Board engage in a promotional program directed at education and employment partners to inform them about the existing and projected skills gaps and collaborate with these partners to provide support in assisting youth and job seekers in general to enhance their skills to meet the needs of the business community.*
- 2. It is recommended that employment services partner with schools to promote their summer employment and other youth services in the schools to students as they look for employment related to their field of study or career of interest.*
- 3. It is recommended that employment services partner with schools to offer their expertise in job development and career coaching to guidance counsellors and Career Studies teachers.*
- 4. It is recommended that Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) engage youth to explore the opportunities for entrepreneurship.*
- 5. It is recommended that Small Business Enterprise Centres (SBECs) and CFDCs promote their training opportunities to local businesses.*
- 6. It is recommended that County and Municipal Economic Development departments work with employers to develop a strong workforce attraction strategy to fill immediate skills gaps.*
- 7. It is recommended that adult education services promote their computer and education upgrading programs to local businesses.*
- 8. It is recommended that community partners offer employment readiness programs to youth through a variety of options that could include Junior Achievement and Job Readiness Program offered by YMCA Employment Services.*
- 9. It is recommended that community partners develop a strategy to connect with expatriates to communicate business and careers opportunities in the Four County Region. The target audience could include youth who go off to post-secondary or employment.*
- 10. It is recommended that community partners must work together to study rural transportation issues and opportunities to encourage strategies related to improving accessibility to and from the workplace from those with limited access to a vehicle.*
- 11. It is recommended that community partners should use the findings from this study and others to develop a strategic plan for local recruitment and retention including promotion of the rural lifestyle and recreational amenities, and spousal support for dual income households new to the area.*

Overall, it will take a unified approach among the three key stakeholder groups to ensure economic and workforce development success for the Four County Region.



To view the full report please visit
www.planningboard.ca 



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