



Employer Attitudes & Perceptions of Apprenticeship Study Research Highlights - February 2006

The *Employer Attitudes & Perceptions of Apprenticeship Study* is a comprehensive report based on extensive research conducted in the spring of 2005 by Corporate Research Associates for the “Skilled Trades: A Career You Can Build On” campaign.

This social marketing campaign is a joint project between the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum – Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage (CAF-FCA) and Skills/Compétences Canada® (S/CC). It is funded by the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program, which provided \$12 million to position skilled trades as a first choice career option. It was launched in September 2004 and will continue until December 2006.

This social-marketing campaign has two key objectives:

1. To reposition skilled trades from its current negative perception toward a more positive position, and eventually, as a first choice career option in the minds of Canadian youth and their influencers, such as parents and educators;
2. To further encourage employers to expand and sustain career opportunities in the skilled trades for young Canadians.

The campaign includes television, radio, cinema and print ads as well as targeted collateral material and a website (www.careersintrades.ca) that provides further information to youth, parents, educators and employers.

This document highlights the main findings of the study.

About the Study

The primary objective of this research was to conduct a robust, quantitative research study that will provide a benchmark that identifies employers' current attitudes and perceptions towards apprenticeship training across various regions and sectors within Canada. It is the first known pan-Canadian study of this kind.

The data was collected by a random telephone survey of 1,038 companies within four key sectors — construction, manufacturing, transportation and service — using a stratified sampling strategy to ensure the data was representative of each region and sector. A major effort was made to ensure the sample reflects a good balance of employers who currently employ apprentices (461 employers interviewed) with those who do not but may have done so in the past (577 employers interviewed). The telephone interviews began on March 23, 2005, and were completed on May 2, 2005. The findings are spread out over four research areas. A sample of this size provides a 95% level of confidence with a sampling error of $\pm 3.1\%$ percentage in 19 out of 20 samples.



Corporate Research Associates was successful in engaging key decision makers to participate in this research study. In almost eight out of ten cases interviewers were successful in reaching the “owner or manager”. Others who participated in the study were HR executives (5%), Directors or Presidents (5%) or Other categories (11%) such as the Controllers, Bookkeepers/Accounts, and Training Managers.

The sample is based on an exhaustive review of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) – the system for classifying companies and enterprises according to the activities in which they are engaged. Only employers for whom apprenticeship training would be relevant were considered as possible participants.

The goal was to have a minimum representative sample of 1,000 businesses. Corporate Research Associates interviewers dialed almost 20,000 individual telephone numbers to complete 1,038 interviews. The average interview length for the survey was 9.60 minutes. Each potential participant was asked to describe the industry that best describes their business. In some instances, employers were pressed for specifics on their activities. Interviews were terminated when interviewees said they work in industries that are not applicable to apprenticeship training. Interviews were also terminated when interviewees said they are not familiar with apprentices or apprenticeship training.

Additionally – given such a research initiative has never been undertaken at the national level – the study was provided to a number of third-party experts to verify the validity of the results. Based on this review, the project team is confident that the findings in this study represent a fair and accurate reflection of the incidence rate of employers who currently employ apprentices in Canada, as well as their views regarding apprenticeship training

Study Highlights

One of the major findings of this research study is that less than two in ten employers (18%) currently employ apprentices in Canada in all four sectors. The study also measured the capacity of employers to train apprentices, based on the requirement that every apprentice must be supervised and mentored by one journeyman. Overall, 41% of employers surveyed have journeymen on staff across all four sectors.

The research shows that employers that hire apprentices do it primarily to address their workforce needs. Twenty-two per cent (22%) said “ensuring a sustainable supply of skilled workers” represented their top motivation for hiring apprentices, in an unaided response. Another 16% said their top motivation was “the ability to train apprentices to their own requirements,” while still another 14% said “meeting their future workplace needs” was their top reason.

The research also suggests that apprenticeships have staying power – once employers begin hiring apprentices, many continue to do so. The data shows that 86% of employers with apprentices on staff expect to be hiring more or about the same number of apprentices in 12 months time. Additionally, those companies that currently employ



apprentices have been doing so for a long time, with 44% having been doing so for 15 years or longer.

Among employers that currently do not hire apprentices and those that have stopped, 35% said apprenticeship training is “not applicable” to their business. This finding is noteworthy because, as described above, significant care was taken to select a sample of employers for which apprenticeship training is relevant. Another 32% said they were “unsure of future workload needs” or that they simply don’t “need extra workers.”

The following provides a summary of all the key findings:

1. Prevalence of Apprenticeship Training in Canada

- Overall, 41% of employers within the manufacturing, construction, transportation, and service sector have journeypersons in their employ that could provide employment opportunities and the mentoring required to train apprentices.
- This study establishes that companies currently employ an average of 2.9 apprentices within the four targeted sectors.
- Overall, it was found that approximately one in five (18%) companies currently employ apprentices in Canada.
- Furthermore, it was found that, of the 82.4% of employers who currently do not employ apprentices, over half (55%) of them have never hired apprentices, and slightly more than one-quarter (27.4%) have employed apprentices in the past.

2. Understanding Employers’ Motivation and Experience

For employers who currently hire apprentices:

- The research shows that for almost one quarter (22%) of employers, the key motivation for hiring apprentices relates to the need for businesses to ensure a sustainable supply of skilled workers, followed by the ability to train apprentices to their own requirements (16%).
- 60% of employers estimate that their current apprentices will complete their apprenticeship with their company.
- Employers indicate that almost two-thirds (63%) of journeypersons have completed a portion of their apprenticeship training with their current employer.

For employers who currently do not hire apprentices (including those that may have employed apprentices in the past):

- More than one-third of employers (35%) stated they do not employ apprentices because apprenticeship training is not applicable to their business. Another 32% said they were unsure of their workload needs or that they simply didn’t need extra workers.
- Of those employers that used to hire apprentices but stopped, 40% said the main reason for halting employment of apprentices was because of low business volume, followed by 11% of employers who said that no apprentices were available.

3. Perception of Apprenticeship Training

- Nearly 90% of companies surveyed — regardless of whether they currently hire apprentices, had apprentices in the past, or have never hired apprentices — have a



favourable opinion of apprenticeship training in Canada.

- The key drivers of this positive perception are:
 - that apprentices can be trained to the requirements of a company
 - that apprentices have the required basic skills
 - that apprentice training contributes to their bottom lines.

4. Likelihood to Employ Apprentices in the Future

- Overall, 39% of all participating employers indicated either a definite or probable intention to hire an apprentice within the next 12 months.
- Of the companies that are currently employing apprentices, almost 9 in 10 (86%) of them said they expect to be employing apprentices in the next 12 months.
- Most of the companies currently employing apprentices demonstrated a solid track record in this area, with 44% having been doing so for 15 years or longer.
- When all participating employers were asked to identify what would make it easier to hire apprentices, 27% gave no answer or had no answer, 22% said having access to “additional funding or wage subsidies” would help, and another 10% answered “better trained or qualified apprentices.”

Concluding remarks

The findings of the *Employer Attitudes & Perceptions of Apprenticeship Study* provide valuable insight into employers’ attitudes towards apprenticeship training as well as the prevalence of employers who hire apprentices within the manufacturing, construction, transportation and service sectors across Canada.

This research builds on a study released in the Fall of 2005 by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum – Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage (CAF-FCA) and Skills/Compétences Canada (S/CC) called, *Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Awareness and Perception Study*. This study showed that negatives perceptions of skilled trades are well-entrenched among adults and particularly youth. A major finding was that only 32 per cent of youth aged 13-17 say they would be likely to consider a career in skilled trades. (More details on this study are available at: www.careersintrades.ca).

Both studies reinforce the reality that there are no easy fixes to the shortage of skilled workers in Canada which promises to get only worse due to declining birth rates and an aging workforce. The “greying” of the Canadian workforce presents enormous challenges for employers. According to Statistics Canada, almost one fifth of the baby boom generation will be at least 61 years of age by 2011, creating the real potential for shortages in several occupations.

Certainly, a big part of the solution is educating the next generation of workers to enter skilled trades which play such an important role in Canada’s knowledge-based economy. Indeed, trades touch almost every aspect of our lives from the homes we live in, to the cars we drive, to the food we eat.



Additionally, more needs to be done to educate employers that apprenticeships are an attractive and cost-effective way to develop highly skilled and productive employees. These training programs are not to be used solely when workers are in short supply; nor are they a luxury to be afforded when profits are up. Rather, apprenticeship training should be viewed as an integral part of day-to-day business operations.

Yet, the research in this study shows that this is not the case. It demonstrates that many employers stop hiring apprentices when they don't need extra workers or when they are not sure of their future workload needs. When looking only at employers that used to provide apprenticeship training, we can see that a significant percentage (40%) said the No. 1 reason they stopped hiring apprentices was because of "low business volume." Given such results, it wasn't surprising to find that less than two in ten employers (18%) currently hire apprentices across the four sectors.

Meanwhile, the study also shows that 41% of employers have journeypersons on staff and therefore have the capacity to provide the required mentoring to train apprentices. Even more encouraging is that 90% of the companies surveyed have a favourable opinion of apprenticeship training in Canada, suggesting that there are no apparent barriers related to the image or reputation of apprenticeship training among employers.

The research suggests there is an important opportunity to increase the number of registered apprentices in Canada at a time when the economy continues to face significant challenges as a result of the shortage of skilled workers. To that end, the campaign is actively developing a number of education programs targeting employers. The materials are designed to raise awareness about apprenticeship training, particularly around the competitiveness advantages they provide and the various assistance programs in place to help them hire apprentices. The campaign partners expect these programs will remain in use well beyond the current mandate of the campaign which ends in December 2006.

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