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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Public Policy Forum wishes to thank the following individuals and groups for their contribution to this study:

- The over 6,000 college and institute students who responded to our survey
- The study sponsors, Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
- Anna Toneguzzo and Terry Anne Boyles from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges
- The members of the Advisory Committee

Issue Statement #2: Smart Workplace: Recruiting and Retaining the Next Generation of Workers from Colleges and Institutes

Introduction

In partnership with the Association of Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC) and with financial support from the department of Human Resource and Skills Development Canada and the Public Service Human Resource Management Agency of Canada, the Public Policy Forum recently undertook an on-line survey of community college students in Canada.

The main purpose of the survey was to assess college and institute students' interest and motivation in working for the federal public service. The survey also provides insights on college and institute students' perspectives on future career choices and preferences, the skills they gained at college and preferred job search strategies.

To help inform career counseling, recruitment campaigns and human resource policies around the workplace of the future, the Public Policy Forum is analyzing the results of this survey and releasing a number of issue statements on survey findings.

The first issue statement presented survey findings supporting the recruitment of community college and institute graduates into the federal public service of Canada and an enhanced role for community colleges/institutes in promoting lifelong learning among public servants.

This second issue statement presents survey findings on what community college students consider the most important factors in choosing a place of employment, how they view the job market, a self-assessment of the skills they have acquired through their community college education and what strategies they will use to find a job.

The Context: A Changing Workforce and Workplace

The Public Policy Forum research has primarily focused on the federal public service but much of the information collected reflects the views of the respondents on a host of workplace issues.

The baby boom generation—made up of those born between 1946 and 1964—have created the workplace as we know it today with the traditional 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. workday, hierarchical management systems, and standards around workplace culture and values. But these baby boomers are reaching retirement age and they currently make up almost 50% of the workforce. In the federal public service, for example, projections are that over 40 percent of public servants will be eligible to retire with unreduced pensions by the year 2012.¹ And when these baby boomers retire, a particular skill set and work culture will be retiring with them.

The next generation of workers is entering the workforce with a different view of what the workplace should be. For example, a study commissioned by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) in 2002² concluded that there was an existing and widening gap between the work and life values of youth entering the labour market and those of their managers and supervisors. The HRSDC study concluded that this disconnect raised important issues for how employers design jobs and how they recruit new workers.

At the same time, the workplace is changing. In all sectors, evolving lines of business and technology are creating a demand for a more technically literate and flexible workforce.

So what will the workplace of the future look like? The workplace may operate twenty-four hours a day to accommodate markets and consumers around the world. To keep overhead costs down in light of soaring energy costs, to eliminate unproductive travel time and to address personal safety concerns, production and management teams may telework from remote locations. Most routine transactional jobs will be replaced by technology and workers will be expected to think and act independently while contributing to team goals and products. Workplaces and the workers in them will be under constant pressure to keep up with change as new kinds of work, new ways of working and new workers move in and out of the organization. Gone will be the one company career based on the skill set framed in a yellowing document on the wall.

Who will flourish in such a workplace? Futurists, such as Richard Worzel³, advise that knowledge workers—individuals who combine up-to-date knowledge and up-to-date problem solving skills—are the fastest growing segment of the workforce and they will be in much demand. Successful organizations will attract them with opportunities to use their skills now and to continually upgrade them. Management guru Peter Drucker

¹ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat data: Public Service Eligibility for Retirement with an Unreduced Pension 2002-03 to 2012-13.

² Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. *A Study on Preparing Canada's Youth for the Job Market of the Future*. HRSDC:2002:

<http://www11.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/hrsdcaarb/publications/research/2002-000003/2002-000003.pdf>.

³ Worzel, Richard. *Who Owns Tomorrow?* Penguin Canada (Toronto:2002).

believes that competition for these knowledge workers will lead employers to treat them more as coveted volunteers than employees.⁴

How will employers meet the challenge of a rapidly changing workforce in rapidly changing technological times? The Public Policy Forum is proposing that employers target community colleges in their recruitment campaigns and create *smart workplaces* by tailoring recruitment and retention strategies to those being sought by the next generation of knowledge workers. Here's how.

The Community College Sector in Canada

The member institutions of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC), while broadly known as community colleges, are in fact distinguished by a range of titles including institute of technology, cégep, and university college.

Because education is a provincial or territorial responsibility, these institutions vary in mandate, management models and policy frameworks. However, they share the primary functions of responding to the training needs of business, industry, the public service sectors and the educational needs of vocationally oriented secondary school graduates.

According to the ACCC, member colleges represent student populations of 900,000 full-time and 1.5 million part-time learners on over 900 campuses. Colleges are rooted within the communities they serve and are generally also the primary community vehicle for adult education and employee updating. This includes employment-related programs such as apprenticeship and continuing education courses, which often maintain varying entry levels and range from the technologies to the creative arts. In addition, a significant number of university graduates attend college upon completion of their degree in order to acquire vocational skills for employment. As a result, the average age of full-time college student is between 26 and 28.⁵

The ACCC says that a unique feature of these institutions is their linkage with business and industry, and hence their integration into economic development. Curricula are derived from industry-based sources. Co-operative and in-industry training programs, in which students study at the college and then work in industry for alternate semesters, are often available. General program operations are reviewed by industry-based advisory committees which usually report to the college's community-based Board of Governors (in most jurisdictions). Provincial/territorial governments give Boards responsibility for ensuring the relevance and quality of college operations.⁶

⁴ Drucker, Peter. *A Survey of the Near Future*. The Economist 3, Nov. 2001.

⁵ ACCC Web site, www.accc.ca.

⁶ Ibid.

Beginning to Fill in the Research Gaps

The community college/institute sector is, clearly, already a presence in workforce education and training. In an on-line, technology-driven environment, community colleges/institutes will also be an increasingly important source of skilled employees in every sector of the economy.

To date, though, most research on post-secondary recruitment and retention has focused on university graduates.⁷ There is a gap in the documented analysis of recruitment issues in the college/institute sector. That's where this PPF survey comes in.

The Public Policy Forum Survey

Through the ACCC, the Public Policy Forum invited Canadian colleges and institutes to participate in this survey of their students. Institutions were targeted in geographic areas where there is a significant federal government presence. In total, 22 colleges and institutes across Canada agreed to participate in the survey. Of those 22, five⁸ were unable to participate due to technical or timing difficulties. (Please see Appendix A for a list of the 17 participating colleges and institutes.)

The survey was designed with the support of an advisory committee of college and institute representatives as well as representatives from sponsoring federal government departments (listed in Appendix B) and was pretested with two marketing classes at Algonquin College in Ottawa.

Each participating college and institute was provided with the bilingual e-mail text and link to the bilingual survey to distribute to all of their students via their intranet system, e-bulletin boards and student e-mail system. In this invitation to participate, students were offered a chance to win one of twenty \$100 cash prizes for completing the survey. From March 4 to April 13, 2005, over 6,000 students completed the survey.⁹ All students who voluntarily completed the entry form were included in the draw and winners were randomly chosen on April 14, 2005.

⁷ See, for example, the Public Policy Forum publication *Facing the Challenge: Recruiting the Next Generation of University Graduates to the Public Service* (1998), and *Recruiting the Next Generation of Scientists to the Public Service* (2004).

⁸ Northern College, Vancouver Community College, Grant MacEwan College, Lethbridge Community College, and Collège Edouard Montpetit.

⁹ The 17 participating Canadian community colleges and institutes represent a student population of 84,625 out of the approximately 736,000 students enrolled in 145 community colleges and institutes across Canada.

The survey asked students:

- about their career plans
- for a self-assessment of the skills they acquired or improved upon through their community college or institute education
- for their views on the job market and careers in various sectors (public, private, not-for-profit)
- about their previous work experience; and,
- what were important factors in making job choices.

More specifically, the survey included questions on respondents' interest in a career in the public sector, what they thought of the federal government as an employer and as a workplace, and where they thought their chances for employment were highest. The survey also asked students to assess the extent to which their community college education had improved essential workplace skills such as their ability to communicate effectively, analyze and problem solve in real-life situations, and apply technical skills in their area of study.

Of the respondents, 63.2 percent were female and 36.8 percent were male. In all, 93.2 percent of surveys were completed in English and 6.8 percent in French.

To further analyze the results, we sorted the data according to age groupings: 17-24; 25-29; and over 30 years of age. In addition, we cross-tabulated age groupings to whether or not students had job experience, either through full-time careers before college or through co-op placements during college, to determine if experience in the labour force had an impact on career preferences and perceptions of the workplace.

Findings and Recommendations

An analysis of the survey responses on the workplace and career-related choices, provides us with insights into the preferred workplace of the future. The students' self-assessment of essential workplace skills leads us to conclude that community college and institute graduates are an important human resource pool for the workplace of the future. Employers, who want to attract and retain this next generation of knowledge workers, will have to tailor their recruitment and retention strategies to what the students are looking for.

Here are our findings and recommendations in detail.

Recommendation #1: A smart workplace will include graduates from community colleges and institutes

Community college and institute education provides essential skills for the workplace of the future and their graduates are knowledge workers in the making. When asked to assess their college or institute education, 78 percent indicated that their ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing had improved. Over 86 percent indicated that their ability to identify problems, think critically to solve them and to plan design and execute tasks had improved. Over 85 percent indicated that their college or institute education had improved their ability to adapt to new situations and environments and to work in teams. Most significantly, almost 85 percent indicated that their college or institute education had improved their ability to recognize that learning is a lifelong process.

Recommendation #2: Employers recruitment and retention strategies should include offering jobs that use students' skills now, offer training opportunities, and competitive benefits and salaries.

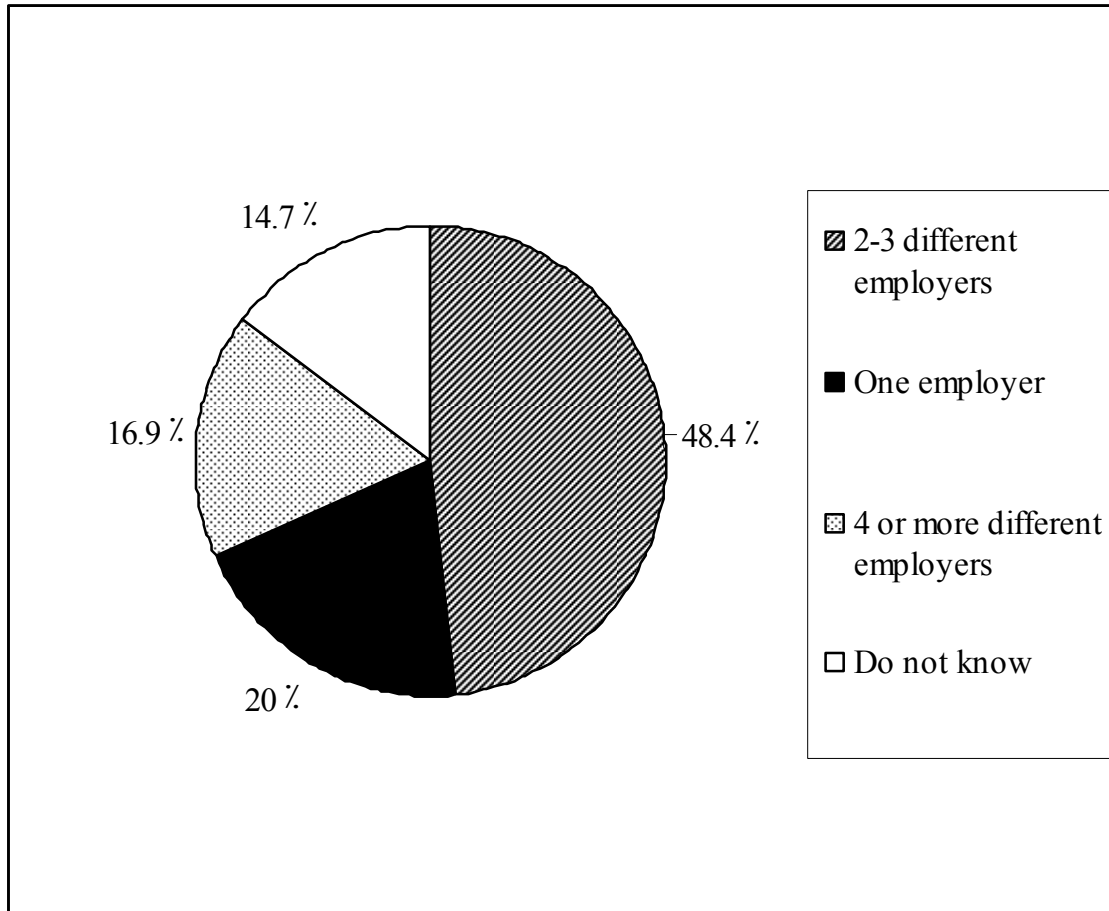
Too often, employers recruit for skill sets that they may need in the future rather than focusing on the skills that they need for the current job. This practice is particularly so in the public sector where candidates with the highest level of education are often given hiring preference because these additional skills may be needed in the future. The next generation of workers is not content to hold a job for years until the skills that they currently have are put to use. They want the opportunity to advance in their careers by using the skills they now have and by acquiring new skills through on-the-job training opportunities.

Here's more about what students expect to find in the workplace and what their career preferences are.

Most students are optimistic about their post-graduation job search. Almost 80% felt that it was very likely or somewhat likely that they would find the type of job that they were looking for within 6 months of graduation. They plan to focus their job search in the period February through May (95%) of their graduating year. Over 46% say they will be seeking a job after graduating from their current program of study, while 24% will go back to their previous job or begin a new job that has already been arranged. Almost 23% will continue in school. Of those looking for work, almost 80% hope to find full-time positions either on a permanent basis or as term contracts.

When asked to consider their career path, 20% expected to have a career with one employer. Almost 50% expected to have at least 2 and 3 employers and 17% expect 4 or more employers. Almost 15% indicated that they could not predict how many employers that they would have throughout their career. See Graph 1.

Graph 1 - When you consider your future career path, do you expect to have a life-long career with one employer or do you anticipate working for multiple employers?



When asked what their career preferences were, 40.4% of the whole sample indicated that they would prefer a career with one employer. For students over the age of 30, that percentage rose to 52%. For students in the 17 to 24 year age category, only 35% indicated a preference for a one-employer career. Self-employment was the career preference for 20% of the sample regardless of age or job experience.

The students are looking for careers that provide work that is interesting, that uses the skills that they acquired in college and for organizations that provide access to training and development. When asked how important a list of seventeen factors were when considering their future careers, 96.7% chose work that is interesting, 95.6% chose an opportunity to work in their field of study, 95.5% chose access to training and development, and 95.3% chose ability to use skills and expertise appropriately as very important or somewhat important. Other factors that were given high ratings were ability to balance work and personal life, 94.4% and competitive wages and benefits at 93.7% and 93.1%, respectively. See Table 1 for a full list of responses.

Table 1 - How important to you are each of the following factors when considering your future career? (Choices: Very important, Somewhat important, Neither important nor unimportant, Somewhat unimportant, Very unimportant, Do not know)

Factors	Somewhat and Very Important Total (%)
Work that is interesting	96.7
Opportunity to work in your field of study	95.6
Access to training and development	95.5
Ability to use skills/expertise appropriately	95.3
Ability to balance work and personal life	94.4
Competitive wages	93.7
Competitive benefits	93.1
Opportunities for promotion	92.7
Organization with a good reputation	91
A workplace which respects the difference among people	90.1
Long-term job security	89.9
Flexibility to move throughout different areas of the organization	89.2
Work that contributes to the betterment of society	82
Job located within your region	79.1
Opportunities to use state-of-the-art technology	71.3
Ability to work in my choice of French or English	62.8

Both females and males ranked work that is interesting as the most important factor in considering their future careers but there are gender differences in the top 10 rankings. Females rated the opportunity to use their skills appropriately, the ability to balance work and personal life and a workplace that respects the differences among people higher than males. The top choices of males include access to training, competitive wage and benefits. See Table 2 for the full list of responses by female respondents and Table 3 for the male respondents.

Table 2 - Female respondents: How important to you are each of the following factors when considering your future career?

Factors	Somewhat and Very Important Total (%)
Work that is interesting	97.6
Opportunity to work in your field of study	96.8
Ability to use skills/expertise appropriately	96.4
Access to training and development	96.4
Ability to balance work and personal life	96.3
Competitive wages	94.3
A workplace which respects the difference among people	94.2
Competitive benefits	94
Organization with a good reputation	93.4
Opportunities for promotion	93.1
Long-term job security	91.6
Flexibility to move throughout different areas of the organization	89.9
Work that contributes to the betterment of society	86.4
Job located within your region	82.5
Opportunities to use state-of-the-art technology	68.1
Ability to work in my choice of French or English	64.5

Table 3 - Male respondents: How important to you are each of the following factors when considering your future career?

Factors	Somewhat and Very Important Total (%)
Work that is interesting	95.7
Access to training and development	94.4
Ability to use skills/expertise appropriately	94
Opportunity to work in your field of study	93.7
Competitive wages	93.2
Opportunities for promotion	92.5
Competitive benefits	91.9
Ability to balance work and personal life	91.7
Flexibility to move throughout different areas of the organization	88.5
Long-term job security	87.5
Organization with a good reputation	87.3
A workplace which respects the difference among people	83.4
Opportunities to use state-of-the-art technology	77.2
Work that contributes to the betterment of society	74.9
Job located within your region	73.6
Ability to work in my choice of French or English	60.2

When asked to choose the most important factor in making employment decisions after completing their education, competitive wages was the first choice among 25.6% of all respondents. Almost 22% choose opportunity to work in your field of study as their first choice, 15% chose work that is interesting and 7.1% chose ability to balance work and personal life as the most important factor. See Table 4 for the full list of responses.

Table 4 - What do you see as the most important factor in choosing your future employment after completing your education?

Factors	% of respondents
Competitive wages	25.6
Opportunity to work in your field of study	21.7
Work that is interesting	15
Ability to balance work and personal life	7.1
Long-term job security	6.3
Competitive benefits	3.9
Job located within your region	3.8
Work that contributes to the betterment of society	3.5
Opportunities for promotion	2.8
A workplace which respects the difference among people	2.7
Ability to use skills/expertise appropriately	2.3
Access to training and development	1.4
Flexibility to move throughout different areas of the organization	1.3
Opportunities to use state-of-the-art technology	0.8
Organization with a good reputation	0.8
Ability to work in my choice of French or English	0.2

Of those aged 25 to 29 years, competitive wages was the first choice among 29.5%, and among males aged 25 to 29 years, competitive wages was the first choice of 35.2%. Only 26% of females in the same age group chose competitive wages as their first choice. See Table 5 for a full list of responses.

Table 5 - Respondents aged 25-29: What do you see as the most important factor in choosing your future employment after completing your education?

Factors	% of all respondents aged 25-29	% of female respondents aged 25-29	% of male respondents aged 25-29
Competitive wages	29.5	26.1	35.2
Opportunity to work in your field of study	23	26.8	17
Work that is interesting	10.9	9.4	13.1
Ability to balance work and personal life	6.9	7.4	6.3
Long-term job security	4.9	5	4.8
Job located within your region	4.1	3.6	5.1
Competitive benefits	3.9	4.5	3
Work that contributes to the betterment of society	3.7	3.4	2.8
Opportunities for promotion	3.1	2.7	3.9
A workplace which respects the difference among people	3	3.2	2.7
Ability to use skills/expertise appropriately	2.7	2.9	2.1
Access to training and development	1.3	1.1	1.2
Flexibility to move throughout different areas of the organization	1	1.3	0.6
Organization with a good reputation	0.9	0.9	0.9
Opportunities to use state-of-the-art technology	0.4	0	1.2
Ability to work in my choice of French or English	0.3	0.5	0

Females choose opportunity to work in your field of study as the most important factor in choosing employment after graduation (24.8%). Competitive wages was chosen by 22.3% of females. Of all male respondents, competitive wages was chosen by 31.4% as the most important factor and opportunity to work in your field of study and work that is interesting was chosen by 16.7% and 16.5% respectively.

Recommendation 4: Employers should adopt smart recruit strategies which include referrals from current employees, offering co-op programs to students while they are in school and traditional forms of advertising such as newspapers.

Recommendation 5: Students should adopt smart job search strategies, which include developing professional and personal contacts. Participation outside the classroom is as important as participation inside. Your personal networks can be built from co-op and summer employment, and through volunteer, social and cultural activities. Professional, volunteer and personal networks broaden your skill set, your personal development and your contribution to the community.

Recommendation 6: Governments work with community college and institute campuses to raise awareness of potential career opportunities and how to access them.

We asked students to tell us how they were going to go about finding a job by asking them to rate the likelihood of using a number of job search techniques. We found that although students had access to the Internet in their job search (98%) the most popular job search techniques involved personal contacts and very traditional job search strategies, such as looking in newspapers. Some of the least likely means of looking for a job were government Web sites, through the Public Service Commission and government brochures. See Table 6 for a full list of responses. This finding is not surprising considering that the federal government has no recruitment campaign targeting community colleges.

Table 6 - What is the likelihood of using each of the following in your job search?

(In the survey that students completed, the potential responses were not presented in the four categories as they are below)

		Somewhat and Very Likely Total (%)	RANK
Personal contacts	Network of family and friends	75.5	1
	Connections made through my co-op/internship/field placement	73.3	2
	Referrals from professional associations	69.8	3
	Network of previous employers and colleagues	68.8	5
	Referrals from Instructors/Deans	67.3	6
Newspaper	Newspapers, e.g. school, local, national	69.7	4
Internet-based	Company/Organization Web site (not government)	63.4	7
	National job posting sites, e.g. Workopolis	62.7	8
	www.jobs.gc.ca - federal government Web site	61.9	9
	Provincial/territorial and municipal government Web sites	57.2	12
	Campus Internet site	56.6	13
	List serves/E-mail groups	28.7	17
Other	Human Resource and Skills Development centre	59.4	10
	Job fairs	59.3	11
	Information interview (initiated by student to get information on an organization)	51.5	14
	Public Service Commission office	38.9	15
	Government brochures	37.1	16

Conclusions:

If the future workplace can be characterized by keeping pace with rapidly changing skill needs and evolving technology, then employers need to develop new strategies around recruitment and retention of the coveted knowledge worker.

Employers must include community college and institute students in their recruitment strategies as they possess the essential skills needed in the workplace of the future. Employers must also recognize that the next generation of employees is looking for a

different workplace and that successful retention strategies will be all about creating the environment that employees can grow and contribute in.

At the same time, those entering the workforce should be prepared to manage change and to recognize that education is a life-long personal responsibility. Working smart includes making contributions through professional and volunteer networks.

Appendix A

Survey of College and Institute Students: Skills and Career Goals Advisory Committee Members

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Appendix B

Survey of College and Institute Students: Skills and Career Goals

Participating Colleges and Institutes

Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology - Ottawa, Ontario

Cégep St-Jean-sur-Richelieu - St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Québec

College of the North Atlantic - Stephenville, Newfoundland

Durham College - Oshawa, Ontario

Heritage College - Gatineau, Québec

Holland College - Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning - Toronto, Ontario

Justice Institute of British Columbia - New Westminster, British Columbia

La Cité Collégiale - Ottawa, Ontario

Mohawk College - Hamilton, Ontario

New Brunswick Community College and Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick - St. John, New Brunswick

Northern Alberta Institute of Technology - Edmonton, Alberta

Nova Scotia Community College - Pictou, Kingstec and Annapolis Valley Campuses, Nova Scotia

Red Deer College - Red Deer, Alberta

Red River College - Winnipeg, Manitoba

St. Lawrence College - Brockville, Cornwall and Kingston, Ontario

Southern Alberta Institute of Technology - Calgary, Alberta
