

# Enhancing Our Knowledge of the Literacy and Essential Skills Workforce in Canada: An Occupational Profile



In 2013 Canadian Literacy and Learning Network (CLLN) coordinated a large-scale labour market study of Literacy and Essential Skills (LES) workers to get a comprehensive picture of who is working in the field. The ground-breaking study of paid LES workers included instructors, coordinators, assessors, program managers, supervisors, and administrators. In addition to an online confidential survey, CLLN collected data through key informant interviews and focus groups with Anglophone, Francophone, and Aboriginal LES workers. Supplementary research was conducted on LES hiring practices and requirements within Canada, and LES labour market studies in other jurisdictions.

## Summary Findings

This project has confirmed the richness of the Literacy and Essential Skills workforce that has long been reported anecdotally and through observation. The field consists of highly educated, highly dedicated practitioners who value learner-centred approaches and possess significant psychological capital. Predominantly, they are intrinsically motivated and participate regularly in ongoing training and professional development (PD) thereby demonstrating the value of life-long learning.

The LES workforce faces considerable challenges including high levels of temporary job incidence, a large proportion of aging members, extensive overtime, earning discrepancy, and a lack of access to benefits and pension plans. Adding to this situation is the constantly rising level and complexity of what it means to be literate in our digital technology-based economy.

The project results show a strong foundation upon which to build as well as impending challenges that must be addressed if the LES system is to maintain its current strengths and capacity. There are specific human resource (HR) issues that should be considered.

- **Across Canada, the LES system benefits greatly from an incredibly educated and dedicated workforce of LES practitioners who work in safe, supportive environments balancing instruction and administration.**
- **Workers possess high psychological capital and strong LES-related knowledge and skills, and they desire LES-specific credentials and recognition.**
- **LES practitioners work with considerable anxiety, exhaustion and stress due to job precarity, wide-ranging salaries, limited access to benefits and lack of consistent human resource policies.**
- **Impact of impending large numbers of retirements and staff turnover challenges recruitment, retention and LES system stability.**

## Recommendations

Based on the project's findings there are specific recommendations suggested as next steps.

- **Investigate models of professionalization including options for recognition, certification and occupational standards.**
- **Identify supports and enablers to increase consistent access to high-quality professional development and training.**
- **Explore and identify succession strategies and pathways into the field to address retirements and stabilize the field.**
- **Identify and recommend human resource strategies to support consistent working conditions across regions and organizational types.**

Professionalization, professional development, succession planning, career pathways, and human resource frameworks are all key recommendations for future steps to recognize, stabilize and mobilize the Literacy and Essential Skills field. A solid foundation of experienced, educated practitioners exists on which to build an even stronger and more agile adult LES system responsive to the needs of the Canadian labour force. Taking no action risks moving forward into crisis and leaving few options for adults wishing to increase their Literacy and Essential Skills for work, learning and life. The time to take action is now, while the current system capacity of experienced LES practitioners is stable.

*“Literacy is related to the economic development, health, and well-being of individuals, the community and the nation. We should invest money in helping individuals increase capacity because LES helps people, it increases their confidence, their skills and enables them to access better jobs, or jobs period.”*

– CLLN Labour Market Study key informant interview participant

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