THE REALITIES OF WORKING IN THE LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS FIELD

An Occupational Profile of the Literacy and Essential Skills Workforce in Canada

November 2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project, conducted by Canadian Literacy and Learning Network (CLLN), was a ground-breaking, national labour market study of the Literacy and Essential Skills workforce. It provides reliable insights into the state of the LES field and the human resource issues facing it. The goal of this project was to build a picture of the state of Literacy and Essential Skills workers across Canada. We explored and developed a profile of their characteristics, knowledge, skills, educational background, and working conditions.

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NOTES ON LANGUAGE USAGE

“Practitioner”, “worker”, and “educator” are used interchangeably throughout the report to refer to people who hold paid positions in the Literacy and Essential Skills field. As such, they may perform any or all of a range of duties including: instruction, teaching, volunteer training, coordination, administration, management, assessment, evaluation, reporting, curriculum development, outreach and public education.

“Student” and “learner” are used interchangeably to indicate individuals who participate in adult Literacy and Essential Skills (LES) programs across Canada.

Thank you to the following CLLN Staff for their support and advice

Annette Hegel and Chris Harwood

Funding for this project was provided by the Government of Canada, Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES), Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLESPI).

CLLN is funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Office of Literacy and Essential Skills
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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, which was administered by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), CLLN collected data through focus groups with Anglophone, Francophone, and Aboriginal LES workers, as well as key informant interviews. Supplementary research was conducted on LES hiring practices and requirements within Canada, and LES labour market studies in other jurisdictions.

**Key project findings**

This project has confirmed the depth 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 lifelong learning.

The LES workforce faces considerable human resources challenges including high incidences of temporary employment, a large proportion of aging practitioners, extensive overtime (unpaid for the most part), earning discrepancies, 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 help learners be literate in Canada’s digital technology-based economy.

While a strong foundation upon which to build does exist, the project results highlight impending challenges that must be addressed if the LES system is to maintain its current level of a skilled workforce.
There are aspects of the current status of the LES workforce, as well as specific human resource issues that should be considered:

1. Across Canada, the LES system benefits greatly from an incredibly well-educated and dedicated workforce of LES practitioners who work in safe, supportive environments, balancing instruction and administrative duties.

2. Workers possess high psychological capital and strong LES-related knowledge and skills, and they desire LES-specific credentials and recognition.

3. Many LES practitioners work in situations of uncertainty due to job precarity, wide-ranging salaries, limited access to benefits, and lack of consistent human resource policies.

4. Impending retirement of large numbers of practitioners combined with current turnover challenges, will impact recruitment, retention, and LES system stability.

Recommendations

Based on the project’s findings there are specific recommendations suggested as next steps:

1. Investigate models of professionalization, including options for recognition, certification and occupational standards.

2. Identify supports and enablers to increase consistent access to high quality professional development and training.

3. Explore and identify succession strategies and pathways into the field to address retirements and stabilize the field.

4. Identify and recommend human resource strategies to support consistent working conditions across regions and organizational types.

To recognize, stabilize and mobilize the Literacy and Essential Skills field, professionalization, professional development, succession planning, career pathways, and human resource frameworks are all key recommendations for future steps. 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.

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.

— Key informant interview participant
1. OVERVIEW OF THE LABOUR MARKET STUDY

In 2013, Canadian Literacy and Learning Network (CLLN) coordinated a national Labour Market Study of Literacy and Essential Skills (LES) workers to create an informed profile of those educators working in the field. The study involved LES workers employed (both part time and full time) within the variety of delivery organizations across Canada, as instructors, coordinators, assessors, program managers, supervisors, and administrators.

The study covered the following topics:

1. Profile and Context: delivery, socio-demographic, aspects of job, organization, career
2. Human Capital: education qualifications, professional development activities, skills/knowledge
3. Supports: professional development supports, delivery resources, training and skills recognition, performance supports and enablers

Project Background, Components, and Methodology

Studies by Employment and Social Development Canada’s Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (2010) and Statistics Canada (2011) pointed to a gap in information related to LES service providers. CLLN proposed to fill that gap through the development of a Labour Market Study.

With funding from Employment and Social Development Canada, CLLN designed and executed a comprehensive study comprising several distinct components: research, key informant interviews and target population focus groups, and an online survey of the workforce. This report focuses on the results of the survey, drawing on the findings of the other project components which are briefly described here and summarized in the report’s appendices.

1 Formerly Human Resources Skills Development Canada.
Through key informant interviews and facilitated focus groups, 58 practitioners across Canada were consulted. Thirty key informant interviews were conducted with Francophone, Aboriginal, and Anglophone Literacy and Essential Skills practitioners between January and August 2013. Participants from every province and territory took part in these two activities. Approximately one third of the interviews were conducted in French.

Lines of inquiry for the interviews were: LES workers’ employment backgrounds and current work arrangements, ideal qualifications, backgrounds and paths into the field, workplace environments, and forums of exchange used by those in the field.

In May and June 2013, three focus groups were hosted in partnership with other literacy organizations. There were 28 participants total, with each focus group targeting a particular demographic of the LES workforce: Aboriginal, Francophone, and Anglophone.

A summary of the key informant interviews and focus groups, as well as their findings, is provided in Appendix 3 – Results from Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups. The full reports are available at www.lesworkforce.ca.

The project commissioned two research reports to supplement the information being gathered by the survey, key informant interviews, and the focus groups. The research examined relevant studies from other jurisdictions in terms of some of the themes being looked at through this study: working conditions, pay rates, hours of work, background skills, knowledge and education, and recognition and credentials.

A summary of the research reports’ key findings is provided in Appendix 2 – Findings from Additional Research.

CLLN engaged the services of Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) to work with project staff and the advisory committee to develop and conduct the survey. The survey was available online in both English and French.

LES workers were contacted through many channels by both CLLN and SRDC including social media, email, and telephone. Umbrella groups and networking associations were given information about the survey to distribute to their members and contacts.

While 1,575 unique, eligible individuals visited the survey website, the survey results are based on the 690 who responded to half or more of the questions. This convenience sample is a strong response rate based on the latest estimates of the numbers of LES workers of the field. Current estimates put the LES workforce in Canada between 5,000-8,000 practitioners. This estimate is based on consultation during the study with a variety of knowledgeable sources including: government, provincial/territorial organizations, LES networks, and field experts. No definitive list of all the LES workers exists at any level—national or provincial/territorial.

SRDC’s report summary is provided as Appendix 1 – SRDC Survey Observations and Analysis.

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2 A convenience sample refers to using input from any person who is eligible to respond to survey questions.
2. SURVEY RESULTS

The following information is based on the responses (n=690) to the national survey and provides a baseline profile of Literacy and Essential Skills workers in Canada. The data and percentages in this report are taken directly from the Final Survey Report prepared by Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), the survey consultants. This information is a valuable resource for determining the human resources issues facing LES workers and their employers.

2.1 Profile of Respondents and their Organizations

Geographic Profile of Respondents

The survey both reflects Canada’s geographical diversity and presents some of the common complications of assessing Canadian data. Because there are small numbers of responses from some areas, findings derived from participants located in the North, the Prairie Provinces, and the Atlantic Provinces are generally discussed in terms of these geographical groupings. Sufficient sample sizes in British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec allow those results to be provided by province.

The response rate from each province/territory (Figure 1) somewhat mirrors the population distribution across Canada, as well as the estimated size of the workforce in each province and territory. For example, in Ontario the government funds over 200 Literacy and Basic Skills agencies; it is the most populous province, and has the highest survey response rate. The strong response from New Brunswick was due in part to a large number of LES workers being employed by the government and the provincial government’s endorsement of the CLLN survey. There was an under-representative response rate from practitioners in Quebec and Aboriginal LES programs. Therefore, those results should be reviewed with caution.

Figure 2 shows the responses as a percent of total responses, grouped by regions within Canada due to the low response rates in some provinces and territories. SRDC, the survey consultant, cautioned relying on response rates of less than 30 respondents in any one province/territory.
Regional Highlights

As mentioned previously, the survey results have been analyzed based on 690 respondents. In terms of regions the following profile emerges:

Northern Canada (YK, NWT, NU):
- practitioners working for colleges and universities (43%) are more highly represented than in other regions
- proportion working for community-based LES agencies (13%) are relatively low compared with national results

Quebec
- relatively high proportion working for Aboriginal organizations (19%)
- low proportion working for colleges and universities (7%)

British Columbia
- relatively low proportions working for community-based LES agencies (19%) and school boards (4%)
- relatively high proportions working for colleges and universities (34%)

Prairies (AB, SK, MB)
- proportions working for school boards is relatively low (3%)

Ontario
- proportions working for school boards is relatively high (26%)

Atlantic Canada (NB, PEI, NS, NL)
- higher proportions working for community-based agencies (47%) and government (21%)
- lower proportions working for colleges and universities (7%) and school boards (3%)

Only statistically unique regional results are represented.

Profile of LES Organizations

Community-based, colleges and school boards are the predominant delivery agencies across Canada:

- Community-based LES agencies 32%
- Colleges and universities 20%
- School boards 12%
- Government 6%
- Training, employment, and career development services providers 8%
- Social services providers 8%
- Aboriginal organizations 5%
- Other 9%

Please note that:

“Social services agencies” include social agencies, food banks, immigrant settlement agencies, libraries, and agencies for persons with disabilities.

“Other agencies” include those serving inmates and former inmates, and private sector and/or for-profit training agencies.
Figure 3 illustrates the variations in the distribution of different types of organizations employing respondents from across Canada. In most cases, variation is due to the predomination of specific types of organizations that have traditionally delivered LES services in those regions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Type</th>
<th>Atlantic Canada</th>
<th>Quebec</th>
<th>Ontario</th>
<th>Prairies</th>
<th>British Colombia</th>
<th>Northern Canada</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Boards</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/ University</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based LES agency</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/ employment/ career services provider</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social service/ immigrant/ disability org./ library</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal organization</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures 4 and 5 show the size breakdown of the organizations where LES practitioners work. A slight majority of LES workers (51%) work in organizations with 24 or fewer employees; while 48% work in medium to large organizations (25 or more employees) such as colleges and school boards. Only 25% of respondents reported that they work in organizations with 25 or more LES workers.

**Modes of Delivery**

Many organizations, regardless of organizational type, reported using multiple approaches to service delivery. The most common delivery modes (see Figure 6) are small groups, one-to-one sessions, and large groups. Online learning, distance education, and correspondence courses are used the least by respondents.

Regionally, Northern Canada uses large group sessions less often (29%) than other regions which may be indicative of population size and the geographic spread of communities. British Columbia reported more use of large group sessions (70%) than other regions. Community-based organizations had the highest incidence of using one-to-one (85%) and small group sessions (90%).

Online learning is used by just over a third of school boards (36%), followed closely by colleges and community-based agencies, social services agencies, and Aboriginal organizations.

Online learning is most often used in Ontario (46%) and least in Atlantic Canada (15%) compared to 30% overall. The Ontario trend may be due in part to the Ontario government's recent focus on developing online programming for learners in the English, French, and Aboriginal streams of the Literacy and Basic Skills Program.
Client Groups Served

Respondents were asked about the target client groups they serve. In Figure 7 the lighter bar indicates all the client groups served by respondents, reflecting the wide array of LES clients. The most reported target groups are people living on low incomes (81%) and people who have low literacy (79%).

When asked to select the main client group served by their organization (shown in the figure by the striped bars), the most frequently identified group is people with low literacy (28%), followed closely by the precariously employed (23%), immigrants (17%), and Aboriginal persons (13%).

Characteristics of Clients Served

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the literacy levels of the LES clients they serve in their organizations. The five International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) levels were used for the definitions. The survey conceptualizes literacy along a continuum of proficiency from Level 1 (low literacy skills) to Level 5 (strong literacy skills), with Level 3 being the skill level needed for most literacy tasks in our society. Level 2 was most reported (57%) followed by Level 1 (29%) with levels 3 to 5 combined into one grouping (14%).

The distribution of urban, rural, and mixed (both rural and urban) service delivery is almost even among respondents: mainly urban (39%), mainly rural (29%), and mixed (32%).

Community-based agencies (36%) and government (34%) have the highest proportions of respondents serving in mainly rural areas, while school boards and social services agencies predominantly provide services in urban areas. The top two organizational types delivering services in mixed areas are government and other agencies (workplace, prison, private and for-profit agencies).
2.2 Demographics and Working Conditions

Workforce Demographics

Survey respondents indicated that they are, on average, well-educated, with 95% reporting they possess a post-secondary qualification—diploma, degree, post-grad certificate, master’s degree, or PH.D. This provides a strong, receptive foundation for additional training and professional development specific to adult LES program delivery.

Education

- 98% - have a high school certificate
- 75% - have a bachelor’s degree
- 24% - have a master’s degree
- Education, Recreation, and Counseling and Social Sciences (and related fields) are the most common majors

Entering the field

- 9 in 10 practitioners came into the field from outside.
  Top 3 reasons for entering the field: doing an intrinsically rewarding job, helping others, and enabling people to participate in society more

Psychological Capital

- 9 in 10 describe themselves as adaptable, persistent, diligent, resilient, and self-confident

Age

- 55+ years 38%
- 45-54 years 33%
- 35-44 years 19%
- <35 years 11%

Prior to conducting the survey, researchers suspected that there are large numbers of LES workers nearing retirement—reflective of the baby boom effect. This was confirmed by survey results: with 71% of respondents aged 45 years and up, almost three in four LES workers will be nearing retirement over the next 5 to 15 years. This has the potential to have a serious impact on the LES field as large numbers are likely to be leaving the workforce in a relatively short time period.
The potential impact of large numbers leaving the workforce raises the following key questions:

- How will the field prepare for the transition?
- What succession planning is in place?
- How can knowledge be transferred to novice LES workers to provide program continuity and consistent quality support to LES learners?

**Working Conditions**

This section summarizes the survey findings related to the respondents’ type of employment (permanent positions and contracts; full-time and part-time work), overtime hours worked (both compensated and uncompensated), their wages and benefits, and levels of satisfaction with their working conditions.

- Average hours worked (paid, excluding overtime): 30.8 hours/week
- Only 40% of overtime hours worked are compensated
- Average annual gross earnings: $44,000
- Average time worked: 10.5 months/year
- 46% work in temporary jobs
- 30% work part-time
- 82% satisfied with their job overall
- 60%+ are dissatisfied with the lack of pension benefits, the short-term nature of the job, and the lack of extended medical insurance benefits
- 1/3 respondents are quite anxious and feel stress and pressure on the job
- Most accessible resources (87%-60%) are the internet, broadband, high-speed internet, curricula and learning materials, classroom facilities, and computers
- Least accessible resources (38%-22%) are culturally sensitive resources, forum for exchange of information and experiences, and a forum for networking and learning about job opportunities

**Types of Employment**

The number of workers in precarious employment within the LES field is considerably higher than for the Canadian workforce at large (14%).

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3 “Precariously employed” is defined as people who work in jobs that lack predictability and security, which directly affects economic and psychological welfare.
54% of survey respondents are permanent employees.

46% of respondents are temporary employees (including contract, sessional casual, seasonal, or other temporary employment type).

Contract/temporary jobs are a factor across all types of organizations. High incidences of this type of employment were reported in school boards (49%), community-based agencies (47%), social services agencies (46%), government and training/employment providers (44% each), colleges/universities (43%), Aboriginal organizations (40%) and other (31%). From a regional perspective, contract and sessional jobs are highest in Atlantic Canada (59%), and lowest in Ontario (30%) and Quebec (31%).

Almost one third of survey respondents reported that they work part time (less than 30 hours per week), which represents a much higher incidence than in the overall Canadian workforce (19%). While school boards have the highest percentage of part time work, it should be noted that most organization types are well-above 19%.

**Overtime Hours**

The survey results confirm the high incidence of overtime reported by the focus groups and key informant interviews. Overtime represents a substantial human investment of time and effort on the part of practitioners. On average, respondents are being remunerated for only 40% of overtime hours worked. The lack of remuneration for all overtime hours worked represents a substantial subsidy by practitioners to the cost of providing LES programs. This in turn over-inflates the real capacity of the system to provide service.

When looked at through the lens of organization type, respondents working for school boards reported the highest average number of overtime hours, specifically 6.3 hours per week. School boards also have the highest occurrence of part-time work. Survey respondents working in school boards rarely receive compensation for overtime, reporting only 0.4 hours per week of paid overtime.

Overtime is lowest in training and employment agencies. Respondents in government agencies reported the highest rate of compensated overtime hours, at 5.1 hours per week, which is much higher than the overall average of 1.8 hours per week.

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**Average Hours Worked**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Hours Worked</th>
<th>No. of hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average paid (compensated) hours worked per week (excl. overtime) (n=627)</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average overtime hours (compensated and uncompensated) worked per week (n=686)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ie., hours worked in current job(s) beyond the &quot;standard&quot; workweek</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average compensated overtime hours worked per week in current job(s) (n=373)</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average volunteering worked hours per week (n=288) -ie., unpaid hours worked in</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community not considered &quot;traditional&quot; overtime work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Figure 8 – Average Paid Hours per Week (excluding overtime)**

Frequency of part-time work (30 hours or less) by organization type:

- School board (54%)
- Social services agencies (33%)
- Community-based (32%)
- College/university (27%)
- Other (25%)
- Training/employment (20%)
- Government (19%)
- Aboriginal (12%)
EXAMPLE #1:

If we multiply the average overtime hours per week by the total number of survey respondents, we can estimate the number of person hours provided each week.

4.4 hours/week x 690 respondents = 3,036 additional person hours per week.

Annually, this calculates to 138 hours per year in additional person hours to LES agencies based on the 45.5 average weeks worked per year, as reported by survey respondents.

Wages and Benefits

The bulleted list below illustrates a significant wage disparity among respondents. Wage rates are influenced by organizational policies, funding levels, and the historical development of the LES field. The average weekly earnings of survey respondents, $965, are slightly higher than the weekly gross earnings of the average Canadian worker, which is $896.85. However, almost half (49%) make less than $799 per week, while one in four earn over $1200 per week. These results show the wide-ranging rates of compensation in the field for essentially the same work.

- Less than $600: 20%
- Between $600 and $799: 29%
- Between $800 and $1199: 27%
- $1200 and over: 24%

Based on working on average 10.5 months/year, the average annual gross salary is $44,000.

When asked about their satisfaction with wages and salaries, 63% of survey respondents reported they are somewhat to completely satisfied. Satisfaction with wages and salaries varies greatly among types of organizations: training and employment agencies (51%), community-based (57%), other agencies (59%), social services agencies (61%), Aboriginal (60%), school boards (74%), government (77%), and colleges (79%).

The survey results indicate that access to pensions is a significant employment-benefits issue for LES workers. Only 29% of respondents reported satisfaction with their access to a pension. Respondents from three organization types, specifically colleges/universities, government, and school boards (at 57%, 52%, and 40% respectively), reported being more satisfied with their benefits related to pensions than respondents overall. Practitioners working for community-based LES agencies are significantly less satisfied with their benefits related to pensions (7%).

In regard to respondents’ satisfaction with access to extended medical benefits, there was a wide range of responses across organization types. Practitioners working for community-based LES agencies reported very low satisfaction levels (13%).

with extended medical benefits compared to other agencies (25%). In contrast, there are higher proportions satisfied with their extended medical benefits among survey respondents from colleges and universities (56%), Aboriginal organizations (50%), government (48%), and social services agencies (39%), compared to the 26% overall for all respondents across Canada.

**Job Satisfaction**

In spite of concerns regarding key employment factors including job instability, short-term contracts, low wages, low rate of compensation for overtime hours worked, lack of pension and medical benefits in some specific types of organizations, overall job satisfaction is high among the LES workers who responded to the survey. 82% indicated that they are satisfied with their jobs overall.

**EXAMPLE #2:**

Survey respondents indicated that they also volunteer hours each week. Volunteer hours are usually those hours that LES workers give to the program and do not report, knowing that they will never get that time back as time in-lieu or paid compensation. This issue was discussed within the key informant interviews and the focus groups.

3.6 hours/week x 690 respondents = 2,484 additional person hours per week.

The yearly calculation reveals 113,022 additional hours per year being provided to LES programs across Canada.
2.3 Skills, Activities, and Supports

As sections 2.1 and 2.2 have shown, LES practitioners work in a variety of organizational types and sizes. Within the workforce there are high levels of job precarity and wage disparity, as well as uneven access to benefits. We also know that the type and size of the predominant LES workplace differs in some regions of the country. To gain a sense of the services provided and set of skills needed by practitioners, the survey asked respondents to consider the tasks, activities, and resources involved in their day-to-day activities.

Primary Skills and Activities

Survey respondents identified the following as the top five most important skills they need on the job:

- Effective speaking and listening
- Respect for learners
- Clear writing
- Creating a positive learning environment
- Decision making

The results in Figure 10 show the average hours spent per week on various LES delivery activities. These results were then sorted after by, curriculum developer, assessor, administrator/coordinator, manager and/or tutor/trainer (results not shown in figure). Individuals who indicated “instructor” as their main activity spend on average 17.8 hours per week on instruction.

The activities were grouped into five main categories: delivery, operational (management/administration/ coordination), referral and follow-up, tutor/teacher training, and other (results not shown in figure). Almost an equal number of hours are being spent on delivery (20 hours per week) as on operational activities (18 hours per week). This finding indicates a need for further investigation to see if the demands of administration and accountability have an impact on the delivery of LES training to adult learners.
Access to Resources

Respondents were asked to rate both their access to LES delivery resources ("Can I get it at all?") and the sufficiency ("Do I have enough of it?") of LES resources. The results were very similar. Figure 11 shows the accessibility ratings.

Most types of organizations reported similar levels of access and sufficiency with some notable differences. Two exceptions are worth noting:

- Respondents working in Aboriginal programs reported that culturally sensitive resources, a forum for networking and job opportunities, computers, in-class and mobile technology, classroom facilities, and broadband high-speed internet access were not very accessible.

- Government respondents reported that computers—in-class and mobile technology were not very accessible.

The lack of access to computers, in class and mobile technology can impact program design and delivery especially in the domain of teaching problem solving in technology-rich environments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of resource</th>
<th>Quite or completely accessible</th>
<th>Somewhat accessible</th>
<th>Little or no accessibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadband, high speed Internet access</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricula and learning materials/resources</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom facilities – space and furniture</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers, in-class and mobile technologies, software (new and upgrades), other types of hardware and technology/IT support</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills assessment instruments (paper-based and/or online)</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on effective teaching/facilitation practices</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on effective program management/delivery practices</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally relevant/sensitive resources, materials or curricula</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A forum for exchange of information and experiences</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A forum for networking and learning about job opportunities</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11 – Access to LES Delivery Resources
Why Recognition is Important

The reasons given for wanting formal recognition, in order of importance (much or great benefit), ranging from 73% to 24%, are:

- Greater professional pride
- Being more satisfied in job
- Strengthened linkages with colleagues and literacy field
- Motivation to develop my skills
- Enhanced qualifications
- Increased external validation of LES
- Other benefits of skills recognition
- Career advancement
- Great job mobility
- Increased earnings

Top 10 Most Positive Supports

Most performance supports were rated by respondents as “somewhat positive” or “extremely positive” as factors for influencing job performance. In ranked order, the supports are:

1. Cooperation from staff
2. Cooperation and trust among staff/colleagues
3. Safe working environment
4. Flexibility in work schedule to accommodate family responsibilities
5. Cooperation from management
6. Performance feedback/recognition
7. Clearly articulated organizational expectations
8. Clearly communicated and widely accepted standards and ethics
9. Ability to voice opinions and influence changes
10. Involvement in organizational decisions

Performance Supports and Enablers

Supports and enablers focus on factors that enhance performance on the job including organizational-based factors, job descriptions, performance standards and expectations. Most survey respondents had access to a wide variety of performance supports/enablers. Examples from the 16 listed in the survey include: involvement in organizational decisions, working flexible hours, clearly articulated organizational expectations, cooperation from staff, ability to voice opinions, and safe working environment.

When viewed through an organizational lens, there is some variation with regards to types of provisions and supports provided.

- Respondents from Aboriginal organizations reported they have more flexibility in terms of scheduling work and less stress on the job
- Respondents from training/employment service agencies reported that the ability to voice opinions and influence changes benefits them
- Community-based LES respondents reported that involvement in organizational decisions benefits them
- Respondents from school boards and colleges/universities were less likely to say involvement in decision-making benefits them

About two in five respondents reported that they do not have access (either not available or not offered) to the following specific supports (% indicating the factor was not available or offered).

- Performance incentives 40%
- Defined career ladders 33%
- Job/career advancement opportunities 27%
- Overseeing body representing the professional interests 21%

The list of supports/enablers and impacts provides fertile ground for further exploration in terms of professional development of the workforce. LES workers experience a high level of cooperation and trust from their colleagues, which bolsters the psychological capital needed to tackle social and economic changes in the environment. The list also indicates some need for more consistent human resources policies and frameworks across LES agencies in Canada.
Professional Development

Professional development (PD) is a key issue for the workforce. Survey respondents were asked to indicate the types of PD that they participated in as well as the effectiveness of PD. The rating results of “Perceived effectiveness of PD” (Figure 12) reflect the responses to the “PD activities pursued” (not shown) by LES workers; the types of activities pursued were also rated highly for effectiveness.

- All respondents participate in formal or informal Professional Development (PD) activities. The most common (99%-80%) are: learning by doing, workshops, conferences or training events, reading printed and online manuals/materials, volunteering, and informal mentoring.

- Most receive support for PD. The most frequently received supports (60-48%) are: verbal encouragement, coverage of indirect training costs, paid time off to participate in training, and coverage of all tuition or fees.

- Face-to-face types of events are perceived by respondents to be the most effective approach to professional development.

There was a notable low rating given to “webinars or online workshops” with only 42% of respondents stating that these were quite or extremely effective. Online courses received a stronger positive rating. This difference indicates a need for more investigation, especially considering that LES agencies are actively encouraged by funders to provide and/or participate in webinars in order to disseminate best practices and share information about new resources. Webinars may not be the most effective way to make broad qualitative changes among LES practitioners. Connectivity issues and age-related factors may have influenced this finding.

Another potential point of interest is the degree to

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of resource</th>
<th>Quite or Extremely Effective</th>
<th>Somewhat Effective</th>
<th>Not or a little Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning by doing</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person training at an accredited institution</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal mentoring</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal on-the-job training</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job shadowing</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops, conferences or training events</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train-the-trainer events</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance education courses through an accredited institution</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online courses with an instructor</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online courses self-paced</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading online resources/materials</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation training</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading printed manuals/materials</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinar or online workshop with a presenter or facilitator</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12 – Perceived Effectiveness of Professional Development
which the lack of online delivery to learners (30% overall) is influenced by LES practitioners experiences, knowledge, and attitudes towards online learning as evidenced by their PD preferences. Problem solving in technology-rich environments is an important emerging skill domain for adult LES students, according to the latest international survey of adult competencies.\(^5\) The influence of practitioners may be minor relative to the lack of investment in creating online learning programs and resources.

According to the results illustrated by Figure 13, a slight majority of respondents receive support in the form of verbal encouragement, time off, and indirect costs covered to attend PD, and paid time off. The overall results did not vary much by type of organization. This finding indicates that as many as half of LES workers (extrapolating from the survey results) do not have access to PD on a consistent basis. Less than half of survey respondents were given paid time off to attend training and provided with reimbursement for all training fees or tuition.

These results indicate a need for further inquiry. For example, what role, if any does funding play in the provision of or access to professional development? Also, what role do human resources policies play to support ongoing PD within various types of organizations? The role of ongoing professional development is integral to the provision of effective, evidence-based program design and delivery, especially if LES agencies are to provide responsive LES programs based on emerging labour market demands.

\(^5\) The International Survey of Adults, conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).
Skills and Recognition

As shown in Figure 14, LES workers most often receive a verbal pat on the back for enhancing their professional skills and knowledge. Survey respondents indicated that they want more formal recognition of their skills and knowledge through formal certificates (Figure 15).

When responses in Figure 15 are filtered by organizational type, 83% of respondents in Aboriginal agencies strongly recommend a certificate of achievement by an accredited institution. Respondents in other organizational types followed closely:

- colleges: 82%
- government: 77%
- training/employment agencies: 74%
- community-based: 72%
- other agencies: 68%
- social services agencies: 59%
- school boards: 58%

As noted by the list of reasons why they want recognition (see text box on page 21), LES workers responses are quite realistic regarding the impact of recognition on their work. The top four responses emphasize elevating the status of the field and strengthening the connections within it.
When asked about the importance of having LES certification⁶, the answer from respondents was overwhelmingly positive. As Figure 16 shows, 62% of respondents, regardless of type of organization, thought the LES credentials were moderately, quite or extremely important. Respondents from Aboriginal organizations were more likely to rate highly the importance of certification. Just over half of the respondents from social services agencies indicated that LES certification was moderately or extremely important to them.

While most respondents acknowledged having participated in some form of LES-related training, it has not necessarily been in the form of a recognized certificate. When asked specifically about whether they possessed any type of LES certification, only 44% indicated any certification in instruction, assessment, or another functional area. Possession of LES certification is highest in government and community-based agencies (49%), followed by colleges (44%) and training and employment (43%). This result was similar across different types of organizations.

During the focus groups and key informant interviews, some participants acknowledged that there were worries in the field about revealing a lack of LES certification. The main concern was how this lack might be interpreted by various stakeholders. Further, 19% of survey respondents when asked specifically about whether they possessed any type of LES certification, did not complete the question. This may indicate concerns in the minds of some respondents.

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⁶ The word “certification” was not defined in the survey, which may have influenced responses due to personal interpretation of “certification”.
2.4 Workforce Challenges

Future

While the national survey was focused on creating a snapshot of practitioners in the field, LES workers were also asked questions regarding their likelihood of remaining in the field.

With 38% of LES workforce 55 years of age or older and with 21% of respondents indicating they are somewhat unlikely or not at all likely to stay in the field, the potential for a skills gap exists. Another 19% reported being unsure if they will stay in the field. Insufficient compensation and job stability were the two most frequent cited reasons for leaving.

Across Canada, there were statistically significant variations in the reasons given for possibly leaving the field:

- Insufficient compensation and the lack of opportunities to network and exchange views were reported by respondents in Atlantic Canada more often than overall.
- LES workers who responded from Ontario and the Prairies most often reported that emotional burnout is a reason for considering leaving.
- Lack of pride was indicated by higher proportions from the Prairies and Northern Canada than nationally.

While there are no statistically significant variations across the type of organizations regarding the likelihood of remaining in the field, there are two notable differences. The two highest proportions of respondents, who indicated that they are not at all likely and somewhat unlikely to remain, came from school boards and community-based agencies respectively.

These findings draw attention to the need to address human resource issues regarding recruitment and retention, and the associated costs to agencies of training new staff.

- How will these practitioners be replaced?
- What succession planning is in place within organizations?
- Are there clear career paths into the field to provide an adequate number of LES practitioners to replace those leaving?
3. KEY PROJECT FINDINGS

The Labour Market Study collected information from the Literacy and Essential Skills workforce through an online survey, key informant interviews, focus group sessions and additional research. Analysis of the data collected reveals a workforce that is highly educated and highly dedicated. Practitioners value learner-centred approaches and possess significant psychological capital. They are intrinsically motivated for the most part, and participate regularly in ongoing training and professional development. The workforce, however, faces considerable challenges including high levels of temporary job incidence, a large percentage of practitioners over the age of 55, extensive overtime hours, earning discrepancies, and lack of access to benefits and pension plans.

Attention needs to be paid to a number of key issues to ensure that the LES workforce continues to be flexible and fluid enough to respond to emerging needs of program participants.

Four Key Project Findings

1. Across Canada, the LES system benefits greatly from a well-educated and dedicated workforce of LES educators who work in safe, supportive environments, balancing instruction and administrative duties.

2. Practitioners possess high psychological capital and strong LES-related knowledge and skills, while desiring LES-specific credentials and recognition, to successfully serve diverse groups.

3. LES practitioners work with considerable anxiety and stress due to job precarity, wide-ranging salaries, limited access to benefits and lack of consistent human resource policies.

4. Impending large numbers of retirements, combined with current staff turnover challenges, will impact recruitment, retention, and LES system stability.

Based on all these findings, let us turn toward recommending key actions for the future. The next section outlines possible steps toward addressing the issues, challenges, and opportunities detailed above.
4. NEXT STEPS: PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

The workforce is not without its strengths, but is also has challenges. While the average LES practitioner has a fairly high level of post-secondary education, and engages in ongoing professional development (formal and informal), a significant number are fast approaching retirement age. High job satisfaction is balanced precariously against factors such as job insecurity from part-time or temporary contracts, non-remunerated overtime, inequities in pay rates, and a lack of employment benefits. The fact remains that there are few formal pathways into the workforce involving relevant, Literacy and Essential Skills training, and few career ladders for the development and stability of the workforce.

In short, there is a rich, deep LES workforce upon which to build opportunities for enhancing consistent practice and learning progress, but there are also some key challenges to address. Therefore, it is vital to move forward strategically and work toward ensuring that the field is well prepared and positioned to provide the high-quality LES training required by Canadian workers in today’s technology-based economy. A strong LES delivery system, including a knowledgeable and skilled labour force, is key to high-quality learning outcomes and program accountability.

During this project, we heard from practitioners in many communities and from various voices across cultures. They had similar concerns and stories regarding the dedication and value of workers in the Literacy and Essential Skills field. Focus group participants and key informants talked about the lack of resources, overwork and stress, as well as dynamic practice, innovative programs, and commitment to student success within the realities of the individual learner’s context.

Whether they were working with high IALS Level 2 students on job-specific training or Level 1 learners focused on independence, LES workers endeavored to create successful programs and improve their practice. Dedication to ongoing professional development and lifelong learning were not just verbal platitudes given to LES students, but practices within the field.

“LITERACY IS NOT JUST AN ISSUE FACING OUR [FIRST] NATIONS, BUT CANADA NEEDS TO LOOK AT THE ENTIRE ADULT EDUCATION SECTOR.”

— FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT
Four Key Project Recommendations

1. Investigate models of professionalization, including options for recognition, certification and occupational standards.

2. Identify supports and enablers to increase consistent access to high quality professional development and training.

3. Explore and identify succession strategies and pathways into the field to address retirements and stabilize the field.

4. Identify and recommend human resource strategies to support consistent working conditions across regions and organizational types.

The findings of this research provide the evidence that CLLN and the LES field needs to move forward and carry out activities that will lead to the development of standards of practice, certification, ongoing professional development and career pathways that will be applicable to diverse program settings currently available across the country.
The following observations are excerpted from the final survey report completed by Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) for CLLN. The findings are clustered by key themes: service delivery; socio-demographics, employment and career transitions; human capital; and supports for the job.

**Service Delivery**

LES practitioners face a diverse set of service delivery challenges. They work in all regions of the country and in a variety of delivery settings, represent organizations wide ranging in type, and serve diverse client groups. Many work in organizations where they represent a minority of the workforce and they are often engaged in a variety of learning and administrative activities, beyond instruction, necessitating significant multi-tasking and flexibility. Traditional modes of delivery dominate LES instruction, despite broader trends toward digital forms of training delivery and high importance ratings for digital technologies among LES practitioners.

1. Given the diverse settings and the small size of many organizations involved in LES delivery, constraints on their capacity to support LES practitioners may be significant. Additional mechanisms should be considered to facilitate and leverage the support and resources that LES organizations can provide to their practitioners, notably in the area of digital technologies.

2. Further study is recommended to explore the apparent gap between practitioners’ reported use of digital technologies in the delivery of LES services and their rated importance of them.

This may relate to some form of underlying capacity or related constraints of delivery agencies, which result in preferred delivery models that under-utilize digital technologies.

**Socio-Demographics, Employment, and Career Transitions**

The proportion of LES practitioners who are 55 years and older is higher than in the Canadian workforce at large. While most practitioners have high levels of confidence and psychological capital, job anxiety levels are fairly high, which may be linked in part to instability associated with part-time working hours and the temporary nature of LES employment for many practitioners. Despite intrinsic motivations that appear to have led many practitioners into the LES field, a significant minority may leave in the next five years, magnifying succession and recruitment challenges the sector may face due to an aging workforce.

3. A proactive policy to both increase the number of entrants and reduce exits from the LES workforce may be needed to avoid potential labour shortages arising from an aging workforce and concerns over job stability.

4. While government may not be able to directly address concerns over job stability, policies that reinforce and communicate the intrinsic motivations for LES employment may be particularly effective, including efforts to professionalize the field and facilitate collaboration and connection among practitioners.
Human Capital

While practitioners are highly educated and a majority feel LES credentials are important, only a minority have received specific LES-related certifications. This is likely due to lack of options in this respect. Nearly three-quarters of practitioners recommended the creation of additional forms of public recognition, including province-wide certification and a national professional status for LES practitioners. Their motivations for public recognition appear to be diverse. While a significant number of practitioners reported that skills recognition has helped with career advancement and earnings, the primary effects relate to intangible benefits such as professional pride, job satisfaction, and strengthened connections with colleagues in the LES field.

Supports for the Job

While a large majority of LES practitioners reported receiving some form of professional development support from their employers, only about half have received financial support in terms of tuition, other training costs, or paid release time. Public sources of funding, information on available programs, and public recognition of LES skills were deemed to be least accessible and to have met the fewest needs. Notably, only a small minority of practitioners reported that the existing forums for collaboration and information exchange were accessible and sufficient in meeting their needs. Most practitioners also reported as insufficient the existing career ladders and advancement opportunities within the LES field, along with the absence of an overseeing body to represent their professional interests and diverse needs.

5. Steps to professionalize the LES field should include provincially and/or nationally recognized standards of practice, along with a certification program based on those standards, which would appear to have significant support among an already highly educated LES workforce.

6. Any certification program should focus not only on developing best practices in the field, but also on affirming and communicating skills and professional recognition, as the support from practitioners for this appears driven not only by career development interests but by intrinsic motivations.

7. Governments and key stakeholders should explore longer-term strategies to support retention and career advancement opportunities within the field, including additional support for professional development, the creation of suitable career pathways, and support for networks that monitor the professional interests of the LES workforce.

8. A network of stakeholders should lead the development of suitable career pathways for LES practitioners, in a way that ensures a relevant organizing framework linking standards of practice and certification with training and professional development activities, across the diverse regions and settings that LES delivery is currently conducted.
Appendix 2 — Findings from Additional Research

This project commissioned two additional research reports to supplement the results of the survey, key informant interviews, and the focus groups. These reports helped provide context for the project and summarized relevant studies from other jurisdictions. The findings from the two research reports align with the results from the other project components within the themes of working conditions, pay rates, hours of work, background skills, knowledge and education, and recognition and credentials.

Recruitment and Hiring Practices

Research Scope:
- Reviewed job postings, interview protocols, and job descriptions
  - Analysis of 60 job postings and interview questions; 45 documents and resources
  - Included documents from Canada, USA, UK and Australia

Key Research Findings:
- A variety of qualifications/credentials are requested.
- Common skills and attributes are desired.
  - “Communication” is the most required and requested skill.
  - Need for strong “soft skills” and humanistic attitudes, e.g. compassion, conflict resolution, intuition, flexibility, be non-judgemental.
- Skills and qualifications most requested go beyond academic, technical skills such as teaching strategies, assessment experience, and curriculum development.
- Most require a formal “teacher of adults” type of certificate.
- Belief that the performance of students can be predicted by the quality of instruction.
- There needs to be evidence of an instructors commitment to ongoing professional development and lifelong learning.
- Median wage for LES workers in Canada is $25/hour; even split of part-time and full-time jobs; almost all positions are contracts.

Labour Market Studies in Other Jurisdictions

Research Scope:
- Within Canada and international.
- Reviewed 100 online resources, 45 examined in detail, 11 deemed relevant to current study.
- Very little similar research has been done, especially in past five years; there is a need for more.
KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS:

- Common and preferable for practitioners to possess, and for LES agencies to request, adult education credentials and experience. For example, some sort of “teacher of adults” certificate, relevant post-secondary education, number of years’ experience teaching adults.

- Most important credential is a relevant teacher of adults certificate.

- Most LES workers in other jurisdictions are female, Caucasian, 40 to 55 years of age and have post-secondary education.

- Median reported wage is $20-$25/hour.

- LES educators work more hours than they are paid for.

- Time and money keep LES practitioners from increasing their knowledge, skills and credentials, based on results from reviewed reports.

- LES workers are under-paid, over-worked and experience poor working conditions.

- Going above and beyond the job description makes for a successful LES worker.
During the project 58 practitioners from across Canada were consulted through key informant interviews and facilitated focus groups. Visit www.lesworkforce.ca for the full report.

Key Informant Interviews

Thirty key informant interviews were conducted with Francophone, Aboriginal, and Anglophone Literacy and Essential Skills practitioners between January and August 2013. Participants came from every province and territory. Approximately one third of interviews were conducted in French.

Lines of inquiry for the interviews were: LES workers’ employment backgrounds and current work arrangements, ideal qualifications, backgrounds and paths into the field, workplace environments, and forums of exchange used by those in the field.

FINDINGS:

- Overall, attitudes and personal traits were seen as the most important qualification for being an effective LES worker, above academic and formal training. Work experience is also highly valued.
- Generally, practitioners are working more hours than they are paid for.
- Access to professional development resources in the workplace is standard, but the resources are limited depending on the funds available through the organization.
- Partnerships with outside organizations are common, and it is often through these partnerships that practitioners are able to access resources.
- In-person forums are used to connect with others in the field. Practitioners would appreciate more opportunities to network with other workers, preferably face-to-face.
- There is no consensus on professionalizing the field. However, were the field to be professionalized (i.e. to implement standardized training or expected qualifications), some workers feel there should be a corresponding increase in funding to adequately reflect the increase in qualifications workers would be expected to hold.

KEY MESSAGES:

Four key messages emerged when LES workers were asked to identify and discuss the issues that are impacting the field.

1. The field needs to be valued and recognized.

There is a great deal of positive work being done in the LES sector but it is not, as a field, treated as seriously as the formal education sector. The LES sector in general, and the community sector in particular, needs to be “valued and recognized.” Participants felt there should be awareness about the work that is being done by literacy practitioners, especially in smaller organizations that are operating with few resources.

2. Explore professionalization.

While there is no consensus on professionalizing, during the key informant interviews some participants suggested that the field should be moving in this direction.
A national certification for LES workers is seen as something that could be useful—especially if it is recognized by employers and leads to a minimum remuneration. Recognition of acquired competencies and wage equity across the sectors and provinces, based on experience, is something that many desire. Professionalization is seen as one way to increase funding, and the quality of working conditions. National or regional forums for the exchange of information and resources would be a good way to start this dialogue.

3 The field needs more stable funding.
Commonly cited was the need for increased resources and funding. Stable funding is seen as a way to ensure a stable workforce, as the employment of many LES workers is precarious. One participant noted that “at current funding levels, agencies and programs can’t afford to pay higher competitive salaries that are needed to hire and retain staff.” Some see the need for a federally mandated, Canada-wide curriculum development, or standard training, curriculum, and standards. Others would like increased resources, in particular access to more language-specific materials for those working in French.

4 It’s worth investing in adult literacy.
The final theme that emerged is related to the inherent value of increasing literacy skills of adults. As one interviewee observed, “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.” As another participant noted, this is because “LES helps people, it increases their confidence, their skills, and enables them to access better jobs, or jobs period.” One interviewee remarked that there are “untapped resources in the adult population” and that “some learners only need a short boost. All adult education should be free because it’s worth the investment.”

Focus Groups
In May and June 2013, three focus groups were hosted with a total of 28 participants. In partnership with Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC), the Réseau pour le développement de l’alphabétisme et des compétences (RESDAC), and Canadian Literacy and Learning Network’s (CLLN) provincial and territorial Anglophone literacy coalitions, each focus group targeted a particular demographic of the LES workforce: Aboriginal, Francophone, and Anglophone.

Common trends and findings were observed across all three groups:

■ Attitudes and personal traits are more valued than academic qualifications. Understanding the dynamics and complexities of the adult learner was one of the most important traits consistently mentioned.

■ Academic qualifications are inherently tied to compensation. Literacy and Essential Skills programs and agencies operate with minimal budgets. As a result, they cannot offer salaries competitive with those offered in elementary, secondary, or post-secondary organizations or programs.

■ Overtime is endemic in the field and is rarely paid. Regardless of employer, years in the field, and job position, the majority of LES employees work hours for which they receive no compensation.

■ Life experience of LES practitioners is highly valued. There are diverse paths into the field. Practitioners come from various backgrounds, and this richness should be encouraged.
Quality resources are lacking. Whereas Aboriginal LES instructors struggle to find culturally appropriate resources, Francophone workers are concerned about the poor or inadequate quality and quantity of resources available in French.

Chronic underfunding has wide-reaching consequences for the LES labour market. It affects, among other factors, staff turnover, succession planning, and access to resources and professional development.

Some key points of interest raised by particular cultural/linguistic groups include:

**ABORIGINAL:**

- Experience working with Aboriginals and general knowledge of Aboriginal culture are essential. The workforce must know and engage with the community they are working in.
- Incorporating Aboriginal traditions and teachings in the classroom can have a positive impact on the learning environment and improve learning outcomes.
- Instructors need to consider the whole person that they are teaching.
- There is a need for a national Aboriginal literacy strategy.

**FRANCOPHONE:**

- Workers with university degrees in education prefer more remunerative employment with comprehensive benefits and conditions. Highly qualified workers use LES programs as a springboard to other, better-paid employment.
- Many jobs are on a contract-basis, subject to funding and project approval, seasonal, part-time, occasional, based on demand, etc. This precariousness affects the ability to recruit and retain qualified personnel.

- There are insufficient professional development opportunities available in French.
- There is one national online forum for networking among Francophone LES workers, but it is not widely known and infrequently used.

**ANGLOPHONE:**

- Knowledge of LES is important, but the field is divided on the need for formal education requirements and credentials. For example, many don’t think it is necessary that an instructor should be required to have a teaching degree.
- Recent changes to Employment Insurance are having an impact on the LES workforce.
- There are high numbers of LES workers nearing retirement (5 – 10 years) or who will imminently retire (1 – 5 years), but there are no plans to address recruitment of new workers.
- Generally, LES workers feel under-valued for their work and contributions.

The focus group and key informant interview consultation processes revealed a passionate, anxious, over-exerted LES workforce. Challenges related to funding, a lack of respect for the profession, and inadequate resources are having an impact on the workers providing Literacy and Essential Skills training for adults. This no doubt affects the quality of instruction in the classroom. Yet, despite these issues, the majority of those consulted plan to stay in the LES workforce. With knowledge and expertise behind them, the field seeks to address the challenges that their workforce is facing, while always maintaining a learner-centered approach to their work.
This project was funded by the Government of Canada’s Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLESP).