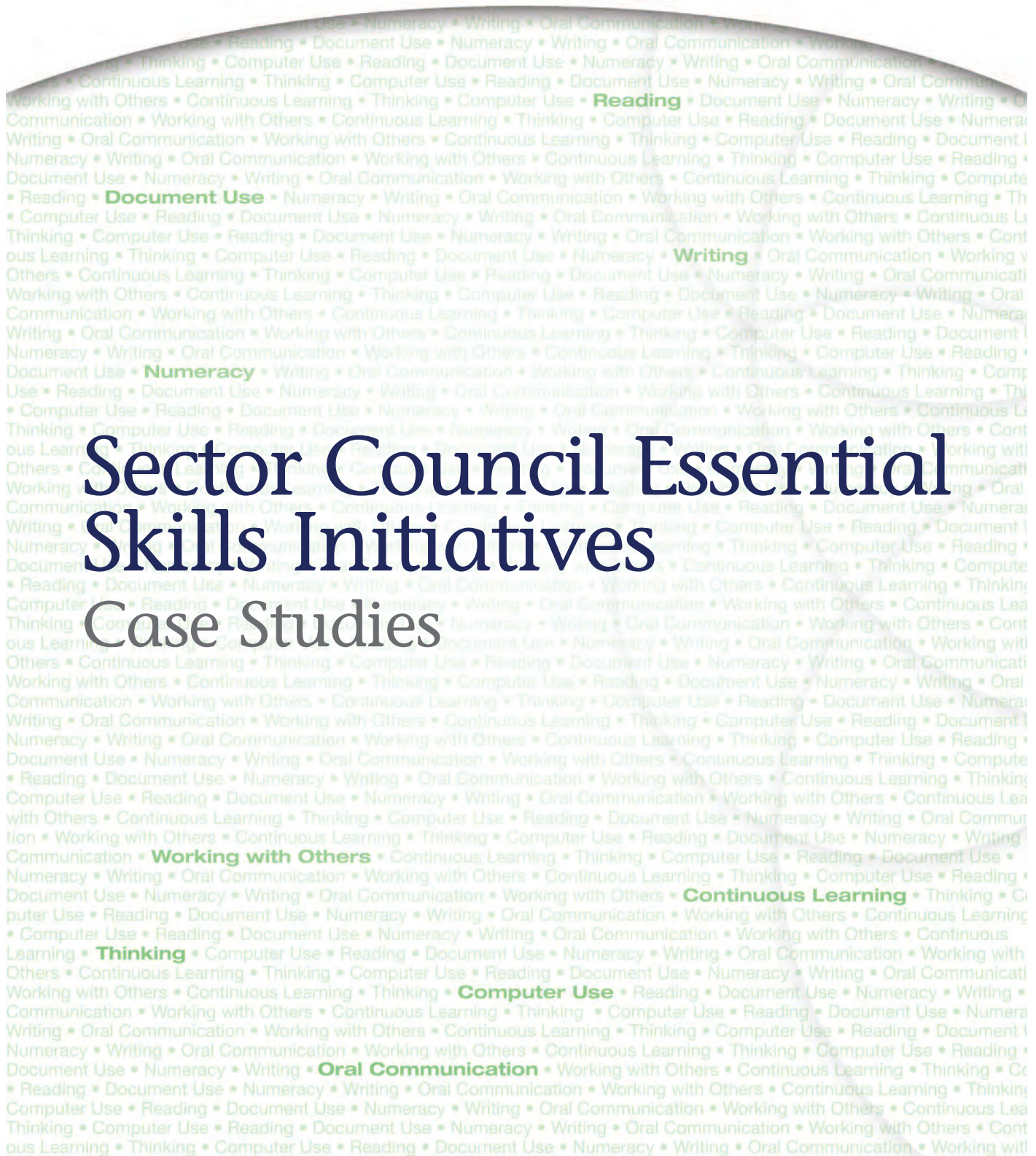




People • Partnerships • Knowledge

Skills and Employment

Office of Literacy and Essential Skills



Sector Council Essential Skills Initiatives Case Studies

Introduction

Sector councils are organizations that identify, research and coordinate initiatives that support the development and management of human resources in nearly every industry in Canada. There are more than thirty sector councils representing and working with industry.

There is a general consensus among councils that conducting Essential Skills assessments, developing tools and providing and promoting Essential Skills training can benefit industries and individual sector councils alike. Many sector councils have developed and implemented Essential Skills initiatives for specific industries, as well as tools and resources that can be used cross-sectorally.

The following case studies highlight five different sector council Essential Skills initiatives. While there are many other sector councils working in this area, these case studies outline the variety and breadth of Essential Skills projects. The sector councils profiled are:

- The Construction Sector Council
- The Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council
- The Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council
- The Canadian Automotive Repair and Service Council
- The Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters.

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Construction Sector Council (CSC)

The CSC is a national organization formed as a partnership between labour and business. This council promotes skills development and addresses human resource issues in the construction sector. CSC has identified its priorities as labour market information, technology at work, career awareness programs and standards and skills development.

Essential Skills Rationale

For the past 15 years, the issue of Essential Skills in construction has been identified as a concern in labour market studies, focus groups and industry consultations. In 2004 CSC held a workshop with industry representatives to determine the interest in and importance of Essential Skills in the construction sector. The workshop confirmed that Essential Skills are critical for the construction industry and that extensive work needed to be done in this area. A strategy was developed as a result of the workshop.

Essential Skills Strategy

The strategy has five key areas of emphasis:

Research — Develop an inventory of existing materials and conduct research into all current information on Essential Skills in construction.

Awareness — Raise awareness of the importance of Essential Skills and of the resources and tools available.

Clearinghouse — Make information, tools and resources easily accessible on the CSC website.

Coordination — Develop links and partnerships with organizations to further common goals in Essential Skills work.

Standards and Training — Incorporate Essential Skills into existing and new occupational standards, and into trades training.

A coordinating committee was organized to oversee the development and implementation of the strategy. Two key initiatives were developed. The first project was an inventory of existing Essential Skills tools. CSC then created an awareness campaign, not based on a standard set of promotional materials, but on a set of practical tools to engage the industry. Three workbooks in a series called *Build on Your Talents* were developed for three distinct groups:

Employers — *Plain Language for Construction* is a tool for supervisors, forepersons or other managers on construction sites who need to communicate with contractors and staff. It provides tips and tools on how to use plain language when presenting information.

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Trainers — *Essential Skills Activities for Trades* provides educators with exercises and activities that simulate construction workplace situations and improve reading, document use and numeracy skills.

Employees and Students — *Using Trades Math* is a practical tool that helps to refresh math skills through practical, construction-related questions and scenarios.

CSC is working on several other projects, including:

- A review of the impact of Essential Skills interventions on apprenticeship.
- The development of additional Essential Skills workplace training.
- A redesigned CSC website with a section dedicated to Essential Skills, including a searchable database and extensive resources.

Results

By adopting a comprehensive approach, CSC has been able to integrate Essential Skills into many of its tools, resources and products so they are an embedded element that allows for consistency across the spectrum of initiatives. And because support was provided in the form of practical tools, the industry and educators have been enthusiastic about incorporating Essential Skills into training. The Essential Skills workbooks have been so successful that CSC has reprinted them several times.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

CSC discovered that the construction industry was more interested in practical tools than research or abstract concepts relating to Essential Skills. This has made employers, trades people, potential workers and the industry in general more supportive of CSC's Essential Skills initiatives.

Many individual companies and organizations have Essential Skills initiatives in place or under development. CSC has learned that it can play an important role in bringing partners together to pool resources, share knowledge and avoid duplication of effort.

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Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council (CTHRC)

The CTHRC was created for industry, by industry to address human resource issues and challenges in the Canadian trucking industry. CTHRC develops national occupational standards, provides labour market information, promotes career awareness initiatives and develops training programs and assessment tools to assist the various elements of the sector.

Essential Skills Rationale

A research study conducted by CTHRC determined that a number of truck driver and dispatcher candidates had challenges with Essential Skills, particularly in the areas of reading, document use and numeracy. To address this, CTHRC took a comprehensive approach to Essential Skills and has developed a strategy that addresses four key areas: Awareness, Assessment, Upgrading and Partnerships.

Essential Skills Strategy

Awareness — Trucking companies in general are not aware of the importance of Essential Skills. CTHRC has taken two steps to address this. In 2004 they held an Essential Skills conference to highlight the research and tools developed for the industry. More recently, the council developed a series of news articles aimed at the trucking industry describing and discussing the Essential Skills concept and explaining how a commitment to Essential Skills can be a valuable business investment.

Assessment — CTHRC has developed customized assessment tools which include real work situations that drivers, dispatchers, driver trainers and safety professionals face in their jobs.

Upgrading — CTHRC has developed sector-specific upgrading modules for document use and numeracy to address gaps identified through needs assessments.

Partnerships — CTHRC is committed to fostering links with individuals within trucking companies and building champions who understand and support Essential Skills, and can share information and raise awareness within their workplaces.

CTHRC also commissioned a report titled *Essential Skills as a Predictor of Safety*, which established a direct link between Essential Skills and improvements in safety performance. The report reviewed Essential Skills levels among Canadian Petroleum Products Institute (CPPI) certified professional drivers in Alberta. It confirmed that those who did not meet Essential Skills standards in specific areas were more likely to be involved in safety incidents.

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Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council

Tourism is one of the largest sectors in the Canadian economy. The Tourism sector council was established in 1993 to address labour market issues and promote professionalism in the tourism sector. It develops and provides national occupational standards, training tools, professional recognition, professional certification and labour market research.

Essential Skills Rationale

The council's priority in developing tools and resources is to support the recruitment and retention of skilled workers in the tourism sector. In order to attract new entrants and particularly under-represented groups such as new immigrants, Aboriginal people and people with disabilities, the council has developed programs designed to appeal to a broad range of potential employees. They are supplemented by initiatives that help people develop the skills that are applicable to all entry-level occupations in the sector. These initiatives have strong Essential Skills components.

Essential Skills Strategy

As an established sector council representing a large workforce, Tourism has been integrating and considering Essential Skills for many years. Its Essential Skills strategy has three main components:

Standards — Essential Skills have been integrated into occupational analyses since 1990, before the term “Essential Skills” existed, and were re-structured in 1995 to match HRSDC’s definitions. The council has developed Essential Skills profiles for nineteen occupations and is working on twenty-six more.

Assessment — Tourism has self-assessment tools that are directly linked to twenty-nine occupations in the tourism sector. These tools are sector-specific and assess both Essential Skills and transferable skills. The council has a comprehensive assessment process that is a model for other councils and has been used in assessing foreign-trained professionals.

Training — Tourism offers modular-based Essential Skills training in twenty-nine occupations. Courses can be taken online and contain detailed exercises and examples relevant to the tourism industry.

The council's most innovative work in the area of Essential Skills is the development of a training workbook titled *Tourism Essentials*. It is designed to train new workers in the skills relevant to all entry-level positions within the tourism sector. These transferable skills are a combination of both Essential Skills and Employability Skills (as defined by the Conference Board of Canada). They include skills, attitudes and tourism knowledge elements.

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The *Tourism Essentials* workbook is a self-study tool that includes exercises, scenarios, multiple choice questions and skills checklists. It is a comprehensive document that gives students and potential workers a solid understanding of the skills required in the tourism sector. *Tourism Essentials* is also part of a larger strategy to encourage tourism employees to receive certification. Completing this workbook is often the first step toward achieving the council's transferable skills standards, which then leads to certification in all tourism occupations.

Results

As *Tourism Essentials* is used in many different contexts and is not delivered by the council, quantitative data on its impact is not available. Feedback from students and other users, however, is positive and has led to document updates every three to five years.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

The council emphasizes the need to develop Essential Skills profiles in tandem with other occupational standards, and to use Essential Skills to cross-validate those standards in order to ensure consistency.

It has developed tools and resources in order to increase Essential Skills in all entry-level positions, rather than specific occupations. This has given the resources broader appeal and use in the industry.

And finally, the council has developed partnerships at the regional and provincial level (e.g. tourism education councils) in order to reach under-represented groups, particularly at the local level.

www.cthrc.ca

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Canadian Automotive Repair and Service Council (CARS)

CARS is a national, non-profit organization that undertakes research and activities supporting the human resource and training development of the automotive repair and service industry. CARS supports and represents employers and employees, and acts as a voice for the sector.

Essential Skills Rationale

CARS represents an industry heavily reliant on technology, and Essential Skills are foundational to many of this industry's required technical skills. This is why the organization judged it important to provide Essential Skills tools to employees, employers and trainers. To that end, CARS has developed a comprehensive Essential Skills strategy.

Essential Skills Strategy

The CARS Essential Skills strategy was undertaken in two phases. In Phase I, CARS prepared Essential Skills profiles for a number of occupations and developed Essential Skills assessments for reading, document use and numeracy. More than 600 volunteers from across Canada participated in testing to establish benchmarks. CARS then reviewed internal curriculum and training materials to analyze the extent to which they incorporated Essential Skills. Based on these steps, CARS developed an Essential Skills workshop for CARS motive power instructors. The workshop gave trainers the opportunity to receive and provide feedback on teaching methods, with a special focus on Essential Skills training.

Phase II is currently in development. It will include the development of additional workshops for instructors, and the review of existing curricula at selected colleges to determine the extent to which Essential Skills are included in training. CARS also determined in Phase I that thinking and oral communication skills are key Essential Skills for this industry, and are therefore planning to develop assessment tools for these skills.

Results

- Essential Skills profiles for twelve occupations in the industry.
- Sectoral benchmarks for assessing Essential Skills.
- Formal process for reviewing CARS training curricula to ensure Essential Skills are included in training.
- Essential Skills training-for-trainers workshops leading to increased instructor capacity in the areas of Essential Skills assessment and training methodologies.
- Essential Skills assessments available online.

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Lessons Learned and Best Practices

CARS has determined that its Essential Skills initiatives are primarily aimed at instructors, rather than entry-level individuals, which makes this initiative unique. The process has addressed curriculum and content issues, but also delivery and design, by helping instructors to enhance their capacity to deliver effective training. Instructors have also made a valuable connection between industry training and Essential Skills profiles, ensuring current and future employees in the sector are well-equipped at both the foundational and job-specific levels to do the work required.

In the process of developing its Essential Skills strategy, CARS has generated interest among educational institutions. It is now establishing additional partnerships to continue this work with colleges and school boards, including the Toronto District School Board.

And finally, the research to develop Essential Skills profiles has given CARS a better understanding of individual occupations in the sector, further enhancing its capacity to offer relevant and necessary support and training in the sector.

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Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters (CCPFH)

The CCPFH is a non-profit organization mandated to ensure that fish harvesters in Canada have the knowledge, skills and commitment necessary to meet the current and future human resource needs of the Canadian fishery. To do this, CCPFH represents the interests of fish harvesters, develops programs to increase professionalism and plans and implements training for the fish harvesting industry in Canada.

Essential Skills Rationale

The fishing industry is changing rapidly due to a number of factors:

- Fishing boats use more technology.
- There are new and complex regulations.
- Fewer people are learning skills in the traditional way (e.g. on the boat).

In addition to this, many of the people employed in this sector have not completed high school. It became apparent to CCPFH that there was a growing need for formal training and for a more in-depth understanding of industry needs. Increasing the Essential Skills of current and potential fish harvesters was seen as a vital component of ensuring the long-term viability of the industry.

Essential Skills Strategy

CCPFH began working in the area of Essential Skills in 2002 with the development of four training modules for specific fish harvesting jobs. These modules can be self-directed or delivered by a facilitator, and enable learners to develop the Essential Skills necessary for specific occupations.

In 2005, the council developed the *Essential Skills Guide: A Handbook for Fish Harvester Trainers*. The guide defines Essential Skills, explains how to identify Essential Skills needs, describes how to deal with a lack of Essential Skills and how to use the training modules to teach adult learners.

In 2007, CCPFH developed an Essential Skills assessment tool. While the training modules were developed as a request from industry members, the assessment tool was developed as a result of a study that showed that fish harvesters required support with a number of Essential Skills, particularly reading, document use, numeracy and problem solving. CCPFH developed the tool to help individuals assess their Essential Skills and to better determine upgrading needs.

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Finally, CCPFH is in the early stages of adding an Essential Skills component to a distance learning course called *Fishing Master Certificate*. The course will integrate Essential Skills elements with existing course material and upgrading tools. For example, while individuals are completing a training exercise requiring them to make a particular calculation, they will be able to use pop up boxes and other web devices to access further information or assistance.

Results

As the assessment tool has just been launched and the distance learning tool is still in development, it is too early to fully evaluate the success of these projects. The distance learning tool is expected to be successful because this type of learning is very important in the industry. Many professional fish harvesters live in remote and small communities, and some are reluctant to leave for extended periods to undertake training. Also, they must attend training outside fishing season and cover their own travel and tuition costs. Incorporating Essential Skills into distance learning courses will help ensure that individual Essential Skills needs are addressed.

CCPFH has indicated that even if only a small number of professional fish harvesters take Essential Skills training, the initiative is still important and seen as a success. Essential Skills training is a sensitive topic; some individuals are reluctant to enrol in classes or training, fearing they may be “singled out”. CCPFH stresses, however, that Essential Skills assessments are not used as a pre-screening tool or as part of a job evaluation, which has alleviated some of the anxiety.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

To reduce the level of apprehension associated with Essential Skills training and to increase individuals’ willingness to undertake training and upgrading, CCPFH has integrated Essential Skills into existing training resources. This has increased participation in initiatives that might otherwise have been avoided.

www.ccpfh-ccpp.org

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