

## Northumberland County

Literacy Service Plan and Data  
November 2022



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## 1.a) What are the current trends in your community that will have an impact on delivery of Literacy and Basic Skills services in 2022-2023?

The Literacy Service Plan (LSP) process is an excellent opportunity to reflect on the past year and look to the future. Over the next few years, we anticipate that Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs will have challenges to address as well as opportunities to pursue. LBS programs are well positioned to play a significant role in meeting the needs of individual learners, and in turn, meeting the needs of the labour market. We are confident that the LOCS LBS team is prepared to move forward in this labour market full of uncertainty.

Northumberland is well served by two LBS organizations, one College Sector and one School Board Sector. We are grateful that we continue to have a passionate LBS team committed to serving learners and working together to strengthen services in the Northumberland County.

The trends in this report have been identified through extensive meetings and research, including two Literacy Service Plan (LSP) meetings in 2022, and four in 2021. Information has also been gathered through research reports, including Workforce Development Board (WDB) reports and through participation in the Labour Force Recovery Advisory Group (Peterborough, Northumberland, Haliburton, and Northumberland) and the Community Employment Resource Partnership (CERP), as well as through newspaper articles and discussions with our peers and support organizations throughout the province. The LOCS region LBS team continues to meet monthly where information is shared. Additionally, we also drew on the 2021-2022 data reports provided by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

It is important to note that while this report focuses on Northumberland specifically, the trends affecting LBS services are consistent across the Literacy Ontario Central South (LOCS) region and across the province. There are individual differences that will be highlighted, but overall, we have observed many common trends.

We continue to manage in what we hope is a time of recovery, while responding to the ongoing effects of the pandemic. We are hearing that everyone, learners, clients and partners included, are feeling the fatigue that comes with almost three years of disruption. The increased need for mental health supports is seen locally but is a worldwide trend. We are also hearing reports of a recession and we hear employers' concerns about recruitment and retention. We are also seeing staffing changes in both LBS and among our community partners. This has resulted in dramatic shifts to our support networks and referral systems. There is no denying that the changes in the labour market are dramatic, touching every aspect of service delivery. What was predictable in the labour market is no longer predictable. Things that worked in the past are not guaranteed to be effective now.

The pace of change makes predicting the future a challenge. We know that in training, employment and community services we will all need to monitor trends, try new things and capitalize on our creativity and adaptability. We will need to be prepared to take some risks if we are going to meet the complex and changing needs of learners, partners, community members, employers and the overall labour market. This includes exploring new ways of reaching learners and clients. I am confident that the LBS organizations in the LOCS region are up to the task, but this will not happen without support and partnerships.

We are grateful to receive Skills for Success funding to research and develop new programs, tools and strategies that will support us in meeting the changing needs of learners and the ever-evolving demands of the labour market. It is important to acknowledge that change takes time but with these renewed resources, LBS will be better prepared to respond to the growing needs of learners in our region.

The trends we will explore in this report:

1. **Technology** – including access to technology and digital literacy.
2. **Education and Training** – including online learning, Better Jobs Ontario and micro-credentials.
3. **Health and Social Supports** – including mental health and poverty.
4. **Labour Market** – including recruitment, retention, apprenticeships, sector specific trends and workplace/workforce training.

## TECHNOLOGY

### Access to Technology

The pandemic has drawn our attention to the importance of equal access to technology (hardware/software) and reliable, stable, affordable internet. Access is critical as we work toward building healthy communities and strong economies. This includes learners, employees, employers, and educators.

During the pandemic, there has been a lot of attention focused on what is called “the digital divide”.

“The digital divide in Canada refers to the discrepancy that exists between Canadians who have access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and the benefits they provide compared to those who don't.” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_divide\\_in\\_Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_divide_in_Canada)

The digital divide is caused by gaps in access to the digital world due to the availability and affordability of both internet and digital technology. Those living in poverty are excluded due to the cost of technology. In March 2022, AlphaPlus released a report called ‘Enhancing the Literacy and Basic Skills Program Through Integrated Delivery’. In this report we learned that the challenges “experienced in the LBS system are indicative of the growing and persistent digital divide where a proportion of Ontario's population is unable to afford, access, or navigate digital technology adequately. For example, a 2020 study found that 39% of low-income Ontarians don't have an internet connection at home, whereas only 1% of high-income Ontarians lack in-home web access” (p. 3). <https://capacity.alphaplus.ca>

This disparity is even greater for individuals living in rural areas where internet access is expensive and unreliable or unavailable. This means that those living in poverty and/or rural areas face barriers to full participation in learning, work and community activities. The AlphaPlus report confirms that while technology and online learning can remove barriers such as transportation, childcare and work schedules, “it also creates significant barriers for learners with lower digital literacy skills, unreliable internet access, and limited access to devices. The challenges are most significant for lower skilled and economically disadvantaged learners but also differ with age and, in some cases, are also linked to geographical resources and infrastructure” (p. 3). <https://capacity.alphaplus.ca>

The LOCS region includes a large rural area. We also serve people living on limited incomes. In 2021-2022, 30% of LBS learners in Northumberland reported their source of income as OW, ODSP or EI and 14% reported no source of income. This means that LBS organizations see the impact of the digital divide firsthand. Learners without access to technology face barriers to accessing programs and services. While LBS can remove some of these barriers, potential learners may not know this option exists. We speculate that many people who didn't access LBS services didn't know there was a potential solution available.

### Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is needed to access training, education and employment opportunities, as well as community, government and financial services. AlphaPlus confirms that “Integrating digital skills and digital literacy while building other essential skills supports learners to successfully pursue their goals related to education, employment, and independence” (p. 3). <https://capacity.alphaplus.ca>

Independence includes the ability to file taxes, access income supports and vote online. The pandemic taught us that digital skills are essential if we want to ensure everyone has equal access to information (safety, health notices), food, medical services, community services and financial resources.

In addition to independence, learners with an employment goal need digital literacy skills to job search effectively. The importance of digital literacy to job search was highlighted in the Workforce Development Board's 2022 EmployerOne Survey where we learned that "Employers are using online job boards, social media and company websites" for recruitment (p. 2).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2MMiFbW76vxoePNRGvUn8wzAMa50Gwe/view>

In addition to finding work, digital skills are needed to keep a job. In a Conference Board of Canada report, 'Digital Skills for Today and Tomorrow', it is projected that "over the next 10 years, nine out of 10 jobs will require digital skills" (p. 6). [https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FSC\\_digital-skills-for-today-and-tomorrow\\_EN.pdf](https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FSC_digital-skills-for-today-and-tomorrow_EN.pdf) Individuals without digital literacy skills may be excluded from the labour market.

Locally, we see that employers are already identifying a need for digital skills training for current employees and new hires including "51% software/apps, 40% file management and 30% hardware" (p. 14).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2MMiFbW76vxoePNRGvUn8wzAMa50Gwe/view>

Employees recognize the value of digital literacy as well. In the 2021 Worker Impact Survey, 27.2% of respondents reported that they "need to update their skills in order to keep up with new technology and/or changes in their job" (Table 12). <https://www.wdb.ca/worker-impact-survey-results/> This need has been observed by LBS and confirmed by our partners. Those working in Employment Services recognize that digital literacy is an important workplace skill.

Employment Service are quoted in the Local Labour Market Planning report as saying, digital literacy is "a skill that some workers re-entering the labour pool lack despite its growing prevalence in the workplace." Obtaining certifications was mentioned as a strong benefit to a job seeker. Not only do certifications expand the skillsets of job seekers, but padding out their resume can give confidence. This makes for a more attractive hire for employers that are looking for these qualifications who would otherwise have to pay for this training or have it done in-house" (p. 21).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a4e00J0u27GeHyah26FgFY7g8I5BUMW7/view>

We have also heard from several sources that employers also need digital literacy support. For example, the EmployerOne Survey found "word of mouth was the most popular method used to recruit new employees" (p. 2). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2MMiFbW76vxoePNRGvUn8wzAMa50Gwe/view> This may be due to a lack of digital literacy and comfort using online methods of recruitment. This can be a significant barrier for employers with recruiting being such a challenge right now. Additionally, employers without digital literacy skills may not be able to stay current and on trend, e.g., communication, estimating, ordering, or promoting their business online. This can also be a barrier for employers needing to complete online forms to access government programs, including apprenticeships. Some of our partners have even mentioned that they would like the opportunity to develop their own digital literacy skills.

We are also aware that digital literacy is essential for those seeking further education. It is important to have basic digital skills before entering a training program.

If someone is assessed and meets the criteria as a LBS learner, they may also have digital literacy needs related to their goal. In LBS we are aware that learners face barriers to gaining digital literacy skills because they first need to develop foundational literacy. We know that "15% of Ontarians aged 16-65 scored at, or below, Literacy Level 1. People at this level struggle with very serious literacy challenges and have trouble reading even the most basic texts," and "32% of Ontarians scored at Literacy Level 2, meaning they can read, but with difficulty and will likely have problems with basic forms and directions encountered in everyday life such as employment or rental agreements, medication instructions and more."

<https://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/literacy-why-it-matters/>

It is important to note that “in 2017 the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) administered the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) to assess the literacy and numeracy skills of Ontario’s college and university students. Results showed that 33% of incoming college students scored below the level that the HEQCO considers necessary to fully participate in the economy and society (Weingarten, 2018). This same assessment, when administered broadly to Ontarians between the age of 16 to 65, found that 47% of adults in Ontario also failed to meet this same standard (Statistics Canada, 2013)” (p. 7). <https://www.idaontario.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/LiftingTheCurtainOnEQAO69747.pdf>

## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

### **Online Learning**

There continues to be a demand for online training, including post-secondary programs as well as professional development. This includes LBS as well. The consensus within LBS is that we will never return to a system of 100% in-class delivery. In the AlphaPlus report, they found that “all of the providers consulted also intend to continue providing some online and/or blended learning instruction” (p. 5). <https://capacity.alphaplus.ca>

LBS organizations will continue to offer online (both synchronous and asynchronous formats) and blended learning and may even expand their online options in response to the diverse needs of learners. It has also been observed that LBS programs have reached some learners because online learning worked better for them; this includes people who are working. Currently we are seeing learners return to in-person training, however, there continues to be learners who prefer some level of online learning.

### **Better Jobs Ontario**

With the changes to eligibility through Better Jobs Ontario, more people will have access to training, including people who may have had barriers to accessing training in the past. We may see more people taking the opportunity to upgrade their skills or change careers.

### **Microcredentials**

The microcredential trend continues, driven by the demands of the labour market. Employers need people with specific skills that can be gained quickly. Workers are also attracted to microcredentials because it helps them stay current in their field by increasing their marketable skills quickly.

A recent article draws attention for a need for businesses of all sizes to consider building a culture of lifelong learning. “We have now started seeing more attention to micro-credentials and about what that looks like in practice.” [https://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/business/canada-s-critical-skills-gap-problem-explained-in-6-charts-1.6100855?utm\\_source=CERIC+Subscriptions&utm\\_campaign=bc3d6e73b7-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2017\\_05\\_25\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_1d052da7c8-bc3d6e73b7-457852509](https://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/business/canada-s-critical-skills-gap-problem-explained-in-6-charts-1.6100855?utm_source=CERIC+Subscriptions&utm_campaign=bc3d6e73b7-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_05_25_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1d052da7c8-bc3d6e73b7-457852509)

In LBS we have noticed an increase in the demand for shorter programs and targeted training. This may be part of the microcredential trend and the desire for quick entry/re-entry into the labour market.

Note: Those participating in shorter, targeted training programs through LBS must first meet the criteria as an LBS learner.

## TRENDS IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL SUPPORTS

### Mental Health

At LSP meetings this year, mental health needs of clients have been front and centre. We are also hearing from employers that mental health needs in the workplace are a significant concern.

It is expected that mental health issues will continue to emerge as people struggle with the repercussions of the pandemic. This is supported by Round 4 of the *Assessing the Impacts of COVID-19 on Mental Health*. This national monitoring survey was completed by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in partnership with UBC researchers. They state that “Far from feeling the pandemic is over, most people in Canada are stressed about what’s next, with 64% worried about new variants and 57% worried about COVID-19 circulating in the population for years to come. Two years of pandemic-related stressors, including grief and trauma, are likely to lead to significant long-term mental health effects on both our population and the frontline mental health providers caring for them.”

<https://cmha.ca/brochure/summary-of-key-findings-ubc-4/>

It is also important to note that deteriorating mental health has a greater impact for individuals from underrepresented groups, for example, “56% of those with a pre-existing mental health condition, 47% of students, 44% of those with a disability, 49% of LGBTQ2+ people and 42% of people who are Indigenous.”

<https://cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Key-findings-summary-UBC-round-4-Final.pdf> In LBS programs in Northumberland 2021-2022, 32% of learners self-identified as having a disability and 5% identified as Indigenous.

### Poverty

We are also aware that there has been an increase in poverty and homelessness in the community. “The wait list for Rent Geared to Income in Northumberland, has grown by more than 260% in the last decade.” “Indigenous people and lone-parent families make up a large proportion of the homeless population in Northumberland.” (p. 25) “Almost 12% of Northumberland residents are considered low-income”. (p33)

<https://www.northumberland.ca/en/living-here/resources/Documents/CSWB-Accessible.pdf> In Northumberland County, 16 % of local children live in poverty. [https://www.hkpr.on.ca/news\\_items/put-poverty-under-wraps/](https://www.hkpr.on.ca/news_items/put-poverty-under-wraps/)

Workers are also facing financial challenges to improving their employment opportunities. In the 2021 Worker Impact Survey, 40% of respondents said the number one barrier to improving their options was lack of financial resources. In the focus group, mental health was also identified as a barrier (p. 12).

<https://www.wdb.ca/worker-impact-survey-results/>

On September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Statistics Canada unveiled “Canada’s Official Poverty Dashboard of Indicators.” They now include literacy as one of the 12 indicators. “Individuals who have a level of knowledge and skills in reading and writing to permit them to fully participate in society.”

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/reports/strategy.html#h2.4>

The following quotes from ‘Building Bridges for the Future Workforce’ report by Community Literacy of Ontario highlights the need for LBS to be prepared to support individuals facing barriers.

<https://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/CLOs-Building-Bridges-Report-March-2021.pdf>

1. “LBS learners struggling with mental health issues, and with addictions that can be brought about in an effort to control those issues, need both flexibility and increased support. Without both in place,

mental health becomes a particularly challenging barrier preventing LBS learners from connecting with employers” (p. 5).

2. “It is not surprising that in the face of poverty, mental health concerns, food insecurity, family issues and lack of access to support, it may be difficult for someone to put themselves in a position to be judged and possibly rejected by a potential employer. This is particularly impactful if a history of rejection or disappointment has taught someone that is what the world has in store for them. How could this be anything but incredibly demotivating?” (p. 11).
3. “Limited access to safety, security, resources, healthcare, transportation, childcare and social support compound these food and housing challenges to create a devastating reality for many LBS learners” (p. 4).

## LABOUR MARKET TRENDS

### Recruitment

Employers in the Workforce Development Board’s region, which includes Northumberland, are saying that they continue to struggle with recruitment. In the WDB’s 2022 EmployerOne Survey, 48% of employers said that the reason positions were difficult to fill was a lack of applicants (p. 8). We also learned that 77% of employers surveyed ranked the availability of qualified workers as fair or poor (p. 12).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2MMiFbW76vxoePNRGvUn8wzAMa50Gwe/view>

The recruitment challenges are not isolated to our area as demonstrated in the following quotes:

- Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development Monte McNaughton says, “there are more than 370,000 jobs available across the province but not enough people to meet the demand.” <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-labour-shortage-retail-1.6599957>
- Rocco Rossi, president and CEO of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, says more than 60 per cent of the organization’s members across all labour sectors are “experiencing difficulty in filling positions.” “It spans the gamut from health care, nursing and other areas to construction to the tourism sector, hospitality to the financial services sector, so it is not unique to one sector.” <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-labour-shortage-retail-1.6599957>
- “Of businesses that expect near-term labour obstacles, almost two-thirds (62%) reported that challenges related to recruiting and retaining staff have worsened from 12 months ago.” <https://chamber.ca/2022-q3-canadian-survey-on-business-conditions-inflation-is-the-top-issue-labour-pains-intensifying-but-price-pressures-and-supply-chains-issues-are-improving/>
- The Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) found that “55% of Canadian entrepreneurs are struggling to hire the workers they need” (p. 3). <https://www.bdc.ca/en/about/analysis-research/labour-shortage>

The Local Labour Market Planning Report 2021-2022 captured employer-identified labour market challenges and issues that included the current labour pool. They identified difficulty in finding suitable workers, shortage of job applicants, and an overall lack of skilled workers as some of the workforce issues they face. They include challenges such as work ethic (lack of motivation, increased absenteeism, lack of dedication and loyalty), the aging workforce, finding young workers with the necessary skills and/or experience and attracting and retaining talent in rural areas (p. 84).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a4e00J0u27GeHyah26FgFY7g8I5BUMW7/view>

In an October 2022 LMI Help Desk report, changes in the unemployment rate were reported. “The unemployment rate has dropped considerably from pandemic highs, and now more than two percent lower compared to the 2019 pre-pandemic levels annual average. As of September 2022, the unemployment rate

in Muskoka-Kawarths Economic Region was 4.0%. This is 5.0% lower than the same month in the prior year, and 3.4% lower than the 2021 annual average. There are less people in our region actively seeking work than last year with employment rate now at 54.6%. As of September 2022, the participation rate in Muskoka-Kawarths was 56.8%, which is higher than pre-pandemic rates (52.9% in February 2020). (Table 14-10-0387-01) (LMI Help Desk report October 2022).

Underrepresented groups have the potential to help address the labour shortage but often face barriers to the labour market. The “Canadian labour market is heavily constrained by structural factors of an aging domestic population, barriers to success facing underutilized domestic pools of labour (e.g., Indigenous and First Nations People, visible minorities, women, disabled Canadians, etc.), and reliance on immigration for close to 100% of net labour force growth. The implication being that much of the underlying labour scarcity has a structural dimension.” <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/where-did-workers-go-understanding-canadas-labour-craig-alexander/>

### **Retention**

The Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) found that of Canadian entrepreneurs “more than a quarter are having a hard time retaining their employees” (p. 3). <https://www.bdc.ca/en/about/analysis-research/labour-shortage>

We are hearing from employers and Employment Services partners that retention is an ongoing issue. “Turnover remains a large concern among employers, with quitting being the most common reason for employees leaving their jobs. Sales and service occupations experienced the highest number of separations, followed closely by occupations in management and trades, transport and equipment operators” (p. 2). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2MMiFbW76vxoePNRGvUn8wzAMa50Gwe/view>

Women leaving the labour market is another significant issue. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce shared that “working mothers are ringing the alarm bells about their well-being. For a labour force that now has a structural gap near 900,000 jobs, we need every single working-age Canadian, and massive amounts of skilled immigration, to have any chance of meeting the needs of businesses across the country. The idea that half of the workforce is at risk of dropping out, opting out or burning out is apocalyptic from an economic perspective. If even 10% per cent of women fall into that category, it is catastrophic.” <https://chamber.ca/news/working-women-are-not-ok-job-numbers-commentary-from-the-canadian-chamber-of-commerce/>

In our region there has been an increase in starting wages, improved health benefits and signing bonuses to attract suitable applicants (LMI Help Desk report October 2022). It is hoped that these strategies may also support retention however, it will be important to consider other options when looking to improve retention. This may include offering training through LBS programs.

### **Apprenticeship**

A recent report from the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum – Forum canadien sur l’apprentissage (CAF-FCA), *Apprentice Demand: A 2021 Labour Market Information Report Ontario*, indicates that Ontario will need approximately 88,960 new certified journeypersons over the next decade to keep pace with economic growth and rising retirements, two-thirds of which will be concentrated in the top 15 Red Seal trades. It will be necessary to attract more than 296,350 new apprentices in the Red Seal trades alone. This does not factor in the number of apprentices that will be needed to maintain certification levels in the other trades. <https://caf-fca.org/research-reports/>

## Sector Specific Trends

In the EmployerOne Survey, the hard to fill positions identified by employers included:

- construction trades helpers and labourers, followed closely by retail salespersons, delivery and courier service drivers, carpenters and transport truck drivers (p. 2).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2MMiFbW76vxoePNRGvUn8wzAMa50Gwe/view>

According to WDB's Local Jobs Hub, the top in-demand occupations in Northumberland 2021 were:

- Retail salesperson; Home support workers, housekeepers and related occupations; Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers and related support occupations; Other labourers in processing, manufacturing and utilities; Delivery and courier service drivers (p. 60)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a4e0OJ0u27GeHyah26FgFY7g8I5BUMW7/view>

Employers and community partners in Northumberland identified a difficulty filling a number of positions:

- Millwrights; electricians; mechanics and technicians; registered massage therapists; AZ/DZ drivers; chefs; environmental workers; licensed early childhood educators and skilled construction trade workers (p.51).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a4e0OJ0u27GeHyah26FgFY7g8I5BUMW7/view>

In the September "Eye-on-the Labour Market" the monthly job postings included:

- Retail salespersons; Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers & related support occupations; Home support workers, housekeepers & related occupations; Cooks; Light duty cleaners; Registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses; Licensed practical nurses; Construction trades helpers & labourers; Other customer & information services representatives; Social and community service workers

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sI3D7OuSi2B\\_A3pHkOy3vGy7hGqSRQwx/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sI3D7OuSi2B_A3pHkOy3vGy7hGqSRQwx/view)

On a national level, the Conference Board of Canada reports that "the pandemic hit jobs in sales and service and in art, culture, recreation, and sport the hardest." "More specifically, the hardest-hit occupations were those related to sports and tourism—particularly jobs in recreation and entertainment, food and beverage services, and air transportation." [https://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-](https://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=11836&utm_source=elibraryrss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=elibrary)

[library/abstract.aspx?did=11836&utm\\_source=elibraryrss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=elibrary](https://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=11836&utm_source=elibraryrss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=elibrary)

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce also reports that, "Labour markets are extremely tight, making it hard for businesses to recruit and retain skilled employees. These concerns are relatively widespread, but most acute in accommodation and food services, construction, health care and retail." [https://chamber.ca/2022-](https://chamber.ca/2022-q3-canadian-survey-on-business-conditions-inflation-is-the-top-issue-labour-pains-intensifying-but-price-pressures-and-supply-chains-issues-are-improving/)

[q3-canadian-survey-on-business-conditions-inflation-is-the-top-issue-labour-pains-intensifying-but-price-pressures-and-supply-chains-issues-are-improving/](https://chamber.ca/2022-q3-canadian-survey-on-business-conditions-inflation-is-the-top-issue-labour-pains-intensifying-but-price-pressures-and-supply-chains-issues-are-improving/)

## Workforce and Workplace Training

With the demand for workers, we anticipate that people will return to the labour market. We also anticipate a growing need for workforce training as more people identify an employment goal path. Workforce training involves supporting people as they gain the skills needed to find work or advance in their companies. This also means a growing number of LBS learners may be working and in need of flexible learning schedules. This may also mean an increase in the number of individuals from underrepresented groups benefiting from LBS programs as they see real opportunities for finding employment.

LBS continues to observe a growing need for workplace training, which is training provided to individuals or groups of workers at a company. Workplace training is supported by, and negotiated with, an employer. This training can support retention, improve productivity and build a stronger workforce.

We know that workers understand the need for ongoing training. In the 2021 Worker Impact Survey, workers stated that they need experience and training to improve job opportunities which includes long term training/education (29.5%) as well as updating skills (27.2%) and short-term skills training (18.5%) (Table 12). <https://www.wdb.ca/worker-impact-survey-results/>

There has been a lot of research recently that supports the need for workplace and workforce training. The following are four quotes from the article “Canada’s Critical Skills Gap Explained in 6 Charts.” [https://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/business/canada-s-critical-skills-gap-problem-explained-in-6-charts-1.6100855?utm\\_source=CERIC+Subscriptions&utm\\_campaign=bc3d6e73b7-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2017\\_05\\_25\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_1d052da7c8-bc3d6e73b7-457852509](https://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/business/canada-s-critical-skills-gap-problem-explained-in-6-charts-1.6100855?utm_source=CERIC+Subscriptions&utm_campaign=bc3d6e73b7-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_05_25_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1d052da7c8-bc3d6e73b7-457852509)

1. “Three-fifths (60.3 per cent) of businesses said they were facing at least one negative consequence to their activities because of the skills gap in their workforce. While the regional disparities were minor, the distribution across different sectors has been uneven. For example, the accommodation and food services sector showed the highest rate of skills gap out of any other sector, with nearly four-fifths (78 per cent) of businesses struggling to hire.”
2. “Employers are also reporting critical gaps in social and emotional skills such as collaboration, and problem-solving management. In fact, older Canadians, she said, have more valuable social and emotional skills that are being missed in the current labour market, and these include more experience, and stronger emotional and social skills developed over time.”
3. “Another report by The Conference Board of Canada showed that the six skills for which vacancies incur the highest costs are active listening, critical thinking, reading comprehension, speaking, monitoring, and coordination. These skills-related job vacancies cost the economy as much as \$25 billion in 2020 – about 1.3% of Canadian’s GDP.”

The Conference Board of Canada’s report “The Labour Market of Tomorrow” states that the skills projected to increase over the next 10 years “include a few core competencies, such as reading comprehension, writing, and mathematics. They also include process skills like critical thinking and active listening.” As well as judgment and decision-making and problem-solving (p. 19).

[https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/71e43917-e444-4a1c-a021-11a6ff1356d2/11836\\_data-briefing\\_the-labour-market-of-tomorrow\\_october2022.pdf](https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/71e43917-e444-4a1c-a021-11a6ff1356d2/11836_data-briefing_the-labour-market-of-tomorrow_october2022.pdf)

The need for workplace and workforce training has also been highlighted locally.

1. In the EmployerOne Survey, under the heading of 'Skills & Training', we saw the top five new skill requirements identified by employers, included: customer service, self-management (ability to work independently, time management, problem-solving), technical occupational-related skills, interpersonal communication (teamwork, conflict resolution, etc.) and computer literacy (p. 12).  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2MMiFbW76vxoePNRGvUn8wzAMa50Gwe/view>
2. In the Northumberland section of the Local Labour Market Planning Report, the top in-demand skills in 2021 were customer service, attention to detail, teamwork, organization and Microsoft Office (p. 60). The lack of employability skills identified for the area included time management; work ethic – lack of interest in job; digital skills; customer service skills; organizational skills; communication skills; and attention to detail (p. 52).  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a4e00J0u27GeHyah26FgFY7g8I5BUMW7/view>
3. In the September "Eye-on-the Labour Market" the Top 10 Skills in Demand included Customer Service; Attention to Detail; Teamwork; Organization; Interpersonal; Work Independently; Leadership; Planning; Oral Communication and Reliability  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1s13D70uSi2B\\_A3pHkOy3vGy7hGqSRQwx/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1s13D70uSi2B_A3pHkOy3vGy7hGqSRQwx/view)
4. In the EmployerOne Survey, credentials were identified as important for employers. When employers were asked about their minimum education requirements, only 23% stated "work experience only" (p. 13). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t2MMiFbW76vxoePNRGvUn8wzAMa50Gwe/view> (Note: There is a false assumption that having a Grade 12 diploma means the individual will have the numeracy and literacy skills needed for the position.)

1.b) Describe the impact these trends will have on: Demand for services, Profile of learners accessing services, Delivery of the five (5) LBS services. How will you and the Literacy and Basic Skills service providers address these demands? What additional supports will be required?

This is a critical time for the foundational support offered through Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) as our programs are needed to strengthen the labour market and our communities. Through reading, writing, math, digital literacy and workplace and workforce training, we support learners on five goal paths including apprenticeship, secondary, post-secondary, employment and independence.

We anticipate that we will see an increased number of learners with complex needs, who are further from the labour market. We anticipate more learners from underrepresented groups, and we also anticipate more learners who are working full- or part-time. We expect to see an increase in the number of learners identifying an employment and an apprenticeship goal path. With changes to Better Jobs Ontario, we also anticipate more learners wanting to pursue training or identifying a post-secondary goal.

We will see more eligible LBS learners who also need basic computer skills. Digital literacy is needed by LBS learners on all five goal paths; however, it has been noted that a lack of basic skills is a significant barrier for those on the independence goal path and those with less than Grade 12. It is important to note that in 2021-2022, 40% of learners in LBS programs in Northumberland had Grade 11 or less. Learners who have identified a secondary school, post-secondary school, employment or apprenticeship goal path will need more advanced digital literacy skills. This means that 95% of learners in LBS programs in Northumberland need more than basic skills for success on their identified goal path. This is important for a post-secondary goal path as well. In the Northumberland area, 42% of learners identified a post-secondary or apprenticeship goal path. (Note: It is also possible that those returning to in-person learning may not have participated in online learning due to a lack of digital literacy skills so they may need additional support.)

LBS organizations are reporting that individuals over the age of 55 are reaching out for digital literacy support, this includes independence in the community, a need to stay connected to others, as well as a growing need for many to return to the labour market. For this group, a lack of digital literacy can be a barrier to reentering the labour market. In the 2021 Worker Impact Survey, “Technology was also reported as a barrier for the older worker” (p. 27). <https://www.wdb.ca/worker-impact-survey-results/> This is an important need to address because, as mentioned, older workers can help with the labour supply issue employers are facing. We are aware that our partners are seeing more clients over 55. The Local Labour Market Planning Report (LLMP) shared that “Employment Service Providers have shown that they are now serving new clients, notably older workers” (p. 21).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a4e00J0u27GeHyah26FgFY7g8I5BUMW7/view>

We have learned through observation and through discussions with our community partners that many young people lack digital literacy skills. They are confident using smartphones and apps and often self-report as having digital skills, but they don’t have skills that transfer to the workplace, or the skills needed for success in training or post-secondary programs. This has the potential to be a factor in retention both at work and in school. We are aware that our partners are already seeing younger people seeking support. The LLMP also shared that “Notably for ES providers in WDB’s catchment area, a higher percentage of their clients are in the youth category than Eastern Ontario (20.1%) or Ontario (18.9%). They also serve a higher relative portion of clients in the 45-64 and 65+ age categories” (p. 23).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a4e00J0u27GeHyah26FgFY7g8I5BUMW7/view>

In 2021-2022, LBS organizations in Northumberland saw 34% of learners in the 18-24 age group, 17% in the 25-29 age group and 12% of learners were over 55 years of age.

LBS programs are aware of the secondary benefits of digital literacy training, including the development of workplace skills such as keyboarding, communication, online research, critical thinking and problem-solving. We also see firsthand that anxiety around technology drops quickly and learners gain confidence and independence in completing day-to-day activities. Digital literacy opens the door to employment, education and training.

As mentioned, with the changes to the eligibility criteria as we shift from Second Career to Better Jobs Ontario, we anticipate an increase in the number of people applying to training programs. This includes people who may not have had the opportunity to apply in the past. This may include people with interrupted education or negative academic experiences, and people who have been out of school and/or the workforce awhile. There will be a need for LBS support as people prepare to enter the next step in their training.

We are hearing that due to the high employer demand, and worker shortages, individuals are being hired who may not have been hired in the past, however, it is possible that some workers won't have the foundational skills needed to be able to develop the skills needed to retain the job. LBS can help workers develop the foundational skills that may help them retain their position. In recent discussions with the Service System Manager (SSM) we have also learned that financial literacy is a barrier to retention. This includes people leaving jobs because they haven't had the opportunity to learn to read a pay cheque, develop a budget or plan for work-related expenses.

A report by Community Literacy of Ontario called 'Building Bridges for the Future Workforce' highlights that "Staff at Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs echo comments made by employers across the province – that a lack of soft skills is a growing challenge. Many multi-barriered learners struggle with arriving for work on time, calling in if they are unable to work, and the other social and life skills employers demand beyond commonly requested credentials like a Grade 12 diploma. This skills and credential gap is tied with poverty as one of the most significant barriers preventing a strong bridge between LBS learners and employers" (p.6). <https://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/CLOs-Building-Bridges-Report-March-2021.pdf>

We are keenly aware of the increasing mental health needs of learners and the barriers faced by those living in poverty. LOCS LBS organizations were fortunate to have the Service System Manager offer LBS access to the CHMA training offered to Employment Services. We are also able to access ongoing CMHA support if someone is referred to LBS from ES.

Note: LBS Service Providers need to first ensure learner eligibility per LBS Guidelines 2.5.1, (Service Provider Program Guidelines (gov.on.ca), prior to establishing a goal path and learner plan. Most learner plans will necessitate a digital milestone component be incorporated given the world we live in. Digital technology should not be taught apart from its purpose and context, i.e., cannot be a standalone. If an individual does not meet learner eligibility for LBS per the Guidelines, but requires digital support, they are referred to computer specific resources offered elsewhere.

The following are possible LBS responses to trends in terms of learners needs:

### **Technology, Digital Skills and Online Learning**

- Prepare learners for success in further education or employment.
- Partner with community groups serving underrepresented groups to offer digital literacy for their clients.
- Ensure that there are programs and supports available at various levels.

- Offer support in the development of basic digital skills so learners can access community services that are only available to them online.
- Be aware of the specific digital literacy needs of various demographics, e.g., older workers and youth.
- Implement technology audits to ensure learners have what they need to access their programs before starting their training.
- Promote online learning as an option, highlighting flexibility.
- Identify and seek solutions to the barriers people face in accessing online learning.
- Ensure remote learners have quick access to instructor support.

### **Better Jobs Ontario**

- Be prepared for an increase in demand as more learners identify a training/post-secondary goal path.
- Assess skills for training/post-secondary level programs.
- Help people gain the skills they need to be successful in Better Jobs Ontario funded training, enhancing their success.
- Offer support in achieving prerequisites.

### **Workforce and Workplace Training**

- Offer programs that will support employee retention.
- Offer foundational skills training to workers.
- Offer soft skills training in workplace settings.
- Support workplace retention by providing financial literacy programs.
- Support learners in completing their Grade 12 diploma.

### **Mental Health and Poverty**

- Continue to support learners through consultation and referral to CMHA.
- Continue to offer training to CMHA clients.
- Continue providing the opportunity for learning and social connections, including reaching out to learners to maintain relationships and offer support.
- Continue to provide information about, and referrals to, community resources that are available to meet basic safety and security needs.
- Build in online safety information, including critical thinking skills, so learners remain safe online.

2. Describe and prioritize any service delivery gaps (i.e., underserved areas, demographics, etc.) within your literacy service planning community.

### **Access to Technology**

As mentioned earlier, there is a digital divide in Canada and LBS organizations see this firsthand. There are those who don't have access to technology, including hardware, software or the internet, which creates a disadvantage in terms of learning, work and life. (Note: Transportation continues to be a major issue in rural areas, however, access to reliable, affordable internet now impacts learners' success equally.) It was also mentioned earlier that access to training supports and existing equipment varies between organizations and sectors.

Solutions to Explore: Explore ways to reach people who are not online. Find ways to support learner access to technology. Explore ways to work as a collective to support each organization in meeting their specific technology needs. Explore partnerships, including accessing technology available through Contact North. Find and share information and resources that will help build capacity in all LBS organizations, regardless of the sector.

### **Team Development**

LBS staff will need to constantly upgrade their digital skills, so they are able to support the diverse and changing needs of learners.

Solutions to Explore: Continue to seek out professional development opportunities. Continue to seek out existing programs. Continue to learn and share tips with each other. Continue to monitor technology needs of organizations and learners. Continue to share information about provincial training available. Continue to develop our digital literacy skills. Continue to share resources and strategies with others in the LOCS region.

### **Digital Literacy**

In a LOCS survey in March 2022, we learned that our community partners wanted to learn more about the digital literacy supports available through LBS. We made this a topic of our Fall 2022 LBS meeting. One gap identified by LBS and partners is the shorter-term digital needs of individuals in our community. During our LOCS area Literacy Service Plan meetings, our community partners identified that completing online forms is an area where people need support, including EI and Better Jobs Ontario applications. We have also learned that those who receive support from Ontario Works need digital literacy skills to manage their benefits online. Community partners anticipate a growing need for both short term and more in-depth digital literacy support.

Solutions to Explore: LBS will continue to work with partners to determine how we can work together to ensure clients/learners have the digital skills they need – both short and longer-term support. Explore ways to market programs. Explore ways to reach those who are not participating because of barriers caused by gaps in digital literacy. Explore ways to offer computer training in-person, online and/or in a blended format at all levels, targeting those on all five goal paths. Continue to explore best practices around online delivery. Seek ways to support larger numbers of learners online, including collaborating with other organizations in design, development and delivery. Access local centres for training, especially in smaller communities. Find ways to offer drop-in support, e.g., tech support or help with forms. Develop strategies to continue offering online programs as well as face-to-face. Track and document strengths, needs, successes and outcomes in response to programming, including learner feedback, and use this information to further develop online programs and services.

## **Workforce and Workplace Programs**

As mentioned throughout this report, employers are currently struggling with recruitment and retention. We need to find a way to position LBS as part of the solution to these issues. Since the transition to the Service System Manager (SSM), our Employment Services partners have an increased focus on job retention; they support individuals equally in both finding a job and keeping a job. In collaboration with our community partners, LBS can play an important role in supporting retention. This year, through Skills for Success funding, we have the opportunity to work with partners, specifically Employment Services and employers, to explore the training needs and gaps in the labour market and carve out a role for LBS to support both workplace and workforce training.

Solutions to Explore: Complete Skills for Success research to enhance local planning and coordination to support workplace literacy pilots. Learn about training needs directly from employers, workers and community partners. Develop an Organizational Needs Assessment tool. Develop outreach strategies to reach employers and workers with information about LBS programs. Explore how we might work with Employment Services to reach employers. Find ways to offer programs that meet employer/employee needs, e.g., online training. Build and offer workplace skills training programs. Identify other workplace training opportunities such as volunteer positions. Find ways to offer workforce training through shared facilitation and partnerships. Explore ways to address the systemic barriers that will impact our work with employers including LBS intake paperwork, schedules and availability, suitability and funding for these initiatives. Find former learners willing to advocate for LBS services with their current employers. Monitor the needs of apprentices. Promote LBS as an important part of increasing apprenticeship recruitment and retention. We will also need to monitor WDB reports and use the LMI Help Desk to stay current in both the jobs and skills demands in the local labour market. Continue monitoring the labour market through research, participation in local meetings and through LSP updates. Continue to monitor labour market information to identify the recruitment and retention needs of employers and the demand for skills training.

## **Better Jobs Ontario**

In the past it was possible for people applying for training through the Second Career program to have support from LBS before their funded training began, however, this was not an option pursued often. Those working in LBS often speculated that people would have benefited from the support LBS could offer before they entered training. This may have improved retention and helped some students avoid becoming overwhelmed and exiting a training program. This need for pre-training support has increased with the expansion of eligibility. Through the Skills for Success funding, we will be looking at ways to enhance local planning and coordination to support the integration and alignment of LBS services with Better Jobs Ontario.

Solutions to Explore: Explore existing needs and barriers to training and recommend solutions. Develop assessments to identify needs before someone enters training. Explore current pathways. Promote the role of LBS in Better Jobs Ontario retention. Develop digital literacy, math, reading and writing programs targeting prep for post-secondary programs, including both in-depth programs and refreshers. Help address prerequisite needs and support learners in developing the communication, digital literacy and numeracy skills needed for success in training.

## Short Programs

Overall, there is a demand for shorter programs, as seen with the trend to microcredentials. Better Jobs Ontario is also limited to one year. Employers need short, clear, goal-focused training. In our discussions with Employment Services, we are hearing that there is an overall need for shorter programs. We are starting to see the demand for shorter programs in LBS as well. Learners may be focused on shorter targeted training rather than making a longer-term commitment to developing foundational skills. This will be a challenge for LBS programs who know it takes time to develop skills. We know that some learners need longer programs to reach their goals.

Solutions to Explore: Explore how LBS might offer shorter, specific programs in addition to existing programs. Explore the development of short, small group, skills-specific training and sector-specific programming. Find a way to offer training of various lengths. Develop rationale for longer programs. Help people identify both short and long-term goals. Find ways to support people who are employed but want to continue working on longer term goals. Monitor the development of microcredentials and promote the value of LBS pre-training support.

## Partnerships

We are seeing an increased number of partnerships forming to meet the demand for education and training. While this includes post-secondary institutions, employers and economic development, it also includes LBS. Currently we are exploring inner-LBS partnerships, partnerships between LBS and Employment Services, and LBS and community partners. Collaboration will be critical in order to meet increasing demands for service and the increase in learners/clients with complex needs.

Solutions to Explore: Initiate partnerships with Employment Services and other community partners. Develop partnerships with employers. Establish partnerships with organizations that serve underrepresented groups. Negotiate the complexities of scheduling, coordination and communication. Find ways to offer online and off-site programs and services. Negotiate win/win agreements that work for all partners. Ensure our partners know LBS is available to partner with them on their projects. Be a good partner.

## Mental Health and Poverty

LBS is aware of the challenges facing learners due to mental health and poverty. Provincially, in 2020 “42% of LBS participants received some form of income assistance, mostly from Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program—nearly seven times the rate of the overall population. Others are in low-wage and precarious jobs or are living in low-income families.” <https://alphaplus.ca/download/the-impact-of-ontarios-digital-divide/> We also know that learning is only successful when the immediate needs of safety and security are addressed; this includes financial security, food security, housing and medical care.

Solutions to Explore: Complete research through the Skills for Success and identify the needs in our communities, focusing on underrepresented groups. Communicate that LBS is a positive, supportive environment. Ensure referrals to wraparound services. Continue to take a community approach to ensuring learners basic needs are met. Continue to work with, and refer to, partners. Continue working with Employment Services to offer case management support to ensure learner/client needs are met through a team approach to service. Continue promoting the ability of LBS organizations to serve clients with multiple barriers, promoting our safe and supportive environment. Monitor the growing mental health needs, the increase in poverty and homelessness, and offer our support to initiatives that will build a stronger community.

### 3. Do you anticipate any challenges with coordinating services to support learner persistence and success in your catchment area? How will you and the Literacy and Basic Skills service providers address these challenges?

LBS programs have done an amazing job coordinating services and supporting learner persistence and success throughout the pandemic. LBS organizations supported learners and coordinated services successfully, they established relationships with new staff and new organizations offering employment services. They worked on projects with community partners, and they have worked to develop a case management process with Employment Services which will improve service coordination.

In June 2022 we asked our community partners to tell us what they observed when they refer clients to adult training programs in the LOCS region; they found that the soft skills learners gained while attending LBS programs, including confidence, time management, organization, resilience, curiosity, goal setting and perseverance, were as significant as the foundational skills learners developed including reading, writing and math. These soft skills are the very skills needed for learner persistence and success. These skills will support retention as learners move on to training, post-secondary programs and the workplace.

LBS organizations now need to offer both onsite and online programs which means an increased demand of their time and resources. For example, many learners will need technical support before the start of an online program, so they are not frustrated before they begin. This will require some creativity to meet these increased demands.

We also hear from learners and our partners that the intake and assessment aspect of LBS can be overwhelming. The current process and paperwork required doesn't work well with programs offered by our partners and may conflict with our partners process needs. It may also interfere with the initial commitment of learners.

Continuing to offer a holistic approach through case management is a significant time commitment that includes the addition of onsite support, phone calls, meetings, and reports, however, it helps to support learner success and persistence.

As mentioned, we also recognize that there is a demand for shorter programs. We know that historically learners need more time and support, specifically those facing barriers. We may want to look at ways we can market/present our programs in smaller 'chunks' so people are not overwhelmed by a learner plan that is more than a few months. If people have clear, achievable short-term goals, as well as longer term goals, this may help with persistence.

LBS organizations will be offering more programs and serving an increasingly diverse group of learners with multiple barriers. LBS organizations will need to find ways to maintain the same standard of service while meeting these increased needs.

Organization:

- Secure ongoing training, resources and establish partnerships so we can support individuals with multiple barriers.
- Learn from partners and peers, access existing resources and expand partnerships to share expertise.
- Find ways to support individuals in different demographic groups and with diverse training needs by drawing on the expertise of our partners.

- Research, design, develop and facilitate programs that meet the needs of learners on different goal paths and reflect the current needs of the labour market.
- Make learning fun, create social connections online and in groups, and ensure programs are interactive and creative.
- Streamline communication and the case management system.
- Market shorter programs, targeted training, or longer plans divided into shorter options.
- Explore a coaching system for supporting learners.
- Explain our process needs to our partners and find a solution.

Learner:

- Provide extensive 1:1 or small group support and coaching for learners, including in-person support and/or remote support.
- Support those with barriers by working on individualized solutions, finding resources and building confidence.
- Offer programs that will help support learners with the goal of moving closer to the labour market.
- Make timely referrals to wraparound services to ensure safety and security needs are met and anxiety and mental health issues are addressed.
- Focus on outcomes.
- Offer flexible delivery of training to accommodate learners' schedules, household demands and work.
- Provide a clear, supported structure, schedules, check-ins, and follow-up contacts.
- Develop learner plans that help see short and long-term goals as achievable.
- Draw a clear path between LBS training and the labour market or an apprenticeship.
- Identify a clear relationship between LBS training and post-secondary success.
- Explain the reason for the intake and assessment process in terms of how it will benefit the development of a learner plan.

#### 4. Please describe any plans to strengthen the quality of workplace and/or workforce Literacy and Basic Skills delivery in your community.

Much of this report has focused on the need for workplace and workforce training. We also discussed our upcoming work in exploring the needs in our area through the Skills for Success funding. We know that workforce and workplace literacy will be an ongoing focus in the LOCS region for the next few years.

It is great that the labour market is offering work opportunities for people who in the past may have been overlooked, however, our concern now is retention. We want to avoid people having negative work experiences that result in withdrawing from the labour market and being too discouraged to pursue training opportunities. Right now, retention is the key for both employers and employees and LBS is well positioned to provide this training.

“According to a report by StatCan, more than half (56.1 per cent) of Canadian businesses in 2021 said that their current workforce was not fully proficient to perform jobs at the required level. A majority of businesses reporting skills gaps were either large firms with more than 100 employees (93 per cent) or midsize with 20 to 99 employees (90 per cent).” [https://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/business/canada-s-critical-skills-gap-problem-explained-in-6-charts-1.6100855?utm\\_source=CERIC+Subscriptions&utm\\_campaign=bc3d6e73b7-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2017\\_05\\_25\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_1d052da7c8-bc3d6e73b7-457852509](https://www.ctvnews.ca/mobile/business/canada-s-critical-skills-gap-problem-explained-in-6-charts-1.6100855?utm_source=CERIC+Subscriptions&utm_campaign=bc3d6e73b7-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_05_25_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1d052da7c8-bc3d6e73b7-457852509)

The LOCS region is committed to continuing to offer our successful workforce training programs. This involves supporting individuals in gaining the skills they need before starting a job, as this training supports workplace retention. LBS offers workforce training such as customer service, digital literacy, point-of-sale and money math. We also work with individuals who are currently working and seeking to upgrade their skills. In the LOCS region 36% of learners were also working.

In addition to workforce training, we see a growing need for workplace training; this involves supporting people who are currently working, in particular those at risk of losing their job. Our goal is to develop workplace training to support workers so they remain in their existing positions and are ready for their next step. We are currently exploring ways to partner with Employment Services and other community partners to offer our support to employers and workers. LBS programs will explore offering individual, group and online programs onsite at the workplace, or offsite. LBS can offer programs including foundational skills and specific workplace skills, including soft skills and digital literacy.

In partnership with Future Skills Centre, The Conference Board of Canada released the report “Digital Skills for Today and Tomorrow.” This report states that “Workplace training and upskilling is key to solving digital skills gaps. Companies need to provide their employees with the time, space, and motivation to continuously develop their digital skills” (p. 4). [https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FSC\\_digital-skills-for-today-and-tomorrow\\_EN.pdf](https://fsc-ccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/FSC_digital-skills-for-today-and-tomorrow_EN.pdf)

LBS can offer support for those on the apprenticeship goal path and support the development of these skills.

## 5. How will you and the Literacy and Basic Skills service providers evaluate and update referral protocols?

Over the past few years there have been changes to the referral process and the way we access information and learn about community resources. As mentioned, the turnover in staff in all organizations has also affected the referral pathways. LBS organizations continue to develop and maintain relationships with Employment Services and community partners; it is these relationships that allow us to support each other and stay informed about the training, services and supports available. LSPs and other community meetings are helpful as well. LBS organizations also continue to invite and accept offers to partner on projects.

We are fortunate in our area to have a referrals system, through the SSM Referral Tool, formerly known as the CERP database. This helps streamline referrals both into LBS and out to our partners.

We welcome referrals from our partners and we are committed to making referrals out to our partners.

It is important to note that Employment Services increasingly supports individuals with complex needs. They now complete an assessment called the “Common Assessment” and this assessment determines whether the client needs Stream A, B or C support. (Note: this assessment does not replace assessments offered by LBS organizations.)

- Stream A: Low-risk of long-term unemployment.
- Stream B: Medium-risk of long-term unemployment.
- Stream C: High-risk of long-term unemployment.

LBS is well-positioned to offer support to individuals in A, B and C Streams, but in particular, Stream C clients. LBS can help by offering our years of experience providing a supportive learning environment and our ability to ensure wraparound services are provided.

The Skills for Success funding will allow us to look at current referral systems and identify ways to enhance local planning and coordination to support the integration and alignment of LBS services within the community. This includes underrepresented groups, apprentices, workers and those hoping to attend training or post-secondary programs.

LOCS is also working with the SSM and our Muskoka partners to explore ways to work together and facilitate the flow of referrals between ES and LBS.

(Note: Tracking referrals in is critical, but it is also important to identify the importance of word-of-mouth referrals. These are the referrals that signal to LBS organizations that someone understood, and even personally benefited from an LBS program.)

### **Things that will impact referral protocols:**

- Turnover of staff and the need to rebuild relationships.
- Keeping current on programs and services offered by our partners.
- Challenges to marketing programs.
- The referral network within the community is seeing fewer individuals overall.
- Individuals needing service are facing multiple barriers and are referred to other partners as a first step.
- OW referrals have dropped as they focus on life stabilization.

**Possible Strategies:**

- Continue to work with Employment Services to offer case management support, establishing communication, building relationships and increasing awareness of what each organization offers.
- Reach out and maintain existing relationships, build new relationships, and stay connected with community partners and continue to offer our support.
- Find ways to communicate that we can offer programs while a learner is also being supported by other community services.
- Communicate with community partners so they know how LBS can help. (LSPs are helpful for this.)
- Highlight all five goal paths so our partners know the options available.
- Promote LBS as a viable referral option for Stream C clients.
- Demonstrate that LBS is a next-step option for building on the SSM soft skills training.
- Develop and expand partnerships and collaborate on projects with community partners.
- Explore LBS marketing opportunities. Find low-cost options for promotion, e.g., leverage the internet (social media) to communicate with partners and potential learners.
- Develop a strategy for reaching people who are not 'participating' in the labour market.
- Promote word-of-mouth referrals.
- Continue to monitor and explore potential referral sources and develop outreach strategies.
- Continue to find ways to support referrals between LBS organizations.
- Expand outreach to underrepresented groups.

**Referrals Out:**

Referrals out to community partners is one of the strengths of LBS organizations. Needs are often identified casually during chats with learners and referrals are made, which includes referrals to other LBS organizations.

**Possible Strategies:**

- Support people in accessing Employment Services.
- Establish an exit process to support next steps as learners transition out of LBS to their next goal.
- LBS organizations need to know the community services available, how they are provided (online, in-person, group) and how to refer.
- LBS providers need to create a welcoming learning environment, so learners feel comfortable; when people are comfortable, they will share their needs and then LBS can offer to make referrals to wraparound services.
- Continue to provide warm 'handoffs'.
- Continue to build the case management system to support wraparound services.

## 6. How will you and the Literacy and Basic Skills service providers review and update plans to provide high quality delivery to learners from underrepresented groups\*?

**Definition:** “An underrepresented group is a subset in a population that holds a smaller percentage within a specific subgroup than the subset holds in the general population. In the subgroup of individuals who participate in the labour market, examples of underrepresented groups include women, Indigenous persons, visible minorities, immigrants, persons with disabilities, racialized groups and youth. The list of underrepresented groups can vary based on the local labour market or within a specific sector.”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underrepresented\\_group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Underrepresented_group)

LBS has always served individuals from underrepresented groups. As the ‘Building Bridges for a Future Workforce’ identifies, “LBS Service Provider Guidelines state that “programs are directed to focus on supporting people who face specific challenges and barriers to success” (p. 3).

<https://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/CLOs-Building-Bridges-Report-March-2021.pdf>

In the LOCS region:

- 9% of learners identified as Indigenous.
- 3% of learners identified as newcomers.
- 5% of learners identified as racialized.
- 59% of learners identify as women.
- 42% of learners identified as being a person with a disability, up significantly from last year.

In the Worker Impact Survey, one recommendation included “Attention may be better focused on reaching vulnerable and marginalized communities moving forward to increase the awareness among the populations who are most in need of assistance” (p. 23). <https://www.wdb.ca/worker-impact-survey-results/> Although this was referencing Employment Services, the recommendations can be applied to all community services, including LBS.

This year we will be completing some specific research into the needs of underrepresented groups in our region through the Skills for Success funding. We will be exploring the potential for partnership similar to the partnership LBS currently has entered with the Canadian Mental Health Association in our region to provide training for their clients.

This past year we looked at ways of reaching underrepresented groups during a provincial marketing workshop and a list of ideas was generated by participants and shared within the LOCS region.

LBS organizations are involved in community groups and committees that serve underrepresented groups. Representatives of underrepresented groups are invited to LSPs in each region including Employment Assistance Resource Network and Northumberland County Social Services

### Serving Underrepresented Groups, Options to Explore:

- Reach out to the Peterborough Native Learning Program to discuss the research being done through the Skills for Success funding to explore serving underrepresented groups, particularly Indigenous groups
- Find ways to reach and serve individuals in underrepresented groups (women, Indigenous persons, visible minorities, immigrants, persons with disabilities, racialized groups and youth) through community partners.
- Identify barriers to reaching underrepresented groups.
- Identify potential partnerships with community programs, e.g., CMHA.
- Go to where people are, e.g., library programs, community social services (e.g., food banks)
- Work as a team of community partners to ensure wraparound services are available, including mental health services, employment supports for persons with disabilities and support for women.
- Recognize that vulnerable populations face barriers to learning remotely and may want/need in-person learning. Offer in-person learning when possible or seek solutions to technology barriers.
- Women are expected to return to the labour market so LBS may wish to explore additional ways of reaching and supporting women (e.g., reaching out to women's services in the community).
- Prepare for the potential influx of youth into our programs over the next 12-15 years as we all work together to address educational gaps that are anticipated to result from the pandemic.
- Offer to partner in supporting newcomers, specifically workplace and workforce related support.
- Continue to support youth by offering training such as soft skills, point-of-sale, and customer service.
- Continue evaluating our programs and services to ensure we are meeting the needs of those in underrepresented groups, so they are able to participate fully in the labour market.
- Seek out groups that could be invited to join LSPs.
- Revisit the marketing workshop materials for a list of ways of reaching underrepresented groups

## 7. In the context of increased demand for remote LBS service delivery, what are the current trends and/or challenges in your community and how will these be addressed?

This is a critical time to support LBS services in continuing to move their programs online, adapting to online delivery and ensuring content meets the needs of LBS learners. AlphaPlus confirms that the “experience of online service delivery during the pandemic revealed that digital literacy is an inseparable and indistinguishable part of adult literacy”. <https://capacity.alphaplus.ca>

Much of this report has been dedicated to looking at the increased demand for remote LBS service delivery including the trends, needs, gaps and opportunities. We have also highlighted how the LOCS LBS community is preparing to address these demands.

LBS services have adapted quickly to offer a range of online options, but there is more to be done. It is a big undertaking to ensure that all programs have equal access to technology, programs and staff skills. “Online learning in LBS has the potential to increase access and remove barriers for many while also building critical digital literacy skills. However, to achieve this goal, specific resources and capacities are required in the system to provide a consistent standard of service, remove barriers and foster innovation and knowledge sharing among a diverse network” (p. 5). <https://capacity.alphaplus.ca>

Below, three key areas are highlighted:

### **Technology:**

During LOCS’ Literacy Service Plan meetings, our community partners continue to report that many of their clients lack access to hardware and software, and/or the internet. In the WDB’s 2021-2022 Local Labour Market Planning Report, it is observed that there is a “Lack of access to technology and broadband connectivity, especially in rural areas” (p. 85).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a4e00J0u27GeHyah26FgFY7g8I5BUMW7/view>

AlphaPlus recognizes that if the digital divide is “left unaddressed, discrepancies in skills and access may increase the likelihood that some learners could fall through the cracks and not receive the services they need if not adequately supported” (p. 4). <https://capacity.alphaplus.ca> Learners falling through the cracks and increased inequity are always a concern for those working in LBS. Barriers to accessing technology creates a Catch-22 situation described in the Community Literacy of Ontario report “Building Bridges for the Future Workforce.” This report identifies that there is a “deep and noticeable connection between those who lack access to digital technology and those with lower digital literacy skills, as those without access cannot learn to use technology comfortably” (p. 7). <https://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/CLOs-Building-Bridges-Report-March-2021.pdf>

### **Skills:**

There is an ongoing challenge for some learners who may not have the computer skills necessary, or access to the tools needed to participate in online learning, however, they may still want online training. This will require a time commitment from LBS staff to support the learners. Everyone working in LBS has done a lot of work and learning during the pandemic to ensure needs could be met, however, supporting online learners is a big commitment.

Even basic digital literacy skills include a broad range of knowledge and not all staff have equal access to training. Remote delivery also creates another component of onboarding of new staff who may not have online facilitation experience.

## Time and Resources:

LBS services now face the challenge of returning to in-person programs which in the past was seen as a full-time job. It is important to note that online training or blended options require an increased demand on time and resources. For example, in addition to offering programs, there is a need for resources (screens and webcams to allow for hybrid programs), and space (e.g., space for computers). There is also a scheduling challenge, as organizations try to offer all options, as well as an increased demand for the facilitators to have time to prepare and offer programs in a variety of ways. Finally, LBS organizations need the time to design and develop online and hybrid programs.

It is well documented that not all organizations have equal access to technology, specifically those in rural areas. AlphaPlus confirms this finding: “Within this system, there are wide disparities between access to organizational resources. For example, college and school sectors often have access to space, digital resources, technical support, and educational materials through their organization. In contrast, community sector organizations often lack comparable resources and facilities and often rely on volunteers and partner organizations to support them, which became an issue during the pandemic when these resources were not available to support the transition to online learning.” <https://capacity.alphaplus.ca>

7 b.) Please describe any trends with e-Channel referrals and if and how these will impact service delivery in your community in 2023-24.

LBS will need to continue exploring ways to expand existing online training by sourcing new programs they can offer to learners. This will be particularly important when supporting people in the workplace. e-Channel will be an option LBS can draw on for some workers in addition to learners in their centres.

We know that some people can access online learning independently, but the majority of learners will need support registering, using the technology and completing the content. LBS organizations can support individuals in completing online courses. This will facilitate learning and build confidence. LBS support can also help learners stay focused on tasks.

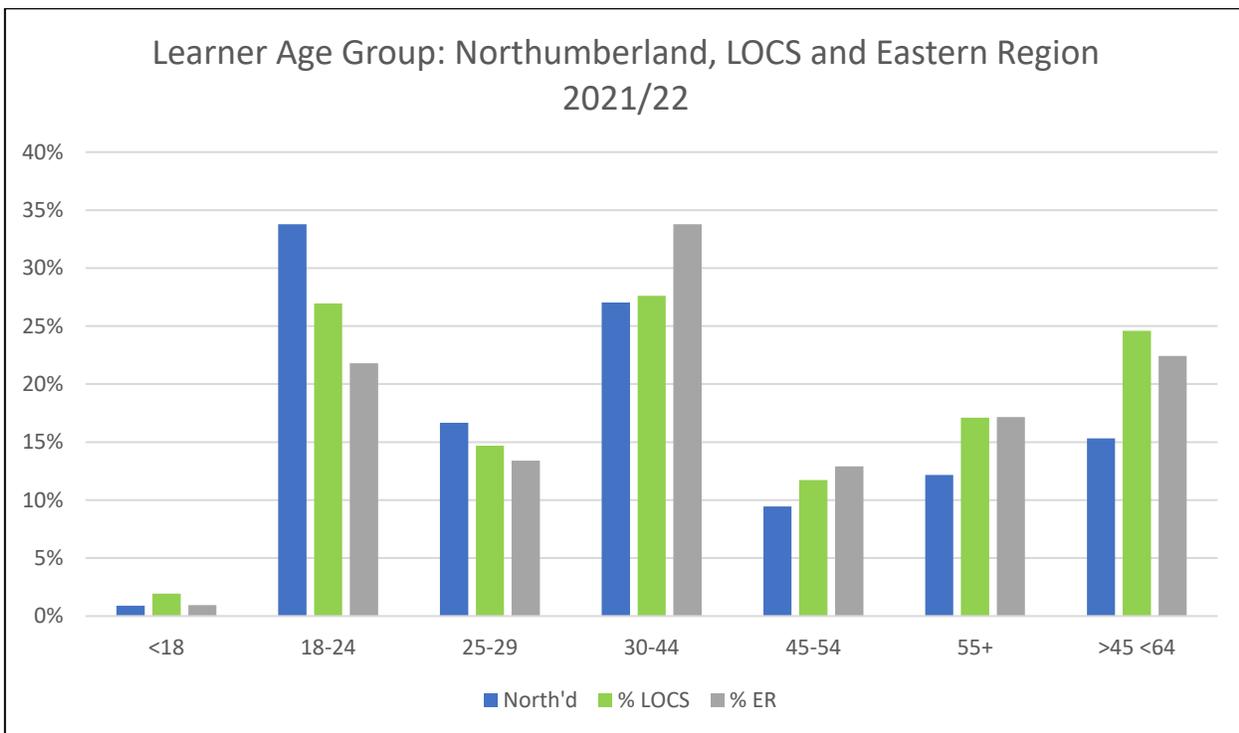
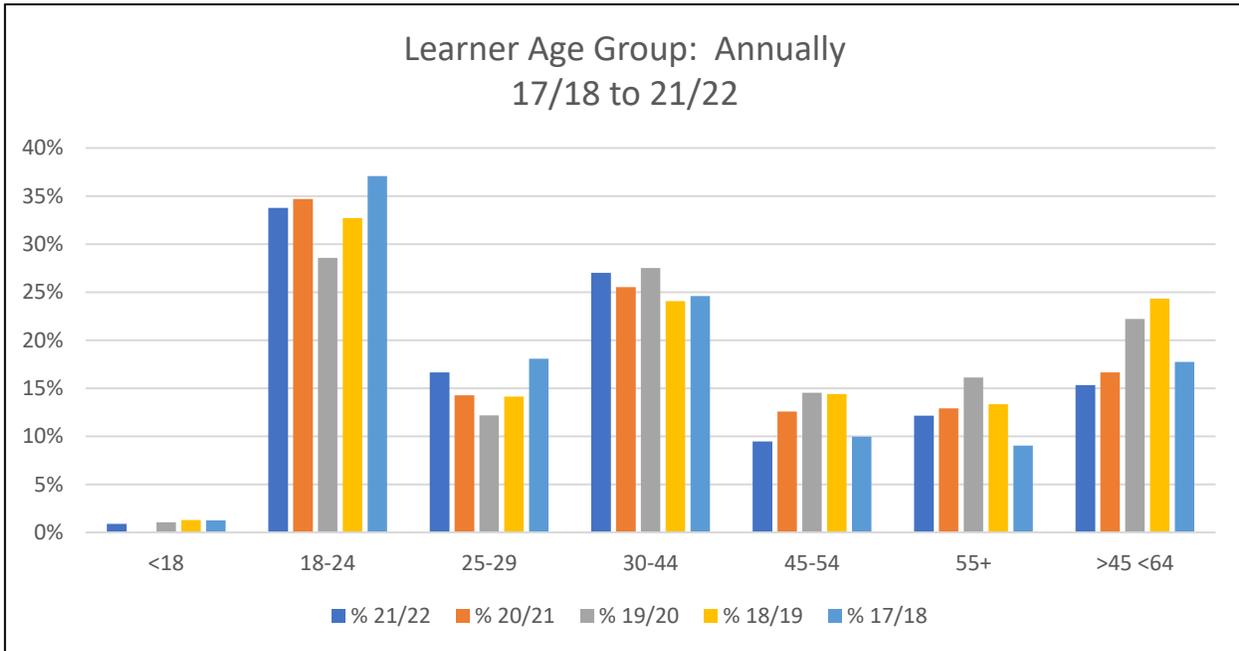
We look forward to the new programs e-Channel will be developing through the Skills for Success funding.

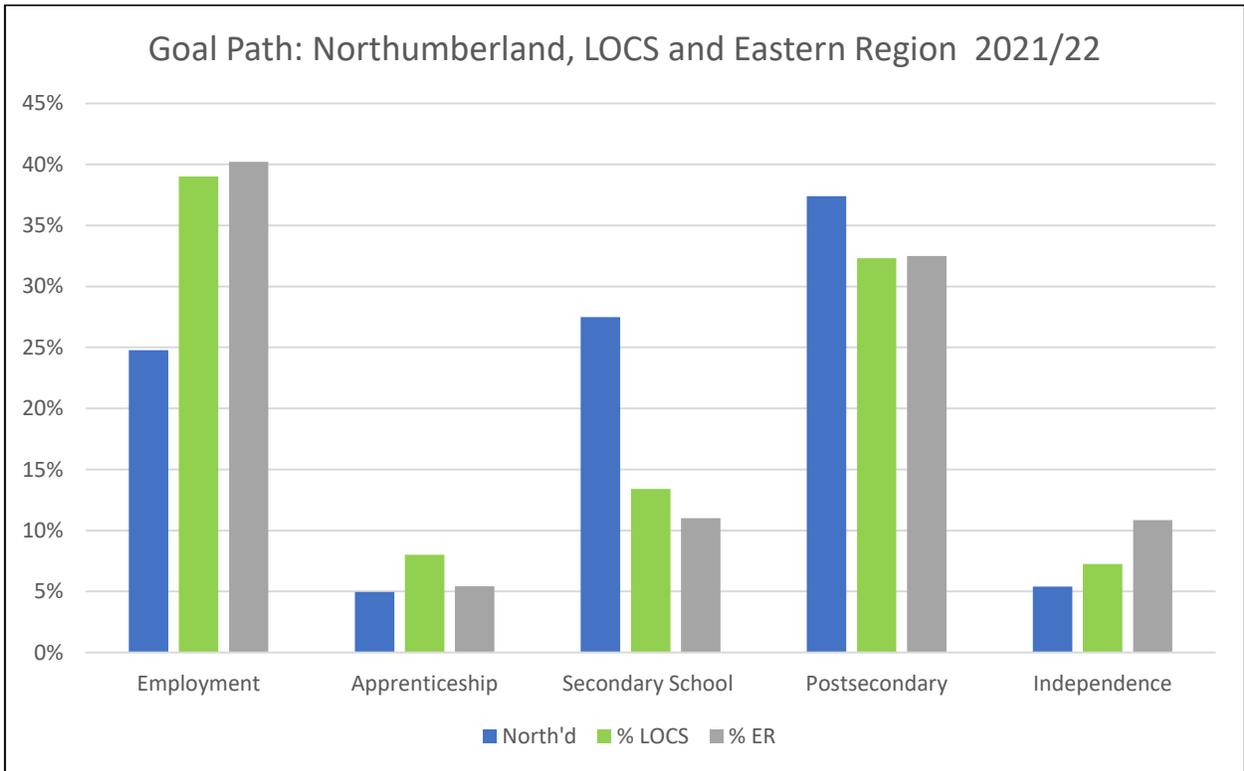
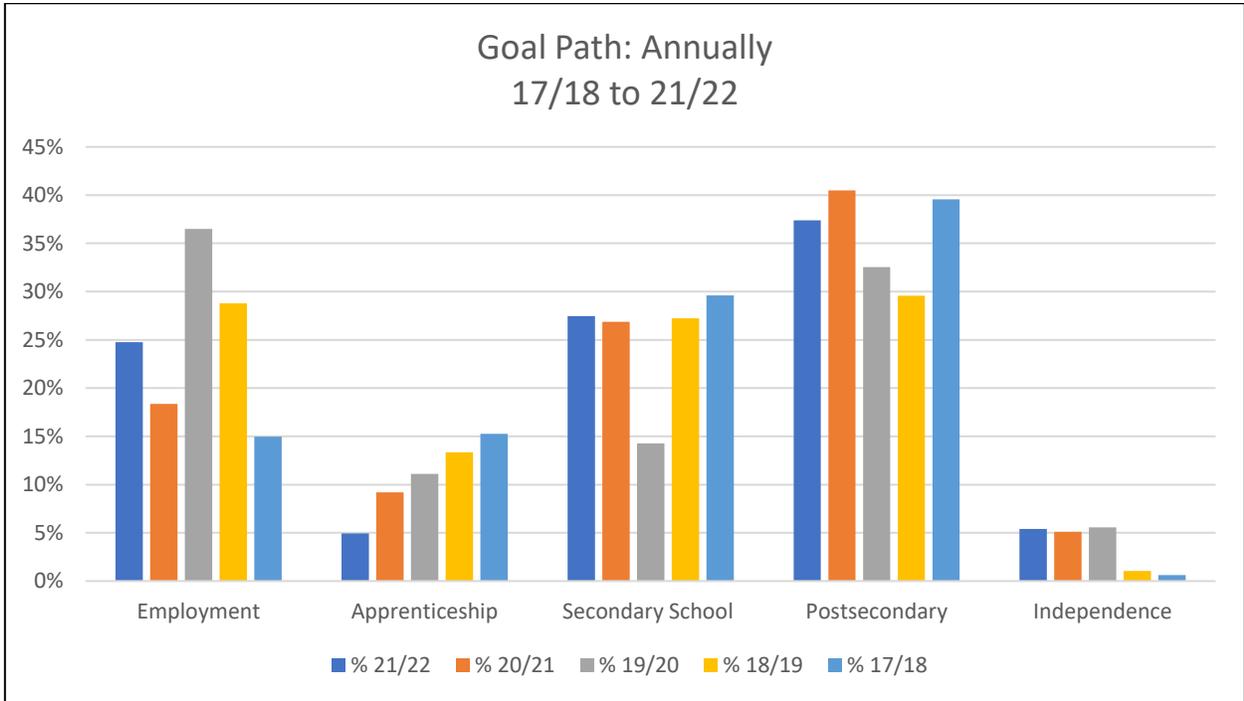
We will continue to work closely with Contact North and are exploring ways to access their technology, including virtual reality programs.

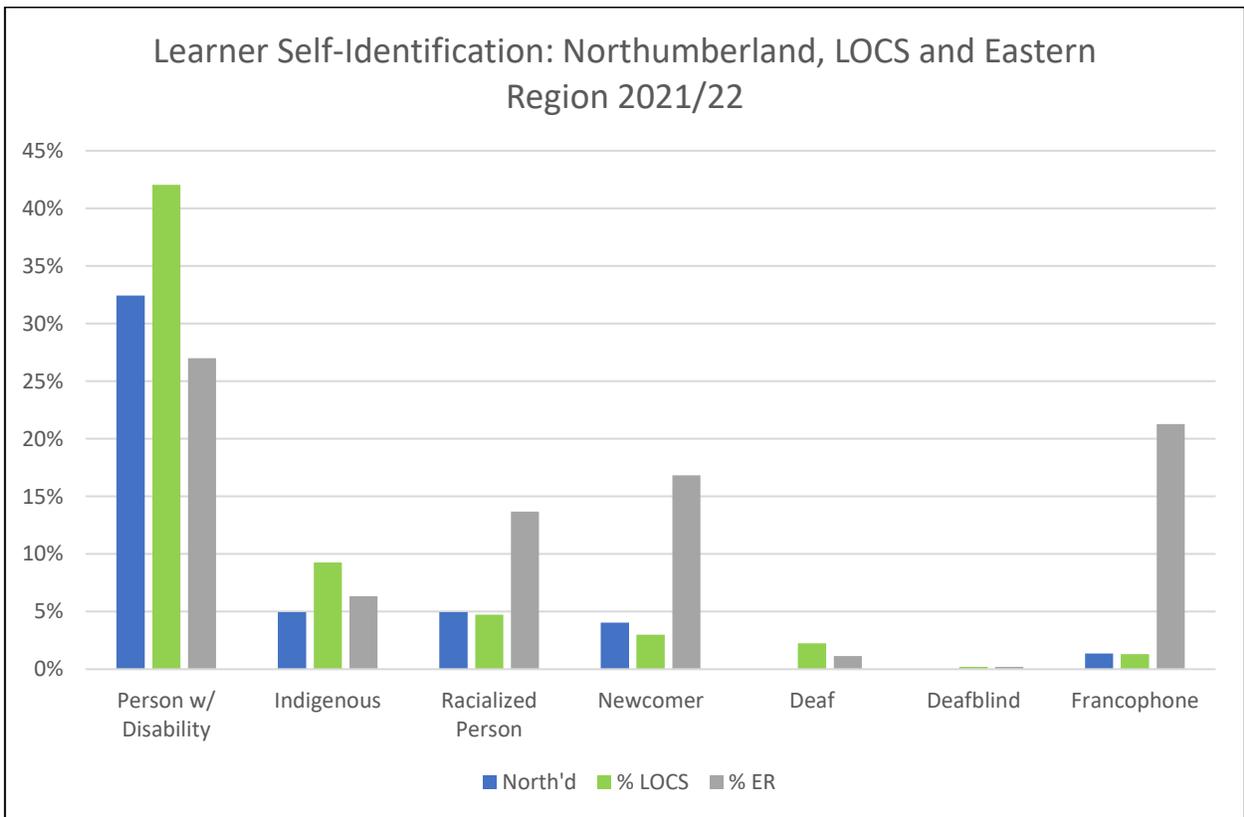
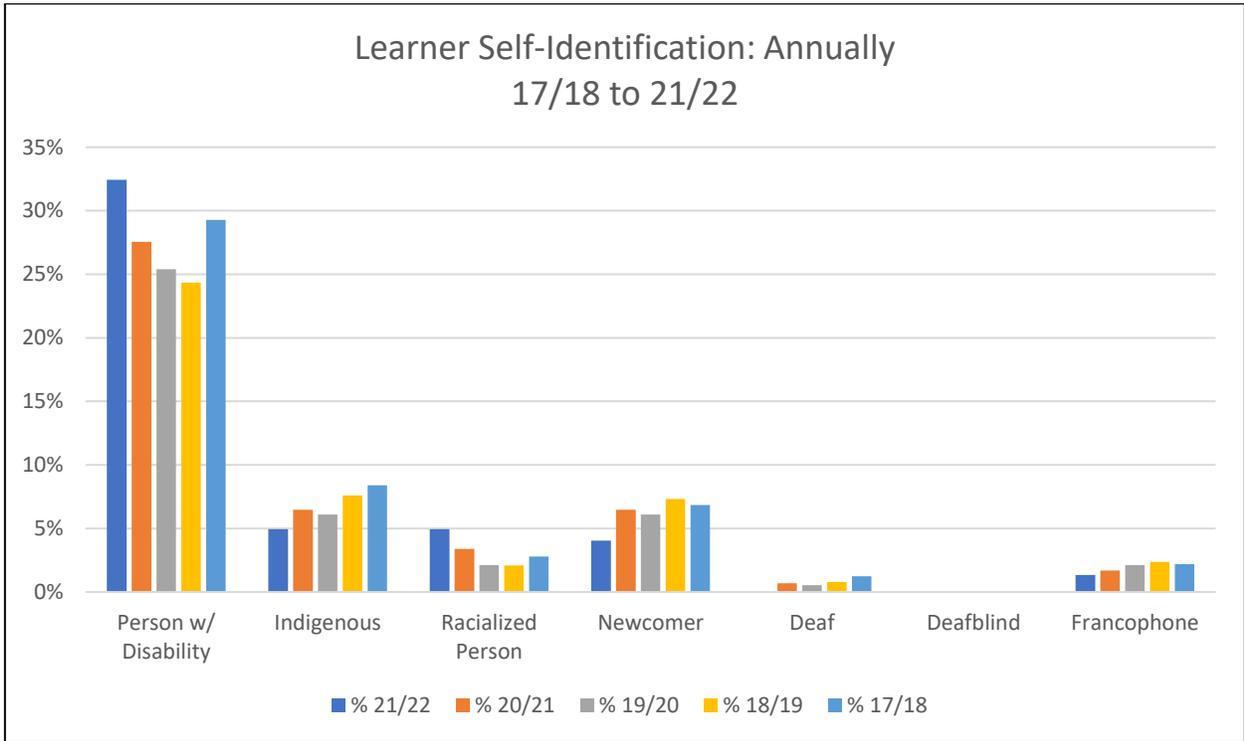
A Contact North manager sits on the LOCS board and a representative from Contact North attends LOCS Literacy Service Plan meetings.

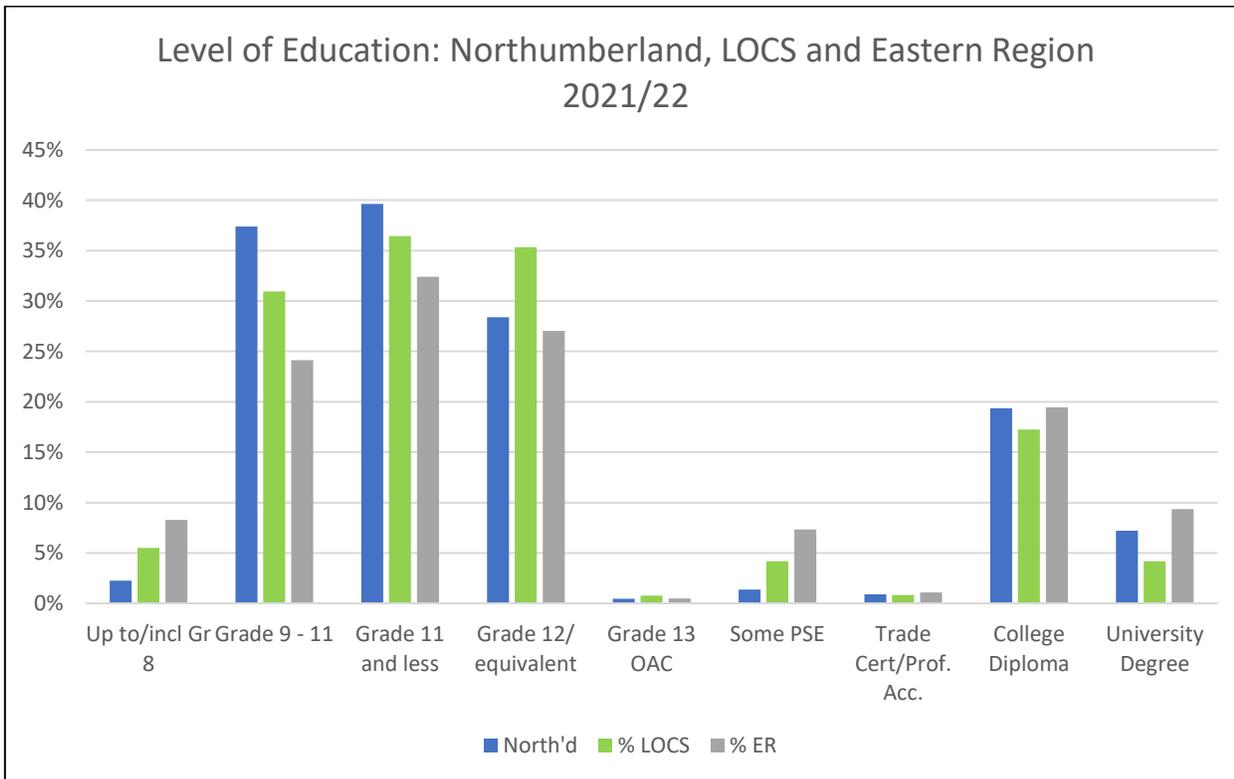
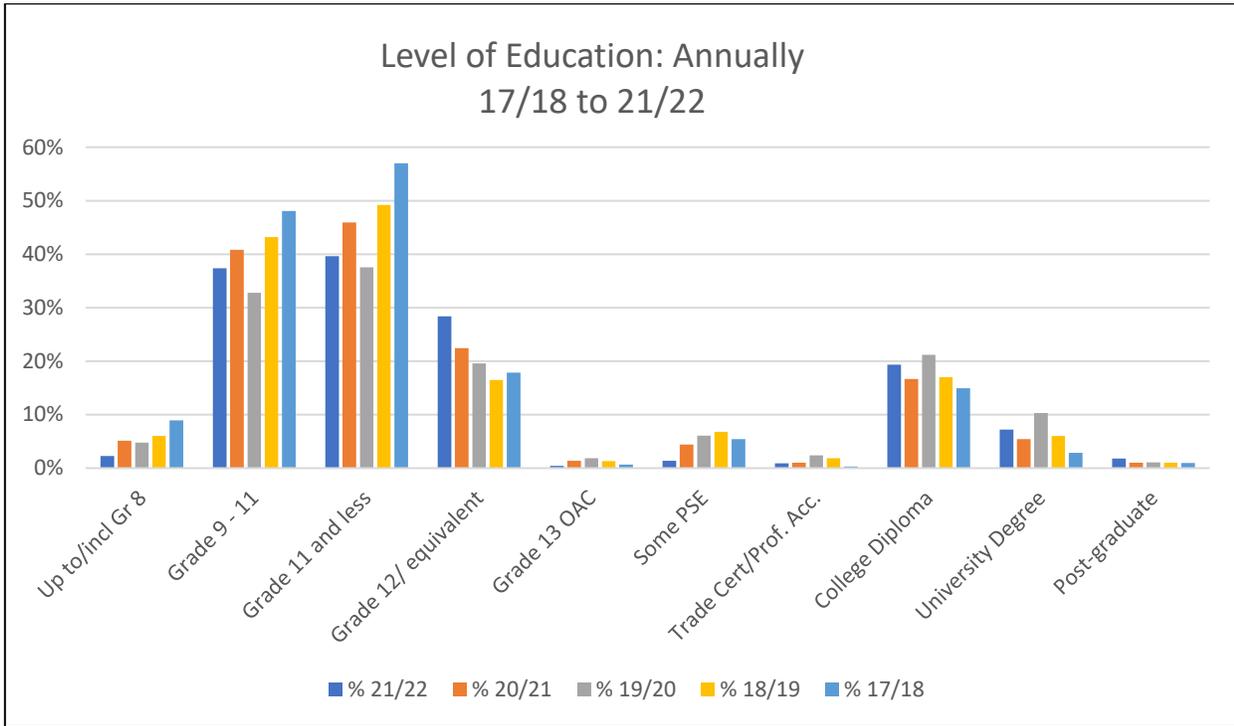
## APPENDIX

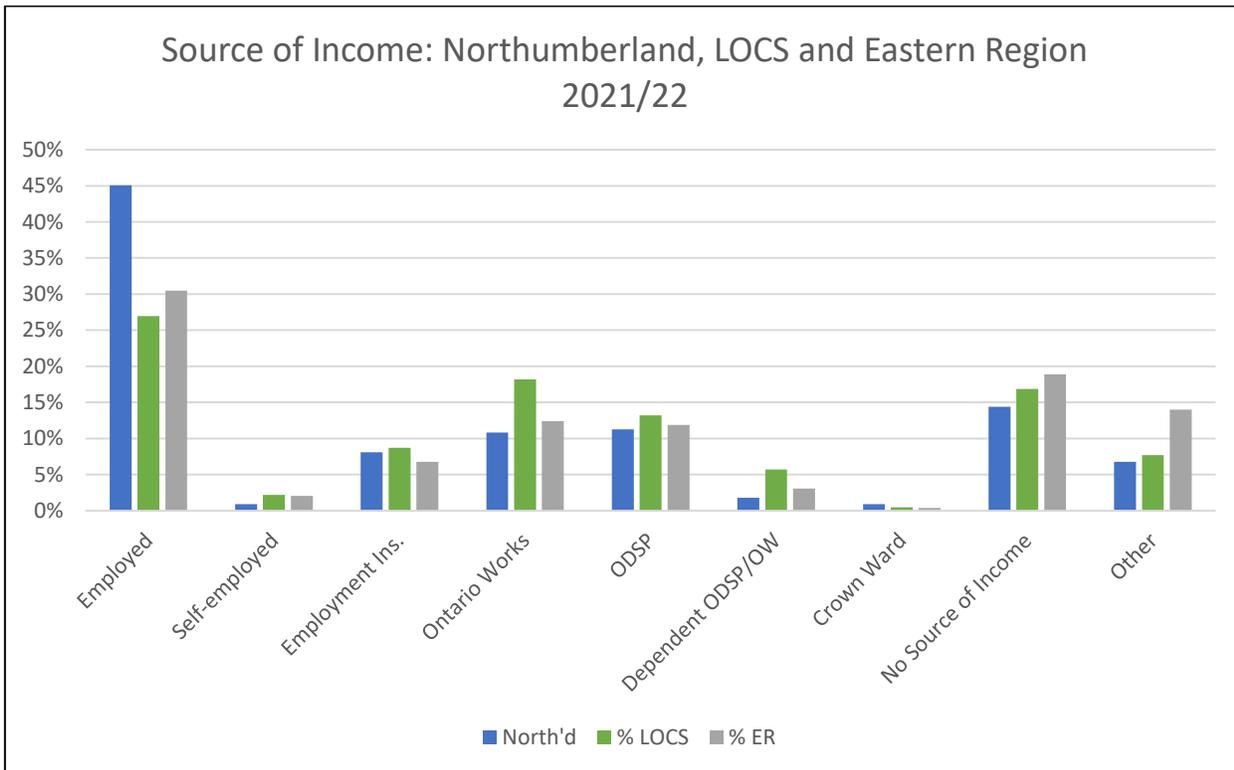
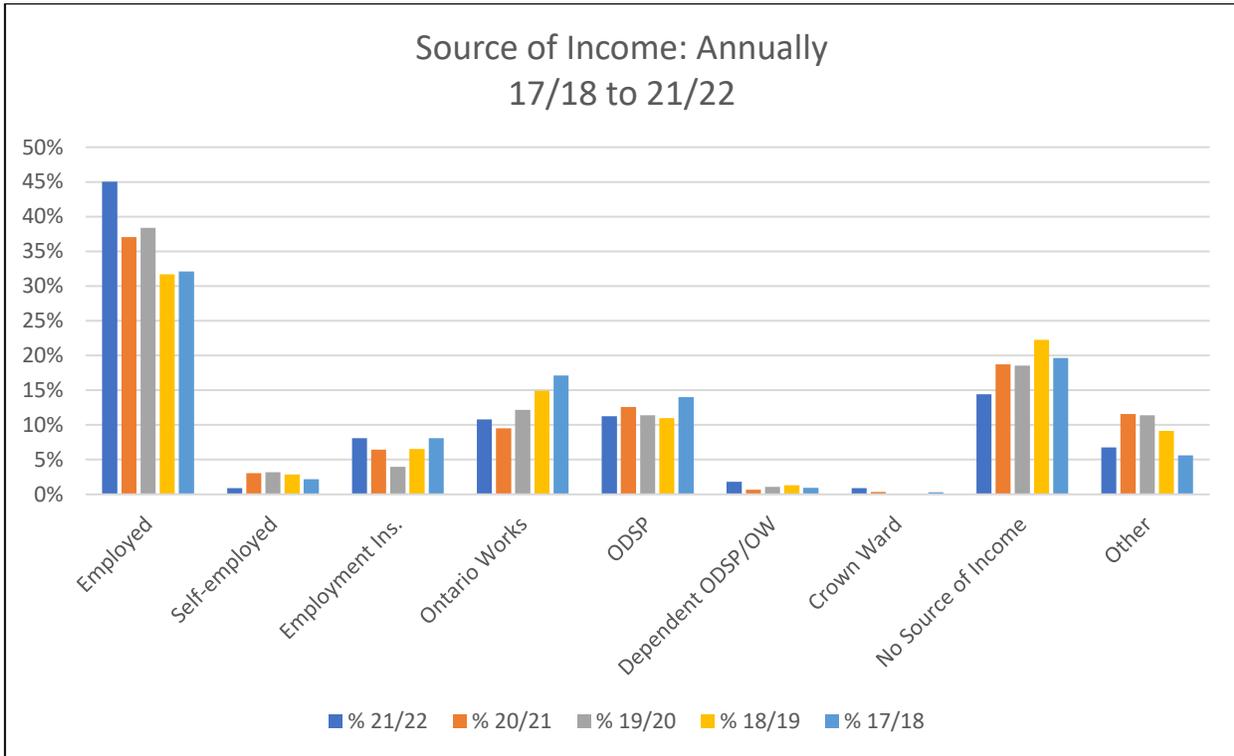
Appendix A – Learner Profile Data for Northumberland (2021-2022)

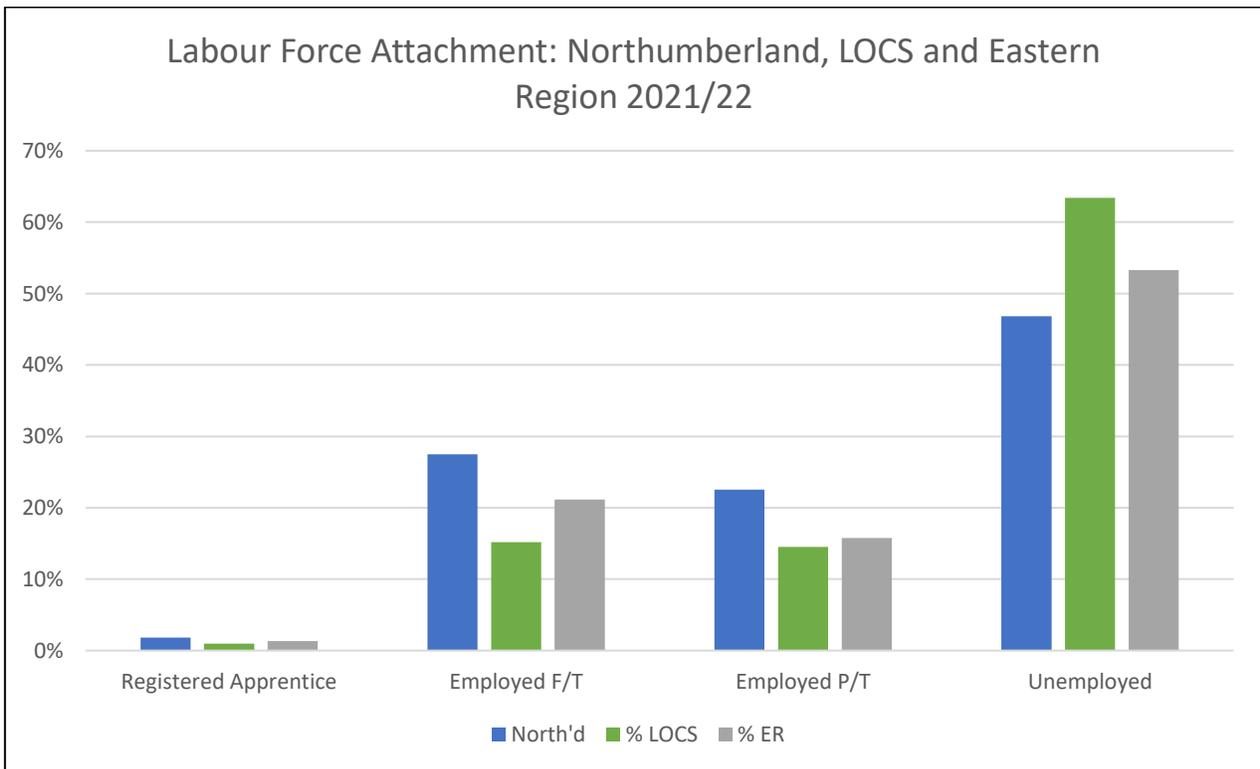
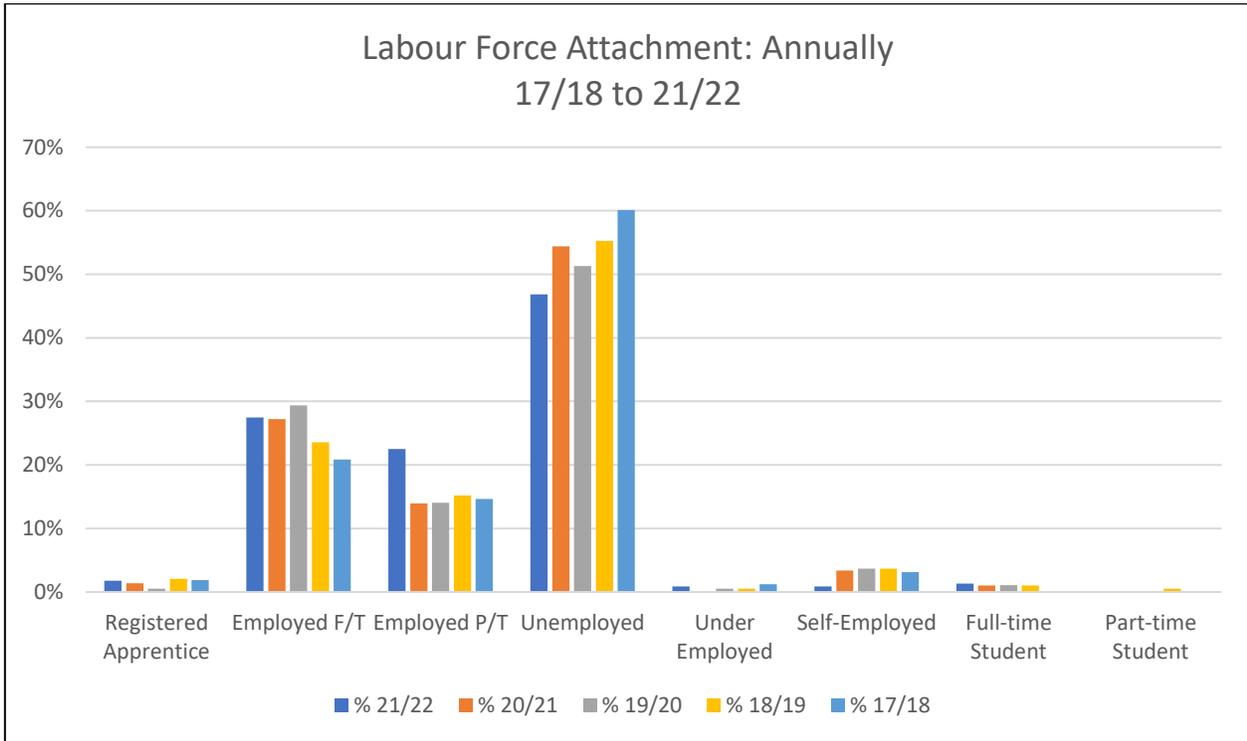


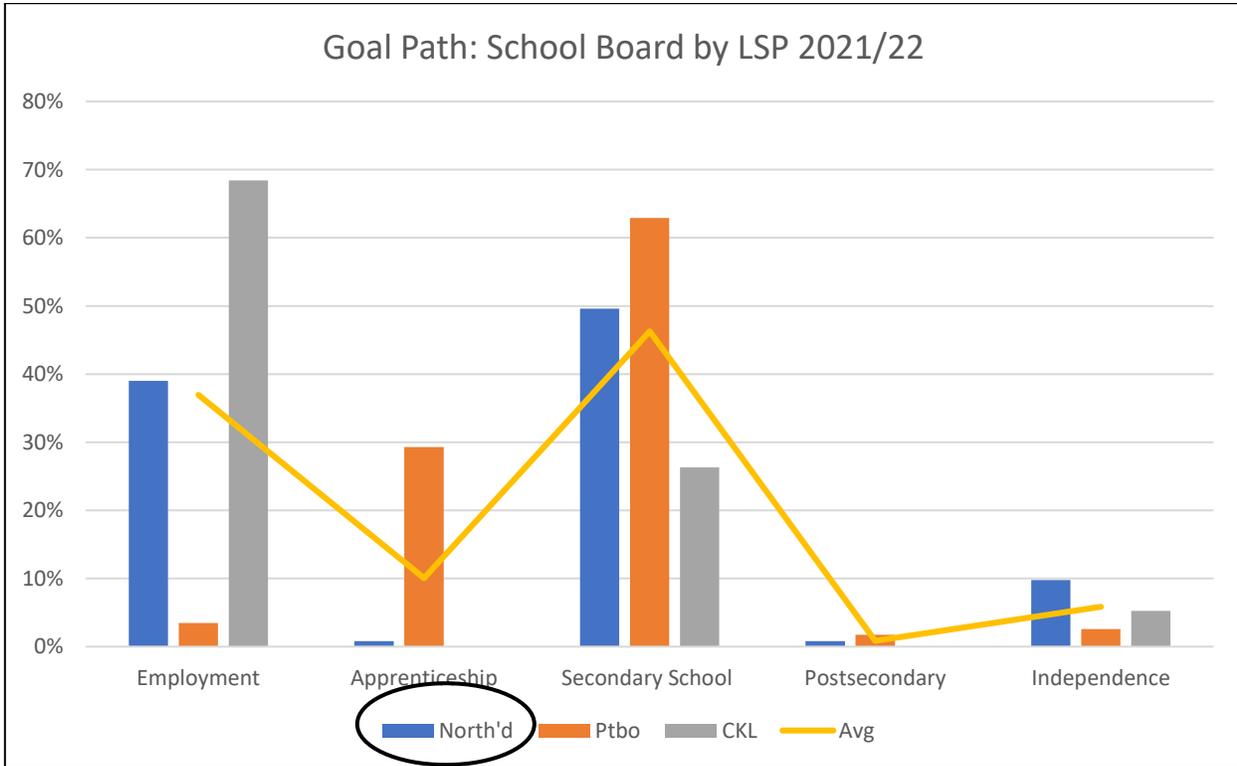
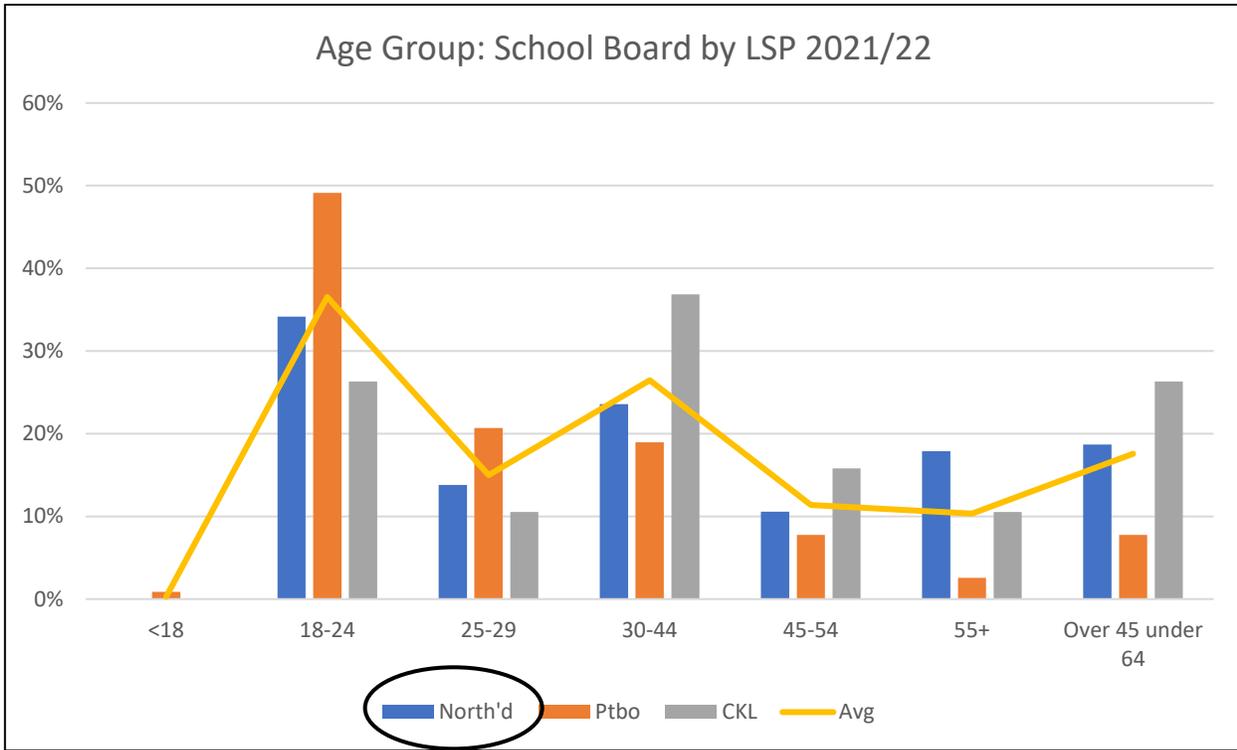


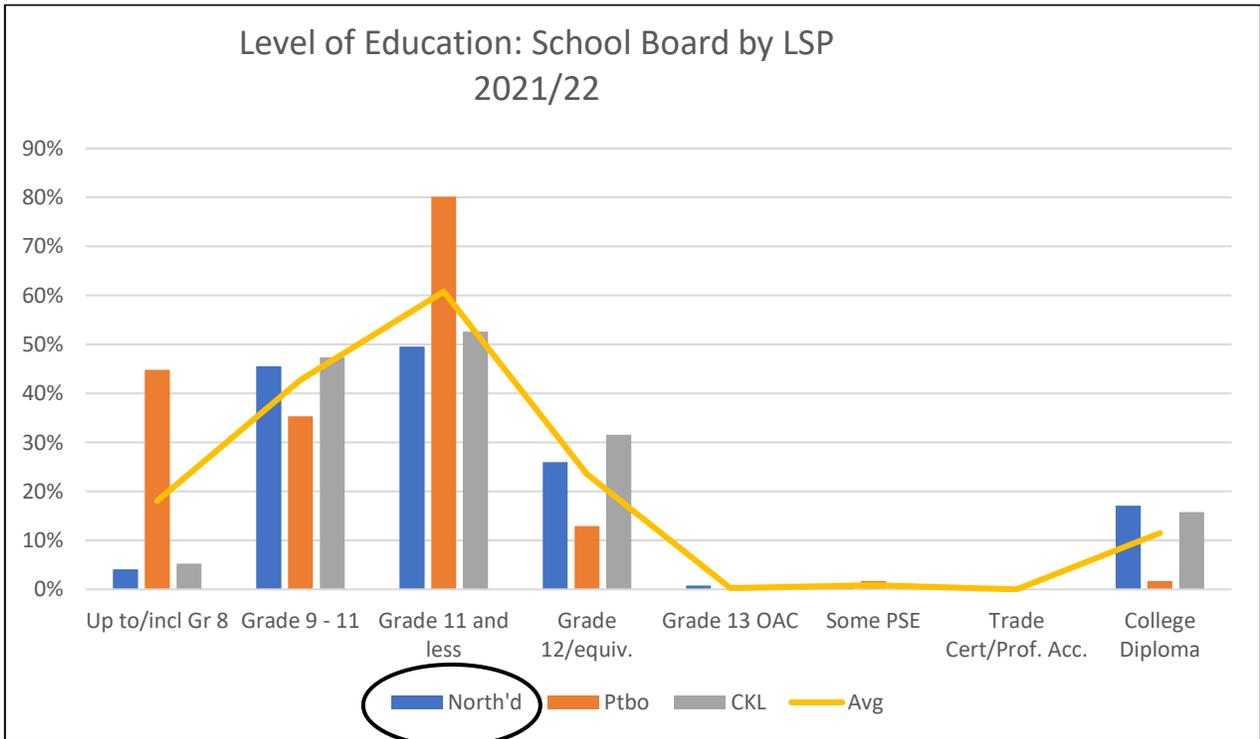
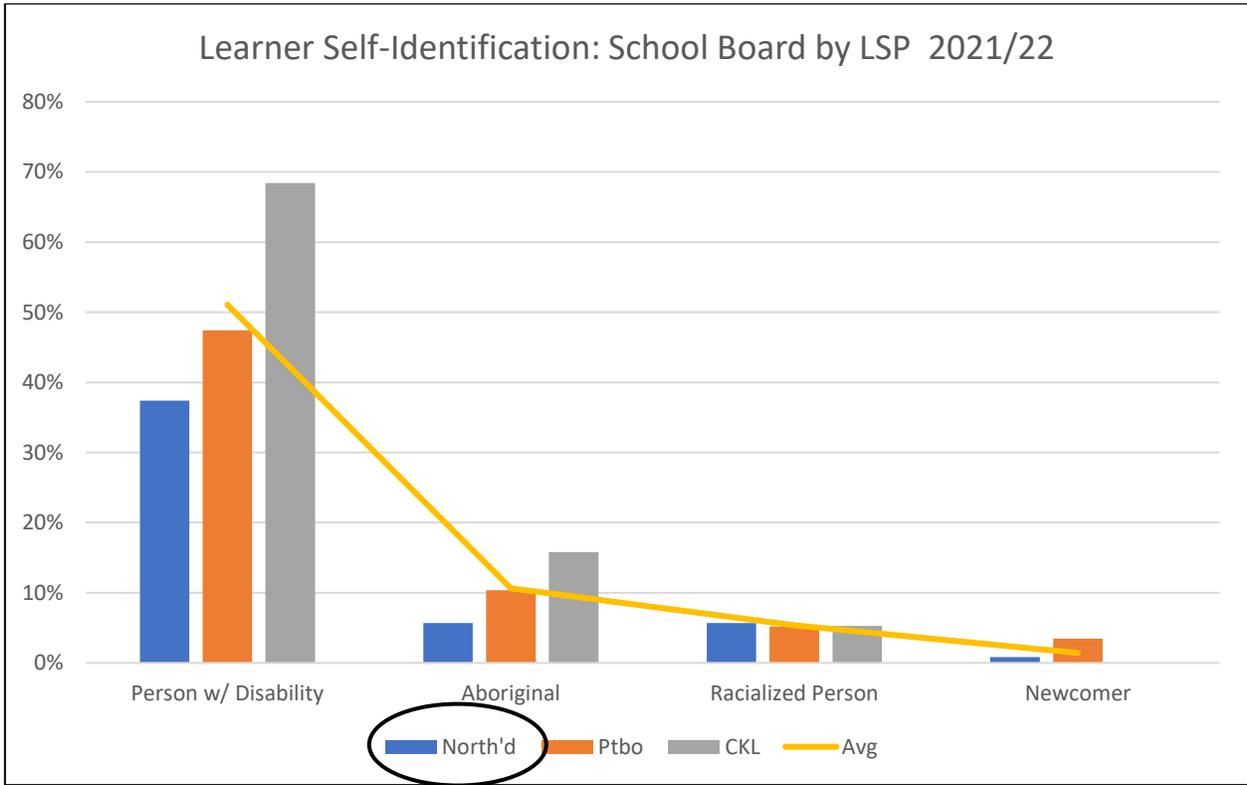


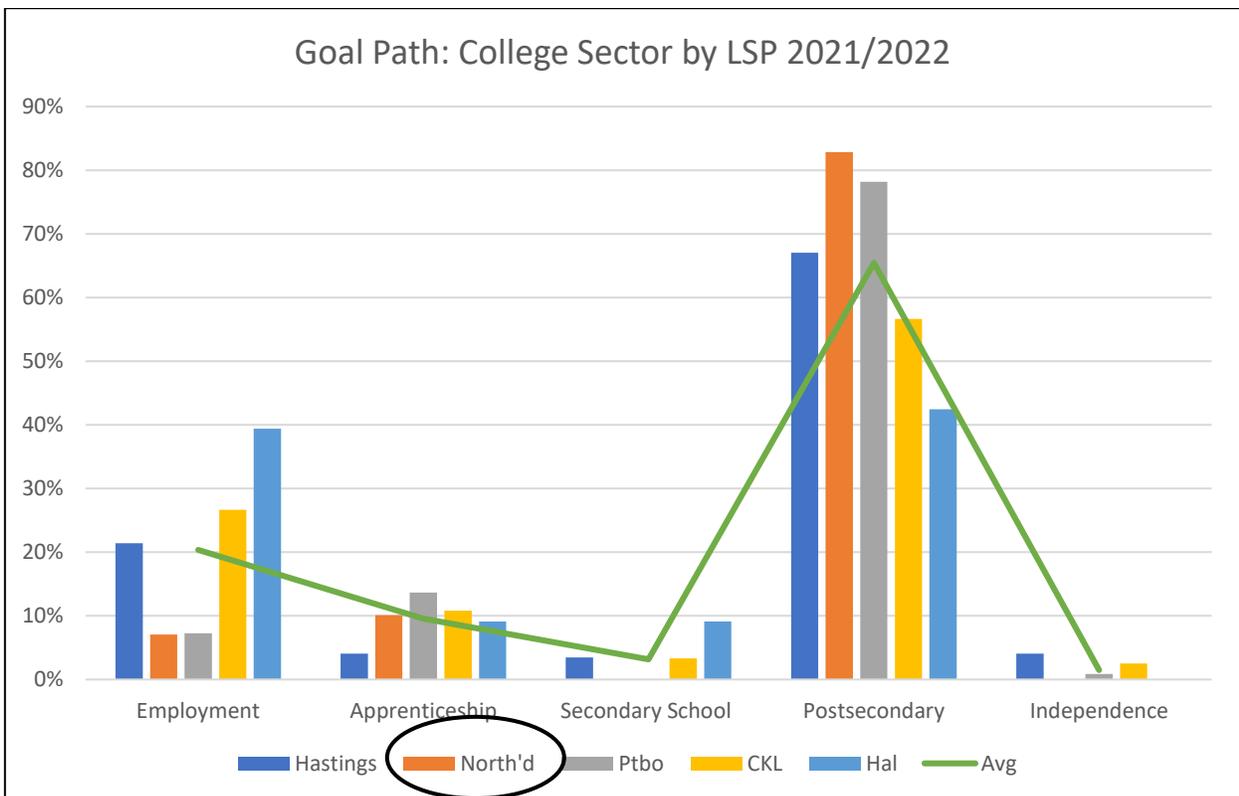
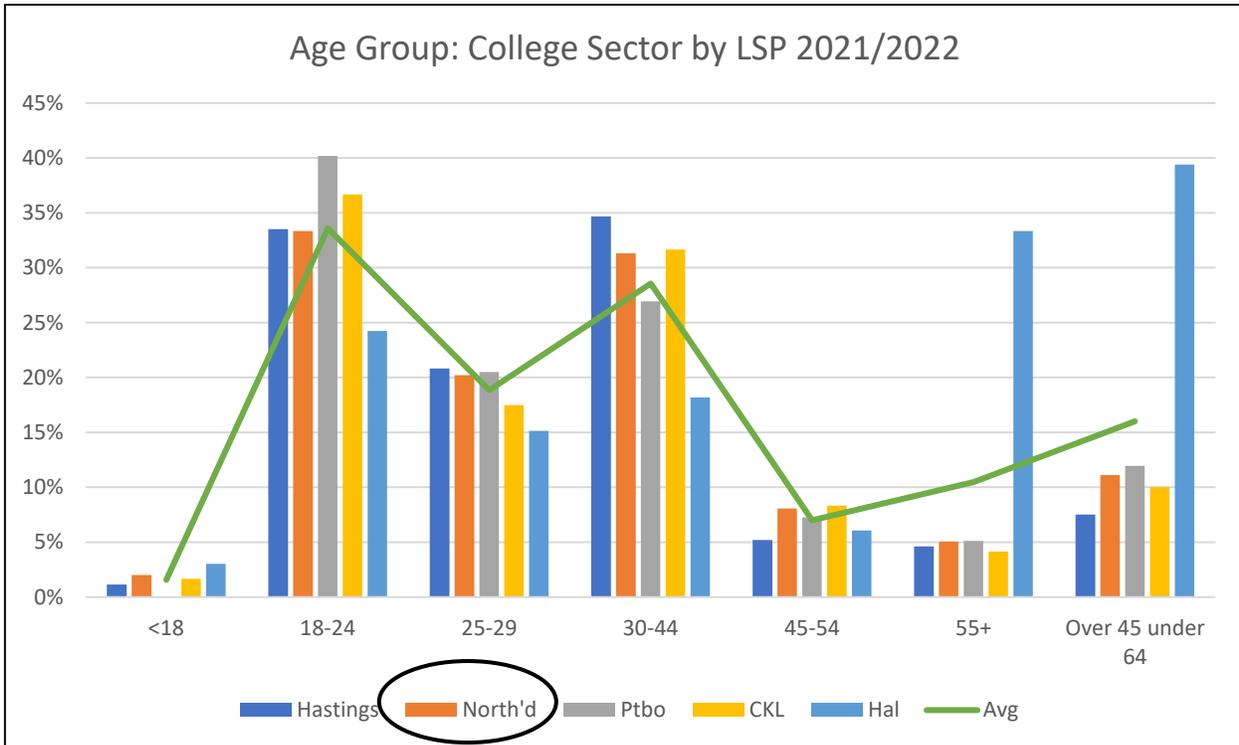




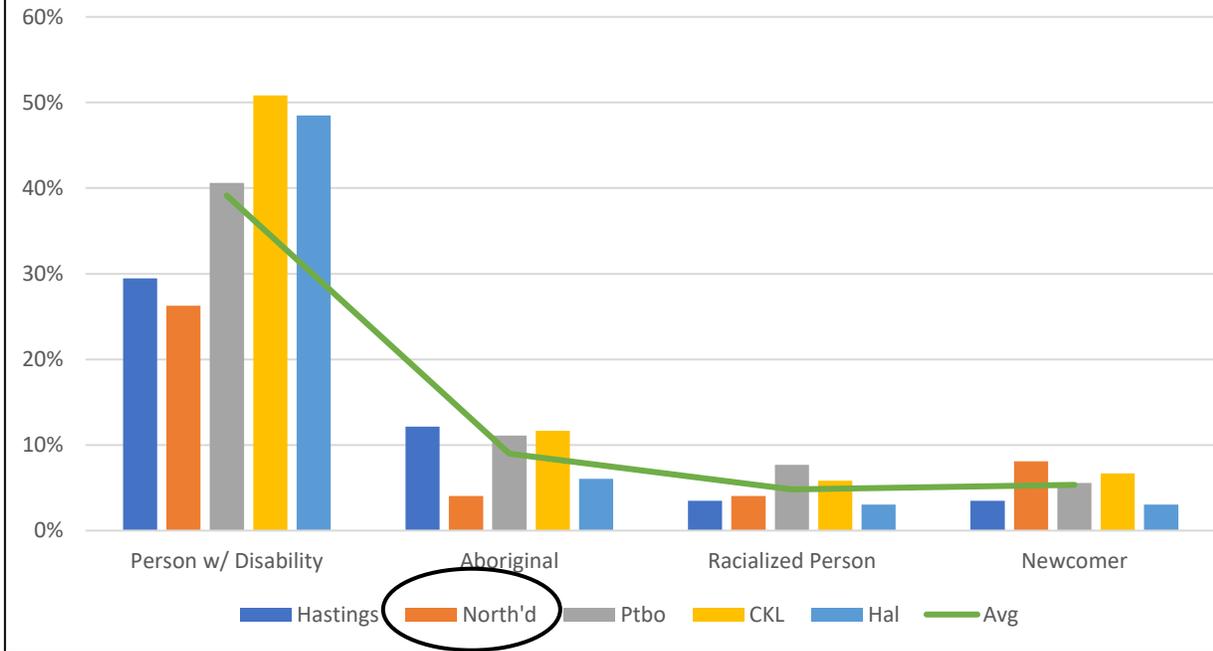




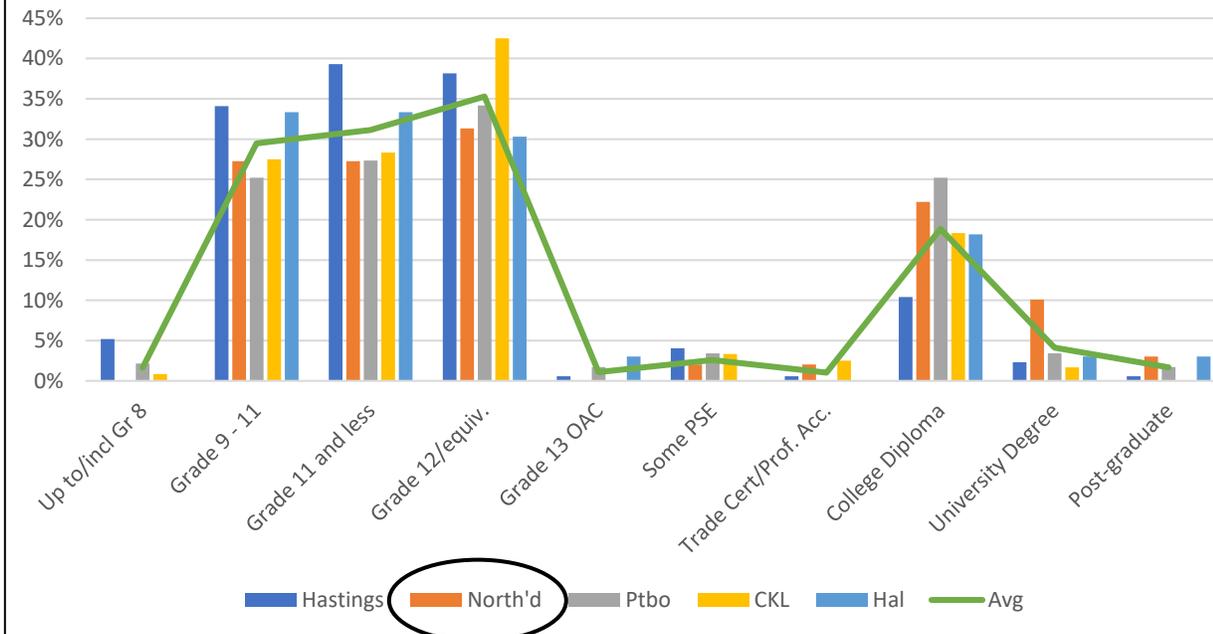




Learner Self-Identification: College Sector  
by LSP 2021/2022



Level of Education: College Sector  
by LSP 2021/2022



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