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Research Announcements

PIAAC

Preliminary Australian Findings from 2011-2012 PIAAC Survey

Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, Australia, 2011-2012: Preliminary Findings [web page]: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4228.0main+features992011-2012>

Australian Council for Educational Research. (2013, Feb.). *International study reveals serious adult literacy and numeracy problems*. <http://www.acer.edu.au/media/international-study-reveals-serious-literacy-and-numeracy-problems/>

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has released preliminary findings for Australia from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the first of the participating countries to report findings from the survey. Respondents to this survey completed tasks designed to assess their skills in literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments. The report says that 44% of Australians aged 15 to 74 years had literacy skills at Levels 1 or 2, while 17% were at Levels 4 or 5. About 38% of employed adults achieved in levels 1 and 2. Roughly 55% of Australians were assessed at Level 1 or 2 on the numeracy scale.

Finalized results from PIAAC are expected this fall.

Keywords: Australia, Literacy proficiency, Numeracy, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), Research announcements, Technology

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LES Workforce

Literacy and Essential Skills Labour Market Study Survey Undertaken in Canada

<https://websurvey.srdc.org/s/SLESW/>

A national survey of the Literacy and Essential Skills Workforce has been undertaken to identify the needs, concerns and future implications for this sector in Canada. Managed by the [Canadian Literacy and Learning Network](#) (CLLN) and carried out by [Social Development Research Corporation](#) (SRDC), it will help provide a picture of the demographics of Literacy and Essential Skills practitioners, the work they do, and where and how they do it. The survey focuses on paid providers who deliver LES services to adults. While the importance of volunteers (i.e. volunteer tutors) in the broad LES field is acknowledged, they are not included in this study.

Visit www.lesworkforce.ca to learn more about the study and to access the online survey in English or French. It is available until **April 30, 2013**.

See also: “[CLLN Announces Survey of LES Workforce](#)” (April 2012 Research Scan), [CLLN Labour Market Study of Literacy and Essential Skills Workers](#) (July-August 2012 Research Scan), and [Occupational Task Profiles: A Pan-Canadian Snapshot of the Canadian Literacy and Essential Skills Workforce](#) [think paper], presented at [Summer Institute 2012, Workplace Literacy & Essential Skills: Shaping a New Learning Culture](#).

Keywords: Canada, LES workforce, Research announcements, Surveys, Teaching

Digital Technology

Environmental scan on Use of Digital Technology in Adult LES Programs

Canadian Literacy and Learning Network. (2013). *New Projects & Partners at CLLN. Literacy Express* (Winter 2013).

http://issuu.com/literacyexpresscanada/docs/literacy_express_winter_2012_13_state_of_the_field

Researchers are carrying out an environmental scan of how digital literacy is being used in adult LES programs across Canada, identifying what tools are being used and how, and what barriers programs face in integrating digital technology. [Canadian Literacy and Learning Network \(CLLN\)](#) is conducting the scan. They are also working with the [Canadian Apprenticeship Forum](#) (CAF) to find out how digital technology is being used in the workplaces in various trades and to investigate employers’ attitudes concerning the impact of these technologies on skill requirements in their workplaces.

Initial findings from CAF research on the “Impact of technology on apprenticeship” was to have been presented at the [CAF’s National Forum Dialogue - Impact of Technology on Apprenticeship conference](#) in Ottawa, ON, on February 21, 2013.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, Canada, Technology, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

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Articles and Reports

Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Claims of Skills Shortage and Mismatch Challenged

Usher, Alex. (2013, March 21) Really, a skilled-labour shortage? In truth, we need arts grads. *The Globe and Mail*. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/really-a-skilled-labour-shortage-in-truth-we-need-arts-grads/article10053385/>

Usher, Alex. (2013, March 19). Skills Shortages, Part 1. *One Thought to Start Your Day* [blog]. Higher Education Strategy Associates. <http://higheredstrategy.com/skills-shortages-part-1/>

Usher, Alex. (2013, March 20). Skills Shortages, Part 2. *One Thought to Start Your Day* [blog]. Higher Education Strategy Associates. <http://higheredstrategy.com/skills-shortages-part-2/>

In a recent series of articles and blogs, Higher Education Strategy Associates President [Alex Usher](#) challenges some current claims about the skills shortages in Canada. In a March 21 op-ed in the *Globe and Mail* he argues that the idea that Canada's economic problems are caused by people getting the wrong kind of education is misguided. He uses government data from British Columbia and Statistics Canada to show that people in the trades actually tend to have higher unemployment rates than bachelor's degree holders. He argues that the labour shortages in the trades in Alberta and Saskatchewan due to the recent boom in the resource sector should not blind us to the risks of rising unemployment in the trades in other regions of Canada by overselling apprenticeships.

Usher addresses the skills mismatch issue in two blog posts. In "Skills Shortages, Part 1", he uses a graph [showing](#) the ratio of unemployed to job openings by province and suggests that the numbers show that outside of the Prairies there is no evidence that skills mismatches are in any way driving unemployment. In "Skills Shortages, Part 2", he looks at unemployment rates by industry and notes that claims of a large skills shortage in the construction industry are contradicted by the fact that "workers in the social sciences, education, and government fields (mostly university graduates) have unemployment rates of about 3%" while workers in the construction trades have a rate of 9%.

Keywords: Apprenticeships, Canada, Policy, Skills mismatches, Skills shortages, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

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Transition from Low-skill to High-skill Work: Promise of the “Career Ladders” Model

Essential Skills Ontario. (2013). From Better Skills to Better Work: How Career Ladders can Support the Transition from Low-Skill to High-Skill Work. *Becoming State of the Art: Research Brief No. 3*. Available at <http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/career-ladders>

In Ontario, as in other jurisdictions, there are many challenges in moving people with low education attainment on social assistance into sustainable employment. Many people who have been through Ontario Works training programs have returned for more training after a spell of low-paid employment, which suggests that more effective approaches are needed to improve the employability of this population. A research brief from Essential Skills Ontario highlights one model that shows some promise. “Career Ladders” is a series of connected literacy, language and skills training programs designed to equip people to find employment within a specific industry or occupational cluster. These programs provide continued training to those employed, permitting them to advance to higher levels of education and employment within that sector. Variations have been used in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and other countries. This brief draws on the literature to describe these programs, and suggests that they have the potential to resolve the “skills mismatch” that could result in a paradoxical combination of high unemployment and labour shortages in coming decades in Ontario. It looks at how such a system might work in Ontario. The brief acknowledges that little rigorous evaluation has been done of these programs’ benefits to employers, although it mentions one case study that suggests good results for learners.

Keywords: Canada, Employability, Low-paid workers, Ontario, Policy, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

UK Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning Advocates Stronger Collaboration with Employers

Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning. (2013). *It’s About Work...: Excellent Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning*. Available at <http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/26611>

In 2011, as part of its reform plan for further education (FE) and skills ([New Challenges, New Chances](#)), the British government established an independent Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning to identify and promote outstanding practices. The Commission identified examples of “excellent vocational teaching and learning in action”, held seminars with teachers, trainers and teacher educators, learners, employers, professional associations and learning technologists, visited Denmark to learn about that country’s approach to vocational education, and conducted a literature review.

In March 2013 the Commission released a report, *It’s About Work...*, in which they say they consistently found that the best provision is collaborative – a “two-way street between providers and employers” – and focused on a real work context. The focus on work allows vocational learners to see why they are learning what they are learning. The “two way street” means that employers are not seen merely as customers, but as collaborators engaged at every level in the creation and delivery of vocational programs. The report sets out four characteristics of excellent programs, including teachers and trainers who have both occupational and

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pedagogical expertise, and eight distinctive features of vocational pedagogy, such as the importance of practical problem solving and critical reflection on experience, including learning from mistakes in real and simulated work settings. It also makes ten recommendations including ways to incorporate employer collaboration in programs.

Keywords: Employers, Teaching, United Kingdom, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES), Vocational education

Aboriginal Peoples

Literature Review Identifies Promising Practices for Aboriginal Learner Success in Skills Upgrading Programs

Mercer, Karen, Bellegarde, April, & Charland, Alice (2012). *A Selected Literature Review for Adult Learner Success: Aboriginal Upgrading Program*. Retrieved March 07, 2013, from http://www.nald.ca/library/research/bowvalley/selected_lit_review/selected_lit_review.pdf

After noticing that learners in the Aboriginal Upgrading Program at Bow Valley College in Calgary, Alberta, often require increased support and services in the last semester of the program in order to complete it, the researchers, who work in the program, set out to learn about best or promising practices for Aboriginal learner success in skills upgrading programs. This review is based on ten pieces of literature the researchers found relevant, which includes literature by Aboriginal scholars and government reports. The report describes themes in this literature, extrapolates promising practices and considers how these practices could be applied to their Aboriginal Upgrading program. Promising practices include: interdepartmental collaboration and engagement in providing support for learners, increasing cultural awareness of non-aboriginal faculty and staff, and mentoring for Aboriginal students. The researchers indicate that based on their report Bow Valley College faculty and staff will develop an academic and personal assessment to be administered at or shortly after admission, to identify barriers the learners may face and develop early interventions.

Keywords: Aboriginal peoples, Canada, Culture, Employability, Literature reviews, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

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Immigrants

Australian Study Identifies Challenges and Best Practices in Serving Culturally Diverse Learners

Adult Multicultural Education Resources. (2013). *Responding to CALD Learners: Cultural Diversity in Action*

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/research/ACFE%20publications%20for%20Learn%20Local/caldlearnerscd.pdf>

This project was conducted from 2008 to 2012, using research, action research and professional development to build the capacity of Learn Local organizations in Victoria, Australia, to deliver education and training to “culturally and linguistically diverse” (CALD) learners. The project was led by Adult Multicultural Education Resources (AMES) in collaboration with participating Learn Local organizations. The report includes case studies of Learn Local initiatives that demonstrate principles of good practice, extracts from collaborative action research conducted by Learn Local organizations to explore aspects of those principles, and messages and insights from the action research projects. Full reports of the Learn Local action research projects are available at www.acfe.vic.gov.au. According to the report, the action research projects illustrate the challenges in engaging and providing appropriate services to CALD learners, particularly in new CALD communities. The report emphasizes “the role of culture in successful communication and in shaping expectations of education, training, the workplace and ways of gaining employment”.

Keywords: Action research, Australia, Cultural communities, Immigrants, Professional development, Refugees, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES)

Official Language Minorities

Lurette, Donald, Roy, Sylvie, & Lévesque, Normand (2011). *Towards an Integrated Model to Support the Literacy Development of Francophones in Canada*. Retrieved February 13, 2013, from http://www.nald.ca/library/research/resdac/towards_support_francophones/towards_support_franphones.pdf

This report investigates approaches that could serve the needs of Francophone adults with low literacy skills, based on a “global” vision of literacy development that considers the community as a whole rather than on the sole delivery of literacy services. The authors’ main objective is to help adult education practitioners broaden their outlook on designing and developing training programs for adults with low literacy skills with this “global” vision, using strategic “inter-program” partnerships. The authors suggest that striving for a learning community is a better goal than striving for a fully literate society. They propose a “literacy development model” with four components: analyzing the environment; creating strategic local partnerships; constructing adapted andragogical interventions; feedback and assessment of actions.

Keywords: Canada, Community literacy, Francophones, Official language Minorities, Teaching

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Policy

Making Employers Partners in Further Education by Empowering Local Enterprise Partnerships: UK Government Accepts Heseltine Review Recommendations

Heseltine, Michael. (2012). No Stone Unturned in Pursuit of Growth
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/no-stone-untuned-in-pursuit-of-growth>

Government's Response to the Heseltine Review
http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/PU1465_Govt_response_to_Heseltine_review.pdf

In the context of the economic crisis that began in 2007, the British government commissioned a report from former cabinet minister Lord Heseltine on how to improve the UK's economic performance. The report, released in October of 2012, contains 89 recommendations. It promotes the concept of "localism" as a way to counter the centralization which, Heseltine suggests, has disempowered regions beyond London and the South-East of England. Chapter 6 focuses on education, and pages 166-179 specifically examine further education, vocational training and apprenticeship. It proposes that because funding flows to the further education system programs based on learner demand rather than employer demand, there is a mismatch between the skills taught and the skills employers require. Since public spending on programs will fall even as program spending needs to rise, ways will need to be found to attract more private sector involvement in vocational training. The report recommends devolving funding for skills programs to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), partnerships of local authorities and local businesses to develop skills programs more in tune to the needs of local employers. The report does, however, recommend national standards for apprenticeships and alternative routes to funding for apprenticeships with large national employers. In March 2013 the government indicated, [in a response](#), that it accepts most of Heseltine's recommendations, and that LEPs will have "a new strategic influence over skills policy", "will be responsible for setting local skills strategies" and will be represented on college governing boards.

Keywords: Adult education, Apprenticeship, Employers, Policy, Postsecondary education, Skills mismatch, United Kingdom, Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills (WLES), Vocational education