


2020 NORTHERN WORKFORCE SURVEY

A multi-sector summary of employment trends across Alberta's north

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Introduction and Purpose

The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) has been conducting workforce scans of northern Alberta since 1995 – approximately every two years. The 2020 Northern Workforce Survey supports the NADC’s continuous efforts to gather data and obtain insights into in-demand and difficult-to-recruit occupations as well as recruitment and retention challenges in Alberta’s north. Survey results inform the NADC’s bursary programs, and may aid northern employers in their hiring and retention strategies.

The 2020 survey was conducted in February. Invitations were sent to 7,718 employers in a variety of sectors within the NADC region on February 5, 2020. Respondents were sent three reminders during the three-week survey period encouraging them to complete the survey. The survey collected 636 viable responses that were used in the final data set. The survey closed on February 27, 2020.

Sampling for the survey was random, using data from Statistics Canada’s Business Register. Alberta’s Office of Statistics and Information (OSI) provided support in generating the sample.

The survey ran using Opinio, a web-based survey app. The questionnaire was available online and accessible by email invitation using a web browser. Controls were in place to ensure survey respondents responded only once. Workforce Consultants with Alberta Labour and Immigration, along with Chambers of Commerce in the north helped the NADC market the survey.

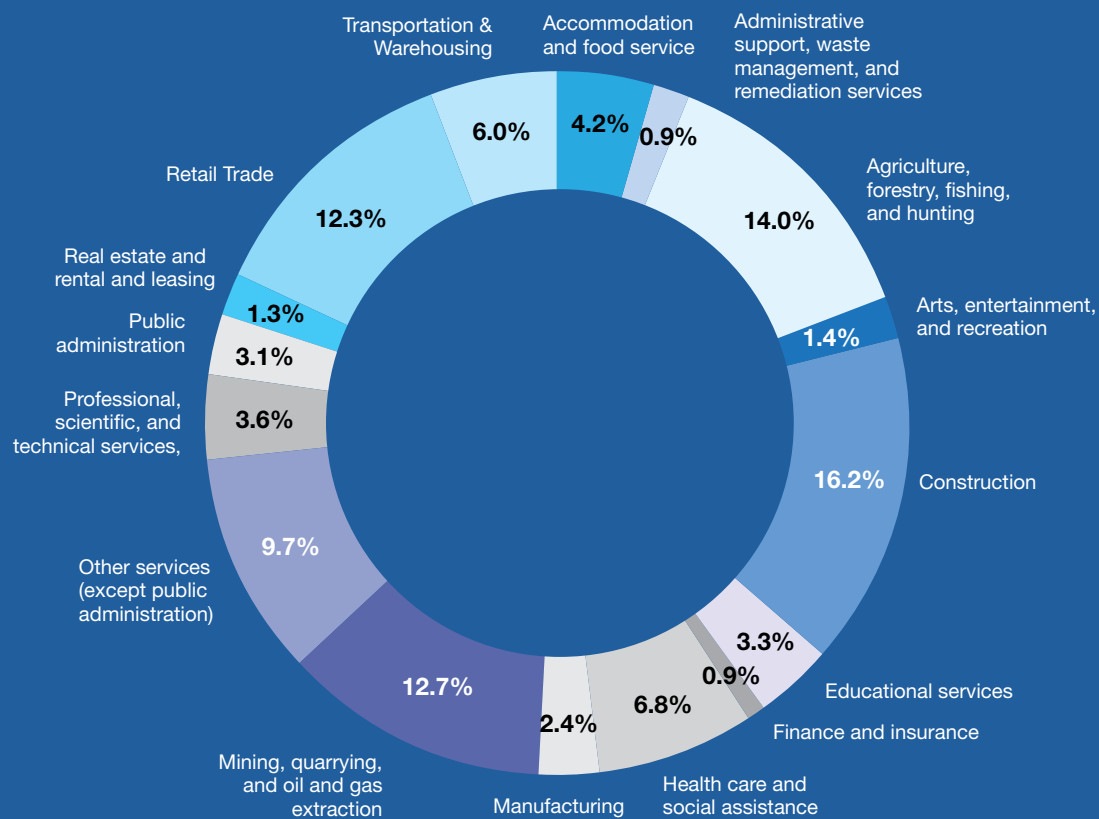
■ Highlights

- Top 10 occupations in demand, sorted by number of mentions (n=453), include: Transport truck drivers, Heavy equipment Operators (except crane), Administrative assistants, Heavy duty equipment mechanics, General farm workers, Construction trades helpers and labourers, Retail salespersons, Welders and related machine operators, Electricians (except industrial and power system), and Cashiers.
- Top 10 occupations in demand, sorted by number of jobs (n=2066), include: Transport truck drivers, Secondary/elementary school teachers, Heavy equipment operators (except crane), Elementary and secondary school teacher assistants, Administrative assistants, General farm workers, Construction trades helpers and labourers, Senior government managers and officials, Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers and related support occupations, and Registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses.
- Of the responses on recruitment experience, 77 per cent (n=3180) mentioned facing no challenges in recruiting or not hiring new employees in the past year.
- Of those who did experience difficulty in recruiting (n=712), the top five challenges mentioned were: low number of applicants (22%), candidates not having the needed work experience (13%), local market not producing enough work-ready/qualified job candidates (11%), lack of interest in the type of job among job seekers (11%), and competition from other employers (9%).
- The respondents who listed occupational categories for their recruitment experience, 50 per cent of occupations fell under the categories of 'not experiencing difficulty' or 'not hiring in the past year'.
- For the educational requirement of in-demand occupations, the distribution of responses is as follows: high school (49%), certificate (28%), diploma (13%), bachelors (7%), masters (2%), and PhD (1%).
- For the self-assessment of their retention efforts for in-demand occupations, the survey indicated the respondents' retention efforts as good (38%) or excellent (36%).

Results

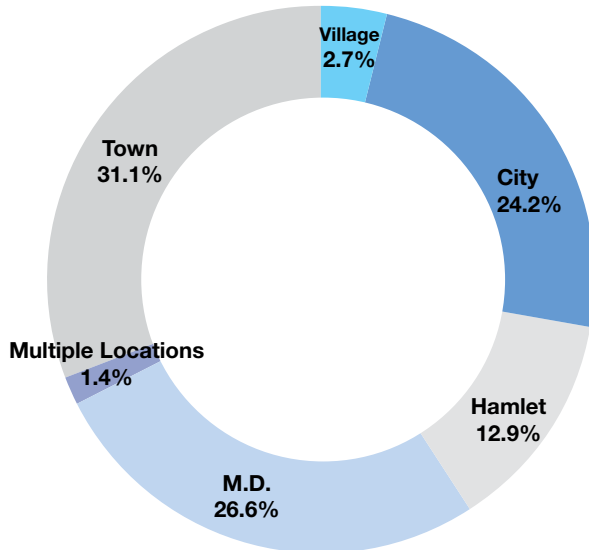
Summary of Responses:

Chart 1: Breakdown of Responses By Sector (n=636)



Note: Fewer than five counts of responses are suppressed and not included in the above diagram.

Chart 2: Distribution of Responses by Business Location (n=636)



Note: Fewer than five counts of responses are suppressed and not included in the above diagram.

Workforce Size:

Table 1 shows percentages of the number of employees in various businesses across the NADC region based on responses provided by survey respondents.

Table 1: Number of Employees Comparisons

Size of Establishment (Business)	# in Survey (n=636)	% in Survey
1 to 4	267	42.0%
5 to 9	142	22.3%
10 to 19	86	13.5%
20 to 49	71	11.2%
50 to 99	31	4.9%
100 to 199	17	2.7%
200 to 499	12	1.9%
500 to 999	8	1.3%
1000 to 1499	-	-
Grand Total	636	100.1%

- Suppressed, as cell count is less than five.

According to the survey results, the most frequently occurring number of employees was one (mode), the median (midpoint) was six, the average was 31, and the standard deviation was 101.8. A median of six indicates that half of the survey responses come from businesses with less than six people, and the other half have six or more.

Occupations in Demand:

There were 1,538 mentions of occupations by 636 respondents. These occupations were coded into 212 occupational categories. There were 4,558 jobs associated with these occupations.

Chart 3 and Chart 4 show the top 10 occupations in demand, sorted by number of mentions and number of jobs, respectively. There are some similarities between the two charts, with transport truck drivers topping both lists. There were also differences. Retail salespersons, cashiers, welders, and electricians may have garnered more mentions but not in terms of jobs. Similarly, there were more jobs than mentions associated with teachers, government managers, nurses, and food counter attendants.

Chart 3: Top 10 National Occupational Classification (NOC) Occupation in Demand - Sorted by Number of Mentions (n=453)

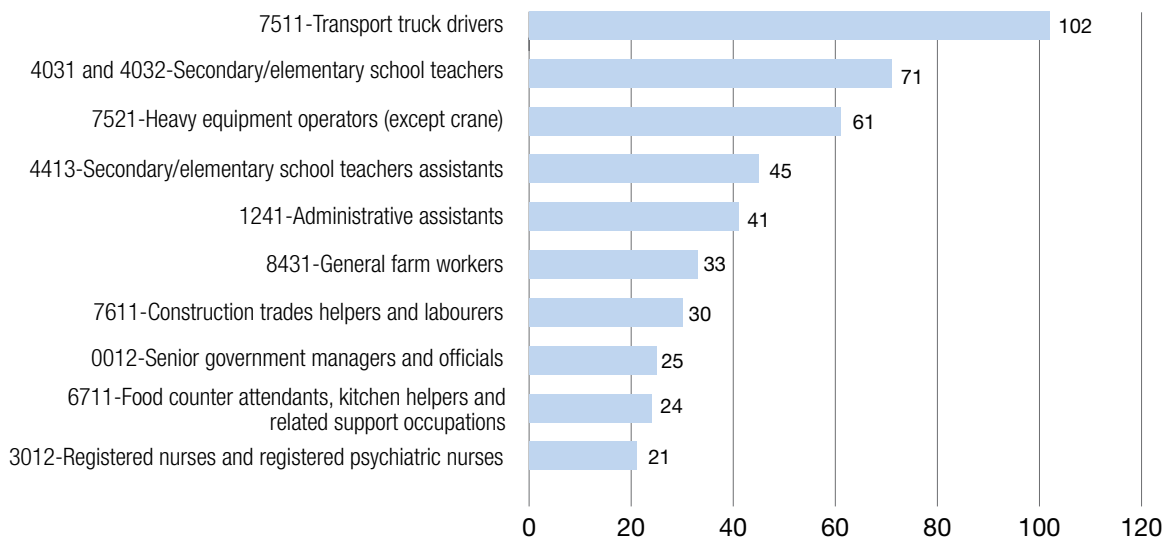


Chart 4: Top 10 National Occupational Classification (NOC) Occupations in Demand - Sorted by Number of Jobs (n=2066)

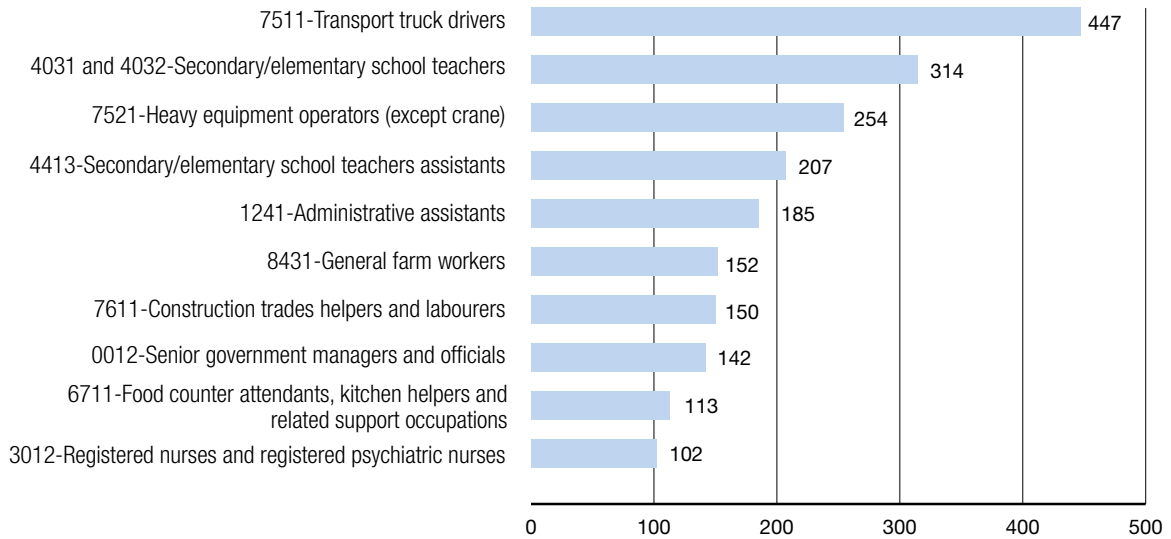


Table 2 compares the top 10 in-demand occupations in the survey with two external data sources: the Short Term Employment Forecast (STEF), and the Alberta Occupational Outlook 2019-2028. When compared to the [Short-Term Employment Forecast \(STEF\)](#)¹, four of the top occupations (cashiers, elementary and secondary school teacher assistants, electricians, and heavy equipment operators) were listed as low demand, while the remainder were listed as medium demand. When compared to the [Alberta Occupational Outlook 2019-2028](#)², shortages were identified in five occupations (including one that is considered low demand in STEF), while surpluses were identified in 10 occupations (seven of which were considered medium demand in STEF).

Table 2: Comparison of top 10 occupations identified in the survey with other data sources

	Short Term Employment Forecast (STEF)	Alberta Occupational Outlook (2019-2028)
Transport truck drivers	Medium Demand	Shortage
Heavy equipment operators (except crane)	Low Demand	Shortage
Administrative assistants	Medium Demand	Shortage
Heavy-duty equipment mechanics	Medium Demand	Shortage
General farm workers	Medium Demand	Surplus
Construction trades helpers and labourers	Medium Demand	Shortage
Retail salespersons	Medium Demand	Surplus
Welders and related machine operators	Medium Demand	Surplus
Electricians (except industrial and power system)	Low Demand	Surplus
Secondary/elementary school teachers	Medium Demand	Surplus
Elementary and secondary school teacher assistants	Low Demand	Surplus
Senior government managers and officials	Medium Demand	Surplus
Food counter attendants, kitchen helpers, and related support occupations	Medium Demand	Surplus
Registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses	Medium Demand	Surplus
Cashiers	Low Demand	Surplus

¹ Alberta's Short-Term Employment Forecast 2019-2021. Government of Alberta (2019). Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/61843e6c-f254-4c93-81b2-36d8f03e6a31/resource/cc430dfa-00e3-48e3-8377-1eaf4b26c39a/download/lbr-alberta-short-term-employment-forecast-stef-2019-2021.pdf>

² Alberta's Occupational Outlook 2019-2028. Government of Alberta (2019). Retrieved from <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/8987e228-9ffa-4a2e-9f79-a9b869df2ccb/resource/502659ff-47fb-4ce3-94db-6a0c2f1f722c/download/lbr-albertas-occupational-outlook-2019-2028.pdf>

Difficult to Recruit Occupations:

Respondents were asked, for each occupational titles they chose (up to maximum of five), to identify one response from a list that best describes their experience in recruiting employees to that position within the past year. Table 3 shows that overall, most respondents fell within two categories: either they did not experience challenges filling new posted positions, or they did not hire any new employees in the past year (77% of mentions).

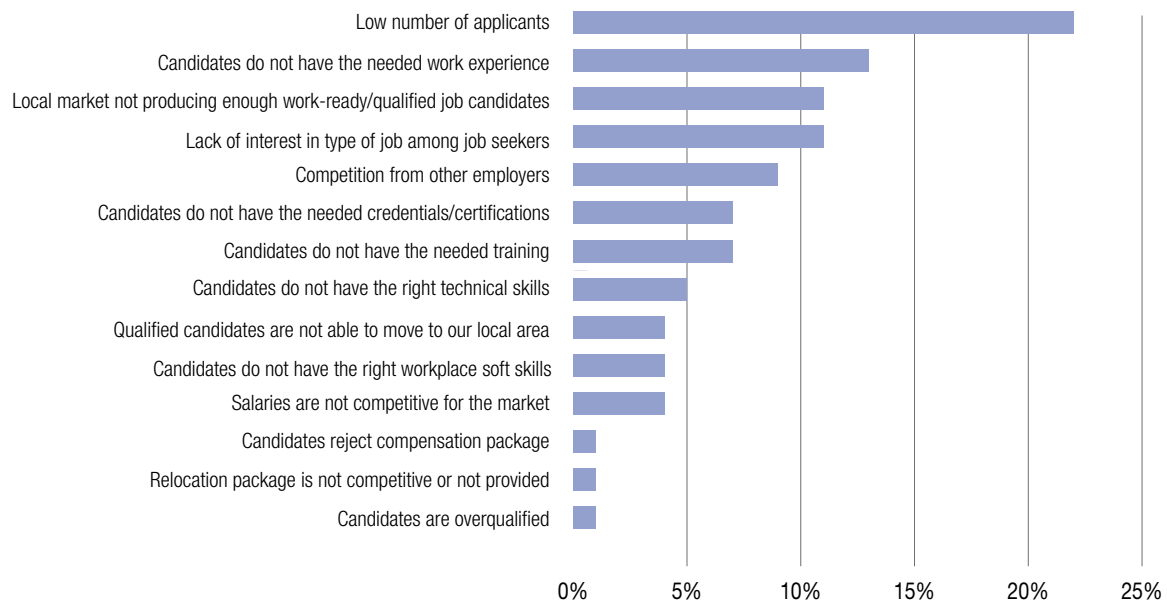
Table 3: Experience in Recruiting Employees Within the Past Year

Experience in Recruiting Employees Within the Past Year	Number of Responses	% of Responses (n=3180)	% of Cases (n=636)
Did not experience difficulty in recruiting employees	2,201	69%	346%
Not applicable as we did not hire new employees last year	267	8%	42%
Low number of applicants	154	5%	24%
Candidates do not have the needed work experience	95	3%	15%
Local market not producing enough work-ready/qualified job candidates	76	2%	12%
Lack of interest in type of job among job seekers	75	2%	12%
Competition from other employers	62	2%	10%
Candidates do not have the needed credentials/certifications	52	2%	8%
Candidates do not have the needed training	51	2%	8%
Candidates do not have the right technical skills	38	1%	6%
Qualified candidates are not able to move to our local area	32	1%	5%
Candidates do not have the right workplace soft skills	26	1%	4%
Salaries are not competitive for the market	25	1%	4%
Candidates reject compensation package	10	0%	2%
Candidates are overqualified	8	0%	1%
Relocation package is not competitive or not provided	8	0%	1%
Total	3,180	99%	*

**Percentages do not add up to 100% because respondents could choose more than one response.*

Chart 5 displays the percentage of responses received for each of the predetermined recruitment experiences. Of those who did experience challenges, the most frequently mentioned challenges were the low number of applicants, candidates not having the needed work experience, the local market not producing enough work-ready/qualified job applicants, a lack of interest in the type of job among job seekers, and competition from other employers.

Chart 5: Recruitment Experience During the Past Year (n=712)



Recruitment Experience:

All 636 survey respondents listed a combined total of 1,258 occupations in the survey, which were coded into occupational categories. Table 4 shows that 50 per cent of occupations fell under the categories of 'not experiencing difficulty' or 'not hiring in the past year'. Survey results show that there is a lot of variability in recruitment experiences when it comes to the types of occupations respondents were recruiting for. The occupations listed by the respondents represent unskilled, skilled, trades, and professional categories of occupations.

Table 4: Recruitment Experience		
Recruitment Experience	Count (n=1,258)	%
Did not experience difficulty in recruiting employees	386	30.7%
Not applicable as we did not hire new employees last year	251	20.0%
Low number of applicants	138	11.0%
Candidates do not have the needed work experience	90	7.2%
Local market not producing enough work-ready/qualified job candidates	70	5.6%
Lack of interest in type of job among job seekers	69	5.5%
Competition from other employers	50	4.0%
Candidates do not have the needed credentials/certifications	45	3.6%
Candidates do not have the needed training	45	3.6%
Candidates do not have the right technical skills	27	2.1%
Qualified candidates are not able to move to our local area	27	2.1%
Salaries are not competitive for the market or relocation package is not competitive or not provided	21	1.7%
Candidates do not have the right workplace soft skills	19	1.5%
Candidates reject compensation package or candidates are overqualified	17	1.3%
Total	1,258	100.1%

Note: Fewer than 10 counts of responses are suppressed and/or aggregated on the above table.

The other half of responses were distributed among 14 recruitment experiences.

The following is a summary of key differences between recruitment experiences, and a sample of some of the comments that survey respondents provided:

Low number of applicants: Of those who hired within the past year (138 occupations falling into this category), low number of applicants was the most frequently cited recruitment challenge. The most frequently cited occupational categories that experienced this issue include transport truck drivers, heavy-duty equipment mechanics, heavy equipment operators, and retail salespersons.

Candidates do not have the needed work experience: There were 90 occupations identified with this experience. The most frequently cited occupational categories that experienced this issue include transport truck drivers, heavy equipment operators, general farm workers, and restaurant and food service managers.

“Combine operator courses should be provided through post secondary or from the farm machinery manufacturers (example John Deere) for adults to be trained to operate machinery worth millions of dollars. Not sufficient training or experience.”

“It is harder to hire a class 1 driver due to the reason that insurance [requires] the driver to have at least 4 years experience hauling dangerous goods.”

Local market not producing enough work-ready/qualified job candidates: A total of 70 occupations were identified with this experience. Heavy equipment operators and transport truck drivers were the most frequently cited occupational categories with this challenge.

“Local candidates do not have the education requirements and/or work experience suitable for the vacancy.”

Lack of interest in type of job among job seekers: There were 69 occupations associated with this recruitment experience. General farm workers and food counter attendants were the most frequently cited occupational categories with this challenge.

“As a pharmacy owner in a rural centre, I cannot seem to coax pharmacists from the bigger urban areas – even with a high[er] than marketplace wage.”

“This is not a short-term problem. [T]he lack of a degree granting program in [Grande Prairie] is an issue.”



Competition from other employers: A total of 50 occupations were identified with this experience. The most frequently cited occupational categories included transport truck drivers, administrative assistants, secondary and elementary school teachers, and registered nurses.

“Good machine operators tend to get hired [for] resource extraction activities. We cannot match salary to attract the strong candidates.”

“For Fort McMurray, the wages we pay our class 5 drivers are very good, however they cannot compete with the wages and perks such as living allowances, etc, available at many companies at oil sites.”

“Provincially-run hospitals and care homes steal our employees on a constant basis.”

Candidates do not have the needed credentials/certifications: There were 45 occupations identified for this recruitment experience. Some of the most frequently cited occupational categories were transport truck drivers, program leaders in recreation, sport, and fitness, and motor vehicle body repairers.

“It is [a] constant challenge trying to find certified ski and snowboard instructors. Especially ones that are willing to work in smaller northern communities versus big mountain destination operations.”

“Being in a rural community, staff are very hard to find especially with the [certification] that is required to work with children. Existing staff are stressed due to high staff turnover and are continuously training new staff.”

“There are very few autobody technicians in the area to hire. We have had no one with their full ticket apply despite numerous ads.”

Candidates do not have the needed training: There were 45 occupations identified for this recruitment experience. Some of the most frequently cited occupational categories were transport truck drivers, heavy equipment operators, and accounting technicians and bookkeepers.

Candidates do not have the right technical skills: There were 27 occupations associated with this experience. Most of the occupations were trades oriented, compared to other categories. Transport truck drivers was among the most frequently cited occupational categories.

Qualified candidates are not able to move to our local area: There were 27 occupations associated with this experience. The most frequently cited occupational categories included registered nurses, transport truck drivers and civil engineers.

“Journeyman parts people are hard to attract to our local area. We are left hiring inexperienced people and working with them through the apprenticeship program. This is costly. Especially if when trained, the employee leaves.”

“There have been very few applications for the position as the local market is [not] producing enough qualified [Doctors of Veterinary Medicine] DVM, and it is extremely difficult to attract candidates to Northern Alberta (3.5 hours north of Edmonton) for any level of compensation or benefits (those being offered are above the provincial average already).”

Salaries are not competitive for the market: A total of 21 occupations were associated with this experience. The most frequently cited occupational categories included welders and transport truck drivers.

Candidates do not have the right workplace soft skills: There were 19 occupations associated with this recruitment experience. The most frequently cited were retail salespersons and administrative assistants.

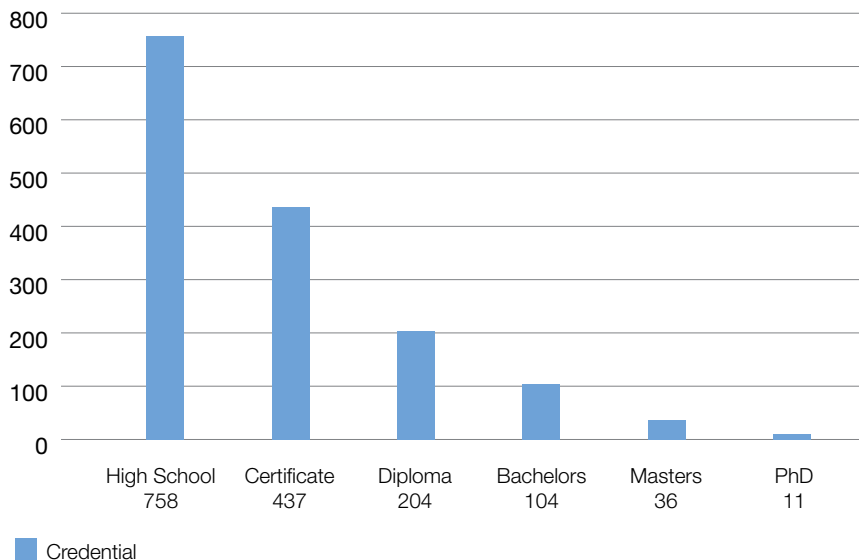
Candidates reject compensation package: Only nine occupations were associated with this experience. Heavy-duty equipment mechanics were the most frequently cited occupational categories.

Candidates are overqualified: Only eight occupations were associated with this experience. Most were unskilled labour (cooks, shelf stockers, labourers).

Educational requirements:

Respondents were asked what the educational requirements were for each in-demand occupation in their establishment. More than one response was permitted. Chart 6 summarizes the results. Respondents were most likely to indicate high school and certificates as requirements rather than diplomas, bachelor's degrees, masters, or doctorates.

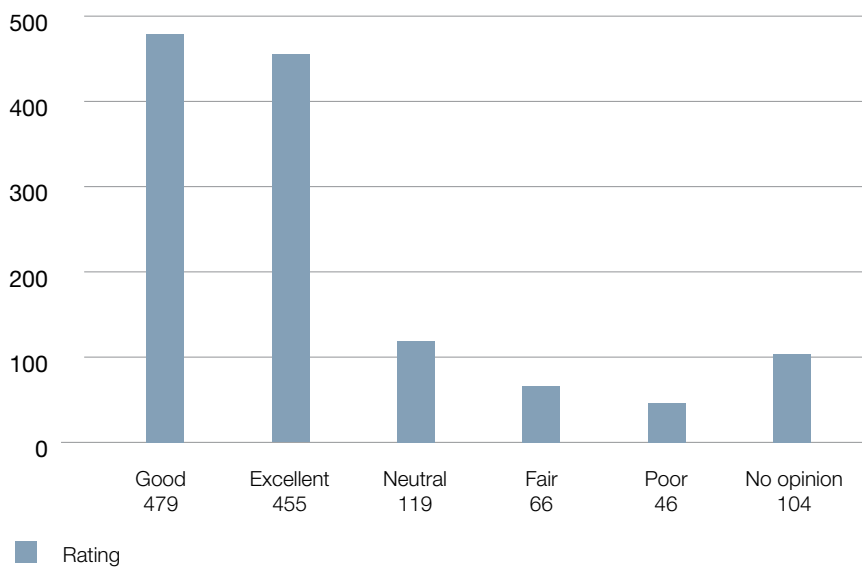
Chart 6: Educational Requirements of In-Demand Occupations (Overall; n= 1550)



Self-Assessment of Retention Efforts:

Respondents were asked to assess their own retention efforts for in-demand occupations in their establishments. Chart 7 summarizes the results overall. Most respondents assessed their retention efforts as good or excellent.

Chart 7: Assessment of Retention Efforts (Overall; n= 1,269)



With regard to those respondents who rated their retention efforts as excellent, the occupations associated with this rating were varied. Some of the reasons for the excellent retention efforts were competitive compensation, offering benefits and training, and creating a great working environment.

For those respondents who rated their retention efforts as poor, the occupations associated with this rating ranged from labourers all the way to Chief Administrative Officers. Some of the reasons for the poor ratings are just as varied: lower pay compared to oil and gas, wanting to move back to a big city, high turnover, not enough work, no perks or extra recognition for experience, low number of qualified candidates, wanting to be paid a lot for little work, and low interest in the job itself.

Conclusion

The results presented in this report are descriptive based on 636 usable responses. The reader is urged to use caution in generalizing results, as the sample may not be representative of all sectors and regions of northern Alberta. For example, the sample and population datasets from OSI contained a lot of missing data with regard to the number of employees in businesses across the NADC region. The sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting, construction, finance and insurance, other services (except public administration), and transportation and warehousing were either underrepresented or over-represented in the sample and population datasets, as values for the sample and the population varied greatly.

Information for 2020 Workforce Survey was collected in February 2020. As a result, survey results do not reflect the impacts of COVID-19 or recently announced government supports. This report in combination with other existing studies and future post-pandemic research, may help provide further insights on the post-pandemic workforce and recruitment challenges in the north.

To learn more about the NADC's initiatives, reports and bursary programs, please visit www.nadc.ca.

