



Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce Newsletter

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 3

FALL, 2010

DID YOU KNOW?

- Alberta's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 6.5% in August 2010, up 0.2 percentage points from July 2010.
- Full-time employment increased by 10,900 people while part-time employment decreased by 15,600 people from July 2010.
- Year-over-year, Alberta's employment increased by 29,000 people and the labour force by 13,500 people.
- The following industries experienced the most employment gains in August compared to July 2010: Educational Services 7,300 people, Wholesale and Retail Trade 4,900 people, and Forestry, Fishing, Mining Oil and Gas 2,600 people.

A Message from the Minister

Premier Ed Stelmach has identified improved competitiveness as an important challenge facing the province. During a forum in early June he said competitiveness is about more than just reducing the cost of doing business. It's about improving the things that influence why a person would choose to live, visit, invest or do business here.

Premier Stelmach has established a competitiveness council to involve industry in the development of specific actions to increase competitiveness. The council recognized five economic factors influencing our level of competitiveness. They include: taxes and fiscal policy, productivity and innovation, transportation and infrastructure, regulation and human capital.

As the Minister of Employment and Immigration, the last point is especially pertinent. We've been focusing on developing the human capital of our labour force for years, but particularly since 2006 with the introduction of the comprehensive Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce (BETW) strategy.

During the four years of implementing BETW we have achieved some significant successes. But we must do more. Notwithstanding the general global economic uncertainty, government and many industry sectors are anticipating an economic recovery and a return to labour shortages.

We can't rest on our laurels. We have to take the lessons learned from the last labour shortage and put them to use to lessen the future shortage.

That's why I am hosting a workforce forum in October to gather the leaders of industry, business, education and government to identify the gaps between what we are doing today in workforce development versus what we need to be doing.

We need to be certain that all those involved in building and educating our workforce are doing what's necessary to inform, attract, develop and retain the kind of workforce we will need in the future.

Alberta will need to be a fierce contender and competitive player in the global labour marketplace if we are to be successful in attracting and retaining talented people.



Minister Thomas A. Lukaszuk

Honourable Thomas A. Lukaszuk
Minister of Employment and Immigration

Government
of Alberta

Get on Board

Students join contest to retain school bus drivers

The provincial Get on Board campaign provided an opportunity for Alberta youth to help retain skilled school bus drivers throughout the province.

Through the Get on Board contest, students grade 7 through 12 in all Alberta school jurisdictions were able to ponder the themes of "We love school bus drivers" and "We need school bus drivers" and consider the integral role school bus drivers play in the successful education of our youth.

School bus drivers are an integral and often overlooked part of the education system.

The "We Love School Bus Drivers" contest saw projects created to highlight the importance and value of the drivers and what they mean to the education system.

Students prepared video and audio clips that promoted the need for professional school bus drivers.

The Get on Board campaign will have long-term benefits through the creation of a School Bus Driver Human Resources Toolkit. Working closely with the school bus driver coordinators and using electronic media, a site will be developed that can be accessed by school divisions and school bus driver coordinators. All the video and audio clips, recruitment and retention information and other tools will be available to the school bus industry.

The Get on Board tour has travelled to more than 100 Alberta communities. The events have played a major

part in the School Bus Driver Appreciation and Retention campaign. The coordinators have spoken with more than 2,000 school bus drivers and several hundreds of potential school bus drivers. The feedback from both the bus companies and school divisions was very positive.

The Get On Board contest was hoping for 20 – 30 submissions from schools but ended up receiving 248. Submissions were judged in early May and all winners have been contacted.

The *Get On Board Toolkit* is now being developed, and media winners are now posted on the Alberta Student Transportation Advisory Council's website at www.astac.ca (click on Toolkit, then Multimedia).

Get on Board contest entries



Retention workshops get Calgary employers' attention

Bob is the kind of guy who shows up to work on time, brings a great attitude, constantly looks for new challenges and learning opportunities and has an eye for management. Bob even organized a staff family picnic day.

Next year, however, someone else will have to organize it because Bob left

the company. This fictional scenario is becoming all too familiar for Alberta employers.

"We've kept only about one third of our workforce from a couple of years ago," said one employer who attended a recent Employment and Immigration (E&I) employer workshop on staff retention. "These are our very best and we need to hang on to them."

Employers who have taken part in the Beyond Pay and Benefits: Employee Retention Strategies workshops realize that although the current economic environment has had its challenges, it does provide opportunities for forward-thinking businesses.

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Why employers hire and keep people with disabilities

The best reason for hiring and keeping people with disabilities is the same as the reason for hiring and keeping any one else—the skills, experience and attributes they bring to the job.

- Competitive advantage: A diverse group of employees is more likely to think like,

identify with and meet the needs of a diverse range of customers.

- Problem-solving skills: People with disabilities have lots of life experience solving challenging problems.
- Public image: Employing people with disabilities helps establish a positive image.

- Larger talent pool: In the past, job seekers with disabilities have often been an untapped labour source. New technologies and increased access to post-secondary education is allowing even more people with disabilities to reach their full potential.

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Retention workshops in Calgary

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“We have recently heard from employers that although Alberta was hit hard by the recession, the economy appears to be moving toward recovery,” said Bruce Cameron, Business and Industry Liaison with E&I. “Smart businesses recognize the need to retain their key employees and practical ideas, such as work-life balance, are vital to employers.”

Two of these employer workshops incorporate an important BETW initiative - retention. By using practical exercises, concrete examples and discussion, employers enhance their learning and bring out innovative strategies.

The workshop helps employers:

- Learn about the high cost of turnover and the need to retain staff.
- Explore generational differences in the workforce and how to better understand and work effectively with employees of all ages.
- Increase awareness of how to show appreciation; use a wide-range of retention strategies to create an organization where people want to work.

“We will create an overall strategy of communicating with staff to make sure we give them what they want in terms of schedule, flexibility and projects,” said one employer.

Another workshop that has also piqued the interest of employers is Better Balance, Better Business: Employee Work-Life Balance Strategies.

The workshop challenges employers to:

- Enhance their understanding of employee work-life balance and how making it a priority will benefit the business and employees.
- Consider new options, learn about relevant resources.
- Begin to create a plan to enhance their reputation as an employer who cares about employees' work-life balance.



Sally Bardoel and Bruce Cameron inform employers about key retention strategies

By recognizing the costs of work-life conflicts such as reduced productivity and increased absenteeism, employers realize that implementing work-life balance strategies help both the company and the employees.

“Workaholic environments need to be assessed. The workaholic shouldn't be perceived as the hero,” said one employer. “There is no benefit to workaholicism and we need to replace it with healthier behavior.”

For upcoming workshops in Calgary visit: www.employment.alberta.ca/Calgary-workshops

Disability supports and services help persons with disabilities maintain employment



A wheelchair accessible minivan. Photo courtesy of Vantage Mobility International

Craig became a paraplegic after he was injured in a vehicle accident.

To maintain his job, Craig needed a modified van that allowed him to get in and out of the vehicle from his power wheelchair. The van conversion allowed Craig to take on jobs out of the city which helped him advance in his career.

Without Disability Related Employment Supports (DRES) and the modified vehicle, Craig would have to remain at the home office, unable to work to his full potential.

DRES provides supports in three different areas:

- Education Supports are intended to ensure that employment destined individuals with disabilities receive the same educational opportunities as non-disabled Albertans.
- Job Search Supports assist individuals with disabilities to seek and obtain employment.
- Workplace Supports assist individuals with disabilities to make the transition to the workplace and to maintain employment.

DRES may assist with the costs of adapting the workplace to accommodate the needs of the

person with a disability. In other cases, the accommodations carry no cost and can benefit other employees as well. The employer may allow an individual to change their work hours or take breaks at certain times. Special workplace signage or arranging an office space differently may also be needed.

Employers have a duty to Accommodate; however, some employers may be eligible to share the cost of disability supports and services.

Examples of Workplace Supports include:

- Sign language interpreters for job interviews and employee orientation.
- Specialized technology such as screen magnifiers, voice-activated software, Braille, screen readers, and one handed keyboards.
- Voice activated software such as Dragon Naturally Speaking for those who have limited access to computer software.

For more information, visit www.employment.alberta.ca/dres.

Employees with disabilities

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- Universal access: Hiring people with disabilities promotes universal access, which benefits everyone. For example, automatic doors installed for employees with disabilities make it easier for other people to enter the premises.
- Preparation for future changes: As the population

ages, employers will need to know how to support their aging customers' and employees' changes in mobility, learning, work style and communication. People with disabilities have lots of expertise in this area.

- Loyalty: People with disabilities have better work

attendance and stay longer with their employers than the average worker.

For more information, visit the TIPS home page at www.alis.alberta.ca/tips and select the audience People with Disabilities.

Productivity Alberta...your productivity



The business of busyness is often the story of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The shop floor is fully used; the staff are busy doing 'stuff,' and the profit and loss statements are in the black. This has lulled Alberta business owners and managers into thinking that all is fine and cash flows will always be strong.

Unfortunately, being busy is not the same as being productive. The busyness that defines the operations and management of SMEs is usually the very thing holding back the growth and long-term sustainability of a company and its employees.

When businesses think of productivity improvement, they quickly think new computer systems, software, new manufacturing equipment, and expensive renovations. There's a certain amount of truth in that thinking – enterprise-wide systems and real estate can be very expensive and can have

questionable economics and payback timelines. But as Lori Schmidt, Senior Director of Productivity Alberta with Alberta Finance and Enterprise puts it, "There are a lot of simple things that businesses can do – like getting employees more engaged – which can really enhance productivity and increase profits."

That's where Productivity Alberta comes in. Based in Edmonton, but serving every region of the province, the team at Productivity Alberta helps SMEs identify productivity challenges and improve their profitability and performance.

The recently launched Productivity Assessment Tool is generating strong interest across Alberta. This one-of-a kind interactive web tool was developed by and for Alberta businesses. Taking as little as 40 minutes to complete, it helps companies unlock

challenges they didn't know they had. It asks a series of key questions about a company that examines the three key elements of productivity: leadership and management, innovation, and operational practices.

So far, the new assessment tool has been used by over 100 companies and has provided targeted connections to programs and services that can make real differences. Schmidt confirms this by saying, "Productivity Alberta is driven by industry's needs and we're ready to work with them in any number of areas. Businesses need only visit our website or call one of our staff to begin on the path toward productivity and profitability."

Productivity Alberta is a service of Alberta Finance and Enterprise. For more information on Productivity Alberta and the Productivity Assessment Tool, visit www.ProductivityAlberta.ca/tools/assessment or call 310-0000 (toll-free across Alberta), then dial (780) 427-6648.

Hiring and retaining immigrants is beneficial to business

Government is working to attract and retain skilled immigrants to ensure that Alberta's economy remains competitive and prosperous. Immigrants bring to our province a wealth of skills, and experience. It is to our economic advantage to help them fully utilize their skills as quickly as possible.

To make it easier for newcomers to participate in Alberta's workforce, the Government of Alberta (GOA) launched A Foreign Qualification Recognition (FQR) Plan for Alberta in 2008. Through this initiative, GOA is collaborating with employers, post-secondary institutions, and other stakeholders to make the recognition of foreign qualifications as smooth as possible.

Employers are increasingly seeing great benefits in hiring and retaining immigrants.

Two employer forums were recently held promoting the hiring and retaining of immigrants. Each forum gathered feedback on support and resources available to employers. Tonya Syvitski, the Talent Attraction Manager at KPMG LLP, said during one of the forums that new immigrants hired at KPMG have provided additional expertise, innovation and diversity to KPMG's clients. "As the world of business becomes more globally connected, many new immigrants join KPMG as experts in international accounting practices," said Syvitski.

Employment and Immigration (E&I) Minister Thomas A. Lukaszuk was the keynote speaker at the Calgary Forum while MLA and

Parliamentary Assistant Teresa Woo-Paw was the keynote speaker at the Edmonton Forum. The Employer Forums were supported by E&I, and organized by the Talent Pool of Calgary and the Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council. The forums were supported as part of the implementation of actions under the FQR Plan for which E&I has a lead responsibility.

Some of the many benefits of hiring and retaining skilled immigrants are:

- Meeting the challenges associated with the future labour and skills shortages while the Canadian-born workforce is shrinking.
- Increasing cultural competence (such as multi-language skills) for companies doing business around the world.
- Bringing high levels of education, innovation and international perspective and expertise.

To promote FQR and the benefits of prior learning, NorQuest College hosted a symposium on April 8, 2010. The symposium brought together experts to generate discussion and share information and best practices. Minister Lukaszuk addressed the symposium and stressed the importance of FQR and prior learning initiatives in helping employers make the most of the skills that immigrants bring to our province.

The International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) also contributes to the implementation of the

FQR Plan. Through the assessment of foreign credentials, IQAS issues certificates that indicate how the educational qualifications from outside of Canada compare with Canadian and provincial standards. Immigrants have reported favorably about their experiences with IQAS.

Manuel earned a Commerce degree at a University in Chile and applied to IQAS to have his education assessed. Now living and working in Alberta, Manuel recognizes the value of the assessment service:

"The IQAS assessment can benefit anyone who is coming from a different country. It is good to be recognized for the training or studies done overseas...It has definitely been a good thing for me to do," he said.

The first FQR annual report is nearing completion. Inquiries may be directed to FQRPlan@gov.ab.ca.

For more information on the FQR Plan, please visit: www.employment.alberta.ca/fqr.



MLA and Parliamentary Assistant Teresa Woo-Paw was the keynote speaker at the Edmonton Employer Forum on March 2, 2010

This link provides information about working in specific occupations in Alberta: www.albertacanada.com/regulatedoccupations.