

Future Vision Scan Survey Report

Prepared for the
Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse

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Introduction

In an attempt to get a broad picture of the training environment that our partner institutions will face five years from now, the Clearinghouse recently conducted a survey of leaders in industry, communities and institutions throughout northern Alberta. We asked them to imagine themselves in the year 2002, looking back over the changes that they have seen since 1997 in the areas of employment and skills demand, and over the major developments affecting northern Albertans and changes in the delivery of post-secondary education and training.

The survey respondents are an optimistic group on the whole, predicting employment growth spurred on by resource development. They also look forward to greater cooperation between educational institutions and industry and among the institutions themselves.

Methodology

A total of 74 surveys were sent to individuals chosen from the NADC's database of key northern contacts. Those surveyed included business leaders, former NADC council members, municipal leaders, Aboriginal leaders and other government personnel who deal with northern issues. This is not a random sampling and is therefore not representative of the population as a whole. What we wanted was the best guesses of the those in a position to influence the future of the region.

The survey is a one-page questionnaire (see Appendix). Where possible, the surveys were sent out by fax, with a small number being mailed. Those surveyed were asked to return the survey by fax within two weeks. Those who had not responded after ten days were contacted by phone, which some surveys being re-faxed.

Responses

Including those that arrived after the September 30 deadline, a total of 37 responses were received, for a 50% response rate. Of the responses 23, (62%) were from the public sector and 14 (38%) were from the private sector. Geographically, the largest number of responses came from the Peace region (14 responses), followed by north-central Alberta (9), Edmonton (6), Lakeland (5) and the northeast (3).

Several of the responses came not from those to whom the surveys were addressed but from others within the same organization; often from Human Resource Managers.

The one group not represented among the respondents is Aboriginal community leaders. The lone Aboriginal respondent is a businessperson.

Results

Closed-ended

All of the questions asked respondents to picture themselves in the year 2002, looking back over the previous five years. For the first two questions, respondents were asked to check the appropriate boxes in tables identical to those below.

Question 1: From 1997 to 2002, how have **employment levels** changed in your industry/ community/institution and in northern Alberta as a whole?

Without exception, our respondents are optimistic about employment growth in northern Alberta over the next five years. All but four foresee at least a small increase in employment in their own industry, community or institution as well as in the region as a whole. Those in the private sector seems to be slightly more optimistic than the public sector.

Table 1: Predicted change in employment levels 1997 - 2002

	Decrease	Small Decrease	No change	Small Increase	Increase	No Response
Industry / Community / Institution		2	2	10	20	3
All Northern Alberta				9	27	1

Question 2: Please describe the change in **demand** for the following major **skill sets** from 1997 to 2002.

Most of those surveyed expect demand for all skill sets to grow. They are most enthusiastic about the need for computer skills and for trade and related skills. Respondents are least optimistic about Health and Social Services and Teaching and Related skill sets.

Table 2: Predicted Change in skill set demand 1997 - 2002

Skill Set	Decline	Slight Decline	No Change	Slight Growth	Growth	No Response
Trades & Related			1	7	28	1
Business and Management			1	18	18	
Computers			1	3	32	1
Health & Social Services	1	1	7	16	10	2
Teaching & Related		2	7	17	10	1
Sales & Service			4	11	21	1

Open-ended

The remaining two questions are open-ended questions about the major changes in the lives of northern Albertans and about the delivery of post-secondary education and training. The responses to both of these reveal a strong consensus on the changes in the region from 1997 to 2002.

Question 3: What development between 1997 and 2002 has had the biggest impact on the lives of northern Albertans?

The expansion of resource industries is, by far, the most popular choice for high-impact developments in the region. Almost all respondents mention one or more resource. Oilsands developments lead the way with other oil and gas developments and forestry close behind.

Other developments mentioned include:

- an increase in value-added production in agriculture and forestry
- the improvement of transportation infrastructure
- the increased use of information technology
- increased population
- increased or decreased levels of government services

One respondent foresees a change in how people approach their careers: “People will be much more self-directed business-oriented than job-oriented (as they are) now.”

Question 4: What have been the most significant developments in the delivery of post-secondary education and training in the region?

The majority of respondents focussed on four areas in answering this question:

Distance education

Many respondents expect to see more education and training available throughout the region via various forms of distance education, including the Internet

Expanded range of programs available

The new technologies available and increasing demand for education and training will combine to widen the range of courses offered in the region. In particular, people foresee an increase in the availability of trades related training.

Cooperation between institutions and industries and communities

Educational institutions will have to become more responsive to the needs of industries in the region. This can be best accomplished by working in partnership with those industries to develop new programs. Likewise, partnerships with the various communities that they serve will help the colleges to meet the needs of a variety of students.

Cooperation among institutions

Many respondents see a need for colleges to work together to serve the region. One respondent looking back from the year 2002 states, "Colleges can no longer offer a full curriculum. They have cooperated amongst themselves in selecting 'specialties' for which (each is) the only college in the North delivering particular courses. This has reduced costs to allow development of new courses in the 'knowledge economy'."

Other predictions include:

- increased trades training available in high schools
- development of a First Nations College
- more financial aid to students
- funding shortfall
- more funding
- more programs for growing populations of disadvantaged - aboriginal - youth
- privatized skills training
- increased part-time training and employment
- more personal development skills/pre-employment training

Not everyone is hopeful of change in post-secondary education. One respondent writes, "Developments have been sufficiently small in scope and impact as to not be noticed".

Summary

The northern leaders who responded to our survey are "bullish" on northern Alberta's future. Resource development, they tell us, will lead the way in generating employment throughout the

region and creating greater demand for most employment skills, especially in trades and computers.

Five years from now, our respondents say, northern Alberta will produce less in the way of bulk commodities and more value-added goods. The North will also be less isolated thanks to an improved and expanded road system and, more significantly, through the widespread use of computer-based communication technology.

Cooperation and technology will be major factors in the delivery of post-secondary education and training in the year 2002. According to the leaders surveyed, distance education technologies will allow colleges to deliver a wider array of courses to more people in more places five years from now. The selection of course will be made in response to the needs of business and industry in northern Alberta, which will be determined by the colleges working in close partnerships with business and industry. Northern colleges will also cooperate closely with each other in order to avoid duplication of programming and to deliver courses efficiently.

Contacts

For reasons of confidentiality we cannot list the survey respondents.