

Entry-Level Qualifications

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Introduction

The Clearinghouse partner institutions serve many students who are working toward their high school diplomas (or equivalents). A significant portion of those students will, for any number of reasons, never complete their full high school program although they may complete grade 12 in some subjects. This report asks whether employers will hire applicants with partial grade 12 completion and, if so, which subjects are the most important for those applicants to have completed at the grade 12 level.

Many employers, particularly smaller ones, are open to hiring non-graduates who have some applicable skills and who have a strong work ethic. In terms of academics, most of these employers look for people with grade 12 level Math, English and Science.

Methods

This report is based on a combination of secondary research and a small survey of employers in northern Alberta. The survey was faxed out to 17 employers throughout the region. Most went to forestry and oil & gas industry companies, with a few going to hotels and large retail operations. A total of 12 responses were received from a mixture of large and small companies, mostly in the forest sector. Information on the oil & gas industry comes from previous Clearinghouse research and other secondary sources.

Survey Results

Question 1: What level of education do you prefer your entry-level, or labourer, employees to have?

All of respondents said that they prefer most entry-level employees to have grade 12. Two employers said that grade 9 was enough for some positions, and one stated that some post-secondary training would be nice, while grade 12 was mandatory.

Question 2: If you prefer grade 12, are you willing to consider applicants with grade 12 in some subjects, but without their high school diplomas?

Eleven respondents said “yes”, they would consider non-graduates. Three said “No”. All three who insist on high school graduation are large forest product companies.

Question 3: If Yes (to question 2), which subjects are most important for applicants to have completed at the grade 12 level?

Math is the most important subject according to our survey respondents; each employer who answered this question included math and five of them gave it the highest ranking. English was the second most popular choice, followed closely by sciences, particularly physics and computer studies. Two employers cited social studies and one mentioned industrial arts.

Question 4: *Outside of academics, what skills or qualities do you look for most in new employees?*

The following skills and qualities were all mentioned by respondents. Those in **bold** were mentioned by several employers:

Good attitude/work ethic/motivation	Physical fitness
People/Interpersonal/leadership skills	Common sense
Computer skills	Willingness to learn
Team skills	Willingness to listen
Mechanical aptitude	Appearance
Communication skills	Dependability
Reading comprehension	Honesty
Past history, future goals	Pleasing personality
Mental alertness	Flexibility in working hours
Assimilation	Ability to analyse problems
Adaptability	

General Points on Employment Qualifications

- Contractors hiring labourers would like to hire high school graduates but a strong work ethic is usually more important than a diploma.
- Larger companies are more likely to insist upon high school completion. A recent report, “Careers in the Pulp & Paper and Panelboard Industry” points out that higher qualifications are needed now for entry-level positions than in the past. Basic chemistry and math are needed in addition to interpersonal skills and a general technical aptitude. Also, entry-level operators do not share the job market advantages currently enjoyed by technicians and tradespeople. There is no shortage of workers with entry-level qualifications.
- Many employers look for new employees who have the potential to move up into positions which require strong math and reading skills
- A 1995 survey of Grande Prairie Chamber of Commerce members found that over one-half of employers require some post-secondary education as a minimum level of training.
- The recent high levels of activity in the resource sectors in northern Alberta created a shortage of trained workers in many fields. This forced many companies to hire people who did not have the qualifications usually required.
- The construction industry would like to see many more high school students involved in the RAP program as a way to get into trades.

- The oil & gas industry requires higher levels of training for their entry-level positions as well. Safety training is very helpful here as is roughneck training from the Petroleum Industry Training Service. Still, most energy contractors stress the importance of attitude over training when it comes to new employees.

Summary

Individuals who, for whatever reason, cannot complete their entire high school program should concentrate on obtaining grade 12 level credits in Math, English and Sciences in order to have the best chance of finding work in northern Alberta. Computer skills would also be very helpful.

Completing high school is a good step toward dependable employment, largely due to the doors that it opens for further training, but a diploma alone will not make up for a poor work ethic. Many Employers will overlook a lack of grade 12 Social Studies but they will not overlook tardiness or laziness. Any employment preparation courses that accompany Adult Upgrading programs should emphasize the importance of attitude in the work world.

Sources

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Contacts

Jo-Ann Boon, HRDC, 532-4411

Lynn Bowes, Accounting Clerk, Vanderwell Contractors, 849-3824

Barry Connolly, Area Manager, Tolko Industries Ltd, 523-2101

Merv Ellis, Alberta Construction Association

Bev Ewashko, Northland Forest Products, 743-3773

Derek Getty, Human Resources Consultant, Alpac, 525-8104

Marianne Gingles, Human Resources Coordinator, Weyerhaeuser Canada Ltd., Grande Prairie Operations, 539-8313

Jim Holte, Accountant, Manning Diversified Forest Products, 836-3111

Stephen Kushner, Alberta Contractors Association, 455-5999

Rob LaFontaine, Human Resources Coordinator, DMI Peace River Pulp, 624-7309

Bill Mitchell, General Manager, Boucher Bros. Lumber Ltd., 322-3945

Norman Parent, H.R. Manager, Weyerhaeuser Canada, Slave Lake Sturdi-Wood Mill, 849-4333

Harold Stuckert, Human Resources, Klinger Oilfield Services Ltd., (306) 825-7870

Betty Switzer, Employee Relations Supervisor, Millar Western Forest Products, 778-2221

John Vogt, General Manager, Travellers Motor Hotel, 624-3621