

# Challenges Facing Youth Transitioning to Work



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# Introduction

This report examines the changing nature of the labour market and its impact on youth employment, and ultimately, the quality of their lives. There are more temporary, seasonal and contract jobs, causing a wide fluctuation of work schedules, no benefits, and workers who cannot make personal and family plans. This has led to a decrease in job duration, with the traditional career ladder dismantled. Entry level jobs are outsourced and top level positions are hired from outside. Many are asking about Halton's youth and their future.

## Data Sources

The data used in this report comes from two data sets from Statistics Canada. The first is the 2011 National Household Survey. The replacement of the 2011 long form census by the voluntary National Household Survey (NHS) presents significant challenges in data availability, comparability, and reliability<sup>1</sup> in the development of this document.

Due to the change in data collection methodology from a mandatory long form census to a voluntary survey, the non-response rate of the NHS is significantly higher than those of the previous long form census. Statistics Canada warns users to use caution when comparing NHS data with earlier censuses and analyzing data at lower level of geography. Therefore, an alternate source of data is needed to look at trends.

Statistics Canada tracks the changes in the Canadian labour market via its monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS)<sup>2</sup> which is a survey carried out to identify labour force trends over time. However, it should be noted that the NHS and LFS use different sampling methods and definitions, so the figures from each of the datasets will be different and cannot be compared to each other. In this document, the LFS will be used for comparison and trends analysis.

However, the 2011 NHS data are used in developing a snapshot of the community. Also, the NHS data will not be mapped or studied at lower levels of geography (i.e. Census Tract or Dissemination Area).

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<sup>1</sup> Community Development Halton, *Changes to 2011 Census Threaten Community Data, Community Dispatch Vol.14 #5, 2011 National Household Survey, Community Dispatch, Vol.18 # 5, Limitations of the 2011 National Household Survey, Community Dispatch, Vol. 19, #1.*

<sup>2</sup> The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a household survey carried out monthly by Statistics Canada. Since its inception in 1945, the objectives of the LFS have been to divide the working-age population into three mutually exclusive classifications - employed, unemployed, and not in the labour force - and to provide descriptive and explanatory data on each of these categories. Data from the survey provide information on major labour market trends such as shifts in employment across industrial sectors, hours worked, labour force participation and unemployment rates.

## Context

The nature of work is changing. It is a complex issue, but things like global competition, decline in workers participating in unions and employers valuing their employees differently have all contributed to the shift that has occurred in the workplace.

Across Canada, it has been recognized that there is a problem with employment. Various issues have been identified as challenges within the labour market. High unemployment among youth, the fact that postsecondary education may not result in a good job and employers concerned with a shortage of skilled workers (Zisys, 2014:7). As well, issues of temporary employment, shortage of skills or experiences and income inequality have created a labour market that is polarized between good jobs and precarious jobs. To address these issues, it is critical to see workers are not a cost to be constrained but, rather, an asset to be invested in (Zisys, 2014:9).

The youth unemployment rate in 2014 of 13.5% is more than twice the rate of those above 25, youth employment has barely improved since the worst of the recession and youth labour force participation has declined substantially. Youth who do have a job are more likely to be working in a precarious, temporary position or to be working part-time involuntarily (Hatt, 2014). In a study of precarious work in Southern Ontario, it found that only 60% of Greater Toronto Area (GTA) workers today have stable, secure jobs (PEPSO, 2013). While this report focuses on workers that were not youth, it does point to the challenges youth will face in the future.

In a study looking at youth employment in Ontario, it found that only one in two youth are fortunate enough to be holding down a paying job (Geoby, 2013). Part of the challenge is that young workers are often the first to experience job loss when there is a downturn. As well, youth are competing with older workers who are staying in the work force longer, or with newcomers for the same scarce jobs. This despite the fact that many youths in Ontario are doing what is most often asked of them; that is, to get an education that will lead to a good job.

As young people are getting fewer of the jobs that are being created, there is a need for our governments to look at their role in developing appropriate public policy (Yalnizyan 2014). To this end, the federal government undertook a study of youth employment in Canada and submitted a report and recommendations to the House of Commons in June 2014. There were 23 recommendations submitted which included a number to encourage the federal government to continue with initiatives already underway. There was also a number of recommendations to help youth make better career decisions and deal with issues of

student loans, entrepreneurship and apprenticeships. Only one of the recommendations is actually concerned with creating job opportunities for youth but it too needs further study. Missing are any big ideas to actually tackle the problem of youth unemployment (Hatt, 2014).

The Broadbent Institute conducted a poll of millennials in the workforce and their parents to understand intergenerational similarities and differences when it comes to employment expectations (Broadbent Institute, 2014a). Results indicated that youth face precarious work with low benefits, lowered expectations for positive economic outcomes and that there is a lack of trust that corporations are working to create good jobs. As a result, the Broadbent Institute released a report “urging the development of a bold Youth Job Guarantee that would ensure those under age 25 have access to a good job, paid internship, or training position within four months of leaving formal education or becoming unemployed” (Broadbent Institute, 2014b, 2). A bold public policy direction is considered critical in any response to the challenges of young people transitioning to work.

Over the last number of years there has been significant changes in the employment services sector. The Ontario government unveiled a Youth Jobs Strategy as part of the province’s 2013 budget to help more young people find jobs or start their own businesses as well as attempting to help employers find the skilled workers they need.

The main program of the strategy was the Ontario Youth Employment Fund, which provides employers with funding to hire a student or recently graduated youth for four to six months for training and work experience. Other programs in the strategy include a Youth Innovation Fund to boost employment for graduates and post-graduate students in the high-demand areas of science, technology, engineering and math by providing internships at innovative companies; a Youth Entrepreneurship Fund to spark high school interest in entrepreneurship; and a fund called Youth Skills Connection, which promotes partnerships between business, nonprofits and educators to identify skills gaps and develop targeted training.<sup>3</sup>

As well, at the federal level, Ontario signed the Canada-Ontario Job Fund Agreement in March 2014. The agreement is a key source of funding for new, employer-driven, training initiatives and represents an opportunity for the province to engage more effectively with employers to support Ontarians in obtaining the skills required to fill and succeed in available jobs. The grant will provide direct financial support for employers who wish to purchase training for their workforce. This program is intended to support employers in

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/employmentontario/youthfund/>

taking a greater role in workforce development. The cost of training is a shared investment between employers and the government.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the 2015 Ontario Budget, the Ontario government renewed the Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy for another two years as it saw continued high youth unemployment. There are two new programs that are part of this renewed strategy. The first program is called Youth Job Connection, which is to provide intensive support and training to young people facing multiple barriers to employment.

This program is to offer paid training, jobs and mentorship to youth aged 15 to 29 who are not working, in school, or in training, and part-time after-school jobs for high school students between 15 and 18 who face challenging life circumstances.

The second program is called Youth Job Link that focuses on providing youth, including those who might already be working, with education or training. This new program aims to help young people find jobs through various resources and information, and is designed to also include summer job opportunities.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/coig/coig\\_faq.html](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/coig/coig_faq.html)



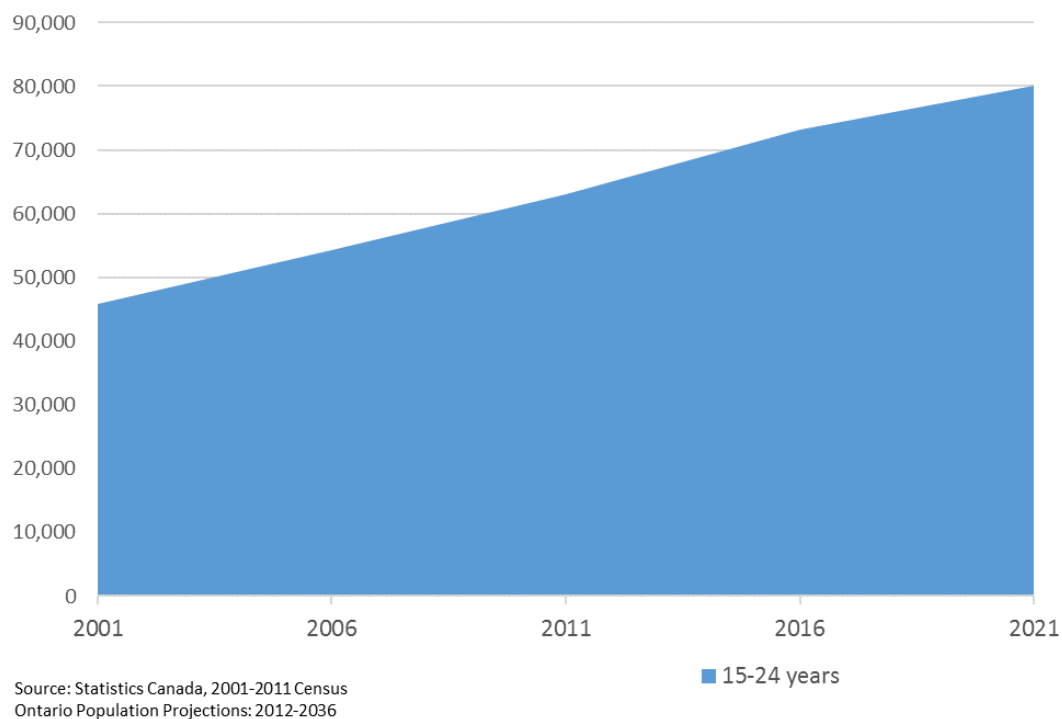
## Youth Population

For the purpose of this study, youth is defined as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. This definition is widely used by international agencies such as the United Nations and the World Bank, as well as Statistics Canada.

Youth related data released by Statistics Canada are usually further broken down by two age subgroups: 15-19 years and 20-24 years. While both groups can be in the labour market, the first group corresponds to those entering and completing high school education and the second group includes those completing postsecondary education.

In 2011, there were over 63,000 persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years living in Halton Region. They represent about 12% of the total population. According to the latest population projections prepared by the Ontario Ministry of Finance<sup>5</sup>, Halton's youth population will reach 80,000 by 2021 (Figure 1). Its share of the region's total population will remain the same at about 12%, where one in eight residents is a youth.

**Figure 1. Youth Population, Halton Region, 2001-2021**

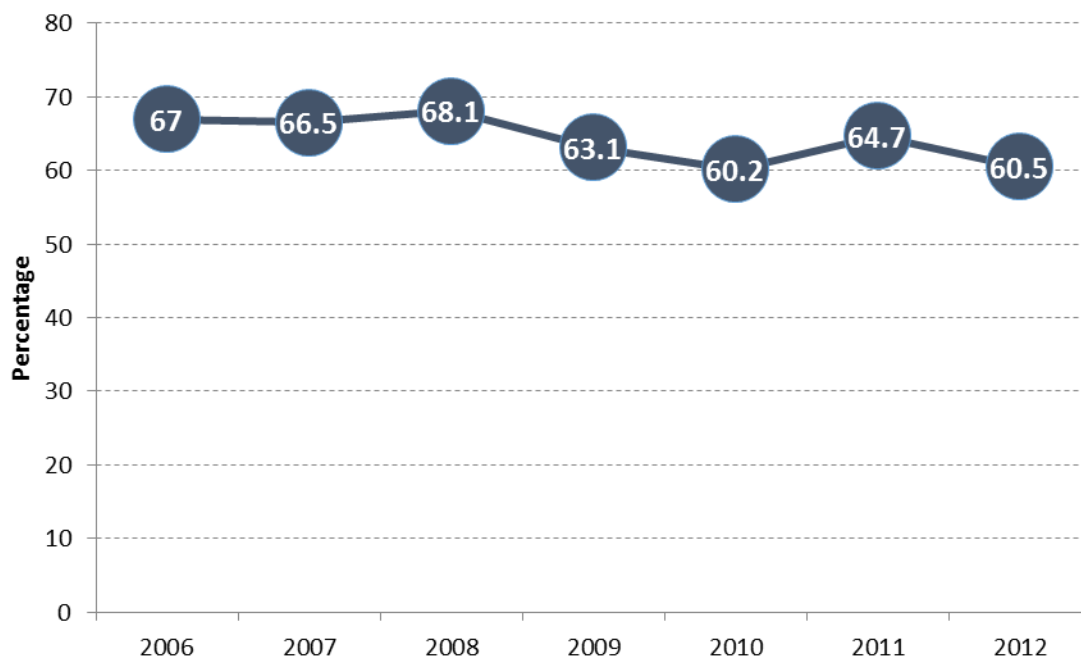


<sup>5</sup> Ontario Ministry of Finance, *Ontario Population Projections: 2012-2036*, Spring, 2013

## Labour Market Participation Rate

The participation rate refers to the proportion of the total population who are in the labour force, including those who are employed, looking for work or on temporary leave from work. It can include students, if they are working or looking for work. It does not include those outside the labour force, such as students not currently looking for work or stay at home parents not currently looking for work. Figure 2 indicates that the participation rate of Halton youth aged 15 to 24 years has decreased from 67% in 2006 to 60.5% in 2013. A decrease in the participation rate followed the economic downturn of 2008, which saw a large number of young people leave the labour market, and it has not recovered to pre-recession levels.

*Figure 2. Labour Force Participation Rate of 15-24 Year Olds, Halton, 2006-2012*



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Study, V0213\_24\_Table1 - Labour force estimate by age group

Within the Canadian context, the youth labour force participation rate declined between 2008 and 2014, the first significant, prolonged decline since the early 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Participation in the labour force for youth is linked to enrolment in school and most of the decline is explained by higher enrolment rates. Of particular note is the increase in the percentage of

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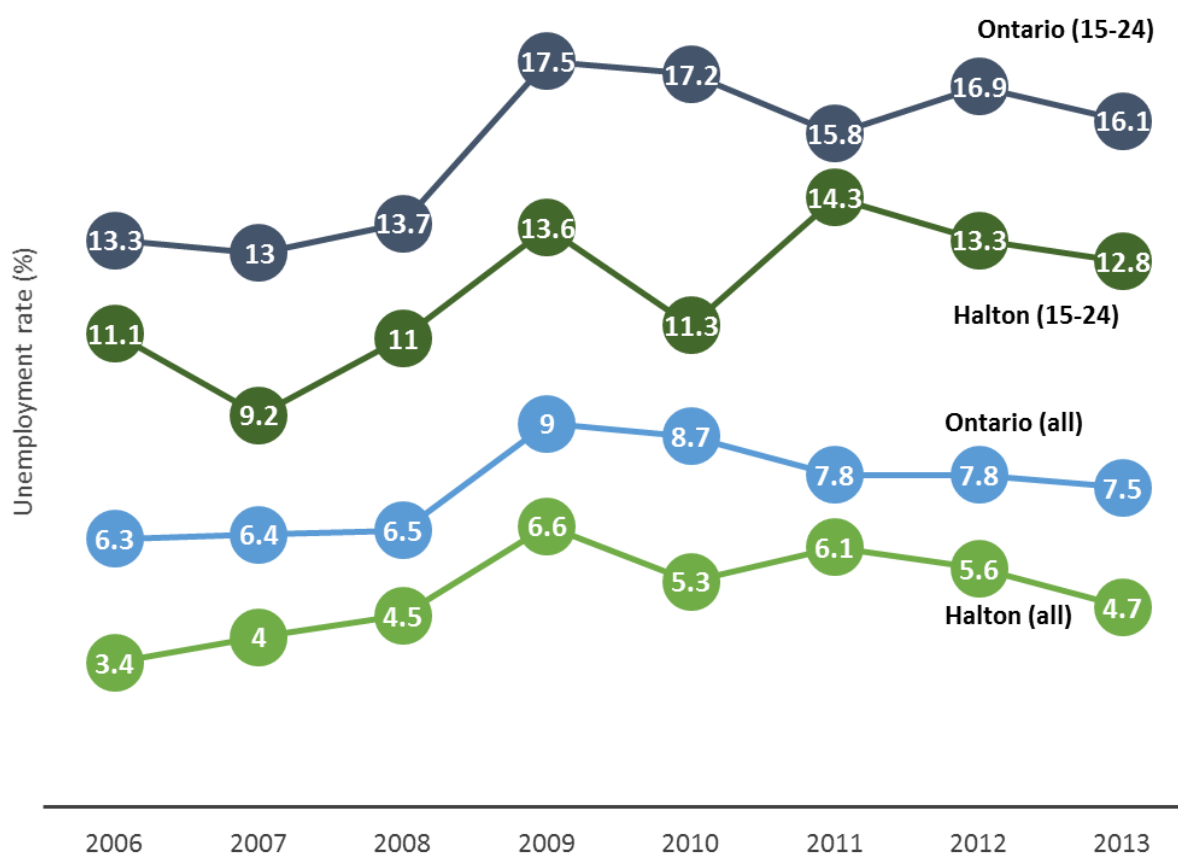
<sup>6</sup> Andre Benard. *Youth Labour Force Participation: 2008 to 2014*, Statistics Canada Economic Insights, no. 052, October 2015.

high school graduates pursuing postsecondary education. This would seem to indicate youth are staying in school in order to boost future employment opportunities and earnings instead of being unemployed or being paid low wages.

## Youth Employment and Unemployment

Figure 3 shows the trend line of unemployment rate for the youth population in Halton Region and Ontario between 2006 and 2013. The youth unemployment rate has historically been higher than that for the total population (15 years and over). It is twice as high as the overall provincial unemployment level. While the gap between youth and overall unemployment rates in Halton is comparatively small, the differences range between 5 to 8 percentage points between 2006 and 2013. However, in 2013, youth unemployment was still 2.7 times higher than the overall unemployment rate.

*Figure 3. Unemployment Rate by Age Group, Ontario and Halton Region, 2006-2013*



Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 109-5324

The graph also highlights the impact of the 2008-2009 recession resulting in the rise of unemployment rates for the total and youth populations both in Halton and in Ontario. When compared with the chart (Figure 2) on participation rate, it shows that the youth unemployment rate was increasing at the same time that the participation rate was decreasing. This indicates more youth were unemployed while at the same time, there were large numbers of youth leaving the labour force. Although the economy may show signs of recovery, both unemployment rates remain higher than those prior to the recession.

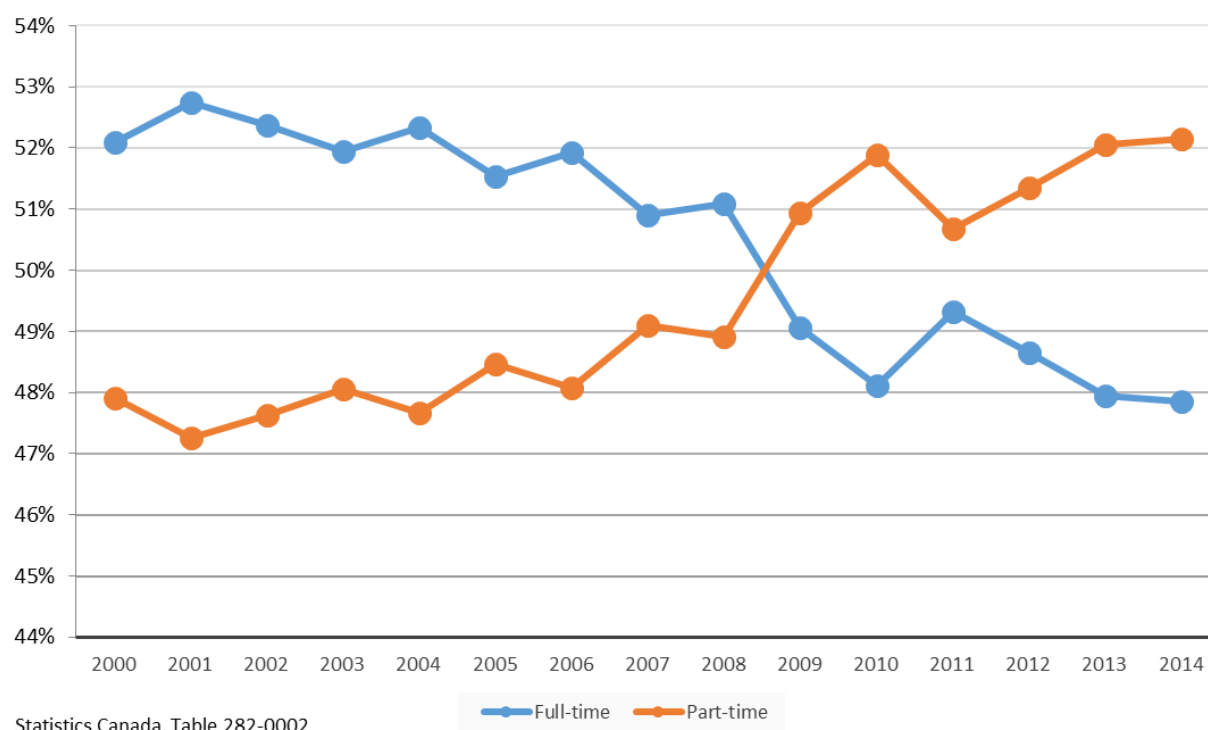
The Peel Halton Workforce Development Group found youth aged 15 to 24 years continue to feel the effect of the recession of 2008 (Peel Halton Workforce Development Group, 2015). In particular, youth without a high school diploma were most affected, with unemployment rates of 30%.

### **Full-Time and Part-Time Employment**

Similar to the unemployment rate, the proportion of part time employment held by the young workers (15-24 years of age) is higher than the overall labour force. Part time employment is the term referring to jobs with less than 30 hours per week. In 2014, about one-fifth (19.4%) of the jobs in Ontario are part time. For the youth population, over half (52%) of the employment is part time.

Again, as shown in Figure 4, the impact of the recession of 2008-2009 is evident on youth employment in Ontario. Prior to the recession, there was more full time employment than part time employment. After the recession, the reverse took place. There were more youth working part-time than those working full-time. In fact, since 2011, the percentage of youth in part-time work is trending up, while full-time employment is trending down. This indicates the continued challenges of finding full-time work in the post-recession period.

**Figure 4. Proportion of Full/Part-Time Employment for 15-24 Year Olds, Ontario, 2000-2014**

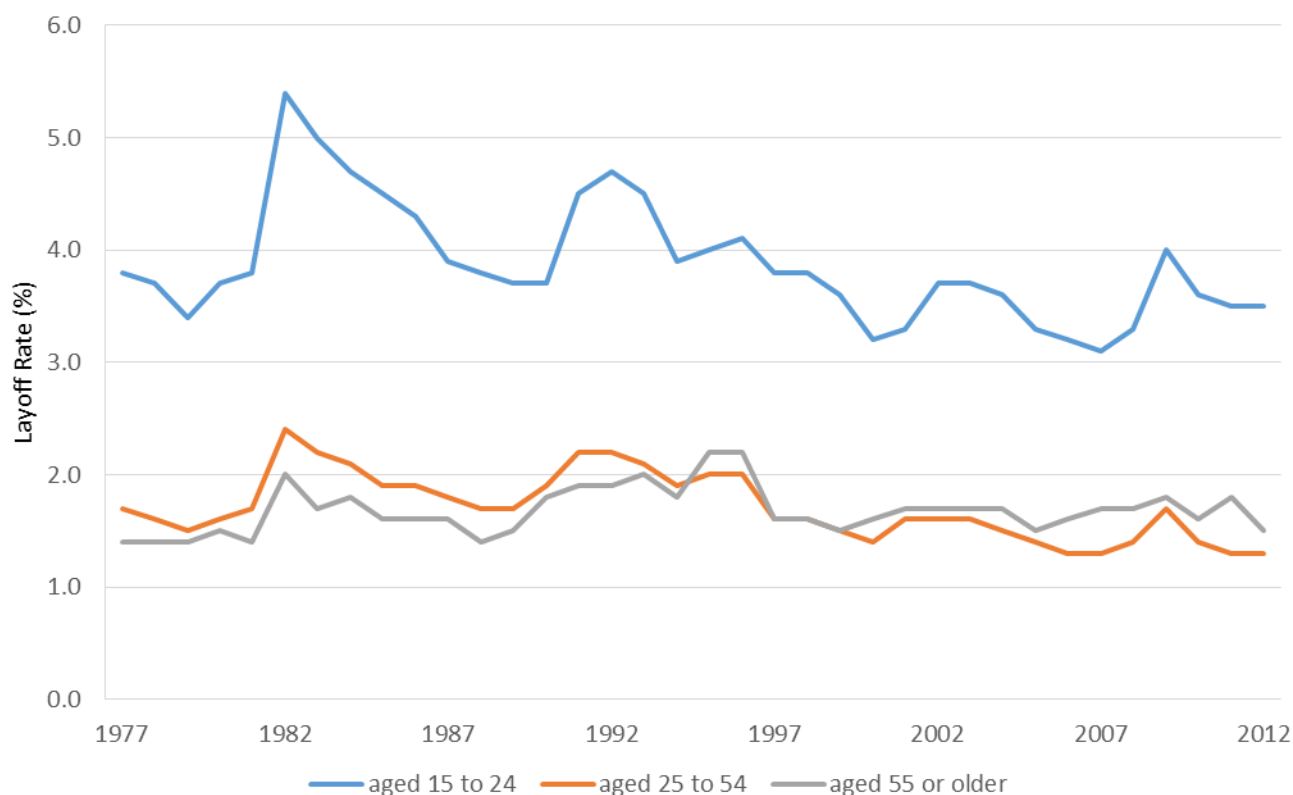


According to the Peel Halton Workforce Development Group, while youth are more likely to be employed part-time because of school attendance, this falls off as the level of education increases (Peel Halton Workforce Development Group, 2015). This is presumably because as youth obtain a diploma or degree, they are more likely to be seeking full-time employment.

As documented in a Statistics Canada's Economics Insights paper<sup>7</sup>, between 1977 and 2012, young workers aged 15 to 24 are more likely than adult workers to be laid off by their employers. Since 1977, the annual layoff rate for youth aged 15 to 24 has been between 2.0 to 2.7 times more than that of adult workers aged 25 to 54 (Figure 5).

<sup>7</sup> Andre Benard. *Unemployment Dynamics Among Canada's Youth*, Statistics Canada Economic Insights, no. 024, June 2013.

**Figure 5. Monthly Layoff Rates, Canada, 1977-2012**



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Study

## Job availability in Ontario in 2015

A recent report<sup>8</sup> by Employment and Social Development Canada shows that the Ontario labour market has flat lined. In July 2015, job growth in part-time employment was offset by a decline of full-time work. While the unemployment rate improved, the participation rate in the labour market dropped. The growth was primarily seen in the goods-production sector with a gain of 33,300 jobs in the past year. Construction activity was the main source of this increase, with the largest gains coming from the construction industry. Employment in the services-producing sector also rose, with the largest increases coming from the finance, insurance, real estate and leasing industry and the professional, scientific and technical services industry.

While the unemployment rate for Ontario youth aged 15 to 24 increased to 14.8%, it was still above the national average of 13.2% in July 2015. Summer employment amongst

<sup>8</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (2015), *Labour Market Bulletin - Ontario: July 2015 (Monthly Edition)*. <http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/lmi/publications/bulletins/on/july2015.shtml>

students intending to return to school in September declined by 3.4% compared to 2014. However, Ontario students still have greater challenges finding jobs relative to the Canadian student population, as the Ontario student unemployment rate was 18.7%, well above the Canadian average of 16.3%

### **2011 National Household Survey Snapshot**

The 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) provides a more detailed set of labour market data for the youth population in Halton Region. Given the difference in data collection methodology, the NHS data should not be used in comparison with those collected by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) or previous censuses.

According to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS)<sup>9</sup>, of the 63,000 youth in Halton in 2011, about 40,000 (63.3%) were in the labour force (Figure 6). They were either employed or unemployed. The 7,400 unemployed youth include those without paid work or without self-employment work and were available for work. In 2011, the unemployment rate for youth (15-24) was 18.7%. For those between 15 to 19 years, the unemployment rate was 21.4%, which means that one in five teenage youth were looking for work.

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<sup>9</sup> Due to the change in data collection methodology from a mandatory census to a voluntary survey, the non-response rate of the NHS is significantly higher than those of the previous long form censuses.

**Figure 6. Labour Force Characteristics, 15-24 Year Olds, Halton, 2011**

	15-19 yrs total	20-24 yrs total	15-24 yrs total	15-24 yrs female	15-24yrs male
Total - Labour Force	34,415	2,860	<b>62,675</b>	30,350	32,325
In the labour force	16,800	22,870	<b>39,675</b>	19,630	20,040
Employed	13,200	19,070	<b>32,270</b>	16,290	15,980
Unemployed	3,600	3,800	<b>7,400</b>	3,335	4,060
Not in the labour force	17,610	5,390	<b>23,000</b>	10,720	12,280
Participation rate	48.8	80.9	<b>63.3</b>	64.7	62
Employment rate	38.4	67.5	<b>51.5</b>	53.7	49.4
Unemployment rate	21.4	16.6	<b>18.7</b>	17	20.3

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey

About 23,000 youth (36.4% of all youth) were not in the labour force. The *not in labour force category*<sup>10</sup> refers to persons who were neither employed nor unemployed. They included persons who were either unable to work or unavailable to work as well as persons who were without work and who had neither actively looked for work nor had a job to start. Students and youth who could not work because of long-term illness or disability are included.

As expected, over three quarters (76.5%) of the youth not in the labour force were between 15 and 19 years – they were likely still in school.

Although the unemployment rate is most commonly used to measure the performance of the labour market, it does not include those who are not actively looking for work or who have given up looking. The employment rate which calculates the employment to population ratio presents a more complete snapshot of the labour market – how many people have jobs as a percentage of all people in that population. For the youth population, slightly over half (51.5%) were working.

To some extent, female youth are slightly better-off than their male counterparts in both the unemployment and employment rates. Over half (53.7%) of the female youth were working. Their unemployment rate is three percentage points lower than that of the male

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada, *Classification of Labour Force Status*, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/concepts/definitions/labour-travail-class01a-eng.htm>



youth. This reflects the national trend where unemployment rates for women have been consistently lower than that of their male counterparts since 1990.<sup>11</sup> This may in part be explained by a larger proportion of women participating in postsecondary education than men, particularly between the ages of 20 and 24.<sup>12</sup>

### **Educational Attainment**

In Halton, over one-third (37%) of the youth between 15 and 19 years completed high school or equivalent while many of them were still in school (e.g. with no certificate, diploma or degree). A more appropriate measure of the number of youth with a high school diploma as their highest educational level attained is to look at the older age group (20-24 years). As the 2011 NHS data indicates, less than half (45%) of that cohort successfully completed high school (Figure 7).

Within the 20 to 24 years age group, about half have obtained postsecondary education. About one-quarter (24%) have received an university certificate, diploma or degree at the bachelor level or above.

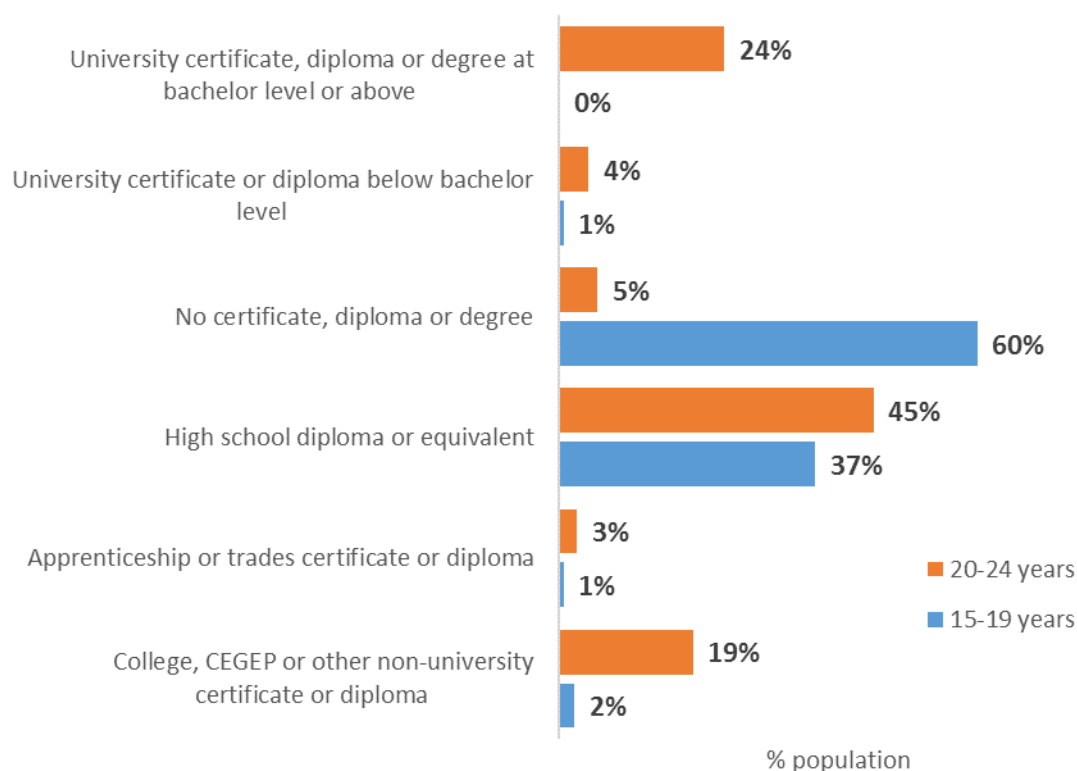
However, only 2.5% of the 20 to 24 age group has an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma compared to the provincial average of 3.7% and national average of 7.8%.

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<sup>11</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada. *Indicators of Well-being in Canada. Work - Unemployment Rate*. <http://well-being.esdc.gc.ca/misme-iowb/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=16>

<sup>12</sup> TD Economics Special Report (2014). *Young and Restless. A Look at the State of Youth Employment in Canada*.

**Figure 7. Highest Level of Educational Attainment by Age Group, Halton Region, 2011**



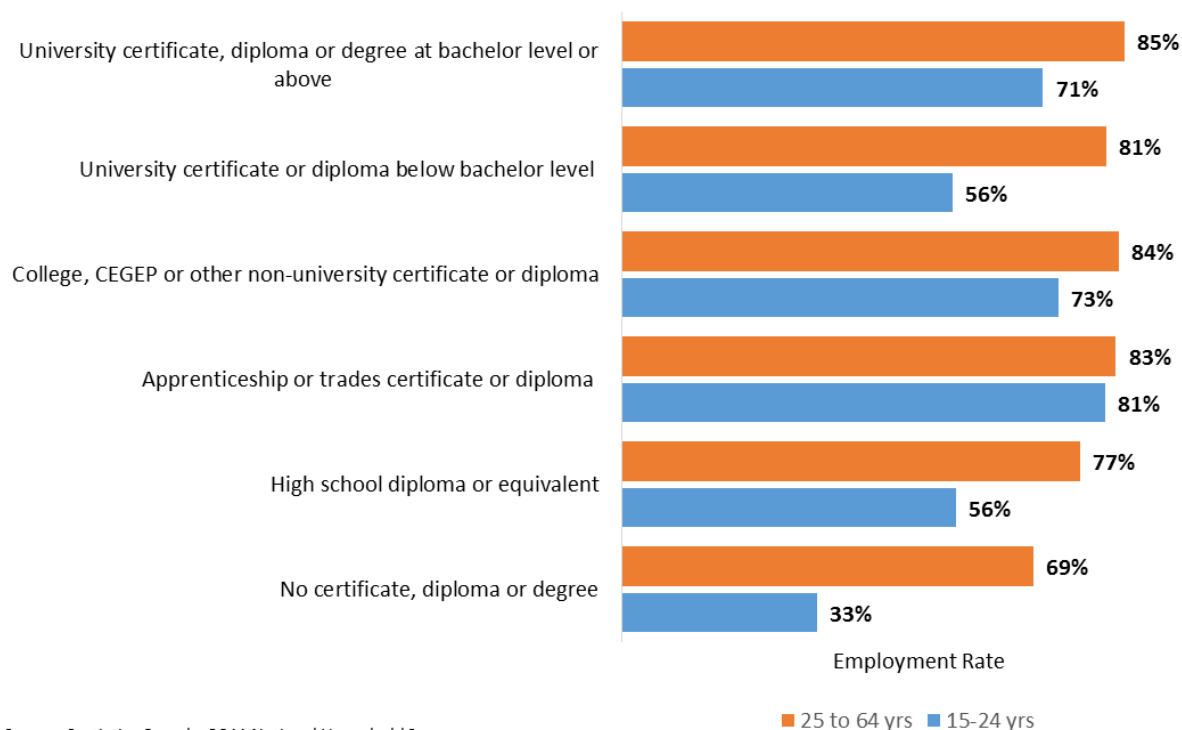
Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey

## Employment and Educational Attainment

In general, there is a positive relationship between higher education and better employment outcomes. As shown in Figure 8, the employment rate for the adult population (25 to 64 years) with no certificate, diploma or degree was at 69% and rose to 85% for those with university degree at the bachelor level or above, a difference of 16 percentage points.

For the youth population (15-24 years), the difference in the employment rate is more significant. The employment rate for those with no certificate, diploma, or degree was at 33%, less than half of that of the adult population. With a university diploma or degree, their employment rate improved to 71%. While this does seem to indicate an improved employment rate with higher education, youth in the 15 to 19 year age group are also participating in the labour force at a much lower rate (49%) than the 20 to 24 year age group (81%).

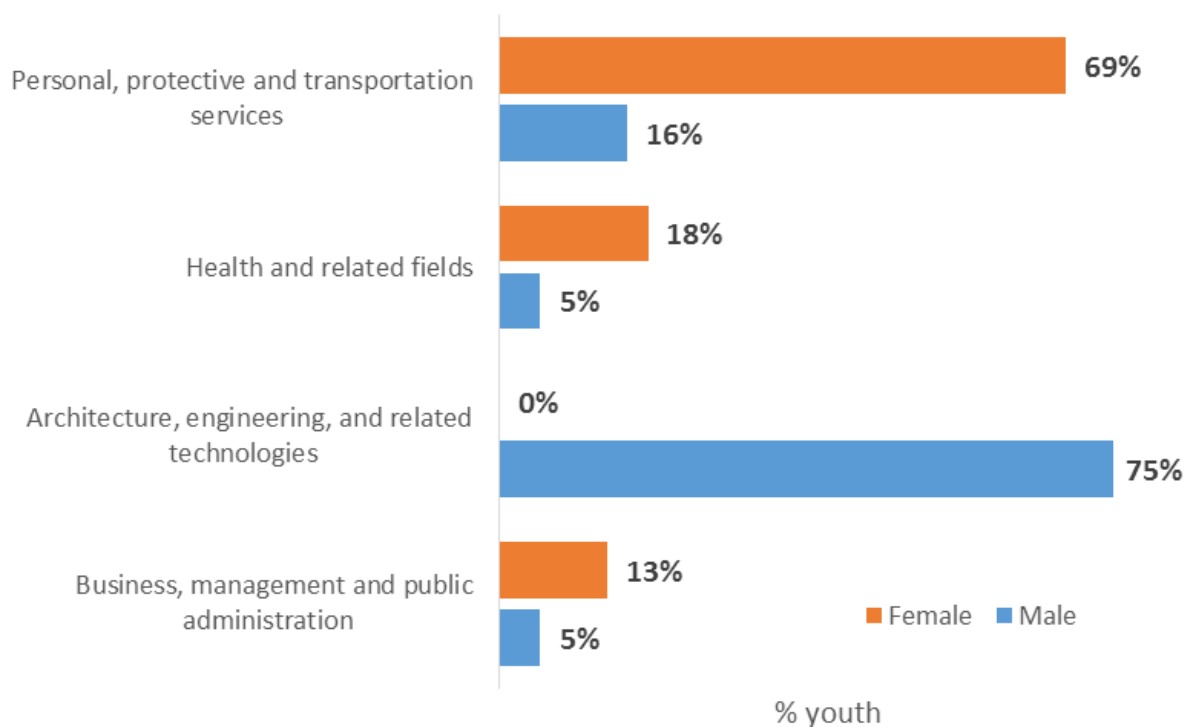
**Figure 8. Employment Rate by Educational Attainment and Age Group, Halton Region, 2011**



Of particular interest is the employment rate for those with an apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma. For the youth population, this level of educational attainment has the highest employment rate (81%). It is even higher than those with a university diploma or degree. The gap between the youth and adult population with an apprenticeship or trades certificate is the smallest (2 percentage point) among all levels of educational attainment.

There were more male youth pursuing this type and level of education than females. The ratio is approximately 3 to 1. The gender variation also appears among the major fields of study, as shown in Figure 9. For example, a majority (69%) of the female youth enrolled in personal, protective and transportation services compared to 16% for male youth. This category includes personal and culinary services; military science, leadership and operational art; military technologies and applied sciences; security and protective services; and transportation and materials moving. For male youth, three-quarters (75%) were in architecture, engineering, and related technologies. There were no female youths in this field of study.

**Figure 9. Proportion of Youth with Apprenticeship/Trade Certificates by Field of Study and By Sex**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey

## Youth Occupations

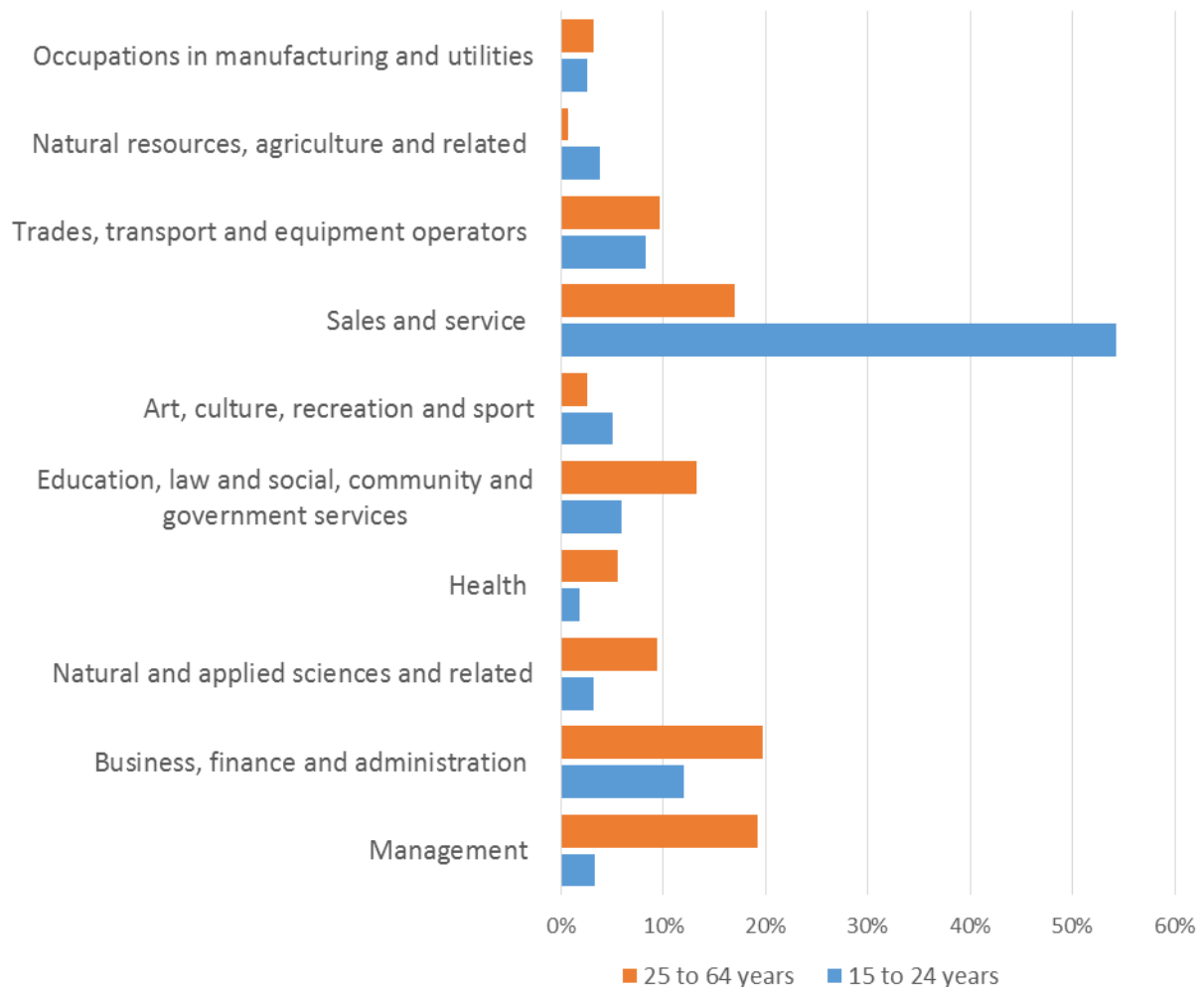
By far the most common occupation for youth is sales and service. As shown in Figure 10, it accounts for over half (54%) of youth workers. This proportion is more than double the average (22%) for the total labour force.

The next popular occupation is business, finance and administration (12%) followed by the trades, transport and equipment operators occupation (8%).

One in eight youth worked as retail salespersons or sales clerks. One in ten worked as food counter attendants or kitchen helpers. About 9% worked as cashiers.

Most of the jobs are characterized as precarious, meaning they are poorly paid and insecure.

*Figure 10. Proportion of Employed Labour Force by Occupation and Age Group, Halton, 2011*



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey

## Implications

- In addition to unemployment, many unemployed youth have to repay student loans and have other financial obligations.
- Unemployed youth may be forced to take on precarious employment.
- Long-term unemployment may have detrimental impacts on mental health of youth.
- Long-term unemployment also has a negative impact on the future earning potential of youth.
- Youth unemployment can lead to anti-social behaviour.
- Are we training our youth appropriately for the current and future labour market?

## Key Informant Perspectives on Youth Employment

Several key informants were identified and interviewed for their insights into youth employment challenges in Halton. They represented the following organizations:

- Employment Halton
- Goodwill, The Amity Group
- Halton Industry Education Council
- Oakville and District Labour Council
- Peel Halton Workforce Development Group
- The Centre for Skills Development and Training
- YMCA of Hamilton, Burlington, Brantford

Below is a summary of their perspectives.

### Underemployment and Precarious Employment

The issues of underemployment and precarious employment were identified as significant issues for young people. Key informants discussed the dynamic of more part-time work coupled with a lack of experience means that there is competition with older, more experienced workers, especially for precarious positions. As one respondent noted, “The impact of recent closures adds adults into the local labour market in competition with youth for all jobs.” There was recognition that as an increasing number of older workers continue participating in the labour force beyond traditional retirement age of 65 years, this puts pressure on part-time opportunities.

The demise of manufacturing has impacted not only job prospects for youth but also income levels. Manufacturing jobs most often pay the equivalent of a living wage in the workplace. The effects of the 2008 recession has resulted in flattening or pushing down wages, as well as seeing pensions cut.

One respondent indicated that the jobs that youth now have in the service and retail industries used to be the survival jobs for newcomers.

### Student Debt

Student loans are creating challenges for youth to make progress in their working lives. They have greater debt coming out of postsecondary education; they might have to live at home as they pay down their debt. There are also false expectations of what life will be like after postsecondary education. It is as if the bubble has been popped.

## **Information on the Labour Market**

One of the challenges identified in the literature is that young people seeking work face a lack of good information on current job prospects as well as future career planning. Key informants indicated that this lack of information represents a disconnection between the academic disciplines youths choose to pursue and the types of jobs that are currently in demand. One respondent indicated that the challenge of students coming out of university is that they do not always know what they want to do. Another respondent wondered if there was a way to converge college and university education, as business is investing less in training, yet they want trained employees

In addition, the several organizations discussed to what extent there really is a skills gap. Finding out what the real story is requires good labour market information on which to make informed decisions. The planning piece of a young person's entry into the labour force is critical and information that assists in the navigation and connection to the labour force is critical. A challenge identified is how to enlighten parents that university is not the only path and to get beyond the stigma of skilled trades. For this, a paradigm shift is needed. Another respondent identified that there may also be cultural challenges in career paths. The example given was for Filipino girls to go into healthcare. Youth need to be empowered to make appropriate career decision.

A critical element, as highlighted by one respondent, is the importance of young people networking as much as possible. Knowing someone who might provide that entry to a job is critical and youth who do not have connections are at a disadvantage.

## **Attitudes**

Key informants identified that youth of today are different from the youth of 20 years ago. Traits identified include not having the same work ethic and an attitudinal shift with a focus on themselves, wanting something more immediate.

They also identified that young workers have unrealistic expectations of their place within the labour force. This was both in terms of their expectations of the kind of jobs they are qualified to secure as well as rates of compensation for entry level positions. There is an identified aversion for entry level work.

The role and advance of technology in the workplace has also had impact. Young workers are comfortable with the use of technology and readily employ skills tailored to the newest technologies.



## **Employer perceptions of young workers' experience and skills**

Key informants indicated that employers are looking for those with experience and are investing less in training. Lack of experience is one of the biggest barriers for young workers and when employers are not providing opportunities, it becomes more challenging to gain that experience. The challenge is that the changing nature of the labour market means that there are fewer jobs out of high school, meaning that youth are introduced to work later in life.

A number of respondents indicated that employers are looking for “soft” skills, such as attitudes towards work, being able to work with others in teams and professional appearance. It was even mentioned that a young person may have credentials but not soft skills, thus being passed over for a job opportunity. As one respondent summarized it, “Hard skills are teachable, but it is the soft skills such as being a team player, most important. This is what employers really want.”

Key informants identified an attitude towards millennials where the experience has been that young people feel entitled and this raises potential issues with accountability.

## **Current Strategies**

One respondent indicated that initial uptake to the Canada-Ontario Job Grant, which provides direct financial support to individual employers who wish to purchase training for their employees, was low. They identified that small businesses may be looking for immediate payback on training investment versus future planning. Another respondent indicated that “despite the fact that Halton is an affluent community with lots of advantages, we still don’t serve youth well.”

There was also discussion on current community and government supports that indicated challenges in navigating the various systems and programs. Programs can be disjointed and issues such as continuity of funding challenge youth employment services in delivering appropriate assistance. One example given by a respondent was of a youth employment preparation project that had positive outcomes, but is no longer funded.

The other area of supports discussed were those youths with various challenges or barriers. One example provided was for youth with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) who may have fallen through school system. Other areas identified as needing further supports were mental health and addiction, as well as newcomer youth, especially if they are not within the education system. Finally, the issue of transportation, particularly in a north-south direction with Halton, was identified as a continuing challenge for those seeking employment and training opportunities.

## Recommendations and Actions

Based on the information gathered from the literature and key informant interviews, a few potential strategies came forth.

- Develop creative solutions around mentoring and mediation, given that retention within the workplace was identified as an issue.
- Increase opportunities for youth to learn and practice networking skills, and increase awareness about these employment opportunities.
- Increase the availability of information and skills training workshops that provide youth with tools to enter the labour market
- Improve access to employment information and career development to youth to help mitigate some of the barriers to gainful employment.
- Increase flexibility in training that allows for realistic expectations through the development of individualized solutions and supports
- Improve coordination across the employment services sector that minimizes the competitive nature of organizations. Look at organizational best practices, as one size does not fit all.

From a public policy perspective, a number of items need to be considered in order to address youth employment challenges.

- Reduce or remove financial barriers to higher education. The cost of education should not burden students with a debt load.
- Regulate internship programs to ensure that participants receive the appropriate educational and training value from the work.
- work or where their work provides economic value to their employer
- Develop appropriate minimum wage and living wage policies that ensure equitable compensation for work.
- Develop flexible requirements and the appropriate supports and resources for taking on apprenticeships. Currently, strict requirements may be too much for small business employers.
- Provide a broad range of supports, particularly for youth with additional challenges and barriers to employment, such as mental health and addiction, and transportation.

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