



A HUMAN RESOURCES STUDY OF THE HOME BUILDING AND RENOVATION SECTOR FOR NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Carpenter Interview Report

May 2005

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Introduction and Methodology

1.0 Introduction and Methodology

A survey of carpenters in Newfoundland and Labrador was conducted over the period March to May, 2005. The purpose of the survey was to collect background information such as the age, sex and educational attainment of carpenters as well as information on:

- ▲ Training received by respondents and the respondents' views on training
- ▲ The skills, experience and work history of respondents including their assessment of employment conditions

Carpenters were identified by employers and by training institutions. Personal interviews were held with 26 carpenters; twelve were identified by training institutions as attending or recently completing carpentry training while 14 were identified by employers.

The survey was not designed to provide information that represented all carpenters in the province. It was designed to provide in-depth information on the situation and opinions of workers with a range of skills and experience in the industry.

The survey attempted to select workers with a range of skills. Employers were asked to put forward names of carpenters who were highly skilled, had medium level skills or were low skilled. In reality most workers identified by employers were highly skilled. Part of the reason for this is that the survey took place in March – a time of year when only the highly skilled core workforce remains employed in the residential construction industry.

Background Information

2.0 Background Information

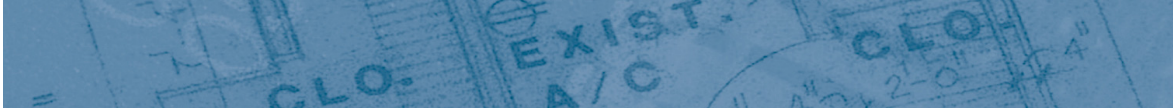
2.1 Age and Sex

The age profile of interviewees is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

AGE PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES	
< 25 years old	6
25-34 years old	6
35-44 years old	7
45-54 years old	5
> 55 years old	2

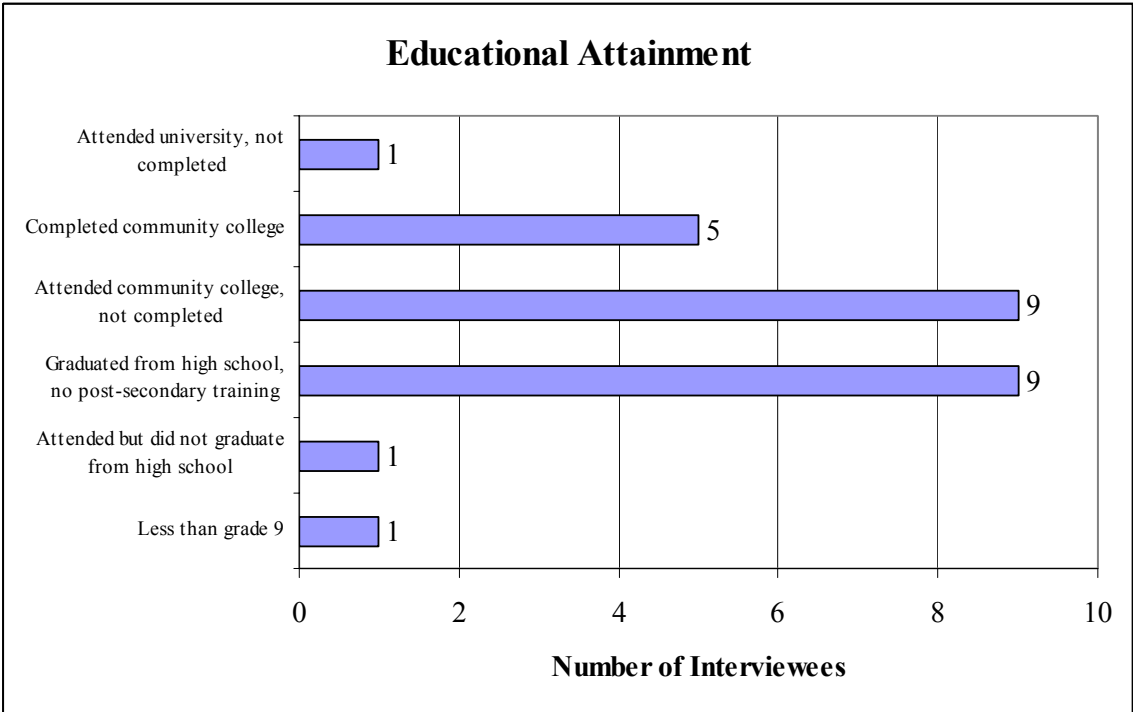
Carpenters less than 25 years old were over-represented in the survey. The average age of interviewees was 36. Only one interviewee was a female.



2.2 Educational Attainment

The educational attainment of interviewees is depicted in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1



Most of the nine individuals who attended but had not completed community college were young people who were taking institutional training. Only a small fraction of the interviewees had not completed high school.

Documentation and Assessment of Training

3.0 Documentation and Assessment of Training

3.1 Apprenticeship and Certification

Three of the 26 interviewees were certified carpenters, that is, they held a Certificate of Qualification in carpentry from the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Four of the interviewees were Apprentices while six were taking, or had just completed, their first nine months of institutional training and were hoping to find an employer and enter the Apprenticeship program. The remaining 13 interviewees were working as carpenters but were not certified. Two of these 13 individuals had been enrolled in Apprenticeship but dropped out of the program. Financial considerations and the lack of a perceived advantage to having a carpenter's certificate were the reasons for these drop outs.

3.2 On-the-job Training

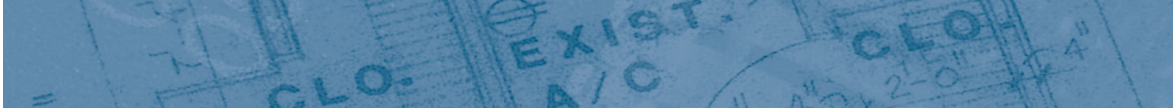
Ten interviewees had received formal on-the-job training¹. Eight of this total indicated that they received a minimal amount of this training. Seven interviewees indicated that they had received no formal on-the-job training while nine did not respond to this question or had limited on-the-job training and could not respond to the question.

All interviewees who had a significant level of on-the-job experience indicated that informal on-the-job training² was an important source of the carpentry skills they had acquired. Seven of these respondents identified “mentoring” by more senior carpenters as a way in which they had learned carpentry skills while six mentioned on-site supervisors as an important source of training and three mentioned family members³.

¹ Formal on-the-job training is defined as training that is clearly distinct from regular work activities. That is, formal on-the-job training is not provided in the course of on-going work activities on job sites.

² Informal on-the-job training occurs in the course of completing regular work activities.

³ Interviewees could identify more than one training source.



3.3 Assessment of Training

On-the-job training was rated as the best form of training by nine of ten interviewees who answered this question. Interviewees rated on-the-job training as a 4 out of 5 compared to the 3 out of 5 rating for training received at Community Colleges. Twelve interviewees noted that they preferred hands-on training and recommended that more hands-on training be added to institutional training programs. Three individuals who had taken institutional training felt that there should be more instruction in their programs. Several interviewees made the point that a combination of theory and practice is the best way to impart skills. The need for modular training and to update the curriculum of the Community Colleges to correspond to current realities in the residential construction industry was identified by several interviewees.

Skills, Experience and Work History

4.0 Skills, Experience and Work History

4.1 Skills and Experience

Sixteen respondents provided information on whether they were specialists or generalists in the carpentry trade. Most of those who did not provide information on this question did not have enough job experience to provide useful responses. Twelve respondents were generalists although a significant proportion of these specialized to some degree. Four respondents were specialists with three specializing in finish carpentry and one in framing.

Experienced carpenters interviewed for the study had experience in a wide range of carpentry skills including: footings, framing, insulation, drywall, trim/finish, flooring (wood), siding and roofing. This being said, many of the carpenters indicated that they did not use some of these skills on their current jobs – especially footings, insulation and drywall as these tasks are frequently sub-contracted.

4.2 Work History

4.2.1 Seasonality of Employment

Thirteen interviewees provided information on the seasonality of employment. Ten indicated that they worked year round while three worked on a seasonal basis⁴. All of the nine experienced carpenters who were interviewed worked “year round”, a finding that no doubt resulted from the time of year (March) during which the survey took place and the fact that the carpenters worked for well-established employers. The “year round” employment pattern for experienced workers in the survey would not be expected to represent the employment pattern for carpenters as a whole.

It is important to note that virtually all of the carpenters who indicated that they worked year round took some time off in the winter⁵ ranging from two to six weeks and claimed EI.

Most of the carpenters interviewed in the survey indicated that they worked on a seasonal basis prior to beginning work for their current employer. This may reflect strong demand conditions in the last number of years but it also may indicate that the employment pattern of their current job is not

⁴ Seasonal work is defined as having the winter months off starting in December and usually ending in April/May.

⁵ Some interviewees noted that it was common practice to have time off around Christmas.



indicative of the broader pattern experienced in the residential construction industry.

Four Apprentices provided information on the seasonality of employment prior to beginning their current Apprenticeship term. Three of these individuals worked on a seasonal basis while one worked “year round”.

4.2.2 Work by Industry Sector

Eleven of the 22 interviewees who provided information on the industry sector in which they worked indicated that they had worked exclusively in residential construction within the last five years. An additional four interviewees worked 90% or more in residential construction. Seven interviewees had spent a significant proportion of their time working in the non-residential building sector of the construction industry over the past five years.

4.2.3 Supervisory Responsibilities

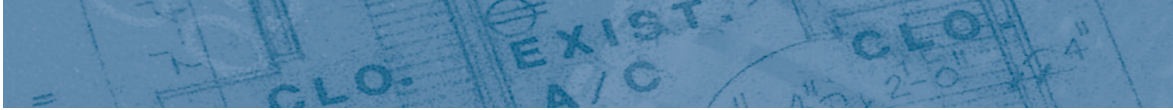
One-half of the Non-Apprentices had some level of supervisory responsibilities. All of them either worked independently with no supervision or received a minimal level of supervision. All of the Apprentices with job experience were supervised on job sites.

4.2.4 Number of Employers

Twelve interviewees provided information on the number of employers they had worked for in the past. Nine had worked for a large number of employers while two worked for two employers and one interviewee worked his whole career with one employer. Eight of the twelve interviewees were in long term jobs at the time the interviews were conducted.

4.2.5 How Interviewees Got Their Jobs

Thirteen respondents provided information on how they got their current job. Ten of these respondents found their jobs through family and friends involved in the industry, two approached employers directly and one used industry and community contacts to find their job.



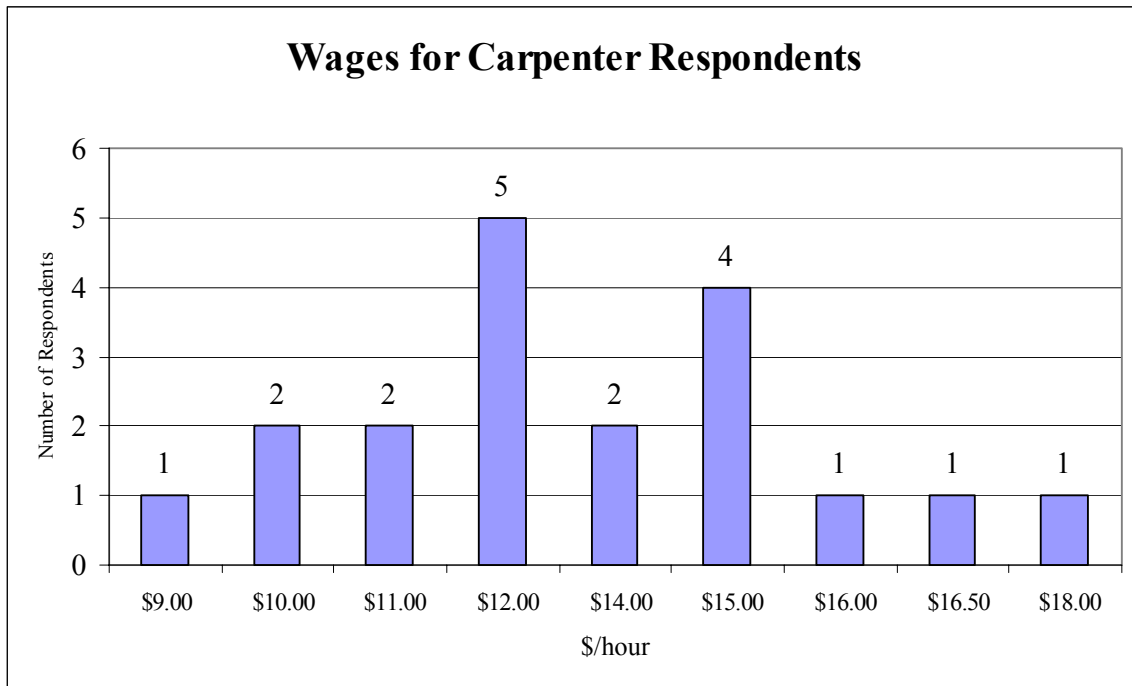
4.2.6 Work in Other Occupations

All except two carpenters with significant work experience were working exclusively in the carpentry occupation over the last number of years. One carpenter had worked in marine diesel and one as a plumber in the recent past.

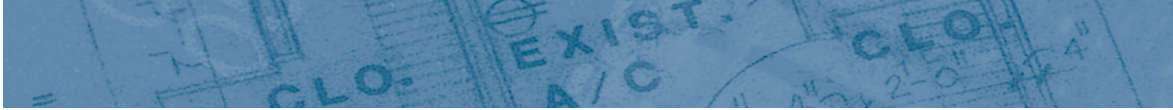
4.2.7 Wages

Wages for nineteen respondents who were able and willing to provide this information is presented in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2



Eleven of the nineteen respondents made between \$12 and \$15 per hour and the average wage was \$13.13 per hour.



4.2.8 Unionization

Three of the 26 respondents were members of trade unions. Three non-unionized respondents had been members of a trade union in the past.

5.0 Perceptions

5.1 Difficulty Finding Employment

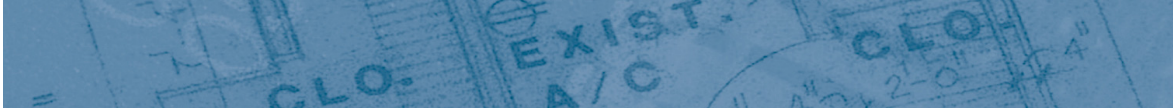
Twenty-three respondents provided information on the degree of difficulty they felt that they would experience finding employment. Fifteen of these respondents did not believe that they would have difficulty finding another job. Seven of the eight respondents who felt that they would have difficulty finding another job were Apprentices or pre-Apprentices who were taking or had recently completed institutional training.

5.2 Skills that Increase Employability

All respondents felt that the ability to work independently was the most important skill that influenced the employability of carpenters. The interviews indicate that demand conditions for carpenters who are capable of working independently, without supervision, are significantly different than for carpenters who require a significant level of supervision. Attitude, motivation, technical skills and supervisory abilities were other attributes that were felt to influence employability.

It is interesting to note that the interviewees did not identify specific technical proficiencies that improved their chances of finding a job as a carpenter. It should be noted, however, that the ability to work independently requires a basic proficiency in a wide range of carpentry skills. The highly skilled carpenters interviewed for this study all had knowledge and experience in a wide range of carpentry skills including: footings, framing, insulation, drywall, trim/finish, flooring (wood), siding and roofing.

Interviewees did not feel that institutional training and certification as a carpenter improved employment prospects or increased the wages offered by employers in the residential construction industry. Respondents did feel, however, that certification increased the opportunities of carpenters in industry sectors outside residential construction and in other provinces. The advantages of certification were significant enough to motivate two of the uncertified journeymen interviewed to make plans to challenge the journeymen's exam in order to become certified as a carpenter.



5.3 Mandatory Certification

All of the respondents strongly supported mandatory certification. A number of reasons were provided for this support. The two most frequently mentioned were that mandatory certification would improve the image and degree of professionalism associated with the occupation and that mandatory certification would be effective in controlling the underground economy.