

A HUMAN RESOURCES STUDY OF THE HOME BUILDING AND RENOVATION SECTOR PHASE III FOR PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Focus Group Report

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| 1.0 Purpose | 1 |
| 2.0 Methodology | 2 |
| 2.1 Scope | 2 |
| 2.2 Participant Selection and Recruitment | 4 |
| 2.3 Interview Guide | 4 |
| 2.4 Analysis of Findings | 4 |
| 3.0 General Findings and Results | 5 |
| 3.1 Trades Workers Availability and Capacity | 5 |
| 3.2 Industry Challenges | 5 |
| 3.3 Training and Development Gaps | 6 |
| 4.0 Detailed Summary and Analysis of the Main Themes | 7 |
| 4.1 Availability and Recruitment of Trades workers | 7 |
| 4.2 Impacts of Difficulties Finding Skilled Trades Workers | 9 |
| 4.3 Demand and Supply | 10 |
| 4.3.1 Supply | 11 |
| 4.3.2 Demand | 12 |
| 4.4 Training | 14 |
| 4.4.1 Secondary Training | 14 |
| 4.4.2 Post-Secondary Training | 14 |
| 4.5 Apprenticeship Training | 16 |
| 4.6 Training for Existing Workers | 19 |



Purpose

1.0 Purpose

The focus group component of the research process was intended to supplement the findings of the comprehensive employer survey, and provide the research team with an opportunity to further validate survey findings and/or explore the issues with those working directly in the industry. The sessions explored more fully the views and perceptions of contractors/employers, trades workers and apprentices within the industry with regard to a number of issues related to labour supply and demand, education and training and industry trends and challenges.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Scope

A total of twelve focus group sessions were held in the three counties of the province. Separate focus groups were held with residential builders and contractors (four groups), ICI builders and contractors (two groups), non-unionized trades workers and workers (three groups), unionized trades workers (one group), apprentices (one group) and Holland College instructors (one group). In total, 86 individuals participated in the focus group discussions. In terms of industry distribution, the breakdown is as follows:



Table 1
Focus Group Sessions

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Employers – Builders: | |
| Road Builders | 3 |
| ICI | 9 |
| Residential (General Contractor) | 12 |
| Electrical (Residential) | 5 |
| Plumbing & Heating (Residential) | 9 |
| Cement Finishing | 1 |
| Welding & Metal Fabrication | 2 |
| Total | 41 |
| Workers (Journeyman) | |
| Carpenters | 7 |
| Plumbers | 7 |
| Electrical | 6 |
| Masonry & Bricklaying | 3 |
| Sheet Metal | 2 |
| Total | 25 |
| Workers (Apprentices)¹ | |
| Carpenters | 5 |
| Plumbers | 2 |
| Electrical | 3 |
| Bricklaying | 1 |
| Sheet Metal | 1 |
| Construction Labourer | 4 |
| Total | 16 |
| Holland College Instructors | |
| Carpentry | |
| Plumbing and Heating | |
| Electrical | |
| Total | 4 |

¹ While there was only one focus group for apprentices in which seven participated – apprentices also participated in the other worker focus groups, as well.



2.2 Participant Selection and Recruitment

Depending on the target group, several methods were used to recruit the participants. In terms of residential and ICI employers and contractors, the employer/contractor master list developed for the employer survey was used as a starting point, and this was supplemented by suggestions from members of the Project Steering Committee. Care was taken to ensure that there was both geographic representation and diversity; i.e. that there would be a variety (large and small, builders and sub-contractors) of perspectives and experience in each group.

With regard to trades workers, individual builders and contractors were contacted and asked to provide names of employees and workers who they felt would be interested in participating. The names of union trades workers were provided by the various union locals, and a list of apprentices was provided by the Apprenticeship Office at the Department of Education. In addition, Holland College helped to organize the session with their construction trades instructors.

2.3 Interview Guide

A structured interview guide was developed by the research team, in consultation with members of the steering committee, to explore several key areas, including: the availability, recruitment and retention of skilled trades workers, demand and supply factors, worker turnover, training and industry and business trends. While the essential areas and themes explored were the same for each group, some of the specific questions differed depending on the group and the particular perspective they had to offer.

2.4 Analysis of Findings

With the consent of each group, the focus group sessions were audiotaped and the facilitator reviewed and summarized the feedback and discussion. The discussions were analyzed in terms of: the key themes that emerged across all focus groups, the consistency in views and perceptions expressed by participants, the frequency of particular views and comments, the intensity and/or tone of the feedback, and the extent or degree to which participants related their comments to their own direct experience.

General Findings and Results

3.0 General Findings and Results

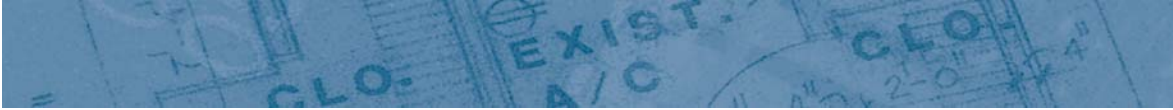
Generally speaking, the focus groups provided a very clear sense of how those on the “front lines” of the PEI Construction Industry view the whole issue of the availability of skilled trades workers. In a broad sense, builders/employers, contractors, trades workers and apprentices had quite similar views in many areas. The ensuing section presents key points that were identified in the focus group sessions on the following important topics.

3.1 Trades Workers Availability and Capacity

- ▲ The availability of skilled trades workers is currently a large problem for most builders, employers and contractors across the industry.
- ▲ The capacity and “readiness” of new entrants coming out of the construction trades programs is not meeting the needs and expectations of most employers.
- ▲ There is also a strong concern regarding an emerging “succession gap”; as existing employers/contractors age and retire, there does not appear to be a new generation of “business inclined” trades workers coming forth.
- ▲ Most employers believe that the situation will get worse before it gets better.

3.2 Industry Challenges

- ▲ The chronic low wage structure within the industry is seen as a major problem in terms of the recruitment and retention of younger people; many acknowledge that with the number of career occupations availability today, that a career in the construction trades will be a “hard sell”.
- ▲ The apparent de-valuing of the trades over the past two decades seems now pervasive; the traditional image of the construction trades, as a difficult, dangerous and low paying job appears very entrenched.
- ▲ The lack of a certain level of certification and professionalism within the industry tends to act as a “drag” on future growth and development as a sector; with the exception of a few trades most do not require certification or license to practice, and anyone can set



themselves up as a builder/contractor if they so choose.

- ▲ The seasonal nature of the industry and the subsequent impact of the EI system on the availability of labour within the industry.
- ▲ The impact of the underground economy on the industry's capacity to establish a "floor or threshold" upon which "bona fide" construction businesses can grow and develop.
- ▲ The lack of industry cohesiveness; while many seem aware of, and are concerned about these larger challenges, there appears to be no focused energy or mechanism within the industry to discuss and determine constructive ways to respond.

3.3 Training and Development Gaps

- ▲ Young people in high school have very few opportunities to become exposed to "hands on" skills and the trades.
- ▲ There appears to be a weakness or shortfall in terms of the current recruitment/screening process for incoming students to the construction trades.
- ▲ New skills and work ethic of many new entrants coming out of construction trades training do not meet the needs and expectations of employers.
- ▲ There appears to be not enough balance of theory and "shop" or "on-the-job" training for students.
- ▲ Apprentices are not getting the degree/extent of on-the-job mentorship they need because the journeyman is "too pushed" simply trying to keep up with the job demands and deadlines.
- ▲ There is no formal structured program or mechanism to ensure that existing workers get access to ongoing training.
- ▲ There needs to be a much more effective working relationship between the education and training system and the industry.

Detailed Summary and Analysis of the Main Themes

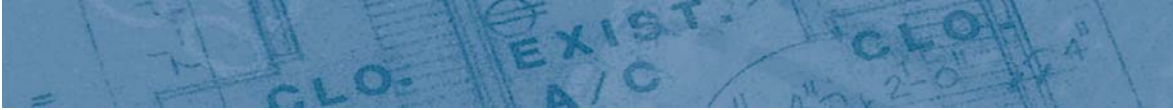
4.0 Detailed Summary and Analysis of the Main Themes

4.1 Availability and Recruitment of Trades workers

There was consensus among all six employer (Residential and ICI) focus groups that there was a major problem regarding the availability and recruitment of trades workers, both at the entry and especially the skilled trades workers levels. Specific trades that were mentioned by most groups included: plumbers, carpenters – especially higher-end skill level, electricians, bricklayers, and cement finishers. In addition, many employers noted that finding good, experienced site managers and supervisors is a growing problem; this gap tends to limit the capacity of the employer to pursue new work, and to provide the appropriate level of mentorship and support to younger apprentices. Several employers noted that the only way to get a good site manager or supervisor was to “*steal him from someone else .. your competition*”.

In the employers view there are several reasons for this situation:

- ▲ Over the past two decades, the value and importance of the trades as a respectable occupation has declined, the secondary school system essentially withdrew the trades from their curriculum in the mid-1980's, and the messages to young people from parents and the social/community environment generally was to that university was the way to go.
- ▲ Current trades school graduates do not seem to quickly or easily “fit in” to the actual construction environment; many young people are not exposed early enough to “hands on” work, and as a consequence, many don't know their own aptitude for certain occupations or trades.
- ▲ There are fewer new people coming into the trades, and those who are coming in do not have the required training and certifications.
- ▲ The wage structure within the industry has been chronically low and this is a disincentive to anyone looking at various career options.
- ▲ The seasonal nature of the work itself; many younger people are looking for occupations and careers that offer year round work.



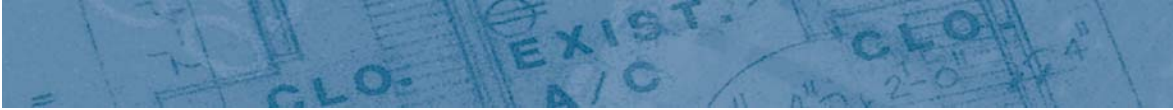
- ▲ Many of today's job applicants do not have the required work ethic.

In terms of recruitment, most employers continue to use “word of mouth”, but a number have recently tried newspaper advertisement with little positive results. While these efforts did result in replies, very few applicants, if any, had the qualifications and experience that the employer was looking for. Employers indicate that they often have *“to hire 5 people in order to find one good person who is worth hanging on to”*. (Employer) In addition, employers noted that they would hardly ever use the HRDC job bank or any of these types of programs. In their experience these are rarely helpful and usually involve way too much paperwork.

When recruiting new entrants, most builders/contractors said that they tend to try to *“grow their own”*; i.e. find someone – perhaps a young labourer – who seems to have the interest, aptitude and motivation, and encourage him toward skill development and training. They do this as a solution of last resort; they have a great deal of frustration with the current approach to the recruitment, screening and training of construction trades workers. In their view, *“a whole lot of money is being spent on trades training ... we contribute to this with our taxes, and we still are not getting what we need ...”* (Employer)

Employers are generally looking for employees who:

- ▲ Have a good attitude, positive.
- ▲ Are ambitious and motivated – someone who wants to learn and is “teachable”.
- ▲ Have some level of technical and mechanical aptitude – someone who is accustomed to working machinery and tools.



- ▲ Have some level of training and people skills – certification is preferable but not essential.
- ▲ Are generally younger - if you spend the time/investment in bringing him along – he is with you for a longer period of time.

Employers generally believe that it will be harder to get qualified trades workers in five years time. A participant in one group felt that in five years time *“we will be taking them in from Europe”*. The changing demographics will be a big factor; the trades worker who is now 50-55 wants to slow down or get out; and there are not enough younger people who are working toward their certification to fill this pending gap quickly enough. The other compounding factor is that the shortage of skilled trades workers is a North America/world problem, and all jurisdictions will be scrambling to get qualified trades workers at the same time. With PEI’s lower wage levels generally, this will pose even greater challenges to the industry.

4.2 Impacts of Difficulties Finding Skilled Trades Workers

Employers in all focus groups felt the lack of skilled trades workers is having a direct impact on their capacity to grow and develop as a business. Builder/contractors describe themselves as being “more selective” in what they do, and they do not pursue opportunities as “aggressively” as they might otherwise if they were confident that labour supply was available. Many openly acknowledge that work that they would have readily bid a few years back, they no longer bid for - they simply don’t have the manpower to do the work. When considering new work opportunities, many employers find themselves asking *“who would I be able to get to look after this job?”* In many instances there is no one beyond their existing crew, and so the work is not pursued. Another contractor noted that he sees both heavy demand for contract work, and also pent up demand for speculative building. *“If I had more qualified carpenters I could do three times as much work, and employ three times as many workers”*.

Because of these skill shortages, builder/contractors end up pushing their existing crews a bit too hard, and need to work long hours to meet customer timelines. In other instances, employers tend to hire workers who they know are not qualified, and then they (or their site supervisors) spend more time/attention overseeing their work. Builders/contractors agreed that this is a real problem on several levels. With fewer and fewer experienced trades workers around site supervisors are often working with crews who have limited experience, the oversight demand and responsibility is getting heavier, and the



supervisors are beginning to feel the stress. This view was confirmed in the worker focus groups; the older and more experienced trades workers described the difficulty of working with unqualified labour, and the additional responsibility and stress they often feel. *“those who are prepared to take more responsibility get ‘pushed hard’ – after while they just give up and get out”*. (Participant – Worker Focus Group)

The issue of succession planning also looms large in the minds of many builders and contractors. There are now contractors, who are getting out because of their age and in many cases the business simply closes and employees get picked up by another operation. Many existing trades workers tend to see the “headaches” that builders and contractors must deal with, and very few are interested and/or willing to take on the task of owning and running a business. The overall fear is that there will increasingly be fewer and fewer builder/contractors to employ trades workers. When asked if they felt if the lack of trades workers willing to get into the business side of the operation was a skill/training issue, most employers felt it was more likely the fact that *“for the little additional money you might make most guys would not want the hassle”*.

Another significant impact that was identified in all focus groups was a concern that it is getting increasingly harder to maintain the overall quality level of the workmanship, and in some participants’ minds it is already going down. All focus groups commented on this in some way, and it suggests that both employers and workers alike are recognizing that they are doing things that are not up to the same building standards as in earlier times.

4.3 Demand and Supply

A strong theme emerging from all employer focus groups was the negative business impacts that resulted from government income support and employment development policy. In the view of many employers, Employment Insurance (EI) and other employment creation programs are becoming much more of a “disruptive” factor given the increasingly tight labour supply that the industry is facing. In their view these programs are having both supply side and demand side impacts.



4.3.1 Supply

In terms of labour supply issues, employers in all focus groups identified the EI system, and the province's Employment Development Program, as two major factors, which compete directly with their needs for skilled workers and labourers. Even though the data shows that the construction industry has become less seasonal in the past several years, the seasonal work – EI cycle remains firmly entrenched, particularly in the rural parts of the Island. Many employers have the situation where their workers simply leave the job once their get their EI eligible weeks accumulated. *“I have 5-6 good workers ... have been with me for years and I couldn't get by without them ... but they tell me 'straight up' ... 'we're here from April until November – then we're gone'... I have no choice if I want them back next year ... one year I had work building 2 barns and we worked into the winter ... once we finished they said 'never again'.. (Employer focus group participant”)*

In several instances, employers stated that they see the provincial Employment Development Program – and particularly the highway road crews - as a direct competitor with them for labour. These jobs often pay higher per hour wages for labourers, and it provides enough weeks to qualify for EI, and hence these workers stay with that cycle. In addition, other employers noted that they recently lost some very skilled carpenters to what they termed a “government subsidized employer” who was able to offer a higher wage plus benefits. *“I had a guy for 13 years, worked with him ... helped him get his ticket ... once he had his ticket he got offered a job for higher wages and benefits by a government subsidized employer and was gone”.* (Employer focus group participant)



4.3.2 Demand

Employers in all focus groups identified the underground economy as a critical issue in terms of their capacity to grow their businesses, and charge out their labour costs at a level where they could afford to pay higher wages and benefits. Employers see this happening mostly in the residential building area, and in particular with home renovations. In their view, there a large numbers of people, and in many cases people who are drawing EI, who are “working for cash” at a lower rate, and undercutting the local contractor who is employing people, trying to pay a fair wage, paying his taxes, etc.

Employers in the rural parts of the Island were particularly vocal about this issue. The group that they find most annoying is the group who work in the fishery; they earn their regular pay for fishing 2-3 months, get their “big stamps”, and then put their tools in their trucks and go out and “work for cash”. Employers in the rural part of the province believe this to be a wide spread practice, and see it as a “brick wall” as far as their efforts to grow and develop as small businesses.

In fact, many employers (and workers and apprentices) see this widespread practice as contributing to the low wage structure within the industry, which in turn represents a major impediment to the recruitment and retention of both skilled trades workers and new entrants. In addition to the underground economy, employers believe that the wage structure in the construction industry is chronically low because of a range of other “multi-layered” factors and issues: there has been historically a low value placed on construction labour; much of the labour environment is non-unionized; there are only a few trades that actually require certification (plumbing and electrical); there is limited enforcement of building codes and standards; there is no provision that builders and general contractors be licensed; and there is little cohesion among the industry to work together to look for ways to strategically develop and grow the sector.

In short, there is no regulatory and/or industry accepted “floor” from which to build and develop the sector. In many ways, even though the Island has experienced quite robust construction activity in recent years, there persists a “race to the bottom” type of mentality. Employers describe this in several ways: contractors continually undercut each other, trying to keep their labour costs to a minimum to get the work, more and more workers (including licensed trades workers – both union and non-union) are



out “working for cash” and undercutting the small contractor.

This is the environment within which the industry is now trying to attract new blood and energy; many employers see these strongly entrenched behaviours as major challenges facing the industry. While daunting many employers believe that steps have to be taken to address some of these inherent problems, *“perhaps this whole worker shortage will prove to be a good thing ... we need to get the industry ‘cleaned up’ ... we need to get us back to where we need to be ..”* (Participant Employer Focus Group)

In fact, most employers strongly believe that there needs to be some level of standard and professionalism established within the industry if it is going to grow and develop. This could perhaps be achieved by requiring that more/all trades be certified, and that builders/contractors be licensed to *“ply their trade”*. While everyone agreed that a higher degree of professionalism is necessary in order to meet the increasing demands/expectations of an ever-discriminating customer, there was a difference about how this might happen. One contractor argued that one shouldn’t expect and/or wait for government to move in and regulate everything. He argued that the industry should begin to establish its own criteria vis-à-vis what is a professional standard/image (e.g. Red Seal, strictly follow the approved building codes, etc) and then vigorously promote this image to the public. He argued – “in the end the customer pays my cheque – not government”. He believes that if the industry can lay out a professional standard of how it goes about its business, then eventually the discriminating customer, the bankers who are approving large mortgages, and insurance companies who are ensuring buildings and properties will begin to accept a more professional way of building things.



4.4 Training

In the focus group discussions, all participants noted that while there have been recent efforts to improve and strengthen the focus on trades at the high school level, and the Holland College and Apprenticeship training systems, there are a number of gaps that need to be addressed.

4.4.1 Secondary Training

Across all focus groups (employer, worker, apprenticeship) the closure of the integrated (academic and trades training) provincial vocational schools (Provincial Vocational Institute and Summerside Vocational) in the mid 1980's was a major mistake. In their view, it signalled a de-valuing of trades and trades training within the province, the only real option for kids with aptitude for "hands on" work was removed from them, and it directly and subtly gave the message to both kids and especially parents that trades were "*not the way to go*".

As a consequence, many participants in the focus groups believe that a whole generation of Island young people who may have had the aptitude and interest in the trades has been missed. Many believe that some new model or approach to give young people early exposure to the trades and "hands on" work must be re-integrated into Island High Schools. One employer describes his view of the situation in this way. "*while we are still considered a rural province, the current generation of kids are no different (in terms of their day-to-day experience) than kids growing up in Toronto ... at one time on PEI you learned your mechanical and hands on skills by working on the farm or fishing and so on ... most kids don't get that opportunity anymore .. we need to create more opportunities to expose them to this at an earlier age ..*" (Participant Employer Focus Group).

Hence, even though it will not have any immediate payoffs in terms of the current worker shortage, many focus group participants see addressing the current gaps in the secondary school level (more focus on trades, more "hands on" courses, work coops, an attitude change among administrators and teachers, etc) as the first step in putting a long term solution in place.

4.4.2 Post-Secondary Training

Employers see a real problem in terms of the skill level and overall job readiness of new



workers who are coming out of the trades training programs and seem to be unprepared for the actual work environment and work demands. One contractor noted a recent experience with two Holland College carpentry graduates; once on the job he discovered they did not know the basics; e.g. working with ladders on a building, not able to use a maul to drive a stake to put in footings, etc. Neither one lasted a week on the job. His lament – *“these guys spent a whole year in this program and didn’t seem to know anything”*.

This observation was confirmed in the focus group discussion with apprentices as well. Employers are not sure whether this reflects a training issue, a screening/selection issue when the students are being considered for the program, or an attitudinal/motivation problem on the part of the student. Their bias is that it may be a screening issue; their belief is that it is difficult for any young person to know their aptitude for a particular construction trade without any prior exposure to that trade.

Employers also believe that the fact that many young people come into the trades without prior exposure and experience is a strong factor in the eventual “drop out” or withdrawal rates with regard to apprenticeship training. They believe that better screening of incoming students is needed and that more on-the-job experience while students are in the program is needed. This on-the-job experience should come in the early phases of the program – “not just 2-3 weeks at the end of the school year”. Again, apprentices confirmed this view as well. Many apprentices in the focus groups believe they would have benefited, and would have been better prepared for the actual job, had they had more on-the-job opportunities while in training.




4.5 Apprenticeship Training

Generally speaking many employers believe that there have been improvements to the Apprenticeship Program in recent years. Greater efforts are being made to more directly engage employers and potential apprentices, stronger follow up and support measures are in place to track the apprentice as he moves through his program, there has been a new Accelerated School Apprenticeship Program introduced into Island High Schools, and steps have been recently taken to have the EI application/approval process expedited for apprentices in block release.

However, employers in all six focus groups feel there are areas that require further work. Many employers believe that there needs to be more direct and frequent communication between the Apprenticeship Officer and the employer/journeyman who is working directly with the apprentice. It is not always clear to the employer what is being covered in the training program, and it also may not be clear to the Program Instructor what the apprentice is actually doing on the job. Employers felt that in order to ensure that there is a relevant link between training and the work environment, more communication was needed.

Another emerging issue is the time availability of the journeyman assigned to mentor and support the apprentice. Many employers indicated that, because of the general lack of skilled trades workers and site/project supervisors, many journeymen are fully committed to meeting the project deadlines and have very little time to properly mentor and support their apprentice. They view this as a serious gap and it is growing. In terms of this issue, it is useful to note that the recently developed Holland College training program for bricklayers did provide for a “job coach” to come on-site one day a week to assist the apprentice bricklayers who were working. This person provided “coaching” to apprentices with two different companies, and it was one employer’s view that this was a very helpful to both the apprentices involved and the journeyman who had responsibility for mentoring.

Employers also felt that there needed to be a better instructor-student ratio for apprentices on Block Release Program. There can be as many as 15-20 apprentices in a block, each at a different point in their study, and all needing individualized assistance. It may not be possible for one instructor to give everyone the time and support they need, and, in the absence of some additional structure or support, the students may not progress as quickly, or simply waste time. Apprentices made this same observation



as well. *“I would have been lucky to get 15-20 minutes of his time a day ... when you have been used working on the job and being busy all day ... it's hard to switch gears and sit in a library all day”* (Apprentice)

Employers in all focus groups were also critical of the EI application/approval process for apprentices going on block release. Many employers have had the experience where the apprentice was back on the job before they received any EI support. This is a major source of frustration for them, and their apprentices, and they really can't understand why the bureaucracy has been so difficult on this. *“You wouldn't see a fisherman waiting 6-7 weeks for his “pogey cheque” ... he would have burned the place down ..”* (Participant Employer focus group).

Employers are aware that recent efforts have been made to improve the process. However, many continue to employ apprentices who have been “burned” in the past, and they maintain that until the funding “roadblocks” are fully removed, many apprentices will simply not put themselves or their families through the experience again. Apprentices also stressed this as a critical issue and a major disincentive to anyone who has ongoing living expenses to meet, and it can be a “back breaker” for anyone with a family to support.

Another observation made by employers and apprentices alike is that in some instances such as carpentry, there is no real incentive for the apprentice to follow through with the apprenticeship program. Anybody can call themselves a carpenter, and eventually the apprentice begins to wonder whether it makes any sense for him to work hard, train, be certified, and *“after all that employers don't even have to hire you to get the work done (unlike plumbers and electricians) they can hire someone who just has a box of tools in his truck”* (Apprentice). While the solution to this may go beyond the Apprenticeship Program, it does serve to underline some of the disincentives to young apprentices, as well as any other young person considering carpentry as an occupation.

The wages available to apprentices were also identified as an issue, both by the apprentices and by a number of employers. Employers indicated that they try to provide their apprentices with an adequate wage, but because the overall wage structure for a journeyman is low, then the apprentice wage is low as well. They also see that with so many other occupations with better pay opportunities available to young people – that the low wage can be a disincentive to enticing young people to consider becoming a trades




apprentice.

Another aspect of this problem was highlighted by an employer who remarked that *“once the apprentice gets his ticket he will be looking for more money (which this contractor said is understandable) . . . and if his present employer can't or won't pay it . . . he will either look around to see what others are paying, or go out on his own . . .”* Hence, many employers are cautious; they may be reluctant to invest in someone, if he is going to move on once he gets his “ticket”.

Generally speaking, builders/contractors and apprentices didn't feel that the length of time to move from apprentice to journeyman was a problem. They believed that generally an apprentice can do it in 4-5 years and that it takes that long for the apprentice to be exposed and become familiar with the scope of skills and work tasks that are part of a journeyman's experience. They agreed that anything that could be done to better “streamline” training with the industry's work cycle would be beneficial to both the apprentice and the employer.

In addition, to these larger issues, employers and apprentices also identified several other training related issues. These include:

- ▲ Tuition costs – many employers believe that the costs for trades training, especially for the student who is not EI eligible is a disincentive. The student most likely has to get a student loan, and when finished your wage level is constrained until you finish your apprenticeship. This can be a huge disincentive for young people.
- ▲ The location of the training and the distance to travel. In the past several years, Holland College has located its core training sites in various parts of the province; carpentry in Charlottetown, electrical in Summerside, and plumbing, heating and welding in Georgetown. For some students living in the extremities of the Island, distance and the cost of traveling can be an issue. For some trades like sheet metal, students and apprentices have to go to New Brunswick for training. Apprentices in particular feel that there should be more financial assistance to pay for travel and accommodation expenses for students who must travel and/or live elsewhere while in training.
- ▲ Both employers and apprentices noted that in some instances (electrical and carpentry) the



course curriculum, materials and/or equipment may not always be up-to-date. They believe there should be a review of the curriculum on a regular basis. Holland College instructors agree that keeping the curriculum up-to-date is always a challenge, and they continually work at it. However, to completely revise a particular program curriculum would take considerable time and resources, and these are always limited.

4.6 Training for Existing Workers

Generally, both employers and workers acknowledged that this continues to be a major gap in the current system. Essentially there is no formal training structure or process through which training can be provided to existing workers. Apart from periodic training sessions (half day, week-end sessions, etc) offered by suppliers regarding a new product or technology, some short term opportunities offered by the employer, or the worker taking training on his own, there is not much available to existing workers. In many instances, it is the builder/contractor himself who may go to a training program, and then take back the knowledge and information to his crew. This whole area of training continues to be a major gap within the industry.

While most employers felt this way, there was one group of employers who indicated that they consciously budget for the training of their existing workers “if you don’t do this you won’t stay in business for very long”. Another employer’s view was that if you don’t spend some money on getting your workers trained on new developments “. . .you will end up spending the money anyway by having to fix mistakes, or by re-doing something the way the customer expected it to be done in the first place”.

In terms of their own training needs employers and builders agreed that training to assist business owners to better manage and develop their businesses is a critical gap. In most cases, the builder/contractor began as a trades worker first, and then eventually ended up running a business with almost no formal preparation and training. Having access to this type of training would also be beneficial to other trades workers who may now be working as journeyman, but may be interested in the business side of the trade.

While builder and contractors believe that the working relationship between industry and the education and training system has been improving, they believe that to really address some of the existing gaps or



“disconnects” between training and industry the two partners need to work more effectively together to ensure that there is:

- ▲ a better match (in terms of aptitude and interest) between the student and the actual trade he/she is applying for
- ▲ more flexible or adaptable delivery modules (train in a cycle that better responds to industry cycles),
- ▲ more frequent periods of on-the-job training opportunities and make these placements more relevant (i.e. a prearranged understanding between College, student and employer as to what he will be involved in and experience – not just a “gofer”).
- ▲ some level of mentorship or job coaching available to the apprentice on an ongoing basis.

Builders and contractor believe to address some of the above, there needs to be more formal relationship between industry and educational institutions. This would be a relationship that goes beyond just giving feedback on program curriculum, and begins to look at ways to address some of the more fundamental issues identified earlier.