

To assess the state of seasonal staffing in Canada's tourism sector, Workplace Matters Panel members were asked 14 questions about their ability to hire, train and retain seasonal employees during the summer of 2010. Sixty percent of respondents had hired seasonal staff. Most panel businesses (38%) employed between 20 and 99 seasonal employees, while 31% hired fewer than five seasonal employees (Figure 1). Whether a company hired one employee or more than 200, only 23% of Panel businesses had hired more seasonal staff in 2010 than they had in 2009. This suggests that most organizations did not expect to see a significant increase in business compared to the previous summer.

Figure 1. Number of Employees Hired



### Little Difficulty Finding Qualified Staff

The majority of panellists reported that finding qualified seasonal staff was either very, or somewhat easy. While 31% did have trouble recruiting workers, only 8% indicated that they found doing so extremely difficult. Respondents also felt that most of those who applied for work were qualified for the positions being filled. This finding contradicts anecdotal evidence that suggests that despite receiving large numbers of résumés, employers have difficulty recruiting qualified applicants. Panellists indicated

that 54% of those who applied for seasonal positions were somewhat qualified for the positions they sought. A further 23% felt that applicants were well qualified, or very well qualified, for the positions they applied for. Only 23% reported that the pool of workers from which they were hiring was unqualified (Figure 2).

### Training Seasonal Employees

Panellists reported that they spent anywhere from four to 100 hours training their seasonal staff, the average being 32.6 hours. A minority of panel respondents (42%), felt the amount of time they spent on training was enough to turn new hires into fully qualified employees, while 58% did not. It is interesting to note that those who felt that their training created fully qualified employees spent less time training than those who felt it did not create fully qualified workers (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Ability to Find Qualified Seasonal Staff

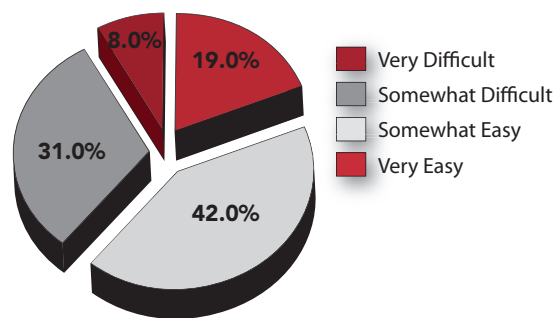
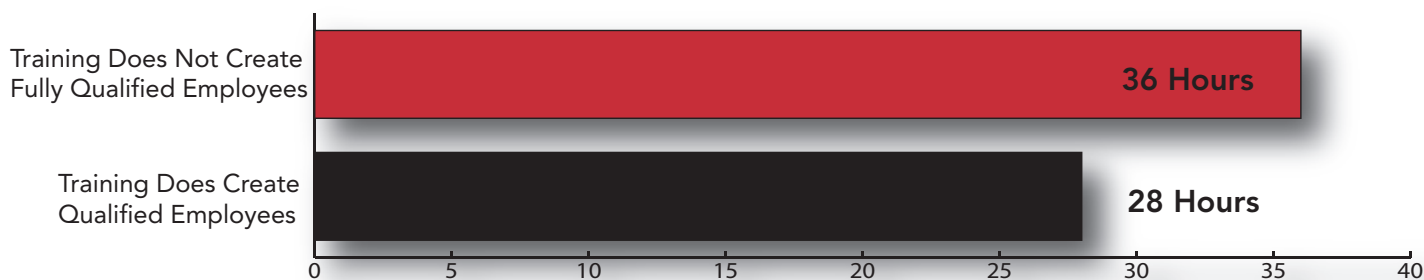


Figure 3. Average Hours Spent on Training by Perceived Results of Training



Panel businesses were most likely to offer formal on-the-job training, such as an established training program (88%), while 43% offered informal on-the-job training that was conducted as needed. Only 19% of panellists offered formal off-site training. For the most part, businesses offered a combination of the three types—only 12% of businesses offered informal training and nothing else.

## Seasonal Employees and the Return to School

Seasonal employees tend to be young. According to the 2006 Census, over 30% of those working in tourism were aged 15–24, compared to only 15% of those in the general labour force. Of these young workers, 71% were pursuing secondary or postsecondary education and 70% worked for part of the year. The seasonal employees hired by Panel businesses were also largely students. Only 4% of panellists reported that none of their seasonal employees returned to school in early September, while 31% reported that over 75% of the staff they hired returned to school at the end of summer (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Percentage of Panel Businesses by Percentage of Seasonal Employees that Returned to School



In general, employees ceased to work once they returned to school. While this may be desirable in some cases, anecdotal evidence suggests many employers would prefer to keep their seasonal employees for at least a few weeks past the beginning of the school year. This makes sense given that in Canada, 40% of all tourist arrivals and 32% of all domestic visitations take place during the third quarter of the year. Furthermore, during this time frame locals frequent neighbourhood restaurants and attractions more often. All of this consumption by tourists and residents contributes to an increase in service requirements, even after the school year begins.

Although the beginning of the school year can cause staffing problems, it should be noted that seasonal staff were less likely than either part- or full-time staff to quit their jobs. A recent Workplace Matters study on turnover found that the voluntary turnover rate for seasonal staff was 12.5%, compared to 33.3% for part-time employees. (Figure 5)

Figure 5. Turnover Among Panel Businesses by Employee Work Pattern

|                     | Voluntary Turnover | Involuntary Turnover | Total Turnover |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Seasonal Employees  | 12.5%              | 17.5%                | 30.0%          |
| Part-time Employees | 33.3%              | 10.0%                | 43.3%          |
| Full-time Employees | 13.8%              | 4.6%                 | 18.4%          |

Seasonality is a fact of life in a Canada. Traditionally, the tourism sector has turned to young people to fill these temporary positions. This practice has fit well with this labour group's desire for temporary employment before they move on to a full-time career. However, this employment strategy will become more difficult to maintain in the coming decades as demand for tourism goods and services increases while at the same time, those under the age of 25 become a smaller proportion of Canada's population. As the population ages, employers will need to consider other labour pools that contain workers who purposely look for more flexible employment. Many older Canadians seek part-time or seasonal opportunities to stay active after retirement and to share their knowledge and experience without the responsibility of a full-time commitment. Many persons with disabilities want to participate in the part-time labour force. As such, working a few shifts each week or for a few months each year meets these labour groups' employment needs while helping a business meet its labour demands.

While some employers are already implementing strategies to attract non-traditional tourism workers, others are coming up with innovative solutions such as employee-sharing programs between winter and summer resorts. With Canada facing an impending labour shortage and an aging population, continuing to find new solutions to this growing problem must remain a priority for both industry stakeholders and government, now and in the coming years.

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

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