

# 2021

## York Region Job Seeker Survey

Workforce Planning  
Board of York Region



**Workforce Planning BOARD**  
OF YORK REGION  
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## Workforce Planning Board Planning Board of York Region

### Introduction

Through discussions with employer contacts and employment services partners in the late summer and fall of 2021, the Workforce Planning Board of York Region (WPBoard) identified that employers faced challenges in the hiring of new staff for entry-level, mid-level and senior-level positions. WPBoard developed and executed an employer survey in York Region in order to get a snapshot of current employer practices related to hiring, as well as to explore employer skill needs. In conjunction with the employer survey, WPBoard also administered a survey of jobseekers in York Region for the purposes of understanding their labour market experiences during the pandemic and their plans for employment in the near future.

Over the course of the last two weeks of November 2021, an online survey was developed with input from Employment Ontario employment service providers and other community stakeholders that support jobseekers in their employment search. Individual links to the survey were disseminated to client contacts by each participating agency, as well as promoted through a social media outreach campaign by WPBoard. In order to increase the response rate, jobseekers who completed the survey and provided their email address were entered into a draw for a Tim Horton's gift card.

In total, 1817 respondents visited the survey. There are varying numbers of responses per question and the analysis presents the percentage distribution of responses for each question. As such, this is not a random sample which is representative of the workforce in York Region; it was skewed towards individuals who are or have recently been seeking employment. Indeed, around one half of the respondents indicated that they were currently unemployed but looking for work. Thus, this survey provides an insight into the experiences and plans of this segment of the labour force.

Each heading below lists the question which was asked.

### Did you experience unemployment since the pandemic started (in March 2020)?

Only one in five (19%) of respondents indicate that they did not lose employment during the pandemic. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one response, and the most common response was that they had lost their job (33% -- one of three). Among those who chose "Other," the most common explanation was that they were either already unemployed at the time the pandemic hit or had not been in the labour force, most often because they had just arrived to Canada or had arrived after the pandemic arose, or had been students at the time and have since completed their studies and have started looking for work.

**Table 1: Impact on employment during pandemic**

IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT	PERCENT
No, I did not become unemployed during this time.	19%
I was laid off temporarily.	16%
I lost my job.	33%
I quit/left my job voluntarily.	10%
I had my hours reduced.	10%
I had my hours increased.	0%
Other (please specify).	23%

### At any time since the pandemic started, did you access CERB (Canada Emergency Response Benefit) or CRB (Canada Recovery Benefit)?

Almost half (46%) of respondents indicated that they had made use of either CERB or CRB.

**Table 2: Reliance on Canada Emergency Response Benefit or Canada Recovery Benefit**

Yes	46%
No	54%

### Have you changed your occupation since the pandemic started?

Roughly one-third (34%) of respondents had changed their occupation since the pandemic started.

**Table 3: Change in occupation since start of pandemic**

Yes	34%
No	66%

### Have you pursued training or education opportunities since the pandemic started?

Half of all respondents indicated that they have pursued training or education opportunities since the pandemic started. Of those, slightly more sought to upgrade their skills in their current occupation, while the rest did so for the purpose of a career change. In total, slightly over one in five engaged in training or education in support of a career change.

**Table 4: Pursuit of training or education opportunities since start of pandemic**

No	50%
Yes, for the purpose of a career change.	22%
Yes, for the purpose of upgrading my skills in my current occupation.	28%

Applying the results in Table 4 to the proportions in Table 3, we can estimate the following:

- Two-thirds (65%) of those who had changed careers had engaged in training or education (34% of all respondents changed occupations and 22% of all respondents engaged in training in order to change careers)
- Four-in-ten (42%) who stayed in their occupations engaged in training (66% did not change careers, but 28% engaged in training to upgrade their skills)
- The point is, those changing careers are more likely to engage in training

### Are you currently employed?

Slightly over a third (36%) of respondents were working at the time of the survey, and of those working, a slight majority were working in a different field than where they had been employed before the pandemic. Around half (51%) were unemployed but looking for work, while another 11% were not working either for personal reasons or because they were looking after someone. Among those who answered “Other,” some provided more explanation regarding health issues which prevented them from working or that they were engaged in training to upgrade their skills.

**Table 5: Current employment status**

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	PERCENT
Yes, I am working in the field I worked in before the pandemic happened.	15%
Yes, I am working but in a different field than where I was working before the pandemic happened.	21%
No, I am not working but I am currently looking for work.	51%
No, I am not working for my own personal reasons.	7%
No, I am not working because I am looking after someone else (for example, a child or an elderly relative).	4%
Other (please specify).	8%

## In your job search, what type of work are you looking for?

Jobseekers were asked in what category of occupation were they seeking work. A list was provided, and they also had the opportunity to write in their response. The answers represented a wide mix of occupations. By far, the two largest occupations represented the broad clusters of customer service occupations and office jobs, in both cases cited by around one-in-three (32%-33%). These jobs largely represent entry-level occupations, as does the third-placed selection, cashier or shelf-stocker (16%). However, there were a number of occupations which represented mid-level and possibly senior-level occupations, such as:

- Health sector (15%)
- Professional services (12%)
- IT (12%)
- Childcare (11%)
- Skilled trades (10%)
- Teacher (10%)
- Supervisor (10%)

The responses add up to more than 100% because respondents were allowed to select as many occupations as fit their circumstances. Half of all respondents (51%) selected only one occupation, whereas 30% selected three or more occupations.

Among those selecting “Other”, there was a very wide range of occupations. There were only two occupations which were cited three times or more: occupations in the banking or finance sector or a social service worker.

**Table 6: Type of work being sought**

OCCUPATION	PERCENT
Customer service (salesclerk in a store, server in a restaurant or at a food counter, greeter, host or hostess, front desk clerk)	33%
Office (clerk filing documents, doing data entry, administrative assistant, receptionist, secretary)	32%
Cashier or shelf stocker (in a retail or grocery store)	16%
Health sector (for example, home care worker, personal support worker, nurse)	15%
Professional services (bookkeeping, accountant, legal services, consultant)	12%
IT (develop websites, create/manage datasets, resolve computer problems, develop applications, manage social media accounts)	12%
Childcare	11%
Skilled trades (construction, manufacturing, services or motive power)	10%
Teacher (working in a primary or secondary school, or in a tutoring business)	10%
Supervisor (provide direction or supervise other workers)	10%
Work in a factory or warehouse	9%
Labourer (manufacturing, construction, warehousing)	9%
Attendant (marina, golf course, gym, recreational facility)	6%
Cleaning (cleaning rooms in a hotel or office or home)	6%
Security guard	4%
Driver (truck, bus, taxi, delivery, courier)	4%
Landscaping (labourer, gardener, cutting and pruning, snow shovelling)	4%
Provided personal services (hairstylist or laundry services)	3%
Other (please specify):	16%

## How do you search for a job?

Jobseekers were asked what methods they used to locate job opportunities. By far, the Internet has become to major source for job leads, with 82% making use of online job boards, 50% looking through social media and 42% checking out company websites (the total responses up to more than 100% because respondents were allowed to select as many methods as applied).

Slightly over a third (37%) made use of Employment Ontario Service Centres, while smaller proportions (all under 20%) relied on media advertisements, temp agencies or “Help Wanted” signs.

**Table 7: Job search methods**

JOB SEARCH	PERCENT
On-line job board postings	84%
Social media (for example, LinkedIn)	50%
Company websites	42%
Employment Ontario Service Centres	37%
Media advertisements (for example, radio or newspaper)	19%
Temp agencies	15%
"Help Wanted" signs	13%

## Have you worked remotely (not in the workplace) since the pandemic started?

Three-in-ten (29%) of respondents indicated that they have worked remotely since the pandemic started.

## Are you more likely to return to the workforce/remain in the workforce if remote work is an option?

Remote work has quickly become a common feature of everyday employment. Respondents were asked to select from a series of statements regarding remote work. The majority were accepting of a hybrid work arrangement, partly in the workplace and partly remotely (55%). A small proportion felt that their occupation could not be performed remotely (17%), while an even smaller proportion would only consider remote work (8%). The small proportion citing “Other” (4%) often referenced the fact that they were unemployed.

**Table 8: Remote work as an option**

VIEWS ON REMOTE WORK	PERCENT
I will accept a combination of both in-person and remote work.	55%
My occupation does not allow me to work remotely.	17%
Remote work does not impact my decision about employment.	16%
I will only work remotely.	8%
Other (please specify):	4%

## If remote work is your preference, can you tell us why?

Almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) who accept remote work do so for the convenience. The remaining reasons tend to relate to barriers (lack of access to a car, the need to take care of dependents, concerns about using public transit or working in the workplace). In most cases, the selection of “Other” was explained by remote work either not being an option or not being a preference.

**Table 9: Remote work as a preference**

WHY PREFER REMOTE WORK	PERCENT
I like the convenience of working from home/ remotely.	64%
I do not have access to a car.	31%
I need to take care of dependents (children, parents).	21%
I am uncomfortable using public transportation.	16%
I am uncomfortable working in the workplace environment.	14%
Other (please specify):	11%

## What would encourage you to take a job?

Jobseekers were asked to identify incentives which would encourage them to take a job. They were provided with a list and were asked to select their top three, which also included an option for “Other” which they could fill in.

**Table 10: Incentives which would encourage employment (top three)**

INCENTIVE	PERCENT
Higher wage	68%
Benefits (extended health benefits, pension)	64%
Flexible hours	46%
Healthy work/life balance	41%
Work from home/remotely	34%
Guaranteed number of hours per week	34%
Positive company culture	31%
Fully vaccinated workplace	19%
Shorter work week	12%
More vacation time	11%
Free parking	9%
Workplace that does not have a vaccine mandate	7%
In-office childcare	4%
Other (please specify):	3%



By far, the two most important incentives were:

- (1) Higher wages
- (2) Benefits (extended health, pensions)

The next tier included:

- (3) Flexible hours
- (4) Healthy work/life balance.

The third tier had:

- (5) Work from home/remotely
- (6) Guaranteed number of hours
- (7) Positive company culture

Items which were less frequently cited were: fully vaccinated workplace; shorter work week; more vacation time; free parking; workplace that does not have a vaccine mandate; and in-office childcare. Among the “Other” category were accommodations for individuals with physical disabilities.

## What services would help you in your search for a job?

Respondents were asked to indicate the services they felt would help them in their job search. They were provided with a list and were asked to choose their top three preferences.

**Table 11: Services to assist in job search (top three)**

INCENTIVE	PERCENT
Skills training	47%
Job fairs	45%
One-on-one job search counselling	45%
Networking with employers	42%
Job search workshops	34%
Mentorship	30%
Job industry specific information	25%
Literacy training (computer or language)	13%
Personal professional branding	10%
Motivational speakers	9%
Other (please specify):	4%

The preferences fell into three clusters:

- Commonly cited preferences (40% or more of respondents):
  - Skills training
  - Job fairs
  - One-on-one job search counselling
  - Networking with employers

- Second-tier preferences (around a third or less of respondents):
  - Job search workshops
  - Mentorships
  - Job industry specific information
- Less frequently cited preferences (under 15% of respondents):
  - Literacy training (computer or language)
  - Personal professional branding
  - Motivational speakers

It is noteworthy that among all the options offered, skills training received the highest proportion of support. In the “Other” category, many respondents either listed what job search techniques they made use of, or else took the opportunity to explain that they were not sure what service would best assist them.

## In Closing

It is important to emphasize the main characteristics of the respondents who replied to the survey:

- Only one in five did not become unemployed during the pandemic; the rest of respondents either lost their job, were laid off temporarily, had their work hours reduced, left their job voluntarily or were not employed at the start of the pandemic.
- Around half were not employed at the time of the survey; slightly more than a third were employed, with most of them working in a different field than where they had been employed before the pandemic.
- Around a third had changed occupations as a result of the pandemic.
- Around a half had made use of either the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or Canada Recovery Benefit.

Among some of the top findings about these jobseekers:

- Half of all respondents indicated that they have pursued training or education opportunities since the pandemic started; this was particularly the case among those who had changed careers.
- They represent a broad range and mix of occupations, with a large proportion of individuals seeking jobs in customer service or office work, as well as a considerable number seeking employment in mid-skilled and highly skilled jobs, from skilled trades to IT or professional services.

- Many are quite comfortable with the prospect of a hybrid form of work, splitting their time between the workplace and working remotely. The main reason why they enjoy remote work is because of the convenience; for some, it helps them overcome such barriers as the lack of a car or the need to take care of dependents; remote work also alleviates their concern about exposure to COVID while on public transit or in the workplace.
- The vast majority of respondents search for employment via electronic means: on-line job postings, social media and company websites; over a third indicated they make use of Employment Ontario Service Centres.
- The strongest incentives to attract these jobseekers to employment are higher wages and employment benefits (extended health care, pensions).
- Their preferred employment services are skills training, job fairs, one-on-one job search counselling, and networking with employers.

The extent to which so many jobseekers have changed occupations could be one reason why employers are having a difficult time finding job candidates. Those who used to work in that occupation may be looking for work elsewhere, while those seeking employment in that new occupation may not yet have the right job skills or connections to finding the job that suits them. There clearly is also a hesitancy due to COVID about returning to the workplace.

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