

Chapter 3

Saskatchewan's employment and skills system

This chapter provides an overview of key employment and skills policies in Saskatchewan. The Ministry of the Economy plays a key role in the overall management of employment and economic development policies while the Ministry of Advanced Education takes the lead role in the formulation of training and skills programmes. Both ministries work with other provincial level ministries and local delivery organisations to grow the province's economy.

Overview of employment and skills policies in Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan is the middle of the three Prairie Provinces and borders the U.S. to the south. Grassland covers its southern plains, and to the north is the Canadian Shield plateau, as well as coniferous forests, rivers and lakes. Most of its 1.13 million inhabitants live in the southern part of the Province with Saskatoon as the largest city with approximately 257 000 and Regina the province's capital with 210 000. Saskatchewan's population has an annual rate of increase of 1.56% which is among the highest in Canada due largely to inward migration from other provinces and abroad and a high birth rate primarily among Saskatchewan's indigenous population.

Saskatchewan is a comeback story where through the three decades preceding 2006 its population had been shrinking. The last decade has seen the province build a thriving economy that has become a draw for both Canadians and international migrants. Its economy has expanded due to commodity extraction (oil and gas, potash, uranium and metals), agriculture (grains and oil seeds), and services both in the private and public sector.

Local government in Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan's *The Municipalities Act* and *The Cities Act* provide the basic legislative framework for all of the province's southern municipalities. The two Acts also describe the general purpose of municipalities. Section 4(2) of both Acts specify that municipalities have the following purposes:

- To provide good government.
- To provide services, facilities and other things that, in the opinion of council, are necessary or desirable for all or a part of the municipality.
- To develop and maintain a safe and viable community.
- To foster economic, social and environmental well-being.
- To provide wise stewardship of public assets.

Because of the relatively small population base, a number of services that are normally delivered at the municipal level are administered centrally through provincial ministries (in other Canadian provinces, local governments would often provide these services). The most important of these is income assistance but other services such as labour market services are organised and report through the Ministry of the Economy.

While municipalities in Saskatchewan are primarily focused on providing physical services and infrastructure to their residents, local actors are taking an increased interest in labour market activities often in conjunction with the municipalities' interest in economic development. At the same time Ministries responsible for individuals on income assistance recognize that the job market for their clients is local and often dependent on important connections to businesses within the community (Government of Saskatchewan, 2015a).

Ministry of the Economy

The Ministry of the Economy is the lead and primary Ministry responsible for the management of employment and labour market policies; however, both the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Advanced Education play pivotal supporting roles.

The Ministry of the Economy advances economic growth to generate wealth and opportunity in Saskatchewan by attracting investment and removing barriers to growth, facilitating resource exploration and development within an effective regulatory framework; and supporting a robust labour market by developing, attracting and retaining a skilled labour force.

In 2012, the Government of Saskatchewan launched the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012). This is the primary framework through which all labour market and skills policies are developed. The Plan for Growth outlines the province's direction – principles, goals and actions – to foster economic growth, including the mechanism for development of labour market and skill policies.

The Ministry of the Economy works with other Ministries (e.g. Advanced Education and Social Services) to develop strategies in support of the Plan for Growth. As required, and in relation to specific projects, other Ministries are consulted. For example, the Ministry of the Economy actively participates in a number of forums, including the Advanced Education Technical Trades Planning forum and contributes to integrated, enterprise-wide strategies such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Disability Strategy.

Front line operations are delivered through the Canada-Saskatchewan Labour Market offices that provide career and employment services to job seekers in need of information on career and job opportunities, as well as training and/or education options that enable participation in the provincial labour market as well as services to employers. The services are focused on matching the skills of Saskatchewan workers with the skill needs of employers. Funding assistance to attend training is available under the Skills Training Benefits programme. The Saskjobs website is the provincial job bank that enables employers to post their jobs. On average, there are over 6 500 job vacancies listed each day. Labour Market Services contracts with community based organisations/third party service providers to provide programming based on regional labour market needs. Programmes are available to help unemployed individuals acquire the fundamental skills they need to participate in the Saskatchewan labour market. Programmes bring together individuals, community-based organisations, employers and government to work in partnership to provide a variety of work preparation opportunities for unemployed people.

A number of targeted programmes are available to help individuals improve their skills to better align with employer job requirements:

- The Targeted Initiative for Older Workers programme, designed to assist unemployed older workers such as (but not limited to) First Nations and Metis peoples with their transition into employment, aligns with the Ministry of the Economy's core lines of business and with the province's Plan for Growth.
- The Canada-Saskatchewan Job Grant is a programme with the intent to “develop the knowledge and skills of Saskatchewan people” by training workers for jobs. The programme is employer driven and has the potential to increase labour market participation of indigenous groups.

- Northern Career Quest is a partnership with federal and provincial governments and northern resource sector companies to support training and employment for indigenous people living in Northern Saskatchewan.
- The Essential Skills for the Workplace programme supports low literacy adults to gain and apply entry-level essential skills within their communities.
- Expanded Adult Basic Education on reserve as well as increased access in urban centres.
- Pilots were initiated in three cities to support First Nations and Métis in their transition from northern or reserve communities into training or jobs in urban centres.

Apprenticeship

Saskatchewan's *Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act 1999* established the Commission as a Corporation and Agent of the Crown to oversee the province's apprenticeship system. The Commission reports to the Minister of the Economy and is responsible for designating trades for apprenticeship training and certification; registering apprentices and journey people, monitoring their training and providing certification of skill levels achieved; entering into agreements for training delivery; and representing Saskatchewan on interprovincial initiatives.

A board of 20 or fewer members is appointed by the provincial government, with the majority selected from industry, equally representing employers and employees. The commission board also has representation from Saskatchewan Polytech, the provincial government and equity groups.

Canada-Saskatchewan Job Grant

Recently the Canada-Saskatchewan Job Grant endeavors to put skills training decisions in the hands of Saskatchewan employers and help workers get the training they need for available jobs. Through the grant established in 2014 as a cost shared initiative of the federal government and Saskatchewan, employers partner to fund training for unemployed or underemployed individuals leading to a new or better full-time job. The core principles of the new programme are that the:

- Employer selects the candidates for training and decides what training is required;
- Employer has a job available for the candidate at the end of the training period;
- Employer financially contributes to the training; and
- Training must be provided by an eligible third-party training institution.

To access a Job Grant, an employer is required to contribute at least one third of the training costs, with the remaining two thirds, up to CAD 10 000, coming from the Job Grant. Eligible training costs include tuition fees charged by the training provider, other mandatory student fees, textbook and other learning materials fees, and examination fees.

Ministry of Advanced Education

The Ministry of Advanced Education is responsible for developing a skilled and educated workforce that meets the needs of Saskatchewan's labour market. The Ministry works with the private sector, educational institutions and community organisations to develop, retain, and attract skilled workers. They also work with educational institutions to recruit and retain international students, and assist First Nations and Métis learners. The Ministry works with postsecondary institutions towards system innovation and sustainability (Government of Saskatchewan, 2015b), and to achieve the following goals:

- Increase participation in and completion of high-quality advanced education for all students, especially First Nations and Métis people;
- Retain educated and skilled workers in the province; and,
- Attract students from outside the province and the country by promoting Saskatchewan's opportunities.

Colleges and Universities

Postsecondary programmes and services are delivered through partnerships with a diverse group of institutions and organisations including the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, the University of Regina, First Nations University of Canada in Regina, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, federated and affiliated colleges, regional colleges, Lakeland College, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Northern Teacher Education Program/Northern Professional Access College, Dumont Technical Institute (DTI), and Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI).

The Ministry of Advanced Education engages with the institutions to respond to the needs of the labour market and to ensure accountability of outcomes and effective governance practices. The Ministry provides funding directly to these postsecondary institutions. The Ministry is also responsible for registering and monitoring private vocational schools to ensure compliance with the legislation to protect the interests of their students.

Saskatchewan Polytechnic offers technical and professional programmes with four campuses located in Saskatoon, Regina, Moose Jaw and Prince Albert. A network of seven regional colleges serves smaller communities. For Saskatchewan's indigenous population, there is the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology with Campuses in Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert and Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research with campuses in Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert (Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology, 2014).

Saskatchewan's system is unique in two respects; in the technical and professional studies, planning is done province wide to create a broad offering while keeping the resource commitments to individual programmes reasonable. Saskatchewan Polytechnic, the Regional colleges and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology collaborate closely jointly offering programmes, sharing resources and not duplicating offerings.

A unique postsecondary institution is the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT). Established in 1976 the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies is a First Nation governed postsecondary institution, recognised under provincial legislation. The Institute grants certificates and diplomas.

SIIT has over 2 000 students into its urban and community programmes as well as serving over 4 800 clients through eight career centres across the province. SIIT is focused on providing work-ready programmes in an indigenous learning environment. Programmes include both in-class and hands-on learning, with close ties to related industry stakeholders to ensure course content is strong and relevant. SIIT provides applied skills training for careers in a variety of areas, including: Adult Basic Education, Business and Information Technology, Community & Health Studies, Professional Development, Trades and Industrial Training.

Ministry of Social Services

The Ministry of Social Services supports vulnerable citizens as they work to build better lives for themselves through economic independence, strong families and strong community organisations. The Ministry assists these efforts with income supports; child and family services; supports for people with disabilities and safe, affordable, accessible housing (Government of Saskatchewan, 2015c).

Targeted Policies and Programmes

Saskatchewan in addition to the range of services for all its citizens provides targeted programmes for a number of groups. Through the Ministry of the Economy, Saskatchewan has 11 Regional Newcomer Gateways that provided co-ordination of services throughout the province. Operating under a settlement service delivery model that integrates such services as:

1. Settlement advisors.
2. ESL language training.
3. Language assessments.
4. Language training – Stage 2 English providing English Training at an intermediate level and English for Employment providing higher language training for the workplace.
5. Immigrant Bridging to Employment (Foreign Qualification Recognition).

Lastly, Saskatchewan has a Provincial Nominee Program, which provides a Saskatchewan Provincial Nomination Certificate to prospective immigrants with the skills and experience targeted by the province to allow them to apply for Canadian permanent residence with processing times that are faster than other Canadian immigration classes.

Indigenous Peoples

For Saskatchewan, First Nations and Métis people are important for the future of the province (Elliot, 2014). The disparity in education and employment outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Saskatchewan remains one of the province's largest challenges.

While Saskatchewan had one of the lowest unemployment rates among non-Indigenous people in Canada in 2011 (4.6%), the province recorded the second highest indigenous unemployment rate across all the provinces at 16.9% only below the Atlantic region. For on-reserve indigenous in particular, the unemployment rate was 27.7%, compared with 13.4% for indigenous people living off-reserve (Statistics Canada, 2011).

The employment disparity is driven by differences in education outcomes, specifically graduation rates between indigenous and non-indigenous learners. In 2010-11, over 72% of Saskatchewan students graduated “on-time” (within three years of entering grade 10) compared to 32.7% of self-identified indigenous students. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education also tracks “extended time graduation”, recognising that some students require more time to complete Grade 12. The extended time graduation (five years after entering Grade 10) rates were 81.1% for all students and 48.1% for self-identified indigenous students” (Government of Saskatchewan, 2015d).

The province also has a series of goals to:

- Build on the report and recommendations of the Joint Task Force on Aboriginal Education and Employment and seek partnerships with tribal councils, individual First Nations

and First Nation businesses to increase employment, businesses and engagement in the economy;

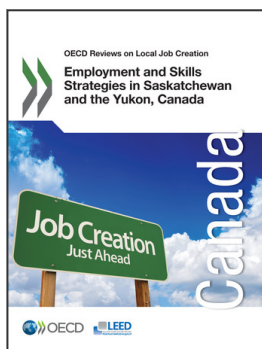
- Reduce the Grade 12 graduation disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the K-12 system by 50 per cent by 2020; and,
- Work with First Nations partners, employers and postsecondary institutions to build on promising programmes underway that assist in transitioning First Nations students moving off reserve to pursue jobs and educational opportunities.

Saskatchewan has moved away from a single focus point dealing with First Nations and Métis in favour of each Ministry having responsibilities with their mandate to provide services and deal with issues arising from the government's responsibilities for First Nation and Métis. In 2012 the Office of the Provincial Interlocutor for First Nations and Métis Relations was established within Saskatchewan's Ministry of Government to signal the changed nature of the province's vision for its relationship with indigenous people.

The role is to provide a bridge to conversation and engagement between the Saskatchewan government and indigenous organisations – a bridge that also involves and connects non- indigenous stakeholders from across the province. Through its work and the relationships it builds the Office of the Interlocutor promotes the Government's innovation agenda, particularly around shared policy objectives, projects and practical arrangements that improve the outcomes of First Nations and Métis (Government of Saskatchewan, 2014).

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