

Addressing the Catch-22: RBC Career Launch Applicants' Recommendations for Improving School- to-Work Transitions

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For this project, CCDF was pleased to work with its associate organization, the Life-Role Development Group Ltd., a national career development consultancy, and Rideout Consultants.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a clear need to improve the school-to-work transitions and the labour market attachment of youth in Canada. For over a decade, the group at risk of not making this transition has expanded beyond those who have typically been the focus of research, policy and programming – those who have left school without a credential. Research is now shining a spotlight on a growing population of youth labeled Poorly Integrated New Entrants (PINEs). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines PINEs as “young people [who] often have qualifications (diplomas or degrees); they frequently go back and forth between temporary jobs, unemployment and/or inactivity, even during periods of strong economic growth” (OECD, 2010, p.13). In Canada, PINEs include a growing group of post-secondary graduates increasingly having difficulty transitioning from school to work.

The difficulty new graduates face during their transition has a lot to do with the labour environment that they are trying to break into. The world of work is changing. In a lean, innovation-focussed, knowledge-based economy, today’s young graduates need to be able to anticipate shifts in careers, manage uncertainty, and be creative. They must also have the ability to tap into finely honed career-management skills and develop an ‘always learning’ mindset. Moreover, young graduates must stay abreast of labour market trends and have the ability to cultivate relationships to gain better access to work opportunities (Bell & Benes, 2012).

This is a tall order for anyone, let alone those new to the labour market. Easing the labour market integration of graduates needs to happen to ensure Canada’s economic prosperity continues. There is a significant link between countries that have effective school-to-work transition systems and economic success (Hoffman, 2015). Fundamental to PINEs’ successful transition into the labour market is leadership at all levels and across multiple stakeholder groups – post-secondary institutions, government, employers and youth - working together to better support transitions from education to employment.

Context to the Study

CCDF was commissioned by RBC to conduct an analysis of applications to its Career Launch internship program for the first three years of its operation (2013 to 2015). The applications received from recent post-secondary education graduates (24 years old or younger) provided data on applicants' work and volunteer history and, in the essay portion of the application, their perspectives regarding what they think can be done to improve school-to-work transitions. RBC asked the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) to analyse these data to see what can be learned about the applicants' school-to-work experience and what they recommend for improving it.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to explore to the extent possible:

- A. The experience of youth transitioning from post-secondary education to work -- examining their challenges, regional and education type/level impacts, their career pathways/work experiences to date, and situate this data in the context of recent literature on school-to-work transitions;
- B. Applicant ideas for supporting better and more efficient labour market attachment of recent graduates; and
- C. Ideas for engaging employers to actively support graduates' education-to-employment transitions.

RESEARCH METHOD

The RBC provided a random sample of applicants to CCDF for a detailed analysis from the total applications received. The sample data set contained 1,475 online entries over the 3-year period. Once all duplicate or incomplete applications were removed from the sample, 1,368 remained of which 30 were French applications (Table 1).

Table 1: Applications in Sample by Year

Year	Applications in Sample
2013	543
2014	407
2015	388
French	30
Total	1368

Because the sample size of French language applications (2.2%) was too small to allow for comparisons across language groups, these applications were integrated into the full sample.

To ensure that the sample provided was representative of the total group of applications received by RBC, the proportion of applicants from each region of Canada was compared. Since there is little year-to-year difference within each group, only the three year totals were examined. For example, in the research sample 81% of the applicants had addresses in Central Canada compared to 82.2% of the overall population. It would appear the sample is an accurate reflection of the total population of applicants.

Table 2: Comparing the composition of the sample to the population

Region	Population (N=5671)	Sample (n=1367)	Difference (Pop – Sample)
	Percentage of Applicants		
Western	13.8	14.7	-0.9
Central	82.2	81	1.2
Eastern	4	4.4	-0.4

Data

Information Captured on the Application Form

Generally, the applicants to the Career Launch Program were required to fill out the same application form. The form contained the following sections:

- Identification Information: First and last name
- Contact Information: Mailing address, telephone and email
- Education: Highest level of education attained, graduation date, institution, and program, field or discipline
- Work Experience: Past work experience beginning with most recent (including summer and part-time). Employer name, position title, duration and description of the experience and what was learned (max. 500 characters)
- Volunteer Experience: Community involvement and extracurricular activities including host organization name, position title, length of involvement and a description of the experience and motivation for getting involved (500 characters)
- Essay: Applicants were also required to write an essay (no longer than 500 words) responding to a particular topic/question. The essay topic/questions that applicants were required to respond to differed slightly from year to year.
 - **(Year 1: 2013)** Finding a meaningful first work experience remains a challenge for many youth across Canada. What solutions would you propose to help more youth gain the experience they need to accelerate their careers?
 - **(Year 2: 2014)** Making the transition from school to work can be very challenging for young college and university graduates. What suggestions would you make for how government, post-secondary institutions and Corporate Canada could collaborate to help solve this challenge?
 - **(Year 3: 2015)** Making the transition from school to work can be very challenging for young college and university graduates. What suggestions would you make for how young people can help to address this challenge?

Research Design

Restrictions of Reporting

Applicant Privacy

Applicant names, contact information, institutions where they graduated, employer or volunteer organization names were restricted from the research. The study was also restricted from using direct quotes from candidates that might reveal their identity. This means that, for the most part, references to candidate ideas, thought or feelings are paraphrased through the report.

Data Entry

Applicants self-entered their information in all sections of the application form. There were no prescribed selection choices or radio buttons to indicate choices. The only restriction came in descriptive areas of the form that had either maximum word or character counts. CCDF found little uniformity in the way the data were entered across the applications. This posed some analytic restrictions and limitations to cross-comparisons, especially in areas where duration and dates were recorded.

Limits of Demographic Information

Coupled with the privacy restrictions, there was very little demographic information contained on the forms. In keeping with Canadian employment laws and practices, there is no section on the form that captures information regarding age, gender, ethnicity, ability, or other demographic characteristics. We know because of eligibility requirements for the RBC Career Launch Program that the applicants needed to be 24 years of age or younger, eligible to work in Canada and have a post-secondary diploma or degree.

Developing Codes and Themes

The narrative data from the essays underwent thematic analyses in order to:

- portray what youth were saying in a meaningful and succinct way, and
- create a data set of themes/codes that could be used in a statistical manner to explore relationships between variables. In this section, the method for code and theme development is described.

An inductive approach to identifying themes in the data was used; no pre-existing theoretical framework or model was imposed on the data. By illuminating the naturally occurring themes within the essays, researchers attempted to highlight the youth voice on school-to-work transition issues, delineate, where possible, core elements of their lived reality within the transition, and isolate their recommendations for enhancing transition success.

Thematic Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Thematic analysis involves six general phases (Braun & Clark, 2006, pp.77-101), each listed and described below.

1. Becoming familiar with the data

CCDF researchers independently read a randomly selected sample of 50 applications per year (n=150 or approximately 10% of the data set). The percentage of English and French applications reviewed in this sample essay review matched the percentage difference between the total English and French applications received from RBC. The intent was to familiarize themselves with the voices of the applicants, the nature of the descriptions, and dominant themes in the text. This sample sub-set would not be sufficiently large for robust statistical analyses, but it provided a broad enough base to see the key themes in the descriptions.

2. Generating initial codes

As with all qualitative analyses, researcher bias can play a large role in both coding data and identifying themes within data. CCDF attempted to minimize bias by:

- having three researchers code samples of the data set independently before comparing findings
- using another researcher to independently code the data by reading the applications and using QSR International's *NVivo* (v. 10) text analysis software.

Researchers met to discuss and agree upon the elements to be coded across the applications. Researchers agreed to focus on the descriptive sections across the application (description of work experience and learning descriptions from it, description of volunteer experience and reason for getting involved, and the essay) for the preliminary coding. Before proceeding with the review of the sample applications, three researchers reviewed the essay portion sample in Year 2 (2014) of the applications in order to complete a preliminary check of inter-rater reliability for both codes and initial themes. Codes identified by each of the three researchers were then compared. Although a statistical comparison of ratings was not conducted, a visual comparison of the codes showed high agreement between researchers.

Similar to the process used by CCDF researchers, the researcher using *NVivo* also conducted a manual coding of randomly selected essays before commencing the autocoding process. Random cases were selected during the autocoding to check accuracy.

The CCDF researchers' codes were compared to the codes generated by *NVivo*.

3. Searching for themes

Themes, or groups of related codes, were independently generated by the coding researchers and generated independently by the researcher using *NVivo*. There was high agreement on the themes between the researchers. Sub-codes associated with each theme were attributed.

4. Reviewing themes

The coding researchers' themes and the themes derived from *NVivo* were reviewed and compared by the entire team. The primary aim here was to ensure they captured all the codes and provided a coherent picture of these data.

5. Defining and naming themes

Final themes were named and defined, ensuring they captured all the narrative data.

6. Interpreting the themes

In determining the themes, the following questions guided the researchers as they explored these data:

1. What do applicants feel about the school-to-work transition?
2. What did applicants expect with regards to the school-to-work transition?
3. What do applicants believe about the school-to-work transition?
4. What do applicants recommend to improve the school-to-work transition?
5. What do applicants report that they currently need to make a successful school-to-work transition?
6. What do applicants report possessing that will help them with the school-to-work transition?
7. What do applicants wish they had prior to the school-to-work transition?

8. What do applicants worry about regarding the school-to-work transition (and beyond)?
9. What do applicants neglect to address when discussing school-to-work transitions?

NVivo, via its ability to “count” codes and themes, was used to ensure that these questions could be answered in a way that represents applicants’ voice proportionally. As will be seen in the “Results” section, not all of the above questions could be answered discretely, and were therefore collapsed into a smaller set of questions.

Note that the data comprise youths’ narrative reports. Everything in the data set is from applicants’ perspectives, and there are no external data points against which comparisons can be made. Comparison questions, such as “How are youths’ perceptions today different than a generation ago?” could not be answered. In addition, there is no comparative data regarding youth who did not apply to this program, and therefore limited inferences can be made to youth outside this population of applicants to RBC’s Career Launch Program.

Relational Analyses

Although this study is a qualitative one, it was anticipated that some global comparisons could be made between the responses of different types/backgrounds of applicants (e.g., urban vs rural; arts vs science vs business programs). The meaningful examination of these relationships was largely thwarted for two reasons. First, as the “Sample” section above illustrates, the applicants were fairly uniform in terms of geography and population density. There was some variation in subject area of degree, but in this case the sample split into 2 main groups: Finance & Business (56%) and everybody else (44%). Comparisons between these two groups could have been meaningfully completed, but it is not clear to what end. The researchers did not see the value in comparing Finance & Business graduates to all others when the “all others” could not be robustly differentiated statistically.

The second factor preventing a statistical approach to examining relationships between many of the variables was the nature of dependent variables (i.e., the codes and themes). Codes were clustered into themes composed of related words and/or synonyms (e.g., the theme Optimistic included the codes optimistic, confident, hopeful and promising). Codes were counted by *NVivo*, and files with “stems” were created for each year and theme so that the researchers could look at each instance of a code’s mention. Researchers then went through the stems and removed items from *NVivo*’s tally that were unrelated to the intent of the theme. Two examples are provided below.

Example 1: Optimistic (optimistic/confident/hopeful/promising) was a theme intended to capture the feeling applicants had about the school-to-work transition and their future beyond this transition. The question being answered in this theme was “Were they hopeful about making it through the transition”? A review of actual stems found four types of references to optimistic/confident/hopeful/promising¹:

- the applicant’s feeling about the future (particularly their future) (e.g., “I feel optimistic that I’ll make a successful transition.”)

¹ NOTE: None of the quotations are from the applicants’ submissions; all are fictitious.

- the applicant's prediction about how the interventions they recommended in their essays would work (e.g., "If industry does X, I'm confident that the transition will be easier for students in the future.")
- the applicant's prediction about how confidence or hope could generally be developed among youth (e.g., "If students do Y, they will feel more hopeful about the future.")
- irrelevant references, such as "the confident candidate will do well in an interview," or "find a confident" (when the applicant meant "confidant")

Example 2: The theme Anxious (composed of anxious/nervous/stressed/worried) was intended to capture the negative emotional reaction of the applicants to the school-to-work transition. A review of actual stems found three types of references:

- The applicant's feeling about the transition (e.g., "I am worried about my future.")
- The applicant's declaration of an item's importance (e.g., "It should be stressed that every student needs X.")
- Irrelevant references, such as "In university, it was stressed that..."

All of the above is to say that the researchers "manually" removed irrelevant stems from those generated by *NVivo*, resulting in the researchers having a different data set than the set held by *NVivo*. Using inferential statistical methods to compare response would have therefore required manually removing specific stems from *NVivo*'s data set, an endeavour well beyond the scope of this project.

Descriptive statistics were used to compare subject area of degree (e.g., Finance & Business, Arts) with the sectors of applicants' work experiences.

RESULTS

Profile of Applicants and their Work and Volunteer Experience

Residency

Table 3 provides a summary of where the applicants lived when they applied to the RBC Career Launch Program. All three application years (cohorts) taken together show that approximately 80% reside in Central Canada, with less than 5% residing in the Eastern provinces. As shown in Table 4, virtually all (97%) of the applications were applying from urban addresses.

Table 3: Number of applications per year

Jurisdiction	2013	2014	2015	Total
Western	65	66	70	201
Central	465	330	312	1107
Eastern	19	19	22	60
Total	549	415	404	1368

Table 4: Number of applications by population density

	2014	2015	2016	Total
Urban	536	401	395	1332 (97.4%)
Rural	13	14	9	36 (2.6%)
Total	549	415	404	1368 (100.0%)

Level of Education

The majority of applicants (84.9%) listed a Bachelor or Bachelor with Honours degree as their highest level of education attained (Table 5). Nine percent listed a Master's degree and 7% a college diploma. As shown in Table 6, over half (55.6%) of the applicants specialized in Business/Finance.

Table 5: Level of education by year

Level of Education	2014	2015	2016	Total
Diploma (College)	44	24	22	90
Bachelor	259	179	203	641
Bachelor and Honours	206	175	139	520
Master's	40	37	40	117
Total	549	415	404	1368

Figure 1: Combined level of education for the three years

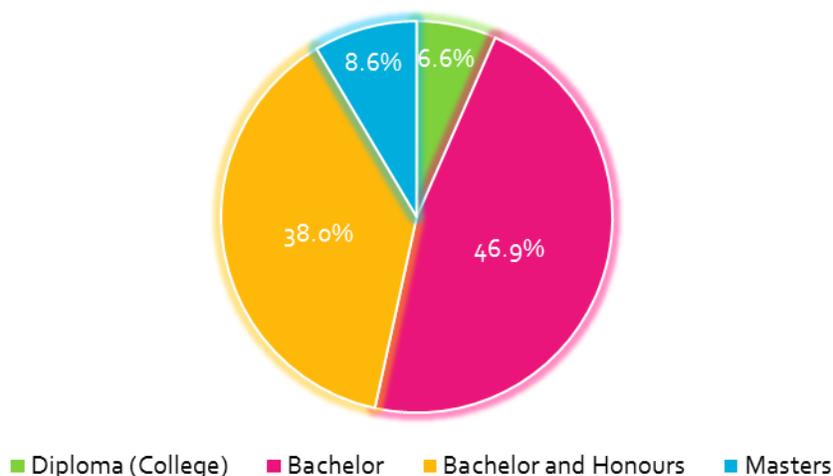


Table 6: Degree subject area

	Year 1 (n=549)	Year 2 (n=415)	Year 3 (n=404)	Total (n=1368)
Finance + Business	56.8%	54.0%	55.7%	55.6%
Arts	20.8%	22.2%	21.0%	21.3%
Maths, Sciences, Engineering and computer/tech related	12.4%	14.2%	16.3%	14.1%
Other (Sport/Recreation/Nutrition/ International or Global Affairs)	10.0%	9.6%	6.9%	9.0%
Total	10.0%	9.6%	6.9%	9.0%

Work Experience

Table 7 shows that almost all applicants (98.8%) have work experience and almost three quarters of the applicants (71.6%) listed as having had three or more positions. Table 8 indicates that in their most recent position most (66.5%) had one year or less at that position. Thirty-three percent indicated that they had two or more years at their most recent position. Inconsistency in the data entry of the duration of each work experience prevented an analysis of the accumulated total of months/years of experience applicant had.

Table 9 and Figure 2 examine applicant work experience across sectors of those in different disciplines. All jobs listed by the applicants in the work experience section were matched to the sectors listed in the National Occupation Classification (see [NOC](#)). This table shows that whereas almost 45% of business and finance graduates had work in the sector; approximately 31% had experience in the sales and service sector. Arts graduates also had a range of experience. Most had experience in the sales and

service sector (36.6%). Almost a third (30.0%) had experience in business finance and administration occupations. Only 9.0% of math, science, engineering and computer/tech graduates found work in natural and applied sciences and related occupations whereas 27.9% found work in business, finance and administration. More arts graduates (6.4%) than any other discipline had work experience at the managerial level.

In the section of the form that asks applicants to describe what they learned through each position, the most common response by applicants was to list the skills that they had developed. Table 10 lists the most common skills referenced by the applicants. Communications (namely oral communication) (15.0%), customer services (10.4%), management (7.7%) and problem solving/analytical skills (7.1%) were most commonly referenced.

Table 7: Number of jobs listed by applicants by year

	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
None	8	1.5%	6	1.4%	3	0.7%	17	1.2%
1	35	6.4%	37	8.9%	46	11.4%	118	8.6%
2	97	17.7%	73	17.6%	84	20.8%	254	18.6%
3	146	26.6%	132	31.8%	120	29.7%	398	29.1%
4 or more	263	47.9%	167	40.2%	151	37.4%	581	42.5%
Total	549	100.0%	415	100.0%	404	100.0%	1368	100.0%

Table 8: Years of experience in most current position

	Number of Applicants (n)	Percentage (n/1351)
1 year or less	899	66.5
2 years	197	14.6
3 years	96	7.1
4 years	57	4.2
5 years	26	1.9
6 or more years	49	3.6
No work dates listed	27	2.0
Total	1351	100.0

Table 9: Sector of work experience by degree

	Finance + Business	Arts	Math, Sciences, Engineering and computer/ technology related	Other (Sport/ Recreation/Nutrition/ International or Global Affairs)	Total
Manager	6.3%	6.4%	4.8%	6.1%	6.1%
Business, finance and administration occupations	44.9%	30.0%	27.9%	37.9%	38.6%
Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	2.1%	1.9%	9.0%	1.3%	2.9%
Health occupations	0.3%	0.3%	2.0%	0.5%	0.6%
Occupations in education, law and social, community and government services	8.3%	10.4%	15.4%	11.7%	10.1%
Occupations in art, culture, recreation and sport	3.9%	8.3%	5.3%	6.9%	5.4%
Sales and service occupations	30.9%	36.6%	30.5%	32.6%	32.3%
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	1.6%	2.9%	2.4%	2.1%	2.1%
Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations	0.3%	1.2%	0.9%	0.3%	0.6%
Occupations in manufacturing and utilities	1.5%	2.0%	1.7%	0.5%	1.6%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 2: Sector of work experience by degree

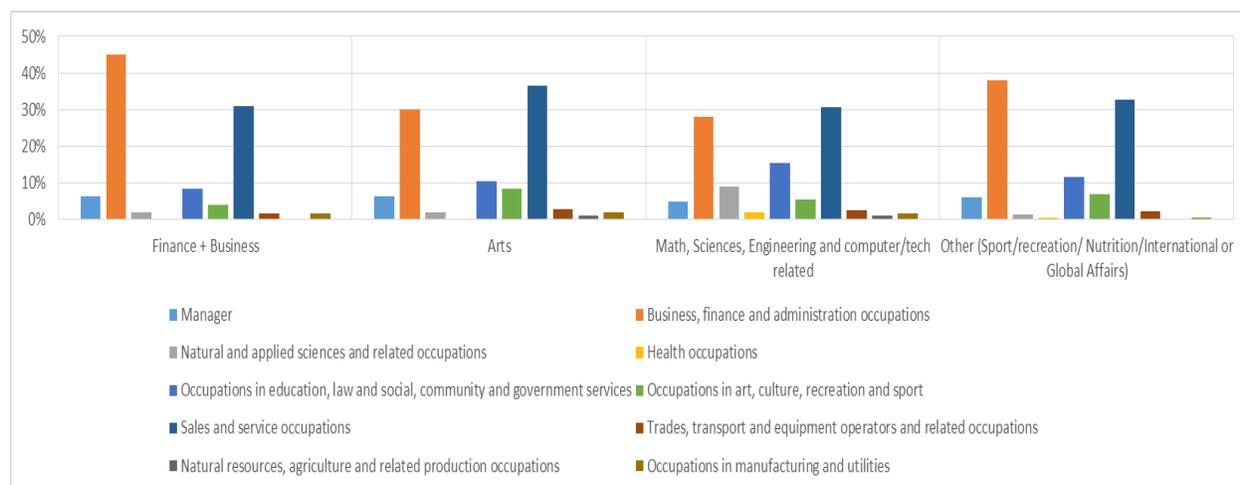


Table 10: Applicant reported skills learned through work experience

	Number of Applicants (n)	Percentage (n/1351)
Communication skills	203	15.0%
Customer service skills	140	10.4%
Management skills	104	7.7%
Problem solving and analytical skills	96	7.1%
Interpersonal skills	95	7.0%
Organizational/Organization skills	91	6.7%
Leadership	47	3.5%

Volunteer Experience

Applicants were also asked to describe their community involvement and/or extracurricular activities. Approximately 93% of applicants listed at least one entry in this section and over half (50.6%) had three or more experiences. A review of the reasons applicants gave for why they decided to get involved revealed different motivations for engagement (Table 12). The majority of applicants volunteered for altruistic reasons, including giving back to the community, contributing to a cause which had personal meaning and the desire to help those in need. Less commonly cited was volunteering to advance one’s own career development, for example, to gain relevant work experience and enhance soft skills.

Table 11: Number of volunteer positions or extracurricular activities reported

	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%
None	35	6.4%	33	8.0%	26	6.4%	94	6.9%
1	92	16.8%	72	17.3%	91	22.5%	255	18.6%
2	124	22.6%	97	23.4%	106	26.2%	327	23.9%
3	122	22.2%	105	25.3%	70	17.3%	297	21.7%
4 or more	176	32.1%	108	26.0%	111	27.5%	395	28.9%
Total	549	100.0%	415	100.0%	404	100.0%	1368	100.0%

Table 12: Motivation for Volunteering

Reason	Broad Definition	Number of Applicants (n)	Percentage (n/1274)
Give back to community/Help those in need	They expressed a desire to give back to the community and/or help those in need.	408	32%
Interested in it and wanted to help out	Applicants found something they were interested in. For example, one person was interested in horses and wanted to find an opportunity to volunteer with horses	201	15.8%
Share their skills and passion in sport	Applicants played a sport when they were younger or continue to and they want others to share the same joy and learn the benefits of playing on a team.	128	10.0%
Has a connection	They volunteered in an area that has a personal significance, such as volunteering for a cancer fundraiser because a family member had cancer.	99	7.8%
Soft skills	Wanted to use, practice and/or develop their communication, teamwork and other soft skills	87	6.8%
Gain experience	Wanted to gain experience in their degree area. For example, a finance major volunteering in a bank	82	6.5%
Other		269	21.1%

Interpretation

The applicants to RBC's Career Launch Program have primarily graduated from a bachelor's program, just over half completed a degree in finance/business. They reside primarily in urban areas in Central Canada.

It appears that many applicants to the program had work experiences from which to support their transition to work. Many have had three or more positions and slightly over a third had two plus years of experience in their latest jobs. In a review of their descriptions of these jobs, it was evident that applicants pursued both conventional and non-conventional routes to gain job experience. They listed co-op related positions, summer work, accessing work experience opportunities through government (e.g. the Federal Summer Work Experience Program) and private company work study and/or internship programs.

Many graduates found jobs in a range of sectors. Over one third (38.6%) had experience in the business, finance and administration sector. Almost a third (32.3%) had work experience in the sales and service sector with almost 37% of arts graduates having found work in the sector.

Participants described a depth of learning across many of their work experiences. Their short descriptions of these positions showed a range in the "quality" of the experience. Overall, however, it seems that many applicants were accessing work experience that provided skill development. In terms of on-the-job learning, a number of applicants spoke to a range of skills that they had developed. Many of the skills referred to by applicants included skills transferrable across sectors.

The data found in the volunteer experience section of the applicant form paints a positive picture of this group of graduates. They are involved in their communities and it seems that the motivations for this involvement stems from their values around "giving back." It is interesting that the applicants downplayed or did not mention the role that volunteering can have in supporting career development in this section as they referred to the career benefits in their essays (see Thematic Analysis). This could be because of the nature of the question: why did you decide to get involved? Participants likely did get involved because they were motivated by the cause and it may have appeared self-serving to state on this job application that they did it to advance their career. These data, when coupled with the data on their work experience above, seem to indicate that many applicants have had work experience in a range of different roles, both paid and unpaid, to which they have applied and developed their skills and increased their employability.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Applicants' Reported Experience of Transition

What do applicants feel about the school-to-work transition?

The essays included references to a variety of emotions related to the school-to-work transition. These emotion-laden words and phrases were grouped into the following themes, the first set of which collect positive emotions and the second set capturing negative emotions.

7. Positive

- *Optimistic.* This theme refers to the applicants' sense of optimism and hope, their confidence in navigating the school-to-work transition, and their tendency to see a promising future. This theme is divided into two parts. The "optimistic – self" identifies instances in which the applicant is clearly referring to their own sense of optimism, whereas "Optimistic – prescriptive" groups cases of advice to other youth to be optimistic and confident if they are to successfully transition to work.
- *Motivated.* Drive, determination and motivation to make the school-to-work transition successful are captured in this theme. Again, there is a division between "self" references (e.g., "I am determined to...") and "prescriptive" references (e.g., "Youth should stay motivated to...").
- *Enthusiastic.* Capturing the excitement, eagerness, energy and overall enthusiasm to make the school-to-work transition, this theme is related to "motivated" but focuses on sentiments of a real keenness to successfully enter the world of work. As with the previous two themes, this one is sub-divided into "self" and "prescriptive."

8. Negative

- *Uncertain & Unprepared.* This theme captured uncertainty, confusion, feelings of unpreparedness, and indications of indecision. Very few applicants referred to their own uncertainty and unpreparedness; almost all mentions within this theme refer to the youth population in general. Further, the overarching view of candidates is that the school-to-work transition is *inherently* uncertain. The uncertainty is not about them, their education or employers but rather it is a "given" to be expected in a major life transition. There was reflection in some of the essays regarding how this inherent uncertainty has been heightened by a complex and changing labour market. In a simpler and more stable work world, the transition may have felt less uncertain, according to some candidates. However, these applicants also pointed out there would be less freedom of choice in such a labour market.

Although not differentiated in the table below, this theme captured uncertainty and unpreparedness in three areas:

- Overall career direction (Where am I headed?)
- How to obtain relevant work after graduation (I know what I want to do, but how do I get work in my area of interest?)

- How to transfer academic learning to the work environment (How can I take the theory I've learned and convert that into practical steps for which an employer would want to pay?)
- *Anxious*. Anxiety, nervousness, feeling stressed and feeling worried were captured in this theme. Again, the vast majority of these instances were about youth in general rather than being self-referential.
- *Discouraged*. The struggle of the school-to-work transition can lead some to be discouraged or disheartened. This theme captures instances of this feeling, again with almost all candidates referring to the youth population in general rather than to their own feelings of discouragement.

As shown in Table 13 below, on average there are few mentions of these “feeling” themes, with the highest average of 8 incidents per 100 applicants for Uncertain & Unprepared.

Applicants used positive and negative descriptors roughly equally to portray their feelings or their recommendation regarding other youth’s feelings about the school-to-work transition (4 uses/100 applicants positive vs. 5 uses/100 applicants negative). When describing the Optimistic or Motivated themes, candidates spoke less of themselves and more of other youth. However, their descriptions within the theme of Enthusiastic were more self-referential than prescriptive.

The negative feeling themes were mentioned in the order of Uncertain & Unprepared (8), Anxious (5), and Discouraged (3).

Table 13: Feelings Regarding School-to-Work Transition by Year – Mentions Per 100 Applicants

	Feeling	Year 1 (2013)	Year 2 (2014)	Year 3 (2015)	Avg	Code Avg	Composite Average
Positive	Optimistic - - self	3	0	4	2	3	4
	Optimistic – prescriptive	2	0	11	4		
	Motivated -- self	4	0	2	1	3	
	Motivated – prescriptive	4	3	9	5		
	Enthusiastic -- self	6	6	5	6	4	
	Enthusiastic -- prescriptive	1	0	4	2		
Negative	Uncertain & Unprepared	5	10	9	8	8	5
	Anxious	3	4	11	5	5	
	Discouraged	2	1	5	3	3	

What do applicants worry about regarding the school-to-work transition (and beyond)?

“Anxious” was one of the themes relating to applicants’ feelings about the school-to-work transition identified in the question above. This theme included feelings of anxiety, stress and worry. This section describes the origin or object of the worry. Two of the three codes were not merged into larger thematic units for this analysis; these codes are sufficiently distinct to treat separately. A theme that was dropped from the original analysis was “obstacles.” An initial reading of the essays indicated applicants worried about a number of obstacles or barriers to the school-to-work transition. Further reading and analysis, however, illustrated that the obstacles they are concerned about lie within the three thematic areas listed below:

- *Catch-22*. Applicants referred to the problem of not being hired because of not having relevant work experience, and not having relevant work experience because no organization will hire them. Joseph Heller’s “Catch-22” was a term often used to describe this double-bind. Applicants worry that there may be no way out of this cycle.
- *Competition*. The competitiveness of the environment they are seeking to enter is recognized by many applicants. They worry that a successful school-to-work transition may require a competitive edge over others, such as relevant work experience, a unique educational program or a broad network.
- *Debt*. Many applicants referred to the problems of student-loan debt in terms of being a restrictive burden that will influence how they live. However, as an object of worry, the vast majority of applicants who discussed debt did so in the context of how it created competitive disadvantages (e.g., by forcing individuals to take work simply for the sake of income).

The relative weighting of worries about their Catch-22 situation, Competition and Debt are provided in Table 14 below. Competition receives the most mentions (15 per 100 applicants), with Debt (7 per 100) and Catch-22 (4 per 100) following.

Table 14: Object of Worry Regarding School-to-Work Transition by Year – Mentions Per 100 Applicants

Object of Worry	Year 1 (2013)	Year 2 (2014)	Year 3 (2015)	Average
Catch-22	5	5	2	4
Competition	16	14	14	15
Debt	4	15	4	7

Interpretation

The low frequency of “feeling” themes is not surprising given the context in which the essays were submitted and the questions posed for the essays. The questions sought solutions and recommendations regarding school-to-work transition issues but did not ask about the experience of making the transition. It would also seem reasonable that individuals applying for a job would temper their emotional comments.

It is interesting that when emotions or feelings were addressed in the essays, there was a balance between positive and negative emotions. Also, one might expect that concomitant with the theme of Uncertain and Unprepared would be equal mention of the themes of Anxiety and Discouraged, but this was not the case. It appears that the applicants in this study either (a) experience uncertainty (8 per 100) without necessarily becoming anxious (5 per 100) or discouraged (3 per 100), or (b) have moderated their responses in the essays so as to appear upbeat. A visual review of Table 13 shows that Year 2 (2014) responses included the fewest references to emotional experiences. These essays regarding collaboration between government, post-secondary institutions and industry tended to use reactions such as discouragement to justify their recommendations (e.g., If this collaboration does not happen, many young people may become discouraged.).

The recognition of the inherent uncertainty of a major transition in a number of the essays reflect some applicants’ understanding that one cannot know the end result of the transition beforehand. Essays that spoke to this issue pointed to the value of this recognition in avoiding discouragement.

The Catch-22 theme is likely more prevalent than is illustrated in Table 14 above; applicants could well have alluded to the dilemma without using language that NVivo would pick up. Also, because of the nature of the questions they were asked (i.e., how to help youth gain experience, how stakeholders can collaborate, and how graduates can fare better) as well as the context in which the questions were asked (i.e., an application to a corporation), it is reasonable to assume that applicants worry more, and about more things, than are revealed in these essays.

Notwithstanding the data limitations, there are some interesting findings in these essays regarding applicants’ objects of worry. The Catch-22 of no work-no experience/no experience-no work is anxiety-provoking to many applicants because they feel it is out of their hands to do something about this. They report doing what they can to prepare for the market they are interested in, but it is not up to them to change the hiring practices of employers. Youth can take things only so far, and they describe then being in a holding pattern until a fortuitous circumstance creates a lucky break for them. Many applicants described paid internships, such as RBC’s, as the positive circumstance that could break through the dilemma. Some applicants recognized that unpaid internships might do so as well, but then new problems, particularly financial, would prevent many graduates from making use of these opportunities. This discussion led many applicants to discuss the other two areas of worry: Competition (e.g., only the wealthy can take on unpaid internships) and Debt (e.g., an unpaid internship is particularly daunting when one is already in debt with student loans).

The description of Competition as a theme was interesting for what applicants did *not* describe, which was the idea of a dog-eat-dog, survival-of-the-fittest mentality in the labour market. Applicants who

described competitiveness as a worry certainly recognized that there may be limited jobs available and that one person getting a job means another cannot have that job. However, the tone of these descriptions of the inherent competitive nature of the labour market were generally matter-of-fact; the worry component arose when applicants described competitive advantages they may not possess. For example, a number mentioned the value of being in a co-operative education program, seeing graduates of co-op programs having an advantage over those from traditional programs.

The Competition theme included not only descriptions of 'external' enhancements to competitiveness, such as co-op programs or one's network, but internal advantages that could be developed. These included self-awareness (particularly regarding skill sets), career planning knowledge and ability, job search ability, and general comportment (including, for example, self-confidence and optimism).

Debt as a theme was often related to the theme of Competition. There was surprisingly little mention of debt as a burden unto itself. One could expect how a heavy debt load would have applicants worrying about what kind of lifestyle they could have and how the debt would impede their ability to engage in desired activities. This is not what they described, however. Almost all discussion of debt was in the context of creating a competitive disadvantage. This could happen in a number of ways:

- Those in debt would be unlikely to participate in an unpaid internship, giving an advantage to those (who are likely wealthy) with the internship experience.
- Debt load could force someone to take an underemployment position simply because debt payments needed to be made. Being employed in a potentially unrelated sector to one's aspirations would prevent the person from actively seeking work in the desired sector, and it may reflect poorly on the person in their resume, further entrenching the Catch-22 situation.
- Debt, or the prospect of imminent debt, can be a significant mental/emotional distraction that may impair performance both at school and at work. The reduced ability to function can create a further disadvantage to debt-laden students via poorer grades, unemployed graduates through impaired work search abilities/energy or new employees due to reduced work performance.

To summarize, the applicants' worries are within the realm of reasonable; these concerns are normal, natural and appropriate given the labour market they face. These worries were not accompanied by self-pity or a "blame the system" attitude, with the possible exception of unpaid internships. These were seen as both exploitive and inherently unfair, giving an advantage to those better-off than others.

Applicant Recommendations to Improve the School-to-Work Transition

What do applicants say is needed to improve school-to-work transitions in Canada?

The question posed in each year's application, although worded slightly differently, asked applicants to share their ideas for improving graduate transition from school to work. For each year, their recommendations were coded and grouped into themes to capture the differences among the responses to each year's question (see Tables 15, 16 and 17 below). The themes listed in each table represent the culmination of two types of analysis – researcher coding and a word frequency search conducted with NVivo. The word frequency search was limited to the 100 most frequently used words that were then matched against the researcher-identified themes to ensure that all themes and codes

were captured. The number/percentage of applicants who mention a theme are captured in the tables below. An analysis of the themes for each year as well as comparisons among the recommendations across years will be made in the discussion section that follows the thematic tables.

Table 15: Year 1 (2013) Applicant response to essay question: Finding a meaningful first work experience remains a challenge for many youth across Canada. What solutions would you propose to help more youth gain the experience they need to accelerate their careers?

Theme/Code	Description	Number of Applicants (n)	% (n/549)
Work Integrated Learning (WIL) ("Co-op" "Internship" "Work Terms")	Co-op programs and internships provide an opportunity to gain work experience that will support entry into the labour market. All students should be able to take advantage of these opportunities. Post-secondary institutions, governments and employers should develop incentives that will allow for more of these opportunities to exist.	227	41.3%
Networking to build connections	More opportunities to network with others during school and after graduation.	230	41.9%
Volunteer	Young people need to take advantage of volunteer opportunities to gain experience/develop new skills.	208	37.9%
Financial incentives	Government provision of incentives to employers to participate in work experience programming (specifically co-ops and internships).	102	18.6%
Job search and career development	Opportunities to learn about career opportunities, career planning and job search strategies.	96	17.5%
Mandatory work integrated learning and career courses	Work integrated learning and career courses (career exploration and the development of career management skills) as graduation requirements for all students.	83	15.1%
Mentoring	More access to mentors that can provide learning about work environments.	53	9.7%
Transferable skills	Students and graduates need to be open to a variety of opportunities because skills learned in one sector can be used in others.	32	5.8%

Table 16: Year 2 (2014) Applicant response to essay question: Making the transition from school to work can be very challenging for young college and university graduates. What suggestions would you make for how government, post-secondary institutions and Corporate Canada could collaborate to help solve this challenge?

Theme/Code	Description	Number of applicants	% (n/414)
Pre and Post-grad work experience programming (e.g. internships/ apprenticeships)	Businesses and governments need to ensure there are programs widely available to give all students and new graduates the opportunity to gain work experience.	285	68.8%
Mandatory courses or placements during education	Schools should add compulsory requirements to degree programs to support transition. Mandatory co-op and career development courses were recommended.	253	61.1%
Make aware of job availability	Students need to be more aware of current job trends, the various career options available and what to expect in the workplace. Employers need to more readily advertise their jobs and to collaborate with governments and schools to provide information on skill requirements and future hiring trends.	242	58.5%
Financial incentives to hire new graduates	Governments should provide financial incentives (tax breaks, wage subsidies) to businesses to promote the hiring of new graduates.	209	50.5%
Hire more recent graduates more entry level positions	Businesses should make effort to hire new graduates including raising the number of entry level positions in their organizations.	196	47.3%
Collaboration	Applicants called for a greater degree of collaboration amongst business, schools, governments and youth to support more effective school-to-work transitions.	190	45.9%
Skills training	Programs should be available to provide students and graduates the opportunity to develop their skills in relevant areas (e.g. learning data analysis).	139	33.6%
Mentoring	Increasing the number of mentoring programs to help students and graduates become familiar with different careers and/or settle into the work environment.	32	7.7%
Graduate or student financial support	Governments can provide students with financial support while they work or provide flexibility in repaying student loans.	20	4.8%

Table 17: Year 3 (2015) Applicant Response to Essay Question: Making the transition from school to work can be very challenging for young college and university graduates. What suggestions would you make for how young people can help to address this challenge?

Theme	Description	Number of applicants	% (n/404)
Networking and connecting with others	Youth should actively seek out networking opportunities.	362	89.6%
Gain work experience and or transferable skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-op placements Volunteer Working other jobs Keep an open mind 	Students and new graduates should seek out and take advantage of any opportunities they have in gaining job related experiences. Volunteering is helpful. Unpaid internships can be considered if there are concrete advantages to doing so (network contacts, skills development). Be open to taking jobs that do not appear to be connected to a desired career path. Skills learned are transferrable in any sector.	266	65.8%
Set goals and make a plan	Develop goals and set a realistic plan for achieving them.	234	57.9%
Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find opportunities to learn Use opportunities to gain career Information Mentors or role models can be good sources for learning about careers and work environment 	Before graduating students should take the time to learn about the career paths that are available to them. They should keep learning beyond graduation. Students and graduates should actively look for opportunities to develop skills, explore career options and learn about labour market trends. Mentors, networking and workshops can be sources of learning and are supports for job search.	220	54.5%
Work-life balance	Self-care is important during the transition period and throughout one's career. Students and graduates should be mindful of achieving work-life balance.	161	39.9%
School does not prepare for the transition	School provides theoretical knowledge and skills. Few students have access to applied learning.	143	35.3%
Stay positive	Youth should maintain a positive attitude throughout their transition.	109	27.0%
Soft skills development	Students and graduates need to proactively seek out opportunities to develop their soft skills namely interpersonal skills as they are critical to finding and keeping work.	100	24.8%

Interpretation

The questions for Year 1 and Year 2 were similar and, as such, so were the responses. In Year 1 and Year 2, the applicants focussed on all stakeholders and their roles in supporting youth in transitions. Year 2 applicants focussed more on the collaboration amongst stakeholders (governments, schools, businesses and youth) but this is likely because the wording of the question encouraged this response.

Year 3's essay question asked what applicants would recommend to other youth. Responses in Year 3 often spoke directly to youth -- often in hindsight drawing upon what the applicants had already experienced so far in their transition. Year 3 applicants encouraged students and graduates to seek out a variety of work experience opportunities, broaden their networks, take care of their health (both mentally and physically) throughout the transition and to keep their "chin-up" at all times.

Applicants in all years saw the need for students and graduates to have more work experience. Namely, they recommended making work integrated learning (WIL) (specifically in the form of co-op and internships) much more readily available to the full student body. Many applicants (specifically in Years 1 and 2) spoke of the need to make work experience opportunities like co-op and internships graduation requirements. Applicants in Year 2 talked about the need for post-secondary educational institutions, governments and businesses to collaborate to make WIL much more widely available.

In Years 1 and 2, applicants made specific references to programs that could be models for collaboration around WIL. Applicants referred to German and Austrian models of apprenticeship – an extensive dual system of education that combines work and learning across a wider variety of occupations than the Canadian apprenticeship model. They referred to guarantee programs in Europe that provide training and work experience to un- and underemployed youth and young adults. One applicant recommended that Canada offer guaranteed summer work programs to PSE students. There were also many references to the expansion of the Youth Employment Strategy specifically the Career Focus program. Other models mentioned were the programs offered by Futurpreneur Canada to support youth entrepreneurship and the UK's Year in Industry (YII) model. YII is a placement program for students either intending a gap year or planning a work "sabbatical" during their PSE studies. One applicant highlighted the program as a best practice because of the participation level of employers. As demonstration of the level of employer engagement, this applicant wrote that there is almost a "cultural" expectation that employers will readily participate. Post-graduate work experience/career launching/graduate rotational programs, like that of RBC's, were also recommended by applicants as critical in making school-to-work transitions more efficient.

Financial incentives were referenced by a number of applicants (specifically in Years 1 and 2) to support the expansion of WIL. Wage subsidies and tax credits for employers were most often mentioned as ways to encourage businesses to provide work experiences to students and to hire or provide training to new graduates. Specific examples included expanding the Ontario Youth Employment Fund and the Ontario Co-op Tax Credit to other provinces. Applicants also mentioned incentives to support students and new graduates. These types of suggestions were far less frequent. Specific examples referenced by applicants included tax breaks to graduates starting careers, free tuition and grants for students enrolling in high demand fields.

Although applicants felt that there should be incentives to support business in providing work experience, applicants also felt that businesses needed to have more positions at the entry level and that they should revisit their hiring criteria. There were a number of references to how businesses are contributing to over-qualification of jobs. Furthermore, applicants recommended that employers mitigate their expectation of finding the “perfectly” skilled graduate and invest more in training and nurturing “potential talent.”

Collaboration amongst stakeholders to support WIL or post-graduate work experience programs was suggested by applicants as critical. Applicants felt that the expansion of co-op would not be possible without the collaboration of employers, PSE institutes and government. One applicant made reference to the Career and Technical Education model in New York City where education and businesses have partnered to develop vocational education and training in several career clusters in high demand jobs. Employers, public schools and PSEs work together to develop career-related curriculum that supports the development of the skills employers say they need in young hires. Students learn these skills, participate in WIL directly related to work in the sector and obtain important credentials required in the sector. In many cases, these programs have commitment from employers that they will hire participating students (see the [Department of Education of New York City: Career and Technical Education](#)).

An undercurrent in applicant recommendations for greater collaboration among stakeholders was the message that PSE institutions need to become better connected to the skills demands and trends in the labour market. There was certainly a reflection that although PSE supported the development of key theoretical knowledge and skills development this learning needs to be married with applied learning or work experience programming. One applicant said that students are not being prepared for the “shock” of the transition from school to work. This was a sentiment shared by many other applicants across all cohorts. Applicants, in Year 3 specifically, saw a role for youth in this. Although they wanted to see mandatory WIL programming, they also recommended that youth seek out these opportunities for themselves whether through part-time jobs, volunteering, and extra-curricular activities outside of their PSE programs.

Volunteering was a core recommendation of applicants to other youth. Primarily mentioned in Years 1 and 3, applicants saw volunteering as an important way to gain skills, networks and experience when struggling to find other forms of work experience. A few applicants mentioned that the key benefit of volunteering was being able to be much more targeted in accessing experience related to one’s career goals. Others referenced the value of overseas volunteering. Several applicants recommended the expansion of Ontario’s mandatory volunteer programming in high school to PSE students.

In every year there was a message to youth to be open about opportunities and not to be “picky” about opportunities that come their way. Keeping expectations in check (i.e. thinking that university graduation means that you will “instantly” have a high paying job) was a thread mentioned by Year 3 respondents under the theme of “School Does not Prepare.” One respondent said that “vast amounts” of graduates think that university degrees are their key selling point. The message that you can learn from any experience was often mentioned in the essays in each year but especially in Year 3. Within this sentiment of not being “picky”, the debate about taking unpaid internships emerged. Most applicants who referenced unpaid internships felt they should not exist and that they were unfair to students who

could not afford to take positions where they were not paid. On the flip side, applicants felt that if the unpaid internship offered career advancement then one should consider it. One applicant mentioned taking an unpaid international internship, which resulted in the applicant being hired by that company.

Networking was a prominent theme in both Years 1 and 3. Applicants in Year 1 spoke of it as “paramount,” a “game changer” and a significant way to get your foot in the door. Applicants stressed the importance of using all forms of networking such as in-person events (career fairs, PSE faculty events and talks) and social media (specifically LinkedIn). Connected to the theme of networking was the theme of mentoring. Although mentoring was not as prominent a theme as networking, it was mentioned throughout the applications for each year. Applicants felt that mentoring would support their learning about careers and work environments and help them build their employability skills.

Learning was a significant theme for Year 3’s applicants. Applicants from this year encouraged other youth to be open to learning new things, look for opportunities to learn and to know that learning is lifelong and “does not stop at graduation.” Applicants across all years felt that they needed more information about careers, career pathways, skills requirements, career planning and career management skills involved in job search. Applicants in Year 1 wanted to see more promotion of university career centres, earlier career development interventions at the high school and post-secondary levels. Year 2 applicants wanted to see mandatory career development courses in all programs. Admittedly, many applicants said that “most” youth ignore career preparation in university. Year 3 applicants encouraged others to take part in the workshops offered by the career centres and many expressed in hindsight that they wished that they had taken advantage of this resource prior to graduation.

The theme of transferrable skills was mentioned more prominently in Year 3 than in Year 1 and not referred to significantly in Year 2. This may be because of the wording of Year 3’s question. Very few respondents in any year made mention of the role of schools, employers, and governments in the development of transferrable skills. Applicants in Year 3 made multiple references to the development of transferrable skills through volunteering, enrolling in WIL, participating in extra-curricular activities. A few also suggested looking online for soft skills development through MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) and YouTube. At least one applicant recommended that transferable skills needed to be a focus of high school curriculum.

Lastly and interestingly, the theme of life-work balance was referenced by approximately 40% of Year 3’s applicants. There was a sentiment of care for one’s mental and physical health in transition expressed by these applicants that was not expressed in the other years. Again, the wording of the question is likely the reason for this. Underlying this advice seemed to be a reflection of the level of stress that transitioning from school to work can have on one’s health. The message from many Year 3 applicants was twofold: be mindful of one’s health throughout this transition and be aware of how some career decisions can impact the balance in one’s life.

The recommendations made by applicants across all three years for the most part concerned greater access to and awareness of the labour market. Top recommendations across the three years focussed on the need for a greater number of work experience opportunities as well as connecting with those in the labour market (e.g. employers, workers, professional associations) to learn about different

occupations, career pathways and work environments. Although access to more WIL opportunities was a significant theme throughout, applicants did not refer to it as the magic bullet in resolving the challenge of school-to-work transitions. What emerged from a review of these essays was the need for a variety of career development activities and interventions and the requisite for these to be far more accessible to a greater number of students. Applicants saw the need for the collaboration of stakeholders for the success in any initiative to increase work opportunities for youth. That said, it was abundantly clear that these applicants saw their own efforts as critical to their success. One applicant quoted American author, H. Jackson Brown, in this regard: “Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

DISCUSSION

The Applicants’ Voice

Using the demographic details within the applications, we note that the applicants to RBC’s Career Launch program are primarily English-speaking university graduates who currently reside in urban Ontario. Just over half are finance/business graduates. We suspect that the group is diverse in many other ways, although the data is not captured in the applications. We note that over the three years the RBC Career Launch Program has been in operation, just over half of the successful applicants have been women and visible minorities. In addition, recent immigrants, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community are represented within each year. References in the essays to ethnicity, race, gender and their experiences as “an immigrant” indicate that the applicants are more diverse than the narrow variables listed within the application.

A scan of the literature shows a wealth of data analyses and literature reviews on the subject of PSE-to-work transitions (see Benes, Bell and Redekopp, *Improving the School-to-Work Transitions of Youth in Canada: Literature Scan*, 2016). There are interviews with Canadian recent graduates for newspaper reports and one or two extensive surveys of graduates (see McKinsey, 2015) but certainly there is limited work on capturing the voice of Canadian PSE graduates and their lived experience of the transition. To our knowledge, there are no Canadian ethnographies on the subject. Although the experience and sentiments captured in these applications do not necessarily represent the full emotional journey of the applicants (they were putting their best foot forward in order to get into the program), the applications do give a sense of their experience of transition, the depth of their work experience and what they feel they need(ed)/is needed to make their and other graduates’ transitions better.

How Comparable is the Applicant Transition Experience?

As highlighted in the Thematic Analysis Section of this report, there was low frequency of “feeling” themes expressed in the essays. When emotions or feeling were expressed, there was balance between

positive and negative emotions. Applicants see the transition as challenging but largely felt that time would yield a positive outcome and that it was important to remain optimistic throughout the process. Without the benefit of other Canadian ethnographies on the school-to-work experience, it is hard to determine if graduates overall feel more discouraged than hopeful. There are some indications in the literature that graduates may feel unprepared, more anxious about their future transitions than previous generations and overwhelmed by their current state of underemployment. Recent studies have found a rise in stress and anxiety among Canada's youth. In a national survey of youth aged 18-24, nearly 90% reported feeling uncomfortable levels of stress (Sun Life, 2012). When asked why they were feeling so stressed, 86% in this age group attributed the stress to underemployment. A 2011-2012 study conducted by the Toronto District School Board found that 73% of students between Grades 9-12 worry about their future (Emotional Well-Being Fact Sheet: Part 1, 2013: 2, p. 2). The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education, in their survey of high school and post-secondary students, reported that 70% of respondents felt unprepared for the transition (CCDF, 2015).

Given this, it may not be surprising that the theme of well-being/work-life balance came out throughout applicant essays, emerging much more strongly in Year 3 in which applicants typically wrote their essay as if writing to a peer. Applicant recommendations to keep healthy during transition and consider aspects of life-work balance in career choices may also be a reflection of the level of stress that these applicants have endured during their school-to-work transitions. It might also be a reflection of a generational value placed on well-being. Deal and Levenson's (2015) extensive survey of 25,000 Millennials (from 22 countries) found that this generation puts a high premium on work-life balance. Their survey found work-life balance as a reasonable condition of employment in Millennials' eyes, not as something one earns over time. Year 3 applicants' advice to other peers may be both a reflection of the challenge of transition and a reminder to stay true to a value that the generation holds in high regard.

Whereas maintaining a life-work balance was a key piece of advice from Year 3 respondents to students and other young graduates, they also advised their peers to not expect significant salaries at first, not to be "picky" about the work they would take, to balance the opportunity (e.g., unpaid internship) against the career outcome and to not expect that a degree will grant ready access to a "good" job. Their advice seems to be saying that university students may have career expectations that are not aligned with the reality of entry-level work experienced by applicants in transition. The desire for more career information across all applicants may also be reflective of how much they now realize they did not know about careers or the labour market.

There is a litany of research on Millennial career expectations; most arguably fueling unsubstantiated stereotypes about the generation. An article in the Washington Post (McClennen, 2016) states that Millennials may be "the most publically denounced generation of all time." McClennen suggests that rather than understanding the complex challenges and realities facing Millennials as reflective of the social issues we all face, there is an increasing tendency to "privatize" these problems as belonging to Millennials to which an edict emerges that this generation needs to stop complaining and become more resilient. Lyons, Ng and Schweitzer (2011), in their generational survey of 3,000 Canadians, found that Millennials have high hopes for starting salaries, salary growth and advancement. They also found that Gen Y have strong desire for self-improvement, to learn and to have challenging work. Millennials in

the survey also “had the lowest levels of self-efficacy, career identification and relied more on the career advice of others” (p. 4) than any other generational grouping that they surveyed. Given that they are the newest generation in the labour market and have less experience in developing their careers, these findings are not unexpected. These results, along with the reflection of the RBC Career Launch applicants, do send a message that schools, employers, career education and service providers need to find a way engage students in career development.

The advice offered by applicants to their peers is largely a reflection of the reality of the transition in Canada. It is challenging, discouraging, and not necessarily meeting expectations; new graduates will need to look for a variety of opportunities to build their careers -- many of which will not pay well or, in some cases, pay anything at all. They will have to make tough decisions that will likely affect work-life balance. As a measure for their peers not to get too overwhelmed by it, applicants proposed that students and new graduates “get experienced,” stay positive, be resilient and keep their expectations in check in what is a challenging road ahead.

What Do They Say They Need to Transition?

Further analysis of the applicants’ essays revealed that youth often emphasized the following three areas when speaking of what they need in order to make successful school to work transitions: transferable or soft skills, practical/meaningful experience (hands-on and relevant) and work integrated learning in its various forms. Although referenced earlier in this report under the thematic analysis by year, the next section explores each of these three areas in more detail.

Transferable Skills

The applicants recognize the importance of transferable skills in facilitating their transition from to school to work, regardless of discipline or industry. In fact, many see transferable skills, also referred to by the applicants as “soft,” “general” and “fundamental” skills, as equalling or surpassing the importance of technical or hard skills. Skills that can be used across a variety of contexts and occupations such as communication, interpersonal, time management, organization, leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making are considered to be of tremendous value to the individual, the employer and the organization, as evidenced in many of the essays. These skills are perceived by the applicants as serving to increase an individual’s confidence, marketability and competitive edge.

Employers who participated in the 2015 survey by the Business Council of Canada (BBC & AON, 2016) show strong agreement with these applicants on the importance of soft skills (such as collaboration and teamwork, relationship-building, communication and problem-solving) for entry-level positions. “Large companies are increasingly looking to recruit or develop employees with strong soft skills. These skills are particularly important when identifying and developing future leaders” (p. 18). These results echo similar findings from a previous study conducted by the Business Council of Canada (at the time, named the Canadian Council of Chief Executives). In the 2013 survey of over 100 of its members, “when asked what attributes matter most when evaluating entry-level hires, respondents tended to emphasize soft skills – also known as non-cognitive skills – over hard skills” (CCCE, 2014, p.6). About 40% of the companies indicated it was difficult to find workers with “a good mix of soft skills” (CCCE, 2014, p.8).

The applicants suggested several opportunities through which such skills can be developed, from both within and outside their studies. These include academic programs (courses, workshops), WIL (co-ops, internships), mentoring, volunteering, extracurricular activities, and paid work. Work and volunteer experiences, whether related or unrelated to their field of study, are viewed as beneficial for developing and improving transferable skills. The non-PSE ideas generated by youth are consistent with large Canadian employers who also identify summer jobs, part-time work, international experience and extra-curricular activities as adding value to a resume and providing opportunities to develop soft skills (BCC & AON, 2016).

The need for youth to be open to acquiring new skills, seek opportunities to learn, and be aware of/able to identify the transferable skills they have gained through past experiences was highlighted by some applicants. Youth, however, are not necessarily adept at articulating the skills they have acquired from their experience. For example, when asked to describe their work experiences and what they learned, transferable skills were not often referenced. The most commonly cited transferable skill was communication at 15%, followed by customer service skills at 10.4% (see Table 10). Judging by the sectors in which the applicants report working, it can be reasonably assumed that there would have been ample demand to use transferable skills (e.g., 32.3% worked in sales and service – see Table 9).

There are examples of initiatives aimed at helping youth in this regard. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (2016) developed a practical guide for effective WIL that aims to enhance the student's learning by creating a "purposeful" experience including, for example, learning outcomes, reflection and assessment. The Career Integrated Learning Project at the Marine Institute, Memorial University of Newfoundland (n.d.), facilitates student reflection on and articulation of the "transferable competencies" (non-subject/non-technical related skills) acquired throughout their academic studies which can aid the transition to work. And, an example specific to volunteering emerged from the current RBC study. An applicant suggested that those offering volunteer positions should identify the skills that will be developed from the experience.

Practical/Meaningful Experience

The applicants believe they need more experience in order to make a successful school-to-work transition and this was the most frequently cited need across all 3 years. Many agreed with the premise presented in the 2013 essay question: "Finding a meaningful work experience remains a challenge for many youth across Canada." They attributed the challenge of acquiring experience to such factors as unfavourable economic conditions, higher unemployment rates, increased competition, and the cycle of "no experience no job/no job no experience." They further contextualize the lack of experience issue as a lack of practical or meaningful experience, the former a reflection of traditionally theory-based academia and the latter of limited experience in one's field of study. A few students also spoke of meaning in terms of work that is personally meaningful and provides an opportunity for growth.

The applicants clearly understand the importance of experience, as reflected in their essays, and they appear to be actively pursuing opportunities to gain that experience. Ninety-nine percent of applicants reported having at least one job and for many, this work experience was related to their field of study thus contributing to its practicality and meaningfulness. Another 93% reported volunteer/extracurricular experience. Their motivations for volunteering may be altruistic but they value volunteering as a means of gaining the experience and skills employers are requiring.

There is limited research on employers' perceptions of paid versus unpaid experience when hiring, however, there are at least two studies that suggest a similar value is placed on both. A joint study by researchers at California State University and McMaster University examined recruiters' judgements of the suitability of fictional applicants for a hypothetical management trainee position (Wilkin & Connelly, 2012). The résumés included combinations of paid and volunteer experience, related and unrelated to the position. No significant difference was found in the ratings recruiters gave to the paid and volunteer experience. The relevance of the experience to the position was deemed more important than whether the work was paid. Résumés with paid and volunteer experience were rated higher than those with only paid or only volunteer suggesting that the youth in this study are on the right track given their high participation in both.

The importance of relevant experience was also shown through a study conducted by researchers with the Academica Group Inc. on behalf of HEQCO (2012) which involved a telephone survey of over 3,300 Ontario employers. Results revealed that "relevant work experience gained from summer jobs, volunteering or other employment" (pp. 34-35) was the top rated hiring factor by employers who do not offer WIL and second for employers who do. Unrelated extracurricular/volunteer experience was the lowest rated factor by both WIL and non-WIL employers.

A recent Business Council of Canada survey of 90 large employers (BCC & AON, 2016) demonstrated that 32% of the respondents required 1 year of full-time relevant experience, 17% at least 2 years and 9% at least 3. WIL was considered an important way to gain that relevant experience. Seventy-two percent of the over 100 companies that participated in the Council's 2013 survey indicated they expect less than 2 years of relevant full-time experience when hiring for entry-level jobs and just under 10% said no experience was required (CCCE, 2014). Similar to 2016, several respondents highlighted WIL as "important sources of relevant work experience" (CCCE, 2014, p.8).

Interestingly, 38% from the 2016 Business Council of Canada survey indicated that no relevant experience is necessary, which would not reflect the experience of many of the youth in this study. Encouragingly, "over two-thirds of respondents believe that new university, college and polytechnic graduates are generally prepared to join the workforce" (BCC & AON, 2016, p.7).

Unlike the multitude of opportunities youth consider available for developing transferable skills, options for acquiring experience are deemed much more limited. Suggestions provided by applicants were limited to co-op programs and internships, volunteering and summer or part-time jobs. Many applicants believe post-secondary educational institutions, corporate Canada and government could do more to create meaningful work opportunities both during studies and following graduation. For example, PSE institutions could ensure WIL programs are available to all students (regardless of program of study) and instructors could incorporate more practical assignments in their courses. Government could provide funding to employers to support the hiring of new grads. Employers could be more open to hiring new grads and could offer rotational programs that not only provide meaningful experience but also enable grads to explore an organization, network and enhance skills. A few applicants spoke to the need for youth to show effort and persistence in seeking meaningful employment as well as the importance of valuing all learning opportunities.

As mentioned, internships were commonly identified as a means for acquiring experience among applicants. A few of them expressed concern with unpaid internships and the toll they can place on students financially and from a health perspective. Social justice is also a consideration given the inequality in access to available opportunities. In the words of one Canadian career professional (Sligo, 2016), “unpaid internships favour the wealthy sections of society, and eliminate employment opportunities from individuals who need an income to survive”

(<http://careerprocanada.ca/unpaid-internships-legal-ethical-considerations-supporting-clients/>).

Underpaid internships (below minimum wage or unpaid) are on the rise and not without controversy due to potential implications for the individual (e.g. mental health issues), society (e.g. shifting costs burden) and the economy (e.g. slowing of growth) (Affield & Couture, 2014). Protection of the intern is also of concern as there are few Canadian laws which govern them directly. Instead, provincial employment standards apply (<http://internassociation.ca/>).

Some of these applicants were, however, prepared to accept an unpaid internship in their chosen field given its potential benefits. This theme was also found in a survey of university students in Scotland: “The study findings suggest that students fully recognise the value of relevant work experience to their future career prospects and are willing, although not always able, to undertake unpaid work” (Smith, Smith and Caddell, 2015, p. 161). Those who accept an unpaid versus paid internship may also be disadvantaged in their eventual job search as demonstrated by an American study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, which showed that graduates who had completed unpaid internships were less likely to receive a job offer (37%) than their peers who participated in paid internships (63%) (NACE, 2013).

Although some applicants see it as their responsibility to seek out and take advantage of all opportunities to develop transferable skills and gain valuable experience, many believe post-secondary educational institutions, government and corporate Canada can do more to ensure those opportunities are available. In particular, applicants provided ideas on how these three groups can collaborate to increase the quantity and quality of WIL such as internships, co-ops, shadowing, and apprenticeships.

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)

This desire for more WIL experiences/opportunities is consistent with international studies of what youth say they want or need in their school-to-work transition. Mourshed, Farrell and Barton (2012) found in their extensive international 25 country survey of over 8,000 youth that about 60% see on-the-job training and hands-on learning as the most effective instructional techniques, but that fewer than 30% are actually enrolled in programs with this kind of learning. Limitations in access to WIL-type programming can be found in other research stating that there is not enough programming to meet the need (McKinsey, 2014). The Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) found that more than half of graduation students report involvement in some type of “work and learning program experience.” On the surface this looks promising, but only a small portion of these graduates reported participating in formal WIL programs (e.g. 14% had co-op placements and 16% had practicums) (CUSC, 2015). Many more reported having volunteered or had “work experiences” outside of the classroom. Applicants to the Career Launch program felt strongly that there was a need for more formal WIL opportunities across the whole student body. Encouragingly, the Canadian Business / Higher Education Roundtable feels the same, wanting a staggering 100 per cent of Canadian post-secondary students to benefit from

some form of meaningful work-integrated learning before graduation (see <http://bher.ca/news/every-university-and-college-student-should-have-access-to-work-integrated-learning-business-and-post-secondary-leaders-say>).

The advantages of WIL are well documented (Hoffman, 2015, Sattler & Peters, 2012, Stirling et al., 2016). Nancy Hoffman, noted innovator in education, scholar and activist and co-lead on the influential Pathways to Prosperity Project with the Harvard Graduate School of Education, argues that “learning to work, learning about work and experiencing a productive workplace should be integral to [...] education, since they offer particularly powerful ways to teach high level content, collaboration, problem-solving and other dimensions of deeper learning” (2016, p.2). Students who participate in WIL have improved rates of transition to the workforce (Sattler & Peters, 2012). Employers reported advantages to WIL participation include having links to universities and having future access to work-ready graduates (PhillipsKPA, 2016). “Postsecondary WIL programs [have been] endorsed by both career development practitioners and business associations as essential to effective workforce development” (Sattler & Peters, 2012, p.6).

Collaboration of stakeholders is critical for more WIL to happen, according to applicants. A number of applicants stated that WIL or post-graduate work experience programs would simply not work without governments, post-secondary institutions and employers working together. Similarly, Sterling et al. (2016) state that WIL must be a shared responsibility between all stakeholders:

- Faculty and staff need to structure WIL through the development of learning outcomes and assessment;
- Stakeholders need to develop a deliberate plan of action that reintroduces theoretical or practical aspects to consolidate learning from the field;
- Students need to integrate or have opportunities to reflect upon what they have learned in the workplace and relate it to next phase of academic/work integrated learning and to their careers.
- Acknowledgement of practice settings as providing experiences to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes, not merely places to practice” (p. 103).

Adding to this is the role of employers to be actively involved in shaping WIL offerings.

Applicants made mention of a number of best practice models that could be explored by stakeholders interested in furthering WIL (see Thematic Review). Mostly, their comments focussed on incentives to get employers and post-secondary institutions involved in offering more WIL opportunities. Financial incentives (e.g. wage subsidies and tax credits) and resourcing of post-secondary institutions were common recommendations made by applicants. Similar recommendations are made in the literature. An Australian survey of employers who engage with WIL found, however, that “the strongest factors encouraging ongoing employer engagement in WIL are support from universities, good personal links with universities, and effective university coordination of students” (PhillipsKPA, 2014, p. 7). Hoffman (2015) argues that from her experience of implementing WIL programs there are three cornerstones that need to be in place for the success of WIL programming:

1. Policies that incentivize employers to collaborate in work-based deeper learning;
2. Policies that incentivize the education sector to support work-based deeper learning;
3. The participation of supporting intermediary organizations such as community foundations and non-profit organizations (pp. 18-19).

In short, applicant calls for an education meaningfully connected with practical opportunities in the work world were consistent with research findings, aligned with leading-edge policy recommendations and congruent with their expressed needs to better see and feel the possibility of how their future selves would use their education. WIL and similar experiences are not simply 'converting theory to practice' exercises; they are means by which the school-to-work transitions can be experienced in a graduated, manageable and therefore less anxiety-provoking manner.

What do Youth Say They Need Beyond Experience?

The applicants' calls for work experience were accompanied by the expressions of other needs, needs supported by school-to-work transition literature. These additional needs fall under two broad categories: transition support and connections. "Transition support" comprises the planning, preparation and execution of career-related transitions as well as developing the competence to manage transitions. The category of "connections" includes networking and mentoring. Networking was viewed as a way to find out about and connect to opportunities, as was mentoring. Mentoring, however, was also characterized by applicants as providing personalized assistance in seizing opportunities and being effective within the opportunities.

Transition Support: Career Education / Career Management Competencies

There is an enormous range of possibilities before and within transitions regarding intentionality, execution and reflection. Some transitions are preceded by intensive preparation; some occur due to happenstance. Transitions in some cases can be in full control of the individual; in other cases, they happen to the individual. Ongoing reflection characterizes some transitions; others are executed with little reflection regarding how and why they occurred or what was learned from them. When transitions go well, deep reflection and learning are likely not as prevalent as when they go poorly: There is simply no pressing need to reflect. The applicants in this study were inside the transition and did not yet know if their transitions stories would end well. They were therefore particularly reflective of what could and should have been different, what they have learned and what could change. Within this mindset, they saw needs that simply were not pressing upon them prior to the transition.

Recommendations to Other Youth and Stakeholders Line Up with the Research

Applicants' recommendations to other youth included exploring options, setting goals, making plans and executing those plans with hope and optimism. Recommendations to key stakeholders included the provision of career education, career planning support, help with career exploration/awareness, work-search assistance, and direct transition support. These proposals are congruent with international and Canadian research findings and policy recommendations pointing to effectiveness of and the need for career development education and support for students (e.g., CCDF, 2015; Hughes, Meijers & Kuijpers, 2014; Mackay, Morris, Hooley & Neary, 2015).

Theory / Practice Disconnect

Of particular interest regarding this set of ideas regarding career development education is that almost all of the Canadian-schooled applicants have had to complete a course on career issues in high school; most provinces have at least one mandatory course on the topic. Ontario, the province in which most applicants were living when they applied, requires at least a half-credit in career studies and, depending on other “Group” choices of studies, an additional credit as well (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/graduate.html>). Many applicants acknowledged that the education was provided to them, but that its lack of relevance or meaningfulness at the time rendered it ineffective.

This disconnect between addressing a clear need and not filling the need is worthy of further exploration. Applicants mention that their “career studies” courses were not relevant at the time they took them. There are a host of factors that could influence this lack of relevance, such as:

- the inherent difficulty of making a topic relevant when it will not be needed until the future, and
- the poor quality with which career studies courses are often taught, due to:
 - the lack of training for teachers on career development issues;
 - the treatment of career studies as a “subject,” taught in the same way as other subjects such as physics and mathematics;
 - the means by which educators are assigned to teach career-related courses;
 - the lack of motivation for educators to teach career studies courses; and
 - the lack of integration of career studies with other aspects of students’ education (Redekopp, Cumming, Gullekson & Day, 2012).

The first point, the inherent difficulty of teaching a skill needed in the future, applies to almost all preparatory education and is likely therefore a red herring in this discussion. Skilled educators have brought future skills/knowledge to life in a wide variety of areas for centuries. The more salient reason for the relevance problem are educational systems, similar across all Canadian provinces, that do not teach career development to educators, do not strategically assign educators to career studies courses, and that treat “career” in the same manner as other subjects (CCDF, 2015; Redekopp et al., 2012). Countries that handle career education more effectively show positive effects of career education on the acquisition of career management competencies, enhancement of social equity, more effective transitions and improved economic well-being (Hooley & Dodd, 2015).

Developing Career Management Skills or Getting Direct Help or Both?

The provision of career education (i.e., classes) and career services (e.g., counselling, guidance, work search facilitation) often go hand-in-hand in countries with active career education systems. It may be that the positive results of career education described above are dependent on the provision of additional career services. Applicants in this study made this distinction in some of their recommendations. Whereas many applicants discussed the need for mandatory career education, others noted the importance of direct transition assistance in the form of specific programs. These recommendations contain a distinction between the idea that skills need to be developed to manage transitions (i.e., “teach them to fish”) and the notion that direct help with transitions is needed (i.e.,

“give them a fish”). Overall, the applicants did not discuss this differentiation in detail; “both are needed” would be the safest conclusion to derive from their recommendations.

Whether acquired via career education, career services or WIL experiences, applicants recognized the importance of career management skills. Current research supports the idea of career management competencies as central to successful transitions. Earlier this year, findings of the first phase of the multi-national LEarning And Decision making Resources (LEADER) project were released on “Career Management Skills” (Neary, Dodd & Hooley, 2016). Of the many findings in this report, two are particularly relevant to this study. First, all participating countries saw the value of career management skills in preparing youth (and adults) for a changing work dynamic. Second, that the language of “career management skills” is poorly understood. This is an area in Canada for which a substantial competency infrastructure exists (Canada’s Blueprint for Life/Work Designs (Haché, Redekopp & Jarvis, 2006)) but is not accompanied by marketing and implementation.

As the applicants pointed out, career management skills may be necessary but not sufficient for successful transitions. Direct assistance may also be necessary. As well as formal career guidance services noted above, many applicants described the importance of mentors and individuals within networks as the providers of some of this assistance. Their thoughts on connections with others are described in the following section.

Connections: Networking and Mentoring

Who Knows What I Know?

The career development field has long advocated networking as pivotal to transition success. Research shows clear relationships between the type and extent of one’s network and one’s general career success (e.g., Blickle, Witzki & Schneider, 2009; Kuijpers, Schyns & Scheerens, 2006). Most of these studies in this area are simply correlational, but at least one study shows a causal relationship between networking and objective career success (Wolff & Moser, 2008). The message seems to have been heard by the applicants in this study. They point to the need for a relational network that can connect them to learning and work opportunities as well as to other individuals. A Canadian career development specialist, Wendy Fox, put it this way:

The phrase used to be ‘it’s not what you know, it’s who you know.’ Then we moved to ‘it’s not who you know, it’s what you know.’ Now, the question is ‘who knows what you know?’

The young applicants in this study appear to appreciate that if no one knows what they know, work opportunities will be very limited. Beyond work opportunities, however, applicants recognize that learning opportunities, advice, guidance, reputation-building and motivation can all be enhanced through effective networks.

Who Has Me Under Their Wing?

Perhaps a little more surprising than their recognition of the value of networks was the appreciation that many applicants had for mentoring. The mentor/protégé relationship has been advocated since at least Plato’s time, and the career development field began touting its various career-related benefits a few decades ago. The evidence base supports this endorsement, showing effective mentorship as a strong predictor of both external career success measures (e.g., salary) and internal career success

measures (e.g., satisfaction) (e.g., Blickle, Witzki & Schneider, 2009; Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman, 2005).

Connecting Career Education and Connections

One possible reason that the applicants in this study endorsed connections, particularly mentorship, was because they did not feel they obtained the relevant guidance, advice and/or instruction about career development in their schooling experience. A mentor/protégé relationship can be the ideal teacher/student relationship. It is one-to-one, enables complete customization of learning, and can be made instructional content directly relevant and meaningful. It seems very clear that the applicants in this study crave the abilities to figure out the work world, to effectively search for work, to be resilient when difficulties arise, and to manage their pathways through life and work. They see mentors and others in their networks as facilitators of learning these abilities, and they saw the K-12 school system and post-secondary institutions as having failed them in this regard.

The desire applicants have for WIL approaches is likely best seen in the context of their call for mentorship as well. There is a sense in the essays that WIL is not a cure-all for transition ailments. WIL is effective when it is supported by a guide, whether the guide is a career development practitioner or a mentor. Choosing the WIL experience, reflecting upon the WIL experience and learning from the WIL experience may only happen in an accidental fashion without such a guide (Stirling et al., 2016 and Hoffman, 2015).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Just Do It!

The youth in this study made a multitude of recommendations for how to improve their school-to-work transitions, the majority of which was very much in line with recommendations made by employers, educators, researchers, practitioners and policy makers. The youth voice in this case echoes and validates that of the experts, providing support and justification for further consideration and implementation of their suggestions.

A Call for Collaboration

Although youth spoke of what post-secondary education, corporate Canada and government could do individually to better support them, the call for enhanced collaboration amongst these three key stakeholders was loud and clear. A shared understanding of the strengths and needs of each stakeholder and a collective response to facilitating school-to-work transitions is highly recommended and essential. This is perhaps most evident in the area of WIL. The desired quantity, quality, range and accessibility of WIL opportunities can best be reached through partnership between educators, employers and government with the ultimate goal of ensuring youth have the skills and experience needed to transition successfully.

Youth in Control with Support

External stakeholders have roles and responsibilities with respect to school-to-work transitions, but youth themselves can and should be in control of their own transitions. Youth could exercise more control in this regard if equipped with the requisite career management competencies early in their career development. As explored in this paper, there are many different types of career related programs and services with the aim of facilitating the development of these competencies. However, availability can be limited and when such programs and services do exist, youth are often not aware of them and/or don't understand their value. It is recommended that quality career development programs and services be integrated at the secondary and post-secondary levels and marketed in such a way that students see the inherent benefits pre-graduation/transition versus in retrospect.

Break the Catch-22: Finding Promise/Potential

Recent graduates cannot break the Catch-22 of no experience-no job/no job-no experience. Only employers can remove the bind, either via internships or by hiring individuals with no direct experience. Internships are described elsewhere. Here, minimizing the perceived risks of hiring individuals with no direct experience is addressed.

There are methods of attracting, recruiting and selecting individuals that can capture their:

- “fit” with the role from a values/interests alignment perspective,
- “fit” with the organization from a values alignment perspective,
- competence regarding transferable skills important to the organization (e.g., communication skills, teamwork), and
- potential or promise to learn the required technical components of the work (without using aptitude tests).

There are a number of career development approaches that support the effective hiring of individuals (e.g. Passion-Based Hiring). These approaches focus not on finding the perfectly skilled candidate but identifying candidates who are naturally inclined to make the values-based choices expected by the organization and are so attitudinally aligned with the role that they are inherently motivated to learn the technical aspects it requires. Training may still be required, but the efficiency of training individuals who are pre-identified as highly motivated to learn can reduce training costs significantly.

Traditionally, organizations have focussed on hiring to skill sets even though there is full recognition that skill development (e.g., training someone to ask a series of investment questions of a client) is far easier, more predictable and more successful than attitude change (e.g., changing someone who does not like serving others into someone who enjoys serving others). Organizations can easily screen applicants who have the core, transferable skills they require by reviewing their work and volunteer experiences on their résumés, and then use evidence-based career development approaches to find the ones who, with some guidance, will thrive in the role and the organization.

Further Research

The Experience of Youth

We need to keep delving deeper into the experience of youth. This report is a start in that direction. The developers of programming, policies, and initiatives need to understand what the transition from school to work is like. Where are youth getting stuck? Where do they find opportunity? What supports are they accessing, which ones are they not and why? And, most importantly, what do youth see as the solutions?

RBC has now taken an important lead in this research. They could continue to collect these data on their applicants and consider interviewing/surveying youth who participated in this study in three years to further examine their experience with the school-to-work transition. Applicant reflections on three years of work/life experience post-graduation and their associated recommendations could prove valuable to increasing our understanding of and supporting the transition process.

Experience: What has value?

Youth are searching for ways to gain the experience they perceive is needed upon graduation but there is little research on what experience is most valued by employers. Do employers recognize and value paid and unpaid experiences? Do they see benefits of work intergrated learning? What value do youth gain from volunteer experiences? Do they build skills and confidence to the same degree as through paid work experiences? Given the significant time commitment students contribute to the range of skill building activities and work experiences it would be important to determine the impact on their careers.

CONCLUSION

The transition from school to work is a significant transition in a person's life. It is challenging, difficult and, in this labour market, quite uncertain. As such, it is not likely to go perfectly for many graduates. There is no magic bullet that will resolve the issues and barriers that today's youth will face as they journey through it. However, it is clear from these applicants, the literature, policy makers, employers and educators that we do need to do better and there is much at stake if we do not.

In the applications that were reviewed for this study, no applicant suggested that they were not the driver in managing their transition. They are ready and wanting the opportunity to shine. Many worked hard to gain the experience they could find to break out of the Catch-22. Yet despite their efforts, they are calling for more support. This should be a red flag for all stakeholders.

Yes, Canadian PSE students and graduates need more and wider access to work-integrated learning. But, from the applicant recommendations and from the research, they need more than this to reduce the number of Canadian graduates struggling with un- and underemployment. They also need ready-access to career development services, education, information, resources and/or mentors to help them build the requisite career-management skills they need to survive and thrive in this labour market. They need employers to give them a chance and provide them with decent and meaningful entry-level jobs. They need schools, governments and businesses to listen to them and step up to the plate. All

stakeholders, including youth, have a role to play; much has been delineated in this report and elsewhere (see Bell, Benes and Redekopp, 2016) on what those roles should be. Socially and economically, Canada cannot afford to have more and more graduates get stuck. Everyone has a responsibility in this and the time to take visionary and collaborative action is now!

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