

Please take one

# The Employment Journey

PEI's Top Source for Career Planning and Job Seeking

## Graduates & employers connect

by Heidi Riley

Whether you are a recent graduate or returning to school, you need to think about the importance of getting to know employers. Many post-secondary graduates have difficulty finding work in their field of study. This may not have anything to do with a shortage of work opportunities. Also, employers may find it a challenge to meet graduates and get more familiar with their skill set. What are some of the reasons for this disconnect and how can it be addressed?

### Workforce issues for employers & graduates

- How can the business community and educational institutions work together to prepare students for a smoother transition to the world of work?
- Newspaper classifieds are not attracting the talented young people companies require. What are some effective ways to recruit post-secondary graduates?
- How can job seeking graduates improve their employability when they are told they don't have enough experience for a position?
- When older workers retire, how can employers preserve their knowledge and create a strong future workforce?
- How can employers overcome the challenges of employing multiple generations with very different communication styles and work habits?

### Pilot project connects graduates & employers

Recently, a group of post-secondary graduates was helped to improve job search skills and connect with local employers. **Rosemond MacDougall** and **Kinza Baker** are from **PEI Career Development Services (CDS)** in Charlottetown. They coordinated a 20-week pilot project called **Collaborative Solutions: Youth and the Labour Force**.

Through the project a series of workshops and round table discussions took place between Island employers and graduates. They learned about each other's expectations and shared ways to successfully enter the workforce.

"Businesses often struggle to find suitable job candidates because traditional hiring methods are not reaching their target audience," says Rosemond. "As many current staff prepare for retirement, employers need new ways to find graduates who will be a good fit for their organizations."

**"When job searching, it's not who you know, but who knows you that counts."**

- Rosemond MacDougall, CDS

"Many post-secondary graduates are unprepared for the next step of finding a job that matches their education," says Kinza. "This project attempted to bridge the disconnect between employers and job seekers."

"We brought together local employers and graduates who have not been able to enter a career in their field of study," says Kinza. "We hoped that employers would recognize the benefits of investing in graduates, and we wanted to help graduates develop strategies for breaking into a career with no job experience."

**"Employers say: prepare prepare prepare. When applying, learn about the company. Be ready to express how your skills will be a good fit for the job."** - Kinza Baker, CDS

### Career Experience Credits

The graduates were not paid to participate, but those who completed the project were eligible to receive credits through SkillsPEI. Half their wages will be paid for 13 weeks if they are hired for a position related to their field of study. If that company or organization keeps them on full-time, 50 percent of their wage will be covered for another 13 weeks.



**Psychology graduate Verley Harrison (left) talks with Tom Stewart, Canadian Mental Health Association/PEI Division.**

**Verley Harrison** recently earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology at UPEI. He has worked in retail, tutoring, and sports, but has not found a job which relates to his field of study. "Before I started with this project, I did not have the skills to find a job on my own. I now have a much improved resumé, I know how to write a cover letter, I know how to dress the part of a job hunter, and I know the value of networking. The employers left me with good tips on the art of job hunting, and how important it is to do your research and be prepared before an interview. I have learned that if I

can't express and demonstrate how my skills are transferable to the work environment, how will people believe I can do the job?"



**Commerce graduate Jessica Groom (right) speaks with Kathy Hambly, Greater Charlottetown and Area Chamber of Commerce.**

**Jessica Groom** recently earned a Bachelor of Commerce from Saint Mary's University. Her work experience has been in the hospitality and tourism industry. "I chose to participate in this project because I needed help to expand my job search ability. Most job openings are not advertised, and networking is the key to finding out about those jobs. This project was a great introduction to local employers. I learned where my skill set is valuable."

For more information, call 626-3680. Visit [www.careerservicespe.com](http://www.careerservicespe.com)





## Job search website for graduates: [www.careergateway.ca](http://www.careergateway.ca)

This website has been developed for graduates to match their education with over **100** local employers who have hired or wish to hire people with these credentials. “Many labour market websites work by searching a job title,” says **Rosemond MacDougall**, CDS. “But that can be difficult if you don’t know what type of job you are looking for. Here you can start your job search using your education.”

The search tool supplies the company name, HR contact information, address, and number of employees. It will tell you about the company and list the job titles and the skills they consider important when hiring. “It’s a great way for employers to highlight their companies and to attract new talent,” says Kinza.

The Chambers of Commerce in Summerside and Charlottetown collaborated with CDS for this project. Two researchers were hired to set up a survey for Chamber members.

Employers who wish to be included on this website may contact **PEI Career Development Services** at **626-3680**.

Funded by the Government of Canada’s Youth Awareness Initiative.

## What value do recent graduates bring to a business?

by Heidi Riley

“Recent graduates offer new and fresh ideas,” says **Kathryn Mills**, Business Manager for **MRSB**, a Charlottetown accounting firm. “They have an eagerness to learn and to succeed. They can also teach us. It’s a case of reverse mentoring with such things as social media.”

MRSB helps businesses to create business plans, apply for government funding, and assist with bookkeeping and payroll, tax preparation, year-end audits, and mergers and acquisitions.

There are **44** staff, including the five partners, accountants and accounting technicians, consultants, researchers, tax specialists, comptroller, human resources, receptionist, administrative assistants, maintenance, and an in-house IT professional.

### Recruiting

“In the fall, we interview third-year Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students who are interested in becoming Chartered Accountants,” says Kathryn. “We have taken on two students this year. They work with us for 12 weeks in the summer as accounting technicians. They get hands-on experience and the opportunity to find out if this is the career path they are interested in pursuing. MRSB gets the chance to evaluate their aptitude and work ethic, and may offer them a position after fourth year as they pursue their CA designation.”

### Making a connection

“It’s a good idea for people considering a career in accounting to make an appointment to speak to a firm about the field and to find out which branch of accounting they wish to pursue. MRSB often attends job fairs, chamber mixers and the Biz2Biz Expo, which is a great opportunity to network.”

### The resumé

“A resumé is the first impression you make with a prospective employer,” says Kathryn. “Make sure your resumé and cover letter are perfect. Ask an instructor or business person to proofread it. Make sure there are no typos, and that you correctly spell the name of the person you are addressing.

“Texting has affected people’s abilities to use proper spelling and grammar. Don’t use abbreviations or a lower case ‘I’ when talking about yourself. Make sure the bullets line up and the fonts are consistent.



**Kathryn Mills, Business Manager, MRSB.**

Taking the time to tailor your resumé to the job you are applying for shows an employer your ability to pay attention to detail even before they meet you.”

Sending in a resumé to express an interest in a position with that business or field can be effective. “I keep resúmes on file, and we may know of other clients who are looking for employees.”

### The interview

Show self confidence by looking people in the eye, and don’t be distracted. Offer a firm hand shake. When considering what to wear to the interview, take your cue from the people working in that setting.

“You can impress the interviewer by doing your home work and researching the company. You can mention you didn’t like a previous job if you back it up with a solid explanation. If you have difficulty during the interview, explain yourself. Interviewers are people too, and they will understand.

“We want to make sure the person will fit well into the culture of the workplace. A strong work ethic is very important, as well as the desire to learn and be part of a positive team.”

Strong references are important. Be prepared and bring a copy of your references to the interview.

### What about limited work experience?

“What counts is how the skills you have learned can transfer to a new job,” says Kathryn. “If you worked as a sandwich artist for example, you learned patience, attention to detail, listening skills, efficiency, punctuality, and team work that can draw parallels in other jobs.

“Also, volunteering speaks volumes about the kind of person you are. It says a lot about your work ethic and shows you are willing to spend time helping others. Being on a sports team shows that you are able to work in a team environment on the job as well.”

### What if you don’t get the job?

“If you don’t get the job, call back and ask what you could have done differently. It shows your professionalism and a willingness to improve.”

For more information, visit [www.mrsbgroup.com](http://www.mrsbgroup.com)

# If you need more experience, consider short-term work

by Stella Shepard

Recent graduates may come out of their educational program with limited work experience. Many employers are saying that a lack of work experience can be overcome by the right attitude and a willingness to learn and to start at an entry-level position.

Finding short-term work is one way to gain experience while you are looking for a long-term job in your field. **H&R Block** is a company which looks for staff to work on a short-term basis. There are many advantages to be gained by this experience. “Staff can gain invaluable work experience and develop employability skills for future employment,” says **Darlene White**, Office Manager with H&R Block in Brudenell.

H&R Block is a national franchise and is independently owned. They offer personal tax preparation, corporate returns, American returns, audit assistance, GST and payroll preparation, and bookkeeping services.

“We offer full training for tax preparation, so limited work experience is not an issue,” says Darlene. “When hiring, we look for potential employees who have a good work ethic, strong people skills, and are computer knowledgeable.”

“We hire staff who are able to pay attention to detail, can deal with stress, and demonstrate confidence, all of which are essential in this area of employment.”

## Recruiting staff

“On PEI, we hire about **25** staff for the five locations in Sherwood, Charlottetown, Cornwall, and Montague.” There are four general positions, including reception, tax associate, bookkeeper, and office manager.

“H&R Block will be offering a training course running from September to November, which is open to the public. We will potentially be hiring graduates of that course. We begin recruiting staff in October. Work begins mid February and usually runs until April.”

## Training staff

“We require that staff have a high school education, and we train them on the job,” says Darlene.

“We provide a full tax course and customer service training. New employees are monitored by senior staff for a period of time. There is limited advancement due to the seasonal aspect of the employment. However, there are several year-round positions and management roles that become available on occasion.”

For more information, visit [www.hrblock.ca](http://www.hrblock.ca) 



**Darlene White is the Office Manager with H&R Block in Brudenell. Darlene began working as Junior Tax Associate with the company 15 years ago. Nine years later, she was promoted to her present position.**

# Advice for recent graduates

by John Arenburg

“If a graduate has limited work experience, one of the biggest things they can bring to the table is community involvement or volunteer experience,” says **Jason Ahern**, Branch Manager at RBC in Hunter River. “Skills gained from these experiences can be transferable to customer service roles with a bank.”

“Don’t focus on the lack of work experience you may have. Focus rather on the experience you do have and sell those transferable skills.”

Jason has been with RBC for 13 years. He began his career at the RBC contact centre in Moncton, New Brunswick, where he held seven roles over seven years. Born and raised in Summerside, he moved back to PEI in 2004 and has since worked in all four RBC branches on the Island. In 2006, he came to the Hunter River branch in the role of Bank Manager.



**Jason Ahern, Branch Manager, Hunter River RBC.**

## Valuable information for your resumé

“You’re selling yourself on a resumé, so be sure to highlight the skills that make you marketable. Employers look for people who can work both independently and as part of a team, so it’s a good idea to describe situations where you excelled in both. Talk about targets that you reached or exceeded, projects where you played a leadership role in getting the job done, and ideas you had that generated results. And list your volunteer roles as well.”

## What the employer is looking for

“One of the things a recent graduate can potentially bring to the job is enthusiasm, eagerness and a willingness to learn,” says Jason. “It has been my experience that recent graduates are usually more open to change and familiar with technology.”

“In the banking industry, change occurs daily. A recent graduate may be able to adapt to those changes quicker. Also, leadership skills and initiative are always a valuable asset.”

## Getting your foot in the door

Timing often plays a role in finding employment. “Opportunities come and go as the market grows or there is a need to fill temporary positions for staff on maturity leave or extended vacation. Sometimes you need to take a temporary role to get your foot in the door. Remember that a temporary role can become permanent, and can often help you develop new skills that will prove useful down the road.”

Mobility is an important factor, especially with global companies like RBC. “We have lots of local opportunities, but if you are willing to relocate, the possibilities can truly be endless.”

## Training available


“At RBC, training is second to none,” says Jason. “RBC has a learning department dedicated to web-based training and on-the-job training. The web-based training is country wide and is interactive, exposing employees to learning situations in different branches. Our philosophy is that a well-trained employee can feel confident and able to serve customers more effectively.”

“Regardless of where you start your career, you should talk to your manager about your future aspirations and determine what training and experiences are necessary to achieve your goals.”

## Success rate for graduates

“The length of time employees stay with their employer depends on many things, including the individual’s career aspirations and goals, their performance, and the level of satisfaction they get from their job. At RBC we are fortunate to have a great mix of long-tenured employees and relatively new hires.”

“Employers have a greater chance of retaining more graduates if they have good career conversations with them, are honest in what they expect from employees, and have a good idea of what employees expect from them. In the end, it needs to be a win-win for the employer and employee, and most of all for the customers we serve.”

For more information about careers with RBC, visit [www.rbc.com](http://www.rbc.com) and check under **Careers**. 

# Adult education highlights: Charlottetown, Montague & Morell

by Stella Shepard

The 2011 **Charlottetown Adult Education** recognition ceremonies in May celebrated the achievements of **432** students.

**Michael Martin** was awarded the \$1,500 Harry MacLauchlan Memorial Scholarship.

**Rebecca Gates** won the \$500 Austin Carragher Adult Education Award.

**Matthew Perry** was presented with the Samuel Holland Entrance Scholarship.

**Kerrie MacDonald** and **Quentin Munn** received PEI High School Graduation Certificates for Mature Students.

The student speaker was **Joni MacKenzie**.

The **Montague Adult Education** recognition night highlighted the many successes of the adult learners.

The enrollment in the GED preparation and high school credits totaled **113**. There were **63** learners enrolled in the day program and **50** learners in the night program. The night program had the largest attendance to date at the Montague Centre.

Some of the learners have been accepted into the following post-secondary programs: **Resident Care Worker, Hotel and Restaurant Management, Human Services, Environmental Applied Science Technology, and Plumbing**. One learner will be studying at **Mount Saint Vincent University**.

An English 621 credit was offered for the first time as an on-line option. **Eight** learners chose that option and were able to access course material from their home computers. Adult Education instructors **Susan Conohan** and **Jessica Campbell** implemented the pilot project.



Charlottetown student speaker Joni MacKenzie (left) with Paula Selkirk, Instructor.

The **Morell Adult Education** recognition night highlighted the learners' achievements.

Of the **20** learners enrolled in the program, **12** were enrolled full-time. **Five** learners earned their GED certificates and **20** high school credits were also completed. **Three** learners have been accepted into post-secondary programs, and **five** are waiting to learn if they've been accepted.

The Adult Education program started in the Morell area in 1998. Since it began, **136** learners received their GED certificates. **Eighteen** students have been awarded their Provincial High School diploma. And **393** high school credits were earned. There were 38 short courses and two Prior Learning and Assessment courses (PLAR) taught.

**Glen Compton** received the Albert Fogarty Award. Candidates must demonstrate initiative, positive attitude, and program performance that moves them toward their academic goal in an outstanding manner. Glen has applied to the Holland College Human Services program.

**Allyson Drake** received the Morell Lions' Award, which honours a student who best exemplifies the Lions' motto of "We Serve." Allyson has applied to the Practical Nursing program.

For more information about the **Adult Education** program, contact the central office at **566-9628** or **1-800-446-5265** and press **3**.



## Check the website for the Calendar of Events

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**Publication Owner/Manager:** Gloria Welton  
**Queens County Reporter/Copy Editor:** Heidi Riley  
**Kings County Reporter:** Stella Shepard  
**Prince County Reporter:** John Arenburg  
**Researcher/Public Relations:** Stacy Dunn  
**Design/Pre-press:** Dynamic Design  
**Webmaster:** Graphic Communications

**The Employment Journey**  
 Box 8816, Yorkdale Estates, PE C0A 1P0  
 Telephone: **Charlottetown** (902) 894-4100  
                   **Montague** (902) 838-4106  
 Facsimile: **Charlottetown** (902) 368-4548  
                   **Montague** (902) 838-3518  
 E-Mail: **employ@pei.aibn.com**  
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