

Study presents key factors impacting the IT Sector's labour force

by Gloria Welton

The **Information Technology Labour Market Supply and Demand Study** identifies several key findings about the IT labour market on PEI. The study concludes that if these findings are not addressed, the overall growth and development of the IT sector on PEI will be affected.

Key findings:

Economic Development

The province's economic strategy, laid out in the document called **Island Prosperity - A Focus for Change** indicates that IT is among the sectors that government has prioritized for investment. Beginning in 2009, the priorities of government investment will focus on four main sectors: **bioscience, aerospace, renewable energy, and information technology.**

"The focus of investment will be in people, innovation, and infrastructure," says **Mike Gillis**, Executive Director of the **Innovation and Technology Sector Council**. "This strategy will give the IT Sector a great opportunity to continue its growth. But the success of the IT Sector depends on an awareness of the current state of the industry and a close working relationship among various stakeholders."

Growing demand for IT workers

The 57 IT companies that responded to the survey included private companies and federal and provincial government. They listed the following jobs that would need to be filled over the next 24 months:

Occupations	Number of jobs
Analyst	10
Computer Science Researcher	2
Management Consultant	2
Network Administrator	3
Programmer Analyst	16
Project Manager	5
Quality Assurance Analyst	5
Senior Manager	2
Service Desk	5
Software Designer	2
Technician	5
Web/Graphic Designer	10
Other	2
Total.....	69

"This list is only an indication of some of the IT Sector's hiring needs," says Mike. "The survey does not include IT jobs that exist within other sectors or industries."

Declining enrollment in IT education

The IT Sector is a highly-educated workforce. A majority of the employees surveyed have a college diploma. The number of IT workers on PEI who hold a bachelor's degree is above the national level.

The study reported a nation-wide trend of declining enrollment in post-secondary training. The supply of IT workers on PEI is largely due to the serious decline in the number of students enrolled in IT programs. Taking steps to increase enrollment in Island IT programs and placing new workers in the industry is a priority. This will require reaching out to students, recent graduates and faculty in junior and high schools, UPEI, Holland College and private colleges. Also, it is important to provide this career information to others who influence students' decisions, such as parents and career counsellors.

Enrollment is improving

UPEI and Holland College report an increase in IT enrollment in the last few years. "We are definitely seeing an increase in enrollment in our IT programs," says **Kim Horreht**, P.Eng., MBA, Program Manager, Holland College. "However, we still are not close to what it was in the late 1990s. One problem we still face is a relatively high attrition rate between first and second year. These are not easy programs but students interested in them will be successful if they are prepared to work hard."

"In the past couple of years, all our graduates were employed before or by graduation. Last year a colleague received inquiries from employers looking for graduates to fill 28 full-time entry-level programming jobs, and he only had 10 graduates. He also mentioned that of the 10 graduates, six had paid OJT placements because the companies wanted to encourage the students to remain working full time after graduation. This is a trend we believe will continue. As well, we received many calls in the summer from employers looking to hire and we were unable to help them. We are beginning to see a shortage in computer professionals much like the trades shortage we started to see a few years ago."

Difficulty attracting and retaining qualified employees

The study identified two key issues which have the most impact on PEI's ability to attract and retain employees: **wages and opportunities for advancement.** "Employees in the sector listed these two issues as being the top two reasons for job dissatisfaction," says Mike.

"Wages paid on PEI are lower compared to larger markets such as in Toronto and Vancouver. Also, the majority of PEI's IT firms are smaller in size. But there is room for improvement through offering other benefits and incentives and working on opportunities for further training and advancement."

"The IT Sector and other partners have been working on bringing high-level professional training such as **Project Management** and **Service and Quality Management** to the province. Normally training is offered in Montreal or Toronto. Bringing it to the province cuts down on the cost and time lost to the employer and employee. This initiative is working, and we plan to continue to define, prioritize, and facilitate the specific training requirements of the IT workforce."

More information needed

"We also want to take a close look at the cost of living on PEI compared to the wages and benefits in this sector and look at the trends across the country. Many new employees and newly-established businesses on PEI believe that the cost of living is lower here. We hope to do a study to get a realistic view to pass on to potential employees, employers and government stakeholders."

Human resource practices in local IT work settings

According to the study, the vast majority of IT employers on PEI have one to nine staff. Because of their small size, many employers have a business plan in place but few have a **Human Resource Plan**. "Human Resource planning provides a detailed picture of actual needs such as number of staff and skill sets both for now and in the future," says Mike. "Also, a plan will provide a good understanding of the current staff's capabilities and interests, and the availability of personnel locally and elsewhere. This type of plan helps employers to avoid staff crises and to react to additional opportunities as they arise. We plan to provide workshops and HR tools on Human Resource Planning."

"The study also pointed out that while many of the surveyed employees said they are generally satisfied with their jobs, there is more that could be done to help retain and attract workers. Employees said that job satisfaction would increase with improved wages, benefits, and opportunities for employees to grow in skills and to find advancement in the firm. Human Resource Planning will help resolve these issues and combat the current 'talent crunch' much of the industry is facing."



The employment scene on PEI Check the Inside Out



IT Specialist: Georges Mardini	3
Website of the month: www.wowjobs.ca	3
Nursing home: Maplewood Manor	4
MacEwen Mews: new community care facility	5
Job hunt: Roseanne Shepard	5
PEI Association of Sector Councils forum	6
Ceridian Canada Ltd.	7
Island Recruiting Inc.	7
Biz 2 Biz Expo	8-9
Employee of the year: Jim Gallant	10
Eastern PEI Chamber of Commerce award winner: KC Collect	10
Kwik Kopy Design & Print Centre	11
Junior Achievement	11
Alf's Custom Cabinet Ltd	12
Johnston's Tire Truck & Automotive	12
Self employment: Janet MacLean	13
Self employment : Joseph O'Halloran	13
Building career education in PEI schools	14
Adult & Community Education: Study Skills	15
PEI Career Development Services: steps to help you find work	16

For more information about the **Information Technology Labour Market Supply and Demand Study** or about the initiatives of the **Innovation and Technology Sector Council**, call **566-3988**. To view the study on-line, visit **www.itsc.ca**

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