



Workforce Development Strategy

Analysis of Survey and Focus Group Findings

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Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation

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CEDEC

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Introduction

This report presents findings from the Workforce Development Survey and Workforce Development Stakeholder Consultation carried out in June 2015. The purpose of the consultation was to gain insights to support the development of a Workforce Development Strategy (WDS) for English-speakers living in Québec. Over the past fifteen years the proportion of English-speakers in Québec has grown considerably, by about 50% in some regions of the province. At the same time as this growth has been occurring there have been economic and labour force pressures, which have made attaining gainful employment more challenging: these include the economic downturn of 2008, employer demands for bilingual applicants, and growing opportunities for English-speakers outside Québec. In fact, an increasing number of young, well-educated English-speaking Quebecers are leaving the province to pursue employment elsewhere – a trend that is worrisome since many of these individuals possess skills that are needed in the Québec labour market.

In addition, whereas English-speakers have historically enjoyed an educational advantage given that the group was previously characterized by higher educational attainment, this advantage is slowly fading, as new cohorts of English-speakers are not completing similarly high levels of post-secondary education. Although the rates of unemployment among French and English-speakers in Québec are similar, recent evidence suggests that the low-income levels and high unemployment are increasingly present among the English-speaking group. Therefore, the situation of English-speakers in Québec is such that (1) an increasing number of well-educated young people are leaving the province for employment, (2) the educational advantage that has historically characterized this group is diminishing during a time when bilingualism is seen as important, and (3) there is mounting evidence that English-speakers remaining in the province are experiencing lower incomes and higher levels of unemployment. For all of these reasons, the development of strategies to retain, and promote opportunities for, English-speakers in Québec are gaining prominence as practically-relevant supports to strengthen Québec's labour force, promoting local economies, and nurturing the vitality of English-speaking communities throughout Quebec.

The following sections in this report present the findings from quantitative and qualitative consultations with stakeholders which were undertaken to deepen the Community Economic Development and Employability Corporation's (CEDEC) conceptual understanding of the challenges and gaps English-speakers face in Québec's current labour market, and how it can help to develop a Workforce Development Strategy (WDS) as an operational roadmap to support this population sub-group.

The first portion of the report looks at the methods and data that were collected for, and are analyzed within, this report. The second section examines the findings. Specifically, this section

looks at what these results mean for the direction and shape of a Workforce Strategy for English-speakers in Québec. The report concludes with a brief summary about how to draw upon the wisdom of civil society organizations and networks as well as educational programs to tackle this important labour force issue.

Methods and Data

Workforce Development Survey

This report includes data obtained from a quantitative survey and a virtual focus group. The quantitative survey, administered in English and French, was available to prospective respondents between May 11 and June 8, 2015 with +/- 420 individuals invited to take part. Invitees were selected from the CEDEC newsletter mailing list and staff and Board member contacts. Invitees were notified of the survey by email, regular mail, and by telephone. Potential participants were selected based on whether they belonged to one of three categories: employer, employment service provider, and/or recruiter. Characteristics such as knowledge of Québec's English-speaking community and labour force development policies and programs were also a consideration.

Survey questions probed participants' familiarity with workforce development resources and services, perceived importance of involvement from civil society organizations, respondents' willingness to take part in a Workforce Strategy, and attitudes toward bilingualism and workforce integration services. Respondents were also asked to identify opportunities, obstacles, targets, and results that should be present in the plan as considerations, or goals. A total of 46 completed surveys were returned (34 English, 12 French), which represents a response rate of 11%.

Broadly, survey respondents fall into three groups: employment service providers, recruitment agencies, and employers. Although some participants did not self-identify, on the basis of those who did, employment service providers represent 26% of the sample, recruitment agencies 6%, and employers occupy 69% of those surveyed. This indicates that employers are over-represented in the sample and this fact should be taken into account when interpreting findings. It is also significant to note that a majority of the participants completed the survey in English.

Most of the survey items asked were based on a 5-point Likert scale where the response option 'very important' represented one end of the spectrum, and 'not very important' the other. Although a 'neutral' option was clearly identified as a mid-point, other categories were not clearly defined. Consequently, the reader should be careful in assuming what respondents meant when selecting that option. For example, some participants may have selected an unlabeled option with the perception that it represented 'important', while others may have chosen it thinking it meant 'somewhat important' or a mid-point between neutral and very important. This consideration is reflected in the analysis.

Workforce Development Stakeholder Consultation

The focus group was hosted via WebEx for a one-hour period from 12:00pm to 1:00pm on June 4, 2015. Seven participants were present either by connection through phone or computer and contributed to the discussion regarding a Workforce Development strategy for English speakers in Québec. Participants represented employment service providers, government, university, and other organizations. Questions were open-ended addressing many of the same themes covered in the questionnaire, notably opinions regarding opportunities, challenges, targets and desired results of a workforce development strategy.

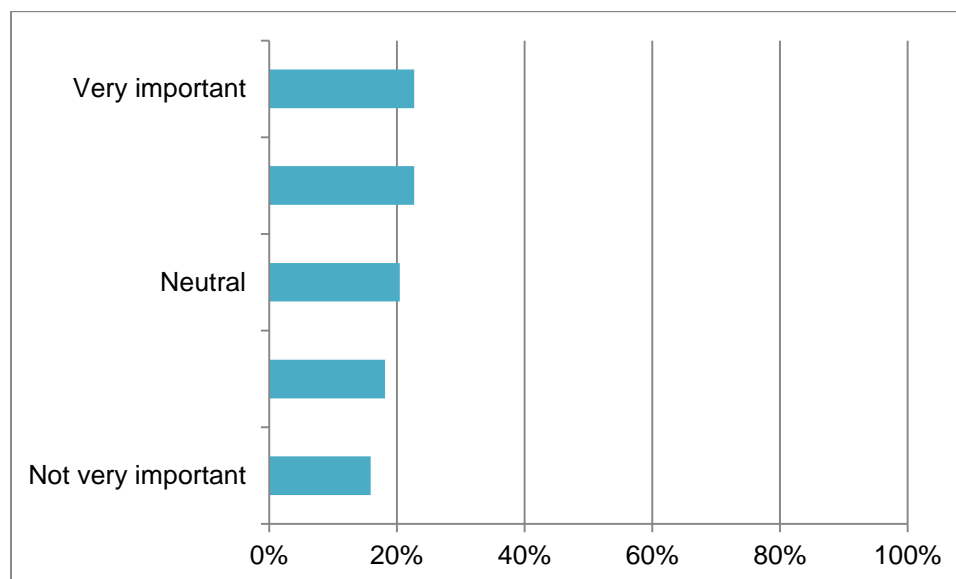
The section that follows summarizes the findings obtained through the questionnaire and focus group. Key points are highlighted to develop a conversation regarding a Workforce Development Strategy for English-speakers in Québec. Survey results are grouped together for those who completed the questionnaire in English and French.

Findings

Descriptive Analysis

As a starting point, survey respondents were asked about their familiarity with workforce development resources and services, Figure 1. While a good portion of respondents report familiarity with these items, a similar group indicates they are less aware. This suggests there is room for education and outreach to stakeholders to ensure they are adequately informed of the available resources and service options so that they are in a position to make use of them.

Figure 1: *How familiar would you say that are you with Workforce Development resources and services?*



Respondents were then asked about the importance of being French/English bilingual to actively participate in the labour market. A majority of respondents indicate that they believe bilingualism is an important skill to be competitive in the Québec economy. Comparing responses of those who completed the survey in English to those that answered the French questionnaire reveals a noticeable difference. Specifically, individuals that completed the English survey were much more likely, 79%, to say that being bilingual is ‘very important’ than respondents who participated in the French version, 38%, Figure 2. This is an important finding because it suggests those who gravitate more toward English identify the pressures to speak and read French to a greater degree than those who are fluent in French but may need to improve their English skills. This result speaks to the importance of this stakeholder consultation and the development of a Workforce Development Strategy for English-speakers in Québec.

Next respondents were asked about the perceived importance of carrying out research specific to Québec’s English-speaking workforce, Figure 3. While about 15% of respondents indicated they were neutral on this point, a strong majority, 85%, identifies that research of this nature is important. This result supports the rationale for carrying out these stakeholder consultations in preparing a workforce strategy.

Figure 2: *How important do you think French/English bilingualism is for active participation in Québec’s labour market?*

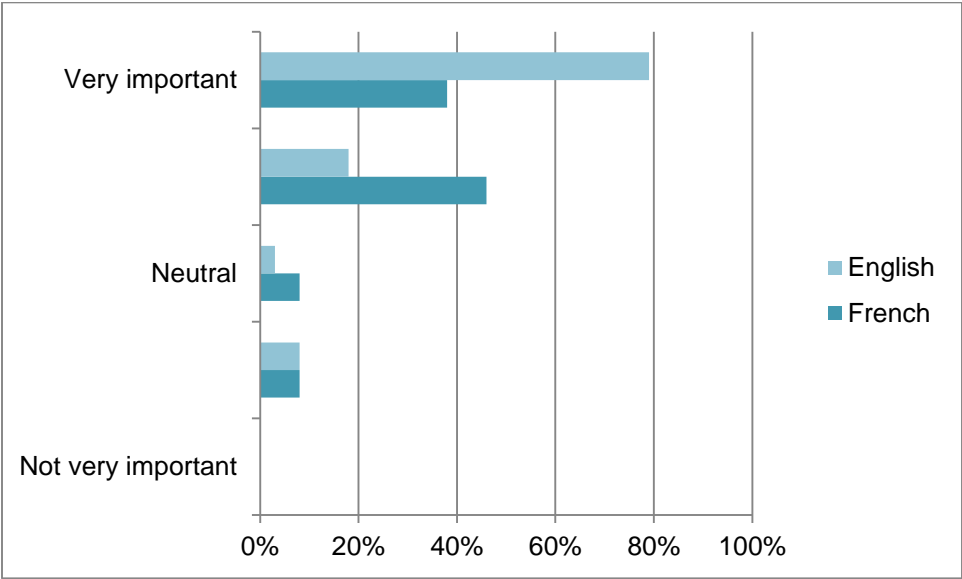
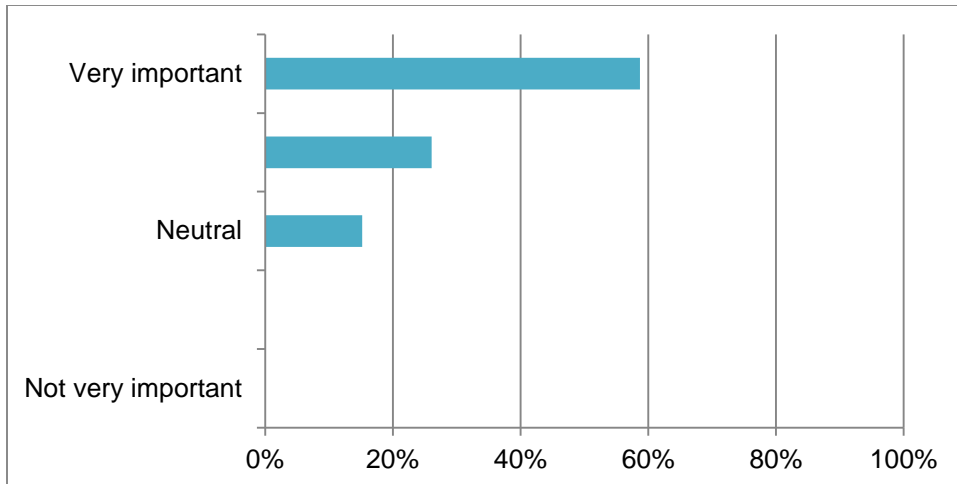


Figure 3: *How important do you think it is that research specific to Québec’s English speaking workforce be conducted?*



With respect to importance, respondents were also probed about the salience of workforce integration and participation for English-speakers in Québec, and how organizations representing these individuals could strengthen their efforts in these specific areas, Figures 4 and 5. Responses to these questions illustrate participants believe developments in workforce integration and participation for English-speakers in Québec are important, notably the creation and coordination of services and the need for organizations to strengthen existing efforts in these areas. This suggests these items are a useful component to support a labour force strategy.

Figure 4: *How important do you think it is that workforce integration and participation services be developed and coordinated for English-speakers in Québec?*

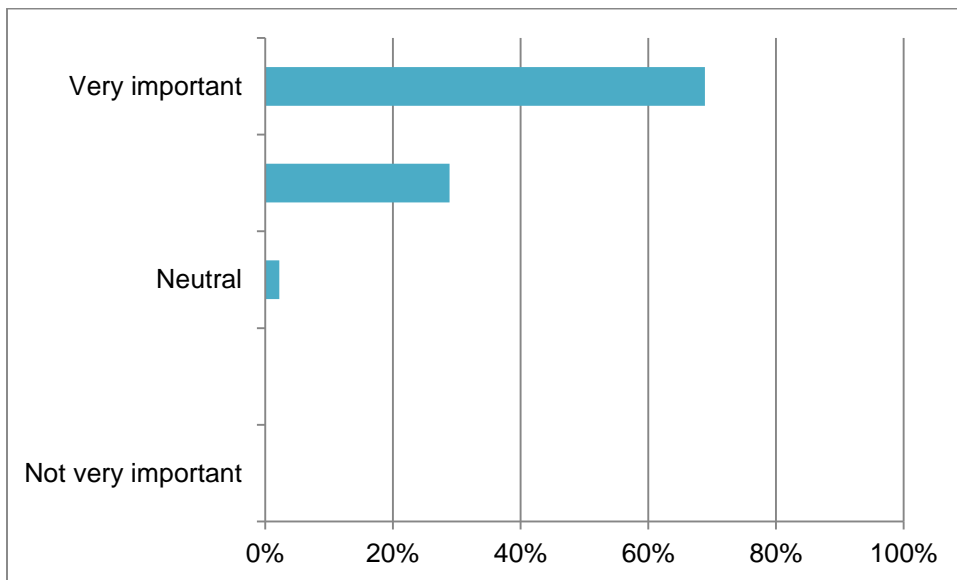
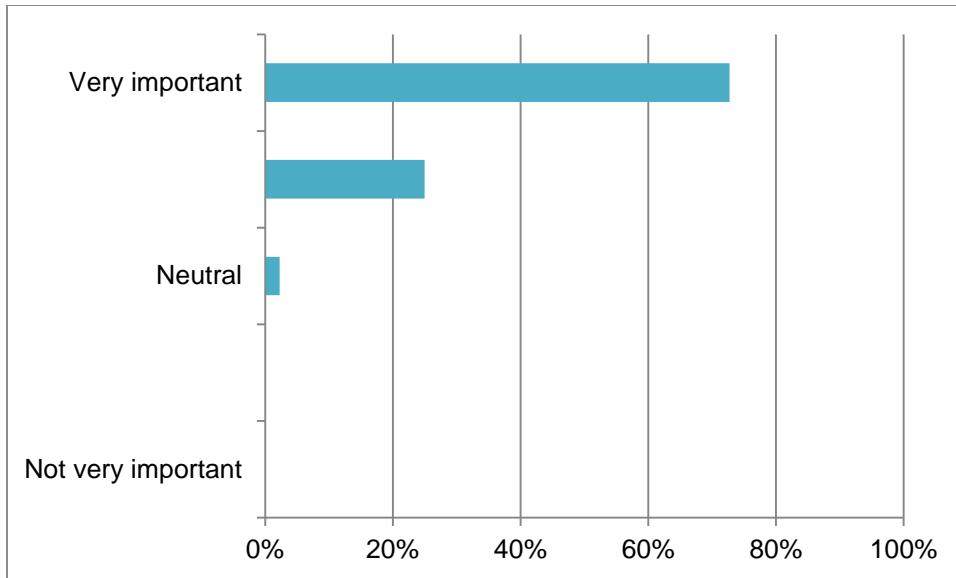


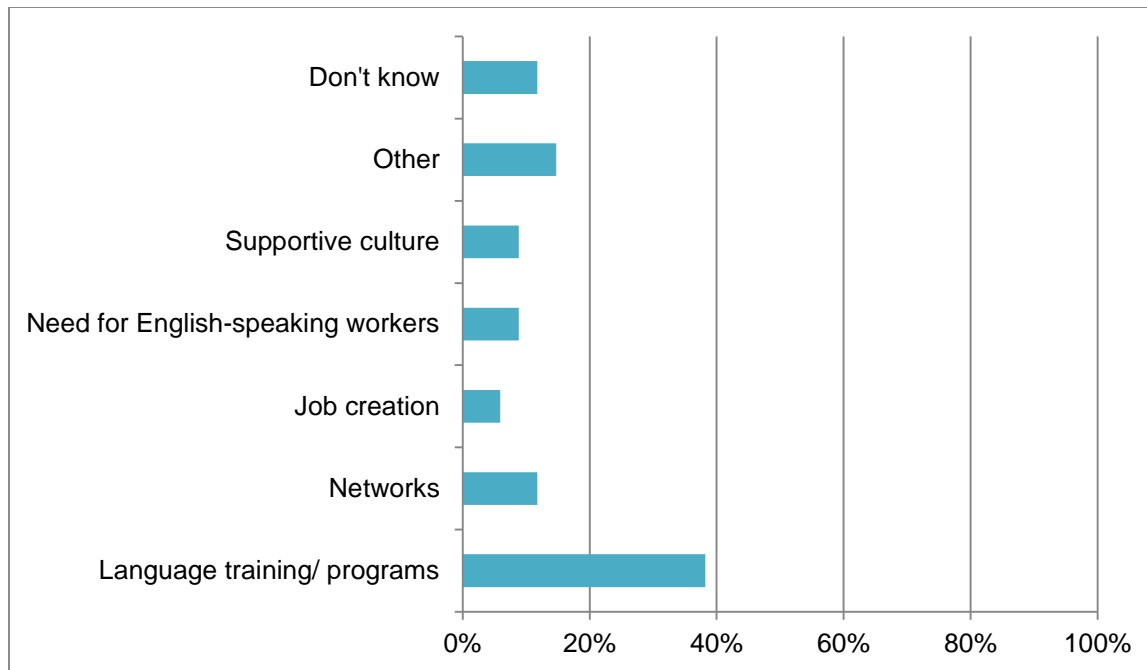
Figure 5: *How important do you think it is that organizations working for English-speakers in Québec strengthen the coordination of their workforce integration and participation efforts?*



Opportunities

To understand existing opportunities for integration and participation of English-speakers in Québec’s labour market, respondents were asked to identify specific opportunities in an open-ended question. Common responses were grouped into five categories. Those that were not mentioned more than once, or connected to any common theme, were included in the ‘other’ group. The most popular opportunity identified by respondents, 38%, is educational opportunities. Specifically, these include language training and programs to help English-speakers learn French either in part, or fluently, to better meet the needs of employers in Québec and compete in the labour market. Respondents in the focus group also stressed the need for easily affordable and accessible French language training in their discussion. This indicates that language courses and training should be a key component of strategy development.

Figure 6: *What do you think are the major opportunities for increasing labour market integration and participation of English-speakers in Québec?*



Other popular opportunities recognized by respondents included the following:

- Drawing upon networks to create opportunities and strengthen supports, such as uniting stakeholders, enhancing communication between employability organizations, and tapping into networks of potential English clients by hiring English-speaking employees, 12%.
 - Networks were also emphasized in the focus group, notably the opportunity to bring various organizations together to better support business and workers, and to connect the two groups.
- Fostering a more supportive culture for English-speakers by lowering language proficiency regulations and sensitizing employers to English speaking candidates, 9%.
- A need for English-speaking workers to fill specific holes in the labour market, particularly in Québec City, 9%.
- Creating jobs and communicating this need to potential employees, 6%.
 - In particular, the creation of jobs at English institutions was suggested.
 - With respect to communication, devising a better way of advertising all English-speaking jobs in Québec.

¹ Please note these holes were not explained or elaborated upon.

- Comments that fell into the ‘other’ category received only one mention and typically referred to particular situations.
 - The ageing population, a need for nurses and personal care workers, and tourism development were some of the items mentioned.
- 12% of respondents were not sure what opportunities might increase labour market integration and participation of English-speakers in Québec.

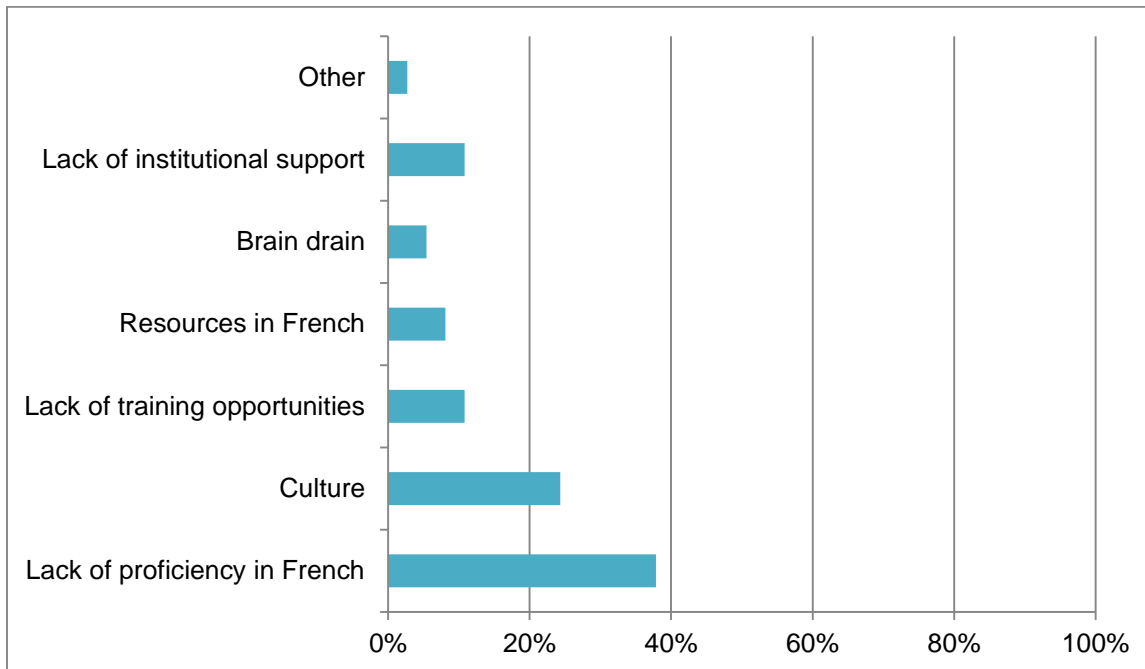
Obstacles

To better understand the operational environment and challenges English-speakers in Québec face or which create gaps that will need to be addressed in tackling this issue, respondents were asked to identify some of the major obstacles to workforce integration and participation in Québec. Responses fell into seven main categories, with the largest, 38%, representing comments that focused on a lack of proficiency in French as a major obstacle to fostering integration and participation among English-speakers. Many of these responses mentioned insufficient French training as part of their description, which is explored below. Others noted that as a consequence of not being proficient in French there are few opportunities for English-speakers.

Other cited obstacles present some interesting insight into how a Workforce Development Strategy might be developed. Generally the bulk of these responses highlighted challenges that are either cultural or institutional in nature, these include:

- The political and labour culture in Québec inherently favours those who are French-speaking, 24%. In different ways, respondents repeatedly emphasized this point and the strain it puts on the English-speaking community with respect to the workforce.
 - Comments focused on feelings of prejudice among community members for those who are not proficient in French and the attitudes of French-speaking Québécois toward English-speakers as a major impediment to integration. Respondents also addressed how it is culturally taboo to discuss the needs of English-speaking persons in the Québec labour market.
 - Focus group responses also picked up on this theme, noting that a lack of French proficiency has resulted in a two-tier system in the province for English-speaking persons, whereby these individuals typically fall into one of two categories: they are either the most educated, with the highest skillset, or possess the lowest skillset, which makes locating work difficult. Furthermore, the effect of these groups on the labour force is exacerbated by the fact that they tend to cluster in certain communities.

Figure 7: *What do you think are the major obstacles to workforce integration and participation of English-speakers in Québec?*



- A lack of French language and professional training programs and opportunities was stressed, 11%. Respondents noted that in addition to a lack of French programming for English-speaking residents, people in general who seek specific accreditations often have to go outside of Québec to earn these as the educational institutions in the province do not support certain types of training. The result, they say, is that many individuals go away for education and do not return.
- Similarly, a lack of institutional supports were mentioned, 11%. This included observations about a lack of support and cooperation from government (specifically the department of Emploi Québec), language restrictions that are increasingly growing tighter, and integration policies that are too-narrowly targeted towards immigrants and could also be helping English-speaking residents who may not be new to Canada.
 - Focus group participants also mentioned the theme of integrating new Canadians. They commented that Québec is not doing enough to integrate this segment of Canadians and also pointed to university students as a group that could benefit from integration and add value to the workforce.
- An abundance of French resources and lack of English language ones were noted as a barrier, 8%. These comments stressed career information only being in French, lack of educational information in English, and the lack of funding for programs designed to support workers in English.

- Finally, ‘brain drain’ was cited as an obstacle, 5%. This refers to individuals who have been trained in Québec and leave because of insufficient work opportunities. Specifically, comments focused on stringent language proficiency requirements encouraging people to leave and the non-recognition of professional credentials earned elsewhere.
 - Retention of workers was mentioned in the focus group session, notably helping students stay in Québec and seizing the opportunity to integrate these young minds into the workforce.
- Comments grouped under the ‘other’ category, 3%, did not present any real matches. One response, for example, cited “politics” as an obstacle.

Targets and Results

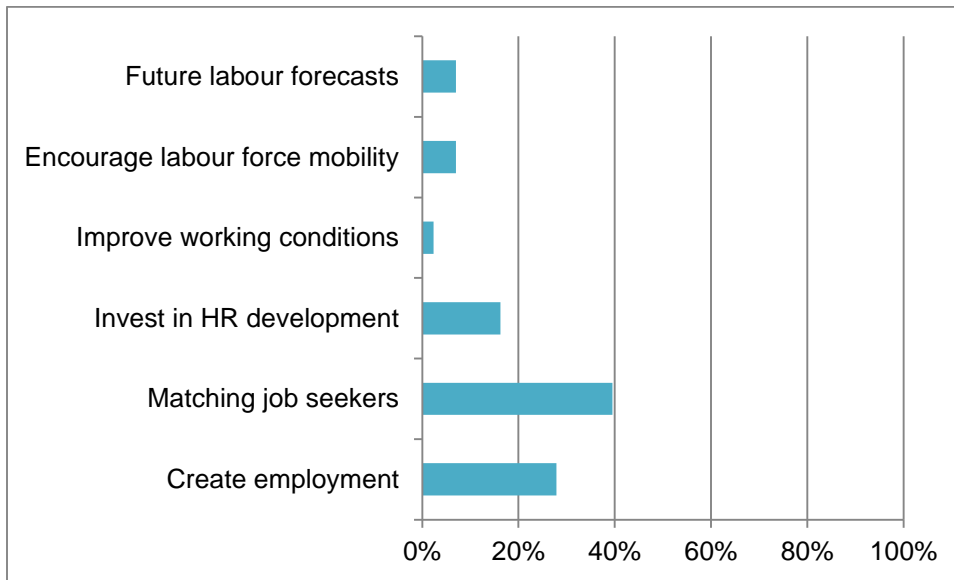
Moving on from obstacles, perceived targets and results were a key theme of the survey. Respondents were asked to prioritize their top targets, ranking them on a scale from 1 to 6. Figure 8 illustrates the items respondents selected as their top target of a workforce development strategy. Helping job seekers match up with employment opportunities emerges as the top priority among participants, 40%. This point was mentioned when respondents were asked about obstacles, and is identified here as a means of job seekers and employers better finding each other to improve labour force capacity. The focus group panel also commented on the importance of matching opportunities as a target.

Employment creation, 28%, is another favoured target among survey respondents and was raised earlier as an opportunity for English-speaking integration and participation in the labour force. Investment in human resources development, 16%, encouragement of labour force mobility, 7%, forecasts of future labour force requirements by jurisdiction, sub-jurisdiction, industry, and occupation, 7%, and improving working conditions, 2%, are also identified as major targets, albeit to a lesser degree.²

Furthermore, the focus group suggested four additional targets. These include the need for local labour market information, a better understanding of the challenges and gaps facing English-speakers living in Québec, access and affordability of French language courses, and the importance of local networks and partners in achieving results. Comments about labour market information are closely aligned with the need for forecasts noted above. Similarly, access to French education and networks are key themes in the responses.

² For a breakdown of all targets and their rankings, please see the Appendix.

Figure 8: Please number in terms of priority (1 being the most important) what you think should be the major targets of a Workforce Development Strategy for English-speakers in Québec?

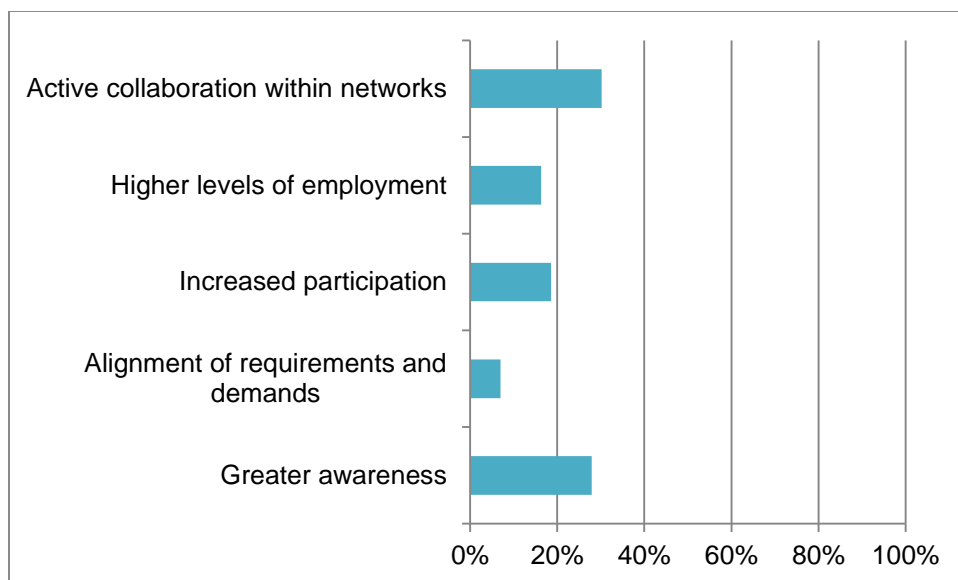


With respect to results, two items emerge as major priorities: active collaboration within networks, 30%, and greater awareness, 28%. Active collaboration refers to cooperation within a broad network of political, public, private, academic and training institutions and programs, and community interests to develop, monitor and continuously improve a workforce development strategy. The power of networks referred to above was raised as a consideration in response to the need for integration and participation of English-speakers, and was identified by focus group participants as a target. Clearly, working with networks and local partners is a tool respondents recognize as having the potential to meaningfully contribute to a labour force strategy, and believe is a top result.

Greater awareness refers to English-speakers' familiarity with labour market characteristics, trends and opportunities, specifically opportunities that they are able to take advantage of. All of these items result in English-speakers being more informed about the labour market so they are better able to navigate through it.

Likewise, increased participation of English-speakers in the labour market was recognized as the third top result, 19%. Higher levels of employment for English-speakers, generally and in terms of specific sub-groups, 16%, and greater alignment between the labour requirements and demands of Québec's labour market and the supply of human resources, 7%, were also recognized.

Figure 9: Please number in terms of priority (1 being the most important) what you think should be the major results of a Workforce Development Strategy for English-speakers in Québec?



Importance of the Research and Future Involvement

Finally, to get a sense of the perceived importance of this research and the goal it seeks to achieve: the creation of a Workforce Development Strategy for English-speakers in Québec, respondents were asked how important they believe it is to put such a strategy in place, Figures 10 and 11. A majority of respondents indicate that working toward a workforce program for English-speakers is important, especially those who completed the questionnaire in English. This result emphasizes comments and answers provided by respondents throughout the survey that (1) carrying out this consultation is important and (2) that developing a workforce strategy for English-speakers is needed to achieve higher levels of employment, better employee matches for employers, and a more skilled workforce.

A final question probed respondents' willingness to take part in the establishment of a workforce development strategy for English-speakers. Responses suggest mixed readiness about actively collaborating in the development of the strategy. Reasons for this may have more to do with the type of organization the respondent represents and how they feel this entity could contribute to such a strategy, given that responses illustrate it is clearly perceived as an important priority. For example, some respondents may believe their organization is better suited to collaborate, or has more to offer in the development of a workforce strategy, while others support the practical importance of the work but are less certain how they specifically and meaningfully contribute to its creation. Though this is speculation, such a justification would explain support for the strategy and the mixed willingness to actively contribute to its development.

Figure 10: *How important do you think it is that a Workforce Development Strategy be put in place for English-speakers in Québec?*

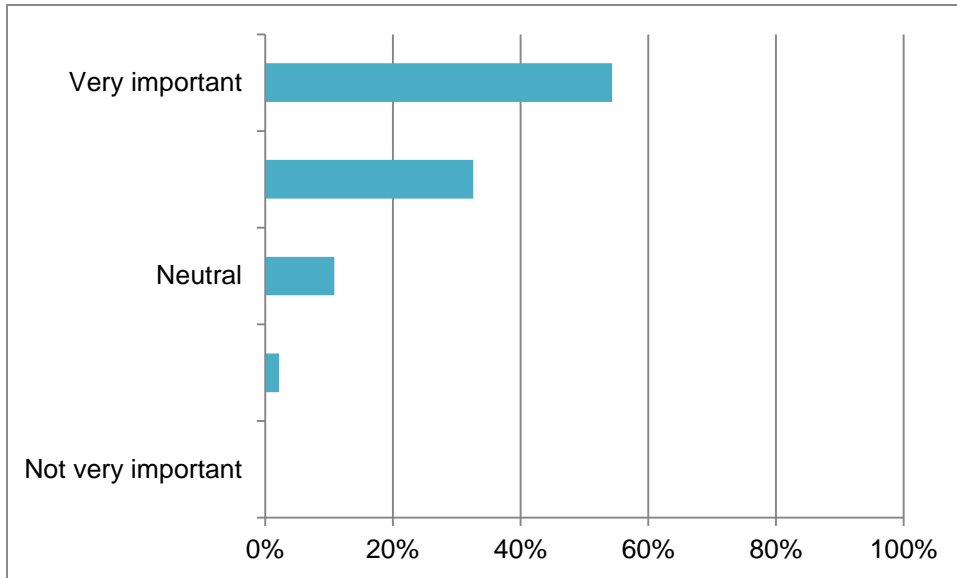
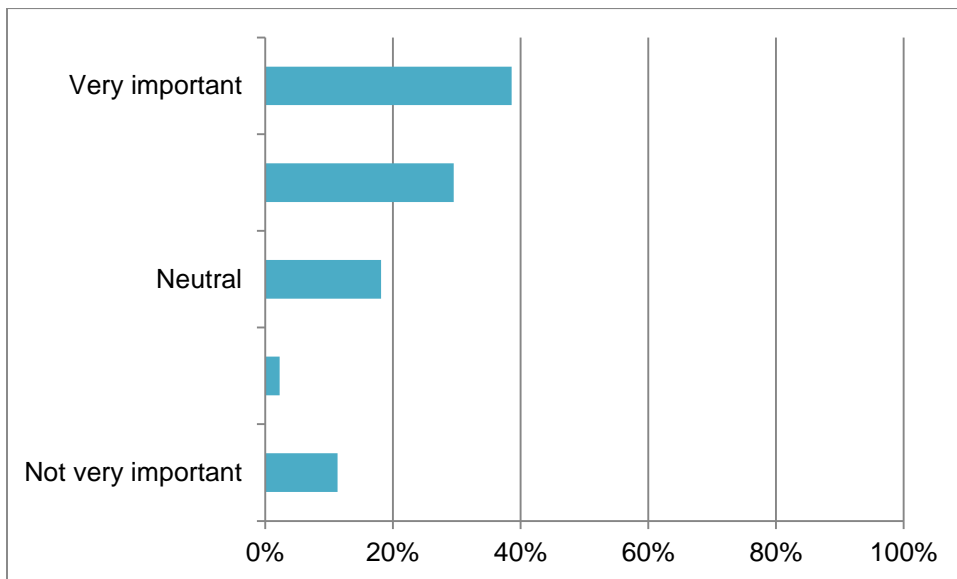


Figure 11: *How willing is your organization to participate in establishing a Workforce Development Strategy for English-speakers in Québec?*



Discussion and Conclusion

The preceding analysis provides useful input to inform the development of a Workforce Strategy for English-speakers in Québec. Notably, respondents believe this research is important. They think it is important for a strategy to be put in place for English-speakers in Québec, for the development of workforce integration and participation services to support this group, and for the involvement of organizations representing English-speakers. Those participating in the stakeholder consultations also acknowledge that bilingualism is particularly important. This pressure seems to resonate more strongly with those who completed the survey in English.

Respondents identify education as the top opportunity. Notably, they stress that French language courses and training that are accessible and affordable should be a component of the strategy. Tapping into the power of networks and fostering a more supportive culture for English-speakers living in Québec were other top mentions. Although not necessarily identified as an opportunity per se, the fact that many respondents do not report being familiar with workforce development resources and services suggests this is an area where CEDEC could make a contribution by enhancing its outreach and education programs.

With respect to obstacles to integration and participation of English-speakers, a lack of proficiency in French is recognized as a primary barrier. In addition to the challenge of bilingualism, a political culture unsupportive of a population that speaks only English, a lack of specific French language training opportunities, and an institutional framework that places tight language restrictions on job seekers are cited. Together these main obstacles are either institutional or cultural in nature. While changes can be made to institutions to make them more conducive to English-speakers seeking work in a largely French Québec, cultural obstacles will be more difficult to overcome.

Matching job seekers' skills with employer needs and employment creation are identified as top targets. Likewise, better tapping into civil society networks and awareness of opportunities and the labour market are noted as major results. Finally, respondents report mixed willingness to be actively involved in a strategy moving forward.

These results present some clear ways forward.

For one, the power of networks seems to be not only an important outcome, but also an opportunity to promote English-speakers integration and participation in the labour force. The importance of informing English-speakers about the labour market, and matching tools to better pair job seekers with employers, are also goals that could be effectively achieved through networks and resource collaboration. This approach is in line with Strategy #3 outlined in the concept paper.

Second, the importance of bilingualism is mentioned repeatedly. Although targets focus on the matching of skills and employment creation and results center on leveraging existing supports and fostering an English-speaking workforce that is aware and engaged, the prevalence of education as both a perceived opportunity and obstacle suggests it merits further attention. Specifically, considering how education training could factor into a labour force strategy should be considered. This could be a natural expansion of Strategy #4 presented in the concept paper, which focuses on integrated and coordinated action.

Although many thoughtful insights are presented here two primary themes which emerge are networks and a dearth in French language education among English-speakers. The Workforce strategy for English-speakers in Québec should address both of these items, while drawing on the other rich suggestions derived from these stakeholder consultations.

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Mission

A volunteer-driven organization, CEDEC sparks economic innovation in building forward-looking, prosperous and confident communities across Quebec through sharing expertise, knowledge and building partnerships.