

Examining quality of work in Grand Erie: An assessment of needs, gaps and opportunities



PARTNERS

Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie



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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with economic uncertainty, has prompted various members of the workforce in Grand Erie to consider quality of work more holistically. They are acknowledging the interconnectedness of work quality as perceived by employers, job quality as perceived by workforce members, and workforce development as perceived by local labour market experts. They are also examining ties of all of this to individual, organizational and community prosperity.

Government and local community organizations have limited understanding of the barriers faced, specific to Grand Erie, and programs and policies required by local businesses to support quality of work.

This project identified gaps in how employers, employees and job seekers within regions of Grand Erie (i.e. the City of Brantford, Six Nations of the Grand River, Mississaugas of the Credit, and Brant Haldimand and Norfolk counties) support and experience the quality of work. Income and benefits, career prospects, work intensity, working-time quality, skill development and social environment were examined. Surveys and interviews identified challenges in compensation and benefits, communication challenges between employers and employees, and gaps in ways in which government supports the quality of work.

This research provides Grand Erie's economic development organizations, educational institutions, community service providers, employers and policy makers with evidence to inform decision-making around practices, projects, policies and partnerships that would support and strengthen quality of work locally.

KEY INSIGHTS

1

Only 54% of respondents indicated they earn enough to sustain their family's basic needs.

2

29% of full-time employees indicated receiving annual pay increases based on inflation, but about 73% of businesses said they offer inflation-based annual raises to all or full-time employees.

▶ The Issue

In 2020, the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie found that a significant portion of the local workforce worked overtime frequently, felt overwhelmed by the amount they needed to do for work, and were overall dissatisfied with their work-life balance. More than one in two employees had considered leaving their job in the last year due to burnout and dysfunctional workplaces. Grand Erie's 2023 EmployerOne survey revealed that retention had become a greater issue since the pandemic for 47 per cent of surveyed employers. Job vacancy data for Hamilton-Niagara Peninsula – which encompasses Grand Erie – indicates that vacancies have almost doubled over the past five years. This inhibits the ability of businesses to expand.

Employers, government and community agencies in Grand Erie were eager to understand why people stay in and leave certain jobs. They were keen on obtaining data that allowed them to develop appropriate policy and practical responses to support economic growth. Quality of work was a useful concept to grow this understanding.



Quality of work is a multi-faceted concept, with each of its elements converging to support sustainable workforce development. It recognizes that how workers perceive and qualify the work that is expected of them influences their performance and productivity levels. Thus, improving quality of work through fostering good, fulfilling jobs benefits businesses, society and the broader economy.

While research on quality of work has grown, there is a need to use the established frameworks to explore local job conditions and quality, to inform decision making.

What We Investigated

This research examined:

- What is the current state of quality of work in Grand Erie?
- What are the types of supports the local workforce would find most beneficial to improve quality of work?

The research undertook a three-tiered approach — a workforce survey (485 respondents, including remote workers and those who travel into work), an employer survey (160 respondents) and a series of follow-up interviews amongst business executives and HR representatives (30 interviewees). The surveys and interviews explored income and benefits, career prospects, work intensity, working-time quality, skill development and the social environment.

The methods resulted in a diverse range of perspectives from employers, employees and job seekers within various business sizes and sectors across each of Grand Erie's communities.

What We're Learning

Findings highlight a need to enhance experiential learning opportunities, community programming (namely more accessible, affordable and quality skill development programs and health and wellness supports), government investments in public transportation, childcare, housing, and mental health, and policy changes to facilitate local and international hiring.

Strengths and weaknesses in current quality of work provisions: Grand Erie's businesses excelled at creating positive social environments and ensuring favourable work intensity and working conditions. Income and benefits packages and career prospects, on the other hand, were not as well rated by respondents.

Communication gaps between employers and employees: Significant discrepancies were observed between employees' and employers' perceptions of wage increases, skill development offerings and career prospects, suggesting a need for stronger communication channels within workplaces.

Gaps between compensation packages offered and the local living wage: Meeting employees' compensation needs was deemed critical by workforce respondents, with low pay – beneath the local living wage figure for many – being the primary reason employees considered quitting their jobs.

Workforce shifts prompted by job quality variations across sectors: By understanding shifts in where the workforce is opting to work, employers and educational institutions may be better equipped to support employee retention and seamless transitions across occupations and sectors.

Government and community supports required by businesses: Amongst other supports, employers specified a need for increased availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of soft, essential and technical skills development training programs. They also identified a need for mental health and wellness supports and training, emphasizing the value of timely responses from government and funding terms that extend beyond one year. Residents with low-paying jobs or lower educational attainment, and individuals belonging to equity-seeking groups would especially benefit from enhanced, targeted supports designed to improve their work quality..

★ Why It Matters

Business consultations conducted by the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie before and during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a pressing need to strengthen organizational health as a means of addressing the labour shortage. Understanding and improving quality of work is a pivotal step in achieving this goal, benefiting local businesses, communities and the broader economy.

The research conducted by the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie illustrates where supports are most required. Workforce stakeholders in Grand Erie are encouraged to use the findings to develop and execute action plans to create and enhance policies, programs and partnerships that support the local workforce holistically and equitably.

Considering the rapid cost of living increases, job seekers and employees prioritized living wages. But employers are struggling due to supply chain issues, decreased demand for certain goods and services, reduced productivity resulting from staffing shortages and more. All of these factors limit their ability to meet their employees' income expectations. Reconciling this is key to supporting economic development and community building in Grand Erie, and involves collaboration, innovative thinking and systemic shifts within businesses, educational institutions, labour groups, government, skill development and literacy organizations.

If addressed collectively and in a timely way, these actions have the potential to reduce labour shortages, raise living standards and foster working environments that are more inclusive, productive and enriching.

► **What's Next**

This project is part of the Future Skills Centre's Quality of Work series, which explores different dimensions of quality work and how these dimensions interact with current challenges in the labour market. Part of a comprehensive strategy to improve the quality of work will entail ensuring workers in vulnerable employment situations have access to similar rights and benefits as other workers, including employment insurance or the right to disconnect. It will also be necessary to provide access to upskilling and reskilling initiatives so that people can access improved employment opportunities in other occupations and sectors.

The Quality of Work series explores current practice related to compensation and benefits, employment security, work environment, professional growth and overall social environment, for workers, employers and policy makers. FSC has funded research initiatives that address key gaps in policy and practice related to quality of work issues in the Canadian context, including understanding how this was playing out locally. FSC is working with funded partners to generate insights across the projects, to be shared later in 2023.