The other reasons, given by three or fewer employers, included employee job dissatisfaction, return to school, health related, and position eliminated (one employer).

In terms of potential job openings, the following table summarizes the findings from the survey of employers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
<th>Stay the Same</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Worker</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Service Worker</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=46)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=100)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=68)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>75.7%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=70)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The "n" is the number of employers who have included among their employees the occupational category listed. Thus, only the estimates of those who employed a given category of worker are recorded. The occupational category that is expected by the largest proportion of employers to increase is that of social worker. Next is community worker, with 37.4% of those employing this category expecting an increase in availability of positions.

Though the number of employers surveyed is not large, and they employ from a handful to nearly 600 workers in the social worker category alone, (government respondents in some provinces), it is still interesting to see that their estimates of availability correspond with the statistical overview of human resources trends in the sector. The figures also coincide with the comments of many respondents about efforts by some provinces to declassify formerly professional level positions and/or to certify lower levels of training for jobs that previously required professional degrees. That is, there is both an increased demand for professional level employees, as defined by the BSW, and a simultaneous drive to save costs by providing services in the community by redefining job descriptions and setting thresholds for qualifications at the lower levels, which means lower pay.

However, having said this, the majority of employer respondents feel that opportunities for hiring in the majority of occupations will remain essentially the same for the next three years (starting with 2000).

ii. Who is hired: equity issues and responsiveness to client diversity

The movement in or out of the sector is important to know at a general level, but it is also important to know some of the objectives that employers want to achieve in their hiring. Because of the changing profile of clients, with growing ethnic and cultural diversity, the full gamut of respondents emphasized that employees should more closely reflect the range of client groups they serve. They feel this is desirable on two counts. One is an issue of equity—respondents feel that the social services sector should embody the ideal of non-discrimination towards any "minority" group, and in fact the sector labour force should itself reflect the panoply of peoples and cultures that make up Canada.

At the same time, it is emphasized by respondents that in order for the social services to respond to community needs, as defined by that community (and this is much more than a geographically delineated community, but a community of interests, experience, history, etc.), social service workers themselves must come from those very communities. Obvious examples are employees with disabilities, from various ethnic groups, from visible minorities, from recently arrived immigrant and refugee groups, and from Aboriginal groups across the diversity that is encompassed by that term. (That is, the diversity within Aboriginal peoples is great, encompassing as it does many languages, cultural characteristics, history, and current political, social and economic conditions.)

Thus, by hiring and retaining more workers from various "equity" groups and other particular communities of interest, the social services sector not only fulfills its goal of being a truly fair and representative employer, but it would be more likely to respond effectively to the needs of the groups with which it works. Each circumstance reinforces the other, each enables the other.
Beginning with equity hiring, the overall picture for the employers in the sector looks quite sound. Social work certainly is a field where women are disproportionately present, compared to their overall distribution in the society and in the labour force. There need be no concerns that they are being overlooked for hiring. However, at a management level, they are disproportionately under-represented, as the sector profile statistics showed.

When considering the proportions of visible minority or Aboriginal persons in the field, the sector as a whole also shows congruence between their proportions in the Canadian population and their representation in social services. (See Table 26, equity representation in sector profile, but note that there are not data on persons with disabilities, and gender data show that women are strongly “over-represented” in the field.) However, national figures do not tell the story of the distribution of individuals across regions, cities, or organizations. In other words, national statistics can’t tell us if the various groups are employed where they are most needed. For that, we must turn to the employer fax-back survey and the in-depth individual interviews with employers.

In an effort to explore the issue of distribution of equity groups among those employed in social services, the 109 employers surveyed by phone were asked what percentage of the four equity groups under consideration occupied positions in their organization. This kind of information is important for identifying where there may be under-representation of any of the groups in the social services sector labour force. The findings are reported in the table below in terms of the number and proportion of employers having at least one member of the relevant equity group on staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Employers (N=109)</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>DON'T KNOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of employers</td>
<td># of employers</td>
<td>Mean % of employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible Minorities</td>
<td>34.9 38</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>28.4 31</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>14.7 16</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>89.9 95</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the four equity groups, women are by far the group that is most widely employed in the social work occupation. Ninety-eight of the 109 employers surveyed employ women, and women make up 78.5% of their social work occupational group in these organizations. This is not an unexpected finding in a field that has traditionally been a bailiwick of women. No more than 35% of employers report having visible minority social workers, and only 28.4% employ Aboriginal persons as social workers. Just 14.7% have disabled persons hired as social workers.

As for the proportion of the other three equity group members among the social workers, Aboriginal workers are an average of just under 20% in those agencies that have Aboriginal workers at all. Visible minorities and disabled persons are both just under 16% of the social workers in the organizations surveyed.

The “minority” position of these equity groups must be put in the larger context of their distribution in the population. In each case, the proportion hired is substantially greater than the proportion of these groups in the population at large. Therefore, though employers and at least three of the four groups (probably excluding women here) report dissatisfaction with their success in hiring members of these groups, for the surveyed employers at least, these patterns indicate some success in achieving their equity hiring goals. The results also indicate that greater effort is required in some cases.

The more intensive interviews of 41 employers gives some indication of their approach to hiring...
and retention of various equity groups. Respondents in this more intensive survey component of the research were asked whether they had any organizational structures in place to support racial diversity among staff, and to enhance their ability to respond to culturally diverse communities.

Of the 41 respondents, the vast majority report that they have active equity hiring policies. This is true at the governmental level, though several of these respondents said that the policy may exist but they find that it may not be fully applied at the field hiring level. As one government respondent in a northern community said:

We have employment equity legislation and our hiring policies reflect this...We have a commitment at a regional level, but at a field level we do not have much success. It is difficult to attract Aboriginal workers who meet the legislative requirements.

(West/NW)

For the other organizations, which made up the majority of responding employers, there are active and seemingly successful equity hiring policies. The two main target groups for hiring are Aboriginal and multi-cultural. There are Aboriginal services that are run by and for Aboriginal peoples, so they fully meet goals of equity hiring. As one respondent in the North said:

We have all Aboriginal staff and all Aboriginal clients, so diversity is not an issue.

(West/NW)

Other groups, which may not be operated by Aboriginal organizations but which largely serve Aboriginal clients tend to have a substantial presence of Aboriginal staff. A respondent from one of these organizations noted that non-Aboriginal staff are eligible to attend government-sponsored networking groups for Aboriginal workers. Another respondent, from the health care field in the Prairies, pointed out that there could be particular challenges facing Aboriginal workers and the organizations for which they work, however. The comment was:

Human resources issues here tend to have an Aboriginal basis. There are more Aboriginal social workers than doctors.

However, two-thirds of them are on leave because of stress—they face different personal and cultural pressures.

They also face prejudice.

(Employer, Prairies)

Many of the organizations reported that they have advisory committees with a strong Aboriginal presence, to help the organization respond appropriately to the service needs identified by the Aboriginal community. There also are less formal means for organizations and government to learn about the needs and expectations of the Aboriginal community. As one respondent said,

First Nations have a high profile in this province, and they tell us what they want.

(West/NW)

There were a few respondents from communities that did not have an appreciable Aboriginal population, so they did not see hiring Aboriginal individuals to reflect local conditions as particularly relevant. But one group did provide services at a satellite office much farther north, in a largely Aboriginal area. They offered culturally appropriate services there and hired Aboriginal workers for those positions. Also, several respondents from these regions reported that their organization did offer cultural awareness training for staff, and this included Aboriginal issues.

With the substantial multi-cultural diversity of Canada, there is also the issue of hiring staff that reflects this spectrum and who can be truly effective in serving various cultural groups. Most of these 41 respondents report that they have in-house programming to increase “cultural sensitivity” for staff. On the other hand, outside of the multi-cultural agencies themselves, which hire largely from among multicultural groups in the community, there seems to be relatively little cross-cultural hiring. As one respondent from a not-for-profit service said:

Nous ne sommes pas nécessairement représentatifs de la société.
Il y a un racisme silencieux, très blanc canadien français. Nous avons une approche très occidentale.

(Central)
translated as:

We do not necessarily represent society as a whole. There is an underlying prejudice favouring white French Canadians. We have adopted a very Western approach.

A respondent from a governmental agency said,

On est déphasé. Le personnel est plus francophone de souche que la clientèle. On embauche dans des programmes plus polyvalents. Souvent, les postes exigent la connaissance du créole et des langues asiatiques.

(Central)

translated as:

We are out of step. The personnel are more likely to be born and bred Francophones than the clients. Moreover, they work in very eclectic programs. Frequently the job requires knowledge of Creole and Asian languages.

The multi-cultural agencies do have diverse staff, usually reflecting their historic evolution serving particular immigrant or refugee groups. But with the rapidly diversifying client group, as the international political scene changes and contributes to the variety of those they serve, staffing cannot be fully reflective of each of the new client groups. This is a challenge for hiring as well as for the day to day work of staff, themselves from a particular multicultural group, but who live with the realisation that their own experience may not cross over into other multicultural groups. For example, a focus group of employees who work with multi-cultural clients pointed out:

It can be difficult to work with newcomers to Canada, because there is so much for them to learn about Canada. Also, our agency serves different cultures, and even though to an outsider it may seem we just serve one cultural group, in reality there are people [of the same racial group] who come from at least four different countries and cultures. Their culture can be very different from mine, and I have to use cross-cultural skills to work with them.

(Focus group with multi-cultural serving agency, Central)

Having a staff base that can reflect and be responsive to a wide variety of ethno-cultural groups is also a dilemma for the other services, whose main focus may not be multicultural services, but who include many different cultural groups in their client base. Many of these groups report active efforts to recruit from a wide variety of cultural groups. For example, one respondent in a multi-cultural service group said:

When we advertise a job opening, we always put in the ad that we encourage people from the client group and equity-seeking groups to apply. We have employed people from these groups.

We are very conscious of anti-racism as a goal and we would really like to get more training on how to promote anti-racism.

(Central)

Several of the organizations that include multi-cultural clients have advisory committees or other systematic linkages to various multicultural communities. A respondent from a large, multi-service agency described their procedures for achieving equity hiring goals:

We have a multi-cultural organizational committee, which ensures that all our policies and procedures are culturally competent and that training is available to everyone. We do an employment equity survey every two years which allows us to target hire for specific positions in support of racial diversity.

(West/NW)

The agency quoted above demonstrates that there are systematic means for organizations to ensure that they have up-to-date information as a foundation for policy development on equity hiring.
G. Responding To Human Resources Challenges: Education and Training in the Social Services

KEY FINDINGS

The Demand Side:

- Across the five main occupational categories, employers surveyed feel that the majority of all current workers meet or exceed expectations for "background skills" (written communication, teamwork, computer skills); the higher up the educational and responsibility scale, the more likely the person is to meet expectations (i.e., managers, supervisors and social workers versus community and social service workers). Employee computer skills are the least likely of the three to be rated as completely meeting or exceeding expectations.

- For "client-focused skills," employers find that service to the elderly is the client group for which the lowest proportion of workers "meet completely or exceed" expectations for working with this group. An average of approximately 50% of the workers are rated as meeting or exceeding expectations, while for other groups (disabled and ethno-racial) the average is close to 75%. At the other end of the scale, the group which employers rate the most employees as not meeting expectations at all or to only to some degree, is the aggressive client.

- For new hires, employers look for "employability skills" as a substrate upon which service-specific skills can be enhanced through work experience. These skills include ability to work in teams yet be autonomous, good communication, maturity and good judgement, openness to diversity of clients and co-workers, commitment, ability to learn quickly and under pressure.

- For new hires, employers would like to see greater capabilities in terms of computer skills and administrative skills. Employers felt that new hires were computer literate, but the larger problem they face is keeping up with rapid changes in software and hardware and having new hires who could readily adapt to the organization's technological base. Administrative skills were seen as necessary for social service workers to be able to take leadership roles over time.

- There was an array of very service-specific skill enhancements called for, depending on the organization's mandate: child protection, clinical, forensic, improved English-language communication skills in immigrant-serving agencies (and others, as well), and understanding the policy environment.

- Employers also would like to be able to attract more individuals who come from various equity and cultural groups, such as Aboriginal and immigrant/multi-cultural. They also speak of the difficulties of hiring and retaining individuals who can work comfortably and effectively in remote communities.

The Supply Side:

- The review of fields of study shows that there is a 28.5% gain in numbers completing studies at the university graduate level in social work and social services. The increase at the community college/diploma level was 39.4%. This reflects a substantial increase in sector-related knowledge (the "capacity") in Canada between 1991-1996.

- At the university level, pursuit of child and youth services studies increased by only 4%, and by 15% at the diploma/college level. The gerontology studies increase was above the rate of increase for social work and social services employment overall, but the numbers of students remains very small. At the college level, the rate of increase was below the average increase for social work and social services and is the smallest field of study component.

- Employers generally find that new graduates lack specific service skills that would allow them to move quickly into being effective workers. There is some sense that college certificate and diploma graduates are more prepared for the jobs they acquire than those from university programs.
An important means of bridging the gap between training and experience is the practicum. Employers and students find this a highly beneficial means of providing/acquiring on-the-job skills prior to full employment. The practicum plays a significant role for students in deciding whether social services, or a given branch of social services, is the career for them.

The analysis of courses offered at the university level, graduate and post-graduate, indicates that there is a paucity of curriculum that addresses either:

- the needs identified by employers (target group service needs, administration, more advanced computer skills, “employability” skills, service-specific—child protection, forensic, etc.)
- the changing demographics, which project needs especially for geriatric services, on-going service needs for youth, child protection, high-need and diverse Aboriginal and multi-cultural client groups.

- the especially high-need groups that are more vulnerable due to factors such as structural changes in service delivery in hospitals and mental hospitals, the reduction of funding for prevention and support programs for persons dealing with substance abuse or family violence. Relevant curriculum would include mental health, substance abuse, dealing with the aggressive client, and counselling skills for the challenging client.

Employers and professional associations do provide some in-house training and professional development, but this tends to be modest in scope and very much reliant on the individual skill needs in the case of employers or the identified needs or members, but not necessarily devised on a “strategic” basis, in human resources terms.

An important function of education and training in any sector is to prepare the labour supply in response to current and future labour market demands. Those demands may well fluctuate as a result of conditions external to the labour market and the sector may have little power to effect those conditions. In the case of social services, the external conditions that shape the sector labour market are enormous. Societal attitudes that devalue the vulnerable and those that work with them, continuous reductions in funding, on-going restructuring of service delivery in the name of efficiency and effectiveness—all of these affect the sector labour market, and in what is generally seen as a negative direction by the sector and those who share its values and concerns. Though the sector itself struggles to change this direction, through advocacy and direct action, this may seem at times to be a daunting task.

But the part of the labour market equation that the sector can affect is the educational preparation of those who enter the field, and the on-going training or upgrading of those already working in it. A sector, and any occupational group within it, can both lead and follow labour market trends. It can lead by identifying emerging trends in labour market demand. It can develop educational and training programs that can provide a pool of workers who can fill those jobs as they materialize.

A sector can follow labour market trends by clearly recognizing existent demand and preparing the supply of workers to fill that demand. This is true both for potential labour force participants (especially students) and for existing workers who are either temporarily not working in the field or who are active in it but could benefit from additional training. This could be to meet raising standards of training in their present position and/or to enhance the possibility of upward mobility in the occupation.

By way of review, it may be useful to return briefly to the change drivers that are shaping the social services sector. This will help set the education and training findings into the larger human resources context. After this review, a short overview of the scope of education in social services, as provided by universities and colleges, will be presented. This will help put the findings on training into the larger institutional context.
1. Change Drivers at the Societal and Sector Levels: Brief Review

The change drivers for the social services sector, as revealed by the extensive interview program for the sector study and by the previous pilot studies, showed that at a societal level there are a number of factors shaping the need for social services and the way that they are supported and structured. These factors included:

**Change Drivers at a Societal Level**

- Major shift in values and attitudes toward those in need of support through public programming; that is, an increased tendency to “blame the victim,” an increasing reluctance to provide funding and related supports to those in need, and a related devaluation of those who provide services to these individuals and communities of interest.

- Globalization, which contributes toward a marginalization of those already marginal to the workforce and to mainstream social structures, thereby leading to increasing separation of individuals and communities from each other, and to increasing poverty and its attendant ills.

- Increasing polarization of the labour market into highly skilled and educated groups and those who are becoming entrenched in a life time of erratic participation in the labour market, with concomitant low and irregular income, increasing periods of reliance on the public purse, and related problems arising from this situation.

- Increased poverty rates, spreading further up and down in the demographic profile of society; sole parent families and their children are especially hard hit in terms of income and ability to withstand the social and economic changes that shape their lives.

- Increased intensity of “social problems,” violence in the family and at large, increased proportions of non-intact families, rise of specific conditions requiring extensive, life-long support for those affected (i.e., fetal alcohol syndrome).

- Demographic changes, with related changes in service needs including:
  - the increase in the proportion of aging persons, with related increases in needs for health care and for preventive and supportive care within the community to avoid unnecessary health care costs and to support the dignity of individuals.
  - increasing numbers of immigrants and a small number of refugees, which require services that are tailored to the particular needs of these individuals and groups;

**Change Drivers at a Sector Level**

These change drivers either arise directly out of the society-wide drivers listed above, or arise out of more immediate conditions in communities and in the workforce itself. These changes are evidenced at a sector level and they include:

- Overall decrease in funding to social services and related fields (health care, education), from whatever source; increased reliance of some services on fund-raising techniques to support services.

- Increased demand by government, the public, and communities/individuals served for accountability in service provision. This includes accountability for responsiveness to community needs, for quality of service, and for cost effectiveness.

- Changes in the structure of service delivery, including a trend toward contracting out and/or privatization of services; redefining of social sector roles and responsibilities as part of that re-structuring (particularly evident in the health care field, where social services and health care services have been delivered through the same organizational framework, which is now rapidly changing).

- Changes in the structure of services to Aboriginal peoples, arising out of the devolution of responsibility to Aboriginal communities and organizations themselves. Whether or not services are yet devolved, this change driver includes:
  - Rising expectations of Aboriginal peoples for services that meet their needs in a more appropriate and effective manner, and that all service providers be accountable to the community for services.
Changes in information technology; increasing demand for skills in this area, but often called for in the relative absence of appropriate equipment, software systems, training, and related supports.

These are the change drivers facing the social services sector as a whole, but how are they experienced at the employer level—at the "demand" side of the labour market equation?

2. Facing the Demands of Change: What Do Employers Want?

A significant source of information on the demand side of the human resources equation is the data from the surveys of employers. There were 41 employers interviewed in-depth and in-person as part of the key stakeholder survey. There were 109 employers who responded to the fax-back survey, and 51 of these were interviewed subsequently by telephone. The employers in surveys were drawn from government ministries hiring social services workers (including social and health services and corrections) and private and not-for-profit organizations. The service scope included health, social welfare, corrections, immigrant and multi-cultural services and service provided by and for Aboriginal peoples.

Employers were asked about two main aspects of readiness of employees to meet current service needs: what skills gaps exist for current, experienced workers and what are the critical skills they look for in new hires (meaning those new to employment in the field, usually recent graduates of diploma or university courses).

a. Skill Gaps: Findings from the Fax-back Survey

The fax-back survey of 109 employers from across Canada and across several industries and organizational categories asked about two types of skills, "background skills" such as written communication, working with teams, or computer skills, and "client-focused skills," which focused on skills for working with groups with particular needs—ethno-racial, disabled, aggressive clients, and the elderly.

The respondents were asked what percentage of the employees in each of five occupations they considered met the requirements for a given skill. The responses were on a four-point scale, which has been dichotomised for this reporting, and the mean response is provided. The findings for the survey of these 109 employers are:

| Table 43: Employers’ Assessment of Staff Skills by Specific Social Service Occupations |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Degree of Skill                             | Community Worker (N=19) | Social Service Worker (N=35) | Social Workers (N=90) | Supervisors (N=53) | Managers (N=53) | Complete & Exceed |
|                                              | Do not meet & Some Ext | Completely & Exceed | Do not meet & Some Ext | Completely & Exceed | Do not meet & Some Ext | Completely & Exceed |
| **BACKGROUND SKILLS**                       |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Written communication                       | 36.3%            | 62.6%            | 26.7%            | 73.3%            | 16.1%            | 82.3%            | 8.3%            | 91.8%            | 4.3%            | 94.1%            |
| Team skills                                | 17.9%            | 23.4%            | 17.0%            | 83.3%            | 17.5%            | 89%              | 12.2%           | 86.4%            | 12.3%           | 86.1%            |
| Computer skills                            | 43.7%            | 38.1%            | 53.4%            | 32.3%            | 45.2%            | 44.5%            | 30.8%           | 68.8%            | 32.4%           | 65.6%            |
| **CLIENT FOCUSED SKILLS**                  |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Working with ethno-racial clients           | 30.8%            | 58.7%            | 19.8%            | 69.3%            | 18.6%            | 65.4%            | 13.4%           | 75.1%            | 14%             | 80%              |
| Working with disabled clients               | 33.7%            | 57.9%            | 12.9%            | 67.1%            | 9.2%             | 76.8%            | 8.8%            | 74.6%            | 12.6%           | 84.6%            |
| Working with aggressive clients             | 38.7%            | 49.2%            | 31.1%            | 63.2%            | 24.2%            | 73%              | 14.6%           | 78%              | 17%             | 79.7%            |
| Working with the elderly                    | 20.8%            | 35.6%            | 7.3%             | 52.1%            | 14%              | 51.1%            | 7.6%            | 43.4%            | 12.3%           | 82.4%            |

(Note: MEAN percentage scores are presented, therefore the rows do not add to 100%)
First, generally speaking, the match between skills and meeting of requirements increases with the degree of training and/or "authority" in the workplace. Taking all three background skills together, for example, it can be seen that there are greater proportions of employers reporting that the community service workers do not meet/somewhat meet the requirements than is so for social service workers, social workers, then supervisors and managers.

It is interesting to see that computer skills are, relatively speaking, the Achilles’ heel of all five occupations, with this gap tending to be the largest of any of the three background skills. But here again, we see that the higher up the occupational scale, the less often it is cited as a gap. So in the case of supervisors and managers, employers report some two-thirds of these occupational groups completely meeting or even exceeding requirements.

Of the five categories of occupation, it is clear that the majority of workers in each category do completely meet or exceed requirements for each of the three background skills. When reviewing the other end of the scale—does not meet or meets to some extent—of the three background skills, there is a larger proportion of community service workers than other occupations who are reported by their employer as lacking these skill requirements for their jobs. However, having said that for the three skills as a group, for the “team skills” category taken alone, the proportion of community service workers ranked in this way is very similar indeed to the social service workers and social workers.

There was a different set of questions asked about manager skills, reflecting the nature of their work (financial, human resources and budget management, and negotiating skills). Here the majority of employers indicate that managers in their employ meet the requirements for these skills, with only negotiating skills seeming to be an appreciable gap, with 17% of employees reported in the negative range of the scale on this.

As for skill gaps in working with the target groups (selected because of the change drivers identified in other components of the study), again it is evident that more employers find insufficient skill levels in working with the elderly and with the aggressive client. The proportion of employees for whom these gaps are reported goes down as the occupational skill and training level goes up. In the case of the elderly, given the demographic trends, this is a clear flag for the need to enhance education and training for working with this emerging target group. As for working with the aggressive client, this returns to the issue of change drivers such as funding cuts, structural changes in delivery, etc. It is to be expected that many of the aggressive clients are reflections of early release from mental hospitals or acute care facilities, lack of community supports, cuts in funding for housing, employment and educational programming, etc.

The reasons for the differentials in skill sets, as identified by employers surveyed, were not explored further in the survey. However, there are at least two contextual factors to be considered. One is that community services workers who tend to be ranked lower in meeting skill requirements tend to have the more modest levels of education and training for their jobs. At the same time, their jobs tend to be most “hands-on” of all occupations. They are direct caregivers to the most vulnerable in society. They thus have the greatest potential for facing challenging, if not explosive situations on a daily basis—with the least organizational backup and related training. Perhaps it would be better to think of the findings in terms of the substantial proportion of employers who find that these employees meet or even exceed the requirements of the job. However, there does seem to be room for more training that would help fill these reported gaps.

The need for training also is true for the background skill gaps identified. The strongest need appears to be for enhanced skills in computer technology. Improved team skills and then written communication are called for to a lesser degree, but the gap is definitely there, in the view of these employers.

b. Skill Gaps, Skills Enhancement and Employability Skills: Findings from the In-depth Employer Survey

There were 41 employers interviewed in-depth about the challenges facing them in terms of the skill levels of current employees, what they look for in the skills of new hires and how prepared they feel...
new graduates are for work in their organizations. These interviews were largely open-ended, so the respondents could elaborate on their views, and therefore provide an enriched portrait of the issues under consideration.

As with the employer fax-back survey, the majority of these employers found that most of their current employees fully met the requirements of their job. Having said that, however, the employers then often went on to describe enhancements of skills—rather than skill gaps—that they would like to see.

The two most frequently mentioned needs for skill enhancement are in computer technology and administrative skills. Over and over respondents would say that current employees had the basic skills for the job, but that there is definitely a gap in computer skills. This was noted in the full range of organizational types and services—from immigrant and refugee serving groups across the country, to Aboriginal services in the north, and multi-service agencies in major urban centers. However, having said computer skills are a gap, the situation is not entirely straightforward. For example, several of the employers who mentioned that current employees lacked skills in computer technology said that the problem was not so much that the current staff were not computer literate, but that the technology and software was changing so continuously that it was hard for staff to stay current with these changes.

The majority of our employees have the skills to do their jobs. The main area in which there is sometimes a skill gap is in the technology area. This is not because our workers do not know how to use computers; it is because computer programs change so quickly it is hard to keep up.

(Immigrant-serving agency, Central)

Several respondents said that there was a need for more administrative and management skills. Responses from two different multi-service agencies, located very far apart in the country, typify these comments:

Social workers need a lot of training in management and administration skills.

They are trained as technicians, so they have limitations to advancing up the career ladder of the organization.

(Employer, Prairies)

There are administrative skill gaps that restrict the movement of social workers into management. The schools of social work don’t teach enough administrative skills (personnel, labour relations, human resources management, financial management, information systems, effective writing).

(Employer, West/NW)

It is interesting that in responding to the question on skill gaps in current employees these respondents not only commented on the need for the immediate job readiness, but also for enhanced skills to allow for mobility within the organization.

Otherwise, the skill enhancements employers would like to see tended to be very service-specific. They would state that their staff were indeed fully capable, but there was still a need for more, and more specific, skills. For example, those in child protection would like to see more child protection skills, those in clinical services need more clinical skills in employees, forensic services need people with these very specialized skills, those in immigrant services would like their staff to have improved English-language speaking and writing skills (though they were not alone in wanting the latter—lack of written communication skills was also mentioned by other agencies). There was also a mention of the need to understand the policy environment in which the organization worked.

One other response is interesting for moving somewhat out of the specific realm of job skills and more into the approach to the job. There was only one respondent who made this kind of point, but it is valuable for making the link between personal qualities and employment skills:

On engage des gens pour leur savoir, leur diplôme, et on vérifie très peu sur le savoir-faire et le savoir-être. C'est presque un péché capital de dire reproché, à faire remarque leur savoir être. On met l'emphasis sur années. Manque souvent de savoir-être et sur le jugement du comportement humain....Aussi, nous avons besoin de
cliniciens; a besoin de quelqu’un qui est capable d’écoute.

(Employer, Central)

translated as:

We hire people based on their knowledge and their degree. We rarely verify whether or not they possess practical “know how,” or the proper attitude. It is almost a capital offence to criticize an individual for his or her attitude. We emphasize years, frequently overlooking whether or not an individual possesses the proper attitude and the way that he or she behaves as a human being...We require clinicians. However, we also require good listeners.

Employers think in very concrete terms about how their current employees meet requirements for the current job. Their employees are competent, but employers do identify skills that could be added on or upgraded to meet changing demand. But when employers were asked about what the “critical skills” they look for in “new hires” the majority of them responded more in terms of the qualities of the applicant rather than their specific on-the-job skills.

The skills they were looking for included:

• Ability to work in teams
• Ability to work alone, using own initiative (especially since there are fewer supervisory positions in the changing organizational structures in which social services are delivered)
• Maturity, good judgement, flexibility
• Good communication skills (listening, interviewing, writing and speaking)
• Ability to think critically, to evaluate situations and take appropriate action
• Multi-cultural openness
• Able to problem solve
• Enthusiasm
• Comfortable with own mortality
• Comfortable with grieving process
• Commitment to social work

• Able to learn quickly and work under pressure
• Time management and prioritization

One of the respondents in a multi-service agency serving a particular language group (however, the group comes from a number of countries), described in one statement the tremendous range of qualities they look for, along with some very specific skills:

We look for self-motivated, creative team players. We look for [the same] language ability and empathy for the community. We look for a balance between counselling, outreach and community mobilization skills. We want someone who is flexible...who is interested in client outcomes and who also understands political, gender and racial issues. We are not hung up with certification—just certification alone will not cut it with us. Traditional advertising for job applicants does not work. We have to seek out people whose work is similar to our work and who is somehow familiar to us or someone we know.

(Immigrant serving agency, Central)

These qualities turn out to the same or very similar to what are known in the human resources literature as “employability skills.” They are derived from several Canadian and American studies of employers, and they turn out to be skills required for virtually any job, and by virtually all employers.”

About a third of the employers interviewed mentioned specific background characteristics that were essential to new hires. These were either linguistic (French/English in bilingual environments, or other languages to serve multi-cultural groups), educational requirements, such as the BSW (especially for child protection work) or MSW (for advanced clinical work) or membership in an Aboriginal or multi-cultural group. This was to meet equity requirements (as in government employers) and/or to more closely match the profile of the groups being served. As two respondents from different departments in the same provincial ministry described what they look for in new hires:

We need to attract visible minorities to comply with employment equity policy. It is very competitive out there and it is very difficult to get the desired mix. It is especially difficult to attract qualified Aborignals.

(Government, West/NW)

I would prefer that we hire First Nations. We aren't very successful in finding the type of candidate we require—the reality is that being a worker for the provincial government is difficult. It is stressful, there are no restrictions on the caseloads, and Aboriginal people can go to Aboriginal agencies in the community for the same salary, in a tax-exempt environment. It also is an isolating experience to be a First Nations person working in provincial government.

(Government, West/NW)

A respondent from a francophone agency serving a multicultural and francophone clientele in a largely English-speaking milieu described a similar diversity of what is needed in new hires:

Nous cherchons des gens qui ont une formation de base importante. Par exemple, une infirmière en soins palliatifs et qui a acquis une formation ou une expérience ethnoculturelle. Parfois, on va concéder sur l'expérience de travail pour avoir des gens des communauté ethnoculturelles, mais il y a des critiques à ce sujet.

(Immigrant and francophone serving multi-service agency, Central)

translated as:

We seek individuals who have had adequate basic training. A nurse, for example, working in palliative care, who has gained ethno-cultural training or experience. At times, we overlook experience in order to hire individuals from ethno-cultural communities, however, this practice raises some criticism.

While employers said that they did indeed seek specific language skills in new hires, no employers mentioned any difficulty in finding applicants who are French-speaking. This apparent sufficiency of a French-language pool to draw from across the country is further supported by the data presented in the statistical profile earlier.

The practicum also plays a role in hiring even experienced workers, in that this background is seen as indicating the requisite skills for a new hire. As one respondent described this:

La formation de base est importante pour les gens qui ont complété leurs cours universitaires. On regarde aussi l'expérience acquise dans leur stage, comme le jugement, l'autonomie, la disponibilité.

(Community health/social service not-for-profit, Central)

translated as:

Basic training is important for those who have completed their university courses. We also take into consideration experience gained during practicum placements, such as judgment, independence and availability.

In a sense, then, employers who are looking to fill positions that open up or are new, are assuming a fair degree of training and experience, and look for how well a person will fit into the environment, and whether they have the skills to add value to the workplace.

Whatever the skills looked for in new hires, a response from one northern employer must be noted, for what it says about the human resources restraints faced at the most basic level in some situations. Looking at “critical skills for new hires” assumes there are candidates to be hired in the first place. But as this respondent said:

It's very difficult to get employees at all [up north]. It is hard to find people to work in the wilderness. We need to rely on community members who want to get a degree or diploma and then come back to the community.

This theme of the challenges of hiring in and for communities in the north is, as always, a persistent one, and one that is addressed from many angles by the diverse data sources for this study.

(Health care, not-for-profit, West/NW)
c. Hiring New Graduates: The Educational and Training Bridge Between Supply and Demand (Employers’ and Students’ Perspectives)

But what about the new graduate? How well does the current education and training bridge the supply side of the labour force and employer demand? Most of the data addressing this key human resources issue comes from the two of the sets of in-depth interviews with employers (41 in-person and 51 by telephone survey). There is a small amount of related data, on field placements in particular, from the fax-back survey of 109 employers, and from comments about the practicum from students in focus groups.

i. Perspectives of the employers on hiring new graduates: training gaps, need for experience, and the role of the practicum

This section begins with the findings on this issue with the data from the 41 in-depth, in-person interviews that were conducted as part of the large-scale intensive interviews with key stakeholders (as distinct from the telephone survey of 51 employers drawn from the fax-back pool of 109 employer respondents). The employers were asked whether they hired new graduates and how prepared they felt these graduates were for their workplace. There were 39 of the employers who responded to this series of questions. Their responses showed a decided willingness to hire new graduates, but at the same time they contain a sobering account of what these respondents see as weaknesses or gaps in the educational background that new graduates bring to the workplace.

The range of responses of these 39 employers as to whether they hire new graduates and how prepared they find these new employees falls into three categories: “yes, but,” “sometimes, but,” and “rarely/not at all.”

Twenty-nine of the 39 respondents said that indeed they do hire new graduates, but virtually all of them qualified their statements or expressed decided reservations about the preparedness of these graduates. In general, their reservations had to do with the educational background—or gaps therein—of the new graduate. The compensating factor that many mentioned was the fact that many of the graduates had done a practicum with the employer, and this gave the employer greater confidence in the choice of candidates. There were two themes within the reservations they expressed—skill specific and what could be called personal background qualities, though these of course can overlap in practice.

Turning to some skill-specific educational gaps of new graduates hired, typical comments from employers in child welfare and related services are:

Yes, we hire new grads for child protection work. But the universities and colleges should be moving to providing the necessary basic skill sets. The BSW provides a good generalist foundation, but not specific role skills. There is a need for streaming for specific kinds of skills within BSW programs so that students can receive basic skills and knowledge in these.

(Government, West/NW)

Yes, we hire new grads, most of our hires are new grads. But they need a strong knowledge base of child abuse and child development.

(Government, West/NW)

From multi-service agencies typical comments are:

Yes, we hire new grads, often those who do field placements with us. This improves their preparation for what we need. However, about 50% of new grads don’t get through their probationary periods. They are not effective working in communities. They need well-rounded experience.

(Not-for-profit agency, West/NW)

We hire new grads through an intern program. Their preparedness varies by the school they came from. Some produce grads that are good in practice and have an understanding of concrete skills. Others have a thorough sociological training without the concrete skills.

(Not-for-profit agency, East)

Of course, employers who provide services in a bilingual French-English environment require bilingual staff. Other than this particular linguistic need, those employers who hire new grads report needing the same kinds of skills as those noted above.
Along with the typical reservations noted so far, one of these respondents pointed out an interesting “effect” of the practicum. If a new hire had completed their practicum in a government setting and then joined the front-line staff in this multi-service agency, the respondent said:

Les T.S. n’interviennent pas de façon très autonome. Souvent, ils ne sont pas prêts à faire de l’intervention de groupe. Et plusieurs T.S. ont peur, surtout si on leur fait faire un stage dans le secteur public.

(Multi-service agency, East)

translated as:

The social worker does not have autonomous intervention opportunities. Frequently, they are not ready to do group interventions either. Many social workers are apprehensive, particularly if they are assigned to a practicum in the public sector.

The blend of lack of specific skills and personal attributes that can be barriers to effectiveness on the job is typified by such comments as:

We hire new grads, but they are not prepared well for child welfare work. New grads do not manage stress and job demands, so we get a lot of burnout cases.

(Government, East)

Yes, but they are not particularly well prepared. They come here thinking they know it all and they don’t. ... They think they are getting into social activism work and they aren’t—it’s social control. The reality of the job can be depressing and confusing, people feel at odds with the direction of the ministry.

(Government, West/NW)

The challenges of finding new hires that are suited to service in the north and/or to providing services from either an Aboriginal perspective or from the perspective of immigrant serving agencies, were highlighted by several respondents. In the case of Aboriginal services, it must be remembered that while many Aboriginal people reside in highly urban areas, in many northern areas the clientele is largely Aboriginal, and hence the hiring challenges very much overlap by type of worker needed and the demands presented by the environment. For example, one employer who also is positioned to have an overview of the hiring patterns in their province explained this dilemma, as they saw it:

We have no trouble finding the desired candidates in [large urban centers]. ... But up north it is almost impossible. We have found that employers will hire other degree holders or diploma grads because they can’t find anyone else in the community.

(Multi-service agency, Prairies)

The respondent went on to describe one strategy that was being taken to help overcome the problem of finding and retaining workers who were comfortable and effective working in the north, in largely Aboriginal environments:

However, we are grandfathering in some Aboriginal social workers in the north, who hold only diplomas.

(Not-for-profit organization, Prairies)

From Aboriginal serving employers themselves come the following descriptions of their situation vis-à-vis hiring new grads. Again, we see the mix of skill gaps, personal capacities, and the working environment that shape the preparedness of new grads. These respondents also provided some of the few comments on the comparative preparedness of college versus university program graduates:

New university grads, BSWs, are not well prepared for our workplace. They tend to lack real work skills. The training provided by universities is largely irrelevant, especially if you are First Nations. First Nations individuals from small communities face a different way of learning and have high expectations placed on them. The skills and practice needed for the reality of work on reserve are not part of the process. We find that the college social work program grads are better prepared than BSWs.

(Aboriginal agency, Prairies)

Yes, we hire grads right out of school. University grads seem to need more handholding and guidance. Community college grads are better with running with things on their own. New grads are not...
prepared to deal with isolation. Also, there is political pressure to graduate Aboriginals even if they have not passed all the courses. Some of these grads are completely lacking in skills. In some cases, there is also local political pressure to try and salvage the situation for those lacking in skills.

(Not-for-profit health organization, West/NW)

Of the eight immigrant serving employers interviewed, five do hire new grads. Here again, they tended to draw from former practicum students to do so. There are particular needs for language skills to serve various client groups, but one respondent talked about how there were attitudes that recent grads had acquired in their training that were not particularly congruent with the cultural expectations of clients. The respondent said:

Yes, many of our workers are still in school. But I believe social work needs to give students less political analysis and more practical skills. Clients come to us because they want to get ahead; [new grads] telling them they are oppressed is not helpful.

...Some of the new grads come with a radical analysis that prevents them from working with the client where the client is. With family violence, many of the clients come wishing to stop the violence, but wanting to keep the family together. However, the radical feminist analysis says that the family must break up. This is not helpful.

(Not-for-profit immigrant-focused services, Central)

The very few employers who hire new grads without reservation spoke to the enthusiasm these individuals brought to the workplace, but again, they hired from former practicum students. As a respondent from an immigrant-service organization said:

Yes, we just hired one last fall.
We have had success with placement students. They have a good understanding of ethics and good counselling skills.
The new grads are ready to dive into work.
(Immigrant-service agency, Central)

There were three employers who reported hiring new grads "sometimes." This relatively low rate of hiring had to do with lack of maturity and insufficient experience for the level of skill and maturity needed, as well as gaps in training. Pressures of demand for staff seemed to lead to the occasional hiring of new graduates, even if the situation is not ideal. Once again, field placements have been the deciding factor. This can override lack of experience or specific skills. (So can experience in the field prior to returning to university of college for a diploma or degree, but the field placement advantage was more often mentioned.) As one respondent in a clinical setting described this:

Yes, we sometimes hire new grads.
But new grads need strong supervision.
We have cut back on admin, so we don't hire many new grads. If we do, they come from those who do field work with us.
New grads lack the clinical skills for us, the ability to work with children and adults in a therapeutic manner. There is a lack of specialization in training through the university programs.

(Not-for-profit, Prairies)

Finally in the consideration of hiring new grads are the seven employers among the 39 interviewed in depth who rarely or never take on these individuals for employment. For one, the constraining factor was the lack of supervision that could be provided, along with lack of experience. As this respondent said:

No, not much. We need five years of experience after an MSW. We only hire new grads for special projects that are appropriate. We don't use much supervision, so the environment is not well suited to new grads.

(Not-for-profit, Central)

Degree of experience was the leading factor for all the rest of these seven who hire new grads. The demands of their particular type(s) of service are very high, the caseload is often high-risk and very large, and the specific skill requirements reflect this. Interestingly, two of these seven are in the corrections field. Not only did they comment on the need for high level skills, but also on the "buyer's
market” that exists in corrections, which means they need not turn to recent graduates for employees.

No, we don’t. Our work is clinical and new grads don’t have a strong clinical base. Our target population is very complex and clients need a highly skilled interviewer.

(Corrections, West/NW)

No, there are so many people applying that even entry-level position candidates have experience. We have field placement students and they are relatively well prepared, but new grads are often missing good analytical skills. They are often not taught the big picture at school. They lack a good understanding of what makes social work important and different from other professions. New grads also tend to lack advocacy skills, social justice and community development skills.

(Corrections, East)

Thus, it is clear that among the employers interviewed in-depth, the majority do indeed hire recent graduates, but they find that there are definite “employability skills” gaps as well as skill-specific gaps. Nonetheless, recent graduates can look forward to a reasonably good chance of finding a first job in their field. This is made even more likely in organizations that provide practicum placements. These employers are more confident of the potential effectiveness of the new hire if they have already been the opportunity to start bringing the student up to speed and to determine the mutual compatibility of student and organization.

The data from the telephone survey of 51 employers shows very much the same pattern. These employers were asked if they hire new staff from recent graduates who have been on field placement with them. Of the 15 employers who hire college graduates, 10 (67%) report hiring from among those who have done placements with them. For those 40 who report hiring BSW graduates, 27 (67.5%) reported hiring their own field placement students. Of the 37 hiring MSWs, 24 (64.9%) also hire from among those who had a practicum with them.

The nature of the practicum as described by these employers confirms the value of imbuing students with the skills that will serve them well in that particular agency in future. For example, the vast majority of new employees are given cases to manage, but they do so under the supervision of a staff member who is a trained social worker. Twelve of the 15 (80%) who hired college students record that this is the situation for field placements. Fully 39 of 40 (97.5%) of those with BSW students, and 33 of 37 (89.2%) of those with MSW students take this approach. An equally substantial proportion of employers structure the positions to ensure that students learn specific skills for the particular working environment. Here there are 14 of 15 (93.3%) who have placements for college students, 37 of 40 (92.5%) with BSW students and 34 of 37 (91.9%) of those with MSW placements.

It is worth noting one difficulty of the placement system, from the viewpoint of just one of the employers. The agency in question is a small one, serving a relatively specific target group. While they do much of what is considered to be social work, those in supervisory positions do not have a social work degree. The “feeder” educational institutions have recently begun to require that any student in a field placement must be under the supervision of a registered social worker. The respondent said that this made it more difficult for the agency to find practicum students, and at the same time this approach reduced opportunities for social work students to have this kind of pre-employment experience. In this case, the increased professionalization of the educational system has decreased the opportunities for employer and student.

With that one caveat, it is clear that a key element of the educational bridge between labour market supply and demand is the provision of practical. This is de rigueur for virtually all programming at college and university levels, and thus is for all intents and purposes available to all students in the field. What, then, is the student view of this element of their education?

ii. The Student View on Practica and Employability Skills

The perspective of students on several of the human resources issues considered in this section of the report comes from a series of 10 focus groups held across the country. Two of these focus groups were with francophone students in Quebec, and
there were a small number of francophone students and students with multi-cultural backgrounds who participated elsewhere in the other focus groups.

One of the groups was with students from a college in the Prairies, and the remaining students were either still in university training or—in a very few cases—had just graduated from their respective program and were employed. Of the students at the universities, approximately half had already completed an undergraduate degree. These were almost all in one of three fields—sociology, criminology, or psychology. There was a smattering of nursing, anthropology, or other social sciences. A number of the university students had considerable employment experience. For some it was in social services, but there was also a range of quite unrelated employment (forestry, administration, art). Whatever their experience, they had decided that they wanted to work in social services, either to promote social change and/or to serve the most vulnerable in society (elderly, multi-cultural groups, youth, etc.)

Most of the college students were returning to school from the workforce, usually from the social services. They had concluded that with all their on-the-job experience their job security or mobility was increasingly limited by not having more formal, certified education. This was a reflection of the increasing insistence by employers, especially government employers, that all employees have a minimum of a diploma or certificate to be hired or to retain employment and advance within it.

Because one of the most important issues in human resource development is bridging the gap between training and employment, with on-the-job experience being one of the most crucial hiring criteria for employers, the first part of this analysis focuses on the role of the practicum in moving the student into employment. The data from the employer surveys clearly showed the employer view of the value of the practicum for decision-making in hiring recent graduates. But what is the view of students on the practicum experience? What is its value for them?

Practical had two closely related functions in the development of these students’ careers in social services. The experience often helped focus their decision-making about the direction they wanted their career to take. It also gave the students a much better idea of what day to day social services work is all about, including its diversity, rewards and strains. The majority of the student respondents found the experience to be valuable, but it was clear that one of the most important factors for a positive experience was the nature of the supervision provided.

In relation to the role of decision-making played by the practicum, several students gave dramatic descriptions of the experience:

I knew I didn’t want to do child protection work, but thought I wanted to work with inner city youth. That was my first practicum, but the supervisor was really at a distance and I was on my own, and I discovered it is really difficult to work with youth who don’t want to work with you. Like, “my God, they don’t want to work with me!” and I had thought I wanted to do one-to-one work... My second practicum I became completely involved in community development and realized one-to-one wasn’t for me. You have to work where the client is and with what the community wants and needs. And that’s research and that’s where I want to be.

(BSW student, Prairies)

I started with the assumption that since I’d liked research in my first degree, I’d stay with that in social work. But in my first placement I was on the front line, then I did a summer doing real grass roots work, as an intake worker with the John Howard Society. That was a real turning point. I realized I really did want to do the policy work. I got a research position and I’ve been there ever since. Now I have a summer job there.

(BSW student, Prairies)

... but not everyone had that kind of [positive] experience. Some of us had horrible experiences, but it is a huge strength of the program to have that opportunity, finding people in the field who can make that happen for you, and to see if
you are a fit. But not everyone has the perfect fit with their practicum supervisor.

(BSW student, Prairies)

My second practicum was a life altering moment. The supervisor was great. The agency set aside time to train and prepare the supervisors. That is where the most learning takes place.

(BSW student, from national group, province not specified)

Learning about the day to day nature of social services was very enlightening for many of the student respondents. Some of the learning was a direct result of the teaching given by supervisors and other staff, but much of it came from observation and participation. As several students described this process:

The group home field placement was a great experience, saw the social worker all the time, a lot of listening and watching and stumbling and recovering.

(BSW student, East)

I had a great time; the social worker supervised us; there was lots of hands on, very real work. You learned to deal with the stress of the job.

(BSW student, Prairies)

It was overwhelming at first, but I learned a lot.

(BSW, student, East)

The first year I didn’t have a social worker for a supervisor. But he was very good. He allowed me to test the waters among the different functions in the organization. So this went really well. And because he wanted a social worker, I was educating him somewhat.

(College student, Prairies)

There were very real frustrations for the students in a number of their placements. These revolved around lack of supervision, lack of relevant work or lack of related learning opportunities. Some of these examples are:

In my first placement I was not supervised by a social worker. It was a very mixed thing, and sometimes there was not enough to do, and the supervisor wouldn’t help out, and wasn’t supportive of having a student. In my second placement I was in a hospital and the supervisor was a social worker and it was a much better experience, and the person was prepared to supervise me.

(College student, Prairies)

The university still needs to do some work around diversity. Many of the placements were quite similar and there weren’t many opportunities to work on an Indian reserve or in an inner city environment.

(MSW, Central)

There was no social worker at my placement and no onsite supervisor. So I did workshops for employees about anything they wanted to know.

(BSW, East)

In my placement I had a supervisor who didn’t want me to take on too much—what she really wanted was a gofer.

(BSW, East)

I did my placement in two hospitals and Family Benefits. I felt that the institutions wanted you to take on as big a caseload as possible and give you as little supervision as they possibly could. You need employers that are willing to train you. The supervisors, who were social workers, were overloaded with work. They just don’t have time to give you supervision. Since we give all this time to institutions and aren’t paid for it, I think that we aren’t really valued. We should be paid, because we really work hard.

(BSW, mixed group, province not identified)

Since virtually all of the students were either still in training or just completing it (and some intended to go on for post-graduate degrees), most were not yet at the stage of bridging between their education and employment. One brought up an interesting point about human resource management in a unionized environment. This student said:
Some agencies won't hire placement students until a certain amount of time has passed because the unions get upset. When you go for a placement you are not supposed to take away the job of someone in the union who is able to do the job. As a result, jobs are often created for your placement.

(BSW, mixed group, province not identified)

The francophone students who were interviewed in focus groups reflected very similar experiences to those of their anglophone cohort. The summary of those findings included the following comments:

Le stage, soutiennent-elles, est un point tournant de la formation. Il permet de mieux connaître la profession, de confirmer le choix de carrière et de solidifier la formation. Elles se sentent davantage en mesure d'évaluer leurs forces et leurs faiblesses. En ce qui a trait au stage lui-même, elles se disent très satisfaites. Leur relations avec leur superviseur sont également satisfaisantes. Ces superviseurs sont eux-mêmes des travailleurs sociaux. Dans l'ensemble, le stage a permis de faire le pont entre la théorie et la pratique.

(BSW, East)

translated as:

The practicum, they claim, is a turning point with respect to training. It helps them become more familiar with the profession, confirm their career choice and solidify their training. They feel more capable of assessing their strengths and weaknesses. They claim to be satisfied with the practicum itself. They are also pleased with their supervisors, who are social workers themselves...On the whole, the practicum helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

In short, the practicum experience as reported by these students tends to be a positive one. It confirms their original decision to move into the field, and even more so it helps them make realistic decisions about the type of work they wish to pursue within the variety of occupations in social services.

The practicum is not without frustrations at times, but with an interested, supportive, and accessible supervisor, it can be an extremely beneficial experience for students. It was for most of those who contributed to these discussions.

They are less aware of the practicum as a bridging mechanism, in part because they are not yet entering the workforce, but the data from employers shows that it is most definitely an advantage for students and employers when hiring is taking place.

Another element of the analysis of the student view on their future employment dealt with the students' own views on the kinds of skills employers would look for in hiring recent graduates. The students all spoke in terms of what were referred to earlier as the qualities a social service worker should possess, rather than specific skills for a particular job. These qualities could be categorized as:

- communication skills ("the ability to be silent, to listen")
- ability to think critically and to look at things objectively
- compassion, empathy (but not lose necessary professional objectivity)
- ethics and respect for ethics
- organizational skills, ability to multi-task
- reading, writing, research, computer skills
- teamwork, networking
- ability to take initiative
- advocacy
- realise we are human and take care of ourselves
- crisis management with clients and ourselves

These qualities are very much like those mentioned by employers when asked what they looked for in hiring recent graduates. Thus, there appears to be near congruence between what employers feel they want and what these students believe is expected of them. Whether educational institutions are structured to develop these skills is the subject of further discussion below. But here are two typical examples of student perception of the qualities that employers need:
You need the ability to work independently. Anyone that is hiring a graduate to do clinical work would be expecting you to have the basic ability to do assessment. You have to be willing to ask for help when you need it.

(MSW, Central)

One program cannot prepare us for all of those. We need to develop our own skills. School does OK with assessments, and there are lots of opportunities to write, to think critically. However, some of this can’t be taught. We’ll always be learning. Life-long learning is a value of the profession.

(Student focus group, West/NW)

One of the MSW students told how they were already applying the independent initiative and life-long learning they saw they would need throughout their career:

I focused on building a network over the last two years. In terms of community development, this is a really crucial element. You have to know what’s out there, who is doing what, and how they’re doing it. You have to stay on top of changes in the community.

(MSW, Central)

3. The Supply Side: How Are Education and Training Resources Responding?

In the introduction of this chapter on the response to key human resources challenges, it was stated that the educational and training component of a sector can lead or follow in bridging between labour supply and demand. In terms of the sequence of the bridging process, education at undergraduate and graduate levels is the first formal building block. “Training” was defined as knowledge and skills enhancement for those already employed in the field, and it can be seen as a means of keeping workers up to date in what is expected of them, as well as assisting them in career mobility. This will be addressed shortly.

Looking at the larger picture, the educational programming as a whole, considerable amounts of data were collected on the range of courses that were offered across Canada. In a separate document a compilation was made of the course offerings listed in calendars and on the Internet for all universities with social work programs and 46 colleges providing social services certificate and diploma courses. This comprehensive view should be of great interest for those contemplating entering the field and those who are in the process of developing and adapting educational programming.14

The numbers may have shifted slightly since the time of the review and it is possible that there was not documentation available from one or two institutions, but the general picture should hold true.

For the present discussion of the response of educational institutions to labour force demands, it may be of use to give a brief overview of the findings on the availability of post-secondary education in the social services.

There is a university BSW program available in every province and territory except Prince Edward Island, Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Every province and territory except Yukon, PEI, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador had college-based programming at the certificate or diploma level. This includes Aurora College in the NWT and Nunavut Arctic College in Iqaluit. Certificate programs tend to be one year in duration and diploma courses are generally two-year programs, which often can ladder into BSW programs. Three of the colleges are Aboriginal—in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. The

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14 Of course, there may well be a number of informal steps before a person enters a social service educational programming. There is the overall socialization process that shapes career decision-making (and which surely accounts to a substantial degree for the social services having always been a female-dominated field, in numbers at least). Social services, and social work in particular, are comprised of a number of “caring professions” with a similar gender distribution. Girls and young women still are in the minority in the physical sciences, computer sciences, etc. They are at least 50% of recent biological sciences programs, but these again lead to female-dominated professions, such as nursing. Women are more likely than men to participate in volunteer work that is of a “helping” nature. These and many more circumstances may lead to a decision to enter formal education in the social services.

15 The document may be viewed on the Internet at www.socialworkcanada.org.
certificate and diploma courses tend to be entitled either “Social Service Worker” or “Human Services Worker” or, for the Quebec CEGEPs, “Techniques en travail social.”

Thus, the geographic coverage of social services education is very wide. The numbers of colleges and universities offering various degrees and diplomas, and the numbers of graduates for the latest years available are as follows.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 44: Numbers of Post-Secondary Institutions Offering Social Services Education, Levels of Accreditation, and Graduate Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College/CEGEP (Quebec)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate/Diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that a number of the larger universities and colleges have several campuses, and in the case of institutions such as the University of Manitoba or the Université du Quebec, they have a number of essentially “stand alone” universities under the rubric of the one institution. Thus, the actual distribution of colleges and campuses is more numerous than the figures above indicate. If the individual branches of the Université du Quebec were counted separately, this would add at least three more to the university figure, and Manitoba would add one more.

Even with this wide distribution of post-secondary institutions, employers, educators and students are aware of difficulties of providing education to individuals living in remote or northern communities - or in provinces such as PEI that do not have this programming available near to home. There are increasing efforts, especially on the part of colleges and universities located nearer the faraway places, to develop distance education programming or to allow for extended educational leave for employees to pursue their education at the university or college. The review of the programming did not indicate that these efforts are widespread yet, but there appears to be a decided awareness of the importance of developing more flexible, responsive ways to meet the educational needs of individuals who face barriers to educational access for geographic or employment reasons (i.e., who are already employed and cannot give up their job to upgrade their education, especially if the institution is more than a commute away.)

a. Feedback from the Deans and Directors Program Change Drivers Identified

The forty-two Deans or Directors of social work education programs at the community college and university level who were interviewed identified a variety of change drivers which shape the design of the curriculum. An Advisory Committee consisting of the various stakeholders was frequently mentioned as the mechanism for conveying suggested revisions. These included:

- funding cutbacks in all provinces over the past ten years
- the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work accreditation process, which has placed greater expectations on schools for content on anti-oppression since 1996
- input from professional associations
- student feedback about content that is missing from the curriculum, which has already been covered in previous degrees, or is covered in more than one course
- employer requests for specialization, for instance in child welfare
- new faculty hires bringing new ideas about both theoretical orientation and practice skills to be taught

1Thanks to Glen Schmidt, Steering Committee member from the University of Northern British Columbia for updating of figures.
2Generally speaking, the term "certificate" refers to programs that are up to a year in length. They tend to be seen as "vocational" courses, and often require a relatively limited educational background (i.e., high school diploma is not always required for enrollment). Diploma programs tend to be two years in length. They require more education for entry, such as high school graduation and relevant prerequisite courses at high school or other levels. These are seen as "career" programs. In social services diploma courses, a practicum period is usually included. While colleges offer certificate or diploma courses, universities may also do so. In the latter case, these are "pre" or "post" bachelor's degree courses and are not bachelor's-level degree programs themselves.
• awareness of new issues, changing demographics, changing policy, new formulations of issues, new theoretical perspectives, or new approaches to practice.

At the college level, the need for an accreditation process and articulation agreements with universities which facilitate entry into university programs for their graduates were also identified as influencing the shape of their programs. Mention was made in a number of schools of reduced enrollments, as well, and in particular a reduction in the number of mature students entering their programs because of changes in funding which make post secondary education less accessible to single parents.

At the university level, respondents talked about the pressure to increase enrollments as a means of maintaining university funding. They also talked about the tension between the expectations of the university - which are that faculty do research and publish - and the expectations of the profession and employers - which are that faculty teach the most current approaches to practice. Mention was also made at the university level of the tension between educating with respect to a critical perspective on social issues, and providing skills training in interventions, a balance that is sometimes perceived as difficult to maintain.

Employment Equity
Most institutions identified difficulty in hiring faculty who belong to visible minority or Aboriginal groups, but especially those outside of the large urban areas. Given the recent changes in accreditation standards for university programs, and the changing demographics in Canada, this is an area which requires more concerted action than in the past. A number of schools talked about the community-based programs they have developed which are attracting more Aboriginal people into college and BSW programs, some of whom will then go on to complete the MSW and PhD degrees which will give these graduates the opportunity to take on administrative and teaching roles within the sector. Distance education was another approach used by some schools to increase accessibility. Others talked about using strategies like hiring sessional instructors of diverse backgrounds to increase the ethnoracial diversity of their teaching staff.

A number of schools also talked about having only recently achieved a balance between male and female faculty members, and the need to keep working on this issue.

Professional Development for Social Work Educators
Social work educators were reported to attend conferences, engage in research, and are active within community agencies as members of Boards of Directors or consultants as a means of staying current with practice developments. Those teaching in universities have the opportunity to take sabbaticals which permit travel to other countries as a means of further enhancing their knowledge of alternative approaches to practice. Some of those interviewed also mentioned that they organize training sessions for faculty on issues of common concern, like increasing the diversity content within the curriculum.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Social Work Programs

Strengths
Most schools reported reasonably positive feedback from employers on their graduates. Some had recently completed surveys requesting this feedback, and for others the evidence was more anecdotal. The college level programs talked about their primary strength being the job readiness of their graduates. The university level programs talked about strengths including a solid generalist foundation at the BSW level, a strong theoretical foundation and critical analysis skills.

Weaknesses
Colleges respondents indicated that employers were looking for more developed critical thinking skills in their graduates. Some also mentioned that new hiring approaches based upon skills assessments were affecting their enrollment levels as students saw the degree as unnecessary in order to obtain employment. They also mentioned a reduction in mature students, especially single parents, in some locations because of changes in funding for post secondary education for those on social assistance.

At the university level, the most often identified critiques of the programs were insufficient emphasis on intervention skills, like clinical assessments, interviewing, the ability to practice in community agencies rather than government agencies, administrative skills like supervision, good writing
skills, and good critical analysis skills. Also mentioned was the lack of identity as a social worker in university graduates, and the inability to articulate the differences in the skills of people trained at the diploma, BSW and MSW levels.

b. Educational Responses To Demand: Bridging Between Course Offerings and Projected Demand Trends

Turning to the bridging between education and the labour force, the findings on this issue presented here are solely from the survey of universities offering one or more post-secondary degrees in social work. The analysis focuses on exploring how close a relationship there is between demand in the labour market for various skill and knowledge sets and the supply in terms of educational preparation as offered at the university level. The demand, or service need, topics were selected based on the previous analysis of the findings from all other research components of the sector study as a whole—the change drivers, the sector profile, and the multitude of interviews addressing the working environment and educational and training issues themselves.

The 13 demand areas and the working definitions of them are:

Poverty: exploration of issues underlying socio-economic disadvantage and the means by which social workers assist this population.

Family Practice: development of knowledge and practice skills in the area of the contemporary family in all of its forms.

Child Welfare: an examination of issues affecting child welfare and existing social work delivery systems in place for child protection.

Racism: examination of the context and consequences of racism and oppression and the exploration of anti-discriminatory practice methods on the part of social workers.

Cultural Sensitivity: examination of multicultural issues and social work skills required when working with an ethnically and racially diverse population in a culturally sensitive manner.

Aboriginal Issues: exploration of social issues facing Aboriginal communities and the knowledge and skills required for social workers to practice effectively with and/or in these communities.

Ageing: analysis of the current policies, services, and practice issues relevant to working with the elderly.

Health: integration of social work practice with current issues in the health care setting.

Mental Health: exploration of the social worker’s role in mental health services, addressing both policy and practice implications.

Substance Abuse: exploration of issues surrounding substance abuse and social work intervention strategies when working with alcohol and drug dependent client systems.

Social Policy: analysis of the development and implementation of social policies and their consequential impact on social work practice and client groups affected.

Youth Delinquency: examination of issues and interventions when working with youth in conflict with the law.

Computer Technology: establishing a basic level of computer competency in software programs currently used in the social service sector.

To collect the course data, the current calendars of all universities in Canada with social work programs were reviewed to identify those courses in which the content dealt with each of the issues. There were criteria for selection into any of the above service demand categories. To qualify, a course first had to meet a standard that was used across all these topics. Specifically, the course description needed to demonstrate that the subject would be explored within the context of social work practice. For example, a course which provides a historical review and analysis of Canadian social welfare policy is excluded from the analysis if the content does not develop an understanding of the impact of these policies on social service delivery.

Once identified, the course number was listed in the appropriate column and then identified from the calendar as Required or an Elective, through the use of either the letter R or E. This categorization was done for each degree program offered by the university. In all cases, the researchers only included
those courses in which the majority of the content dealt with the specific issue under review. Courses were excluded from the analysis if the relevant issue appeared to be addressed for only a matter of a few hours.

There were several iterations of a review of the matrix by respondents at the respective universities. They were sent the materials for each round of review and asked to make corrections as to the proportion of the course devoted to a given topic and to the elective/required information. The researchers reserved the right to delete or add a course based on the study criteria, even if there might be disagreement with the respondent. There was thus, an element of interpretation of the content and intent of some courses. For example, there could be differences in the assessment of the "proportion" of a course devoted to a topic, or the development of understanding of the issue as it related to social work practice. But for the most part, the researcher and respondent views were congruent.

Turning to the findings from the analysis of this set of data, the context is that there are 34 universities across Canada that provide one or more of the three levels of social work degree—BSW, MSW, and Ph.D. Each of these universities offers a program that has been accredited by the Board of Accreditation of the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work. This Board is responsible for developing accreditation standards to reflect the educational policies approved by members of the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work. They also assess the quality of new programs to ensure that they meet these standards before accrediting them for the first time, and review existing programs for reaccreditation every seven years. These standards pertain to content of the curriculum, the practicum, administration of the schools, hiring of faculty and admission of students. While the Association has been asked to consider extending accreditation to social work diploma programs in community colleges a number of times, it has never done so. Colleges programs remain without a parallel process of ensuring quality of service delivery.

The distribution of the degree offerings can be looked at in different ways—how many of each level are provided overall, and then how many faculties deliver a given combination of these. The complete grid of findings is in Appendix C, but the summary of findings on degree distribution is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 45: Combinations of Degree Levels Offered by Universities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSW only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSW &amp; MSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW &amp; Ph.D. only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All 3 levels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though PEI, Yukon and Nunavut do not have a post-secondary social work degree granting institution within their boundaries, each has close ties with universities in other provinces, either on an informal level or through formal programming delivered through electronic and/or limited residence means. It is assumed that the presence or absence of particular courses and the mix between elective and required can indeed be taken as an indicator at least in part of the response of universities to the need for particular social service human resources needs. Of course, today's elective may be tomorrow's required course, and required courses themselves may be changed to elective status or discontinued, depending on a number of factors. Demand may be an important factor in course allocation, but so can the availability of staff in various areas of expertise.

With these considerations kept in mind, the following table leads to some substantial questions about the nature of the response of universities to the larger human resources demands identified throughout this study. The first table below summarizes the findings overall, by topic and numbers of courses at the required and elective levels.

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*The majority of university respondents said that they had a number of ways to solicit input on curriculum development and change. These means included community-based advisory committees (which included employers from diverse sources), formal periodic curriculum reviews and on-going attention to feedback from faculty, practicum supervisors and their students about course needs. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to see the curriculum to a great degree as a response to perceived needs of the labour market.*

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