

Essential Skills:

Bridging the **GAP**

Between Youth and Employers



A **tool** for **Employers**
in Hamilton

MOHAWK

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Human Resources and
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Hamilton Training Advisory Board
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Huh! Have U Heard?

Hamilton's youth population (15-24) tops 42,000, and the city's unemployment rate for the group hovers around 14%. This means there are approximately 6,000 unemployed youth in our city, many of whom lack the basic essential skill sets to gain employment with employers. As a result, youth in our city are caught in the classic Catch-22 of employment: You can't land a job when you don't have the experience and skills, and you can't get experience and skills unless you have been employed.

DID YOU KNOW?

Across Canada, seven in ten employers hire youth. This represents a framework in which young people get connected with, and contribute to, their communities. It provides opportunities to test ideas and behaviours, and to explore, commit, develop, express, earn, belong and influence. Most importantly, it gives them the means to develop the solid foundation of essential skills needed for future learning, careers and life.

Take a moment and recall your first job, and the pride you felt receiving that first paycheque. Finding a job is not only a milestone and rite of passage, but also an important step to becoming a productive member of society. As employers, we need to offer that opportunity to as many of our youth as possible.

Employers Benefit

Like the generations before them, today's youth have been shaped by the events, developments and trends of their time, and the rise of instant communication technologies has produced an innovative generation of workers known as The Millennial's (also known as GenY or Echo Boomers b. 1980-1994), who:

- Possess a diverse array of computer savvy, skills and abilities;
- Generate energy, enthusiasm and new ideas;
- Have the flexibility and openness to be trained, change and develop.

According to research from the Government of Canada, by 2011 the labour force is expected to decline due to retiring baby boomers (born between 1945 and 1955). Combined with projections that Hamilton's youth population will stagnate, and that the very nature of business in today's global marketplace is becoming ever more dynamic and competitive, hiring youth should be viewed as a strategic business solution.

Hiring youth today means that you can

- Meet your organization's immediate personnel needs
- Strengthen your ability to attract talent
- Increase retention
- Create a brand in the marketplace as an employer of choice.

The future strength of our economy depends on our youth.



So, What are Essential Skills?

Essential Skills are the fundamental skills that make it possible to learn all others. They allow people to perform the tasks required in their job and provide them with a foundation for learning job-specific skills that help people participate more fully in the workplace and in the community. They also improve one's ability to adapt to workplace change.

After conducting extensive research, the Government of Canada and other national and international experts identified and validated **nine essential skills** that provide the foundation on which training, implementation and performance analysis are based:

1. **Reading Text**
Understanding materials written in sentences and paragraphs.
2. **Document Use**
Using and understanding labels, graphs, signs and other similar materials.
3. **Numeracy (Math)**
Using and understanding numbers.
4. **Writing**
Writing text or typing on a computer.
5. **Oral Communications**
Using speech to share thoughts, ideas and information.
6. **Working With Others**
Interacting with others to complete tasks.
7. **Continuous Learning**
Participating in the ongoing process of gaining skills and knowledge (for example: workplace specific training)
8. **Thinking Skills**
Reviewing information to make decisions.
9. **Computer Use**
Using computers and other technical tools.

This information can be used for:

- Career and succession planning
- Building job descriptions
- Developing training plans



For Youth Employees:

The Essential Skills Portfolio connects young people to jobs by presenting employers with a supplementary method to evaluate the potential ability of prospective youth employees in a particular job or career path. This can open up new opportunities for employment, enabling youth workers to develop essential skills in the work environment. Mastering essential skills has the power to equip youth with the tools to succeed in the modern economy, and prepare them for progressive positions in both the public and private sectors.

Essential Skills Portfolio Tool

What is it?

The Essential Skills Portfolio tool can be used by both employers and prospective youth employees.

For Employers:

The Essential Skills Portfolio can be used in the recruitment process to identify, analyze and assess the strengths, weaknesses and training needs of prospective youth employees in four key areas of the Essential Skills set, including:

- Oral Communications
- Thinking Skills
- Working with Others
- Computer Use

In using this tool during the recruitment process, employers will have a better understanding of a candidate's level of readiness to meet the job's requirements; be able to utilize and build on the existing strengths of the individual; and if required, develop an action plan to address any essential skills deficiencies.

The Essential Skills Portfolio tool can also be used in the assessment of essential skills in ongoing training and evaluation for all employees.



Youth Focus: Four Essential Skills Impacting Youth

The Essential Skills Portfolio identifies four Essential Skills as key indicators of youth ability in job performance:

- Oral Communications
- Thinking Skills
- Working with Others
- Computer Use

Let's take a closer look...

1. Oral Communications: Using speech to share thoughts, ideas and information.

Oral communication is the active process by which people exchange thoughts, ideas, and messages. Listening is the act of interpreting sounds and/or visual stimuli and using those interpretations to give them meaning. Communication skills are critical elements of customer service and in the creation and maintenance of a positive, effective and productive workplace environment.

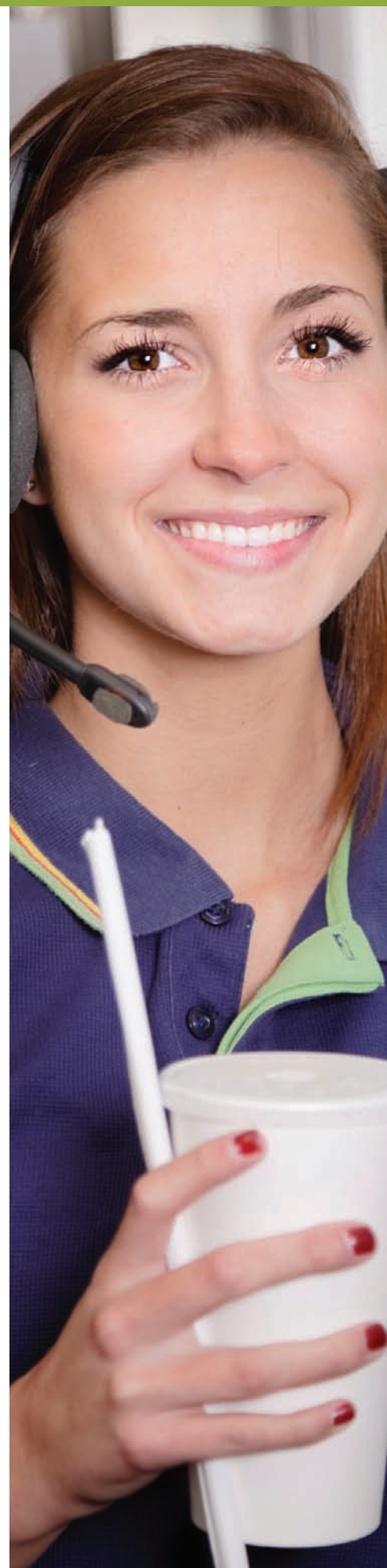
Communication skills include the mix of verbal and interpersonal abilities required to interact confidently and effectively with a range of listeners. Key indicators for oral communications and youth include:

- Ability to listen for, understand and convey information accurately, including understanding the needs of internal and external customers.
- Speaking clearly and directly; including the capacity to clearly share, give and receive information, instructions and explanations.
- Negotiating responsively.
- Empathizing and persuading effectively.

2. Working with Others: Interacting with others to complete tasks.

The essential skill of working with others addresses the ability of youth to carry out tasks within the context of teamwork, communication, self-motivation, and problem solving. As a benchmark for success, competence in this essential skill can be an indicator of:

- How they will effectively manage themselves and their behaviours when faced with challenges (e.g. changes, stress, work loads).
- How they are able to use interpersonal and teamwork skills and strategies required to manage their behaviour and themselves effectively.
- Their ability to work collaboratively to accomplish team goals.





Need More information?

For more detailed information for all nine essential skills please visit the HRSDC website at www.hrsdc.gc.ca. Over 200 jobs are profiled on this site to help you research occupations. This information can be used for career and succession planning, building job descriptions and training plans and well as surveying different job requirements.

3. Thinking Skills: Reviewing information to make decisions.

Thinking skills refers to the ability to use critical thinking to make decisions, problem solve and plan and organize tasks in an effective capacity. This encompasses a significant use of memory and the ability to find, sort, understand and prioritize information. Questions to consider when evaluating thinking skills can include:

- Do your employees make independent decisions?
- Do they take initiative to make suggestions for improvement?
- Do they display good problem-solving skills when presented with a challenge?
- Can they prioritize tasks with little or no supervision?

4. Computer Use: Using computers and other technical tools.

Computers are an important aspect of youth culture and may be an empowering essential skill that engages youth in the workplace. These days, information comes in many forms, including text, numbers, pictures, and sound. Computer literate individuals should be able to retrieve, organize, analyze, describe, and present various types of information in an appropriate manner.

- Are your employees comfortable with computers?
- Can they use them effectively for your business?
- Do employees understand and have knowledge of computers in order to process and communicate information?
- Do they understand the issues surrounding computers and society (e.g. legal issues regarding software use, copyright, and downloads)?



Using the Essential Skills Portfolio Tool

Part 1 of the tool, “Skills Assessment” can be used in two ways. As a recruitment resource, it can be used to assess and analyze the current Essential Skills competency level of a candidate in order to determine their suitability for a position. The information gathered with the tool can allow an employer to de-select a candidate based on their assessment, or consider the strengths of a candidate otherwise unacknowledged.

It can also be used as a tool in the ongoing assessment of an existing employee, in order to identify areas of deficit that should be addressed.

Part 2 of the tool, “Developing Action Plans” will give you ideas to resolve deficits in Essential Skills competencies. Use this tool to develop an action plan to close the gap between deficit and competency to enhance an individual’s employability.

A) INSTRUCTIONS FOR RECRUITMENT:

1. Identify and prioritize the most important functions of the position for which you are recruiting in the context of the Essential Skills.
2. Rate your level of agreement with the statements of expected competencies using the scale provided.
3. Analyze the candidate’s portfolio to identify and understand their Essential Skills, and how much the candidate’s responses align to the job requirement.
5. Attach this checklist to the candidate’s resume as a resource in making your selections in the hiring process.

B) INSTRUCTIONS FOR ONGOING ASSESSMENT:

1. Identify and prioritize the most important Essential Skill elements to the job in which the employee currently performs, or to the job he/she wishes to obtain.
2. Rate your level of agreement with the statements of expected competencies using the scale provided.
3. Evaluate the employee’s overall job performance and consider whether he/she meets, exceeds or falls below your expectations for the job requirements.
4. Attached this checklist to the employee’s performance review, and use in conjunction with other rating systems to evaluate the employee’s level and competencies to meet current, or prospective, job requirements.



Part 1: Skills Assessment

Essential Skill and Competencies	Comments	Scale			
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Oral Communications					
• Articulates thoughts and ideas.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Communicates verbally.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Understands new ideas.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Understands instructions.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Speaks clearly.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Uses appropriate sentence structure.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Remembers information.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Other: _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working with Others					
• Ability to be diplomatic and uses tact.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Displays sensitivity and shows tolerance.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Able and willing to work independently, yet still within a team.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Shows respect for the ideas and opinions of others.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Takes responsibility for his/ her share of the work load.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Contributes to the team effort by sharing information, resources and experience.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Other: _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thinking Skills					
• Ability to plan and organize one's own work.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Able to locate answers and information using a variety of sources, including written text, people, computerized databases, and information systems.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Able to make any type of decision using appropriate information.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Other: _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computer Use					
• Able to use computer applications effectively.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Able to use word processing software (Word).	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Able to navigate Internet with search engines.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Able to send and receive email.	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Other: _____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part 2: Developing Action Plans (Bridging the Gap!)

Instructions:

1. Review the deficits and recommendations specific to the individual you are assessing.
2. Build an action plan to bridge the gap between deficit and competency.
3. Write an action plan with time specific and measurable goals.
4. List any barriers to this plan and your solutions for dealing with them.

Essential Skill Deficits	Coaching Ideas and Recommendations	Action Plan
<p>Oral Communications If a candidate or employee does not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate their thoughts and ideas. • Communicate verbally. • Understand new ideas. • Understand instructions. • Speak clearly. • Use appropriate sentence structure. • Remember information. • Other: _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure individual understands the importance of oral communication to this and future professional roles. • Be forthcoming. Explain where you believe they need to improve. • Establish a routine of daily dialogue, building from small discussions to larger ones. • Try to develop some two-person tasks/projects, and then pyramid into a four-person group to build confidence in speaking with others. • Use peers to provide feedback - this lets both sides benefit from the experience. • Provide opportunities to speak in a safe, non-judgmental environment. 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Working with Others If a candidate or employee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is undiplomatic or tactless. • Displays insensitivity or shows intolerance. • Is unable or unwilling to work within a team. • Disrespects peers. • Fails to take responsibility for his or her share of the workload. • Withholds information, resources, and experience. • Other: _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure employee understands your expectations in regards to teamwork. • Use the Stephen Covey rule "seek first to understand." Why are they acting in this way? Understanding "why" will help you determine your actions. • Ask the "How?" question. How could you solve this challenge? How could dealing with this person in a different way be a good thing? • Ask open ended questions to find out why they are/are not doing some of these things. • Provide opportunities to work in a smaller team. • Assign small tasks to present at team meetings (find out what interests them.) • Teach them about the value of win-win situations. Conflict resolution is about problem solving and negotiation. 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Essential Skill Deficits	Coaching Ideas and Recommendations	Action Plan
<p>Thinking Skills If a candidate or employee is unable to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze, compile and compare data. Locate answers and information. Solve problems when presented with typical workplace challenge. Prioritize tasks without direct supervision. Other: _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Probe deficit to pinpoint point of failure. Redirect individual and stress the importance of following logical steps. Establish and maintain a positive, stimulating, encouraging climate, where questions can be freely asked and addressed. Meet with individual and prioritize job/work flow requirements. Encourage and provide positive reinforcement Support individuals efforts to prioritize daily flow. 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>Computer Use If a candidate or employee is unable to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use computer applications effectively. Use word processing software (e.g. Microsoft Word) Search for information online, and prepare project materials using computers and the Internet. Send and receive email. Other: _____ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess which applications are causing difficulty; recommend internal/external course work. Partner with someone who is good at the task to set aside time to work one on one. Job shadow to familiarize individual to programs. Start with simple applications and move towards a higher level of difficulty. Provide time for practice. 	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>



Important Resources for Employers

HRSDC Website

Search the (HRSDC) Human Resources and Skills Development Canada website for more Essential Skills information at www.hrsdc.gc.ca

Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES)

TOWES is a nationally accepted test that measures three workplace Essential Skills: reading text, document use and numeracy. It can be used to determine a candidate's essential skills level before you hire; to identify skills gaps in existing employees; and it also enables employees to discover their own Essential Skills level aiding them in making informed training, education and career decisions.

TOWES is administered in Ontario and across Canada by colleges.

For more information on TOWES in Hamilton contact Mohawk College at 905-575-2308 or visit www.mohawkcollege.ca/discover/CCTS/TOWES.html

Job Connect

For employers who operate a business in Ontario, and who are looking to hire staff, are ready to provide on-the-job training and/or who are seeking people who want to work, may benefit from Job Connect. Employers may be able to reduce costs associated with training a new employee. Job Connect will register job vacancies and help employers find the right person for the job. Summer Jobs Service also available.

For further information please call: 905-575-2177 or visit www.mohawkcollege.ca/discover/CCTS/jobconnect.html

Canada Summer Jobs

This initiative provides wage subsidies to help Canadian employers - not-for-profit organizations, public sector and smaller private sector employers (50 or fewer employees) - create career-related summer jobs for students between the ages of 15 to 30 at the start of employment

For further information please call: 905-572-2211 or 1-800-935-5555 or visit <http://www1.servicecanada.gc.ca>

Cooperative Education and Experiential Learning

Cooperative Education is an excellent opportunity for students to learn about career opportunities in your workplace. Students registered in various high school programs earn credits and gain experience as they help fulfill your human resources needs. The co-op teacher and school board are there to assist you in developing a placement. Support the future... consider a co-op student for your workplace!

For further information please call:
Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Marilyn Presutti, 905-525-2930 ext. 2845
presuttim@hwcdsb.ca

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board
Rich Neufeld, 905-527-5092 ext. 2256
rich.neufeld@hwdsb.on.ca

Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)

Employers expanding their workforce in skilled trades, and able to provide structured training and supervision can be matched with pre-qualified apprenticeship candidates. Participating students must be at least 16 years old and entering Grade 11.

For further information please call:
Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Leo Paone: 905-525-2930 ext. 2886

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board
Reece Morgan: 905-527-5092 ext. 2631
or visit www.oyap.com

For more information on this publication please call:

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905-575-2308

