



Talent Development
Task Force



SKILLS, TRAINING, LABOUR MARKET POLICY

APRIL 2024

ALBERTA PERSPECTIVES SURVEY



THE
STRATEGIC
COUNSEL

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY



SKILLS, TRAINING, LABOUR MARKET POLICY



This is the seventh survey in the Alberta Perspectives Series to focus on skills, training and labour market policy.

This report continues research initiated in March 2020 dealing with skills, training and labour market issues.

The overall purpose of the research is to understand the experiences of Alberta employers (private sector, public sector and not-for-profit organizations) regarding:

- Perceptions related to Alberta's long-term future;
- Perceived ease/difficulty in hiring needed skills;
- Identification of barriers to more skills training to deal with shortages;
- Identification of preferred options for meeting skills training deficit;
- Identification of type of technical or people skills most seeking in hires;
- Value and experience with Work Integrated Learning; and
- Identification of barriers to taking on WIL students.





SKILLS, TRAINING, LABOUR MARKET POLICY



Methodology

In all, n=217 employers completed the primary survey which was administered on the Alberta Perspectives platform by the Alberta Chambers of Commerce to members and other affiliated organizations.

In addition, n=148 employers agreed to answer a secondary set of follow-up questions.

Surveying for the current survey was undertaken between March 14th to April 12th, 2024.

Significant differences are reported between demographic segments.

↑↓ Significantly higher/lower vs. other segments

KEY FINDINGS

Skills Shortage

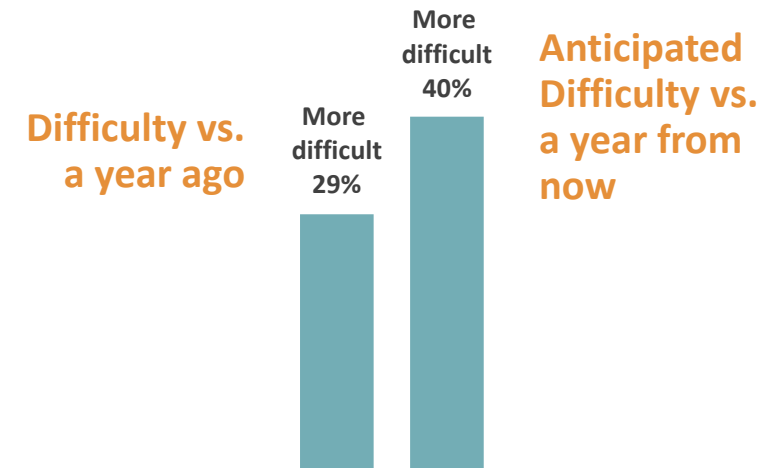
The majority of businesses report it is not easy to hire the skills their business needs.

Eight-in-ten organizations report it is not easy to hire the skills their business needs to function, with one-third (32%) characterizing it as 'not at all' easy.

And, while one-in-ten (12%) say it is easier than a year ago, more than double that proportion (29%) say more difficult, with this difficulty expected into the next year.

Four-in-ten anticipate it will be more difficult to hire the skills their business needs in a years' time compared to today.

82% report that it's not easy to hire skills their business needs to function



Reasons Not Easy to Hire Needed Skills

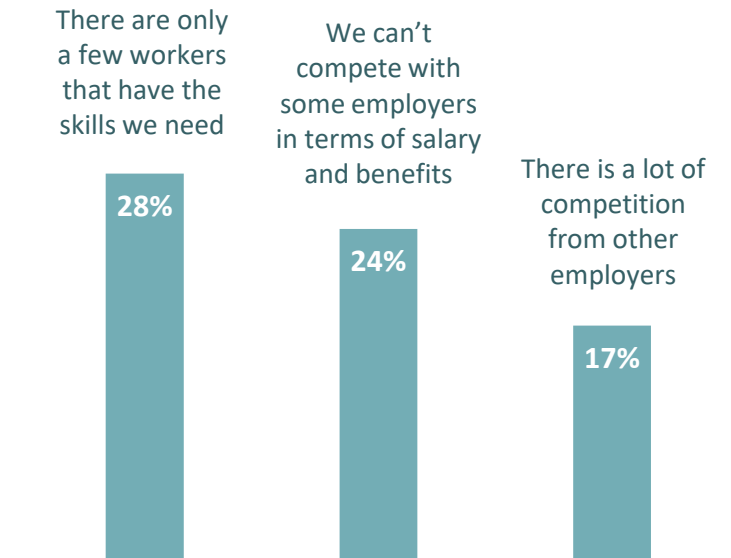
The main hiring challenge cited is the lack of workers with the required skills.

This is followed by competition for the available skilled workers - not being able to compete with other employers in terms of salary/benefits (24%) and competition from other employers (17%).

Problem solving and commitment to quality are the most desired people skills for future hires. In terms of technical skills and competencies, businesses want industry-specific technical skills and analytical thinking.

Previous research had asked about people and technical skills lacking in their hires and problem solving was cited as the most important people skill lacking. This sets up a major conundrum, that while this is the most frequently cited people skill employers will seek, it is also the ones most lacking in the people they hire. This suggests a major focus for any skills training program is the ability to solve problems.

Main reasons for not being able to hire the skills they need



Skills Upgrading and Acquisition

Skills upgrading and acquisition remains important to almost all organizations.

Nine-in-ten organizations report that skills upgrading and new skills acquisition are important to the successful running of their organization, with about half (47%) indicating 'very' important.

The biggest barriers faced are a limited budget for this as well as limited staff interest in skills upgrading.

88%  

report skills upgrading and new skills acquisition is important to the success of their business

Biggest barriers faced in skills upgrading and acquisition are:

-  • Limited budget (34%)
-  • Limited staff interest in skills upgrading (21%)

Training Opportunities

Businesses support on-the-job training and WIL to meet skills shortages.

More support for employer on-the-job training continues to be the preferred option for meeting skills shortages.

In terms of WIL, most employers believe that it makes a difference to a student's work force readiness, with the majority saying 'a great deal' of difference. Top cited benefits are preparing students for the workforce and ability to assess potential employees.

Top barriers to providing WIL opportunities include that it is too expensive, that they are not located near a post-secondary organization, or the complexity of their work.



“More support for employer based on-the-job training in areas of skills shortages” is the preferred option for meeting skills shortages (42%).

WIL (Work Integrated Learning)

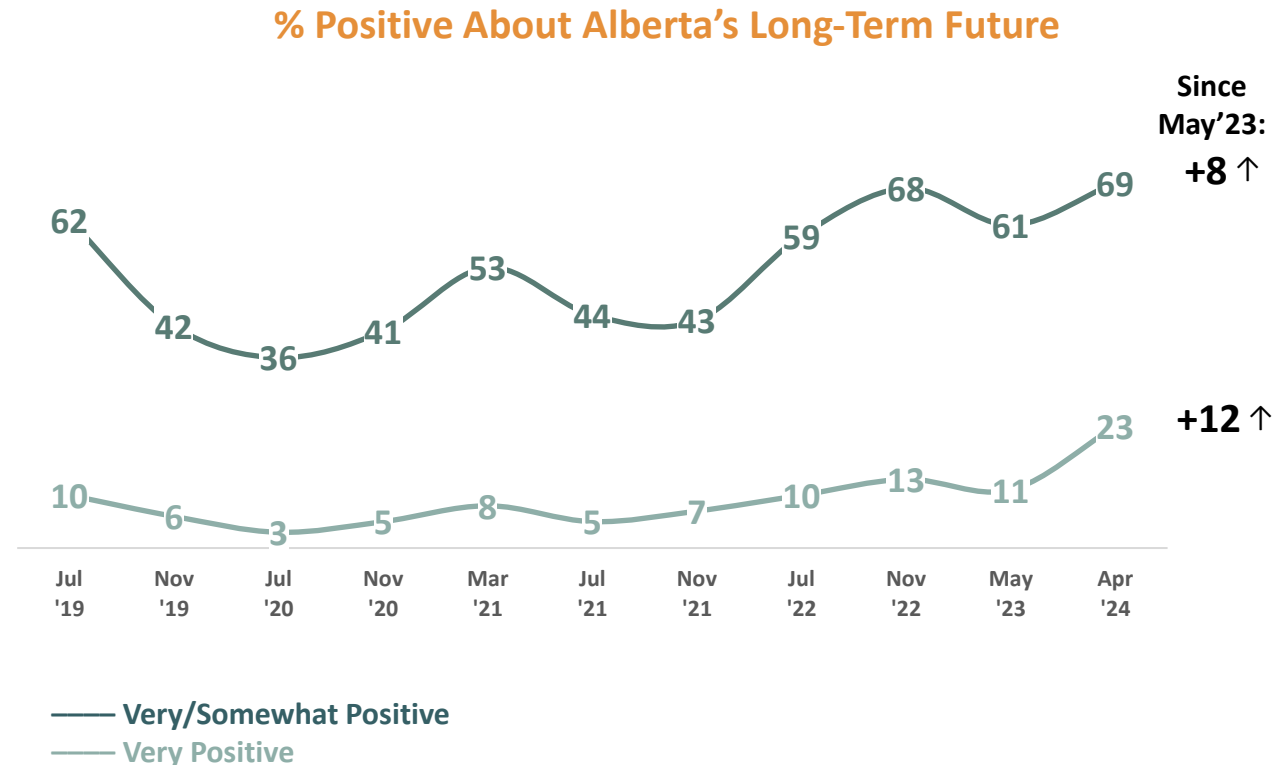
87%

Believe a work integrated learning experience makes a difference to a student's work force readiness

59% say 'a great deal of difference'
28% say 'some difference'

DETAILED FINDINGS

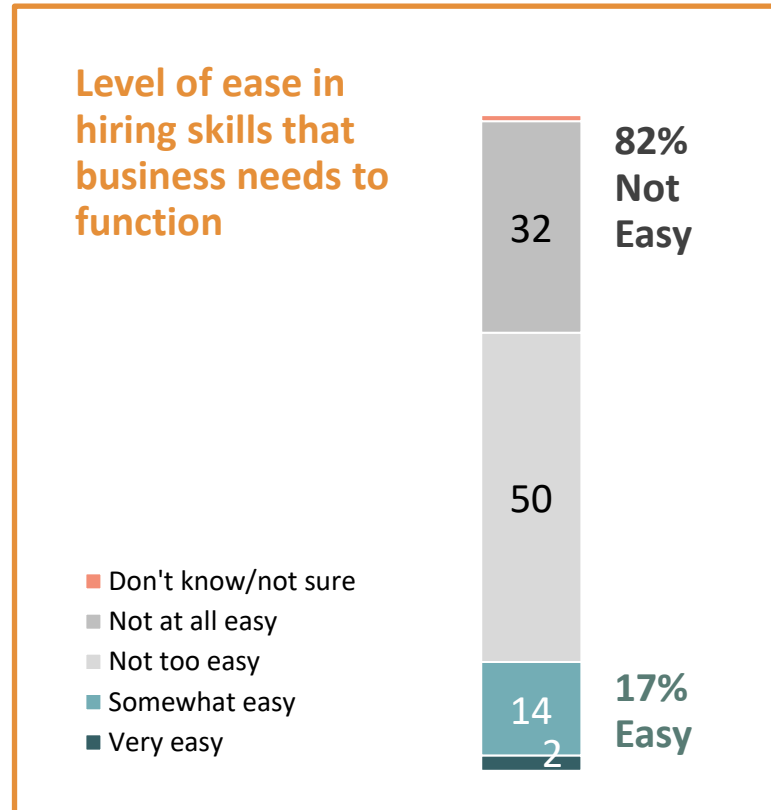
Positive feelings about Alberta's long-term future continues to trend upwards. The proportion feeling 'very' positive is up significantly and is now at the highest point since tracking began.



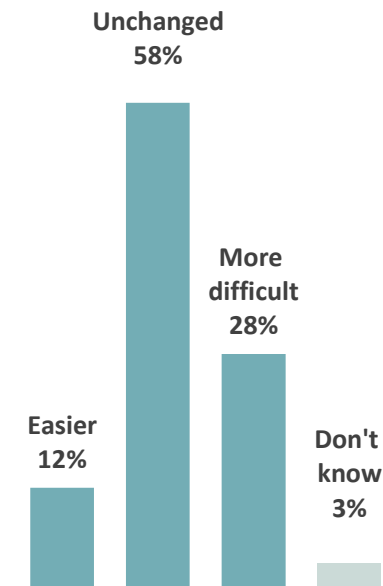
Q1. Overall, how do you feel about the long-term future of the province?

Base: Total sample (Jul'19 n=714, Nov'19 n=1028, Jul'20 n=502, Nov'20 n=847, Jul'21 n=613, Nov'21 n=359, Jul'22 n=564, May'23 n=804, Apr'24 n=259)

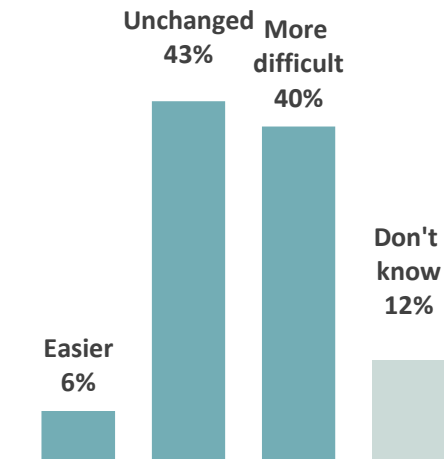
The majority of businesses report it is not easy to hire the skills their business needs to function, with one-third (32%) indicating 'not at all' easy. And, while one-in-ten (12%) say it is easier than a year ago, 29% say more difficult, with this difficulty expected into the next year.



Ease/Difficulty vs. a year ago...



Anticipated Ease/Difficulty vs. a year from now



Q3. How easy or not is it to hire the skills your business needs to function?

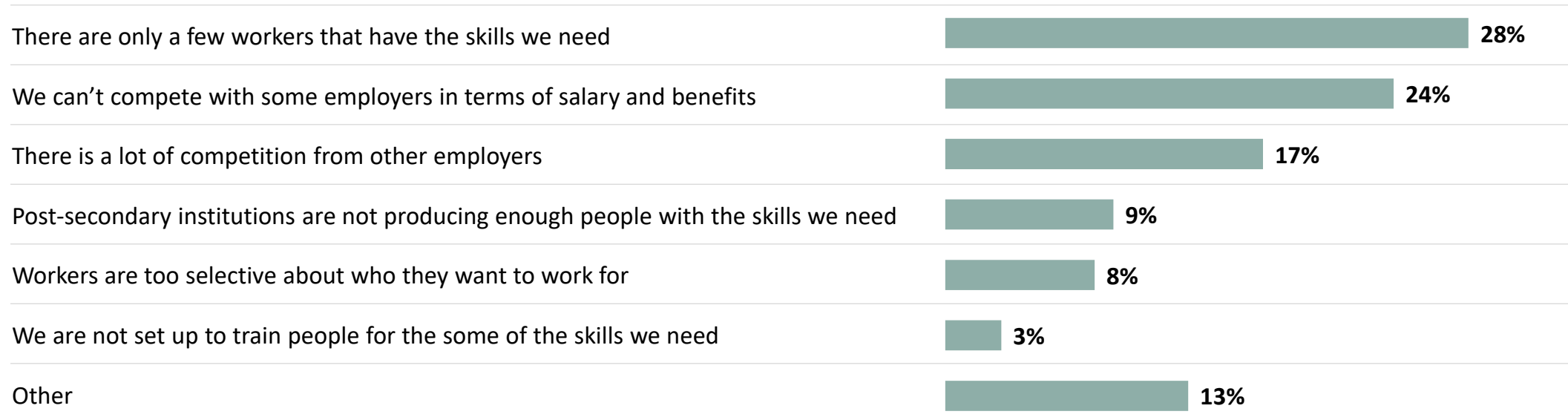
Q4. Is it more difficult or easier to hire the skills your business needs than a year ago?

Q5. Thinking ahead do you anticipate that it will be more difficult or easier to hire the skills your business needs in a year's time compared to today?

Base: Organization employs more than one (Apr'24 n=217)

The main reasons cited for not being able to hire the skills they need are the lack of availability of workers with the required skills (28%) or competition - not being able to compete in terms of salary/benefits for the skilled employees available (24%) and competition from other employers (17%).

Main reasons for not being able to hire the skills you need



Q6. What is the main reason you believe it is (RESPONSE TO Q3) to hire the skills you need?

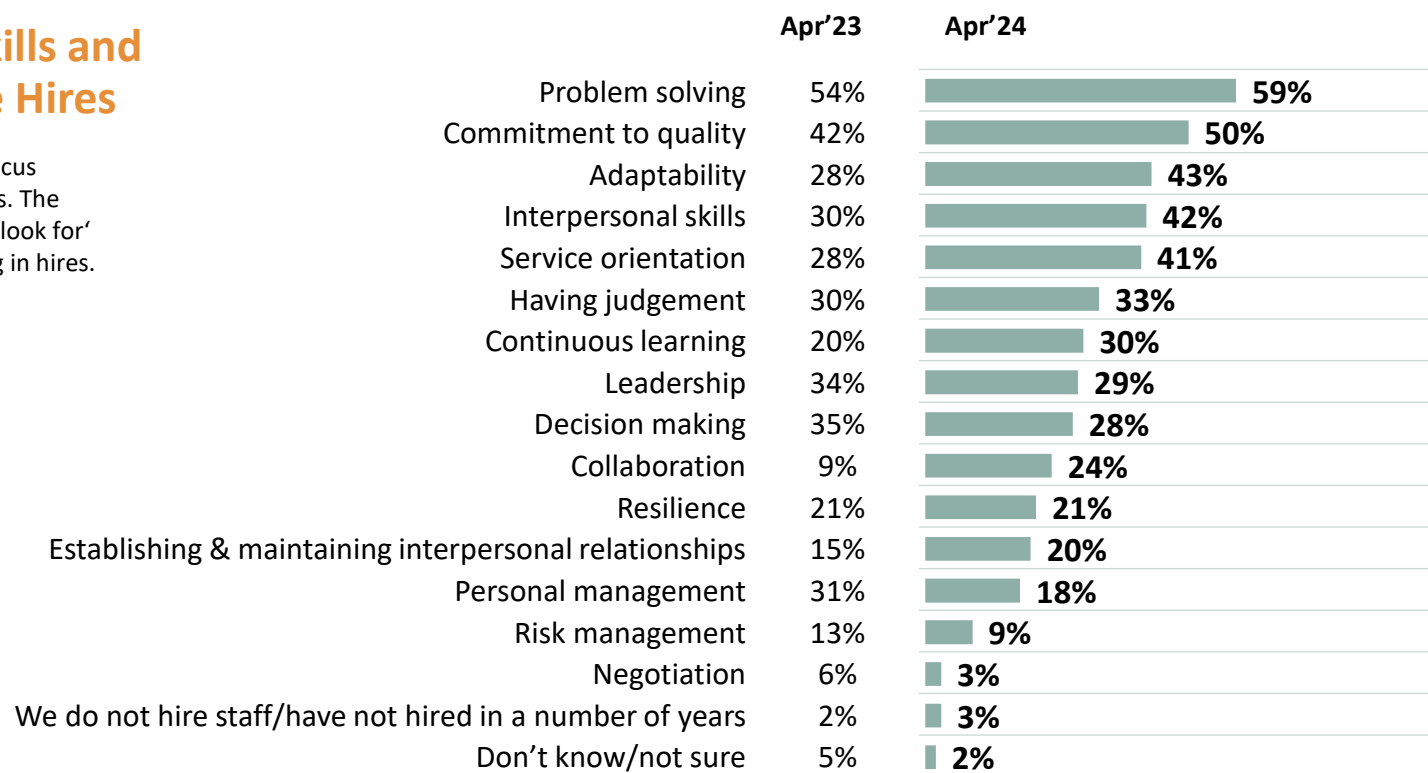
Base: Not too easy or not at all easy to hire skills (Apr'24 n=176)

Problem solving and commitment to quality are the most desired people skills and competencies with future hires. Adaptability, interpersonal skills and a service orientation are in the next tier of desired skills.

- Of interest, whether it is people skills lacking (the 2023 focus of the question) or people skills employers will look for in the future (the 2024 focus) problem solving and commitment to quality are key skills in both cases. The conundrum here it is that, while they are the most frequently cited people skill employers will seek, it is also the ones most lacking in the people they hire.

Most Desired People Skills and Competencies in Future Hires

Note the different question wording and focus which raises caution in making comparisons. The April 2024 question focused on 'skills most look for' while in 2023 the focus was on skills lacking in hires.



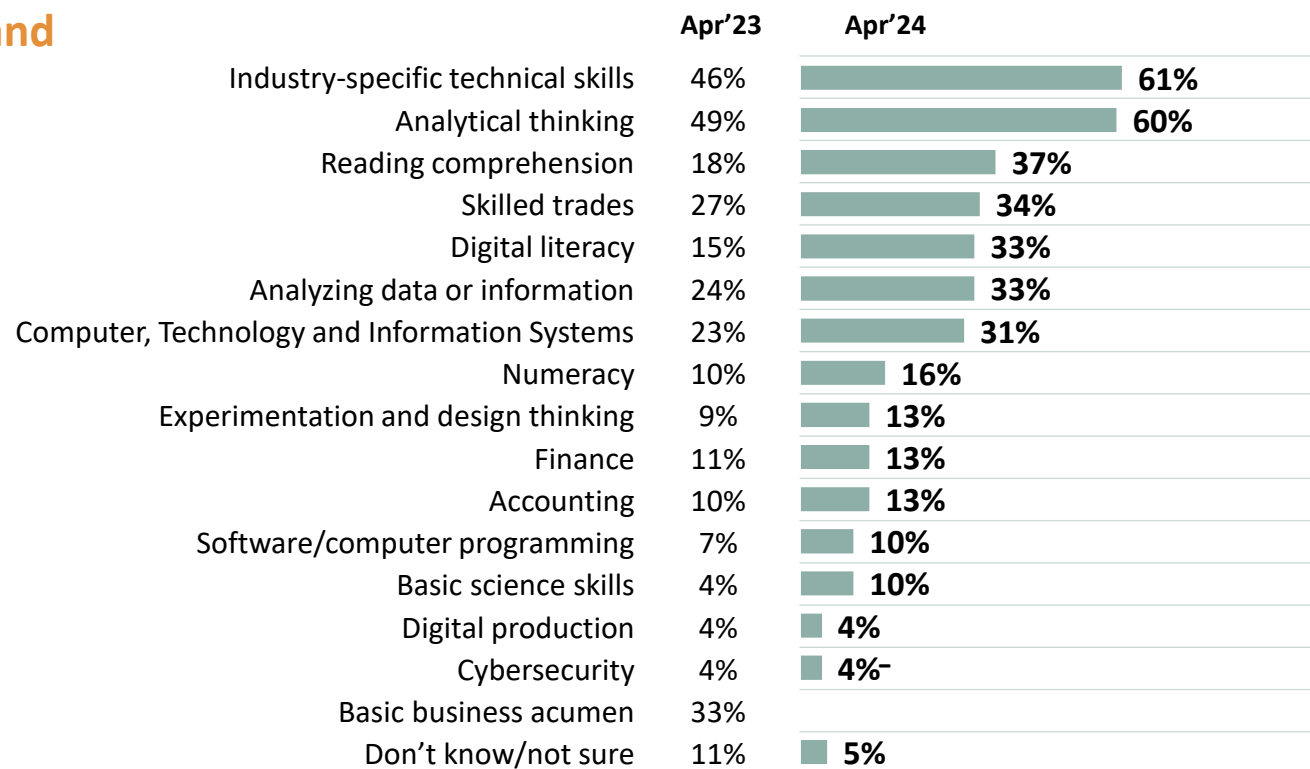
Q7. Of the following, which are the top 5 people skills and competencies you anticipate you will most look for in future hires? Base: Apr'23 n=445; Apr'24 n=212
 April 2023 Wording: Q7. Of the following, which are the top 5 people skills and competencies lacking in the people you hire? (Please select up to 5 options) Base: n=445

By far, the most desired technical skills and competencies for future hires include industry-specific technical skills and analytical thinking.

- When comparing differences between what employers believe they lack in hires (2023 focus) and skills they will most look for in the future (2024 focus) not surprisingly industry-specific technical skills is a key need in hires but also one that is most lacking. The same can also be said of analytical skills.

Most Desired Technical Skills and Competencies in Future Hires

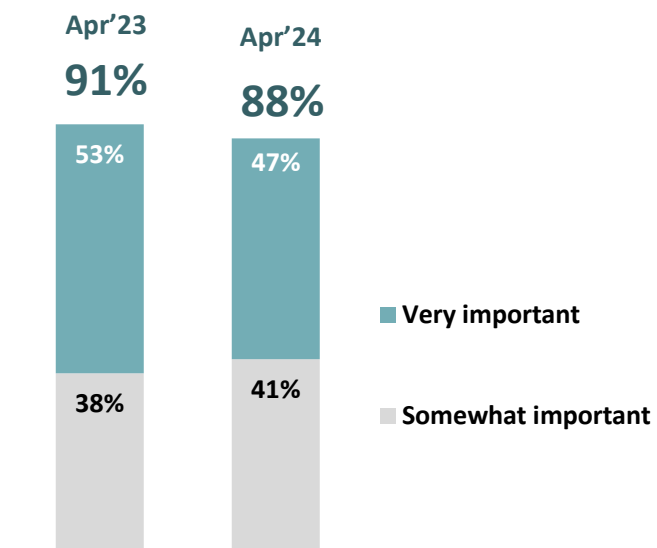
Note the different question wording and focus which raises caution in making comparisons. The April 2024 questions focused on 'skills most look for' while in 2023 the focus was on skills lacking in hires.



Q8. Of the following, which are the top 5 technical skills and competencies you anticipate you will most look for in future hires? Base: Apr'23 n=445; Apr'24 n=212
 April 2023 Wording: Q8. Of the following, which are the top 5 technical skills and competencies lacking in the people you hire? (Please select up to 5 options) Base: n=445

Skills upgrading/acquisition remains important to almost all organizations, with about half (47%) indicating it is ‘very’ important. The biggest barriers faced for skills upgrading and acquisition are a limited budget for this as well as limited staff interest in skills upgrading.

Importance of Skills Upgrading/ New Skills Acquisition



Biggest Barrier Faced in Skills Upgrading and Acquisition

Apr'23	Apr '24	Barrier
21%	34%	Limited budget for this
14%	21%	Limited staff interest in skills upgrading
7%	16%	Few places where the skills we use/need can be upgraded
10%	13%	There are no major barriers
7%	8%	Can't afford to give staff time off
1%	3%	Limited management support for skills upgrading
7%	2%	Other
5%	3%	Don't know/not sure

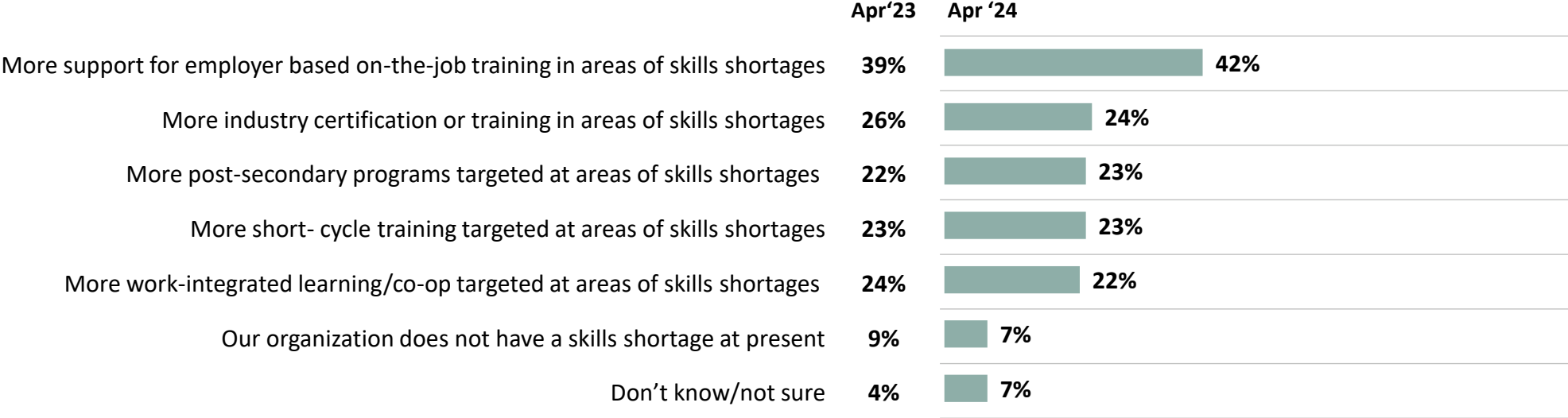
Q9. How important to the successful running of your organization is skills upgrading or new skills acquisition? Base: Apr'23 n=445; Apr'24 n=208

Q10. What is the biggest barrier your organization faces in the area of skills upgrading/skills acquisition? Base: Apr'23 n=445; Apr'24 n=180

More support for employer on-the-job training continues to be the most cited as the preferred option for meeting skills shortages (of employer’s top two preferred options).

- Following on-the job-training, the other options are all modestly and equally supported suggesting they are all viable options after on-the job training.

Preferred Options for Meeting Skills Shortage

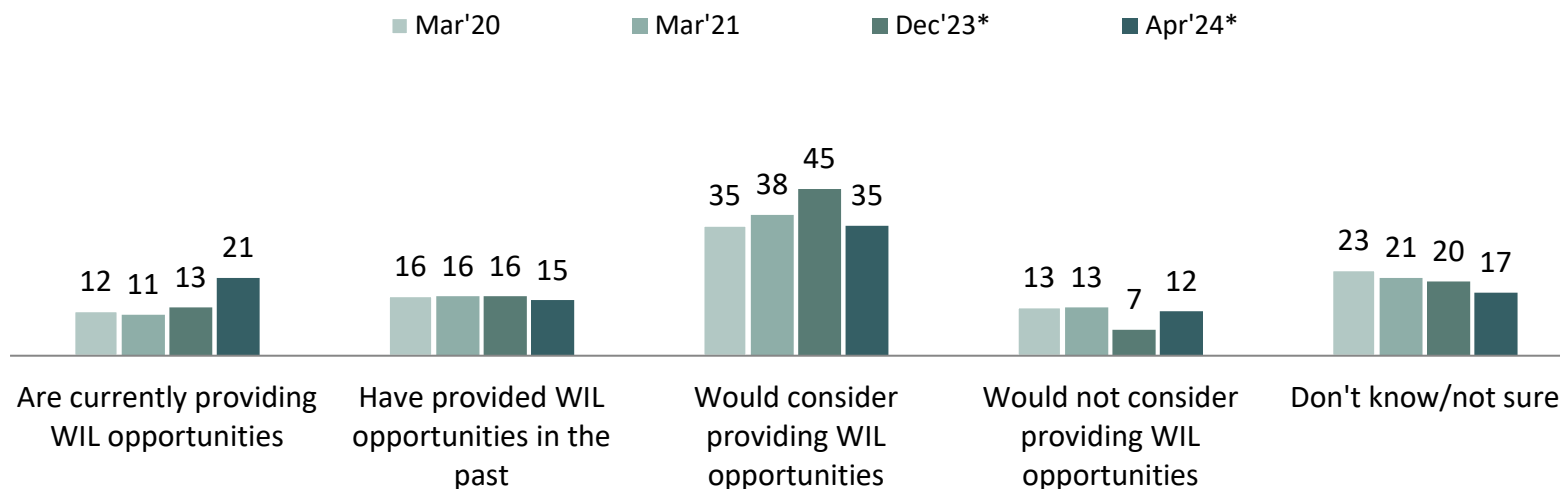


Q11. Which of the following is your preferred option for meeting skills shortage? (Two options allowed) Base: Apr'23 n=283; Apr'24 n=148

There has been a substantial increase in the proportion of employers who are currently providing WIL (13% to 21%), while those who have provided WIL opportunities in the past is stable.

- While the proportion that indicate they would not consider providing WIL opportunities is up compared to December 2023, results have returned to earlier levels.

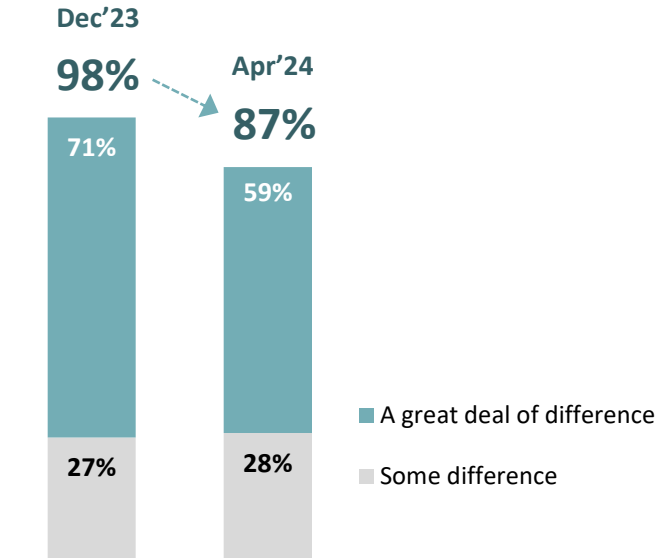
Willingness to consider Work Integrated Learning (WIL)



Q16. Would your business be willing to consider providing work integrated learning (WIL) opportunities (co-operative education placements, internships, applied research projects, etc.) to post-secondary students as a strategy to recruit and/or acquire skilled workers?
 Base: *(Dec'23 n=197); Hire staff (Mar'21 n=505; Mar'20 n=317); *(Apr'24 n=148).
 Responses from Community Insight members*

Most employers believe that work integrated learning experience makes a difference to a student’s work force readiness, with the majority saying ‘a great deal’ of difference. Top cited benefits include preparing students for the workforce and ability to assess potential employees.

Believe a work integrated learning experience makes a difference to a student’s work force readiness



Note: The base for December 2023 was only those currently providing/had provided WIL placements, while the April 2024 question was asked of all Insight Community members. The slight decline in percentages suggests that employers that have not been exposed to WIL are somewhat less likely to believe WIL makes a difference or provides benefits. However, among employers in general, large majorities believe it makes a difference and that there are benefits to employers.

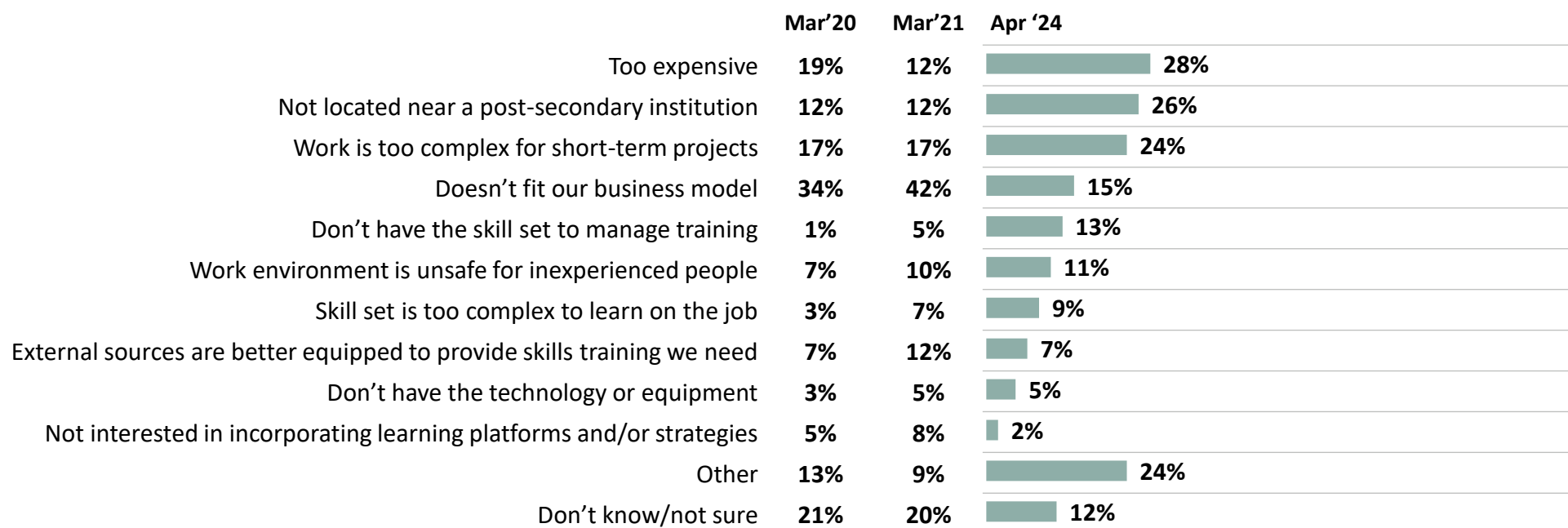
Benefits of providing WIL opportunities

Dec'23	Apr'24	
79%	64%	It prepares students for the workforce
66%	61%	It's a way to try out potential employees
80%	58%	Get to see if the student/they will be a good fit
70%	51%	It's a way of supporting students
54%	46%	They can bring new idea and approaches
36%	40%	It reduces the time to onboard new employees
39%	32%	It provides a source of low-cost labour
-	3%	There are no real benefits
5%	3%	Other
2%	5%	Don't know/not sure

- Q13. In general, how much of a difference, if any, do you believe a work integrated learning experience makes to a student’s work force readiness? Base in 2023 was those currently providing/have provided WIL (Dec'23 n=56). In April 2024 it was all respondents (Apr'24 n=148).
- Q14. What are the benefits of providing work integrated learning opportunities as a strategy to recruit and/or acquire skilled workers? Base in 2023 was those currently providing/have provided WIL (Dec'23 n=56). In April 2024 it was all Community Insight member respondents (Apr'24 n=148).

Top barriers to providing WIL opportunities include that it is too expensive, that they are not located near a post-secondary organization, or the complexity of their work.

Barriers to providing work integrated learning opportunities as a strategy to recruit and/or acquire skilled workers

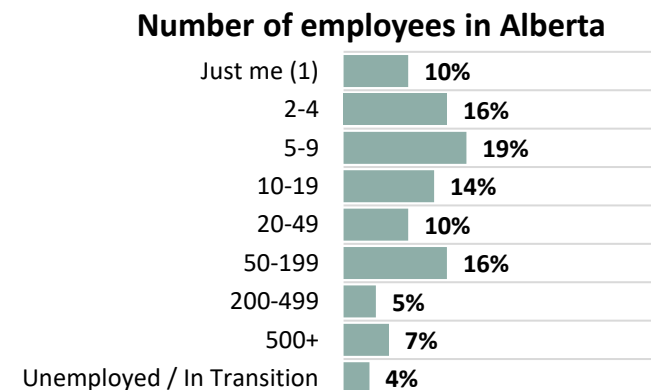
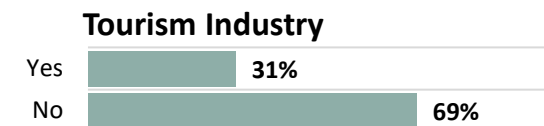
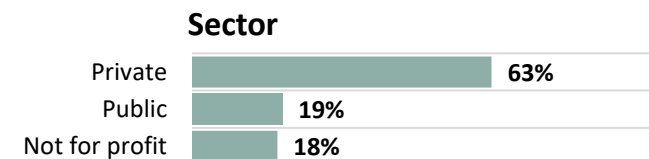
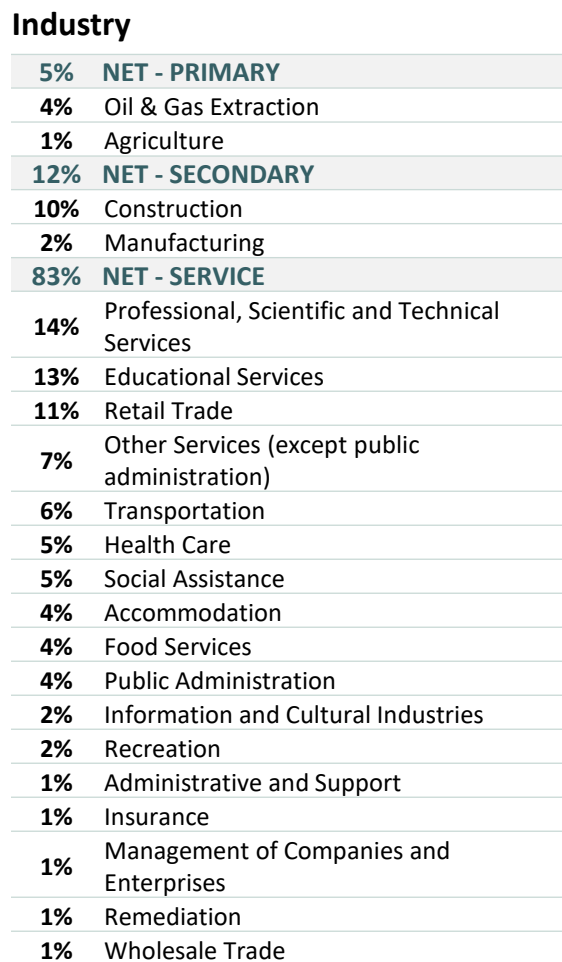
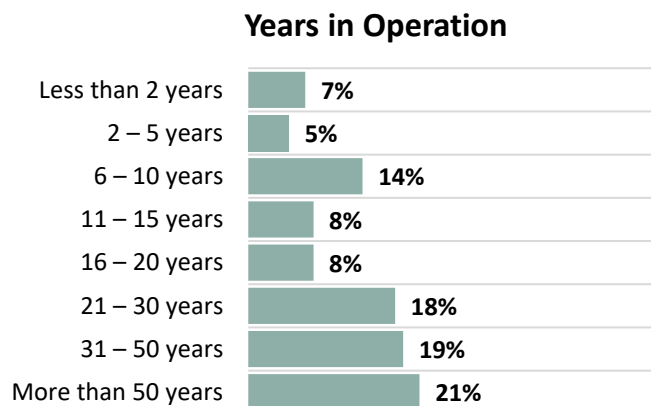
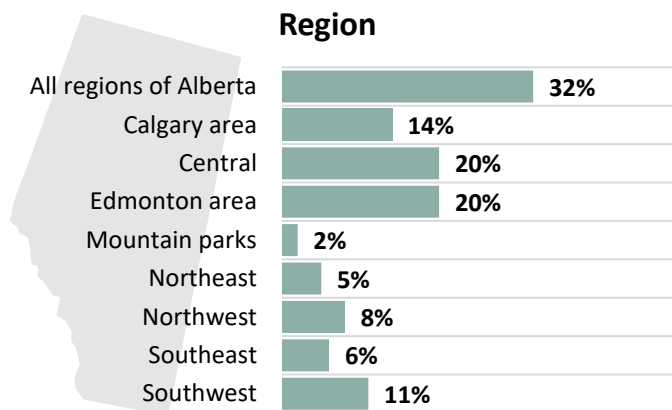


Note: Enhanced base in April 2024.

Q15. What are the barriers to providing work integrated learning opportunities as a strategy to recruit and/or acquire skilled workers? Base: Those currently providing or have provided WIL? Base in 2020 and 2023 was those who would not consider work integrated learning or don't know (2020 n=116; 2021 n=172). In April 2024 it was all respondents who were Community Insight members (Apr'24 n=148).

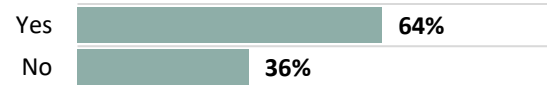
RESPONDENT PROFILE - FIRMOGRAPHICS

Respondent Profile – Firmographics



Respondent Profile – Firmographics

Owner/Partner



Job Title

55%	President, CEO, Owner or Executive Director
5%	Vice president or equivalent
1%	C-Suite executive (CFO, CMO, CTO, CXO)
5%	Partner, advisor or associate
5%	Contractor or self-employed
17%	Other senior manager
11%	Assistant, coordinator or manager (or equivalent)
2%	Other

Gender

