



FINDING THE WAY

**Building a stronger
path between LBS
and Manufacturing**

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Introduction

The manufacturing sector currently represents the second largest group of employers in the London Economic Region. It's a sector with potential to grow, given that employers consistently report they have available jobs but cannot find appropriate applicants to fill them. The inability to fully staff manufacturing facilities in our region reduces production capacity, and slows the potential for economic growth. As new manufacturers like Maple Leaf Foods establish operations in the area, this issue is only expected to grow.

Why are manufacturers having difficulty filling open positions? While educational credentials and manufacturing experience are a piece of this hiring puzzle, it has become increasingly clear that manufacturing employers are struggling to find entry-level employees with strong soft skills. With these skills – including communication, teamwork, problem solving, organizational skills and attention to detail – in place, employers are willing to hire candidates with lower education levels or less experience. Why? Because these new employees have the foundational skills they need to come to work when scheduled, learn new skills, focus on the job at hand, and contribute to the company's success.

Many adult learners in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs are upgrading their skills to increase their employability – their goal is to get a job. They want to work, and have demonstrated both initiative and an ability to learn. Many have the soft or hard skills that manufacturing employers are looking for, but may not know anything about the industry, what is available in the local labour market, or what manufacturing work might entail. The transferable skills they've developed in previous work and life experiences may be an excellent fit for a future in manufacturing.

Similarly, while manufacturers use a wide variety of tools for attracting job applicants including online job postings, internal referral programs, word of mouth and local employment agencies, but LBS programs are not recognized as a potential source of new talent.

We believe that by building a stronger pathway between LBS learners and manufacturing employers, we can help both meet their goals.

A Four-Part Pathway

This report outlines a plan to build awareness, develop community supports, and establish a stronger connection between Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs and manufacturing. The plan is divided into four focuses:

1. Helping employment-bound LBS learners develop the skills valued by manufacturing employers
2. Increasing awareness of the manufacturing sector within the LBS community
3. Developing a well-informed system of support for job seekers targeting employment in the manufacturing sector
4. Promoting connections between manufacturing employers, Employment Services (ES), and LBS

Several key organizations and stakeholders have a role to play in the successful execution of this plan, including:

- LBS program staff
- The Learning Networks of Ontario (LNO)
- ES Counsellors
- ES support groups such as the Job Developers Network (JDN) or Employment Sector Council (ESC)
- Workforce Planning and Development Boards
- Organizations hosting manufacturing-focused SkillsAdvance Ontario (SAO) projects
- Manufacturing bodies such as the Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium
- The Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD)

Focus 1: Helping employment-bound LBS learners develop the skills valued by manufacturing employers

To help Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) learners develop the skills most desired by local manufacturers, we propose the development of a resource list that outlines training material available to help people recognize and develop:

- soft skills manufacturers are looking for when hiring entry-level positions (ex. communication skills, problem solving, and teamwork)
- hard skills manufacturers are looking for when hiring entry-level positions (ex. math, digital literacy, and hand-eye coordination)
- an understanding of the manufacturing sector (ex. “Essential Skills for Manufacturing” and “Apprenticeship in Manufacturing,” both available at <https://www.llsc.on.ca/resources1#SkillsforWork>)

Proposed execution:

1. A summary of the skills manufacturers value most would be created based on the information contained in Literacy Link South Central’s Employer Engagement Report (November 2020). This summary would be written in plain language so it could be shared directly with LBS learners.
2. An environmental scan would be completed to determine already-existing training material available to LBS programs, including:
 - a. content from the Task Based Activities for LBS portal
 - b. curriculum offered by Ontario’s e-Channel programs
 - c. LBS training developed at program-level and by regional literacy networks across the province
 - d. training material developed outside of LBS but available at low or no cost
3. The training resources would be sorted by focus (soft skills, hard skills, manufacturing-specific information) and compiled into a reference list or online database with links to access the material from its original source.
4. The summary of skills manufacturers are looking for and the reference list or online database would be released to LBS programs across the province through the Learning Networks of Ontario. If additional financial resources were provided, an informational webinar could be created sharing those top skills, and outlining how to use the reference list or database to support learners with employment goals.

Focus 2: Increasing awareness of the manufacturing sector within LBS programs

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program staff working with learners interested in manufacturing careers also need non-training resources. We propose a two-pronged approach to helping LBS practitioners recommend sources of research for employment-bound learners, and potential next steps for training. The two elements would be:

- a reference guide outlining local and provincial organizations offering manufacturing resources (ex. the London Economic Development Corporation (LEDC) London Manufacturing Jobs database, and the Food Processing Skills Canada (FPSC) Learning and Recognition Framework)
- profiles of local skills-training projects related to manufacturing (ex. the London Training Centre's Succeeding at Work (SAW) program and the Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium (EMC) Manufacturing Excellence Certification (MEC) program)

Proposed execution:

1. Research would be done into what organizations offer manufacturing-related resources across the province. These organizations would be compiled into a reference guide outlining the resources they offer and how to access them.
2. Research staff would reach out to these organizations to inquire about other resources they would recommend be included in the reference guide.
3. The reference guide would be released to LBS programs across the province through the Learning Networks of Ontario. As with focus 1, if additional financial resources were available, an informational webinar could be created outlining how to use the guide.
4. Through discussions with local and provincial funders and networking organizations, a list of manufacturing-related skills-training projects in the London Economic Region would be developed. Included in the profile of each training opportunity would be the focus of the training, client eligibility criteria, commitment required, and expected outcome. The period of time when the training is available would be highlighted, and contact information would be included for referrals or inquiries.
5. The training profiles would be released to LBS programs in the London Economic Region by Literacy Link South Central. If the financial resources to do so were provided, an informational webinar could be created outlining the programs in the training guide and how it can be used with clients.
6. With additional financial support, the training guide could be expanded to include programs available across the province.

Focus 3: Developing a well-informed system of support for job seekers targeting employment in the manufacturing sector

For a plan to create a stronger path from Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) to manufacturing to be effective, it cannot be executed alone. We propose developing a systemic approach to supporting job-seekers who are interested in a career in manufacturing, providing easier navigation to, and within, programs. This approach includes three key elements:

- developing relationships between the LBS community and manufacturing-related training initiatives and projects.
- strengthening relationships between the LBS community and Employment Services.
- creating a referral loop so LBS practitioners know how to recommend learners to local projects, and staff at those projects know how to refer someone who is not yet ready for involvement as a result of a literacy and essential skills issue to an LBS program.

Proposed execution:

Relationship-building with manufacturing training programs

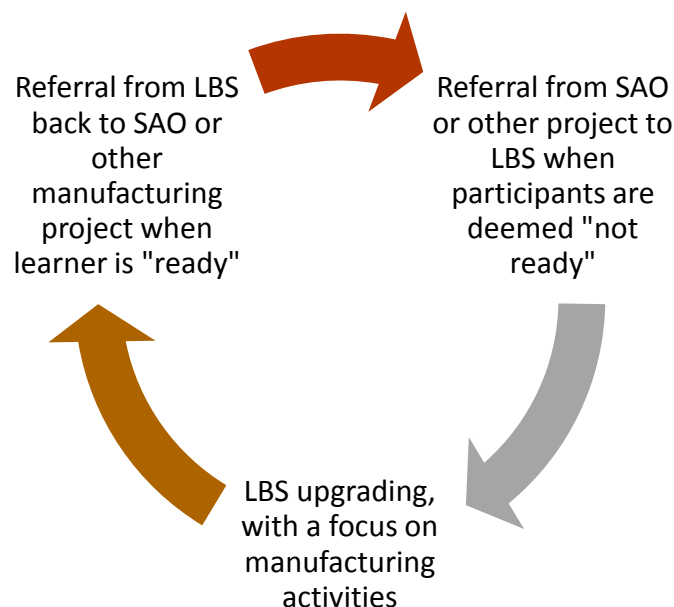
1. Representatives from Literacy Link South Central would volunteer to participate in Advisory and Steering Committees for manufacturing-based SAO and other training projects across the region.
2. When possible, Literacy Link South Central would offer to partner with organizations applying for funding to launch new manufacturing-related training programs.
3. Information about manufacturing-related training initiatives would be shared regularly at Literacy Service Planning meetings, and representatives from different projects would be invited to attend to share in-depth information, marketing materials, and referral processes.
4. Literacy Link South Central would offer to meet with representatives from manufacturing-based training projects to explain the role literacy plays in employment success, and how their participants could upgrade their skills to improve their chances of success in the program.

Relationship-building with Employment Services

1. Recognizing that not all Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) learners on the employment goal path will pursue career in manufacturing, the Regional Literacy Network would reiterate the process for (and the need to) connect employment-focused learners with Employment Services (ES) agencies if they are NOT being connected to a manufacturing-based project like SkillsAdvance Ontario (SAO).
2. To ensure that everyone working with job seekers interested in manufacturing has access to tools to support their work, Literacy Link South Central would share the soft skills assessment tool developed through their 2020/2021 Ontario Labour Market Partnership (OLMP) project with ES agencies across the region.
3. The release of the soft skills assessment would also be shared with support organizations for employment, including the Employment Sector Council (ESC).

Referral loop

1. Formal referral loop processes would be developed for use in the London Economic Region. It would align with the internal processes of both LBS and organizations running manufacturing-focused training initiatives.
2. A process would be established to allow referrals on the loop to be tracked, and the number of successfully looped participants / learners would be determined.
3. LBS and manufacturing-focused project staff would be surveyed on the effectiveness of the referral loop, and if they find it effective and helpful, the process would be shared beyond the London Economic Region as a best practice. If funding were available, a webinar could be created that features representatives from both parties in the loop sharing information about the process and how it supported their work.



Focus 4: Promote Connections Between Manufacturing Employers, ES and LBS

In addition to direct relationship-building with Employment Services (ES) and organizations offering manufacturing-related training, we propose that a marketing and communications plan be developed to strengthen understanding and increase connections between Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) learners and manufacturing employment. There would be four separate audiences for this marketing and communications plan:

- Manufacturers
- Employment Services staff
- LBS learners
- LBS practitioners

Proposed execution:

1. A communications plan / marketing campaign would be developed to let manufacturers know about the skills people develop in LBS and how they align with what they are looking for in a new hire (ex. “we have your next great employee!”). Materials created would be distributed to manufacturers through the Workforce Planning and Development Board, with a focus on local manufacturers who answered “yes” to the question “would you like more information about adult education for your employees?” in the most recent EmployerOne survey. They would also be sent to support organizations for manufacturing, including the Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium.
2. A communications plan / marketing campaign aimed at ES Employment Counsellors and Job Developers would be created, letting them know about soft skill and manufacturing-focused skill building that’s available through LBS. The campaign will build awareness of how a partnership with LBS could co-support their clients (ex. “let us help you achieve your goals”). Materials created would be distributed to ES agencies through the Workforce Planning Board, Employment Sector Council (ESC) and at Job Developers Network (JDN) events.
3. A communications plan / marketing campaign would be created to promote manufacturing as a viable and enticing career for LBS learners on the employment goal path. A connection will be drawn between the skills the learner is developing in the LBS program, and the skills manufacturing employers value most. Materials created would be distributed to learners by LBS program staff.

4. A support guide would be created for Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) practitioners which outlines several ways to support learners in developing their skills for jobs in manufacturing. Information contained in the guide would include:
 - why a job in manufacturing may be a good choice for employment-bound learners to consider.
 - exactly which soft and hard skills manufacturers value most.
 - suggestions on how to talk about manufacturing with LBS learners, especially if they have biases against the idea (ex. myth-busting that all manufacturing jobs are dirty.)
 - a case study demonstrating how LBS programs can build relationships with local manufacturers for the benefit of their learners (ex. some LBS programs have welcomed employers come in to talk directly to their learners about what is involved in jobs at their company.) The case study would share how the visit was arranged and the results. To further support collaborating for client support, the guide would also suggest that Employment Services staff could potentially co-facilitate such a session to encourage interested learners to work with an employment counsellor (note: the learner can not be working with ES and in a skills training program through SkillsAdvance Ontario (SAO) simultaneously.)

The guide would be released to LBS programs across the province by the Learning Networks of Ontario (LNO). With additional funding, an informational webinar could be created to launch the marketing campaign, outlining each element and walking LBS practitioners through the contents of the guide.

Conclusion

To overcome the challenges local manufacturers have filling entry-level positions in their organizations, we need to go beyond traditional online job ads and word-of-mouth. To attract employment-bound Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) learners to manufacturing will involve more than a simple suggestion. Training is available to help job seekers develop the skills they need, and there are learners in LBS programs that will make great employees. Now all we need is a plan to connect them with the manufacturers who need them.

This is that plan. By building awareness, developing community supports, and establishing stronger cross-sector collaborations, we can ensure that more manufacturing jobs are filled, and LBS programs are recognized as a source of new talent for employers seeking to fill entry-level positions.

The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) system is well-positioned to make a difference for both job seekers and employers. Given the opportunity, we look forward to moving forward and building a stronger path between LBS and manufacturing.



For more information about this report, or Literacy Link South Central, please contact us at literacylink@llsc.on.ca or 519-681-7307.

The views expressed in this report are those of Literacy Link South Central, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province. The Government of Ontario and its agencies are in no way bound by any recommendations contained in this document.



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