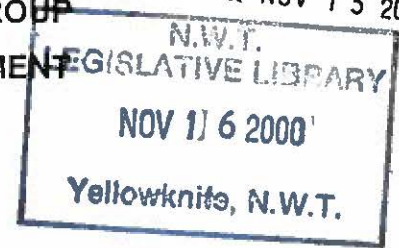


REPORT OF THE STUDENT WORKING GROUP  
ON STUDENT AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT



**Introduction**

Every year, hundreds of Northwest Territories residents attend post-secondary institutions. These students are pursuing studies across the spectrum of occupations. Many of these students receive financial support through the Government of the Northwest Territories' (GNWT) Student Financial Assistance Program. At the same time, the GNWT and northern businesses are struggling to find enough qualified northerners for the many available jobs, particularly in professional, technical and technological fields.

This year, Members of the 14<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly have raised questions about the student summer employment program and about the availability of jobs for students. The Assembly has also been clear in committing to educating, training and employing northerners as a priority.

While the GNWT does try to support the summer employment of students and graduates, there seems to be room to find more effective ways of matching the employment needs of post-secondary students and graduates with the employee needs of territorial employers.

Every year, the Government of the Northwest Territories offers summer employment to students who are currently enrolled in post-secondary education. However, the number of jobs available and the support systems to help students access those jobs varies from year to year. In addition, while some departments have offered small programs directed at employing northern graduates, there is no overall coordinated effort to encourage northern students to remain or return to the Northwest Territories after graduating.

Corporate Human Resource Services has recognized that there is a need to review and revise the current SSEP. At the same time, within CHRS's mandate for human resource planning, there was also a need to look at the broader issue of student and

graduate employment. As a result, a review of GNWT student and graduate employment practices was identified as part of the CHRS workplan.

The review of GNWT student and graduate employment practices has two components:

- a review by GNWT human resource professionals and managers to determine how to be more effective in northern student and graduate employment; and
- a review of the current situation by northern post-secondary students and recommendations on changes required.

This report deals with the student review.

### **Student Working Group on Student and Graduate Employment**

The Student Working Group on Student and Graduate Employment was established to provide a student's-eye view of the SSEP and other aspects of student and graduate employment. Members were guided by the objectives set out in the terms of reference (Appendix A). The following report captures the key issues and concerns identified by the Working Group along with their recommendations for addressing these issues.

The Student Working Group was established in early June 2000 and was comprised of twenty GNWT student employees (Appendix B). Each department within the Government nominated these students. Of these twenty students, seventeen were from Yellowknife, one from Fort Smith and two from Inuvik. The three students from the regions were contacted by conference call for each meeting and on two occasions traveled to Yellowknife to participate in person.

The students met on a bi-weekly basis from June 21 to August 23. Initially, members identified the issues and strengths of programs and services currently available to assist students with employment. The larger group then broke into smaller sub-groups, focussing on three areas: communications, graduate

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employment and student employment. Each sub-group developed recommendations that were shared and discussed with the working group as a whole.

Students drew on personal experience, research of practices in other jurisdictions and other local organizations, discussions with other students and research into what their employing department was doing.

## **Current Programs**

### Summer Student Employment Program (SSEP)

For the past three years, Corporate Human Resource Services, in the Department of the Executive, has been responsible for the Summer Student Employment Program (SSEP). The program operates between mid-April and late August. SSEP's function was the collection and distribution of student resumes. Students also approached departments directly with their resumes.

Employers begin to submit job postings around mid to late April. Students can submit their resumes either through email, by fax, or in person, and only the SSEP is allowed to access student information. Eligible candidates for the program must be currently attending high school, returning to a post-secondary institution in the fall, or just finishing post secondary studies.

Students are selected for the job according to their qualifications and experience. To ensure that students who are already employed do not have his/her resume sent out a second time, departments provide regular reports to the SSEP, indicating who has been hired. GNWT employers are encouraged to use the SSEP; however, they are not required to.

## **Graduate Employment**

Efforts are made by a few departments to contact potential graduates in specific occupational fields. For example, Health and Social Services tries to contact graduating nurses, social workers and physicians to determine their interest in

northern employment and to support those who wish to work in the NWT. The Department of Justice offers a career development program, which includes assistance for aboriginal law students who wish to return to the NWT and work as a lawyer.

For the most part, it is up to graduates to identify and apply for positions as vacancies are advertised on a weekly basis in northern papers.

## Recommendations

**Student Working Group Recommendation 1 – We recommend that all departments within the GNWT make a commitment to use the Summer Student Employment Program (SSEP).**

The SSEP was established in 1998. The purpose of the program was to provide a single location for students to drop off their resumes for government-wide distribution and to have a similar single point for departments to access information about students looking for work.

At present, departments are not required to hire students registered with the SSEP. As a result, department human resource staff often rely on resumes dropped off to their department directly by students. Of the 247 students hired for summer employment this year, only 45 were hired as a result of a referral through the SSEP. While many of the 247 had submitted resumes to the SSEP, it was the resume submitted directly to the departments that got them the job. There are a number of reasons why this may be the case, including:

- The SSEP does not formally begin operations until mid- to late April.
- SSEP student resumes are not easily accessible for Human Resource officers.
- When a student supplies a resume directly to the department, it allows the student to make personal contact and a good first impression on the Human Resource officer.

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The Working Group maintains that there is a need for the SSEP although its role must be revised to provide better and therefore more useful, service for both departments and students. If appropriate changes are made as recommended in this report, the concept of a single collection and distribution point for student resumes is beneficial and worth keeping.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 2 – We recommend that the SSEP begin accepting resumes from students earlier in the year.**

Presently, most human resource officers do not consult the Summer Student Employment Program (SSEP) unless they cannot find a qualified student within their files. This is because the program begins too late in the year. Human Resources begins to receive resumes from students searching for summer employment with the GNWT, from December to late spring, although SSEP does not begin until the end of April. By this time, human resource offices have already received many resumes from diversely qualified students and may have even chosen candidates for summer employment.

Beginning the collection of resumes in December will increase the usefulness of the program for both students and employers. Consequently, it will be easier for government departments to utilize SSEP to find qualified students to fill their summer positions. In addition, this will also make SSEP more effective by helping more students find summer employment with the government earlier in the summer. Therefore, it is essential for SSEP to start earlier in the spring.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 3 - We recommend that all GNWT departments should have access to the SSEP database via the Internet.**

A main concern is the accessibility of the student database. The database is the basis for the Summer Student Employment Program. Currently all requests for resumes by prospective employers must go through the SSEP Co-ordinator.

Providing electronic access to the student database for all human resource officers and managers will simplify the process of identifying potential students for

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employment. Information on which students are searching for work and their education and experience will be readily available and easily accessible. This will eliminate the need for each department to keep separate files with students' resumes.

With the power to search the database on their own for possible candidates, employers will be more likely to use the database.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 4 – We recommend that there should be a Summer Student Employment Program website.**

In many other jurisdictions, information on student and graduate employment is available through the Internet. Given the increased use of the internet by both students and employers, it makes sense to use the technology available to simplify access to the SSEP and to encourage expanded use of the program.

The website would allow students to apply for positions on-line. It would also allow potential employers to access student information in the same easy-to-use way. As it stands now, the SSEP does not interact with employers outside the GNWT. This was one of the concerns, as students would like to see the SSEP also become community based. SSEP is geared towards assisting students finding employment within the GNWT. Employers are encouraged but do not have to use the Student Databank. One of the main issues concerning the Student Database is that there needs to be a better line of communication between the SSEP and the GNWT.

One idea was to mimic the Federal Student Work Employment Program (FSWEP) by producing a web-linked database to centralize all affairs concerning Student Summer Employment. For example: students would be able to search for a job, submit resumes/applications online, be given tips on how to build a proper resume, and would be given a list of contacts for any questions or concerns. In turn, registered Employers would be able to post new jobs, create targeted postings, change profiles, and be given limited access to resumes within the Student Database.

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With the proper development of this web-site we could make the student database easily accessible to those with proper rights.

Students would also be able to search posted jobs that are available for summer students.

This would be a valuable tool for graduates and students to learn about available jobs and contact departments concerning employment.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 5 – We recommend that all students should be able to submit resumes and fill out all required SSEP forms online.**

With the development of a webpage, students would have another option to help them with a job search. Students could submit their resume and fill out the appropriate information, which would then be entered into the SSEP database. An additional form including information such as education, skill level, areas of interest related to their education and departmental preferences could also be included.

This would help the departments find students looking for work in a related area and increase the student's chances to gain experience in an area related to their studies.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 6 - We recommend widening the range of skills on the SSEP form.**

Currently the skill categories on the SSEP form are quite general. The concept of a general application form that highlights skills, interests and education is a good one. However, the existing form needs to be revised to better capture the range of skills that employers may be looking for. In order to provide consistency and to ensure that each person's application emphasizes their skills, it is also suggested that this information be collected through a general, on-line application form to which students could also attach their resume.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 7 - We recommend that the SSEP should create a category on the data entry form to denote whether the applicant is a student or a graduate.**

Currently the SSEP form does not make a distinction between continuing students and graduates. Graduates are considered summer students the summer after they graduate and this notation could provide information to departments who are looking for summer students with a high level of proficiency in a certain area or skill. There may be some summer employment that would be more suited to graduates and there may be the option of continuing employment through the fall.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 8 – We recommend that the SWG partner with North WorkInfoNET (NorthWIN) in their efforts to develop a Student/Graduate Employment web site.**

NorthWIN is a partnership between government, business, community and non-profit organizations, whose mission is to establish and maintain an electronic information network. Its goal is to ensure all northerners have access to reliable labour market information, career services, education and training programs as well as other supports. Its web site links together employers, job seekers, and career and community development workers.

NorthWIN already has in place a territorial and national network that works to ensure that its web site offers current and reliable career and labour market information. By developing a partnership with NorthWIN, the SSEP Student Working Group can work collaboratively to create and maintain an effective, efficient and user-friendly web site.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 9 – We recommend that each summer student job should have an accompanying updated job description/statement of duties and projects.**



Students encounter a range of summer employment experiences within the GNWT. Some students are in job placements where there is a clear assignment of duties or a regular stream of projects to be completed. In other cases, students have limited work to do or limited direction on what needs to be done. As a result, some summer jobs are positive, growth experiences while others are merely a chance to collect a pay cheque without a chance to contribute to the organization or hone skills.

Students recognize that managers are busy dealing with the day to day issues and workload. However, they also feel that having a student represents a tremendous opportunity for the manager and other staff to get specific projects and research complete that is important and necessary. Departments should begin planning summer jobs for students months in advance. Prior to the arrival of students, jobs should already be well thought out and planned. If departments take the time to develop student job descriptions and projects, they would have a better idea of what they would like their student to accomplish over the summer. This would also help the student, as he/she would know exactly what their duties are for the summer. The longer and more thought out the process is, the more advantageous it is to both summer student and employer.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 10 – We recommend that government departments should give summer students priority over non-summer students during the summer employment period (mid-April to late-August).**

The current guidelines indicate that students will receive priority over non-students from May 1 to September 1. However, that priority only applies within affirmative action categories. For example, an indigenous aboriginal person who is not a student has priority over an indigenous non-aboriginal student but has less priority than an indigenous aboriginal student.

The guidelines should reflect the reality that most departments make an effort to create casual positions strictly to support student employment. There are other casual positions that would exist regardless of the time of year and normal affirmative action priority should apply to these. However, there should be a

recognition and acceptance of the fact that many positions are created for students and that these positions should be available only to students, with affirmative action being applied among the students.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 11 – We recommend that Student Financial Assistance should share student information with all departments with regards to recruiting and mentorship.**

Departments within the GNWT must start collaborating with SFA to promote a better working relationship with one another. When departments begin recruiting for certain positions within their department, they could contact SFA to find out which students would be graduating in a related area of study. Once they receive this information they could actively recruit northern students while that are still in the south. This would be beneficial to the government because at this time in a student's career industry and government in the south are also approaching them.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 12 – We recommend that departments within the government take a more proactive approach to telework, co-op programs, student mentorship and graduate hiring.**

One of the biggest stumbling blocks for students when they graduate is the lack of work experience. There are many ways that the GNWT could encourage and support work experience for northern students.

One option would be to identify opportunities for telework. On occasion, there may be projects that students could take on by distance such as research. With existing technology, students and employers could connect on a regular basis to ensure that such projects were completed as required. Giving students who are enrolled in post secondary institutions the opportunity to gain work experience while away at school through work assignments over the Internet has exemplary benefits for both sides. Students can train through mini projects the entire school term via the internet, and in the summer, return prepared and informed enough to carry more responsibility and fill vacant positions or replace permanent employees that are away on vacation more effectively. Students will also have the advantage of investing in relevant

education for their career paths, while concurrently gaining invaluable work experience.

Mentorships between GNWT employees and students studying in a related field could provide support for the students as they complete their studies and make decisions about future employment and selection of specialties. A strong mentorship could be a positive influence in a student's decision to seek employment in the north.

Co-op programs provide an excellent opportunity for students to gain practical work experience and for employers to get a first hand look at the skills and abilities of northern students.

Many northern students attending southern universities have access to a stream of recruiters in the final year or two of their program. These recruiters offer positions that are accessible by a new graduate with limited practical experience. The GNWT should develop a way to contact potential northern graduates and actively encourage them to return. This would include identifying the types of positions that are available for graduates.

Career development programs that exist within the various departments should remain but they could be expanded and improved where possible. To better comply with the Affirmative Action Policy, government departments should open these programs up to candidates in the same way in which the Affirmative Action Policy is run. All students representative of the Northwest Territories should be eligible. For example, if there are not enough eligible indigenous aboriginal students to fill a program of mentorships, scholarships or bursaries, the remaining spots should be opened for other affirmative action students.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 13 – We recommend that departments should be encouraged to consider taking students back from year to year.**

During their first year of summer employment with a department, students learn about the department's process, structure and the programs and services it provides.

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If a student can return to the same department in subsequent summers, there are advantages for both student and employer.

The employer gains a summer employee who carries corporate knowledge and who has a shorter learning curve. There is an excellent opportunity to mentor the student and help them develop the skills necessary to become a future employee after graduation. The student also brings fresh ideas from their schooling which they can share with the department in each successive year.

The student benefits when the jobs each summer are progressively more responsible and add to the overall work experience. The student also has a real-world context in which to share the theories they are learning at school.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 14 – We recommend that the GNWT look for areas where governmental departments can reduce the duplication of services with regards to student hiring.**

Concerns were raised about the duplication of student employment services within the government. All departments receive resumes directly from students prior to the start of summer employment. If the accessible website described in previous recommendations is in place, departments will not need to gather their own collections of student resumes and students will not have to distribute resumes to over a dozen locations within the same organization.

**Student Working Group Recommendation 15 - We recommend that the capabilities of students be recognized more fully in creating summer jobs and that additional effort be made to help students understand what their department does as a whole.**

The students felt strongly that they all have positive contributions to make during their summer employment and would like to have the opportunity to make those contributions. In many cases, students feel that GNWT employers have a limited view of the capabilities of students and do not provide project opportunities that allow

the students to use their skills. They would like to see job descriptions with projects that challenge students, in addition to the filing and cleaning types of projects often assigned to students.

In order to encourage loyalty and a sense of belonging, it would be helpful for students to get an orientation to what a department does. Students sometimes work in a specific job and never get a sense of the bigger departmental picture or their role in that picture. Particularly if summer employment is viewed as a stepping stone to permanent employment, it is important to provide an overview of the work of a department and the government.

**APPENDIX A**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**STUDENT WORKING GROUP ON STUDENT & GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT**

**BACKGROUND**

Each year, hundreds of northern students attend post-secondary institutions to gain advanced education and training. At the same time, northern governments and businesses are struggling to find northern residents with the education and experience necessary to fill the many trades, technical and professional positions in both the public and private sectors.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly has made a commitment to the development and employment of northerners. As part of this commitment, Corporate Human Resource Services within the Department of the Executive is coordinating a review of GNWT programs directed towards assisting student and graduate employment. The purpose of the review will be to identify options and alternatives for improving the linkages between northern students and northern jobs.

One of the key stakeholder groups, which should have input into the review, is students currently attending post-secondary institutions. To facilitate this input, a student working group in student and graduate employment is being established.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Working Group is to provide a student perspective to the overall student and graduate employment review process and to make recommendations for options to improve GNWT student and graduate hiring.

This perspective would include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

- information needs of students/graduates regarding northern labour market needs or other areas

- student summer employment
- graduate student employment
- on-going linkages between northern employers and northern students attending post-secondary institutions
- need for co-op programs, mentorships, internships

The student perspective will be an integral part of the overall review.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

The Working Group will be chaired by Corporate Human Resource Services. Student representatives from each department and region will be invited to participate. A representative of the NWT Students Coalition will also be invited to participate.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Working Group will meet on a regular basis to discuss issues and propose ideas and options for consideration. The Group should address process, program and policy issues.

At its initial meeting, the Group will develop a workplan with specific tasks that the members intend to accomplish as part of the project. This workplan will identify any consultation, costs or other resources that may be required.

The Working Group may wish to develop sub-committees to address specific subject areas. The Student Summer Employment Program Coordinator will carry out in-depth research for the Group.

## **PRODUCT**

The Working Group will prepare a final report, outlining issues and options for revising and refining the GNWT's student and graduate employment practices.

TIMEFRAME

The final report of the Working Group will be due by August 25, 2000. In order to meet this deadline, the Working Group will be expected to meet bi-weekly



**APPENDIX B**

**STUDENT WORKING GROUP MEMBERS**

Roshan Begg	Legislative Assembly
Kim Duong	Education Culture & Employment
Tino Duong	Financial Management Board Secretariat
Steve Hagen	Corporate Human Resource Services
Maurice Helyar	Financial Management Board Secretariat
Jamie Koe	Executive
William McDuff	Resource, Wildlife & Economic Development
Kim Meidl	Financial Management Board Secretariat (Ft. Smith)
Steve Meszes	Justice
Patrick Olenick	Transportation
Anthony Ondrack	Finance
Dale Puskas	Public Works & Services
Sharon Rogers	Financial Management Board Secretariat (Inuvik)
Cindy Stewart	Financial Management Board Secretariat (Inuvik)
Charles Tolley	Financial Management Board Secretariat
Toni Thompson	Public Works & Services
Sara Turner	Financial Management Board Secretariat
Moira Vane	Justice
Steven Voytilla	Aboriginal Affairs
Amber Whitford	Health & Social Services

