

# Understanding the Pearson workforce:

Canada's first airport  
workforce survey



# Executive summary

Toronto Pearson International Airport (Pearson), operated by the Greater Toronto Airports Authority (GTAA), is Canada's largest airport and the most internationally connected airport in North America. In 2018, 49.5 million passengers flowed through Pearson and over the next 20 years, the airport is forecast to serve upwards of 85 million passengers annually.

Pearson is a complex, multi-employer, multi-union work environment. Nearly 50,000 people work at Pearson for 400-plus companies—public and private, large and small—with different employment relationships and governed by different legislative frameworks (Federal and Provincial). Employers include airport service providers, retail partners, airline and agency partners, to name a few, and all have a role in ensuring Pearson is a great place to work.

The GTAA undertook a workforce survey—the first survey of its kind at any airport in Canada—to provide a baseline to understand more about the airport's complex work environment, including who the workers are and how they get to their jobs. The information obtained from the survey will inform future work to identify gaps and support planning and programming to meet the airport's transit and workforce needs.

The survey was undertaken by Northstar Research Partners (Northstar) and developed in consultation with

the Toronto Airport Workers Council (TAWC), a collective of union representatives from across the airport that work together to address issues that impact airport workers.

The report was written with the support of the Peel-Halton Workforce Development Group and Northstar.

## Survey development

Phase one of the survey (qualitative) included the completion of 30 employer telephone interviews with Pearson employers and nine focus groups with a total of 61 Pearson employees. The results of these interviews informed the development of the survey questionnaire.

Phase two of the survey (quantitative) resulted in the collection of 3,582 survey responses from employees in a variety of positions, including above wing, below wing, security, flight crew, administration, retail, facilities, management and customs. Employer groups represented included airlines, airport service providers, the GTAA, agency partners, retail partners and others.

The survey sample size (n=3,582) is accurate to within a statistical tolerance of +/- 1.64 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. These results provide a high degree of confidence, indicating that survey findings are generally representative of the overall workforce population at Pearson.

## Primary findings

The primary findings have been summarized within the report across key themes that highlight the demographics and experiences of the Pearson workforce as they relate to workforce arrangements and commuting patterns.



50,000  
EMPLOYEES

400  
COMPANIES

NEARLY  
50 MILLION  
PASSENGERS

Nearly 50,000 people work at Pearson for over 400 companies, including the GTAA, airlines, airport service providers, retail partners and agencies. Together, we serve nearly 50 million passengers a year.



# STAYING POWER 9 YEARS



The workforce is committed. On average, employees stay for 9 years.

The primary findings and key themes have been summarized below.

## *The workforce at Pearson is diverse and dynamic.*

Situated at the heart of the second-largest employment zone in Canada, Pearson provides a stimulating and stable working environment for a diverse and dynamic workforce. Pearson's employees represent the diversity of the communities surrounding the airport, showcasing the region's roots in immigration and diverse cultural communities.

Similar to the populations of neighbouring cities, the Pearson workforce is generally divided equally along gender lines. The Pearson workforce diverges from the local population in that it tends to be better-educated. Moreover, the Pearson workforce is slightly younger than the overall working-age population.

## WE REFLECT CANADA'S DIVERSITY

46% of the workforce was born outside of Canada.

69% have parents born around the world.



## *Pearson provides a strong and stable work environment with opportunities for employee growth and development.*

In general, Pearson provides a stable work environment and a place to grow for employees. This is exemplified by generally good incomes, strong personal networks among employees, high levels of union membership (72 per cent), medium- to long-term employment tenures (average of nine years) and high levels of permanent (92 per cent) and full time (78 per cent) positions.

The majority of employees believe that Pearson provides not only a good job today, but also opportunity to grow and advance. This is especially true of younger employees who are early in their careers and see a path forward within the airport employment community.



## WHERE CAREERS ARE BUILT

92% of the workforce has permanent positions.

85% receive employee benefits.

78% are employed on a full-time basis.

72% are unionized.

Pearson provides not only a community within employer and work groups, but also between them in a common environment. Employees, across employers and across employer groups, share experiences as employees at Pearson. This provides the opportunity to build strong intra-employer relationships and networking opportunities that may not exist in other employment environments.

## *Overall, the workforce at Pearson is satisfied with their work arrangements and the airport work environment.*

The positive views of the work environment are also reflected strongly in employee satisfaction and attitudes toward working at the airport. In general, survey respondents have positive impressions of their work at Pearson and 80 per cent view the airport as a great place to work. This has translated into an employee base that would recommend working at Pearson to others.

Employees at Pearson report having strong personal connections and networks in the workplace. Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents indicate they have family or friends who either currently work at, or have previously worked at, Pearson. And those survey respondents who have personal connections to others at Pearson are significantly more likely to consider that the airport offers opportunities for career growth (85 per cent versus 75 per cent).

**Employees view Pearson as a workplace that provides opportunity for advancement and career growth.**

Eighty-one percent of respondents see Pearson as a workplace that provides opportunity for career growth and advancement. This is especially true for groups who may be new to the workforce, or who are looking to build experience in lower-skill roles.

This view is reflected also in the expressed desires of respondents for change in the next five years, with 73 per cent wishing to remain working at Pearson, whether this is for the same employer or in the same role varies by type of job and by employer.

Additionally, the results show a high percentage (80 per cent) of workers with higher levels of education which, together with the desire to continue a career at Pearson, points to an opportunity for identifying and supporting career path development.

**Some employee groups at Pearson are more likely than others to experience elements of employment precarity.**

Despite the general finding that Pearson provides good, stable, employment opportunities for thousands of

employees, this experience may not be shared equitably by all workers at Pearson. There are elements of employment precarity within the airport work environment, and these are unevenly distributed among employee groups.

Examining those who work part time or for minimum wage at Pearson, it appears as though they are generally a workforce that is new to the Canadian economy, either as young people just starting out or as immigrants looking to build a foundation in Canada. This is a positive aspect of these employee groups, as young people and new Canadians are often looking for an opportunity to grow and develop at work.

In terms of employment precarity, working part time and for minimum wage are often noted as key factors in determining if a job is precarious or not. The Pearson workforce survey included the measurement of these elements. Employees who fall into these categories are a minority at Pearson, so precarity is not a feature of the workforce overall. This being said, these groups are also not insignificant, and there is a significant overlap in those who work both part time and for minimum wage.

Although a full assessment of employment precarity was not included in the survey, the findings do point to three key considerations of importance:

- (i) Some employee groups are more likely to have elements of precarity in their employment arrangements than others. This includes women, immigrants and younger workers.
- (ii) These groups have different work experiences to others who may not experience elements of precarity in their work at the airport, including fewer weekly hours of work,



# WE HAVE POTENTIAL

80% of the workforce has a technical/trade school, college, university or post-graduate education.

The workforce is highly educated, with most respondents indicating that they completed vocation/technical/trade school, college, university or a post-graduate program.



being more likely to hold two jobs, having lower household incomes and being less likely to own their own homes.

iii) The overall work environment at Pearson appears to mitigate some of the impacts of these elements. In general, those who work part time and for minimum wage know their schedules in advance, that their incomes are consistent from week to week and that they have seen stable income in their current role.

As noted above, there is an opportunity to identify and support career path development, in this case to less precarious jobs. Moreover, there appears to be some mitigation of the possible impacts of these aspects of employment precarity on these employees at Pearson. In general, those who work part time and for minimum wage are highly satisfied with their work environment, with their employer and with their colleagues. They also believe strongly that the airport provides opportunity, and although they express a desire to move on from their current job, they want to stay at the airport in their next role.

*The majority of respondents commute by car to Pearson, even if they live close to the airport, and despite a daily average commute time of two hours, employees report being generally satisfied with their current commute.*

Commuting represents a key challenge for the workforce at Pearson. However, the airport and its employers seem to be managing. Commute times average about 60 minutes to and from work for survey respondents (two hours per day), but employees are generally satisfied with their commute to work, with transit users more likely to be satisfied than drivers. Understandably, though, distance

travelled has a negative impact on this level of satisfaction (i.e., the further the distance the lower the level of satisfaction).

The majority of survey respondents indicate that they travel to work by car, including those coming from communities that are generally close to the airport. The Pearson workforce appears to be more geographically dispersed when compared to the overall working population of Mississauga, indicating that Pearson is able to draw employees from multiple communities in the Greater Toronto Area.

A lack of regular and convenient access to public transit is the primary reason provided for using cars instead of public transit. Whether driving or taking transit to work, a common challenge that employees raise is one of choice; they do not feel that they have options when it comes to their commute. There are clear opportunities for improvement, especially in how access to, and use of, public transit may be supported.

## Moving forward together

This survey and this report could not have been completed without the contributions and support of the airport employees and employers, TAWC, Northstar and the Peel-Halton Workforce Development Group.

In the spirit of continued collaboration, we look forward to partnering with airport employers, employees and TAWC on initiatives to leverage opportunities for increased prosperity at Pearson.



## TOP 5 REASONS FOR NOT TAKING PUBLIC TRANSIT

- 68% Not easy to get to/from home
- 66% Schedule/hours of operation do not meet needs
- 65% Does not run frequently enough
- 61% Too many connections/transfers
- 56% Enjoy driving