



EDUCATION RESOURCES FOR NEWCOMERS TO SARNIA-LAMBTON AN ASSET AND GAP ANALYSIS

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Overview

This brief focuses on Lambton College's role in the community because of the impact this institution has had as an intermediary between immigrants, newcomers and the community at large.

Over the past several years, Lambton College has played an integral role in attracting immigrants to the Sarnia-Lambton region through its international student recruitment and programming initiatives. Other educational institutions also contribute to preparing newcomers for the workplace by offering English-language instruction and job-preparedness workshops. However, these institutions have not been as actively or extensively involved in recruiting international students to the region in the same way that Lambton College has. Collège Boréal offers some programs that lead to accreditations designed for international students, although these appear to combine virtual instruction and in-person attendance at the college's campus in Windsor (Collège Boréal 2025).

Lambton College has also long contributed to the resiliency of the local workforce by acting as an intermediary between local employers and job seekers by offering its students—both local and international—training and accreditation for in-demand roles within the region. In 2023, for example, the college responded to the growing demand for healthcare workers by launching its nursing school, which offers bachelor-level nursing degrees. Additionally, the college responded to local employers' needs in 2023 by introducing a fast-track program for early childhood education and increasing the number of seats in its Construction Boilermaker 428A trade program (Lambton College 2024). Most recently, in 2025, the college added the ability to hold exams for English-language proficiency accreditation under the International English Language Testing System (Lambton College 2025a). The test is one accepted by the Canadian federal government to satisfy its new post-graduate work permit requirement in language proficiency.

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Because of the college's unique dual intermediary role in the community, it is reasonable to assume that when the local job readiness educational network comes under criticism, these complaints mostly refer to the efforts of the local post-secondary educator. Both the business community and former students have raised concerns—directly and indirectly—about Lambton College's delivery of its services.

Employer Concerns

When responding to a 2025 Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board survey, the more than 300 respondents from the region's business community indicated that graduates in general—not just former international students—lacked "necessary skills." They attributed the lack to a "mismatch between education [and] workforce needs" (SLWDB 2025b, p. 12). Local employers have rated communication, management, driving, customer service, and interpersonal skills as top required skills (SLWDB 2025a, p. 17). Their top competency expectations are

- Work ethic;
- Self-motivation and the ability to work with little or no supervision;
- Dependability;
- Teamwork and interpersonal abilities;
- Willingness to learn; and
- Oral and written communication (SLWDB 2025b, p. 8).

Student Concerns

In turn, on social media, an international student who attended Lambton College praises the college for the support it provides in terms of resources and logistics, but warns that placements depend on the professor, suggesting that the competition for work experience opportunities begins in the classroom (yss_me 2021). Nearly two thirds of students consider moving to another city "as there are not enough field jobs here," the former student writes.

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Another poster, a former local student, provided secondary accounts that indicated there were high unemployment rates among international students who took specialized technical programs, as well as how the quality of their education or work experience has hindered their ability to compete for high-paying, highly skilled jobs ([deleted] 2021).

College Response

Expecting a single local college to deliver training that meets such divergent needs and expectations is a big ask, especially when opportunities arise in different niche and highly specialized occupations such as machine learning and agri-business management. Lambton College has responded to the challenge by partnering with other small, northern, and rural colleges in the province in early 2025 to launch the Ontario Regional Economic Workforce and Innovation Network (Lambton College 2025b). (Collège Boréal is also involved in the partnership.) The college has noted that the network will help its participants to expand STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and skilled trades training capacity. Another goal for the project is to expand the pool of specialized candidates for Sarnia-Lambton jobs by connecting local businesses to a larger pool of international students and others studying specialized areas elsewhere in the province.

To address student concerns about finding employment, the college has provided in- and out-of-region employment supports to international alumni through its International Graduate Services & Support Centre. The centre offers alumni seeking to settle in Canada immigration guidance and services, career coaching and job search supports, workshops and social events. These services are delivered through an advisor and digital supports (Lambton College 2025c). The college also supplies internship and work experiences through its network of research partnerships with other institutions and industry, including a number of on-site research centres (Lambton College 2025d).

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Locally, however, the college's specialized and niche programming for international students is dwindling. The decline is not connected to the decision to partner with other educational institutions but rather reflects changes to the conditions of eligibility for post-graduate study permits recently introduced by the federal government. Many of the programs the college offered did not fall under the new permit's eligible areas of study, and the situation reduced international student enrolment. In turn, the college suspended 18 programs for the 2025-26 school year. Most of these are two-year postgraduate programs designed for international students (Duale 2024; Morden 2025).

Services for Other Members of the Migrant Population

The capacity of Lambton College to provide specialized supports and educational streams to other members of the area's migrant population remains unclear. The college certainly offers programs that provide retraining or educational upgrades for immigrants who have relocated to the region from elsewhere in the province or country and instruction in new technologies to other temporary residents, such as migrant farm workers. These programs, however, target the population at large and may not consider the migrant population's unique needs, such as language and cultural supports as well as the need to adapt individuals' existing training and experience to meet Canadian standards and expectations.

Summary

A tendency to conflate the local job readiness educational network with the Sarnia-Lambton region's main post-secondary institution obscures the complexity of both the network itself and the challenges it faces. The increasing reliance on a single institution to deliver the bulk of recruiting, readying and facilitating the entry of immigrants into the local workforce may be the greatest hurdle that this sector faces.

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Identified Needs and Recommendations

Three organizations in the education sector were surveyed as part of the study: Lambton College and two French-language schools operating under the Conseil scolaire Viamonde. Two of the respondents indicated that there are specific activities that could be done to better support migrants in the region. In particular, the following needs and recommendations were identified:

- **Invest in Transportation Services:** All migrants would benefit from improved transportation within the county. This will require collaboration and investment from all levels of government, as well as employers who are looking to hire migrants who do not have a vehicle.
- **Increase Housing Options:** More investments in housing are required to meet the growing needs of migrant populations.
- **Develop and Support Access to Employment Opportunities:** Creating and promoting stable, well-compensated employment opportunities is essential to retaining migrants in the region.
- **Provide Immigration Support:** Temporary migrants should be aided in the process of renewing their immigration documents.
- **Support Migrant Children:** Tutoring and educational supports should be provided to migrant children, and other child-focused opportunities for engagement, such as cultural and sporting events, should be funded and staffed.
- **Expand Access to Francophone Settlement Services:** More Francophone settlement services, led by CCFS and with the help of institutional staff and social workers, should be offered.

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- **Support Community-Wide Education:** Anti-immigrant sentiment should be addressed through public education campaigns and outreach to reduce prejudice and dispel myths about migrants, including those that link temporary migrants to job “theft” and issues around infrastructure availability (e.g., healthcare and housing access).
- **Foster Community Involvement:** Migrants and other members of the community should be consulted to ensure that service and activity development and provision is informed by the needs and wants of the individuals most impacted by these services and activities.

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