

# Study: Overqualification, skills and job satisfaction, 2012

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In 2012, about one in eight workers aged 25 to 64 with a university degree were identified as overqualified for their job because they reported that their job required no more than a high school education.

Overqualified individuals with a university degree, however, were more likely to have lower levels of literacy and numeracy than other university graduates.

These results are from the new study "[Overqualification, skills and job satisfaction](#)," which focuses on the literacy and numeracy levels of overqualified university graduates (individuals with at least a bachelor degree).

The study is based on data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which assessed people's level of proficiency in skills related to literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments.

In this study, individuals with lower skills are those who have a score corresponding to a level 2 or below (out of 5 possible levels) in PIAAC tests. The results in this release are based on literacy scores, but similar results were found with numeracy scores.

## Overqualified university graduates have lower skill levels

In 2012, 12% of workers aged 25 to 64 who had a university degree reported that they were in a job requiring no more than a high school education (namely, they were overqualified). Another 19% said that their job required a college education, and 69% said that their job required a university education.

Among overqualified university graduates, 47% had lower levels of literacy. This compared with 18% of university graduates who reported that their job required a university education.

Lower levels of literacy indicate that individuals may be less able to integrate information across multiple sources, and may be only able to undertake tasks of limited complexity.

## The factors associated with overqualification vary by skill level

The factors associated with overqualification varied depending on the skill level of university graduates. Within the lower-skilled population, some factors were particularly more likely to be associated with overqualification.

For example, lower-skilled graduates who had a university degree in social science, business and law had a 24% probability of being overqualified, even after taking other factors into account.

Among those who had a degree in the same field, but who had higher literacy skills, the probability of overqualification fell to 7%.

As well, among individuals whose mother tongue was neither French nor English, those with lower literacy skills had a 25% probability of being overqualified. This compared with 10% among their higher-skilled counterparts.

## Overqualified workers use fewer skills in the workplace

Overqualified individuals use fewer skills in the workplace than their counterparts who are in jobs requiring higher levels of education.

For instance, in the PIAAC, respondents were asked to indicate whether they perform a number of information and communication activities (ICT) as part of their current job, such as working with a spreadsheet software or programming.



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On average, overqualified workers performed 25% of ICT activities listed in PIAAC on a weekly basis. This compared with 55% among those who reported that their job required a university education.

Overqualified workers were also less likely to perform other types of activities in the workplace, including activities involving numeracy, literacy and "generic" skills (such as instructing people, giving presentations, or persuading others).

### Overqualification is related to lower job satisfaction

Overqualified university graduates were also less likely to report that they were satisfied with their jobs, even after taking into account other factors associated with job satisfaction.

For example, overqualified individuals with a university degree had a 13% probability of reporting that they were not satisfied with their job.

Among university-educated workers who reported that their job required a university education, that probability fell to 3%.

#### Note to readers

*In this study, data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies are used to examine the skill level of university graduates who reported that they were working in jobs that require no more than a high school education (namely, individuals who were overqualified).*

*Because the focus of this study is on university graduates, individuals in the lower range of literacy and numeracy skills are defined as those who scored at level 2 or below (out of 5 levels) in tests administered to survey respondents.*

*Conversely, individuals whose score is level 3 or higher are deemed to have a higher skill level. Adults with a level 3 or higher have been shown to have a better mastery of skills related to literacy and numeracy, and generally have more positive social and educational outcomes.*

#### Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4406](#).

The article, "[Overqualification, skills and job satisfaction](#)," is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society (75-006-X)*, from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website, under *Publications*.

For more information, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)).

To enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, or for more information on *Insights on Canadian Society*, contact Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté (613-951-0803; [sebastien.larochelle-cote@canada.ca](mailto:sebastien.larochelle-cote@canada.ca)).