



**Department of Labour and Advanced
Education
Employment Nova Scotia**

Guide to Skills Up!

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1. What is Skills Up!

The Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market Agreement (LMA) aims to enhance the labour market participation of Nova Scotians, particularly groups currently under-represented in the workforce. The 'Skills Up!' pilot program for 2011-2012 is aimed at aiding African Nova Scotians obtain the training needed to gain sustainable employment.

The LMA is administered by Employment Nova Scotia (ENS), a division of the Skills and Learning Branch of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education (LAE).

The LMA skill development program 'Skills Up!' is to support individuals in need of financial assistance to take the training necessary for sustainable employment. This program is for persons who are ineligible for other skills development programs offered by the government, such as those offered through the LMDA's Employment Benefit and Support Measures, Educate to Work, the school boards or federal programs. Participants are accepted to the program using a selection process based on Provincial priorities, the clients' return to work action plans, and likelihood of success (the probability that upon training completion, the clients will promptly get work in the labour markets in which they will be seeking employment). Participants may be approved for training through public or private training providers that are registered through LAE.

2. Eligible Clients

The Skills Up! Program is available for individuals who;

- Are Canadian citizens or permanent residents legally entitled to work in Canada;
- Are currently a resident ¹of Nova Scotia;
- Are currently unemployed²; or; are employed and low skilled³
- Are not eligible for similar skills development programs offered through other provincial or federal departments including Employment Benefit and Support Measures, Educate to Work or federal programs;
- Have been assessed as having a barrier to employment, which is documented in their Return to Work Action Plan (RTWAP), that can be addressed by education and training;

¹ Current Resident is a person whose primary address is in Nova Scotia and they are living full time in the province at the time of application to the program.

² Definition of Unemployed: Individuals are considered 'unemployed' for ENS purposes if they work less than an average of 20 hours per week. For irregular hours, consider the person's hours over the past 6 months, or the time of total employment

³ Definition of Low-Skilled Employed: Includes employed individuals who do not have a high school diploma or a recognized certification or who have low levels of literacy and/or essential skills.

- Have not been in school for a period of 1 continuous calendar year previous to application
- Identify as an African Nova Scotian⁴

Skills Up! participants will be those who lack marketable skills and need new or additional occupational skills in order to improve their employment prospects, but are otherwise job-ready. An assessment of current skills is required to assess suitability of the client for this program. This is to be done with a case manager from an employment assistance service provider funded by the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. Completion of post-secondary training within the last 5 years is seen as an indicator that in all likelihood the client has marketable skills and should be able to find employment, exceptional circumstances should be noted in the RTWAP.

Skills Up! is for persons who experiencing one or more barriers to employment that can be addressed through training. These barriers need to be adequately documented in the client's RTWAP. Being unemployed, or member of a minority group, in and of itself, is not an adequate rationale for client approval.

3. Eligible Training

The types of training that can be supported through Skills Up! include:

- academic upgrading through NSSAL; followed by occupational specific training indicated by the client's RTWAP
- literacy/numeracy training through NSSAL; followed by occupational specific training indicated by the client's RTWAP
- occupational specific training leading to a certificate or diploma
- Other short term customized training programs as determined by LAE in response to changing labour market conditions.

Skills Up! agreements are not to exceed 36 months in duration. There is no minimum duration specified. Skills Up! can support full and part time training programs. To be considered a full time activity eligible for full support, a minimum of 15 hours of active participation in training in a week is required; determinations of full-time can be made by ENS on a case by case basis.

Part- time training may be considered, however the basic living allowance (BLA) will be pro-rated to the percentage of time actively participating in the training. Financial support for clients wishing to participate in part-time training may be assessed and determined by local Employment Nova Scotia officials on a case-by-case basis.

⁴ African Nova Scotian: African Nova Scotians include all individuals from first migrants to Nova Scotia (Matthew Da Costa circa 1604) to recent newcomers from the African Diaspora.

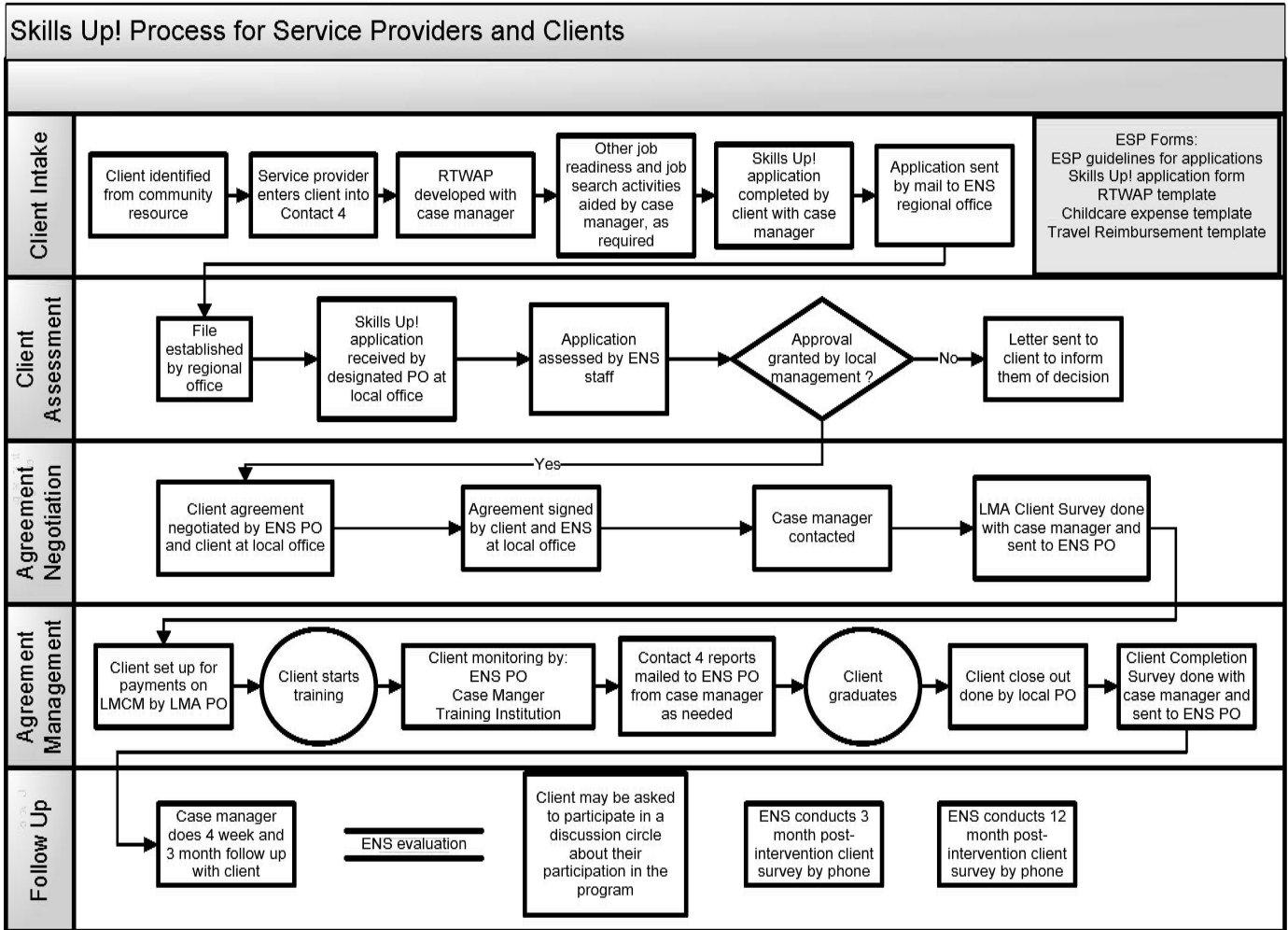
4. Financial Assistance

Individuals participating in Skills Up! may receive financial assistance to cover living expenses, tuition, other instructional costs (such as books), and other *incremental* costs of training such as dependent care, disability costs, transportation, accommodation, program materials (such as tools of the trade) and other (personal) supports. Levels of support will be determined by the FAI calculator, Skills Up! program policy and the assessment of the ENS program officer. It is important to note that the contribution for living expenses and dependent care should not exceed the estimated employment earnings following the end of the training.

Individuals are also expected to make a contribution to their training, as this has been shown to increase the probability of success of the student. The amount of the contribution will be determined according to the individual client needs using the FAI calculator.

The Department of Community Services or Post-Secondary Services for Persons with Disabilities may also contribute where applicable.

5. Process Flow for Service Providers and Clients



6. Client Case Management

6.1. What do we mean when we say case management?

Case management begins when the client and case manager develop a Return to Work Action Plan RTWAP. The case manager provides support and follow-up to the client while they are implementing the steps in the plan. While it is the decision of the case manager as to what tools and processes may best fit the client situation, in general case management proceeds through the following steps:

- Review the client action plan to ensure it is complete, well-documented, and does not contain inconsistencies or potential problems. Ensure that this plan outlines all the necessary steps for the client to reach their employment goal.
- Confirm the commitment of the client to the RTWAP and to any financial commitments required. Provide a detailed rationale of support for any interventions that might be made to access funding from Employment Nova Scotia.
- Assist the client to navigate the steps required to apply for any necessary interventions. Liaise with applicable agencies or service providers, regarding start and finish dates, costs, etc. This would also include verifying whether client has received funding approvals and if there is a requirement to identify other sources of funding.
- Follow-up on participant progress during and after an intervention and identify any corrective action or need to revisit the RTWAP, including verification that needs and goals have been met and no other employment needs require an adjustment to the RTWAP.
- Closure of action plan and recording outcomes. Conduct 12 week follow-up, after the end of the last intervention to determine if the client is employed or self sufficient in their job search.

While all client situations are unique and there is no template that can be used for intervention rationales, there are elements that should be included that will help toward speedy approval of your client's request. A case manager rationale should usually include the following:

- what prevents the client from obtaining sustainable employment with their current occupational skills;
- what process the client has gone through to explore employment options;
- how the intervention recommended will resolve the client employability needs.
- motivation of the client to pursue training diligently.

What is the definition of a Return to Work Action Plan (RTWAP)?

Depending on the individual's circumstances, the RTWAP can include actions that clients need to take to improve their potential of finding long-term employment. Through the needs assessment, the client and the case manager have identified a need or needs in one of four employability dimensions (job search, career decision-making, skill enhancement, and employment maintenance). The RTWAP includes: approaches to remove or minimize the employability barriers; an agreed upon strategy and a rationale that supports the intervention as appropriate to address the barrier; and a financial plan to meet any costs associated with the interventions.

It has been recommended, that if the institution the client is applying to allows them to apply for many programs at the same time, the case manager prepares applications for each of the occupational paths that the case manager supports.

6.2. Using Contact IV for Case Management of Skills Up! Clients

Since an LMA funding type does not exist in Contact IV, case managers can choose one of two options to document LMA clients. Please note that either way, Contact IV will not send LMA information to Employment Nova Scotia, in the same way the "upload" normally does for EI Part II client information. Reporting on LMA clients requires producing a report, from the Query function in Contact IV, and sending it either electronically or by hard copy to ENS. If you have multiple Skills Up clients and end up using Option #1 for some and Option #2 for other clients, remember that you will need to run a Query for each method in order to fully report on your Skills Up! activity.

Option #1- Non-Service Canada Client:

Case managers can set up an LMA client as a "Non-Service Canada" type client in Contact IV. In Contact IV language, this means that the client record does not have the "Service Canada" checkbox selected on the Client Information screen, nor is there any Agreement Number or RC recorded. As you may know, you can then customize the intervention funding source list and the intervention title list to anything you want for "Non-Service Canada" clients.

Note: this option is not recommended if you (the case manager) have any EI Part II interventions recorded (or to be recorded) in the client's action plan. This is because ENS would need the upload of any EI Part II interventions, but by default, "Non-Service Canada" records in Contact IV don't upload at all.

Steps to customize the Funding Source and the Intervention Title drop down lists in Contact IV to create LMA Skills Up! options on Contact IV:

1. Log in as Administrator (username = contact , password= admin)
2. Go to the 'Customize Lists' tab which is the furthest on the right before 'exit'
3. From the drop down 'List Type' menu choose 'Non-Service Canada Type'
4. Press 'new' button from the bottom of the window
5. Enter 'LMA' in the English description box, you can use EMT for French, or whatever makes sense at your organization
6. Press 'save'
7. From the drop down 'List Type' menu choose 'Intervention List'
8. Press 'new' button from the bottom of the window
9. Enter 'Skills Up!' in the description boxes
10. Press 'save'

You can now document a Skills Up! intervention in the Non-Service Canada client action plan.

Reporting:

To report on LMA activity, bring up the Query screen from the Reports menu. In the first row of drop down fields, you can either search for Type of Funding=LMA, or you can search for Intervention Title= Skills Up!. When you "Run" the query, either method should bring the same search results. Print off the client list and forward to your designated ENS project officer.

Option #2- Service Canada Client:

If you already have an open client Case File set up as a "Service Canada" client, or if you're setting up a new Case File but anticipate that there will also be some EI Part II activity (including basic EAS type interventions), then you can add the LMA Skills Up! intervention to the client action plan with the following choices:

- Employability Dimension = Skill Enhancement
- Funding Source = Unfunded
- Intervention Title = (choose one of the six available EAS-type intervention titles. Perhaps "Information and Self Management" might be the best fit. It's inexact, but it doesn't have any significant impact on your reporting to ENS)

Important:

Make sure to record 'SKILLUP' as the intervention "File Number". You can then use this to distinguish this client and this intervention as a Skills Up! participant in your reports. You can perform a Query on this to search for "File Number (Interventions) = SKILLUP". When you send in the report, the ENS program officer can ignore the intervention title and look for the 'File Number'.

6.3. Case managing IA clients

Potential LMA clients who are also clients of the Department of Community Services likely will have already had an assessment from the employment services section (ESS) and a completed NSEA (Nova Scotia Employability Assessment) and action plan. The NSEA and action plan has much in common with the RTWAP, and these documents can be the basis of the RTWAP developed with the case manager, saving the client and the case manager from much repetition. Clients will be recorded into Contact IV in the same manner as other LMA clients and be case managed in the usual manner of your organization. Consultation with their DCS case worker may be appropriate depending on the interventions being recommended, to coordinate our efforts.

6.4. Case Managing Employed Clients

EAS agreements stipulate that their services are for unemployed clients only, and as the LMA programs are available to 'employed- low skilled' clients as well, special arrangements will need to be made for the case management of clients who fit this category who are being referred to Skills Up!.

Clients should be recorded in Contact 4 as 'Non-Service Canada' clients (option 1). Contact 4 reports on employed clients should be sent to ENS when the client's action plan is complete. Case management of employed clients served by LMA through Skills Up! will be accounted for at ENS using a cost-sharing arrangement between LMA and LMDA.

It is not the intention of the LMA to provide EAS services to all employed clients. The initial assessment of the client by the case manager should be sufficient to determine whether this client will be recommended LMA Skills Up! as an intervention and therefore able to continue in the case management process.

7. Applications

The Skills Up! application form is designed to be as close as possible to the Skills Development application, and should be dealt with in a similar manner.

The Skills Up! application requires the case manager to recommend/not recommend the client's request. The recommendation/non-recommendation should address the following elements:

- Determination that the client does not have marketable occupational skills and that skills training is required for the client to obtain employment;
- If applicable, what medical barriers have led to the client's need for training (e.g., when a client has marketable skills but due to medical reasons can no longer work in that occupation);
- Any comments on career decision-making processes the client participated in (e.g., client research, assessment and/or testing; employment counseling);
- Case manager's description of what labour market information was consulted to support the likelihood that the client can obtain employment in the occupational/training goal;
- Clear identification of the occupational goal, not just identification of the training course;
- In the case of academic upgrading, the upgrading must be in support of an occupational goal, for example, to meet entrance requirements for further skills training, or to meet the standard education level required by employers in a specific occupation.

8. Follow Up

Case managers are required to follow up with the clients every 3 months during the duration of the agreement as per usual. It is particularly important that we know right away if a client is no longer attending their course, as ENS has no means of collecting overpayment from clients in our interim payment system (LMCM). If it is a multi-year program, clients are required to re-apply each year, and case managers should be available to assist them in this process.

LMA Client Survey

Case managers are responsible for administering the LMA client registration survey at the start of the intervention (to be submitted to ENS head office no more than 4 weeks after the start of the client's program) and the LMA client completion survey at the termination of the agreement (to be submitted to ENS head office no more than 4 weeks after the client has completed their program, or has quit the program).

Copies of the surveys and the submission instructions can be found on the LMA website www.gov.ns.ca/employmentnovascotia/lma-information . Please return surveys by mail or courier to your ENS Program Officer who will record their receipt and forward them to:

Manager of Accountability
Employment Nova Scotia
Duke Tower 8th Floor
5251 Duke Street,
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 1P3

9. More information

Please contact Employment Nova Scotia at 877-223-0888.

10. Checklist for Applications to Skills Up!

The following documents must be attached to support the client's request for financial assistance. Please ensure that each item described below is included as part of this application.

- Completed Skills Up! Application form
- Return to Work Action Plan Summary that identifies any employment barriers and the appropriateness of training as the intervention to address this barrier
- A copy of the letter of acceptance to the training institute and program requested outlining the required information
 - The start and end date of training
 - The course name
 - The breakdown of costs
 - The tuition payment schedule
 - The number of hours of training per week
 - The scheduled breaks in training, if applicable.
- Documentation supporting your request for additional costs, if applicable. For example:
 - Childcare expense template
 - Travel Reimbursement template

Students re-applying for their 2nd or 3rd year will require:

- Completed Skills Up! Application form
- Statement from the training institute showing grades and attendance from the previous session
- A copy of the letter of acceptance to the training institute and program requested outlining the required information
 - The start and end date of training
 - The course name
 - The breakdown of costs
 - The tuition payment schedule
 - The number of hours of training per week
 - The scheduled breaks in training, if applicable.
 - Documentation supporting your request for additional costs, if applicable.

11. Comparison Chart of LMDA Skills Development and LMA Skills Up!

Category	LMDA Skills Development	LMA Skills Up!
Delivery Model	Regional delivery of program and finances	Regional delivery of program , financial management at head office
Target Groups	EI Eligible clients	Non EI Eligible unemployed or low skilled employed African Nova Scotians
Academic Upgrading	ALP levels 3 and 4 followed by skills training only	ALP levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 followed by skills training
Priority as Funder	EI is the 'first funder' for individuals.	Is 'funder of last resort' for individuals. Must not be eligible for other programs before applying. Ex/ SD, Educate to Work, Opportunities Fund, Aboriginal programs
IA clients	Must come off IA and go through ENS processes	Must come off IA and go through ENS processes. Use NSEA as basis for RTWAP.
Reasonable job search	3 month job search required LMI research template required	Job search not required LMI research template not required.
Labour Force Attachment	Must be in labour force for 3 years before applying.	No labour force attachment required, Must be out of school for at least a year.
Time commitment/ Duration	Full time (as defined by training institute) only 36 month max agreements	Can be full time (minimum of 15 hrs/week instruction); Or Part time (benefits pro-rated to % of full time) 36 month max agreements
Part Time Support	No BLA for clients taking less than 10 hours of training a week	BLA pro-rated by % of full time
Eligible Costs		In addition to LMDA covered costs include: - tools of the trade up to \$1000 - Mandatory medical and dental insurance plans
Disability Supports	Can pay all costs as first funder	Clients should apply with the post-secondary disability supports division at the Department of LAE for support. Interpretation costs are capped at \$ 5, 000
Privacy	Separate Access to information 'consent to disclose' form required. LMDA Access checks done.	Access to information 'consent to disclose' information included on application form. Cannot do LMDA Access checks.
Taxes	Income tax deducted at source.	Income tax not deducted. Clients must set aside a portion of their payments to pay taxes due.
Tuition	Tuition payments sent directly to the training institute	Tuition payments sent to client. A receipt for tuition is to be remitted to ENS PO as proof of payment.

Appendix A – Questions and Answers on Skills Up!

1. Why African Nova Scotians?

A- African Nova Scotians are one of the groups which are underrepresented in the work force that the LMA is specifically designed to help. Our labour market information shows that African Nova Scotians have poor labour market outcomes compared to the Nova Scotian average, and the least amount of employment programs targeted to them.

While progress has taken place over the past decade, given that the unemployment rate fell from 17.7% in 1996 to 9.0 percent in 2006⁵, higher than average unemployment and limited opportunities for sustainable employment are still issues for this population. Many African Nova Scotians work in part time, seasonal or term positions, or are not represented in the province's workforce.

'African Nova Scotian males have a 10 per cent lower participation rate in the labour force. 58.4 per cent of ANS males work, compared to 68 per cent of males in general. African Nova Scotian males and females have higher unemployment rates than the general population'

Despite these labour market outcomes, African Nova Scotians do not have a targeted program aimed at increasing their training to lead to employment, as do many other groups who are under-represented in the workforce. This lack has been an identified gap in Nova Scotia labour market programming that we are hoping to help alleviate with this program.

Programs providing training that are available to other groups under-represented in the workforce include: Opportunities Fund For persons with disabilities, ASETS fund for Aboriginals, Educate to Work for Income Assistance recipients, Youth Employment Strategy (YES) for youth and, Lifelong Learning Plan (LLP) for older workers.

2. Why the Changes in Labour Force Attachment and Recent Job Search?

A- The clients we are trying to reach with this program are different from those the LMDA Skills Development program is meant to serve. Skills Development is meant for people who have had enough labour force attachment to qualify for EI to retrain and continue to contribute to the labour force. LMA clients do not have the labour force attachment to qualify for EI. Often they have not been successful in the school-to-labour force transition phase and need interventions at this stage to be able to help with that initial transition. They also may have been removed from the

⁵ Visible Minority Population: a statistical profile – NS. Service Canada, 2008

labour market for an extended period of time for personal reasons, such as child rearing. Skills Up! is hoping to reach individuals that may have become discouraged to entering or re-entering the workforce. The program therefore requires only a span of one year since leaving school, and no recent job search is required.

However, barriers to employment continue to be requirement for eligibility and will need to be noted in the RTWAP for the client to be considered.

3. Why can students take part-time training in this program?

A- The Labour Market Agreement serves employed clients as well as unemployed clients. In order to be flexible and include clients who would like to upgrade their skills, but need to maintain their current employment, we are increasing the flexibility of the training allowed. The government's jobsHere strategy emphasizes increasing productivity in our current workforce by promoting continuous learning initiatives like Skills Up!.

4. Are persons receiving income assistance from the Department of Community Services eligible for this program?

A- Yes they are eligible, however DCS does provide similar programs to IA clients that should be accessed first. Clients should check with their ESS caseworker as to whether the 'Educate to Work' or 'Career Seek' or 'Link' programs are suited to this client. If a client cannot participate in 'Educate to Work' because the program they would like to take is not an NSCC core course, then they would be appropriately referred to Skills Up! for their training.

Clients would no longer be eligible to receive income assistance for the duration of their Skills Up! agreements. The client should discuss with their IA/ESS case worker before they begin a Skills Up! intervention whether they will be able to retain pharmacare coverage during their training, and if they would be eligible to receive IA during breaks in training (they would need to re-apply on these occasions).

5. How does a client know if they are EI eligible, therefore not eligible to apply for Skills Up!?

A- In general, anyone currently receiving EI; or has received EI in the past 3 years; or has received maternity benefits in the past 5 years, is eligible for EI part II employment benefits (EBSMs), including Skills Development. These persons are not eligible for Skills Up! . A person who has quit their job may be considered 'disentitled' to receive EI benefits, but are still considered eligible for EBSMs, therefore not eligible for this program. Specific questions about EI part II eligibility should be directed to Service Canada.

6. Can short term courses be covered under this program?
- A- There is no minimum course length given. If the course is recommended in the client's RTWAP, and is not a safety course, the client can be eligible for support while taking the course. To be considered, the course must be one that is certified by the Department of Labour and Advanced Education.
7. Can a client take Adult Learning Program (ALP) levels 1 and 2 under Skills Up!?
- A- Training under this program must be employment related and be recorded under the client's RTWAP. Levels 1 & 2 ALP may be supported if they are part of an employment plan which includes a skills training component, and the employment goal in the plan can be reached in the 36 months of the agreement. An example may be upgrading from a level 2 to a level 3, then taking a trucking course. As these ALP programs are normally offered for free on a part-time basis in the community, the support offered for attending these programs may be minimal. The client and case manager must consider carefully the implications surrounding this choice.
8. Can clients take out of province training?
- A- No. Training should occur in Nova Scotia, unless the required training is not available in the province.
9. Will employment service providers be paid additional funds for case managing Skills Up! clients?
- A- No. ENS will take into account the total number of clients being case managed by the service provider when negotiating EAS agreements, as is currently the case. The cost sharing between LMA and LMDA agreements for employed clients who will be recommended for Skills Up!, will be done by ENS.
10. If a person is working, can they still be supported to take part time training - for example evening classes?
- A- If the client is employed and has been assessed as 'low-skilled', for example they do not have a high school diploma or recognized credential or have low essential skills, they are eligible for this program. Part time options are available, so they can work part-time and train part-time. If their in-class hours are less than 15 hours/week, then their allowances under Skills Up! will be pro-rated to the percentage of time they are actively in training.
11. If a person has been out of school for at least a year but has never participated in the labour market, are they considered eligible for support under this program?
- A- Yes they are eligible. If they are under the age of 19, they may not be able to attend ALP programs as they continue to be eligible for services offered by the Department of Education, and should access these firstly. This

program is not intended for school leavers who plan to take post-secondary training already, it is for those who may not have considered this path as a means to achieve sustainable employment.

12. Q- Could a person who has participated in a previous LMA intervention be eligible for Skills Up! ?
 - A- Yes they are eligible. Continued training at a post-secondary institute would be an appropriate continuation of LMA programs in many cases. The client's RTWAP should identify the long range goals of the client, and how they plan to achieve these in the course of the series of interventions.

13. Are client payments under this program taxable?
 - A- Yes, Skills Up! contributions are considered taxable income and clients need to save an appropriate portion of their payments to be able to pay income taxes. This will be re-stated to the client in the acceptance letter to the program. Case managers should plan on discussing strategies to save for income tax with the client when they apply so they can have a plan in place for when the client negotiates support with their ENS program officer.

Appendix B- Occupations with Good Prospects

The following list is for your information. Occupational choices under Skills Up! are not restricted to this list. Reviewing careers with good LMI might be a starting place for discussion with clients who do not already have a career goal.

This list was made based on information from the Labour Market Information Section of the Department of Labour and Advanced Education. Refer to <http://brightcareerfutures.ca> and <http://novascotiacaereroptions.ca> for up to date labour market information.

- Tourism Related Customer Service, Info and Rel Clerks
- User Support Technicians
- Nurse Aides & Orderlies
- Assisting Occupations in Health Services (e.g., optometrist assistant, physiotherapy assistant, pharmacy assistant)
- Registered Nursing Assistants
- Dental Technicians & Lab Workers
- Community & Social Service Workers
- Early Childhood Educators & Assistants
- Program Leaders in Recreation
- Cooks and Chefs
- Security Guards
- Police Officers
- Building Superintendents
- Cement Finishers
- Motor Vehicle Mechanics
- Mechanics – automotive, heavy equipment, and refrigeration and air conditioning
- Tradespersons: carpenters, bricklayers, electricians, and plumbers
- Steamfitters, pipefitters, welders, and other metal workers
- Sheet Metal Workers
- Structural Metal and Platework Fabricators and Fitters
- Aircraft Technicians and Inspectors
- Aircraft Assemblers And Aircraft Assembly Inspectors
- Truck Drivers