



Making Apprenticeship A National Skills Priority

August 2018

Welder
Service Technician
Plumber
Construction Craftsman
Electrician
Cook
Painter and Plasterer
Millwright
Boilermaker
Bricklayer
Class B Glazier
Hairstylist
Industrial Electrician
Heavy Equipment Operator
Tractor Operator

Recommendations

Support parity of esteem for all post-secondary pathways

- Ensure programs do not value one post-secondary pathway above others
- Recognize the Red Seal endorsement (RSE) as a professional credential equal to degrees and diplomas

Consider the unique nature of apprenticeship training in work-integrated learning commitments

- Integrate employer-learner connection platforms across Canada
- Invest \$5 million annually in apprenticeship research
- Work with public sector unions to hire apprentices across federal operations and implement contracts protecting employment to the point of certification

Implement common-sense solutions to the challenge of returning to apprenticeship technical training

- Promote available federal supports that help apprentices return to technical training
- Make Employment Insurance apprentice-friendly

Scale up innovative programs for Indigenous learners in the skilled trades

- Provide sustainable funding to scale up apprenticeship programs that respond to the unique needs of Indigenous communities

Ensure the value proposition of trades certification is clear to young apprentices

- Make data on educational outcomes publicly available and free

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum - Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage (CAF-FCA) is a national, non-profit organization working with stakeholders in all regions of Canada. We influence pan-Canadian apprenticeship strategies through research, discussion and collaboration – sharing insights across trades, across sectors and across the country – to promote apprenticeship as an effective model for training and education.

Through our work, CAF-FCA has shed light on a number of key issues affecting apprenticeship, such as the barriers to accessing and completing apprenticeship and the business case for apprenticeship training.

Background

Apprenticeship is a post-secondary pathway that relies on employer engagement. Rather than *work-integrated* learning, apprenticeship is *work-based* learning. Simply, someone cannot be an apprentice without an employer willing to hire and train them. At a time of intense interest in experiential learning, investments in infrastructure and federal control of national pipeline interests, apprenticeship must be front-and-centre on the skills agenda.

In Canada, apprenticeship focuses primarily on skilled trades occupations, teaching people the skills and competencies needed to perform hands-on tasks to industry standards. The training typically combines alternating periods of on-the-job (80 to 85%) and technical training (15 to 20%). Technical training occurs at a college, union training centre, private trainer or online. Most apprenticeship programs are four years long and lead to trade certification. Once an apprentice has completed the required hours and technical training for their trade, they write a Certificate of Qualification exam. Those who achieve a passing grade of at least 70% become certified journeypersons.

Apprenticeship is regulated by the provinces and territories, creating 13 unique systems geared to the labour market needs and conditions of their region. Advantages to this form of training include the ability to earn a wage while learning and the development of practical, hands-on skills. Apprentices benefit from the guidance of a certified tradesperson.

But, there are intense challenges as well. Apprenticeship is much more complex and nuanced than other post-secondary options. It is subject to gaps in employment, delays returning to technical training and regional differences. Apprentices are employees, subject to market and economic forces from which many full-time students are insulated. They also tend to be older upon registration than their counterparts at college and university, speaking to a demographic

more likely to have financial and family obligations. While the factors that contribute to positive outcomes are integrated and interdependent, so are the barriers to apprenticeship completion.

CAF-FCA believes there are a number of opportunities to improve every apprentice's chances of achieving certification – an outcome associated with consistent employment, smoother labour market transitions, higher wages and enhanced job satisfaction.

Opportunities to Enhance Apprenticeship Training

Within the current government's mandate, attention on apprenticeship training has focused on under-represented and vulnerable groups. While the skilled trades community has embraced efforts toward achieving greater diversity and inclusion, the majority of apprentices are young white men, many of whom also face challenges to entry, employment, progression and completion. Policies and programs must seek to ensure apprentice success regardless of gender or race if all Canadians are to have equal stake in and access to Canada's prosperity.

To ensure Canada has the skilled trades workforce it requires to drive innovation and competitiveness, CAF-FCA presents a "to-do" list where the federal government can have an impact. These recommendations support the ongoing efforts of each jurisdiction to promote and encourage greater engagement in apprenticeship training as a way to meet regional labour market needs.

Support parity of esteem for all post-secondary pathways.

Canada has a "university-first" culture to the detriment of its economic requirements. Canada needs tradespeople who can build, repair and maintain its infrastructure and systems. Tradespeople solve practical problems and innovate in incremental ways that make our homes and workplaces safer, stronger and more productive.

The federal government could assist in promoting parity of esteem for all post-secondary pathways by ensuring its skills programs and initiatives do not inadvertently value one above others. Wage subsidy programs must encourage public and private sector organizations of all sizes to participate in workplace training to the degree and in the field appropriate to their business interests. Programs under the Youth Employment Strategy must include substantive funding to promote skilled trades career options. Employers, including the federal government, should be encouraged to recognize the Red Seal endorsement (RSE) as a professional credential equal to other professional degrees and diplomas. Even census language about the "highest level of education achieved" serves to undervalue apprenticeship credentials. Efforts in these areas do not require new federal dollars, but send a strong message that skilled trades careers are valued.

Consider the unique nature of apprenticeship training in work-integrated learning commitments.

Canadian policy treats apprentices as employees rather than learners, making them vulnerable to economic conditions even while they are “in learning.” The most fundamental way to assist apprentice learners is to provide the best possible connection to first and subsequent employment opportunities. The harmonization of apprenticeship training across Canada has improved prospects for apprentice mobility, though making connections with prospective employers continues to be challenging.

The Business-Higher Education Roundtable’s pre-budget submission speaks to a platform to connect youth with employers. Platforms like ApprenticeSearch.com and Work BC are already making such connections. Opportunities to integrate regional platforms and/or scale them to connect learners and employers in a broader work-integrated learning context should be considered.

The vast majority of apprenticeship training is done by Canada’s small- and medium-sized companies yet, according to CAF-FCA research, only 19 per cent of skilled trades employers participate in apprenticeship training. One of the most effective ways to engage SMEs in apprenticeship is to illustrate the business case. According to CAF-FCA research into 21 trades occupations, employers see an average return of \$1.47 for every dollar invested in apprenticeship training. This statistic is widely used by the Canadian apprenticeship community and is a point of reference for international stakeholders, including former U.S. President Barack Obama. CAF-FCA has been without the resources to update its employer-focused apprenticeship research since 2010. To ensure there is good evidence that employers benefit from their investments in training, the federal government should invest \$5 million per year in apprenticeship research.

The Government of Canada is itself an employer of skilled tradespeople for fleet and building maintenance, transportation and repair services. However, public sector engagement in apprenticeship training is minimal. CAF-FCA urges the federal government to work with public sector unions to promote the hiring and training of Red Seal apprentices across its own operations. To show further leadership, the federal government could protect apprentice employment from Day 1 to certification. If the federal government is going to ask SMEs to make investments in experiential learning, it must set an example.

Implement common-sense solutions to the challenge of returning to apprenticeship technical training.

According to CAF-FCA research, the average apprentice foregoes \$8,000 in wages and overtime pay to attend technical training. Employment insurance pays an average of \$3,600. For those pursuing Red Seal trades, much of that gap can be covered by the Canada Apprentice Loan. However, few apprentices are aware of the available support because the program is not promoted. Funds to promote existing financial supports for apprentices would be well spent.

When apprentices return to technical training, many apply for Employment Insurance. However, they report a number of challenges accessing the EI system. In some cases, apprentices receive their first cheque as they return to work, causing financial hardship while in training. The separation from employment also presents a psychological barrier to training, preventing some apprentices from returning to school, impeding progression and completion. CAF-FCA urges the government to consider revising the EI system to make it apprentice-friendly. One avenue would be to allow employers to continue paying apprentice wages while they are in school, then claim costs from employment insurance premiums. This stands to have a net zero cost to government, while retaining the apprentice-employer connection. It may serve to provide opportunities for apprentices to work evenings and weekends and/or encourage employers to top-up apprentice wages while in training. Given that apprentices continue to identify financial barriers to technical training, this is a common-sense solution for both employers and their apprentices.

Scale-up innovative programs for Indigenous learners in the skilled trades.

Apprenticeship training engages approximately 6 per cent of the Indigenous population. However, many Indigenous apprentices struggle to find sufficient hours of work and must relocate from their communities for technical training, presenting barriers to certification.

Innovative programs are underway. In Nuxalk Nation in Bella Coola, BC, a carpentry program was developed in collaboration with the Industry Training Authority and Camosun College. Nuxalk Construction employs locals to build energy-efficient homes and community buildings, low-income housing and tourist facilities. In Manitoba, YouthBuild (a U.S. initiative for marginalized youth) is being adapted for Indigenous youth. With support from community partners and funding from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, youth are learning construction skills by building affordable housing and other community assets. Programs address the housing crisis and employment shortages among Indigenous peoples.

Two innovative technical training initiatives have been developed by Yukon College and Red Deer College as part of the Flexibility and Innovation in Apprenticeship Technical Training

program. In collaboration with Indigenous communities, the colleges offered remote access to technical training, allowing Indigenous apprentices to stay close to home while progressing in their trades.

These programs are practical examples of solutions to complex challenges. They support skills development, offer sustainable employment and lead to trades certification. They empower Indigenous peoples to contribute to the well-being of their communities. Programs like these require years of work to develop and sustain. However, with appropriate funding, they stand to support self-sufficient Indigenous communities led by highly skilled people.

Ensure the value proposition of trades certification is clear to young apprentices.

Completion rates are a key indicator of the ability of apprenticeship systems to support apprentices through every stage of their learning. This includes preparation for success in pre-apprenticeship programs, appropriate levels of essential and technical skills, persistent employment, ability and motivation to return to technical training, and high-quality workplace training. When any one factor is absent, apprentices are at risk of non-completion.

To encourage apprentices and their employers to recognize the value proposition of progression, completion and certification for both the individual and industry, more insight into outcomes is required. Research emerging from Statistics Canada's Education and Labour Market Longitudinal Linkage Platform must be open and free. Research organizations like CAF-FCA must have data and appropriate resources to analyze and report outcomes-related data, putting outcomes into context for their stakeholders. Unless data is shared with the public and, in this case, the apprenticeship community, investments in data linkages are inefficient.