



# North Superior

Workforce Planning Board

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May 20, 2021

Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs  
Amarjot Sandhu, MPP, Chair / Julia Douglas, Clerk  
Room 1405, Whitney Block  
Queen's Park, Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

Dear Chair Sandhu and Committee Members:

**BILL 288, AN ACT TO ENACT THE BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SKILLED TRADES ACT, 2021**

The Thunder Bay District Apprenticeship Focus Group is a collaborative committee that brings together industry and education stakeholders to address concerns and propose solutions to apprenticeship issues across the region. Since inception in 2014, the Apprenticeship Focus Group has participated in a variety of Government consultations, providing recommendations that address the needs of Northern Ontario in the support of skilled trades advancement in our workforce.

We are pleased to express our support for Bill 288 and the actions proposed to: promote the skilled trades as a rewarding career path, simplify the skilled trades pathway and certification systems, and encourage apprenticeship participation. The legislation provides a solid framework for the future.

Individuals working in the trades in Northern communities face many different challenges than those in Southern Ontario:

- Apprentices are faced with limited options for schooling and exam writing. They are often required to travel long distances to attend training facilities, being away from family for weeks or months at a time.
- As apprentices become certified tradespeople, they often work in smaller companies and are required to be more rounded in all aspects of the trade. Small

companies in Northern communities offer a mix of trade services and are less likely to specialize.

- Many small businesses struggle with workload demands when sending their apprentices to trade school sessions due to the shortage of staffing.
- Work contracts are located across a wide geographic distance, requiring employers to coordinate travel and accommodations for employees and resulting in tradespersons and apprentices being away from family for long periods of time to complete the contract.

Members of the Apprenticeship Focus Group look forward to participating in the Phase 2 consultations, where we will ensure that Northern Ontario perspectives are brought forward to inform implementation plans for Skilled Trades Ontario.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Midge Richardson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

cc Michael Gravelle, Thunder Bay-Superior North MPP  
Judith Monteith-Farrell, Thunder Bay-Atikokan MPP  
Charla Robinson, President, Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce  
Harold Lindstrom, Manager, Thunder Bay Construction Association

## **Northern Ontario Apprenticeship Model**

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### **Principles and Introduction**

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**Northern Ontario, with its vast geography and scattered population base faces unique challenges to building the skilled workforce it needs through apprenticeships and trades training.**

**Northern Ontario is not well served by an Ontario apprenticeship model that takes a one-size fits-all approach.**

**In the proposed Northern Ontario Apprenticeship Model**

- **Access to apprenticeship is simplified**
- **Apprentices are younger**
- **Employment and training services are the backbone on which apprenticeship succeeds**
- **The public is served by trade practices based on standards, certifications, and quality**

**Apprenticeship is “mainstream” and no longer a “best-kept secret.”**

A single, Ontario-focused apprenticeship policy supports a one-size-fits-all apprenticeship model. Ontario is increasingly defined by the GTA with its large population base and proximity to other communities in southern Ontario. Indeed, the 401 highway corridor supports employers, educators, and an economy in which apprentices have many opportunities to participate.

Northern Ontario employers, large and small, will have difficulty taking advantage of economic development opportunities (i.e., mining and resource sector developments) without easy access to skilled workers. The northern workforce faces the prospect of losing out to skilled workers coming from other provinces or countries. Employment services, literacy and essential skills upgrading, secondary and postsecondary education, and apprenticeship training should prepare our northern population to take advantage of the employment opportunities that will emerge.

Northern Ontario is experiencing a shortage of tradespeople as large numbers of older, more experienced workers retire, but fewer, younger, and often less skilled workers are available to replace them. The average age of apprentices in northern Ontario (27) suggests that young people do not see apprenticeship as a direct next step from high school. This Northern Ontario Apprenticeship Model will prepare this region’s young people for work and promote the trades as legitimate and sought-after careers.

Ontario's Employment Ontario network supports apprenticeship by connecting people who desire work with employers who desire workers. Employment services, in particular, are the first point of contact for "one-stop" service.

Quality and standards are the catalysts that drive changes to the trades; the Ministry creates the support and structure for that change to happen.

Apprenticeship remains a "best-kept secret." Educators need to recognize the value of the trades; employers need to have certified tradespersons do work; and the public needs to recognize the value of hiring a certified tradesperson. Policy, legislation, and investment should support a practical and credible apprenticeship model for northern Ontario.

The Apprenticeship "brand" remains mired in the image of "blue-collar," low-skilled work, the default "second choice" of students not academically inclined to university studies. Many trades are highly technical, providing lucrative incomes, satisfying careers, and rich opportunities for advancement. The major influencers of student decisions are university-trained secondary school counsellors and parents. Programs such as Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) are helping to break down the stigma, more still needs to be done. Without the advocacy of these major influencers, saying that trades are legitimate and credible first choices, secondary school students will continue to be encouraged to choose otherwise. This Northern Ontario Apprenticeship Model recognizes this challenge and works to overcome it.

The following recommendations will work towards demystifying and streamlining the process of becoming a registered apprentice in Northern Ontario.

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## Recommendations

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### Recommendations to provincial bodies (Ministry of Labour, Training & Skills Development – MLTSD, and Ministry of Education - MEd)

1. Ensure clear pathways from secondary school to postsecondary apprenticeship training by:
  - a. Expanding pre-apprenticeship programming;
  - b. Developing stronger alignment between the OYAP programs and pre-apprenticeship programs; and,
  - c. Continue to Incorporate soft skills training into co-op programming;
  - d. Suggest consideration of apprenticeship training to be a step on the pathway to further post-secondary education – either for teachers certification or other professional training (i.e. engineering)
    - Recognize journeyperson accreditation as credit towards further education/training
    - There is a teaching aspect to being a journeyperson. There is an expectation to teach the trade through apprenticeship, so that experience should be recognized.
2. Ensure Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) is applied where applicable.
3. Expand funding streams to support increased participation in English as a second language, cultural awareness, literacy, essential skills training, and pre-apprenticeship programming.

Access to literacy and essential skills training to prepare workers for pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, or qualifying exams need to be provided with great flexibility through a site-specific and place-based training model.

4. Support learners in the most appropriate and available means in northern Ontario communities (small, rural and/or remote) based on present infrastructure (i.e. on-site delivery, distance technology, broadband, and e-learning).

**5. Expand funding, tax incentives, and policies that support employers and apprentice training in northern Ontario.**

Access to timely and locally available in-school training is a huge barrier. Too often, apprentices need to travel out of town and out of region to attend trade school. This is expensive (temporary loss of employment, travel, costs of living away) and disruptive to the apprentice and to the apprentice's employer and family. If an apprentice is required to travel to larger centres in Ontario, policies must support both the apprentice and the employer therefore provide funding and tax incentives to both employer and apprentices to offset the additional financial burden necessitated by inter-provincial travel, accommodation and temporary loss of employment and loss of labour during training period.

**6. Ensure traditionally underrepresented groups including women, Indigenous people or people of color have access to specific supports to ensure access to funding, training and support while pursuing a career in the skilled trades.**

**7. Ensure a sufficient supply of qualified secondary school trades teachers by:**

- a. Establishing a relationship between the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) that promotes the certification of secondary school trades teachers in northern Ontario;**
- b. Re-examining current requirements for trades teachers; and**
- c. Prioritizing relevant trades experience to fast-track experienced journeypersons into secondary school teaching positions.**
- d. Ensure comprehensive promotion to employers to increase awareness of programs' availability and eligibility.**

In northern Ontario it can be difficult to find qualified trades teachers. Discussions need to take place between MLTSD, OCT, and MEd to ensure that:

- Certified journeypersons that are also trades teachers continue to be placed to teach the compulsory trades to protect the integrity of the trades as well as protect the health and safety of students and teachers
- If certified technology teachers cannot be found, Skilled Trades Ontario and OCT can make recommendations on what skill sets would be required
- Everyone works together to educate the public and promote how to become a secondary school trades teacher. As the shortage of qualified trades people increases, so does the number of qualified secondary school teachers. This is an issue that needs

to be addressed before secondary school trades programs become non-existent or lose their integrity within trades professions.

- 8. MLTSD, pre- and post-Employment Services Transformation, to continue to increase funding to support increased participation in employment services, recognizing that clients and/or service providers may need to travel to access or provide these supports due to large geographical distances between service delivery sites/satellite locations.**
- 9. MEd should introduce and enhance awareness of the trades within the elementary school curriculum.**

## Recommendations to Ministry of Labour, Training & Skills Development (MLTSD) and Skilled Trades Ontario

1. Establish northern Ontario pilot project(s) to set apprenticeship ratios, where necessary, allowing for small- and medium-sized employers, in particular, to request exceptions based on the trade being considered and on a site-specific basis, to promote employer engagement in small, rural, and remote communities.

### *Employer Case Study*

*"I own & operate a small residential construction company in a small northern Ontario community. I employ 6 year around full-time staff. Myself & one of my staff are ticketed Red Seal Journeyperson's. In an effort to further develop the remainder of my staff's skills & knowledge. I have begun enrolling staff members into the apprenticeship program.*

*Since starting to enrol staff into the apprenticeship program, I have discovered the unrealistic ratio's for Journeyperson's to apprentice in the carpentry trade. For my first apprentice it's a 1 to 1 ratio. In order to have a second apprentice, I must employ an additional 3 Journeypersons; this is completely unrealistic.*

*There is no reason that the Carpentry trade could not be a 1 to 1 ratio or even 1 to 2 (1 Journeyperson, 2 Apprentices). Every daily task we complete on a project done so in pairs as a minimum. 90% of all task's completed on any construction site (commercial or residential) are undertaken with a team of 3 workers. 1 Journeyperson, 2 skilled labours / apprentices or future apprentices.*

*Under current ratios, my company can only produce 2 Journeyperson's in the next eight years. This is a large contributing factor our current & future short fall of qualified Trades Person's in the work force.*

*Alternatively, with a 1 to 1 ratio change or each apprentice my company could produce 6 Journeyperson's in the next eight years. Or with a 1 to 2 ratio change or each apprentice, my company could produce 16 Journeyperson's in the next eight years.*

*The current ratios are greatly discouraging to me as employer, and to my staff trying to future develop their skills to become a Journeyperson."*

Geographic isolation creates hardships for apprentices in the current model. We need to improve employer engagement in hiring and training apprentices. We know there's a long-term return on investment. Employers in rural and remote communities tend to be small and medium-sized. They have difficulty providing apprentices with enough long-term work, full scope of trade practice, or qualified journey persons to meet ratio requirements. As a result, apprenticeships often take too long to complete. And, in taking too long, "life just gets in the way" and apprentices walk away.

**2. Support the ongoing review of the rationales for and processes by which trades are deemed compulsory or voluntary.**

Entry into a trade must mean something. A trade is a profession and should be handled like any other profession. Each trade has a scope of practice, and for an individual to call him- or herself a journeyperson in that trade, they must prove their competence in that trade. Verification of proof of competency is in the form of a Certificate of Qualification.

This proof of competency also must mean something. Presently, it only means something for 22 trades of the 144 trades in Ontario because the compulsory trades are the only trades that demand a Certificate of Qualification to perform the work. The remaining trades have no reason to become qualified even though their designation as a Journeyperson is an indication to their employer as to their qualifications for employment. This is not unlike many other educations, however, is significantly different than training in a profession.

A very hard look should be given to which trades are compulsory and those that are not, the scope of the work in the trade and the value of making regulations and licensing both local and provincial that governs who can perform a trade's scope of practice. This should promote the idea that being a tradesperson is a worthy profession. The scope of practice in any trade should not stifle the affected industries or the economy.

**3. Skilled Trades Ontario maintain a registry of prescribed trades classified as compulsory and voluntary in regulation.**

To assist in workforce development and planning, it is necessary to have reliable data of registration regarding trades classified as voluntary as well as compulsory in regulation. This will provide valuable evidence and insight into the current demographics of practicing journeypersons and apprentices in the province.

**4. Skilled Trades Ontario provide public access to data collected through the registration of prescribed trades classified as compulsory and voluntary in regulation.**

Public access of this data would facilitate knowledge and understanding of the workforce in all prescribed trades and allow for local planning and coordination of efforts to ensure sufficient numbers of journeypersons and apprentices to sustain and grow the economy.

MLTSD utilize its existing network of 26 local boards in the province to assist local stakeholders and decision-makers in the coordination and planning of workforce development in the skilled trades.

**5. Establish a relationship between MLTSD and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) that promotes the certification of secondary school trades teachers in northern Ontario.**

In northern Ontario it can be difficult to find qualified trades teachers. Discussions need to take place between OCT and Skilled Trades Ontario to ensure that:

- Qualified trades teachers continue to teach the compulsory trades to protect the integrity of the trades
- Qualified trades teachers continue to teach the compulsory trades to protect the health and safety of the students and teachers
- If qualified trades teachers cannot be found, Skilled Trades Ontario and OCT can make recommendations on what skill sets/ expectations can be taught.
- Everyone works together to educate and promote how to become a secondary school trades teacher. As the shortage of qualified trades people increases so does the number of qualified secondary school teachers. This is an issue that needs to be addressed before secondary trades programs become non-existent or lose their integrity.

## **Recommendations for a local/holistic approach**

- 1. Educate the major influencers – parents, educators, and guidance specialists – through promotion of the trades as professional careers**
- 2. Ensure that professional development of educators and guidance specialists includes orientation to trades and occupational opportunities in the trades**

A recommendation for best practice in this regard would be to establish ongoing labour market orientation sessions between the local school boards and the schools' guidance specialists to provide them an overview of occupational demands and trends identified in the labour market.

- 3. The Apprenticeship Focus Group will continue to work collaboratively to address apprenticeship issues and support economic growth and will work closely with regional MLTSD personnel located in northwestern Ontario offices.**
- 4. Improve awareness and recognition of employment services as a “hub.” This is required among schools, employers, community groups, and other service providers to link the system together to increase apprenticeship opportunities in communities.**

Employment Ontario employment service provider hubs (Service System Managers and contracted service providers) continue to offer Ontarians a one-stop source of information, services, and programs. Employment services is the “hub” to assist individuals with clear pathways to education, employment, and training, including apprenticeships. Services are tailored to the needs of the individual, employer, and community. Service providers delivering employment services provide seamless services, aligning service delivery with agencies and other community partners to coordinate work at the community level. Employment services can continue to educate and work with local employers in northern Ontario communities to expand the role of Employment Ontario employment services to increase apprenticeship opportunities by matching job seekers and employers, increasing apprenticeship registrations, and supporting the retention and completion rates of apprentices.

- 5. Increase awareness of the financial incentives available to eligible employers for hiring and training apprentices through Employment Ontario employment services.**

**6. Northern Ontario communities must establish local mechanisms to create employer consortiums to place apprentices among non-unionized, small- and medium-sized employers in particular.**

The practice of establishing employer consortiums is well-established in Europe and Australia. Local chambers of commerce and governments provide the administrative structure for “shopping” apprentices out to small and medium-sized employers. The consortium model is also established in Ontario. The Hamilton Skilled Trades Apprenticeship Consortium is an excellent example. Another is the Joint Apprenticeship Training Trusts (JATT) in which construction sector unions place apprentices with employer partners.

MLTSD must recognize that their rules and regulations negatively affect Small-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) in Ontario’s smaller, rural or remote communities. It is important to note that the economic landscape in northern Ontario is significantly different from that of the more densely populated southern Ontario communities; therefore, unique and local solutions are required.

**7. Review the allocation of apprenticeship training seats. Make recommendations to MLTSD for increasing training capacity, including through flexible training schedules that make it easier for northern Ontario apprentices to access training and for employers to release apprentices for training.**

Training delivery agents provide the in-school portion of apprenticeship training. Essentially there are only two types of providers: community colleges and labour-sponsored organizations. In-school training is based on seat allocations. In-school apprenticeship training operates as a business – seat purchases and allocation must be carefully planned in advance and utilized fully. If enrolment isn’t realized for planned apprenticeship sections and start-ups, classes simply don’t run.

Completing an apprenticeship requires careful coordination of employer-based training with in-class training. Ideally, apprentices go to school, then to work, and back to school, and so on. In practice, the cycle is disruptive to both the employer and apprentice. For example, an apprentice may be asked to go to school during the employer’s busiest time of the year;. On the other hand, an apprentice may be finished in-school training but be unable to re-employ with the employer because of lack of work. In northern Ontario, where work can be quite sporadic and employers are unable to commit to regular work schedules for apprentices, timely and convenient access to in-school training can be a challenge. This is a significant impacting the construction industry, in particular.