



Skills Ontario Presentation to the Standing committee On Finance & Economic Affairs

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Presented by:
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On behalf of Skills Ontario, I'm pleased to provide the following submission regarding the Ontario budget.

First, I would like to acknowledge and thank the Government of Ontario for demonstrating exceptional leadership throughout the Covid 19 period and for the steadfast support that has been shown for Skills Ontario during what has been a very challenging period

With the strong support from Minister McNaughton, the Ministry, educators, labour and industry partners, we have been able to pivot quickly to virtual/remote activities that continue to advance our mandate of inspiring and enabling the next generation of skilled trades & tech leaders. We have been able to offer our programing remotely, and offer some new initiatives, including our Skills-At-Home series, our podcast and Paper Glider Plane competition. The registration and survey data support the fact that we can continue to have a significant impact in a remote/virtual context. Our virtual Summer Camps program allowed us to double our registration numbers from the previous years and 96% of survey respondents said they were more likely to consider a career in skilled trades and technologies -- another strong affirmation that we are on the right path.

We were very pleased that the government has included Skills Ontario in the budget as part of the Skills Strategy. The Ontario government has recognized the importance of skilled trades and we fully support the initiatives that will assist us in getting the message out to youth, parents, employers and others. We have an enormous opportunity to work together to have more success in realizing our common goals and objectives.

The pandemic has also truly underscored the value of skilled trades and technology careers. Ontario's skilled professionals have been critical in keeping our economy, our health care system, and our society running as smoothly as possible under these extraordinary circumstances. I believe that many now view these career paths far differently and positively than they did only a few months ago. Many of these skilled jobs are essential to the functioning of the economy and to the H&S system!

Notwithstanding the progress we are making, the skills challenge remains one of the most significant economic challenges of our time. In total, skills gaps in Ontario cost an estimated \$24.3 billion in foregone GDP. Meanwhile, Ontario is currently facing a shortage of 190,000 skilled workers, which is projected to rise to 560,000 by 2030 (Conference Board of Canada). Thirty nine percent of Ontario employers experienced difficulty filling a job opening over the last 12-18 months because they could not find someone with the right qualifications. In some sectors like manufacturing, the shortages are even greater. In a recent survey by Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME), 69% of respondents said they were experiencing immediate skills shortages. This concern is only expected to intensify with demographic realities. Our workforce and population are ageing and without further action, there will be more skilled workers leaving the workforce than entering it.

Meanwhile Covid 19 is expected to further exacerbate the skills challenges with delays in training and certification coupled with growth in demand from key areas such as construction, health and safety, manufacturing automation, advanced IT, etc.

Better connecting skilled people with the needs of business is a social and economic imperative. Over the past 30 years, Skills Ontario has grown into the most impactful organization encouraging youth to consider a career in the skilled trades and technologies. Engagement with students, teachers, parents, volunteers, business, labour, employers, and mentors ensure our programs connect education,

experience, and employment. Skills Ontario has changed millions of minds (92% improved perception across 365,000+ youth annually) about the quality of career offerings in skilled trades and technologies.

We are very pleased that the government has re-committed to funding support through the 2021 Skills Ontario Competition (now virtual & remote). We are seeking the support of the government for a multi-year commitment for Skills Ontario that will enable us to sustain and scale up our efforts to encourage more youth pursue careers in the skilled trades and technologies. With the current pandemic and beyond, there is an even greater need and role for Skills Ontario in providing more hands-on experiential learning, career exploration and engagement with employers.

With the wind-down of the Ontario College of Trades (OCOT), Skills Ontario is well placed to assume an expanded and enhanced role to ensure the momentum of promoting skilled trades continues to build. We continue to increase our impact on improving youth employment prospects and addressing the skilled trades shortages. While the pivot to virtual offerings, with students unable to participate in person, we have been able to find a way to connect to a broader youth community and demonstrate results.

With additional resources we know we can only reach more students and achieve even greater results for individuals and the economy.

Notwithstanding our success, there is a lot more that needs to be done, and a lot more that Skills Ontario will do. We have increased our efforts to better engage other crucial audiences, particularly parents and the business community. Skills Ontario held its first Business Summit earlier this year, to better inform, include and engage businesses in developing a broader awareness and skills solutions.

Skills Ontario engages a vast network of key stakeholders in the apprenticeship system including businesses, educational institutions (Primary, Secondary, and Colleges), unions, students, apprentices and tradespeople (alumni). We will continue to play a role in bringing these groups together to provide input and support to the government's system improvements and help improve outcomes across the skills ecosystem. A key area of opportunity that we are working on is the improved inclusion and engagement of employers/businesses in the process. We will be highlighting success and sharing best practices and helping them overcome barriers that have prevented them from being more involved in developing solutions and being proactive.

Skills Ontario is seeking the support of this Committee for the following key recommendations for the budget:

1. Scale up Skills Ontario's successful programming further.
2. Increase commitment to engaging under-represented groups in skilled trades, like Young Women, Indigenous students, persons with disabilities and new Ontarians.
3. Sustained and increased funding for enabling and promoting skilled trades and technology careers to youth and influencers (eg. Parents). With the wind-down of OCOT, Skills Ontario is well positioned to take on enhanced role related to enabling and promoting of Skilled Trades & Technology Careers.

Thank you to the Standing Committee on Finance & Economic Affairs for consideration of these recommendations.

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