

## Skills for Jobs Task Force

Submission of the Alberta Construction Association    May 15, 2020

### Core Concepts of Alberta's apprenticeship education model

- Apprentice contracted to an employer
- Majority of learning on the job under a trained journeyperson
- Technical training by a post-secondary institution integrated with on the job learning and application of skills learned at school
- Public funding of apprenticeship training delivered by post-secondary institution, no public funding of a union or non-union affiliated training centre (keep training separate from possible labour-relations issues)
- Industry led through Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, Provincial and Local Advisory Committees
- Strong employer support through tuition reimbursement programs and scholarships

**Is an Apprentice Viewed as Equivalent to a Post-Secondary Education? No**

#### Why Not?

Lack of familiarity and generally poor perceptions of educators, parents, and youth that trades are inferior to “white collar” occupations and that trades are pursued by people not capable of success in other post-secondary pathways (eg. some educators refer to post-secondary and the trades, rather than post-secondary including the trades).

### Strengths and Weaknesses of Alberta's Apprenticeship Education Model

- **With the way apprentices learn their trade in Alberta today**

#### Advantages / Strengths

- Industry leadership critical to ensure relevancy to labour market
- Offers fast-track to employment and learning
- Peer learning and networking amongst apprentices

#### Disadvantages / Weaknesses

- Make-up of AIT Board and Advisory Committees not always representative of industry (ie. Industrial vs commercial, union vs non-union)
- Members of AIT Board and Advisory Committees sometimes removed from current in the field experience
- No requirement for journeypeople to keep skills current, yet are providing approximately 80% of the apprentice's training on-the-job. On the job mentoring not mandated or monitored

- Time required to update the curriculum can significantly lag the speed of changes in technology, materials and methods (eg. green construction). The time lag is increased by having to negotiate with other jurisdictions to harmonize programs across Canada
- Workforce demand varies with changing market conditions and hence apprentice employment can be interrupted
- Not every trade school offers all trades, necessitating student relocation and additional accommodation expense. Employers may also be reluctant to release apprentices to a larger community with potentially more employment opportunities
- The current record keeping of logging so many hours for a task does not necessarily measure actual learned competencies and can hold back an eager apprentice who is competent with fewer hours
- The compressed time frame and multiple opportunities to retest the classroom materials may foster memorization rather than learning
- Balance with family responsibilities as many apprentices already have children

#### **-advantages / disadvantages of block release format**

##### Advantages

- Apprentices and employers can attempt to schedule block release when work demands are less
- Rapid application and integration of classroom and on the job learning speeds tradesperson development

##### Disadvantages

- Apprentices may be uncertain their employer has work for them upon return from block release
- Apprentices may suffer a loss of income during block release
- Employers may have to juggle manpower requirements if many apprentices are absent at the same time
- Employee can opt to go back to back classroom training which disrupts the employer's work flow
- Employer has no input on readiness of apprentice to take next level of classroom training

#### **What are some of the things that hold apprentices back from making progress and completing their program?**

- Potential interruption in employment
- Potential loss of full wage during periods of technical training. Receipt of Employment Insurance payments during technical training is delayed – a Provincial bridging program would help
- Not every employer can provide the complete on the job training, necessitating the apprentice to job search
- Potential mismatch of apprentice skills and requirements of existing employer

## **Opportunities to Improve How Apprentices Learn Their Trade**

- Sustainable and predictable capital budgets provide greater certainty of sustainable careers and facilitate employer and apprentice planning
- Significantly increase dual-credit classroom training in the K-12 education system, coupled with priority RAP placements for these students
- Augment in-person classroom training with digital delivery
- Reduce the number of opportunities to pass a module
- Promote a Green Hard Hat and training book for first year apprentices so that other workers recognize the need for extra support for the apprentice
- Partner and assist employer associations in actively marketing and redeploying apprentices to improve skill development and apprentice completion

## **What Level of Education and Training is Required for New Hires?**

To encourage the trades as careers of choice, ACA Public Policy “strongly urges employers to support young people who are currently enrolled in the K-Grade 12 school system to complete their high school prior to considering a career in construction...With the exception of students that are engaged in RAP or other work experience programs, employers are encouraged to limit student’s hours of employment during the school year”

The increasing digitization of construction, enhanced building performance, and associated technologies suggests apprentice education and skill requirements will continue to increase.

Specific program prerequisites and entrance exams should be considered as many apprentices have been out of K-12 for a number of years and may need refresher academic support, while other programs do not. Multiple eligibility pathways should be encouraged. Consider a pre-apprenticeship training certificate as a prerequisite with WCB premiums covered by the WCB rather than the individual employer.

## **Are employers willing or unwilling to take new employees with little to no knowledge, qualifications or relevant work experience? What makes them willing / unwilling?**

Stringent safety and quality assurance requirements, along with a competitive bidding environment that fosters the necessity to continually improve productivity, creates challenges for employers to take on unskilled new employees. Unskilled employees who impact employer safety performance do not just impact the current project, but potentially jeopardize all future bids. This reluctance is exacerbated given that competitors can avoid these challenges and “poach” the new hire once they have skills, or even that the natural progression of the early year apprentice may be to a different employer to round out their skills.

A second constraint on an employer is their complement of competent journeypeople and the nature of the projects to match the potential new hire.

These constraints illustrate the flaws in social procurement/ community employment mandates in public procurement. Hiring unskilled labour comes at a significant cost to the project and the employer.

Cost-shared programs that mitigate some of the risk may incent some employers to assume a greater share of early year apprentices.

ACA would be interested in developing a partnership of AIT and employer associations to encourage the full development of the apprentice shared across a number of projects and employers, thereby reducing the risk and burden on any one employer.

**Are employers in your industry willing (or unwilling) to have younger apprentices on the job, such as high school students in RAP?**

Along with safety concerns, additional challenges may include integrating classroom scheduling and work scheduling, and the fact that fewer young people have obtained their driver's license or may be uninsurable. An option for a 3 month on the job block of time would incent more employers to take on RAP students

ACA urges that obtaining a driver's licence be an accredited high school course available in Alberta high schools.

Reinstate a 3 month probationary period before the apprentice is indentured.

**Is it important that new hires in your industry already have soft skills (ie. Communication, problem-solving, ability to work on a team)?**

All of these skills are essential prerequisites to safe and productive on the job learning. High school credit courses jointly developed and delivered with employers could be a means to address this need.

**Mentorship**

**What is the role or value of mentorship in supporting a quality learning experience for apprentices on-the-job?**

The apprenticeship model rests on the quality of mentorship provided to the apprentice. Not every quality journey person is a skilled educator and mentor. Highly skilled mentors may also be among the most productive employees and the employer then faces a trade-off between current productivity and development of the apprentice.

**Is this an area where additional supports for employers or certified journeypersons in a mentorship role would be helpful? Yes**

**What kind of supports?**

Training in mentorship (BuildForce Canada developed a mentorship program). Perhaps incentives for recently retired journeypeople to augment employer capacity.

Mentorship training should be added to the final period of technical training and be available as continuing education for journeypersons.

Financial support for employers that follow through with mentorship program.

### **Perceptions of Skilled Trades Professions**

#### **Do Albertans hold positive perceptions of the skilled trades?**

The lack of stable careers due to varying economic conditions may do more harm than the perception of skilled trades.

#### **What opportunities are there to improve perceptions of skilled trades as viable career options for Albertans?**

Rename the on the job training as a practicum

#### **How does having compulsory certification trades benefit employers? Employees? Albertans?**

#### **In what ways (if any) does regulating compulsory trades create barriers or challenges for employers or industries?**

Certification of specific skills critical to maintaining public safety rather than compulsory certification additional trades may strike the appropriate balance between assurance of competency and minimizing barriers in management rights and labour mobility.

### **Final Thoughts**

The K-12 education system accountability pillars need to change to hard targets for career outcomes: dual credit programming, work placements, etc. The K-12 system needs additional resources to meet this new mandate.

Wage scale should rise to maintain a distinct step up from legislated minimum wage.