

2.1 Modernizing the apprenticeship system

HIGHLIGHTS:

- Skills Canada estimates that 40% of new jobs created in the next decade will be in the skilled trades, with only 26% of young Ontarians considering a career in the trades.
- The OCC is calling on the newly elected government to modernize the apprenticeship program to keep up with the growing demand for skilled trades and ease labour shortages.
- Modernizing should include creating a digital process for apprenticeship applications, and revising the journeyman-to-apprentice ratio.

Skills Canada estimates that 40 percent of new jobs created in the next decade will be in the skilled trades, but only 26 per cent of young people aged 13 to 24 are considering a career in this field.¹ This problem is worsened by the fact that those young people who do choose a career in the trades face significant barriers to entry, particularly in finding an apprenticeship position. As the 2016 Annual Report of the Auditor General revealed, less than half of the individuals who begin an apprenticeship program in Ontario complete it.² While the average completion rate for apprentices in Ontario (from 2011/12 to 2015/16) was approximately 47 percent, completion rates for voluntary trades were significantly lower than for compulsory trades (35 percent vs 59 percent).³

One of the factors influencing this low completion rate is that the current platforms utilized throughout the apprenticeship application and training processes are onerous, outdated and fragmented. There is an opportunity to enhance support for apprentices by leveraging the Ontario College Application Service to provide both candidates and employers with an electronic, single-entry access to the apprenticeship application and registration process.

In addition, it is critical that the government revise the current journeyman-to-apprentice ratio. Despite the recent decision to revise several ratios to start at 1:1, there needs to be greater flexibility within the Ontario apprenticeship framework similar to other jurisdictions across Canada. In Nova Scotia, employers can apply for a ratio increase for the number of apprentices per journeyman on a per-project basis. The implementation of a similar process in Ontario could alleviate some of the challenges that employers experience with respect to recruiting sufficient journeymen to hire additional apprentices.

Expanding and modernizing Ontario's skilled trades apprenticeship system would ensure the continued transformation of our economy and would enable businesses to remain competitive by attracting and developing talent. Modernizing the apprenticeship system would also help address regional disparities across the province, wherein rural communities and small urban centers struggle to attract and retain skilled talent.

1 Dawson Strategic. *Modernizing Ontario's Skilled Trades Apprenticeship and Training System: Building New Opportunities through Governance and Regulatory Reform*. 2015. <http://dawsonstrat.com/files/2015/05/Skilled-Trades-Report-2015.pdf> P. 5.

2 Office of the Ontario Auditor General. *2016 Annual Report, Chapter 3: Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, Section 3.04: Employment Ontario*. http://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/arreports/en16/v1_304en16.pdf P. 2.

3 Ontario Chamber of Commerce. *Talent in Transition: Addressing the Skills Mismatch in Ontario*. 2017. <http://www.occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/Talent-in-Transition.pdf> P. 26.