

Effective Promotion and Recruitment of Construction Apprentices

A Submission to Ontario's Apprenticeship Youth Advisors
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Council of Ontario Construction Associations

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Introduction

The Council of Ontario Construction Associations (COCA) is a federation of 29 construction associations that represents 10,000 general contractors and trade contractors that operate in all regions of the province in the industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) segment of the construction industry. Our membership includes construction enterprises of all sizes, and that are both unionized and non-union. COCA is the largest, most diverse and most representative voice for the non-residential construction sector in Ontario.

The mandate with which the Apprenticeship Youth Advisors have been charged, namely to attract more youth, including under-represented groups, to skilled trades careers, is an extremely important one. Promoting skilled trades careers, addressing the stigma associated with skilled trades careers, removing the barriers to entry and streamlining and modernizing the pathways into the trades, these are all essential undertakings. However, it is short-sighted to focus only on intake. It must be understood that appealing to more youth to consider the skilled trades as a first choice career option is only one step in a multi step process needed to achieve the ultimate goal of equilibrium in the labour market for skilled trades people.

There should be a pre-screening process to ensure that only those with the appropriate interests, aptitudes skills and possibility of success are accepted into apprenticeships. More incentives are required to motivate contractors to become engaged in training construction apprentices as employer-sponsors. Apprentices, employer-sponsors and training delivery agencies must be regularly monitored, evaluated and supported. Richer incentives are required to motivate apprentices to complete their apprenticeships and become certified.

The greatest emphasis should be placed on the trades where shortages exist and are emerging based on the most reliable labour market information available. An immigration strategy will be required to fill immediate needs for journeypersons. Programs should be put in place to accelerate the development of mentors. Journeypersons must be provided with opportunities to learn and advance in their careers. While promotion and recruitment are crucial, these intake activities are barely the first step in a long road map towards labour market equilibrium.

Responses to Youth Advisor Questions

How can we encourage/support more youth to enter/entering the skilled trades? What best practices do you use or have seen, what would you implement?

The Youth Advisors should develop, in consultation with stakeholders, a sound, multi-pronged, long range strategic plan whose primary goal is to increase the number of new apprentices in order to eventually fill labour market demand for journeypersons.

The plan must have a long horizon because immediate and short-term results will not be possible. Apprenticeships typically take three to five years to complete and certification rates for some trades are very low so we must be in it for the long haul.

The plan must also be a dynamic living roadmap that is subject to constant evaluation and improvement. Metrics must be established to measure the progress being made against the plan's objectives. The plan must appreciate the differences in demand for each trade and in this regard, the Advisors are no doubt aware of the annual BuildForce Canada labour market studies which reflect these variances. The ultimate goal is a construction trades labour market that is in equilibrium, where the supply of labour for each trade meets demand.

The plan should have at least the following components:

1. A high-level awareness campaign to elevate the understanding of the true nature of construction work as it is today, the rewards of construction work, the kinds of comfortable lifestyles that careers in the construction trades can support and the pride construction workers feel in creating something of tangible and lasting significance in their communities.

The awareness campaign must address multiple target audiences including elementary students, high school students, college and university students and graduates, educators at all levels and parents. While all of these target audiences are important, the importance of reaching parents cannot be understated. Parents play a highly influential role in the career choices made by and for their children.

Awareness messages must be tailored for each of these audiences and reflect the needs of regional labour markets.

Some of the messages in the awareness campaign should include:

- The high level of earnings that are available in many construction trades. Young people are greatly influenced by their potential earnings in the construction trades. Learning about the earnings potential in construction trades can be a game changer for young people when they make their career decisions. As an example, electricians can make more than professional engineers
- Construction trades careers offer economic security and make home ownership and a comfortable lifestyle possible
- Trades careers are not "dead end jobs", they are careers for life
- The opportunities for growth, learning and advancement are unlimited. A successful apprentice will become a journeyman and if ambitious can advance to become a foreman,

a supervisor, a project manager, an estimator and construction company owner. We have an example in our COCA federation of an individual who started his career as an apprentice, became a journeyman, practiced his trade for a number of years before returning to school to become a lawyer and today is a construction trade association executive. The sky is the limit for an apprentice

- There are 37 apprenticeable construction trades to choose from, beyond the most well-known carpenter, electrician and plumber trades. Each trade requires differing aptitudes, abilities and interests. There are lots to choose from for all interests and abilities
- Construction workers take justifiable pride in seeing the product of their own work
- For young people with more progressive values and an interest in protecting the environment, there is a place for them in green building
- For young people interested in innovation and technology, the construction industry is currently undergoing transformational change with better methods and materials including the use of Building Information Management (BIM), drones, automated guided vehicles, automated brick laying machines, data driven management systems with apps and the use of artificial intelligence
- Construction today is a modern industry that embraces contemporary management practices. It's not the neanderthal industry it once may have been
- The vast majority of contractors are highly reputable and have the best interests of their workers at heart
- Tremendous strides have been made in health and safety in the construction industry. It is no longer the dangerous industry it once was, and the safety record of Ontario's construction industry measures up to the best in the world
- During the novel coronavirus pandemic, the construction industry was deemed to be "essential" and construction workers continued to work and earn their paychecks while unfortunately many non-essential workers were laid off and did not receive paychecks or had their hours of work and incomes significantly reduced

It is important that tailored awareness messages are conveyed to the various target audiences using media that are appropriate for the target audiences. For example, radio, television and newspapers should be used for older audiences and social media for younger audiences.

2. A lower level, on the ground, programs approach at the school level that gives young people exposure to construction with hands on experiences. In this regard, there are already many organizations engaged very effectively providing programs that give young people exposure to the construction trades. These organizations include construction trade unions, construction associations, construction companies, school boards, colleges and others. Those activities include:

- Construction careers fairs
- Construction site visits: young people can get “hooked” on the construction industry as the result of a site visit
- Construction careers showcases that use technologies such as virtual reality experiences and simulators to gain the interest of young people have been very effective
- Bursaries for promising but needy students who enter apprenticeships
- A specific example is the London District Construction Association’s partnership with other local construction associations, local construction trade unions, school boards, Fanshawe College and the provincial government to procure a warehouse facility to be used as a showcase centre for construction trades on a rotating basis; once in place, students will visit the site and experience the trades of their choice
- The Ontario Masonry Contractors Association (which funds and operates the Ontario Masonry Training Centre in Mississauga and Ottawa) has active working relationships with school boards in Windsor, Peel and Ottawa where they participate in those school boards’ Construction Specialist High Skills Major programs.

In Windsor, the OMCA invested approximately \$100K to convert a surplus school that was donated by the school board, for the purpose of trades training. Contractors and supplies to get the project off the ground. The school board donated the space and sent their teachers to the OMTC training centre to audit the level 1 apprenticeship program. Students can begin taking a masonry course in grade 9 and continue through their time in high school, doing co-op in grade 11 and in grade 12 signing up for OYAP. (We are told that once kids get into OYAP, they rarely drop out.); dual credits are also made available through St Clair College; 40% of the students are women; OMCA continues to support the program providing materials, equipment and instructional assistance when necessary; even with all of these features, it’s not an easy sell to all school boards

- In Niagara, the Niagara Catholic District School Board partnered with Niagara College in a program that saw 17 students from across the Region construct vendor booths for an outdoor Christmas market in downtown Niagara Falls
- The Sault Ste Marie Construction Association is engaged in the Build This City initiative, a SkillsAdvance Ontario workforce development pilot designed for Sault Ste. Marie. It gives job seekers FREE short-term construction fundamentals training and helps them get work and advance in the local construction sector. The training for job seekers includes industry standard certifications, training on basic construction techniques and soft-skills training to prepare job seekers for a career in construction. It gives local employers access to job-ready, skilled workers to meet their workforce needs and supports to train staff for advancement opportunities.

The successes of these activities and those of other organizations should be measured against their objectives. Those that are most successful could be replicated in other regions of the province.

Because construction is not for everybody, extensive measures should be undertaken to ensure that those accepted into apprenticeships have the right aptitudes and abilities for success. If they did not have exposure to construction trades in high school, there should be additional measures taken. These measures include a thorough orientation to the industry, extensive interviewing, psychological evaluation and skill testing. Only those with the best chances for success should be accepted.

3. Trades training and shops must be put back in the school system to provide young people with hands on trades experiences and to spark an interest in pursuing construction trades careers in more students. There are challenges to bring this to reality. One of the challenges is the cost of building and maintaining the shops and keeping them up to date with the constantly evolving equipment that is used in the industry. This can be overcome by soliciting support from the local industry through their construction trade unions and construction associations. The industry recognizes that this will not be done by government and school boards alone. The construction industry recognizes that it has a role to play in making this happen.

The second challenge is hiring journeypersons with the teaching skills and the qualifications required by the Ministry of Education and the College of Teachers, who will work for a teacher's wage. Instructors from the Ontario Masonry Training Centre are already training teachers in Windsor, Peel and Ottawa and this could be duplicated elsewhere. Or possibly teacher wage schedules could be amended to provide for the hiring of journeypersons to teach at something close to construction industry wages.

The shortage of workers is not unique to the construction industry although it may be more critical in construction. Because of the age demographics of North American society, today we are seeing baby boomers in all industries retiring in larger numbers than there are new entrants. So the proposed strategic plan must be well designed for the construction industry to compete aggressively for new entrants against most other industries.

Some words of advice to inform the plan:

- It is critically important to reach children at a young age to spark their interest in construction trades careers; that interest must be nurtured as they progress through the school system
- Industry members who visit schools to make presentations about construction careers usually have the greatest chance to influence students if they are younger. Recent grads are ideal, as opposed to industry veterans

- One-on-one personal contacts are needed to change minds and provide advice and encouragement to students as they move through the school system. A program to develop mentors should be implemented
- Pre-apprenticeship programs, which are funded by government, are very effective in providing young people who didn't grow up around the construction industry and have no family contacts in the business, with a pathway into construction trades careers
- College and university graduates must be a target for the strategy; they make excellent apprentices; they are more mature, have more life experience, are disciplined and really want to work
- Some contractors prefer to take on apprentices that are a little older and who have more life experience as opposed to someone fresh out of high school
- Carefully designed strategies may be needed to recruit individuals from underrepresented groups into the construction trades as this has proved to be particularly challenging
- Athletes, especially those who have participated in team sports, make good apprentices because they understand the value of teamwork, hard work, dedication, focus and attention to detail. The work on a construction project in many ways resembles the flow of play in many sports. Awareness and recruitment activities could be developed to focus on sports associations
- Schools that are most successful at steering young people with the appropriate interests, aptitudes and abilities into construction apprenticeships often have an enthusiastic teacher who is a champion for the trades; much can be done to initiate and strengthen relationships with educators and make them aware of construction careers and turn them into construction champions
- There have been difficulties experienced in bringing students onto active construction sites because of the possibility of accidents and the exposure to liability; these challenges must be addressed
- High school construction co-op and construction Specialist High Skills Majors programs must be actively promoted to students, parents and contractors
- The Ministry of Education has to step up and take a genuine interest in having young people pursue apprenticeships. Lip service isn't enough

How can we address the stigma associated with pursuing an apprenticeship and/or a career in the skilled trades?

- Apprenticeship used to be thought of as “lesser than” and a path to which only young people who didn't have the academic requirements for college or university were steered. This should not be the case today. The fact is that many university graduates are finding success in apprenticeships in the construction trades
- There is a low level of awareness of the rewarding and fulfilling careers available in the construction trades today among educators - teachers, guidance and career education

counsellors and principals. A concerted effort must be made by the industry to educate the educators about the modern construction industry of today

- There may be a built-in bias in favour of college and university education in the school system and against apprenticeship training. This seems only natural as most educators have university educations, many with advanced degrees. The construction industry must help educators appreciate that today's modern construction industry offers a wide range of outstanding career opportunities. The construction trades offer opportunities to learn and earn on the job. These opportunities are available to recent secondary school graduates and to others who may begin their apprenticeships following another post-secondary experience
- Educators should be made aware that the lifetime earnings of a journeyperson can equal if not exceed those of a college or university graduate. Apprentices earn while they learn and become certified as journeypersons debt free and without student loans
- There is a general lack of awareness of the variety of rewarding and fulfilling careers available in the construction trades particularly among educators, parents and the students themselves
- Contractors, construction management staff and journeypersons can help elevate awareness by going into schools and colleges and making presentations. Students are most influenced by this type of face to face, personal contact rather than learning from a teacher or a website
- Trades careers are not "dead end jobs", they are careers for life that provide very comfortable lifestyles and they can be a pathway to other roles in the construction industry
- Schools that are successful in promoting construction trades careers usually have a teacher who is a champion for the trades. The industry must undertake to develop construction industry champions in schools across the province
- Some parents are concerned that construction work is dangerous, and they don't want their children exposed to the risks associated with the industry. The truth is that great strides have been made in accident and sickness prevention in the construction industry in Ontario
- Presentations about today's modern construction industry should be made at Parent Evenings at schools

What are barriers you face in hiring/promoting/recruiting skilled trades workers? What solutions do you use or would like to see to challenge these barriers?

- There is generally a low level of awareness of the rewarding careers available in the construction industry. As a result of this low level of awareness and other factors, there aren't enough young people interested in becoming apprentices. Measures must be undertaken to elevate the profile of skilled trades careers
- There are 40 apprenticeable trades in the construction industry. Each trade requires different skills and aptitudes. Most people know what an electrician, plumber and carpenter do but have no idea about the other trades. The industry should undertake to educate

guidance and career education counsellors in the school system about the kinds of career paths available in the construction industry

- The construction industry is thought to be low skilled, unprofessional and behind the times. Nothing could be further from the truth. Today's construction is leading edge
- Construction trades careers are not for everyone. It is critically important to make sure individuals' aptitudes, abilities and interests are aligned with the trades they wish to pursue
- While everyone may not be suited to a career in the construction trades, the industry offers careers for everyone in non-trades lines of work including estimating, business development, accounting, design, IT, human resources, health and safety
- The vast majority of contractors do not take on apprentices. If more apprentices are needed, more contractors are going to have to hire apprentices
- There are additional costs to a contractor to hire and train an apprentice. Apprentices are not productive in their first year or two on the job. They require supervision and training. The incentives offered by government are not sufficient to offset the costs and the lost productivity. Richer incentives are required to motivate contractors to hire apprentices
- Some contractors are reluctant to take on an apprentice for fear that once that apprentice becomes productive, they will be stolen away by another contractor
- Many contractors prefer to hire young people as general construction workers for 3 or 4 years to see how they fit with the industry and have proven their worth and exhibited some loyalty before they take them on as apprentices
- Most trade construction businesses are very small enterprises. Some contractors feel they cannot afford to hire an apprentice. Others believe they do not have the scale to take on an apprentice or cannot offer the apprentice the opportunities to learn full breadth of work of the trade
- Construction work is cyclical. There are times when there is lots of work and times when there is none. When work dries up, apprentices are often the first to be laid off
- Often when apprentices achieve an hours worked threshold, their employer-sponsors are very busy and need them on the job. Sometimes there are not in-school courses conveniently available
- Apprentices need journeyperson mentors to support them on the job; unfortunately, mentors are retiring at a faster rate than new mentors are being created; programs should be put in place to help younger journeypersons learn to be mentors
- It has been particularly challenging to recruit individuals from underrepresented populations into the construction trades. The construction industry must build bridges into community groups and service organizations and develop trusting relations with community leaders to begin the education about the industry
- The coronavirus pandemic has widened the gap between rich and poor. Less advantaged young people who do not have access to the internet or who have to share computers with their siblings, will suffer educational challenges. We must ensure that all young people have access to computers and the internet. They cannot be allowed to fall behind with their educations.

How can we improve pathways into the skilled trades?

The construction industry is unusually complex. It has at least three sub-sectors: Industrial, Commercial and Institutional (ICI), Residential and Civil. And Residential can be subdivided into new build and renovation with the new build side further divided into multi-residential high rise, multi-residential low-rise and single family. Further complicating the industry is the split between unionized construction and non-union. All of these different parts will have different business practices, construction methods and cultures and add to the complication of a young person's career choice.

Also, there are a total of 40 apprenticeable construction trades. Twelve are compulsory trades and the rest voluntary. Not all construction trades are the same in terms of their public awareness. They differ in terms of the aptitudes and skills they require. When people think about construction trades, they think carpenter, electrician, and plumber. People are familiar in a very general way with those trades. But they have no idea what a boiler maker, sheet metal worker, millwright or iron worker does. As a consequence, contractors hiring apprentices for the carpentry, plumber and electrician trades can experience little difficulty while contractors who require apprentices in lesser-known trades can have great difficulty.

Furthermore, the construction trades are not for everyone. They are most suited for people who are experiential learners, who prefer to learn by doing rather than by reading a book, doing lessons, or listening to a teacher in a classroom. Unlike office work, construction takes place out of doors, exposed to the elements, hot in the summer and cold in winter. Construction projects are the ultimate team exercise. Construction workers must be team players who, regardless of their trade, share the common goal of getting the project done to the very best of their abilities, on time and on budget. It is critically important to ensure that the aptitudes, abilities and interests of the apprenticeship applicant align with the trade they have selected.

Currently, the recruitment of new apprentices is done largely through the personal networks of those already in the business, usually a trades person, a construction trade union or a contractor. A good portion of new apprentices are recruited through the membership of local construction trade unions. Some apprentices find their way into construction because they have a connection with a contractor or an employee of a construction company. While this system has worked reasonably well in the past to meet labour market demand, those personal networks are not sufficiently expansive to meet the labour market demands of today and tomorrow. New approaches are needed. And a better pathway into the industry is needed.

Young people who determine that they want to become apprentices and have decided on the trade they want to pursue, must find a contractor in that trade who is willing to take them on, be their sponsor and sign a training contract to that effect. If the young person does not have any connections

to the industry, no family members, friends or neighbours in the industry, then this can be a daunting task. There must be supports in place to assist young people who are seeking employer-sponsors.

Government funded pre-apprenticeship programs can be very helpful for young people without personal connections to the industry. No employer-sponsor is required. After completing 18 to 20 weeks of in-school training there is a work placement that provides some job site experience and exposure to contractors. Those who successfully complete pre-apprenticeship programs are considered level 1 apprentices.

Apprenticeship registration is an overly complicated five step process that involves both the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development and the Ontario College of Trades. This process must be streamlined and handled by a single stewardship organization for the trades that exists outside of government.

There are currently many wonderful organizations doing great things to encourage young people to consider careers in the trades. Some organizations such as Skills Ontario work across all industry sectors. Many of COCA's local mixed trade association members have programs to promote construction trades careers and our provincial trade associations are actively involved in recruitment activities for their trades. There are organizations that promote construction careers to young women and others that focus on other underrepresented groups. It would be instructive, as much as is possible, to catalogue all of these initiatives, to determine their target audiences, to measure their relative successes and shortcomings and to identify gaps in order to share best practices, avoid duplication and based on the evidence put a focus on what works.

These are our submissions, and we trust they are received and considered in the most helpful and constructive way they are intended.

Sincerely



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President