



# Pre-Budget Submission: Supporting Apprenticeship in Canada

---

## Summary

Apprenticeship has long been the poor cousin of post-secondary training, taking a back seat to Canada's investments in university and college education. Yet, there is an urgency to rebalance post-secondary training priorities to reflect the skills mix necessary to Canada's prosperity. The reality is that employers are facing growing and consistent challenges when it comes to finding workers with the specialized skills available through apprenticeship training.

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum – Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage (CAF-FCA) pre-budget submission proposes solutions that focus on education and training to meet the identified needs of Canadian business. CAF-FCA suggests greater emphasis on research, innovation and collaboration to support workplace training, which will not only maximize the number and types of jobs available for Canadians, but will ensure Canadians are well-prepared with the necessary skills and expertise to fill these roles.

Skilled tradespeople are essential to sectors including construction, manufacturing, mining, electricity, automotive repair, forestry and service. They are the people who build, maintain, operate and repair the country's infrastructure with the hands-on expertise required to ensure Canada works. Apprenticeship is the primary way in which certified tradespeople are trained.

CAF-FCA is calling on the federal government to support a national vision for apprenticeship training by funding an arms-length agency to:

- Conduct research and analysis to ensure apprenticeship policies, programs and systems are based on solid evidence
- Identify and disseminate Canadian and international best practices for vocational education and training, expanding opportunities to share and adapt innovative programs across Canada
- Promote apprenticeship training to youth, parents and educators, ensuring that they have the information and resources necessary to access apprenticeship training, while supporting skilled trades employers to overcome barriers to the creation of apprenticeship positions

CAF-FCA estimates the impact described below can be accomplished with an investment of \$25-million over five years. Future funding should depend on emerging requirements, impact and a fresh understanding of the federal role in apprenticeship training.



## Background

Apprenticeship is a post-secondary pathway that is largely carried out in the workplace. In Canada, apprenticeship focuses primarily on skilled trades occupations, teaching people the skills and competencies needed to perform hands-on tasks to industry standards. The training typically combines alternating periods of on-the-job (80 to 85%) and technical training (15 to 20%). Technical training occurs at a college, union training centre, private trainer or online. Apprenticeship programs are typically four years long and lead to trade certification. Once an apprentice has completed the required hours and technical training for their trade, they may write a Certificate of Qualification exam. Those who achieve a passing grade of at least 70% become certified journeypersons.

Apprenticeship is regulated by the provinces and territories, creating 13 unique systems geared to the labour market needs and conditions in each region of Canada. Advantages to this form of training include the ability to earn a wage while you learn and the development of practical, hands-on skills. Apprentices benefit from the guidance of a journeyperson mentor (certified tradesperson).

Apprenticeship systems are much more complex and nuanced than other post-secondary options. Apprenticeship training is generally less linear, subject to gaps in employment, delays returning to technical training and regional differences related to everything from sequence of training to required on-the-job hours. Apprentices are employees, subject to market and economic forces from which many full-time students are insulated. Apprentices in Canada also tend to be older upon registration than their counterparts at college and university, speaking to a demographic more likely to have financial and family obligations. The factors that contribute to positive outcomes are integrated and interdependent. More than ever, it is critical that apprenticeship training keeps up with rapid technological change and contributes to engaging workers, increasing learning capacity and overcoming barriers to achieving trade certification.

## International Experience

Around the world, there is an increasing emphasis on and investment in apprenticeship training. In July 2015, the U.S. Department of Labor signed a joint declaration with the Swiss government to collaborate and exchange information on best practices in vocational education and training. Though education delivery is traditionally the domain of state governments, there is an understanding that a globally competitive workforce is reliant on national leadership and vision.

Many of Canada's international counterparts have launched major reviews of their apprenticeship systems in the last decade, resulting in focused changes to make them more effective and responsive to the 21<sup>st</sup> century environment. Countries such as Australia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Germany have undertaken to assess program design, as



well as youth and parent perceptions, employer engagement and completion rates. They have also evaluated funding models and supports with a view to understanding their relative impact. For example, a recent study was conducted on the impact of government incentive changes on company training behaviour in Australia and Germany. Research like this informs how different cultural and industrial environments affect the impact of government investments and identifies how companies make training decisions. Evaluating impact is essential to informing policy and efficient government investment. Recent CAF-FCA research to determine the impact of government incentives on employer participation in apprenticeship indicates that Canada is missing opportunities to conduct such evaluation.

Jurisdictional responsibility for apprenticeship regulation in Canada is fundamental, particularly when it comes to responsiveness to industrial and regional realities. However, there are extensive opportunities to support jurisdictional apprenticeship systems with more and better information. By conducting research, supporting pilot programs, articulating best practices and evaluating the impact of government investments, the jurisdictions will have data on which to make informed policy and programming decisions. The Forum of Labour Market Ministers, following their meeting in July 2015, agreed to pursue “a collaborative approach to improve employer engagement in apprenticeship. Collaboration will focus on complementarity and coordination of programs, leveraging resources and experiences across governments and sharing information and best practices.” The practical considerations for translating intent to action have yet to be articulated, but we believe the federal government’s role could be defined based on a number of solid international examples.

Jurisdictional responsibility for education, including apprenticeship, has often resulted in inaction at the federal level. Other countries have provided a blueprint for achieving an appropriate and balanced role at the national level.

***Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (Germany)***

The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) is a centre of excellence for vocational research and for the progressive development of vocational education and training in Germany. Technological, economic and social change presents companies with the constant challenge of maintaining a highly-qualified skilled workforce. BIBB works to identify future challenges, stimulate innovation in national and international vocational systems, and develop new, practice-oriented solutions for vocational education and training.

***National Centre for Vocational Education Research (Australia)***

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) is a professional and independent body responsible for collecting, managing, analyzing, evaluating and communicating research and statistics about vocational education and training nationally.



NCVER contributes to improving Australia's education and training system by ensuring that policy and practice are based on sound evidence. Its mission is to be Australia's leading provider of high-quality, independent information on vocational education and training to governments, the education sector, industry and the community.

### ***National Apprenticeship Service (United Kingdom)***

The National Apprenticeship Service supports, funds and coordinates the delivery of apprenticeships throughout England. They are responsible for increasing the number of apprenticeship opportunities and providing a dedicated, responsive service for both employers and learners. This includes simplifying the process of recruiting an apprentice through apprenticeship vacancies, an online system where employers can advertise their apprenticeship job vacancies and potential apprentices can apply.

### **Scope for National Investment**

Canada spends billions of dollars annually to support university and college education with an eye to creating economic prosperity. Training for skilled tradespeople has an equally important role in Canada's economy and, at a minimum, should be a destination for sufficient federal investment to accomplish three fundamental objectives:

#### ***Research & Evaluation***

There is a requirement, at the national level, to analyze and evaluate apprenticeship systems with a view to better understanding subjects such as the complexities of employer engagement, barriers to training and completion, school-to-work transitions and the extent to which apprenticeship can mitigate skills shortages. It is necessary to understand apprentice progression, the role of under-represented groups and the impact of both financial and other supports. More consistent data collection, analysis and reporting will ensure governments, educational institutions, labour unions, employer associations and others within the apprenticeship community will be better positioned to address the realities of apprenticeship training based on timely and sound evidence. International best practices and comparisons must be conducted at the national level or we will fail to understand their relevance to Canada. With appropriate funding support, there is scope to engage national and international researchers to examine these and other relevant topics.

#### ***Connections & Best Practices***

For a country that embraces technology and connectedness, there are a surprising number of projects and initiatives that take place in relative isolation. Innovative, entrepreneurial and successful ideas – homegrown in Canada to overcome our unique challenges – should be shared, expanded upon and adapted across the country. In many cases, community-based programs have limited funding and are unsustainable on their own. By creating a national network and hub for



apprenticeship innovation, it is more likely that lessons learned will be shared and adapted. Rather than merely identifying best practices, there is scope to develop partnerships and expand the reach of innovative programs across the country.

Conducting experimentation through pilot programs is risky for institutions and organizations with limited financial and human resources. By assuming early risk to test innovative ideas and share results, the federal government can support more targeted investments that have a basis in evidence and example. Areas of potential experimentation relate to alternative approaches to technical training and how the employment and progression of apprentices is managed.

### ***Promote Awareness & Knowledge***

Apprenticeship remains a post-secondary pathway that few understand, with negative effect on participation rates and an increased likelihood that skills shortages will persist. This creates an urgency to ensure employers are making positions available and young people are choosing apprenticeship as a post-secondary pathway.

High school educators and guidance counsellors rarely have direct experience with apprenticeship and, as a result, are more likely to recommend their students pursue a college or university education. Parents are another important source of career influence. In a survey conducted by CAF-FCA in 2014, parents suggested that clearer information about apprenticeship is needed, as are opportunities to learn about the skilled trades at school. Parents lacked insight about how to find an employer sponsor and felt teachers should be encouraged to talk positively about careers in the skilled trades. Professional development for teachers and clearer information for parents are areas in which a federally-funded organization or agency could make an effective contribution.

Equally important, non-participating employers in the skilled trades often lack sufficient understanding of apprenticeship, impacting their capacity to hire and train. In a June 2011 report, CAF-FCA found that only half of employers who work in trades with apprenticeship programs were aware of apprentices and apprenticeship training. This speaks to the need for a consistent and well-resourced campaign to develop and disseminate “how-to” resources and information to share the advantages of apprenticeship training.

### **Conclusion**

A federal investment in apprenticeship training should focus on supporting capacity and responsiveness to emerging issues and challenges, with a view to informing decisions about policies and programs at both a national level and among apprenticeship community partners. The work-integrated nature of apprenticeship and the realities of rapidly-changing business requirements call for focused, timely action to address emerging needs. Extensive connections



**Canadian Apprenticeship Forum**  
**Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage**

with the apprenticeship community – with business, labour, education, equity groups and provincial governments – will be key. Follow-on benefits of such an investment support government priorities such as infrastructure renewal, youth employment and pre-apprenticeship training.