



Youth Employment in Canada

About Us

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum – Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage (CAF-FCA) is a non-profit organization that connects Canada's apprenticeship community. Participants work collaboratively to support vibrant and innovative apprenticeship systems and policies with a view to developing a highly-skilled, inclusive and mobile skilled trades workforce. Employers, unions, equity-seeking groups, educational institutions and the provinces/territories support CAF-FCA operations through membership.

As a national voice for the apprenticeship community, CAF-FCA influences pan-Canadian apprenticeship strategies through research, discussion and collaboration. Its research agenda is based on the premise that stakeholders require accurate, unbiased insights into apprenticeship challenges in order to address them. CAF-FCA is a national forum for apprenticeship dialogue, connecting stakeholders to share promising practices, identify barriers and collaborate on solutions. The organization also promotes apprenticeship as a valued post-secondary pathway to youth, parents and employers, leading to rewarding careers in high-demand professions.

Since 2000, CAF-FCA has fundamentally changed the conversation about apprenticeship in Canada. It has provided research insights, facilitated dialogue, profiled promising initiatives and promoted apprenticeship. By creating opportunities to share successes and address common issues, CAF-FCA has contributed to effective local, regional and national solutions.

Apprenticeship: Work-based post-secondary education

As baby boomers retire, the need for highly-skilled tradespeople increases, with collective sector estimates suggesting that Canada will need more than 500,000 skilled trades workers by 2020.

Apprenticeship training offers advanced technical skills through a combination of practical, on-the-job work experience and intensive technical instruction. Some 80 – 85 per cent of the training is done on-the-job and the other 15 – 20 per cent is completed in a post-secondary institution, leading to trade certification. Advantages to this form of training include the ability to earn while you learn, practical hands-on learning, job opportunities in every region of Canada and a satisfying career path. The average duration of an apprenticeship is four years.

Apprentices make an increasing proportion of a journeyperson's wage as they progress toward certification.



Despite these benefits and the fact that the youth unemployment rate continues to hover around 15 per cent, the apprenticeship community continues to face a variety of challenges in recruiting and retaining apprentices. New apprentice registrations continue to increase, indicating that employers are making apprenticeship positions available in their workplaces. However, the completion rate has not kept pace, resulting in a perpetual shortage of certified tradespeople.

Youth Perceptions

In spring 2013, CAF-FCA undertook a survey with 13 – 17 year olds to measure their perceptions of careers in the skilled trades. We compared findings with those of a parallel investigation in 2004.

When the results are compared, more youth say they understand the apprenticeship process and have easily found information about the skilled trades. Most have positive perceptions of skilled tradespeople and careers in the skilled trades. The apprenticeship community still has work to do when it comes to reaching youth influencers and promoting opportunities for women and apprenticeship as a first-choice post-secondary option. Survey responses indicate that youth today are less likely to believe that tradespeople will always be in demand.

Main Findings

- 42% are open to considering a career in the skilled trades
- Almost 40% had considered a career in the trades within the last year
- 48% said they were aware of how much money they could make
- 46% said they would be proud to work in the trades
- More believed skilled trades careers are more appropriate to men than women than in past surveys
- Young people continue to perceive university as first-choice post-secondary pathway
- Parents, teachers and friends do not encourage trades careers

Key Challenges

Despite high demand for skilled tradespeople, there are many factors contributing to Canada's failure to engage youth in achieving trade certification. For the purposes of this brief, we address two with profound impacts on youth employment in the skilled trades.

Preparation for success

The first is reflected in our country's failure to prepare apprentices for the nature of work in today's skilled trades workplaces. While Canada requires more skilled tradespeople to build, maintain and operate its infrastructure, mine its resources and support economic opportunity, the

trades continue to be viewed as career options of last resort. In reality, the skilled trades often require advanced math, science and technology skills. Today's skilled trades workplaces embody the practical application of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills.

Often, hands-on learners don't connect with classroom learning and fail to see the relevancy of foundational subjects, such as mathematics. While these students may eventually find the trades, they do so with inadequate levels of math, science and technology. Teachers, parents and youth need practical tools and realistic insights into the requirements of trades careers, elevating the status of the apprenticeship post-secondary route and supporting better informed decisions among youth.

Many employers also report that poor essential skills represent a barrier to training apprentices, which may affect an apprentice's ability to succeed in technical training. A more comprehensive understanding of the trades in demand locally, the skills and prerequisites for success, and opportunities to be exposed to how skills are applied in the workplace stand to increase the level of respect afforded to this post-secondary pathway.

Funding announced in the 2013 federal budget (\$19 million over two years to promote education in fields where there is high demand from employers) may help move this agenda forward, but has not yet been implemented.

Access to continuous employment

The second issue relates to continuous employment opportunities – an apprentice must be employed for the duration of their apprenticeship to achieve the necessary on-the-job hours. When contracts end or work is no longer available, apprentices are often the first to be laid off. Rather than “learners,” apprentices are uncertified employees. This status leaves them exposed to economic conditions. Because there are 13 different apprenticeship systems across Canada, apprentices also face hurdles to labour mobility, even when demand for late-stage apprentices elsewhere is strong. Youth are more likely than their older counterparts to give up on a trades career.

Apprenticeship harmonization efforts may help address labour mobility issues, though this is a long-term endeavour. Regional harmonization (as is occurring in Atlantic Canada and among western provinces) is likely to come on stream more quickly and with results that are easier to track. Employers and apprentices require a better understanding of how to navigate mobility issues in the meantime.

Securing employment for apprentices throughout their learning process will require collaboration among smaller employers and greater commitment to the development of certified skilled



tradespeople in general. This is an area where there is something to be learned from international approaches to apprenticeship training and the relative success of joint apprenticeship committees across Canada. Consortium models among small employers show promise and pilots may prove worthwhile, particularly in regions experiencing high demand. Solutions around access to grants, tax credits and other supports should be built into the consortium structure and industry associations/unions may prove good partners for providing administrative support.

Recommendations

CAF-FCA has identified three major areas where the federal government could have a substantive impact regarding opportunities for youth employment in the skilled trades.

1. **Re-value post-secondary options:** Students today are provided with an unlimited number of choices and very little direction when it comes to their post-secondary education. Rather than spending the resources and time to evaluate competencies and interests, students are often encouraged to figure it out at university. This wastes time and money, and results in highly educated, under-employed youth. The Government of Canada has a role to play when it comes to connecting education to application in the workplace, generating a greater parity of esteem for all post-secondary pathways.
2. **Preparation for success:** Given the 300+ trades occupations and very different levels of demand across the country, more effort is required to define demand at the local and regional level. Connecting high-demand occupations with an understanding of prerequisites for success stands to better inform youth, parents, educators and career counsellors. Upfront screening for skills gaps and opportunities to address them will position youth for success. Help connecting students with employers is required to move youth efficiently into employment.
3. **Continuous employment:** Tradespeople are largely trained in small- and medium-sized businesses (77%), many of which have limited human resources supports. Specialization can be a barrier to training to the full scope of the trade. As contracts end or work diminishes, uncertified apprentices are the most vulnerable to lay-off. Pilot projects that bring together small employers to “share” training and offer administrative support stand to make apprenticeship training more attractive to Canadian business. Administrators may play a dual role, also encouraging apprentices to return to technical training and progress toward certification, helping to overcome objections and set apprentices up with available supports. Access to grants, tax credits and other supports are key to making this approach viable.