

Brief submitted to the Postsecondary Review

By the

Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)



Regarding Apprenticeship and the College Sector

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Apprenticeship and the College Sector

Ideally, apprenticeship is a partnership between apprentices, employers, labour and educational institutions. All of the parties bring expertise and interests to the table and all of the parties should be involved in any future developments.

It is a disturbing trend that government and the colleges are presently attempting to drive change in the apprenticeship system without reference to the other partners in the system. Provincial Apprenticeship Committees are a valuable resource for the system and should be used to ensure that any changes in the apprenticeship system meets the needs of all the partners. These committees bring all of the stakeholders in the system together to oversee apprenticeships in each trade. The curriculum of the in-school portion of apprenticeship training is approved by the Provincial Apprenticeship Committees and the curriculum committees that involve the colleges, which deliver in-school training and report back to the Provincial Apprenticeship Committees. This link is critical to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and current.

Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology have an important role to play in the delivery of apprenticeship training in Ontario, a role that should be supported and enhanced. In 1965, when Ontario Minister of Education Bill Davis introduced the College of Applied Arts and Technology Act, he specifically mentioned that trade skills, apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training should be offered by the new colleges. As a result, from its inception, the college system has been involved in apprenticeship training, demonstrating a proven capability in the field.

College faculty members, who teach in apprenticeship and trades training, are recruited from the ranks of qualified trades-people. They usually have extensive experience in the trades they teach and have developed expertise in teaching and curriculum development for skills training and apprenticeship programs. As college faculty, they benefit from being part of a larger community of educators where they can depend on the support of their colleagues to help develop learning materials and to hone their own teaching skills as adult educators.

Historically, through the allocation of public funds to the colleges, the province has made significant investment in developing facilities specifically designed to accommodate skills training. With the support of programs such as the Apprenticeship Enhancement Fund, colleges invested millions of public dollars in updating the equipment that their students use to gain valuable hand-on experience.

Pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship students who attend colleges are able to benefit from being part of a larger educational community. Students who have disabilities can access services at centers dedicated to providing support for

students with special needs. Students with personal or financial problems can seek assistance through available counselling services. Students can also make use of on-campus student facilities that colleges have developed, such as tutoring, athletics centers, libraries, and student centers.

The apprenticeship training system has served Ontario well for more than sixty years. However, changes that occurred under the Conservative government -- particularly the introduction of the Apprenticeship Certification Act -- have undermined the system. The Apprenticeship and Certification Act encouraged the fragmentation of trades and introduced tuition fees for apprenticeship programs. The introduction of tuition fees downloads the costs of training to the individual, and acts as a deterrent to potential new apprentices entering the trades. The new tuition fees do nothing to enhance the funding for apprenticeship training because the revenue they generate is taken off the already declining per diem payment that the colleges receive for such training.

With a 7% actual decline in the overall apprenticeship per diem funding (including tuition fees) over the past decade -- 20% when adjusted for inflation -- Colleges are struggling to maintain facilities and equipment for these programs.

In addition to charging tuition fees, Colleges are no longer able to provide textbooks as they had in the past, resulting in additional costs to apprentices. Further, when the apprentices do purchase their textbooks, these books are seldom applicable if the apprentice goes from one fragmented program to another.

The A.C.A. has also allowed colleges to introduce new models of apprenticeship training such as co-op diplomas that do not conform to the traditional apprenticeship system.

Co-op placements are valuable means for students to gain experience in their chosen field but they cannot replace the traditional apprenticeship. Students on co-op placement are not apprentices and do not receive the same type of on the job training that is at the core of the apprenticeship system.

These new models have been introduced without any extensive study of how effective they will be, and it is hard to imagine that graduates from these programs will have the skills they need to succeed as qualified trades people. Colleges have not always seen the provision of the in-school portion of apprenticeship training as a financially viable activity and the introduction of these models could be driven by the colleges' desire to increase revenue from apprenticeship training rather than to commit to improving the apprenticeship system. Students, who once were only required to attend school for short periods, now will be required to pay full tuition for the years that they are receiving training.

Conclusions

- Strengthen the existing Provincial Advisory Committee system and provide the committees with adequate funding to set standards, approve curriculum and enforce apprenticeship regulations.
- Public funding for apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training must go to projects that involve public institutions.
- To encourage more apprenticeship training, abolish tuition fees for apprenticeship programs.
- The government must commit to exceeding the current commitment for funding apprenticeship.