

TRANSCRIPTION

HEADLINE: Round Table on Creating a More Efficient Labour Market in Canada
Hosted by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards: Session on
Improving the Effectiveness of the Apprenticeship System in Canada

PRINCIPAL: Shirley Dul, Executive Director, Apprenticeship and Industry Training,
Alberta Learning

Moderator: Our final lead speaker is Shirley Dul. She is the Executive Director of Apprenticeship and Industry Training at Alberta Learning. Shirley?

Shirley Dul: Thanks. I have to agree with some of the comments that have been made so far, particularly as they relate to the perception of the trades as a viable career option and the cost of providing apprenticeship training but I think there's varied experiences across Canada with apprenticeship. I have been asked to share the province of Alberta's experience. Currently we have well over 30,000 apprentices in our 55 trades and occupations. If we included the branches of trades where certification is available, we'd have close to 70 trades in Alberta. Growth since 1993 in apprenticeship has been over 40%. There are several new trades and occupations in the past few years and some examples are metal building systems erector, warehousing technician, gas utility operator, construction craft labour and others. And most recently the Outdoor Power Equipment Technician trade will come into effect April 1st of 2001. The Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board is currently looking at steel detailer as a new occupation. This has the support of becoming an occupation from the Canadian Institute of Steel Construction and the National Institute of Steel Detailing. We've also received from PSAC, which is the Petroleum Service Association of Canada, applications for more than 17 occupations in the oil and gas sector.

Alberta also has an active high school apprenticeship program called RAP, the Registered Apprenticeship Program. As of December 2000 we had close to 700 students active in that program who are currently in Grade 10, 11 and 12. In addition, we have close to 800 who have started in the high school apprenticeship program, graduated from high school and have continued on into full-time apprenticeship. The RAP program, which has been in effect since 1994, has had 154 grads that are now journey people.

Alberta trains a lot of apprentices and we have very strong industry support. In fact, if you look at the stats, while Alberta has 9% of the Canadian population, we train almost 20% of Canada's journey people. We do so through a strong industry system, The Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board and provincial apprenticeship committees, by legislation in the province of Alberta, set the standards for training and certification. We have between 500 and 600 industry members who participate on those committees. Membership is made up of employers and employees.

Government provides the administration and the colleges provide the technical training. And as we know, apprenticeship is 80% on the job and 20% technical training. Technical training is very important in the province of Alberta. We believe that the best journey person is someone who has a good combination of broad based on-the-job

work experience and quality technical training. In the province of Alberta we'll run about 900 technical training classes in the coming year, which is up from about 850 last year.

Our average of a journeypersons 41.5. Our most common age for starting an apprenticeship is 19, 20, 21, and 22. But our average age is 27. With respect to average age, if you take two twenty year olds and one 50 year old, you have an average age of 30, but I am not sure that tells you anything about the people. Apprenticeship in Alberta and across Canada welcomes people at any age into the system.

We've tried to ensure that Alberta maintains a system that is relevant and has strong industry support. We want to continue to ensure that it's strong. Recently we engaged in a consultation process where the board and the department asked industry how they would like to see the system improved? Six recommendations came forward:

1. More options for training. While there was strong industry support for the "block release" option, industry also wanted more options for technical training.
2. Improved financial support for apprentices.
3. Increased promotion of ways to start an apprenticeship and have prior learning recognized.
4. More training opportunities for youth.
5. Increased options for certification of workers, and
6. Continued strong industry support for the advisory committees.

In Alberta we're finding that the hiring and training of apprentices by employers has only increased but we have also got more and varied employers who are involved. For example, the Construction Owners Association of Alberta, who are the main builders in our current strong economy in Alberta, have taken a real interest in apprenticeship. When they put tenders out for contracts, points are awarded for the number of apprentices that the contractor will be training. Initiatives such as this are very helpful in promoting apprenticeship within the province.

There are number of other initiatives that have taken place. We have an industry/government partnership with Careers: The Next Generation. This is a Foundation who has individuals, mainly from industry, who go out and talk to high school students about the value of a career in the trades. They also work with employers to encourage them to take on high school apprentices.

We also have a new scholarship called the Registered Apprenticeship Scholarship. There are fifty \$1,000 scholarships for high school students who start their apprenticeship in high school and continue on into the regular apprenticeship system. The industry also raised \$340,000 to develop a CD Rom called TradeUp. This CD-Rom promotes the construction trades to high school students. It has won an award.

To keep in tune with what's happening, we do a survey annually to determine the industry's satisfaction with the system and their recommendations for improvement. One year the survey goes to apprentices, the next year to employers. We use the information gained for system improvement.

I wanted to address the four questions that came to us in our package.

Does the current low completion rate for apprenticeship programs in Canada (9.3 percent of total registration in 1998) represent a problem, and if so what measures should be taken (e.g. gradual licensing and training modules)?

In Alberta our data shows the completion rate of first year apprentice completers who go on to complete all of their program requirements within two years of the earliest possible completion date is 73 to 74%. Now this methodology is consistent with the methodology that most colleges and technical institutes use, at least in Alberta, to calculate completion rates. However, if we looked at instead the total number of starts and when they should complete, then Alberta's completion rate is someplace between 50 and 60%. For example, if I look at 1994, 7264 new apprentices started. In 1998 we had 4200 graduates. That's in the earliest possible time. If we gave them a little bit more time of course the completion rate is higher. I don't understand the methodology that was used to gain the figures that were provided to us here. I've also checked with my colleagues across Canada and I don't think that 10% is correct. I think that's an important point.

Does the fact that only around one half of persons who complete apprenticeship programs obtain a Red Seal pose a problem for the national mobility of skilled tradespersons?

One of the questions here was respecting mobility. If you exclude Quebec, the number of people obtaining their red seals is increasing. In 1995, the number of people obtaining their red seal was 48%, in 1999, 66% an almost 20% increase and it continues to increase annually.

Should attempts be made to expand the apprenticeship model beyond its traditional occupations and to new occupations?

I would say absolutely. And in some provinces there is some success there. If I go outside of our province there are new occupations called pork production technician, custom harvester, electronics assembler, plastic moulding machine setter and operator as well as others that have been designated in the last couple of years.

Is the low participation of women in apprenticeship programs a concern and if so what measures can be taken to address this issue?

And the fourth question was is low participation of women a problem. I'd agree that it is. All initiatives seem to have had limited success. I would suggest that maybe we need to look at some other occupations that want to attract non-traditional participants, perhaps even with the opposite issue. We need to look at their successes and maybe we can learn from them. The nurses have not been able to attract the opposite gender as well but I think there may be things we could learn from the engineering field.

If I were to look at the challenges facing apprenticeship, I would say that the perception of the trades as a viable career option is a major issue. Particularly when we've got competition in the labour market with a severe shortage of nurses, teachers and IT people as well shortages in many other occupations. We don't make it very easy, as my colleague indicated, with respect to trades and vocational training in high schools.

Funding has decreased for shops and there's limited opportunity for youth to even get a taste of what a trade might look like.

Another inhibiting factor is the cost of entering some of the trades and occupations. For example, if you want to be heavy equipment technician, in your first and second year when you're making a very limited income, the cost that you have to bear in purchasing tools is around \$8,000. That is quite challenging for many young people.

We have the issue of how parents perceive the trades and occupations as a career for their child. Governor John McKernan from the US published a book called "Making the Grade". One of the things that I found interesting was that he said we would never change parents' perceptions of the value of a career in the trades for their son or daughter until there is career laddering. It is important that a parent can see that if you have your journey person's certificate, that you will be given credit towards other college and university education. My research on that issue with the young people in our province tells me that there is certainly some merit to that concern.

My last point is that we need good data and I'm not sure that we've got good data on what's happening with apprenticeship across Canada. I think there is a very varied experience, depending on the amount of support that industry has provided and government has provided.

Moderator: Okay, thank you very much Shirley. I think the presentations really underline the fact that we really can't talk about a national apprenticeship system in Canada. We have -- it's under provincial jurisdiction and the state of apprenticeship varies greatly by province. I think we've seen the contrast between Alberta where the system appears to be working quite well and Ontario where there appear to be more problems.

I just want to give some clarification on the numbers that Shirley referred to. Those numbers were put together by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards and they reflect Statistics Canada's data base on apprenticeship which they receive their data from the provincial apprenticeship directors. So it's administrative data and the completion rate it's not a cohort analysis tracking people over time. It's just the ratio of the total number of people registered in an apprenticeship program compared to the percentage that graduate every year. And that's why we compare that with other forms of post-secondary education such as community colleges and universities. And for example if an apprenticeship program were three years and everyone completed in three years you'd expect based on this methodology a completion rate of 33% and that's what you have approximately in the community colleges and universities. But in the apprenticeship program it's much, much lower. It's around 10% nationally and certain provinces I'm sure it's much higher like in Alberta but one could argue still, when you look at the number of people completing apprenticeships every year I think the number is around 18,000 or so, they're in your binder, and then compared to the number of people that are registered in apprenticeship, which is around 180,000 or so, there's very few that actually complete every year in terms of the official numbers. Now maybe there's something wrong with those numbers and if there is we should be looking at the numbers that Statistics Canada releases on that issue.