

The Apprenticeship System in Saskatchewan

Fundamentals of Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship is essentially a mentorship training model in which skilled tradespersons (usually journeypersons) pass on knowledge and skills to learners (apprentices) in a workplace setting. It is an effective means of skills development that has been practiced formally and informally throughout the world for hundreds of years. Formal apprenticeship systems pre-date modern concepts of government, democracy and nations. The system has evolved over time and adapted to serve the needs of employers and tradespersons in a modern economy.

Most of the fundamental elements of Saskatchewan's apprenticeship program trace their origins back to the craft guilds of medieval Europe. These elements are:

- (i) The contract of apprenticeship establishes an on-going relationship between the employer and apprentice, setting out the obligations of each party
- (ii) The majority of skills development occurs in the work place (learning by doing) under a mentorship model, with a skilled tradesperson teaching and supervising the apprentice
- (iii) The system is industry-driven (employers and workers in the labour market create the basic supply and demand conditions which drive the system)
- (iv) It is largely paid for by the investment of employers and apprentices
- (v) The standards which define occupations and the journeyperson certification are developed and approved by industry

Introduction to Saskatchewan

A formal apprenticeship program was introduced to Saskatchewan in 1944 by an act of the provincial legislature. At that time, thirteen apprenticeship trades were designated and, at the end of the first year, forty-nine contracts of apprenticeship were registered in Saskatchewan. The system is based on skills development in the workplace and certification to industry standards for designated occupations.

Initially, the role for government was limited to registration of the apprenticeship contracts, administration of examinations and issuing trade certifications. There was little or no formal technical training associated with the program. The administration of the apprenticeship program was performed within a unit of the Saskatchewan Department of Labour. The responsibility for the program moved to the Department of Advanced Education and Manpower in 1983 and then, in 1999, to a non-departmental government agency with industry governance.

Government helps to fund the system and supports industry in developing standards. Government funding assists with the administration of the system and largely covers the institutional technical training portion of apprenticeship. The private sector continues to pay the largest cost of producing a skilled, certified tradesperson through its investment in on-the-job skills development. The average annual cost to the government of an apprenticeship training position is about \$3000. This compares very favourably to government's annual cost for other types of post-secondary training position, which are estimated to be in the range of \$12,000-\$15,000.

The expansion of the technical training system in Saskatchewan in the 1960's introduced the institutional technical training element to apprenticeship. It is typical for an apprentice to attend several weeks of formal technical training in an institutional setting each year, alternating with 9-10 months of paid employment during which skills are developed in the work place. Nonetheless, apprenticeship continues to be based predominantly on a workplace training model and certifications are the product of industry standards for occupations, technical training curricula and examinations. In most trades, some 80-85 percent of training takes place on the job.

Apprenticeship Renewal – The Creation of SATCC

The late 1980's and 1990's was a time of rapid change and some turmoil in the apprenticeship system in Saskatchewan and throughout Canada. Apprenticeship as a training model had largely fallen out of favour with public policy planners. It was deemed to be rigid, time-based, unresponsive to labour market needs, inaccessible to equity groups and limited to the old economy (so-called "smoke-stack" industries). The apprenticeship unit lost one-third of its budget and staff during this period. At one point, it was disbanded completely, with vestiges of its responsibilities distributed to various government departments. In the mid-1990's, the Federal government announced that it would withdraw completely from the purchase of apprenticeship training over three years, taking \$4.36 million out of the Apprenticeship systems in Saskatchewan.

The Provincial Apprenticeship Board (PAB), which was then an industry advisory group to the program, was galvanized into action under the leadership of a long-serving Board Chair, Mr. George Pellerin. The PAB launched a series of actions, research and issues papers which were intended to address the challenges and criticisms facing the apprenticeship system. The PAB took charge of the apprenticeship agenda to enable industry to be proactive in the face of significant change.

In April, 1996, the PAB published a discussion paper calling for industry to take a strong direct, role in all aspects of apprenticeship (*The Future of Apprenticeship: An Industry Vision*). The industry advisory council, which included the PAB and representatives of all Trade Advisory Boards, met in 1996 to consider the future of the apprenticeship program and to form a steering committee to consult with all stakeholders. Later in 1996, the steering committee released its report recommending the development of options for a renewed, industry-driven system (*Apprenticeship Renewal: Opportunity for Positive Change*). A tripartite committee of representatives of industry, government and the training sector was formed to develop models for the renewal of the apprenticeship program. In May, 1997, the tripartite committee released its report, setting out a range of options for apprenticeship renewal (*Apprenticeship Renewal: Options for a Renewed Apprenticeship System in Saskatchewan*).

The industry advisory council (PAB and representatives of all Trade Advisory Boards) met in June, 1997 and unanimously endorsed a recommendation for a co-management model for the renewal and governance of the apprenticeship program in Saskatchewan. The recommended model called for the establishment of a non-departmental government agency with an industry-majority Board of Governors. In May 1998 the Minister responsible for apprenticeship announced government's decision to establish the SATCC to manage apprenticeship and formalize industry leadership of the program. A new apprenticeship act was passed in the following session of the legislature and was proclaimed October 1, 1999, creating the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission (SATCC).

SATCC features a large, inclusive Board of up to 20 members. The majority of Board members are selected by industry organizations and/or representatives based on groupings of related trades (referred to as sectors). A minority of Board members are selected by the Minister to represent other stakeholders in the system, including the government, training providers and equity groups. SATCC is responsible for the governance, management and administration of the apprenticeship program in Saskatchewan. It sets the strategic direction for the program in consultation with the Minister, and is responsible for the planning and performance of the program, as well as reporting its results to industry, government and the public.

Some Advantages of Apprenticeship

As a means of preparing workers for a wide variety of occupations, the apprenticeship system has clear advantages over exclusively classroom-based skills training.

Current and Relevant Skills Because apprentices are employed, their training helps them develop the skills actually required in existing or emerging jobs in real workplaces. Apprenticeship training helps people acquire relevant skills that will help them find and keep secure, well-paying jobs.

Labour Market Planning Because employers are paying the wages of apprentices and investing in their skills development, the decision to hire and invest in the skills development of an apprentice is a signal of business confidence and a positive labour market indicator. The independent human resource decisions of thousands of employers, when aggregated, can be an important labour market planning tool.

Economic Contribution Apprentices “earn while they learn”. Since they are earning and spending wages, they are contributing to the GDP, contributing to general consumer spending, and paying taxes to the public sector.

Cost-effective From a public sector perspective, apprenticeship training is very cost-effective. Apprenticeship is the lowest cost post-secondary training program in terms of government investment. At the same time, employers have productive employees in the workplace, off-setting their investment in apprentices’ skill development.

Broad Standards The apprenticeship system is based on province-wide training standards. Standards provide the mechanism to match the on-the-job and institutional training to the needs of industry. They take the form of detailed training outcomes – or “competencies” – and form the basis for technical training curricula and skill-based examinations leading to the certification of skilled journeypersons. Standards are also used to assess prior learning and experience for clients who are able to document employment experiences equivalent to the apprenticeship program. Province-wide and national standards ensure employers that journeypersons and apprentices are able to perform work in their trades to standards that are comprehensive, transparent and measurable.

Labour Mobility The industry approved and recognized standards for apprenticeship trades provides journeypersons with an unparalleled degree of mobility between employers, within the province and across Canada. Apprenticeship is a key element in the education and training systems of all Provinces

and Territories. While each jurisdiction has developed its own model for administering apprenticeship, they all adhere to interprovincial standards in all major trades. Occupational descriptions, competency profiles and examinations are the same across the country in each of the 49 Red Seal trades which serve approximately 95% of all registered apprentices in Canada.

Distributed Learning Apprentices live, work and learn throughout the province. Almost every city, town, rural and Northern skilled workplace employs apprentices, and is therefore a centre of learning. Apprenticeship provides opportunities for some high school graduates from smaller centres to continue to live and work in their home region, thereby contributing to their local economy and population stabilization. Some 60% of Saskatchewan apprentices live outside of the two major cities.

Apprenticeship Administration and Client Services

Through the *Apprenticeship and Trades Certification Act (A-22.2)*, a Minister of the provincial crown delegates authority for the apprenticeship program to the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission (SATCC). SATCC is responsible for the governance, management and administration of the apprenticeship program in Saskatchewan. In consultation with the Minister and his/her representatives, SATCC sets the strategic direction for the apprenticeship program.

SATCC supports the delivery of the apprenticeship program through a network of nine offices across the province. Most of the Commission's 65 employees are based at a head office in Regina. The apprenticeship program has grown to 50 designated trades and over 8000 registered apprentices. The staff of the Commission is responsible for the overall administration of the program, including provision of the following services:

- registering apprenticeship contracts
- counseling apprentices and employers
- assessing the qualifications of apprenticeship applicants
- supporting industry to articulate standards for occupations, technical training curricula and exams
- coordinating Saskatchewan's participation in the Inter-provincial Standards Red Seal Program
- contracting for the delivery of technical training
- developing a technical training plan and scheduling apprentices to attend technical training
- administering examinations
- certifying skilled tradespersons
- enforcing apprenticeship regulations
- promoting participation in training and certification to employers and workers in the skilled trades
- promoting skilled trades careers to youth

Technical Training

The technical (institution-based) component of training comprises approximately 15-20 per cent of total apprenticeship training, and is purchased on behalf of apprentices by the Commission. Apprenticeship technical training is available in both Red Seal and provincially-recognized trades. SIAST provides the majority of the apprenticeship technical training under contract to the Commission. Certain trades access selected public or private sector trainers in the province. Apprentices in trades with very low numbers usually attend training institutions in neighbouring provinces. The cost of technical training consumes the majority of the Commission budget (some 75% of total expenditures). The provincial funding the Commission receives is largely allocated to the purchase of technical training. Apprentices pay 5-10% of the cost of their technical training through tuition fees.