



OPPSBA Submission to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development regarding the Experienced Apprenticeship Pathway Consultation Paper

September 18, 2024

Introduction

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) is pleased to provide comments and feedback to this Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development consultation paper regarding an Experienced Apprenticeship Pathway.

We are fully aware of the government's plans to support skilled trades in Ontario and have been long standing advocates of increasing awareness of, and enrolment in, the skilled trades as a pathway of choice for students. In our most recent [funding submission](#), we suggested there be "targeted marketing and communications, specifically directed at parents, students, educators and employers, to further elevate skilled trades to a respected and desirable pathway be continued." And we would support increasing access to those individuals who have historically faced barriers to accessing these options.

As part of the *Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act*, OPSBA provided commentary on an Accelerated Apprenticeship Pathway Proposal led by the Ministry of Education. In that [submission](#), we stated our concerns for young students (aged 15 and 16) prematurely leaving a secondary school setting. This would lead to a devaluing of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

We are also aware of the government's [announcement](#) in May 2024 regarding a new pathway called Focused Apprenticeship Skills Training (FAST), which will allow students in Grades 11 and 12 to participate in more apprenticeship learning through additional co-operative education credits while completing high school.

After speaking with officials, we understand there is no FAST consultation paper, and have been directed to provide some comments about that as well.

OPSBA's two trustee consultative groups, the Education Program and Policy Development Work Groups recently met to discuss the current consultation paper, and the feedback can be found below.

Demographic Questions

1. What region are you from?
 - Eastern Ontario (postal codes starts with K)
 - Central Ontario (postal codes starts with L)
 - City of Toronto (postal codes starts with M)
 - Southwestern Ontario (postal codes starts with N)

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) is the number one stakeholder voice for education in Ontario (all regions.)

2. Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)
 - Employer
 - Sponsor/Group Sponsor
 - Union/Association
 - Educational and/or training institution (e.g., Training Delivery Agent, Private Career College, Literacy and Basic Skills provider)
 - Individual
 - Worker in the trades
 - Other (text box)

OPSBA represents nearly 1.4 million students, or almost 70% of the entire K-12 student population, including all 31 English public school boards, as well as 10 school authorities.

3. What sector is your feedback regarding? (Select all that apply)

- Industrial
- Service
- Construction
- Motive Power
- Other (text box)

OPSBA is providing feedback as a stakeholder in the Education sector.

1. What do you think are the benefits of having an Experienced Apprenticeship pathway for Ontario's apprenticeship system?

- *Provides a viable option for young people, who are no longer in school, to find a way to succeed and contribute.*
- *Allows for completion of an OSSD while they participate in the program.*
- *Given that the average age of apprentices is now 28, this may encourage an earlier start.*
- *If financially incentivised, participation by individuals and organizations may increase.*
- *Allows for second career options.*

2. One of the goals of the Experienced Apprenticeship pathway is to increase the number of skilled journeypersons in Ontario. In your view, will the current proposal achieve that goal?

It targets a different audience which will be helpful. Awareness about the program is critical to its success so effective marketing will be needed.

- *The challenge will be ensuring that there are enough organizations that will take on apprentices as this is a long-term commitment.*
- *We are concerned about the lack of academic skills needed to complete the program.*

3. The Ministry is proposing 'age' and 'number of years out of formal education' in addition to existing employer/ sponsor requirement as the criteria for individuals accessing the Experienced Apprenticeship pathway. Do you think these three elements are sufficient to determine entry into apprenticeship training?

- *Academic skills will need to be assessed to ensure success.*
- *The idea of an established employer or sponsor is important but how does a candidate secure one and who assists with this process?*

4. What additional criteria do you think the Ministry should consider adding to ensure individuals accessing the Experienced Apprenticeship pathway are successful during apprenticeship training?

While not an admission requirement, monitoring and support for those in the program needs to be clearly thought out.

5. What core foundational skills do you think individuals accessing the Experienced Apprenticeship pathway would require to be successful for on-the-job training?

- *Functional literacy and math skills.*
- *Knowledge of Occupational Health and Safety as well as employment standards will be needed.*

6. Do you have other thoughts (e.g., Should the age requirement be lower or higher?) about the Experienced Apprenticeship pathway that you would like the Ministry to consider?

- *Why is the age of 21 selected? Would 19 or 20 not be appropriate? Having a lower age, closer to when a student leaves secondary school, could increase the “connectedness or re-engagement” – the ability to find an individual and share pathway information. A younger intake who also increase the pool of potential apprentices.*

Other Questions and Comments:

- Who is the co-ordinator for such programs as mentorship and regular monitoring will be essential. What roles do colleges or training centres play in this?
- This would appeal to a limited group and would not be easy to manage. The challenges will be getting organizations to take on such apprentices given their lack of academic backgrounds and further, the availability of such placements as well as the workload around taking on apprentices.

OPSBA Recommendations:

- A pilot project in an urban area with one of the trades unions partnering would help jump start this. If it is not well-organized, it won't have buy in. An institution needs to organize and champion this. Carpenter unions, for example, could assist, although this is often the work of colleges.
- School boards that have Continuing Education departments could be the best way to support the accelerated pathway – those individuals who are no longer officially part of the school system. Continuing Education staff have the experience and expertise to provide this type of programming.
- Any pilot program should involve the corresponding municipal and industry partners to identify what local community need is present. (i.e. what trade or skill set is in demand that a successful pilot can help alleviate?)
- We support the expansion of programs for students who are in schools and support the accelerated entrance into the skilled trades for students who are interested in the trades.
- Important to have the school / adult connections, etc.

- With regards to the FAST (Focused Apprenticeship Skills Training) – this will appeal to a limited group of high school students who are connected to schools and monitored by co-op teachers, which will assist in keeping students on track ensuring they are successful and have options to return to the school system. These students are Grade 11 and 12 students making early career decisions.
- Students will also get a special seal on their diploma reflecting their commitment to the skilled trades.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Education is clearly working to promote and accelerate access to the skilled trades through a variety of programs. The FAST program allows for select high school students to pursue their interest in a trade and begin their journey in an accelerated manner while remaining connected to their home schools.

The Experienced Apprenticeship pathway provides another option for those who wish to enter the skilled trades later. The success of this program will be dependent upon strong marketing, successful pilot projects, close connection with the credit granting institution (Continuing Education) and relationships with industry partners such as unions.

Both programs will allow different and accessible entry points into skilled and well-paid jobs. OPSBA is a willing partner in these programs and hopes that the government will provide funding to support their success.

As the key advocate for our members, we look forward to continuing our work with the Ministry of Education and relevant stakeholders on future initiatives related to all aspects of the apprenticeship program. We are ready to meet at any time to discuss this and other proposed new education programming, so please do not hesitate to contact our staff to set up a meeting.