



ONTARIO SKILLED TRADES ALLIANCE

How to Address the Skills Gap in Ontario

Issue: Skills Canada estimates that 40% of all jobs created in Canada over the next decade will be in the skilled trades and in construction 8,000 new workers are needed every year to replace retiring tradespeople. Despite this demand, the skills gap continues to grow in Ontario because we are saddled with: a) a poor governance model that restricts access to careers in the trades; and, b) an archaic training and apprenticeship system.

Background: The Conference Board of Canada, in their review of the Ontario apprenticeship system, estimated that the current system design is costing the province \$24.3 billions in lost GDP and \$3.7 billion in lost taxation revenue. The Ford government can fix this broken system and encourage success in the skilled trades, rather than suffocate it.

In the six years since the Ontario College of Trades (OCOT) was created, the number of persons entering and completing apprenticeships in the province has declined, despite increased demand and investment. There is a very clear need to rethink how our training and apprenticeship systems are managed and remove barriers to entry into the trades.

Recommendations to fix the Skills Gap: There are a few key changes that the Ford government can make that will represent quick but important “wins,” that will positively impact the skilled trade’s employment environment and help to create tens-of-thousands of well-paying jobs in the province. These include:

1. **Halt any new trade certifications and remove the trade certification process from the OCOT.** Moving any trades that are presently classified as “voluntary” into the “compulsory” category will only serve to exacerbate the skills shortage by further restricting what work certain tradespeople can perform. We believe the government should allow the present working environment on jobsites for skilled trades to continue operating as is with no new restrictions. Furthermore, to ensure that additional barriers are not erected, the Ford government should remove the trade certification process from the OCOT mandate.
2. **Lower apprenticeship ratios and remove the ratio setting process from the OCOT.** Ontario’s skilled trade ratios are amongst the highest in the world. They are artificially restricting the number of people employers can hire into the trades, despite the growing demand. The Ford government should move to immediately lower apprenticeship ratios and close off any future process for restricting the number of individuals able to practice in a trade by removing the ratio setting process from the OCOT mandate.
3. **Remove all enforcement responsibilities from the OCOT.** Enforcement has long proved to be the most controversial and disruptive operation housed at the OCOT. It also duplicates an existing practice that the Ministry of Labour (MOL) has regulatory authority over. Prior to the OCOT, MOL inspectors were responsible for trade compliance and can easily fulfill this role again as part of their routine inspections of job sites. This would reduce the number of worksite disruptions and reduce the OCOT’s costs.



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4. **Reform the Skills Training and Apprenticeship System.** The OCOT mandate has been misdirected and has duplicated or complicated previously-in-place government processes. Its mandate needs to be simplified, with contentious and complicating factors removed (as noted above). There remains a need for an agency that regulates the compulsory trades. This is an ideal vehicle that should also be mandated to actually end the skills gap through reform the apprenticeship and training delivery system, and promoting careers in the skilled trades. An exercise should be launched to identify how to best address these issues based on best practices from other jurisdictions, and a new mandate should be struck that focuses entirely on these issues.