

Stakeholder Summary

Apprentice retention and completion focus of new study

The completion rates of Ontario's apprentices remain a point of concern, prompting growing interest in programs to improve retention and completion. A new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario examines the development, implementation and efficacy of the Apprentice Retention Program (ARP).

Project description

ARP was developed in a partnership with Western University, Fanshawe College, the local Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities' (MTCU) Employment Ontario office, the Apprenticeship Network and the Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workplace Planning and Development Board. The program consisted of nine hands-on and two online workshops focusing on building life skills and resilience. Session topics included school and workplace learning, communication and employer expectations.

The study, *The Apprentice Retention Program: Evaluation and Implications for Ontario*, was conducted in the fall of 2012. A total of 26 registered apprentices taking their in-class training at Fanshawe College participated in the study – 11 of them in ARP and 15 of them only in interviews. Data were collected from the ARP participants before, during and after the activities, and included program evaluation exit cards. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with apprentices, former apprentices and employers in the skilled trades to identify what they thought to be the major issues facing apprentices.

Findings

Most ARP participants interviewed said the program provided valuable information that they could use in their work and personal lives. Sessions on employer expectations, finances and budgeting were among the most well received topics. Discussion-based sessions were preferred over lecture-style deliveries.

Those apprentices who were interviewed and who participated in focus groups strongly believed that they would benefit from greater face-to-face support from MTCU employment and training consultants. Employers and apprentices would have liked to know more about support services available to apprentices.

Many apprentices said they would have liked to know more about the scope of job opportunities available post-apprenticeship. Almost all study participants indicated that they had experienced some difficulty during the apprenticeship training process and that they were able to complete the training because they were in some way supported or had a unique opportunity to overcome specific barriers.

The study identified several themes that surfaced repeatedly in interviews and focus groups including financial support, access to support from MTCU, difficulty with school curriculum and challenges in their personal lives. None of these factors was mutually exclusive and participants typically addressed more

than one barrier in conversation, “suggesting that any intervention designed to improve apprentice retention needs to be multi-faceted and work on many levels, taking into account the dynamic nature of the apprenticeship training process as well as the lives of the apprentices enrolled,” say the study authors.

Recommendations

While programs to assist apprentices in overcoming barriers to completion could be helpful, the authors recommend that they be part of a core curriculum of training or pre-apprenticeship training offered during regular class hours by established members of the training community. “There are still pockets of resistance within the field of apprenticeship training to offering or accepting support and acknowledging the need for programs to improve success... Through integration and perceived normalcy, there is a chance that more apprentices will have the opportunity to succeed and complete their training.”

This report is the third in a recent series from HEQCO on apprenticeship, following on [Apprenticeship in Ontario: An Exploratory Analysis](#) and [Apprenticeship in International Perspective: Points of Contrast with Ontario](#).

Authors of *The Apprentice Retention Program: Evaluation and Implications for Ontario* are Ron Hansen and Catharine Dishke Hondzel, Western University.