

Stakeholder Summary

Federal governments are key players in apprenticeship systems around the globe

Much of the public discussion surrounding changes to Ontario's apprenticeship system has focused on what is happening in other systems around the world. A new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) examines seven countries' apprenticeship systems and finds that while many operate with government structures similar to Ontario's, federal governments are much more involved in coordination, legislation and decision-making.

Project Description

Apprenticeship in International Perspective: Points of Contrast with Ontario examines the apprenticeship systems in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Australia, England, France and the United States and looks at six different dimensions: historical and cultural factors, governance, scope, participation, apprenticeship structure, and qualification and completion rates. Germany, Austria and Switzerland were selected because they operate "dual system" models that are often presented as inspiration for other countries. Australia and England have undertaken a series of reforms in the past 30 years to grow apprenticeship. France was chosen for the manner in which employer participation is encouraged, while the United States struggles with many of the challenges faced by Ontario.

Findings

Apprenticeship in Ontario is still largely restricted to the trades, but other jurisdictions have expanded beyond this traditional sector to include high-growth occupations in emerging areas of the economy. For example, England has established apprenticeships in information technology, finance, legal services and digital media, and has seen growth in business administration, retail and health care enrolments.

Apprentices in Ontario and the United States tend to be older than those in Europe and these two systems are the only ones in the world primarily used by adults. This creates a number of unique challenges as many apprentices in Ontario are at a stage where financial, family and life obligations may be challenges to completion. The costs of apprenticeship can be a major barrier to participation in Canada, especially for older participants. Many apprentices in Ontario are required to pay for their in-class training, and those not qualified for Employment Insurance are not salaried during this time unless their employers elect to do so. Several other international jurisdictions offer in-class training for free and apprentices continue to be paid while training off the job.

The "dual system" model of apprenticeship, which blends in-class education at a vocational school with workplace training, is often considered successful for its ability to attract large numbers of young participants and has completion rates between 80% and 90%. Apprentices in this model spend about 70% of their training on the job and 30% in class, as opposed to Ontario where apprentices spend between 85% and 90% on the job. But the success of the systems in Germany, Austria and Switzerland

are closely linked to unique historical and cultural factors that have created a positive public perception of apprenticeship and strong employer participation.

Jurisdictions attempting to increase participation in apprenticeship should be mindful of what has taken place in England and Australia as both countries made significant changes to expand their systems and boost enrolment in recent decades. While both expansions were quite successful in increasing the number of apprentices, they led to significant questions about the quality of training. These examples show that expansion of apprenticeship is possible through creative, engaging marketing and adapting to new sectors of the economy, but issues of quality must be closely monitored.

Apprenticeship in International Perspective: Points of Contrast with Ontario is written by HEQCO researcher Nicholas Dion.