



NOVA SCOTIA
APPRENTICESHIP
AGENCY

BUSINESS PLAN

2022-2023



NSAA 2022-2023 Business Plan

Introduction

Apprenticeship is a post-secondary education and training system that leads to certification and quality careers in the skilled trades. Apprentices receive hands-on training from certified tradespeople along with in-class technical training and long-term practitioners without formal training are supported to achieve certification.

The Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency is the legislated authority for trades training in the province and in this role partners with industry, community organizations and equity groups to promote apprenticeship opportunities, and to ensure that trades-specific training is responsive to the needs of industry and the Nova Scotia job market.

The 2022-2023 Business Plan for the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency (Agency) continues to prioritize actions that advance the Agency's 2020-2025 Strategic Plan as well as those identified in the Agency's renewed *Building More Equitable Pathways* framework to advance an equitable, diverse, accessible, and inclusive apprenticeship system.

In addition, the Business Plan also incorporates the new Government's priorities, where the Minister of Labour, Skills and Immigration has been given the mandate to modernize apprenticeship programs in Nova Scotia as well as provide support to her colleagues on related mandate priorities, including promoting the skilled trades through awareness and experiential opportunities for in-school youth and increasing the diversity of those who participate. In addition, the apprenticeship system has been linked to the population growth strategy, social procurement efforts, the recent safe, affordable housing strategy in terms of responding to labour shortages, and to the Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Reduction Act to ensure innovations that support environmental sustainability are incorporated into trades programs.

In the new year and as the hub of the trades training system in Nova Scotia, the Agency will seek to strengthen its position to fulfill its mandate and prepare effectively to meet the increasing demand for skilled trades labour now and into the future. This work will require a significant level of outreach to youth, those underrepresented in the system, and their influencers to increase the number of individuals pursuing apprenticeship and entering skilled trades careers. In addition, the Agency will explore and develop measures to support a stronger certification rate among equity seeking apprentices and those experiencing learning challenges. The Agency will continue to provide a meaningful forum for industry to guide and shape apprenticeship programs that are relevant and respond to emerging trends and trade practice and bring forward legislative and regulatory amendments designed to increase

responsiveness to apprentice and employer needs. The Agency's work will be carried out in partnership with employers and industry, training providers, community-based organizations, and other government bodies under the auspices of the following principles:

- **Diverse and inclusive:** We will embrace the need for diversity and encourage entry into a much wider range of trades, helping apprentices and employers understand the value of a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- **Partnership-based:** We will put the employer/apprentice relationship at the heart of the trades training system. The employer is the primary trainer and beneficiary; therefore, the system must be industry-led and industry-driven.
- **Service Excellence:** We will strive to provide efficient, responsive service to clients and employers, leveraging technology to ensure access to resources and information.
- **Innovative and strategic:** We will make system- and trade-level decisions with industry, being open to multiple, flexible solutions and recognizing the dynamic nature of industry.
- **Flexible and accessible:** We will identify and provide system supports and training that will ensure success, including bridging programs and essential skills programming.
- **Results-focused and accountable:** We will be accountable and transparent to apprenticeship system partners for decisions, resource allocations, and performance, and we will establish standards and accountabilities for all participants — apprentices, employers, joint registration agreement participants, training providers, and service providers.

Operating Environment

In 2021-2022, the apprenticeship system continued to meet the challenge of remaining fully operational while the COVID-19 pandemic persisted in new waves. The Agency integrated system innovations developed during the height of the pandemic into regular operations and experienced an overall rebound of apprenticeship registrations and completions.

While there has been a strong recovery in 2021, the loss of new registrations in 2020 poses a risk to the availability of certified tradespeople in future years. Employers are already reporting that they are having difficulty meeting labour force needs. It is estimated that the province will require approximately 11,179 new certified tradespeople to meet sector demand requirements over the next eight years, accounting for recovery, new growth, and retirements. This data covers 31 trades across the four sectors and represents between 92-99% of apprentices, depending on the sector. Given the current certification rate, the Agency needs to attract 28,000 new apprentices over the time period.

In addition, a landscape of systemic challenges threaten success in meeting this demand. First and foremost, an outdated perception of the skilled trades continues to hinder recruitment. Youth are not choosing Apprenticeship as a first choice and usually enter in their late twenties. The national average age to start an apprenticeship is 28 with the median age being 26.

According to the Youth Attitudes Towards the Trades Survey (2018; 2012), less than 1 in 10 15-year-old students and only 2% of 15-year-old female students definitely plan on pursuing a trades career. Student intentions towards pursuing jobs in the trades have remained largely unchanged between 2012 and 2018. Of students who have an intention to pursue post-secondary upon graduation in 2020-2021, 40.8% said university in NS, 17.9% said NSCC and 0.3% said Apprenticeship (NS Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) Graduate Intention Survey).

As a result of the Agency's many successful programs and partnerships, women and underrepresented groups are increasingly interested in pursuing skilled trades but many face obstacles to being hired or experience discrimination and harassment in the workplace which leads to leaving the trade before obtaining certification. The overall certification rate for apprenticeship training is 46%, reflecting a need to focus on retention strategies to support more apprentices to completion. Finally, Nova Scotia still lags in employer-sponsored training overall, affecting participation in apprenticeship which depends on employers to increase the availability of apprenticeship opportunities for new entrants (Canadian Survey on Business Conditions, Stats Can, Apr-May 2021).

Throughout the past year, the Agency has been working with its partners to change this landscape and in particular with its largest technical training provider, Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC), to renew its joint stewardship of the apprenticeship and trades qualifications system. NSCC and the Agency will continue to work towards their revised shared goals of achieving effective joint communication and decision making across both organizations, promoting the skilled trades, delivering quality training and inclusive learning experiences, and coordinating engagement with industry and other partners.

Moving forward, the Agency will seek to grow its impact in youth and equity programming to expand recruitment, achieve a greater level of service excellence to support program completion, and invest in timely and relevant trade program development, along with its Atlantic and pan-Canadian counterparts, to enhance the quality of training and integrity of trade certification. The Agency will continue to explore innovative, learner-focused delivery mechanisms for technical training and exams, prepare to implement the Apprenticeship Management System to provide real-time electronic service to its clients and expand its reach to employers and other partners in its effort to continuously improve.

Business Plan Priorities for 2022-2023

Attract Skilled Trades Talent

In meeting the labour market needs of the future, the Agency will grow its efforts in attracting Nova Scotians to the skilled trades. Youth, parents, and educators need to be aware of education pathways for the skilled trades, have access to information and opportunities

available and make informed decisions with appropriate information about employment opportunities in the skilled trades. In 2022-2023, the Agency will:

- Continue marketing the Apprenticeship Awareness Raising campaign, “Ready When You Are”, including television ads, a social and digital media campaign, billboards, and transit shelter and bus wrap ads. The campaign promotes the skilled trades as a quality post-secondary career to youth, parents, influencers, and the public, advancing the value of trades certification and promoting diversity and inclusion throughout the campaign.
- Collaborate with the Population Growth Marketing Working Group to support the pan-Canadian campaign to attract skilled trades workers to Nova Scotia and connect them to industry organizations.
- Partner with NSCC, EECD, industry associations, community, and equity-seeking organizations to promote careers in the skilled trades to youth, equity groups, and women through innovative awareness and experiential learning programs.
- Support successful Board and Trade Advisory Committees in their deliberation of trade applications and development of advice to the Minister on apprenticeship matters.
- Increase support at an industry sector level, including the development and dissemination of skilled trades labour market information resources for system users and leaders, growing participation in apprenticeship, and increasing capacity in new and undersubscribed trades.
- Support implementation of the strategic plan of the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Advisory Committee and grow coordination of efforts within the African Nova Scotian community.
- Provide oversight to the implementation of actions identified in *Building More Equitable Pathways II* to improve and advance inclusion in the apprenticeship system for women, Indigenous Peoples, African Nova Scotians, newcomers, Persons with Disabilities, and other underrepresented groups.

Support the Journey to Certification

The number of registered apprentices in Nova Scotia continues to rise and the Agency needs focused attention on apprentices and employers to achieve higher retention and certification rates in apprenticeship programs. This includes access to learning resources, innovations in service to clients, and ensuring training programs are modern and responsive to changes in trade practice and technologies. In 2022-2023, the Agency will:

- Incorporate a set of curriculum resources into apprenticeship technical training to build compassion, empathy and understanding of diversity and inclusion.
- Continue implementation of the new virtual cohort delivery model for apprenticeship technical training.

- Implement a learning support framework, including referrals for learning supports, the development of individualized learning plans, essential skills programming, accessible assistive technology, classroom interventions, exam accommodations, and theory and/or trade specific tutoring services, for apprentices with language challenges and learning disabilities.
- Continue to grow an interactive Apprenticeship Learning Commons that meets the diverse needs of apprentices and trade qualifiers by providing supports/resources, such as mathematics modules, study guides, and examination preparation materials.
- Consolidate the management of strategic initiatives including the Forestry Sector Apprenticeship Initiative, the new Construction Sector Apprenticeship Initiative, the delivery of financial supports, and equitable service delivery and ensure permanent resources to support women in trades.
- Continue to refresh and update apprenticeship curriculum, pre-apprenticeship programs, logbooks, and examinations in response to harmonization and through quality engagement with industry.
- Review current trades programs for incorporation of emerging clean technologies and green energy to support environmental sustainability in the longer term.
- Develop and implement teaching and learning standards that ensure quality first-tier instruction and learning support leading to successful experiences for system participants.

Foster a Culture of Workplace Learning

Employers are the primary training provider in the apprenticeship system. It is important that employers know their role in the system and build a respectful workplace where learning is valued, and the success of apprentices and journeypersons is supported. With changing technologies, it is increasingly important that employers keep their apprentices and journeypersons current with new systems and processes. A culture of workplace learning ensures learning is viewed as positive – not only for those who need to improve on a specific task, or who are new to the trade - but is important for everyone and from which everyone benefits. The Agency also has a role to play to ensure government is a model of affirming workplace learning culture. In 2022-2023, the Agency will:

- Expand learning opportunities through remote delivery options.
- Explore the development of microcredentials to expand learning opportunities for apprentices and certified journeypersons.
- Continue to engage employers to increase their participation in the system and educate them on their role in training and the importance of equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion.

- Develop opportunities for employers to engage with Indigenous organizations and other equity-seeking groups to promote a culture of respect and inclusivity in the workplace.
- Emphasize the message of workplace learning in promotion and advertising.
- Deliver Journeyperson Mentoring Training and Endorsement, Respectful Workplace Training and Gender and Inclusion Training to employers and journeypersons in the apprenticeship system.
- Implement business transformation and achieve a higher level of client service through the re-design of the Agency's support model.

Advance the Value of Certification

Nova Scotians need to experience workplaces that are fair, safe, and equitable, and have confidence that employers understand the value of certification and invest accordingly in the skills of certified trades workforce. Apprentices and journeypersons need to have pride in their trade and promote it to others as a career of choice to ensure the demand of the skilled trades workforce of the future is met. In 2022-2023, the Agency will:

- Continue implementation of a province-wide compliance and enforcement plan with input from the Compliance and Enforcement Group, including identified priorities.
- Develop compliance plans with Construction Managers of publicly funded Infrastructure Projects to promote and ensure compliance in the skilled trades.
- Develop an enhanced sector engagement approach to increase employer participation in apprenticeship, providing more opportunities for apprentices and supporting employer efforts to recruit and retain new apprentices.
- Explore options to strengthen the language in the government sustainable policy and apprenticeship procurement policy where public entities must consider trades certification and/or apprenticeship in all skilled trades sectors where appropriate.
- Work with partners to identify opportunities to certify existing trades professionals and for diverse communities to capitalize on apprenticeship opportunities in public construction projects.
- Recognize and celebrate apprentices who complete their journey.
- Recognize employers for their contributions to the apprenticeship system with a focus on those who champion workplace learning and demonstrate support to women and underrepresented apprentices to complete their journey to certification.
- Continue the review of the legislative framework to improve the flexibility of the apprenticeship system while maintaining the integrity of the certification of journeypersons in Nova Scotia.

Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

The capacity of the Agency to evaluate and measure program success will be key in its efforts towards continuous improvement. To this end, the Agency will:

- Apply existing and new methods of analysing data to help in identifying programs and activities which yield planned results including surveys of employers and apprentices.
- Provide increased and varied opportunities for collecting first voice information and data to measure and determine the impact of its programs.
- Take steps to discontinue and eliminate practices and processes which threaten or impose barriers to program success

The Agency reports annually on key indicators identified in the strategic plan, including system influence, employer engagement, inclusiveness, labour market responsiveness and successful completion.