



ONTARIO REFRIGERATION &
AIR CONDITIONING
CONTRACTORS
ASSOCIATION



Thursday, November 12

SUBMISSION FOR the SKILLED TRADES PANEL

For:

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From:

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide HRAI Canada's initial recommendations for Phase 1 of the Skilled Trades Governance Consultation process. We are pleased to contribute to this important consultation and thank you for the work you are collectively doing to improve access to and governance of the Skilled Trades Sector.

For the second phase of the consultation process, HRAI would be pleased to host virtual roundtable(s) discussions with members of the Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration sector. We would include our industry partners and representatives from the Ontario Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Association, the Canadian Plumbing and Heating Institute of Canada, and other industry partners.

HRAI-Canada is the national trade association for the heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration (HVACR) industry, representing over 1,250 member companies across the country and about approximately 900 businesses in Ontario. Our members include manufacturers, wholesalers and contractors who collectively employ tens of thousands of skilled trade professionals across the country and contribute more than \$12B annually to the Canadian economy. HRAI also provides technical certification training that is recognized throughout Canada.

Our recommendations for your consideration are as follows:

- **Create a Gas technician Trade:** Work in conjunction with the MGCS, MLTSD, HRAI, ORAC and TSSA to find an effective way to align this certification under MLTSD and to make it a trade. This will create a clear educational pathway to provide access to this apprenticeship, create more seamless service and processing and create alignment with other provincial jurisdictions.
- **Promote Trades differently:** Consider “rebranding” the trades to resonate more directly with the values and priorities of today’s students, which include the desire for meaningful (and well compensated) work, an interest in serving communities, a high comfort level with advanced technologies and concerns about addressing the climate crisis. Dedicate resources and commit to working with industry associations to rebrand and market the building trades as technically innovative and capable of delivering real solutions to issues like climate change and ensuring healthy indoor environments.
- **Start where it counts:** Develop a Ministry of Education Skilled Trades Strategy with includes more emphasis on trade career opportunities at the secondary school level. This should also include dedicated personnel in every school and every school board who can connect students to trade career opportunities based on interests of demonstrated aptitudes. Rather than designating trades as “Plan B” learning paths, there should be more explicit connection of trades to relevant mainstream academic subjects like math, physics and chemistry (e.g. using examples relevant to HVACR trades). This will provide the institutional sustainability needed to demonstrate the importance of and the need for skilled tradespeople.
- **Modernize & Digitize Administrative Functions:** Administrative processes related to the tracking, certification and renewal of apprentices, apprenticeships, the education process and employers’ processes must be digitized as quickly as possible.
- **Continue the Achievement Incentive Grant:** Make this grant permanent and signal to industry, to youth, to parents/guardians and educators that improving the apprenticeship system is a long term strategy which requires ongoing investment to ensure the sector’s sustainability.

KEY PRIORITY 1 - BREAKING THE STIGMA

Promote Trades Differently – Rebrand the Trades to focus on Climate Change and STEAM:

Rebrand the trades to resonate more directly with the values and priorities of today's students, which include the desire for meaningful (and well compensated) work, an interest in serving communities, a high comfort level with advanced technologies and concerns about addressing the climate crisis.

Dedicate resources and commit to working with industry associations to rebrand and market the building trades as technically innovative and capable of delivering real solutions to issues like climate change and ensuring healthy indoor environments.

- **Climate Change**: Many youth want to contribute to addressing climate change. The Building Trades and Construction sectors' play a significant role in addressing climate change through the utilization of technologies and building science which will reduce carbon emissions being generated by homes and buildings.
- **STEAM**: Describe and market the variety of opportunities within the sector – entrepreneurship, research and development, financial management, innovative technology and problem solving – beyond the more traditional concept of being 'on the tools'. Tradespeople in the HVACR and Construction Trades sectors work with highly innovative tools and products, there is ongoing research and development in the sector and this needs to be communicated and marketed with and by all stakeholders – particularly the relevant Ministries of Labour, Training and Skills Development and Education - in that light.

KEY PRIORITY #2 - IDENTIFYING THE BARRIERS, INCLUDING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS, PREVENTING YOUTH FROM UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS ENTERING THE SKILLED TRADES AND EXPLORING STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE THEIR PARTICIPATION

Start where it counts: Develop a Ministry of Education **Skilled Trades Strategy** with includes more emphasis on trade career opportunities at the secondary school level. This should also include dedicated personnel in every school and every school board who can connect students to trade career opportunities based on interests of demonstrated aptitudes.

Rather than designating trades as “Plan B” learning paths, there should be more explicit connection of trades to relevant mainstream academic subjects like math, physics and chemistry (e.g. using examples relevant to HVACR trades).

This will provide the institutional sustainability needed to demonstrate the importance of and the need for skilled tradespeople.

The **private sector** and industry associations like HRAI Canada have demonstrated a willingness and interest in partnering with schools and schools boards to provide assistance where needed including, for example, with the donation of equipment to schools. This needs to be explored and systemized.

- **Secondary Education System:**

- **Space:** Particularly for the HVACR trade, dedicated teaching/lab space is required to allow students the opportunity to see, experience and learn.
- **Co-op:** Trades must be offered as viable co-op opportunities for students. The industry needs to make space available for these learners.
- **Guidance Teachers:** need to be better educated about the opportunities, the variety within the Skilled Trades and the process by which to begin apprenticeships. The dedicated board staff person would be key to assist.

KEY PRIORITY # 3 - IMPROVING ACCESS INTO APPRENTICESHIP

- **Continue the Achievement Incentive Grant:** Make this grant permanent and signal to industry, to youth, to parents/guardians and educators that improving the apprenticeship system is a long term strategy which requires ongoing investment to ensure the sector's sustainability.

HRAI recognizes the need for the HVACR industry to better support those attempting to enter the trades by providing more mentorship and apprenticeship opportunities.

The province's recent announcement of the \$21 million investment in 2020 – 2021 for the new **Achievement Incentive Grant** to encourage small and medium employers to train apprentices towards program completion and trade certification is important. As you know, given that the vast majority of the businesses required to support and train apprentices are small businesses (1 to 20 employees), it is important that there is a recognition of the human and financial resources they dedicate to this process.

- **Modernize & Digitize Administrative Functions:** Administrative processes related to the tracking, certification and renewal of apprentices, apprenticeships, the education process and employers' processes must be digitized as quickly as possible.

These processes, platforms and methods already exist and in particular are successfully utilized by, for example, the Joint Training and Apprenticeship Committee and other training organizations.

It is imperative that digital tools and resources ensure:

- Apprentices, their hours and courses are clearly tracked throughout the process,
- Clarity and consistency regarding the next steps in the apprenticeship process.
- Ministry contacts – which change frequently – are consistently updated and maintained,
- Next steps for the apprentice, the college, the ministry and the employer are clear, readily available and understood.
- All trade licenses, certifications and renewals are tracked, updated and accessible as required to those legitimately requiring access.

KEY PRIORITY #4 - SUPPORTING THE RETENTION OF APPRENTICES AND SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF AN APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

- **Create a Gas Technician Trade:** Certification of Gas Technicians is the responsibility of the Technical Safety Standards Association (TSSA) rather than the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD). However, oversight of other certified trades and apprenticeships is the responsibility of the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

In most provinces, the Gas Technician certification is a trade and creating an apprenticeship program for gas technicians or deeming it a trade would align Ontario with other provinces. However, TSSA and MLTSD are separate organizations with distinct revenue models and accountabilities to government. For years, the two agencies have not found a mutually agreeable solution that would address this industry anomaly.

Further, the Canadian Free Trade Agreement's Regulatory Reconciliation and Cooperation Table's 2019/2020 work plan continues to work toward the **removal** and **harmonization** of numerous barriers to inter-provincial/territorial trade, investment, services and labour mobility. The opportunity to discuss the potential alignment of Gas Technicians' certification is important to the HVACR sector.

HRAI has a good working relationship with TSSA and ORAC and would be pleased to facilitate discussions with representatives from the MGCS and MLTSD to determine an effective way to resolve this issue in order to create alignment with other jurisdictions and to increase labour mobility.

- **Post-secondary:** Ensuring a high quality of training and a clear, timely pathway through the apprenticeship program to graduation is necessary to help breaking the stigma associated with the skilled trades.
- **Clear Pathways:** In a recent survey of HRAI members, it is clear that it is unnecessarily difficult, confusing and far too lengthy a process for youth, New Canadians, guidance teachers, parents and others to see, understand and navigate the pathway through the apprenticeship system.

When attempting to hire new G2 technicians, one of the impacts of this anomaly are the significant delays in processing administrative paperwork at both agencies. Members report that delays in starting a new staff person can range from 2 weeks to 3 months.