



Suggested responses to Ministry of Advanced Education Discussion Paper:
A Proposed Model for Industry Training in BC

What are your comments on industry training roles and responsibilities as proposed?

The paper speaks extensively of “employers” responsibility for training. The challenge for any new training model is to ensure that the needs of an individual employer are addressed within the context of the overall industry. Given the multi-employer, multi-site nature of construction, it is essential to ensure workers have broad enough training and skill sets that can be transported to other sites and employers, and are not “boxed into” a narrow band of skills that cannot be transported to other employers.

In regard to identifying training needs, the construction industry has a long and successful history of identifying training needs through the apprenticeship system. We need to build on the successes of the existing system while remaining responsive to emerging trends and needs. As noted above, given the multi-employer, multi-site nature of construction, this needs to be done on a sector basis rather than on an individual employer basis. Changes to the training system and scope of training is best developed by industry representatives who employ apprentices and are committed to improving the overall skill sets of everyone in the industry.

What are your comments on the proposed model for industry training?

There is concern that the Industry Training Authority may not be responsive to construction industry needs. The construction industry is particularly complex and there must be a balance of authority to answer the concerns of differing elements within the industry.

It is critical that there be clarity on the scope of the credentials to ensure that such training is not so narrow as to be employer specific. There is a big difference between recognizing a limited number of levels for a carpenter, for example, and issuing credentials for specific sub-sets such as door hanging. The employers in the industry who have an understanding and commitment to developing a fully skilled workforce are the ones who can best make these determinations.

The paper does not fully recognize the importance of field training. While there are some opportunities for “up-front” training, much of the benefit of apprenticeship training is the opportunity to “field test” the concepts learned in a classroom under the supervision of an experienced worker. Field training will not only clarify any need for further study, it will also provide practical information not available in books. This practical knowledge is a significant component of a skilled tradesperson. Quite simply, the fundamental importance of direct experience for the acquisition of skills must not be overlooked. The employers in the industry who have an understanding and commitment to developing a fully skilled workforce are the ones who can best determine the appropriate mix of classroom and field training.

A major concern under the new system is ensuring that employers of apprentices recognize and fulfill their responsibilities to allow and encourage apprentices to engage in skills upgrading. If the focus and drive of the new system is to meet the requirements of individual employers, how are we going to ensure that apprentices pursue skills upgrading if their employer is satisfied with their current level of training and refuses to let the apprentice attend classes and meet the on-going requirements of attaining subsequent credentials? We agree that “employers will have the opportunity to identify what training is needed for their employees...”, but believe that this should be determined within the context of overall industry requirements.

In regard to new practical assessments, we recognize there is certainly a role for such innovations, especially in confirming the skills of a worker from other jurisdictions or with existing credentials. It should not however be used to supplant field experience in applying concepts learned through books and classrooms.

What are your comments on competency-based assessment for industry training?

Generally, the existing apprenticeship system in construction is based on competencies in the various trades. The proposed model does not provide enough information on how the suggested assessments will be carried out. We believe that, given the potential for many new levels of credentialing, it is important to identify who, how, when and where such assessing of competence will be conducted. Again, the employers in the industry who have an understanding and commitment to developing a fully skilled workforce are the ones who can best determine the answers to these questions. Also, how will such competencies be measured in the context of the overall trades training?

What are your comments on the role of compulsory trades in the new model?

Flexibility must be tempered with concern for public safety.

Also, the need to address skill shortages must include the need to attract youth into construction careers. This is difficult to do if the individual trades cease to be recognized as “careers” and turn into “jobs”. Young people need to have some level of assurance that they can expect decent wages down the road or why go to the expense

of learning the trade. It is interesting to note that the trades with the highest demand for training are those that have a compulsory element.

We are not certain that the new proposed Safety Standards Act will in fact address the training component of the compulsory trades. As noted in the paper, not all the compulsory trades are envisioned to be included in the new safety legislation, and there is no direction as to what happens with these trades.

In regard to accessing the training that is designated as part of a compulsory trade, given the focus on modular training, we do not anticipate problems in allowing workers to access training. It is a question of the overall skills required to perform a specific trade, and again, we believe employers in the industry who have an understanding and commitment to developing a fully skilled workforce are the ones who can best determine the issue.

What are your comments on accountabilities in the new industry training model?

It is necessary that all stakeholders be accountable for meeting their responsibilities.

The accountability of the Industry Training Authority to industry will be very important. The extent of their authority to structure training for construction will be a critical issue. What criteria will be established around consultation and input with industry prior to decisions being made and funding allocated?

Under the proposed model Industry is expected to shoulder the responsibility for identifying training needs and for developing programs. Industry groups that seek to meet these responsibilities should also be accorded some level of authority to implement their ideas as long as they fall within the spirit of the proposed model.

What are your comments on the proposed governance structure?

The construction industry has serious concerns about the model put forward. The Industry Training Authority will have a small board. Given that such a small board must by definition exclude many stakeholders from sitting at the table, there needs to be well-drafted legislation clarifying roles and defining powers. If industry is to take the lead in developing and managing industry training, they should be free to take this lead without the concern that their voices will not be heard or listened to.

We recommend that the legislation gives specific responsibilities to industry sector groups that choose to come together. The construction industry has recommended the establishment of the Construction Industry Training Board that would be empowered to manage industry training within their sector as long as they are within the spirit of the proposed model. Funding tools, such as industry levies, should be available to those sectors that can identify a need for additional funds. The construction industry has shown general acceptance of such levies and, again, the employers in the industry who have an understanding and commitment to developing a fully skilled workforce are the ones who can best determine the use and amount of the levy.

We are concerned with the suggestion that the “allocation of training funds will align training delivery with available jobs.” Construction is a very cyclical sector of the economy and the employment opportunities can fluctuate dramatically. However, the need for skilled workers remains to ensure that when a turnaround occurs, there are sufficient workers to do the job. The construction industry has recommended that a levy be instituted to ensure the level of funding is commensurate to the demands required by the industry on a long-term basis. This is a critical element of the construction industry’s recommendations, and once again, the employers in the industry who have an understanding and commitment to developing a fully skilled workforce are the ones who can best determine these requirements and the appropriate levy. The construction industry would generally accept such a levy, on the basis that they have control over the training of their sector of the economy.