

Beyond hours: Piloting an alternative to tracking and understanding apprentice competency in Canada



PARTNERS

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum



LOCATIONS

Across Canada
Ontario
Quebec



INVESTMENT

1,084,500



PUBLISHED

August 2024

☰ Executive Summary

The persistence of labour and skill shortages within the trades is exacerbated by challenges with on-the-job training and skills recognition.

The prevailing methods to document and formally recognize the skills that apprentices acquire through workplace learning are outdated.

This project highlights that new technologies can help apprentices engage more meaningfully in their own learning and can improve the overall quality of workplace training within the skilled trades across Canada.

Yet tools of this nature are not silver bullets. Apprentices point to the continued need to explore career pathways and options with qualified experts. In addition, there are other practical barriers to more widespread adoption of such tools, including cost, practical integration and other far more pressing challenges within the sector.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 More than 2,000 apprentices tested a digital tool.
- 2 Seventy-three percent of apprentices reported interest in using digital e-portfolios or logbooks.
- 3 Ninety-three percent of apprentices want access to help from a qualified expert who can identify skill gaps and tell them where they need to improve.

▶ The Issue

Apprentices are employed in trades sectors where layoffs, project closures and other disruptions are commonplace, which leads to high job turnover. However, the current system for skills recognition for apprentices that supports their re-employment is outdated and relies heavily on hours worked and paper log books. And while there exist a number of online skill tests, few, if any, are designed in a manner that integrates the standards of Red Seal trades.

This project explored how digital tools can support apprentice learning on the job and facilitate skills recognition in support of continued employment.



🔧 What We Investigated

This project piloted a new online skills assessment tool to better document the competencies of apprentices, specifically in the electrical, carpentry, plumbing and welding trades. The project tested whether this helped apprentices address skill gaps and showcase their capabilities to prospective employers, and thus find jobs more efficiently. The project also assessed, through industry engagement, the barriers to industry-wide adoption of such tools and how they can be improved to enhance skills development and employee progression.

✔ What We're Learning

Digital tools support learning in the trades but cannot replace expert guidance

Digital tools can play an important complementary role in workplace learning and the recognition of on-site training for apprentices.

However, digital tools cannot replace practical guidance in helping apprentices identify skills gaps and areas for improvement. There are also concerns regarding the cost of implementation (financial and time) and maintenance. Stakeholders felt that there are more pressing concerns within the skilled trades, including improving overall employability skills among today's youth, recruiting future talent and keeping standards and curricula up to date.

★ Why It Matters

Addressing labour and skills shortages within the trades is an essential part of Canada's workforce strategy and a necessary step in an effort to, among others things, make progress in reaching ambitious climate goals. Canada needs a robust talent pool of skilled tradespeople to support in the large infrastructure projects emerging as a result of initiatives to decarbonize our supply chains and economy.

Digital tools have an important part to play in this space and elsewhere, but more careful analysis is merited if wider adoption is to be considered. And importantly, in-person support continues to offer significant value in the overall delivery of career and training guidance. Improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery and recognition of workplace learning is an important pillar to Canada's broader skilled trades strategy.

Have questions about this report? Contact us communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

Tobin, S. (2024) Project Insights Report: Beyond hours: Piloting an alternative to tracking and understanding apprentice competency in Canada. Toronto: Future Skills Centre. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/beyond-hours>

Funded by the
Government of Canada's
Future Skills Program



Beyond hours: Piloting an alternative to tracking and understanding apprentice competency in Canada is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.