

Questions and Answers: Reforming Apprenticeship and Supporting the Skilled Trades

New Legislation

1. Why is Ontario introducing this legislation?

Skilled trades workers are at the front line of our economic recovery, with businesses playing a crucial role in training our next generation of workers through apprenticeship programs.

A Skilled Trades Panel appointed by the government learned during consultations with stakeholders that the current skilled trades and apprenticeship system is hard to navigate. With responsibilities shared between the Ontario College of Trades and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, apprentices must sometimes go back and forth between the college and the ministry to register as an apprentice or write, pay for and receive exam results, among other services. This can discourage people from pursuing a career in skilled trades, make processes inefficient, and negatively impact the economy as employers struggle to find qualified skilled trades workers.

The proposed legislation would address this problem by allowing the government to create a new crown agency, Skilled Trades Ontario, which will allow apprentices, journey persons and employers to access all client services in one place, and with more digital self-service options that will make the system more efficient and easier to use. Compliance and enforcement would be separated from the agency and handled by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. If passed, the legislation would be implemented in phases.

Skilled Trades Ontario

2. Why is the government proposing the creation of a new agency called Skilled Trades Ontario?

The skilled trades and apprenticeship system plays a critical role in Ontario's economy. However, the current system is outdated and overly complex. As such, the government is proposing the creation of a new agency, Skilled Trades Ontario, to replace the Ontario College of Trades. This is part of the government's plan to build an apprenticeship and skilled trades system that is easier for people to access and navigate. This would attract more people to the skilled trades, better prepare them for good jobs, and address industry needs.

Responsibility for the delivery of skilled trades and apprenticeship functions is currently shared between the Ontario College of Trades and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. This has contributed to confusion among apprentices, employers, and stakeholders. That's why the government is creating an agency to provide clearer access to enhanced services for apprentices, skilled trades workers, and their employers. At maturity, the proposed agency, Skilled Trades Ontario, would help apprentices and workers access registration and get certification all in one place, with enhanced digital service delivery.

3. How would the people of Ontario benefit from the proposed agency?

The people of Ontario would benefit from these changes through streamlined service improvements, easier navigation of the system, and the reduction of red tape. Pending passage of the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021, the proposed agency would have a mandate to ensure Ontario's skilled trades and apprenticeship system is responsive to changes in the economy and delivers the training and skills required by workers.

At maturity, it would bring together services under one industry informed organization, with modernized digital-first services that will be continually improved based on ongoing

stakeholder input. The new model would minimize duplication and provide one point of access to apprentices and tradespeople.

4. When would the proposed agency be in place?

The ministry is taking a thoughtful and measured approach to the transition to the proposed agency, Skilled Trades Ontario. If the legislation is passed, some Ontario College of Trades services would continue as part of the proposed agency. These changes are expected to happen in December 2021. The ministry would continue to co-deliver existing apprenticeship services until the agency has reached a mature state.

The transition to a mature state agency, with proposed apprenticeship services integrated, is expected to take up to three years.

5. How is this new agency different from the Ontario College of Trades?

In the new simplified and client-focused model, the new agency would be industry-informed, and accountable to the Minister of Labour, Training, and Skills Development. The agency's government-appointed board would be made up of individuals with competencies and skills that reflect the agency's mandate.

Unlike the Ontario College of Trades, at maturity, the agency would be the single point of access for all apprenticeship and skilled trades clients, focusing on training and certification. The new agency would not have a role in compliance and enforcement activities.

The proposed agency would have greater accountability to government, including the requirements to submit annual reports, business plans, and audited financial statements.

6. What is happening with the wind-down of the Ontario College of Trades?

To maintain uninterrupted services to the public and to ensure a smooth transition to an agency-led model, the ministry is taking a phased approach to transitioning to the new agency, Skilled Trades Ontario.

Implementation of the proposed agency is planned for December 2021. The college would continue to deliver its core services during the transition period and until the new transition delivery model is in place. The ministry would continue to co-deliver existing apprenticeship services as it does today and until the proposed agency has reached a mature state.

Staff would continue to work with colleagues at the Ontario College of Trades and, subsequently, the new agency as required. Further updates will be provided as they become available.

The Ontario College of Trades functions transitioning to the agency in December 2021 are:

- Development and maintenance of apprenticeship training and curriculum standards
- Development and maintenance of exams
- Issuance of certificates for journeypersons
- Assessment of non-apprenticeship stream applicants (trade equivalency assessments).
- Maintenance of the public register
- Ongoing client services and supports

Ministry functions that would continue to be co-delivered until the proposed new agency reaches its mature state are:

- Apprentice registration (registered training agreements)
- Monitoring of apprentice progression and in-school scheduling
- Issuance of Certificates of Apprenticeship
- Administration of exams, including exam marking

7. What is the ministry doing to improve the online experience for clients of the apprenticeship and skilled trades system?

The current service delivery model for the skilled trades is fragmented, outdated and paper-based, with limited options for self-service. This creates many barriers for people in starting, progressing through, and completing apprenticeship programs and maintaining certification status.

Therefore, the ministry is proceeding with its plan to procure a digital solution through an open competitive bid process. This portal will be a modernized digital delivery channel, providing round-the-clock access to online services. The launch of an initial phase of the portal is expected late in 2021. A comprehensive assisted support model would continue to exist for people who are unable to use digital services on their own.

More information will be provided as it becomes available.

8. Were stakeholders consulted on these developments?

Yes, the government is responding to stakeholder feedback. These changes to the legislative framework and the proposed service delivery model were informed by the recommendations of the Skilled Trades Panel, which consulted with the public and industry stakeholders.

9. Why did the government decide to wind-down the Ontario College of Trades?

As part of the government's commitment to reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens and to transform the apprenticeship and skilled trades system in Ontario, the government announced its intention to wind-down the Ontario College of Trades in fall 2018.

The government has taken a phased and industry-informed approach to the wind-down of the Ontario College of Trades. The recent introduction of the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021 will help support the next phase of wind-down—and the implementation of the proposed new agency.

10. How would an employer hire an apprentice if the Ontario College of Trades is being wound down?

Once established, the new agency and the ministry will continue to support employers who want to hire an apprentice, following the existing process of registering a training agreement with the ministry. The full process can be found at [Ontario.ca/HireAnApprentice](https://www.ontario.ca/HireAnApprentice). Employers can also use the [Ontario Job Bank](#) to find a suitable apprentice and to post apprenticeship opportunities.

Finally, employers can also contact the [Employment Ontario network](#) to find suitable candidates for apprenticeship. The Employment Ontario network helps match employers with job seekers and job seekers with employers.

11. Who would develop the apprenticeship program standards and issue certifications during this transition period?

During the transition period, the ministry will continue to handle apprenticeship registration while the Ontario College of Trades and, subsequently, the proposed agency will remain responsible for certification until the agency reaches a mature state and is able to take over the delivery of apprenticeship registration.

The ministry remains committed to working with the Ontario College of Trades to ensure any potential revisions to program standards allow enough time for implementation planning and preparation. The Ontario College of Trades and, subsequently, the new agency will continue to be responsible for the apprenticeship program standards development.

Skilled Trades Panel

12. What is the role of the Panel? What is its mandate?

In September 2020, Ontario appointed a Skilled Trades Panel to provide recommendations on improving the oversight and delivery of apprenticeship training and certification and ensuring the skilled trades sector is more responsive to the province's changing economy.

The panel's mandate involves two phases. In Phase 1 (completed December 2020), the panel provided advice and recommendations to the minister on the replacement of the Ontario College of Trades and on a new approach to oversight and delivery of the skilled trades and apprenticeship system in Ontario. In Phase 2, the panel will provide advice and recommendations to the minister on matters related to classification and training for the trades.

13. What was the focus of the Skilled Trades Panel's Phase 1 mandate?

The first phase of the panel's work, from September to December 2020, focused on a new service delivery model to replace the current services delivered by the Ontario College of Trades. This work is complete, and the [panel's recommendations can be found on Ontario.ca](#).

The government is now moving forward with introducing a new legislative framework, Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021, informed by the panel's Phase 1 recommendations. If the proposed legislation is passed and fully proclaimed, it would replace the *Modernizing the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Act, 2019* and the *Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act, 2009*, becoming the new legislative framework for skilled trades and apprenticeship.

14. Who did the Skilled Trades Panel consult with for the Phase 1 work on the new service delivery model?

Recommendations were informed by consultations with the public and industry stakeholders who provided advice on the path forward for the skilled trades and apprenticeship system. The panel engaged a broad range of stakeholders, including apprentices, tradespersons, employers, training delivery agents, unions, businesses, associations and organizations from each of the four trade sectors.

The panel received approximately 70 written submissions and held over 20 virtual meetings with stakeholders. The panel carefully considered each submission and the included advice. The ministry is releasing the panel's report, which includes its [Phase 1 recommendations, on Ontario.ca](#).