

The In-Demand Skilled Trades Study

Report produced by the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie

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Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie
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OUR VISION

A skilled, resilient workforce contributing to dynamic communities and their economies.



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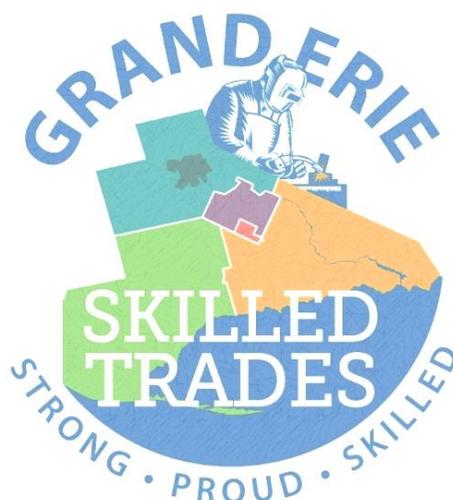
Prepared by: Danette Dalton, Executive Director, Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie

Wynona Mendes, Labour Market Analyst, Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie



In-Demand Skilled Trades Project

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Executive Summary

Between late August and November 2019, the Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie (WPBGE) engaged with 126 employers in efforts to better understand the growing demand for skilled trades in the Grand Erie region, encompassing the communities of Six Nations, New Credit, the Counties of Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk, and the City of Brantford. The consultations took several forms, including an online quantitative survey (51 respondents), qualitative engagement events (59 respondents) held at different locations across Grand Erie, and one-on-one interviews and discussions with employers (16 respondents). Employers were asked up to 7 questions (depending on the engagement) designed to offer insight into their experiences with various stages of the apprenticeship process. The project implementation was a success thanks to the team effort by Workforce Planning Board staff, and all of our partner agencies and businesses who supported us with the project. The engagement events were attended by many different supporting institutions/organizations and skilled trades people who were not eligible to respond to the engagement questions as they were not deemed to be an employer, but were an integral part of the engagements. Findings from these engagements were analyzed, both as a whole and by business size and sector, and are detailed within this report.

Six Nations and New Credit communities within the Grand Erie region have a unique relationship with the land, its resources and the workforce, which continues to shape the history and economy of the area today. The WPBGE recognizes the unique role that Indigenous peoples have had and will continue to have in the growth and development of this region, the skilled trades and the development of skilled trade careers.

Top issues impacting the skilled trades community include:

- Stigma around the trades
- Students' limited exposure to the trades
- Impact of retirements
- The soft skills gap (people not prepared for work, poor attitudes regarding work)
- Inadequate training (mentors not prepared/skilled to train apprentices, incompatibility with apprentice)
- Competitive wages

As a result of these issues, employers are struggling to fill both apprenticeship and journeyperson positions. In Grand Erie, top in-demand trades identified by various sources include:

- Welders
- Construction and Industrial Millwrights
- Residential and Industrial Electricians
- General Machinists



- Truck and Coach Technicians
- Automotive Service Technicians
- Plumbers
- Sheet Metal Workers
- Cooks

The WPBGE has taken an active role in the community over the last several years in conjunction with many community partners such as the Indigenous community, the local school boards, post-secondary institutions, and local businesses to engage the community in the skilled trades through events such as Epic Jobs. It is imperative to deliver positive local experiences such as Epic Jobs because they improve the perception of skilled trade work. The availability of skilled trade work and skilled tradespeople has a huge positive impact on the local economy, thereby increasing the overall quality of life, for the individual and their family, and for the community. Having the skilled resources and knowledge right in your community will create a more sustainable, self-sufficient and prosperous community.

Detailed within this report are a number of actionable strategies that both the government and employers themselves can undertake to respond to the recruitment, training and retention issues at hand. Top priorities include increasing awareness about skilled trades, strengthening the focus on skills training in elementary and secondary schools, and offering financial support both to apprentices and their employers/trainers.

Danette Dalton

Danette Dalton, BES, MCIP, RPP
Executive Director
Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie





1. What do employers feel are the most important issues that are expected to impact skilled trades in your community over the next five years?

Stigma Around the Trades

As employers see it, many young people, and their parents, perceive the trades as repetitive, dirty, dangerous, low-paying, unstable career options that do not require a high degree of skill or intelligence. A 2019 report on construction trades notes that only 8% of workers were positively influenced by a guidance counsellor. The same report found that 96% of individuals in construction attribute the skilled tradespeople shortage to stigma and negative parental influence. Apprenticeship is often only promoted as a back-up option to students struggling with academics or deemed unsuitable for college or university paths.

“In Europe, skilled trades are not a ‘job of last resort’. These careers are revered, respected, and understood to be secure, challenging and lucrative options”
~ Grand Erie Employer

Limited Exposure to the Trades

This stigma is growing because young people have limited exposure to the trades. Employers agree that interest must be cultivated at a young age, starting with increasing awareness of different tradespeople and the work they do.

Secondary schools have shifted the focus from trades to colleges and universities over the past few decades. There are only a limited number of schools in the Grand Erie region that are skill-focused and/or offer adequate preparatory technical courses or experiential learning opportunities. Employers feel that they do not have sufficient opportunities to connect to high school students, and that guidance counsellors and career teachers don't always have enough information on how students can learn more about the trades. Due to this, there are fewer apprentices coming out of high schools based on Employment Ontario data.

WPBGE's 2015 study on apprenticeship echoes these findings. Lack of knowledge around the trades was ranked second in terms of barriers to attracting apprentices, falling closely behind employment opportunities/regulations.

Retirements

The trades workforce is aging; over 17% of Brantford's residents are 65 years and over. Companies expect many more retirements in the next 3 to 5 years. Employers, particularly of small businesses, fear that with the retirements, they will lose the knowledge and skillsets required to sustain their business. Because of



the limited supply of new entrants, they are not always able to find a qualified apprentice to pass their knowledge along to. Succession planning, therefore, is emerging as a pressing issue.

“Our largest hurdle is an aged population of skilled people. The younger generation does not want to “fill their shoes”. People are retiring quicker than they are being replaced. It is tough for us to find anyone who has an ambition, mechanical aptitude and willingness to learn.”

~ Grand Erie Employer

Skills Gap

Employers are noticing a soft skills gap in the workforce— about 50% say that new apprentices lack the motivation, attitude and interpersonal skills required for success as a tradesperson. Young people who express interest in the trades are not dedicated or committed, and they do not want to do laborious work. This is reflected in 2019 job posting data from Talent Neuron, which lists attention to detail, oral & written communication, teamwork and customer-service oriented as top skills in demand among skilled trade positions. These traits are sought out almost twice as frequently as top technical skills.

Competitive Wages

Small and medium businesses across Grand Erie struggle to compete with bigger companies who can pay \$3-\$5 more per hour. One indicated that the Ontario minimum wage increase impacted them greatly, because they were now offering the same pay for an entry-level apprentice as some less demanding service jobs. Employers note that potential employees at the entry-level have unrealistic wage expectations.

Other Issues

Other concerns raised by employers include inadequate training, lack of transportation, automation and insufficient government investments in industries that employ skilled tradespeople.

2. How is technological change impacting the skilled trades in organizations in your community?

According to the In-Demand Skilled Trade engagements, many businesses are not affected by technological change in any way and still rely extensively on manual labour. Grand Erie’s EmployerOne 2019 survey results echo this finding. For some others, technological change has increased the demand for skilled trade workers with advanced technical knowledge and subsequently made it more difficult to fill these positions (eg: the use of computer diagnostics to repair cars).



In the construction sector, particularly among medium and large businesses, employers note that technology is eliminating jobs. Trades like bricklayers are being replaced by machines and are hence unable to find work. Others have not eliminated the need for workers, but have created a lower demand for tradespeople and an increased demand for general labourers, typically only requiring the supervision of a single engineer. This affects unionized businesses, who now struggle to find work for their members.

Among some businesses, technological change does not eliminate workers, but it does make tasks less labour intensive. Further, some technology upgrades require additional training. Tradespeople are expected to have some computer literacy, and extra specialization is required to repair automated machinery.

“Digitizing millwrights' and electricians' equipment requires more skills from those positions. Our hope is that computerized equipment will allow one person to cover off several machines to counter shortages of people.”
~ Grand Erie Employer

While some businesses perceive these changes as positive as they reduce the demand for skilled trades workers, others, particularly unionized ones, see technological changes as a threat to their workers.

3. What skilled trades are hardest for employers in your community to fill and why?

Journeypersons

Top in-demand journeypersons include:

- Welders (industrial, construction and service)
- Construction Millwrights (industrial and construction)
- Residential & Industrial Electricians (industrial and construction)
- General Machinists (industrial)
- Truck and Coach Technicians (motive power)
- Cooks (service)
- Tool & Die Makers (industrial)
- Gas Technicians (construction and industrial)
- Plumber (construction)

Reasons

While many companies, particularly unionized businesses in the construction sector, do not have much difficulty finding journeypersons, others noted several reasons they struggle to fill some positions.



A majority of employers across all sectors (approximately 69%) agree that there are not enough qualified applicants, with some (approximately 61%) going even further, stating that there aren't enough applicants in general.

Among industrial businesses specifically, competition between employers is significant. Bigger firms - both in Grand Erie and in surrounding regions - offer better wages and more up-to-date equipment, and small, medium and even some large employers are unable to compete with this.

Limited regional transportation also makes it difficult for employers in Brant, Norfolk and Haldimand to find workers as their available labour pool is limited.

In addition, specific skillsets are hard to find because of an absence of training programs for certain trades. One plastic manufacturer pointed out that there are no training facilities in the region catering to this sector.

Other concerns include employers' inability to assess foreign educational qualifications, lack of language requirements among potential applicants, and an unwillingness among qualified tradespeople to work night shifts.

Apprentices

Top in-demand apprentices include:

- Welders
- Construction Millwrights
- Industrial Electricians
- General Machinists
- Truck and Coach Technicians
- Automotive Service Technician

Reasons

Many industrial businesses state they have no difficulty finding apprentices. Among these businesses, the challenge is securing apprentices who are reliable and motivated. Around 46% of employers cite lack of soft skills, such as motivation, attitude or interpersonal skills as a top concern.

About 69% of employers do struggle to find qualified apprentices. They specifically look for 2nd or 3rd year apprentices with experience and that are ready to work because they do not want to train people from scratch. These businesses are often competing with many others for the same pool of applicants, which poses some challenges, particularly for 1st year apprentices looking for an employer to take them on.

Another dominant issue is the lack of public transportation – flagged by around 22% of employers. Both industrial and construction businesses struggle to find workers because of this; many applicants live far from the industrial areas in Grand Erie and cannot get to work without access to private transportation.

Other reasons include unwillingness among apprentices to run hand-operated equipment such as lathes and grinders, lack of interested apprentices in niche industrial sectors and insufficiently trained apprentices who do not have the skills required by specific industries.



3. a. What methods have employers used to fill those positions that are hard to fill?

Most employers advertise these postings through multiple avenues, with online job boards (used by 78% of businesses), company websites (used by 63% of businesses) and social media (used by 51 % of businesses) being the Top 3. Word of mouth is also used frequently by all sectors.

Employers in the manufacturing sector use paid recruitment agencies and recruit new graduates from schools far more than other sectors, while businesses in the service and motive power sector rely heavily on free employment agencies.

Journeypersons

To recruit journeypersons, businesses turn to online job posting websites, job fairs, and even specialized recruitment companies that focus on hiring skilled tradespeople (e.g. Headhunters, located in Cambridge). Employers find that some sources typically used to find employees, such as LinkedIn, do not work as well for attracting skilled trade workers.

Apprentices

Many companies use temporary staffing agencies to find interested and qualified candidates, and some have had success with bringing these individuals on as apprentices. Some, particularly in the industrial sector, use high school programs like OYAP and college co-op programs to identify people who meet the skill requirements, and recruit these new grads upon program completion. Almost all of the medium to large construction businesses consulted for this project cited that they use the shared apprenticeship model and work collaboratively with other employers to ensure that apprentices complete their training with a diverse range of skills.

Previous studies on the subject, including WPBGE's *Barrier's to Apprenticeship* (2015) identify "finding an employer to register under" to be one of the biggest obstacles, because apprentices are often found through word-of-mouth.

3. b. What needs to be done by employers to increase the number of apprentices and journeypersons in in-demand trades?

Increase Awareness about the Skilled Trades

Employers of all sectors and business sizes agree that they need to play a more active role in improving the perception of skilled trades work. They acknowledge that while they are actively involved in building their communities, they do little to promote the work they do. They recognize that children and youth within their communities need more exposure to the trades, to showcase these jobs as viable careers that



require leadership and project management skills and come with above average pay, benefits and, in some cases, pension.

“We need to improve the perception of these jobs. Blue collar jobs are making better than average wages and this needs to be promoted. These employees need to be cutting edge, reliable and motivated. We no longer need the people who can't do a white collar job. We need smart, motivated people who can do the job and we're willing to pay them very well.”

~ Grand Erie Employer

Employers need to be more involved, both in funding and in helping develop programs that improve the perception of skilled trade work.

Attract Students and Recent Graduates

In addition, employers need to work more closely with high schools to increase interest among students. This can involve increasing the number of experiential learning/co-op placement opportunities offered through high schools, advocating to bring back ‘shop’ classes and technical courses, and even offering/donating appropriate resources, such as machinery, for high school and college classes when possible. Some even suggest working with educators and guidance counsellors to change schools’ attitude towards the trades and to educate them on the apprenticeship pathway and its many benefits, so that they can pass this information along to students and their parents.

Train Apprentices

Some employers are simply not open to the idea of training apprentices, and they recognize that this needs to change. According to employers, a top reason for apprentices dropping out of training is because they decide that their chosen trade is not right for them. To mitigate this issue, employers suggest giving apprentices an overall view of the trade they are in at the beginning of an apprenticeship. Interestingly, construction businesses note that the opposite is occurring more frequently. In efforts to speed up the process, some apprentices are only taught what they need to know to fulfil certain tasks. As a result of this, they graduate without the complete knowledge base required of journeypersons. Allowing sufficient time for training was thus identified as something employers need to do.

In addition to this, employers recognize that they need to extend their search to get the candidates they seek. This includes offering people without a high school diploma the opportunity to work for a probationary period and considering potential rather than credentials when selecting apprentices.

Lastly, employers recognize that the training offered does not meet industry standards, and that they need to be more involved with college programs in developing these trainings.

Retain Apprentices



Employers across all sizes and sectors agree that offering competitive wages/benefits, as well as flexible work hours, is important to retaining good apprentices. These help them stand out, especially when other area businesses are not doing the same. Some employers even offer additional benefits, such as profit-sharing models that reward the hardest workers.

In addition, employers recognize that offering meaningful training and career development plans and subsidizing further education for interested employees is helpful in retaining apprentices and journeypersons.

3. c. What needs to be done by the Ontario government to increase the number of apprentices and journeypersons in in-demand trades?

Decrease Stigma around the Skilled Trades

Employers agree that the government must be more proactive in reducing stigma around the trades. The current culture steers most away from the trades. As a result, anyone interested in the trades is brought in, regardless of suitability. Employers often encounter apprentices who lack commitment or are unwilling to work in difficult conditions, such as at heights, outdoors or in the heat. Meanwhile, many students who are skilled at working with their hands do not see the trades as an attractive option because of the stigma.

Employers suggest a large-scale public awareness campaign to promote the trades to demographics that may not typically consider this path. They emphasize a need provide current statistics on how much various tradespeople earn.

Strengthen the Focus on Skills in Schools

Employers identified some suggestions for strengthening the skills focus in high schools:

- Increase funding for existing and new trade/technical courses in all high schools
- Connect students with local employers by establishing an employer bank that youth can refer to when looking for co-op/placement opportunities. Promote this among small businesses that cannot advertise elsewhere
- Train guidance counsellors and teachers to identify prospective apprentices and to give students the appropriate resources they need to make an informed decision
- Encourage field visits to sites where youth can engage with tradespeople
- Develop a program to try persuading more high school grads to get into the trades.
- Make it easier to find information on trades, including resources to help students figure out which trade is right for them
- Reducing redundant paperwork involved in the registration process and make government support available and accessible
- Integrate soft skills training into school curriculums

Offer Financial Support to Apprentices



One of the biggest identified barriers to apprenticeship is cost, and employers recommend government incentives and grants to offset this. WPBGE's (2015) study on apprenticeship barriers recognizes that it is common for apprentices to spend up to \$8,000 in their first two years of apprenticeship, often with little immediate return on investments. Many employers focused specifically on the high cost of work boots and tools, suggesting incentives such as financing options, tool bonuses upon completion, and programs such as a depot where apprentices can borrow or rent tools. Existing tool tax credits offered by the government are insufficient or not well promoted. Additionally, employers believe the cost of tuition for apprentices is too high and increasing unnecessarily.

Offer Financial Support to Businesses

Small businesses particularly would benefit from having grants/wage subsidies they can use to attract and retain apprentices over the course of their apprenticeship, because they fear apprentices will leave for a larger employer/better salary. For small employers, taking on an apprentice is a financial burden as training is time consuming and decreases productivity.

Other Suggestions

Other suggestions include streamlining the accreditation process for entering apprentices and ensuring that apprentices have enough time to learn their trade thoroughly.

“Lesser qualified candidates may be considered” is a regular statement in our job postings, due to a lack of certification.”
~ Grand Erie Employer

One employer noted that the suggestions they make are often disregarded by government authorities. They suggest more opportunities for communication between employers and government bodies, wherein such feedback will be received and acted upon. In addition, employers ask that the Ontario government apprenticeship offices follow-up more regularly with them to identify issues before they become serious problems. They want the ministry to assign staff resources to offer support/guidance as needed throughout the apprenticeship process.

4. Has your organization sponsored or is currently sponsoring apprentices?

Approximately 50% of employers surveyed were currently sponsoring an apprentice, with above average sponsorship from the construction sector. Another 25% stated that they had sponsored apprentices in the past.



The remaining 25% of businesses did not sponsor apprentices; based on EmployerOne 2019 results this is largely due to financial hardships and a fear of apprentices leaving the organization after training. The block release system also poses a challenge for some employers, who struggle to fill the labour gap when their apprentice is in school.

5. Have organizations participated or considered participating in group sponsorship training?

The majority of businesses surveyed were not aware of what group sponsorship was, and among those that did, more than 75% said they would not consider it because they would like to keep the people they invest their time and money into. This is particularly true of industrial and motive power businesses. While many construction employers also indicated little interest in this type of training, the Hamilton-Brantford Building Trades Association, consisting of unionized medium and large construction trade employers, were largely in favour of group sponsorship. According to some members, they have been following this model for over 100 years in some cases, with plenty of success.

5. a. If yes, how important is group sponsorship training to addressing organizations' skill requirements?

Approximately 50% of businesses that participate in group sponsorship training agree that it is very important to their business, with a smaller percentage deeming it somewhat important. Among members of the aforementioned construction group, this type of training is vital to their collective success. They attest to benefits like cost sharing and having apprentices graduate with a more thorough understanding of their trade.

5. b. If no, what support or assistance would employers need to make group sponsorship training of apprentices a worthwhile option?

Financial support/government incentives were cited most frequently and were of particular importance to the motive power businesses surveyed. Interest/support from other businesses and interest/support from a trade association followed closely behind, with the latter being slightly more popular among construction and service businesses. Finally, many industrial businesses stated that they would benefit from having an organization willing to take on a leadership role in developing a group sponsorship training program. A few stated that they would need more information on this, how it would work and how they might benefit from it.

For some employers, they would not consider the group sponsorship training regardless of the supports offered because they did not see it as advantageous to their organization. Small organizations, in particular, invest in apprentices with the hope that they will continue with the company upon becoming journeypersons, and with a shared model, this is less likely to happen.



6. What have been employers' experiences with respect to apprentices dropping out of their training?

Apprentices who drop out before completion often do so because the certification exam is daunting. Some fail repeatedly, while others do not write the exam because of stress or fear of failure. These individuals tend to be hands-on learners, who do well with their work portion but don't do well in classroom setting or get test anxiety. Employers have mixed attitudes about this. Some think that the exam is too difficult and that it isn't an accurate reflection of the individuals' skill levels. Others are firm about not wanting to decrease the difficulty of the exam and subsequently making it easier for unqualified apprentices to become journeypersons. In many cases however, employers are open to keeping an apprentice on board indefinitely. Some even pay them at a journeyperson's rate if they feel that the apprentice is competent and does their job well. Medium and large employers, particularly in the construction sector, boast a significantly higher completion rate.

Some employers have tried to mitigate this problem by having progress reviews and offering apprentices support with the challenges they face. Others sponsor the apprentice's training and offer bonuses upon completion.

6. a. What reasons did employers report with respect to apprentices dropping out of their training?

The biggest factor responsible for apprentices dropping out of training was cost, both of schooling and of tools. Many students cannot afford two months of school and are unable to collect employment insurance during this time.

Apart from this, many apprentices drop out because they lack the soft skills, motivation and attitude that employers are looking for.

Some employers, especially in the construction and motive power sectors, had apprentices drop out/leave because they were interested in pursuing a different career path or found a business that offers a higher wage. Others, primarily in the industrial and construction sectors, experienced drop outs due to difficulty learning the trade. A few employers cite interpersonal problems between trainer and trainee and personal/family reasons.

Employers presented several suggestions for what the government can do to resolve these including:

- Subsidize apprenticeship training and certification costs; incrementally increase grants as apprentices' progress through different education levels
- Sponsor/create a loan program for tools
- Offer/promote incentives like the completion tax credit
- More flexibility with the training schedule
- Provide more information to employers and apprentices about the apprenticeship system
- Remove the annual College of Trades fee, or present a better explanation for its purpose
- Change the block release system, instead offering classes nightly, once a week or online



- Increase the selection of high school trade courses/experiential learning opportunities and make them more intensive, so as to broaden students' understanding of what they can expect; credit individuals who pursue apprenticeship for hours worked during high school
- Improve the gap between EI and apprenticeship schooling, such that apprentices are able to access EI during their schooling without long wait times.
- Advertise statistics on wage rates and satisfaction levels of tradespeople versus degree holders
- Work with the Federal Government and other provinces to standardize apprentice programs across Canada
- Ensure that students with learning challenges are able to access assistance easily

6. b. How well has apprenticeship worked for employers as a way of addressing organizations' skills requirements?

Approximately 35% of respondents stated that apprenticeship has worked extremely well, and another 17% said it worked moderately well. The construction sector found it most useful, with the industrial and motive power sectors falling close behind. About 25% of respondents stated that apprenticeship worked somewhat well, and the remaining 23%, many of which were service sector organizations, said it did not respond to their needs sufficiently well.

6. c. What barriers do organizations face related to apprenticeship?

About 50% of employers, largely in the industrial sector, cite low interest/participation in apprenticeship as a top barrier. Other common barriers include lack of essential skills (such as numeracy and literacy) among participants and a shortage of qualified trainers who have the time/capacity to train apprentices. This is particularly true of first/second year apprentices, who need a lot of training to work in the industry and often pose a bigger liability risk. A fewer number listed licensing requirements, regulatory barriers, inflexible apprenticeship system (such as 'block release' periods and classes being offered during busy periods) as obstacles. Some employers, primarily small and medium sized businesses, mention financial burdens and an inability to pay apprentices as being big barriers.

6. d. What changes could the Ontario government make to the apprenticeship program to better respond to the needs of employers?

In addition to the suggestions presented in section 6(a) to help apprentices complete their training, employers also made the following recommendations:

- Increase involvement - outreach, support and consulting - with employers to ensure that training is continually meeting industry demands and needs



- Increase collaboration between different government bodies – e.g.: Ministry of Labour, Skills Development and Training and the Ministry of Education - to make the system easier to navigate. Currently, employers find that while the former may be interested in implementing changes, the latter does not execute them.

We need increased strategic collaboration between the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, Ministry of Labour, Skills Development and Training and the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation & Trade. There's clearly a significant disconnect that is exasperating the underemployment problem. [...] The debt and late start is clearly having a negative effect on the Ontario economy.

~ Grand Erie Employer

- Offer training for trainers. While competent, many journeypersons do not have the leadership skills to guide apprentices (particularly youth) through to completion
- Offer incentives/financial support to cover mandated health, safety and work placement training
- Establish a minimum essential skills requirement (i.e.: math, physics and communication) to start an apprenticeship
- Make employers accountable for accepting an apprentice's previous hours worked. Many businesses insist that apprentices start over, thus delaying the process of becoming journeyperson, and in some cases, turning people away from apprenticeship
- Change/align training to meet future needs, such as an increased focus on technology and up-to-date equipment
- Minimize bureaucratic barriers such as extensive paperwork to register as an apprentice and delays in processing certifications
- Improve funding for union trade centres
- Create and increase promotion of forums/job portals wherein prospective apprentices can explore opportunities specific to skilled trades
- Increase training regulations around more trades in efforts to ensure that apprentices graduate with a thorough understanding of their trade
- Increase the availability of training programs for niche sectors
- Increase the pathways to apprenticeship by creating more (optional) pre-programs
- Make it easier for apprentices to transition from province to province

7. What further comments did employers provide about apprenticeship and/or the skilled trades?

Employers repeatedly emphasize the importance of reducing stigma and increasing education around trades.



“We need to address the "economy of academia" where our school systems (especially universities) require enrollment numbers as part of their fiduciary health. We (as a society) are encouraging too many young people to pursue degrees and diplomas in areas that won't provide a return on their investment. This is very bad for the individual, families and our economy.”

~ Grand Erie Employer

Several suggest using the German system of apprenticeship – earlier start, shorter in-school training, less job-hopping and greater respectability around the trades – as a model to adopt. Some suggest better promotion of Skills Ontario competitions as a way of increasing involvement, pride and morale in the trades.

The group of medium to large unionized construction employers spoke of the importance of strengthening and enforcing regulations around using registered apprentices exclusively. Despite following all necessary protocol and ensuring that their apprentices have the required qualifications, they are often out-bid for contracts by companies that operate within the underground economy. These contractors use improper materials and apply poor craftsmanship, thus tarnishing the reputation of the community. According to the group, even government projects are often undertaken by companies with unregistered apprentices, and many do not even have adequate safety training.

Finally, employers require security that the apprentices they train will continue to stay with them. Apprentices often move in pursuit of better pay or more advanced equipment, and by helping small and medium companies remain competitive, through offering grants and incentives, the government can support these businesses.

Conclusion

Through engaging with local employers and community partners over the course of these engagements, the WPBGE gained useful insight into the challenges that surround the skilled trades. Many, as detailed above, pertained specifically to the apprenticeship process, while other comments pointed to greater needs within the communities we serve. Members from our Indigenous communities, namely Six Nations and New Credit, highlight the need for increased support for youth programs that can respond to the specific challenges faced by these communities. Additionally, issues such as transportation and access to quality education are particularly pressing for smaller, more remote communities, and employers agree that this must change in efforts to holistically respond to the skilled trades shortage.

Employers consulted during the In-demand Skilled Trades project were excited to see that their comments were welcomed and eager to provide suggestions, pinpoint specific gaps within the system and recommend who needs to be involved in making these improvements. That said, they agree that these efforts must continue and that solutions should be developed quickly to ensure that the severity of the problem does not increase.



Contextual Information

1. Source(s) used to identify the skilled trades that are in-demand

- a. **Employer Engagement:** Yes
 - i. **Type of engagement:** Appreciation and engagement lunches for skilled trade employers within each of the communities served by WPBGE
 - ii. **Number of engagements:** 5
 - iii. **Total number of employers at engagements:** 57
 - iv. **Industries represented by engagements:**
 - Construction (NOC 23)
 - Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (NOC 11)
 - Manufacturing (NOC 31 -33)
 - Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (NOC 54)
 - Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services (NOC 56)
 - Health Care and Social Assistance (NOC 62)
 - Accommodation and Food Services (NOC 72)
 - Other Services (except Public Administration) (NOC 81)
 - v. **Engagement dates:**
 - Brant County: September 18, 2019
 - Haldimand County: September 20, 2019
 - City of Brantford: September 23, 2019
 - Norfolk County: September 25, 2019
 - Six Nations and New Credit: September 27, 2019
- b. **Surveys:** Yes
 - i. **How many employers were surveyed?:** 51
 - ii. **How many employers of the occupations with vacancies that are hard to fill, or in-demand are in the local area (approx.)?:** Approximately 54% of Grand Erie region employers have hard to fill positions (EmployerOne, 2019)
 - iii. **When was the survey completed?:** The survey ran from late-August to the early December, 2019
 - iv. **How were employers selected and contacted for the survey?**
 - Emails were sent to WPBGE's list of Grand Erie businesses



- Social media posts targeting employers were created and promoted
- Screening questions were used at the beginning of the survey to ensure that only qualified individuals could respond

c. **Job Postings:** Yes

- i. **Number of job postings for the local area:** 1368 skilled trade positions
- ii. **Job postings for the occupation as a percentage of all postings:** 16%
- iii. **Job postings period:** January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019
- iv. **Other:** N/A

d. **Existing Community or Local Labour Market Plan Report findings:** Yes

- i. **If yes, please explain:** WPBGE's annual Local Labour Market Plans outline yearly apprenticeship registrations and completions based on Employment Ontario data.

e. **Existing sector and/or occupational outlook reports:** Yes

- i. **If yes, please explain:**

In 2012, WPBGE developed a list of in-demand occupations (titled Outlook 2021) using data projections with employers and knowledge of the local labour market. Findings were published in the report: *Employment by Industry and Occupation: Projections: Grand Erie Area*.

In 2015, the apprenticeship system in Grand Erie and Elgin Middlesex Oxford was examined in greater detail, with findings detailed in the publication: *Barriers to Attracting Apprentices and Competing their Apprenticeships*. 280 individuals participated in this study, ranging from potential apprentices to journeypersons, teachers, community providers and employers.

In 2017, WPBGE, in partnership with Conestoga College and Fanshawe College, published a report on the demand for welders in the manufacturing sector, the main factors contributing to a shortage thereof and a strategic plan for addressing the gap.

In 2018, the findings from Outlook 2021, along with data from EmployerOne, Vicinity, Canada Business Counts, and Employment Ontario, were used to create a report – Journey to Apprenticeship – outlining apprenticeship within the region.



In 2019, sector profiles were created using EmployerOne data. These profiles indicated details such as top hard-to-fill positions, time taken to fill certain positions and employer ratings of the availability of qualified workers.

ii. Report name:

- Employment by Industry and Occupation: Projections - Outlook 2021
- Barriers to Attracting Apprentices and Competing their Apprenticeships (April 2015)
- Manufacturing (Welding) in the Grand Erie region: A Strategic Plan (December 2017)
- Journey to Apprenticeship (September 2018)
- EmployerOne 2019 Sector Spotlights (May 2019)
 - Spotlight on Manufacturing
 - Spotlight on Construction
 - Spotlight on Health Care and Social Assistance
 - Spotlight on Accommodation and Food Services

iii. Date completed:

Noted above.

f. Statistics Canada data: Yes

i. Census: No

a. Reference Information: N/A

j. Labour Force Survey: Yes

a. Reference Information: 14-10-0314-01 (formerly CANSIM 282-0159)

k. Employment Ontario Data: Yes

a. Reference information:

*For questions regarding the data represented in this report,
please contact:*

Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie

danette@workforceplanningboard.org

519 756 1116

Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie

1100 Clarence St. South, Suite 101, Box 12

Brantford, Ontario, N3S 7N8



Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie
Commission de planification de la main-d'œuvre de Grand Erie