



Pathways to apprenticeship

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IT'S A POPULAR career choice but with a variety of routes to choose from, the road to becoming an apprentice can be confusing and even difficult to navigate.

The following is a look at popular routes:

TRADITIONAL PATHWAY: The traditional approach to becoming an apprentice is to find an employer, union or joint apprenticeship training committee willing to teach you the trade. Once you've landed a job, contact the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (www.edu.gov.on.ca) and officially register as an apprentice. The educational component of your apprenticeship may be completed at a community college.

"About 90 to 95% of people interested in the trades follow this pathway, though that will vary according to the trade and sector," says Rolf Priesnitz, director of apprenticeship at George Brown College in Toronto. It offers a host of apprenticeship training programs, including baker, carpenter, construction and maintenance electrician, education assistant, plumbing and steamfitter.

You can find apprenticeship training programs at colleges across Ontario at www.ontariocolleges.ca.

PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS: Pre-apprenticeship training programs prepare candidates to find employers to take them on as an apprentice. They're up to 40 weeks in duration and include the Level 1 apprenticeship in-school training, relevant safety training and a minimum eight-week work placement.

Programs are offered by colleges, approved apprenticeship deliverers and community agencies. Candidates can apply directly to the organizations providing the training. To find out about local programs, contact the Employment Ontario Hotline at 1-800-387-5656.

ONTARIO YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM (OYAP): If you're a full-time student in Grade 11 or 12 and are at least 16 years old, you can participate in OYAP, a school-to-work transition program that allows you to earn co-operative education credits through work placements in the skilled trades.

OYAP is available in three versions: Regular Co-op, Dual Credit Accelerated (includes trade school) and Specialized Tech/Co-op (includes technological studies classes). Contact your high school guidance counsellor, co-op education teacher or the OYAP co-ordinator for your school board to learn more.

CO-OP DIPLOMA APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS: These programs are offered at some community colleges and are geared to students who want to pursue an apprenticeship and diploma at the same time and aren't currently registered as an apprentice.

Applicants must meet academic eligibility standards for entrance into this program but having employer sponsorship before registering is not required. George Brown offers a heating, refrigeration and air conditioning technician co-op diploma apprenticeship program.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS: The traditional pathway to apprenticeship can be challenging for many who wish to pursue the skilled trades, particularly during tough economic times.

Norm Fenton, dean of Durham College's School of Apprenticeship and Skilled Trades, suggests an alternative route that begins with completing a post-secondary program. "Most companies nowadays will not hire somebody right from high school or off the street as an apprentice unless they have some training," he says.

Community colleges offer a variety of options for those seeking to open the door to apprenticeship, including two-year diploma and one-year techniques certificate programs. Most certificate program graduates are prepared to write the Level 1 exemption test while diploma grads should be qualified to write Level 1 and Level 2 exemption tests.

"These programs are designed to prepare people so they will be very competitive when they start applying to companies for apprenticeship," Fenton says. Durham currently has 1,450 apprentices and another 600 in post-secondary programs. "We expect to see (post-secondary students) back in a year or two as apprentices," he says.

Upon completion, graduates can seek employment, register with the ministry upon employment as an apprentice, return to college for the educational component of their apprenticeship and finally write their Certificate of Qualification to become a certified journey person.

Learn more at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

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