

Apprenticeship

Algonquin College Academic White Paper

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- College Programming Strategy
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PREFACE

In 2007, Algonquin College began a five-year strategic planning process to re-think its focus and set a direction in line with current trends and future needs. In the context of that strategic exercise, the Academic Division is exploring key questions about the ways the College may sustain its reputation, enhance its educational offering, and deliver that offering consistently across all programs. The following is one of 10 papers addressing specific issues that demand forward-looking consideration.

Authors

John-Paul Tapp (Co-Chair)

Murray Kyte (Co-Chair)

Joy McKinnon

Linda Cooke

Stephen Finnagan

Altaf Sovani

Jeremy Anderson

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This white paper reviews Algonquin College's position as it pertains to apprenticeship training in a time of growth expectations and strategic planning and offers several recommendations, one of which is described as over-arching. The principle issue under review is framed to consider the Ontario government's enumerated growth policies for apprenticeship within the College's 2008-2013 Strategic Plan.

Multiple points are raised for consideration including: the shared role that the College plays with government and industry to achieve growth targets; the College's vast experience and excellent standing with respect to apprenticeship training; the impact of the Centre for Construction Trades and Building Sciences and other approved and proposed funding projects; and the recent announcement of the government to move toward a new regulatory framework for apprenticeship trade through the establishment of College of Trades.

THE ISSUE

The Government of Ontario has established a growth target of 25%, over the next three years, with respect to new registered apprentices. Over the next five years, Algonquin College is committed to being a leading Canadian college having a new skills training strategy that integrates postsecondary, apprenticeship and other training programs, specifically aligned to the needs of its communities, including flexible program offerings that accommodate government policy and addresses the changing needs of the student population.

With this in mind, the issue can be framed in the form of a question:

- What does Algonquin College need to do in order to achieve its strategic goals within the scope of the established government direction pertaining to apprenticeship?
- It is highly recommended that readers explore the content of the Compulsory Certification Project report prepared by Tim Armstrong. It includes an excellent background on the evolution and current state of the apprenticeship training system. The report can be found at:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/ccr/report.pdf>

BACKGROUND AND CONSIDERATIONS

Apprenticeship is viewed by the province as an important contributor to the provincial economic engine and it has been often stated that they look to the college system to deliver the required education and training.

Algonquin has a long history of delivering quality apprenticeship training within the four traditional sectors of apprenticeship: Motive Power, Construction, Industrial and Service. It is known as a leader in apprenticeship training, curriculum development and stakeholder relations throughout the province.

All colleges in the system have a Head of Apprenticeship Training representative who sits on the provincial Heads of Apprenticeship Training Committee. Algonquin participates fully in this committee and has often had leadership roles and used the structure to raise issues and achieve gains for Algonquin and the Ontario College System.

Apprenticeship enrolment at Algonquin College has shown a gradual and consistent increase over the last 5 years with revenue climbing from \$3.8M in 2002–03 to our current level of \$5.5M in 2008–09.

Over the years, Algonquin has made good use of the opportunities presented by government through the Apprenticeship Enhancement Fund (AEF), the Apprenticeship Innovation Fund (AIF), and alternate programming (pre-apprenticeship, co-op/diploma/apprenticeship, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) Dual Credit, etc.) to increase the quality and capacity of the programs within our mandate. Algonquin College has received significant capital allocation through the AEF, which has been applied to refurbishing labs and facilities used in the delivery of a variety of trades programs in both the apprenticeship and related postsecondary areas. For example, the AEF funded the construction of “S” building which houses the delivery of apprenticeship and postsecondary Motive Power Training. Additionally, AEF investment in the electrical area upgraded labs, supported Algonquin in its bid to become a Hydro One Centre of Excellence.

This varied portfolio is also responsible, in large part, for the funding of the Centre for Construction Trades and Building Sciences (CCTBS) and underlines the requirement to reaffirm our commitment to apprenticeship education and training going forward.

Algonquin’s recent response to the 2008/09 AEF Request for Proposal, calls for equipment funding of \$2.8M which will allow for an increase of 400 seats by 2011. This number, when compared to our current maximum seat purchase plan of 2,600 seats and combined with potential growth in other areas, brings the stated goal of 25% growth over the next three to five years well within reach.

This AEF proposal also speaks to the need for greater access to apprenticeship training for students who reside in the rural areas. While the Pembroke Campus offers apprenticeship training, it is of limited scope due to limited infrastructure. These issues will remain even with approval of the AEF funding, yet flexibility and some opportunities will be created. However, there is an immediate need of investment to enhance tools and training aids to allow rural campuses to deliver quality programming. Further, enhanced communication, collaboration and alignment of resources are required to incorporate the Rural Campuses’ needs within in the College’s strategic direction for apprenticeship.

Algonquin has pulled back on its involvement in AIF projects, which are designed to lead curriculum development/enhancement/innovation. The College was once known as leader in this area, but has taken a back seat in recent years due to human resourcing challenges.

Considerations

A key priority for both provincial and federal governments has been to address concern over the availability of skilled trade workers to replace an aging workforce. They view the expected significant shortages as an economic threat. Policies have been implemented which aim to increase enrolment in apprenticeship programs through tax incentives, equipment grants, facility grants and programming. These policies include student success strategies aimed at expanding the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), Dual Credit opportunities, Specialist High Skills Major initiatives, and promotion of apprenticeship as an excellent career path.

In addition, the government is emphasizing the role of immigrants and other under-represented populations in contributing to the skilled trades workforce. Aboriginals, for example, are one such group.

These programs, incentives and grants represent a time of opportunity for Algonquin and underline the advantages of our current portfolio and standing in the stakeholder community.

Most recently, the provincial government announced that it would be moving forward on the issue of compulsory certification and establishing a new College of Trades (regulatory body) in Spring 2009. This body will have a significant impact on the future of trades training and apprenticeship at the College, including expected increases in the number of apprentices. It is of note, however, that the implementation of such a policy framework will result in significant advocacy and alignment of resources within government, industry and training delivery agents.

Algonquin College has entered the first year of its five-year strategic plan (2008-2013). The College envisions itself to be a leading Canadian College recognized for its unique programs, services and support systems, which lead to student success. The plan calls for a new skills training strategy that integrates postsecondary, apprenticeship and other training programs specifically aligned to the needs of its communities, including flexible program offerings that accommodate government policy and addresses the changing needs of student population.

Save for some minor exceptions (i.e., OYAP), enrolment in an apprenticeship program at the College cannot occur until an apprenticeship agreement is entered into by an employer and an apprentice (our student), all of which is highly regulated by the Ministry. Individual employers, however, are often challenged to take on new apprentices due to regulations, business challenges, and/or a failure to embrace a responsibility for training a new generation of workers. In times of economic uncertainty, employers are reluctant to commit to contracts of apprenticeship due to the attributed costs. Additionally, in some sectors of apprenticeship, labor unions control the number of new apprenticeship agreements carefully to ensure stable employment for their members; although this impact is lessened somewhat through non-union sub-sectors.

There is some debate in the literature on the severity of the expected skilled trades' shortage, which compounds the difficulty of predicting the potential for enrolment growth in apprenticeship at Algonquin College.

The task of increasing enrolment to meet the provincially established target is a shared task between government, industry and the training delivery agents. One of Algonquin's key responsibilities is to ensure that it aligns and leverages the supports provided by the provincial government to assist in attaining the 25% growth goal. We must plan strategically to ensure that we have the capacity to accommodate the predicted growth, both for existing and new trades, and to ensure that we take all possible steps to encourage and market apprenticeship as a first-rate career option. At the same time, we must fully understand our role and focus on the areas that we are able to influence, such as retention and student success rates, expansion of the OYAP program, Dual Credit programs, Specialist High Skills Major initiatives, and promotion of apprenticeship as an excellent career path.

OPPORTUNITIES

Algonquin College has worked hard to capitalize on the priority issues of the government as it relates to apprenticeship. The approval of the CCTBS project is reflective of this and along with Algonquin's capital commitment, it demonstrates that we understand and are able to respond to the priorities and, in particular, the need to establish a strong base of skilled trades workers.

The vision for the CCTBS, one that brings union trainers, construction associations, apprenticeship, and diploma and degree programs into one centre, will enhance the College's position in the community and in the province as a leader in one of the largest sectors of apprenticeship training. It will provide expanded opportunities for collaboration, applied research, and industry engagement. It is highly reflective of the College's new strategic direction.

Algonquin College has submitted to the government a proposal to build a new campus for the Pembroke Campus. The proposal includes enhancement and expansion of apprenticeship training.

However, more work needs to be done; resting on our laurels, specific to approved projects, current RFPs and the like, is not indicative of transformative leadership. We must seize these opportunities within a strategic framework that guides our thinking and course of action. A structure must be developed to affect commitment and involvement from all levels and Schools at the College. Commitment results in a shared understanding of the benefits and pain associated with operating apprenticeship programs within Algonquin College.

Opportunities abound for the College; they include a return to applying to the Apprenticeship Innovative Fund (AIF) projects for which it was once known as leader; developing student success initiatives which enhance retention and graduation rates within apprenticeship; working with our secondary education partners to better align mutually beneficial initiatives; developing new pathways and support systems that will attract and retain under-represented populations; and finally, seriously reviewing and scanning the environment for new apprenticeship training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper suggests that opportunities abound for the College in this environment through leveraging of existing resources and relationships, and by leading and planning strategically. It puts forth 12 specific recommendations, the first of which is above all others:

1. The College must enhance the effective internal structure around apprenticeship and align it within the College's new strategic directions: to wit, the development of a new skills training strategy that integrates postsecondary, apprenticeship and other training programs specifically aligned to the needs of its communities, including flexible program offerings that accommodate government policy and addresses the changing needs of the student population. This internal structure will need to be comprised of a matrix of individuals at multiple levels and from many different Schools within the college. We will need to strive to create a simplified and integrated communication system, which supports a collaborative team and is representative of one strong voice with our government partners and community stakeholders.
2. Continue positioning Algonquin College as the Eastern Ontario leader in apprenticeship training by emphasizing our state-of-the-art facilities, staff expertise and vast experience in delivering quality training.
3. Use our leadership role to influence government direction with regard to apprenticeship completions, regulatory change, and program delivery models.
4. Maximize the opportunities that are made available by the Ministry through the Apprenticeship Enhancement Fund (AEF), the Apprenticeship Innovation Fund (AIF), and other programs to build our capacity in program areas that have demonstrated a commitment to the training culture by actively participating in the apprenticeship training system.
5. Promote the use of a virtual campus solution as outlined in the recent AEF proposal, which could be combined with more apprenticeship training at rural campuses and provide a competitive advantage over other colleges.
6. Rural Campuses: enhance equipment and training aids and expand apprenticeship training within a new college-wide strategic framework for apprenticeship.
7. Continue pursuing apprenticeship options in programs that have a postsecondary fallback position that reduces our financial risk, while allowing Algonquin to build infrastructure and equipment resources. These programs allow us to serve students that do not have credentials – example (Developmental Services Worker, Early Childhood Education, and Cabinetmaking and Furniture Technician) through day release and part-time offerings. Algonquin College can move to block release (full-time) providing there is adequate market demand.
8. Expand the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). The Dual Credit (Automotive example) could be applied to Hairdressing, Cook, and Machinist. Offerings in these areas would allow for growth with limited risk and provide students with an excellent school-to-workplace opportunity.

9. Move with caution on development in new areas and avoid commitments that might have long term staffing and infrastructure requirements. Consider partnerships or business models that mitigate risks and guarantee Algonquin's financial security, such as the one currently in place with ABBOT Point of Care.
10. Support participation of College faculty on provincial apprenticeship working groups.
11. Continue pursuing our current strategy of working with the trades that have demonstrated a commitment to the training culture. Concentrate our effort on ensuring a quality product.
12. Participate in and support the development of the new College of Trades.