

## Construction weighs in on new Ontario jobs act

by [LINDSEY COLE](#) Jun 15, 2015

It may have taken some revision, but overall Ontario's Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act is being supported by several industry stakeholders, particularly the component that puts apprentices directly in the mix of government projects.



"The government's really putting down a priority which says apprentices and diversity in employment and construction is a priority," states David Frame, director of government relations with the Ontario General Contractors Association (OGCA).

Bill 6, which was recently passed by the province, sets out stipulations to ensure apprentices and underrepresented groups in construction are involved in infrastructure projects through plans submitted during procurement.

According to the legislation, a bidder that enters into a procurement process for the construction or maintenance of a government asset needs to provide a plan that includes the number of apprentices the bidder intends to employ in each trade and the methods they intend to use to support the apprentices' training.

It also requires the bidder to outline how they intend to create employment opportunities for apprentices who are women, Aboriginal People, newcomers to Ontario, at-risk youth, veterans and residents of the community where the asset is located.

"It's challenging the industry to use this to be inclusive," Frame adds.

"This says to the industry, you go out and you decide how you can do this. Put your goals in place and then sit down and be accountable with us (the government) on how you've done."

But getting to this point wasn't that simple, Frame explains, as the government had initially set out specific quotas for the industry to fulfill.

"As general contractors we are only employing a very small percentage of the workforce that's going to be on that job site. We cannot respond to the number of apprentices. So we said, let's find a better way of doing this," he states.

"The assumption is, at the end of the job, or even at points during the jobs, we'll have to report on how we're doing to meet the targets of the plan."

Geoff Wilkinson, executive director of the Ontario Road Builders' Association (ORBA), also says the amendments were needed.

"The language around apprenticeships is very much improved and that's something that ORBA advocated for," he explains.

"The way the original wording was, it would be very difficult for some of our members to meet the requirements that the government had originally wanted. We're all in favour of apprenticeship programs and working to improve opportunities for the Aboriginal communities, women and people within the region of a project."

Karen Renkema, senior manager of public affairs for the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada says the language change made a difference, but more details need to be hashed out.

"The legislation contemplates some of the requirements in the apprenticeship plan, but does not contemplate fully exactly what the apprenticeship plan is going to look like," she explains.

"The reality is that apprentices aren't picked up on a project basis. Employers commit to apprentices for, three, four, five years, in order to get their training done. Employers are committing to hiring these individuals (including underrepresented groups) as employees. We need to recognize that we don't want to hire a whole bunch of people in order to fulfill an apprenticeship plan and then there's no ongoing employment relationship after the fact."

Frame states the issue now will be working with regulatory bodies, such as the Ontario College of Trades, to see how much leeway there is in getting apprentices on the job. The act states that the plan "must conform to any applicable requirements respecting journey person to apprentice ratios that are established for the purposes of section 60 of the Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act, 2009."

"There's considerable discussion over where the direction we're going in is in terms of apprentices and how much flexibility we are going to have in terms of hiring apprentices," he states.

"The College has largely been working in a policy vacuum from government and it's been left up to the College to say this is where we believe the priorities are. Now we have a clear legislative statement from the government. You need to respond from a policy point of view and a

regulatory point of view...so that we can be better positioned to hire apprentices and a more diverse workforce."

While apprenticeship plans were a large component of Bill 6 for those in the industry, another aspect that is being applauded revolves around strategic planning. The legislation will require the current and future governments to table a long-term infrastructure plan at least once every five years.

"I think this will result in the right projects being selected overall," says Andy Manahan, executive director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario.

"Ontario seems to be aligned with long-term planning, but the federal government, certainly during this election year, is very short term and non-strategic. The bigger issue now is with our multi-layered government approach to things, how do we get the federal government in tune with what the province needs overall?"