



R.J. Simpson  
Minister, Education, Culture and Employment  
P.O. Box 1320, Yellowknife, NT, X1A 2L9

September 28, 2020

**Re: NWT Polytechnic University Initial Areas of Teaching and Research Specialization**

Dear Minister Simpson,

Thank you for requesting our input on *the Northwest Territories Polytechnic University Initial Areas of Teaching and Research Specialization* discussion paper. On behalf of the Northwest Territories & Nunavut Construction Association (NNCA), we would like to express our support for the NWT Polytechnic's proposed Skilled Trades and Technology area of specialization. We would also caution that the Polytechnic must be given flexibility within its areas of specialization in order to stay relevant and responsive to the evolving labour market needs of a dynamic northern construction industry.

We agree that there is high potential for employment among northerners who pursue an education in Skilled Trades and Technology. As noted in the discussion paper, there are expected to be more than 2,000 trades-related job openings in the NWT between 2015 and 2030. This anticipated demand aligns with research from BuildForce Canada, which projects 880 construction trades job openings in the NWT between 2019 and 2023.<sup>i</sup> Across Canada, more than 350,000 apprentices need to be recruited in Red Seal trades to keep pace with labour market demands over the next 5 years.<sup>ii</sup> Respondents to the NNCA's 2020 Membership Survey said they could grow their workforce by an average of 31% if not for the current skilled labour shortage.

However, if the Polytechnic remains in a silo apart from industry and the rest of the NWT's education system, it will fail to capitalize on this socio-economic opportunity. This is evident from the NNCA's 2020 Membership Survey – almost all respondents (91%) noted a lack of support at the high school level for individuals pursuing apprenticeships. A third of these employers also stated that prospective apprentices in the territory are not receiving the education in math, science and literacy needed to pass the Trades Entrance Exam. These claims are backed up by data provided by the GNWT: over the past 5 years, only 53% of NWT residents who wrote the Trades Entrance Exam passed on their first attempt. This has delayed or ended nearly 300 apprenticeships in the territory since 2015.<sup>iii</sup>

Employers have also described issues with apprentices who have the strong academic background needed to become a journeyman, but who lack practical experience and struggle with a steep learning curve as a result. An NWT Polytechnic could seek to bridge this experience gap by increasing access to Work Integrated Learning (WIL) opportunities in construction. The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum surveyed youth across Canada about this issue and found that a large majority (78%) believe WIL opportunities should be the top priority for government and the apprenticeship community.<sup>iv</sup>



There are also financial barriers to completing apprenticeships, for both employers and apprentices. This is true across Canada, as employers in construction can invest upwards of \$250,000 to train a single apprentice. These costs include wages and benefits for both the apprentice and the journey person providing training, wastage of time and materials required to correct apprentice mistakes made on-the-job, and administrative costs related to managing apprenticeship contracts.<sup>v</sup>

Respondents to the NNCA's 2020 Membership Survey also reported that apprentices can encounter difficulties covering the costs of their technical training. They attend this training for periods of up to 4 months, at a time when they are not earning a wage and often must maintain two residences – one in the community where they are employed, and one in the community where they are attending training.

These concerns follow new findings from the Conference Board of Canada that apprentices in northern Canada face “fundamental barriers” to accessing technical training.<sup>vi</sup> The GNWT has acknowledged a sharp decline in technical training enrollment at Aurora College, and notes that there are an increasing number of requests from apprentices to enroll at institutions outside the territory.<sup>vii</sup> NWT apprentices surveyed for the Aurora College Foundational Review flagged numerous factors discouraging them from pursuing technical training in the territory,<sup>viii</sup> and the NWT Polytechnic must take these concerns seriously if it truly aspires to be a world-class Skilled Trades and Technology institution.

We also do not need to wait for a Polytechnic to begin strengthening apprenticeship culture in the territory. Stable infrastructure funding can give companies the certainty needed to make long term investments in training, and existing supports for apprentices and journeypersons can be enhanced in the short term so that all apprenticeship stakeholders can hit the ground running when the Polytechnic is established. We look forward to continued engagement in the creation of this institution with a view to developing the next generation of skilled tradespeople and construction industry leaders.

Sincerely,

Duc Trinh  
President  
NWT & Nunavut Construction Association

Matt Belliveau  
Executive Director  
NWT & Nunavut Construction Association

Sent via email to:

[ri\\_simpson@gov.nt.ca](mailto:ri_simpson@gov.nt.ca)

CC'd:

[ronna\\_sharegan@gov.nt.ca](mailto:ronna_sharegan@gov.nt.ca)  
[katherine\\_robinson@gov.nt.ca](mailto:katherine_robinson@gov.nt.ca)  
[jennifer\\_thompson@gov.nt.ca](mailto:jennifer_thompson@gov.nt.ca)  
[chris\\_joseph@gov.nt.ca](mailto:chris_joseph@gov.nt.ca)  
[andy\\_bevan@gov.nt.ca](mailto:andy_bevan@gov.nt.ca)



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- <sup>i</sup> BuildForce Canada (2020) Construction & Maintenance Looking Forward: Canada's Territories. Retrieved from: <https://www.buildforce.ca/en/lmi/forecast-summary-reports>
- <sup>ii</sup> Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2020) Apprentice Demand in Red Seal Trades: A 2020 National Labour Market Information Report. Retrieved from: [https://caf-fca.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Apprentice-Demand\\_National-2020.pdf](https://caf-fca.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Apprentice-Demand_National-2020.pdf)
- <sup>iii</sup> Source: Figures provided by GNWT Education Culture & Employment – Labour Development & Standards. Between 2015 – 2020, there have been 612 writings of the Trades Entrance Exam with a 53% pass rate on the first attempt.
- <sup>iv</sup> Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2018) Youth Skilled Trades Employment Strategy. Retrieved from: <https://careersintrades.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/YouthJobsBetter-Future.pdf>
- <sup>v</sup> Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2009) It Pays To Hire an Apprentice: Calculating the Return on Training Investment for Skilled Trades Employers in Canada. Retrieved from: <https://nsapprenticeship.ca/sites/default/files/docs/pubs/CAF-pays.pdf>
- <sup>vi</sup> The Conference Board of Canada (2020) Bridging Generational Divides: Advancing Digital Skills in Canada's Apprenticeships and Skilled Trades Ecosystem. Retrieved from: [https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/19c9584b-759e-4de1-914c-0b01a0b3a7b1/10707\\_impact-paper\\_bridging-generational-divides.pdf](https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/19c9584b-759e-4de1-914c-0b01a0b3a7b1/10707_impact-paper_bridging-generational-divides.pdf)
- <sup>vii</sup> Government of the Northwest Territories (2019) Government Response to the Findings and Recommendations of the Aurora College Foundational Review. Retrieved from: [https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/government\\_response\\_to\\_the\\_acfr\\_-\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/government_response_to_the_acfr_-_for_web.pdf)
- <sup>viii</sup> MNP LLP (2018) Aurora College Foundational Review. Retrieved from: [https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/aurora\\_college\\_foundational\\_review\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/sites/ece/files/resources/aurora_college_foundational_review_report_0.pdf)