

Chapter 15

Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission—Increasing Apprentices from Underrepresented Groups

1.0 MAIN POINTS

Saskatchewan will need more than 8,000 new apprentices and 5,000 new journeypersons to meet labour demand requirements between now and 2026, yet the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission projects new apprenticeship registrations and completions will be below market demand (at about 7,000 and 4,000 respectively).^{1,2} This will leave a market gap of about 1,000 new apprentices and journeypersons each.

We assessed the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission's processes to increase apprentices from underrepresented groups in skilled trades.

At June 2023, we found the Commission reported actual number of apprentices from underrepresented groups compared to established targets to senior management and its Board, as well as identified and established adequate actions to address most barriers underrepresented groups face. However, the Commission needs to obtain more input from underrepresented apprentices to help expand identification of barriers (e.g., workplace sexual harassment/discrimination) they face and actions to address them.

We also found the Commission needs to:

- Revise its target (11%) related to female apprentices and identify actions to attract female apprentices in skilled trades. Active female apprentices over the past five years remain relatively stagnant, yet this group represents a high proportion of the provincial workforce at 49.8% and therefore, a key source of workers for skilled trades.
- Enhance and implement its Innovation and Inclusion Strategy (a five-year strategy aiming to increase participation of underrepresented groups in the skilled trades) established in 2022.
- Expand its targets (e.g., targeted number of new registrants, exam pass rates) for all underrepresented groups and analyze why it has not met its targets for underrepresented groups.
- Pursue visible minority representation on its Board.

Apprentices from underrepresented groups contribute to a workforce with a broad range of skills, abilities, and experiences, and are key to building diversity in organizations and supporting economic growth for the province.

¹ Completions refer to individuals who completed their apprenticeship program and received their Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship. They may or may not have applied to receive their Journeyman certificate.

² Adapted from information provided by the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission.



2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the results of our audit of the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission's processes to increase apprentices from underrepresented groups in skilled trades.³

Underrepresented groups include:

- Indigenous persons
- Visible minorities
- People with disabilities
- Females

Underrepresented groups are groups of individuals whose participation rate in an apprenticeship program is less than the group's proportional representation of the Saskatchewan population.^{4,5}

The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act, 2019, makes the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission responsible for developing approaches to apprenticeship training and certification that support increased access, participation, and completion by members of underrepresented groups. The Commission is responsible to create a relevant, accessible and responsive apprenticeship training and certification system to meet employers' and employees' needs and priorities.⁶

Of the Commission's 76 employees, 14 staff work directly to promote apprenticeship and to support apprentices from underrepresented groups in the skilled trades.⁷

For the year ended June 30, 2023, the Commission earned revenue of \$25.4 million and incurred expenses of \$25.9 million. In 2022–23, the Commission spent 72% (\$18.5 million) for contractual services (e.g., technical training) as well as on advertising, promotion and marketing activities (2021–22: \$20.9 million).⁸

2.1 Apprenticeship in Saskatchewan

To register as an apprentice, an individual must have a job with an employer who agreed to apprentice them in their desired trade. The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission does not train individuals for jobs they might obtain in the future. The Commission trains individuals for jobs that they are already in, with a few exceptions (e.g., hairstylist).⁹

³ An apprentice is a person who takes part in a structured system of supervised training that, upon completion, will lead to certification in a designated trade (e.g., electrician, carpenter, plumber). Saskatchewan's designated trades or skilled trades are professions regulated by *The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission Regulations, 2020*.

⁴ *The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act, 2019*, section 2.

⁵ Based on the percentage of women available to work between 15 and 74 years of age, 47% of an organization's workforce, at all levels (e.g., management, labour), could be women. As an example, women represent only 9.4% of those working in transport and heavy equipment operation and related maintenance occupations. www.saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/2019-employment-equity-targets (18 September 2023).

⁶ *The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act, 2019*, sections 13(a) and (d).

⁷ The 14 staff consist of 13 staff in the Communications & Marketing and Innovation & Inclusion branches, along with a Senior Indigenous Advisor who reports to the Chief Executive Officer.

⁸ Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission financial records.

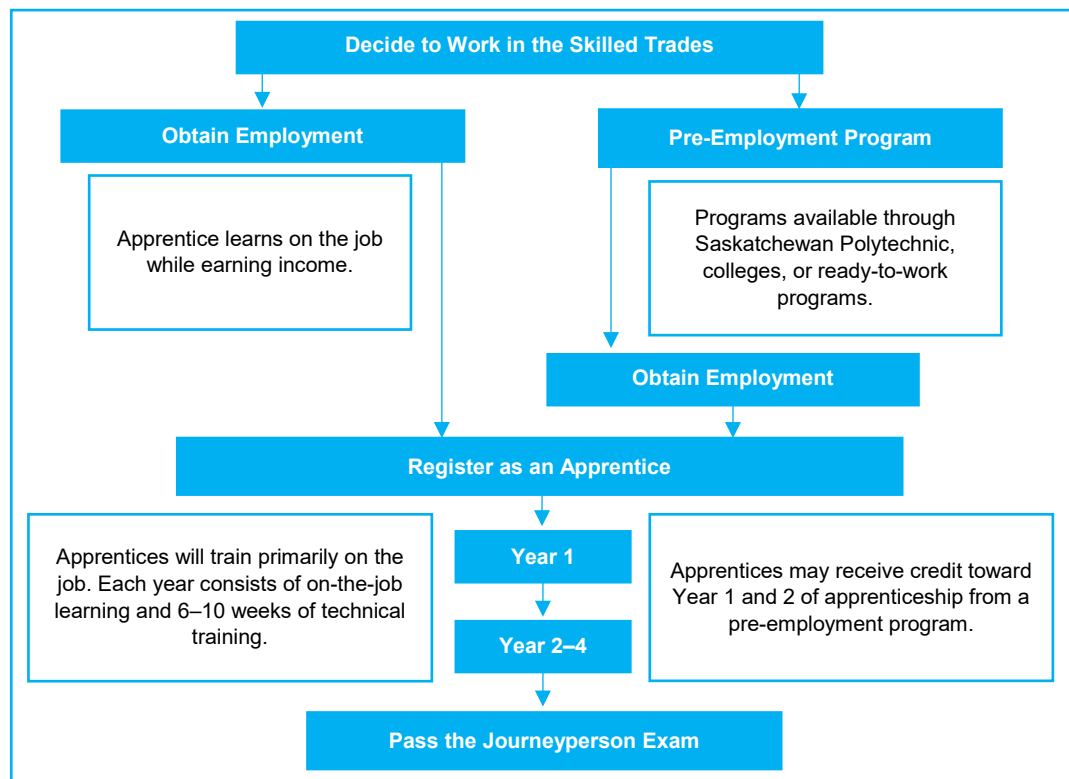
⁹ Unlike most apprentices, hairstylists attend technical training upfront—before obtaining a job in their trade or registering as an apprentice.

Once an employer decides to train an individual as an apprentice, the employer and the apprentice must submit an application to the Commission. An apprentice takes part in apprenticeship training, which is a structured system of supervised training, leading to certification as a journeyman in one of Saskatchewan's designated trades (e.g., construction electrician, carpenter, plumber).^{10,11}

Apprentices spend approximately 85% of their time working on the job, obtaining knowledge, and learning the skills associated with a trade from a certified journeyman. Apprentices spend the remaining time on theoretical and technical in-school training, which reinforces and expands on what they learn on the job. Technical training usually takes place at an institute (e.g., Saskatchewan Polytechnic) for a period of 6–10 weeks each year.¹²

Apprenticeship training ranges from two to four years depending on the trade. For example, it takes a hairstylist apprentice at least two years to complete their program, while it would take a construction electrician at least four years to complete their program. Once an apprentice completes their final level of training, they are eligible to write the journeyman examination. Upon successfully passing the certification exam, the apprentice receives both a Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship and a Journeyman Certificate of Qualification.¹³ **Figure 1** outlines the pathways to becoming an apprentice and a certified journeyman.

Figure 1—Pathways to Apprenticeship and Journeyman Certification



Source: Adapted from www.saskapprenticeship.ca/what-is-apprenticeship/ (12 September 2023).

¹⁰ www.saskapprenticeship.ca/what-is-apprenticeship/ (12 September 2023).

¹¹ A journeyman is an individual who worked at a trade for several years, passed all examinations, and received a Journeyman Certificate of Qualification from the Commission or another Canadian apprenticeship authority. Adapted from www.saskapprenticeship.ca/experienced-workers/ and www.gov.nl.ca/atcd/journeymen/ (12 September 2023).

¹² www.saskapprenticeship.ca/what-is-apprenticeship/ (12 September 2023).

¹³ Ibid.



2.2 Importance of Underrepresented Groups in the Skilled Trades

Saskatchewan will need an estimated 8,238 new apprentices and 5,239 new journeypersons to meet demand requirements over the period from 2022–26. However, the projected new apprenticeship registrations and completions are below the projected numbers required (at 7,016 and 4,051 respectively).^{14,15} This poses recruitment challenges for employers in the province.

In 2019, the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum published a labour market report showing that from 2019 to 2023, an estimated 67,000 new journeypersons would be required to sustain workforce certification levels across the 10 largest Red Seal trades in Canada, excluding Quebec and the Territories.¹⁶ Saskatchewan needs concrete efforts to attract apprentices, especially from severely underrepresented groups—namely women, Indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities—to sustain the current job pool.¹⁷ Saskatchewan also anticipates increased recruitment challenges over the near term for seven Red Seal trades, specifically: carpenter, electrician, cook, refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanic, sheet metal worker, steamfitter/pipefitter, and welder.¹⁸

In its 2022–27 Strategic Plan, the Commission set a goal to satisfy industry demand for a skilled and certified workforce in Saskatchewan. The Commission sets performance measures, targets for the percentage of active apprentices (see **Figure 2**), and actions to address barriers to increase apprentices from underrepresented groups. The Board of Directors, through its annual business planning process, approves the performance measures and targets.

As indicated in **Figure 2**, the Commission met its targets in 2022–23 for female apprentices in trades with low female representation (e.g., crane operator), visible minorities, and apprentices with disabilities, but did not meet targets for Indigenous apprentices or female apprentices. Overall, actual percentages of active apprentices from underrepresented groups over the past five years remained relatively stagnant for females, yet this group increasingly represents a higher proportion of the workforce (at 49.8%).¹⁹

Figure 2—Target Versus Actual Apprentices from Underrepresented Groups (2018–23)

Underrepresented Group	2022–23 Target (%) ^A	2022–23 Actual (%)	2021–22 Actual (%)	2020–21 Actual (%)	2019–20 Actual (%)	2018–19 Actual (%)
Indigenous Apprentices	18.0	17.4	17.3	17.7	18.1	17.6
Female Apprentices	11.0	10.7	10.3	10.9	10.1	10.3
Female Apprentices in Trades with Low Female Representation	5.5	6.6	5.5	5.2	5.2	5.5
Visible Minority Apprentices	4.5	6.7	5.3	4.2	4.5	5.3
Apprentices with Disabilities	7.0	9.5	7.8	6.8	6.9	7.8

Source: Adapted from Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Commission records.

^A Percentage of total active apprentices in Saskatchewan. Active apprentices are those who are actively seeking certification (i.e., status has not been suspended or cancelled).

¹⁴ Completions refer to individuals who completed their apprenticeship program and received their Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship. They may or may not have applied to receive their Journeyperson certificate.

¹⁵ Adapted from information provided by the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission.

¹⁶ The Red Seal designation means a journey/trades person can practice their trade in any province or territory in Canada having demonstrated the knowledge required for the national standard in that trade. www.red-seal.ca/eng/about/pr.4gr.1m.shtml (13 September 2023).

¹⁷ www.macleans.ca/work/women-in-skilled-trades/ (13 September 2023).

¹⁸ Adapted from information provided by the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission.

¹⁹ www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810002001&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.111&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.1 (29 September 2023).

Without effective processes to increase apprentices from underrepresented groups, Saskatchewan may be unable to meet industry demand for skilled workers. Apprentices from underrepresented groups contribute to a workforce with a broad range of skills, talents, and experiences, and are vital to building diversity in organizations and supporting economic growth.

3.0 AUDIT CONCLUSION

We concluded, for the 12-month period ended June 30, 2023, the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission had, except in the following areas, effective processes to increase apprentices from underrepresented groups in skilled trades.

The Commission needs to:

- **Revise its targets related to female apprentices and identify actions to increase the number of female apprentices**
- **Obtain more input from underrepresented apprentices to help identify barriers they face**
- **Implement actions to address key barriers underrepresented apprentices face (e.g., sexual harassment/discrimination in the workplace)**
- **Enhance and implement its Innovation and Inclusion Strategy**
- **Expand its targets(e.g., targeted number of new registrants, exam pass rates) to include all key milestones for underrepresented groups**
- **Analyze why underrepresented group targets are not met**
- **Pursue visible minority representation on the Commission’s Board**

Figure 3—Audit Objective, Criteria, and Approach

Audit Objective:

To assess the effectiveness of the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission’s processes to increase apprentices from underrepresented groups in skilled trades for the 12-month period ending June 30, 2023.

Audit Criteria:

Processes to:

- 1. Establish strategies for increasing engagement (i.e., access to, participation in, and completion of apprenticeship programs) of underrepresented groups**
 - Engage with stakeholders (e.g., trade boards, employers, apprentices, high schools, Saskatchewan Polytech, Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, Dumont Technical Institute, regional colleges, Distance Learning Centre) to identify barriers for underrepresented groups in joining the trades
 - Set reasonable targets for evaluating progress in increasing engagement of underrepresented groups
 - Identify key actions in conjunction with stakeholders (consider priorities, responsibilities) to achieve targets
 - Assign resources for strategies (e.g., determine financial, human and technology resources required)
 - Communicate strategy to stakeholders

**2. Implement strategies and related actions**

- Work with employers to provide apprenticeship experience for underrepresented groups consistent with strategies
- Track results of strategies and actions to increase underrepresented groups
- Periodically report on results to stakeholders and the public

3. Evaluate effectiveness of strategies (e.g., collect and analyze data)

- Analyze outcomes against established targets
- Adjust strategies and actions as necessary

Audit Approach:

To conduct this audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Commission’s processes, we used the above criteria based on our related work, review of literature including reports of other auditors, and consultation with management. Commission management agreed with the above criteria.

We examined the Commission’s plans, strategies, research, Board minutes and reports relating to increasing apprentices from underrepresented groups in skilled trades. We interviewed Commission staff responsible for increasing apprentices from underrepresented groups in skilled trades. We assessed the Commission’s processes for identifying barriers experienced by underrepresented groups in the trades, developing actions to address these barriers, and outcomes of actions taken. We also used an independent external consultant with relevant expertise to aid our assessment of the Commission’s processes and in identifying good practice.

4.0 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Board Representation of All Underrepresented Groups Needed

The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission’s Board of Directors appropriately includes representation from most underrepresented groups, except from visible minorities.

The Commission engages with key stakeholders (e.g., training institutions, employers, employees) through its industry-led Board, which can include up to 20 members. The majority of the Board members must be from industry, equally representing employers and employees.²⁰ In 2022–23, the Commission’s Board had six employer representatives and six employee representatives. **Figure 4** outlines the Board representation.

Figure 4—Commission Board Representation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six employer representatives • Six employee representatives • Ministry of Immigration and Career Training representative • Ministry of Education representative • Saskatchewan Polytechnic representative (representing training providers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Nations representative • Métis representative • Northern Saskatchewan representative • Women in trades representative • People experiencing disabilities representative
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Source: www.saskapprenticeship.ca/commission-board/ (18 September 2023).

We found the composition of the Commission’s Board consistent with *The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act, 2019*. However, we found the Board does not include visible minority representation.

While not required by legislation, it is good practice to appoint a member from each underrepresented group, including visible minorities (e.g., Black, Asian, Arab, Latin

²⁰ *The Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Act, 2019*, section 5.

American). Barriers facing each underrepresented group may differ, along with the appropriate actions to address them.

Figure 7 shows that visible minority apprentice registrants declined by 59% between 2021–22 and 2022–23 (from 115 to 47 registrants).

Without explicit representation from visible minorities, the Commission may be unaware of unique barriers visible minorities face with apprenticeship. It may also lack a sufficiently inclusive perspective in developing strategies to increase participation from all underrepresented groups.

1. **We recommend the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission pursue visible minority representation on its Board of Directors.**

4.2 Barriers Identified, But Lack Apprentice Input

The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission identified barriers faced by apprentices from underrepresented groups, but did not obtain sufficient input from those apprentices. The Commission could also improve the survey it uses to obtain feedback from apprentices on their training experience.

The Commission appropriately relies on the knowledge of its staff when identifying key stakeholders it should be engaging with to identify barriers impacting underrepresented groups. Its 2022–27 Strategic Plan outlined these stakeholders, which included employers, employees, apprentices, educational partners (e.g., Saskatchewan Polytechnic), journeypersons and tradespeople. In the development of its Strategic Plan, we found the Commission's Board engaged most key stakeholders such as trade boards and industry associations to identify barriers underrepresented groups face and potential actions to address them (see **Figure 5** for established actions). Examples of these barriers the Commission and its stakeholders identified include:

- Sexual discrimination/harassment in the workplace
- Weak math, literacy, and science skills
- Learning disabilities reducing the likelihood of successfully completing apprenticeship

We found that while it identified apprentices as a key stakeholder, the Commission did not seek sufficient input from this group.

The Commission appropriately surveyed apprentices every two years to collect information about their apprenticeship experience (e.g., satisfaction with on-the-job-training, support offered by the Commission), but its survey questions need improvement.

We found the survey did not offer the opportunity for apprentices to expand on their responses and provide insight into barriers faced. For example, the Commission's 2021 survey asked apprentices whether they have been unable to attend technical training and why (i.e., provided several options for apprentices to select from such as location of training or financial reasons). Forty-three per cent (43%) of respondents selected "other" reasons



for their inability to attend technical training. However, the survey did not provide respondents with the ability to elaborate on those “other” reasons. Obtaining reasons in its survey as to why apprentices did not attend technical training could help the Commission identify potential barriers apprentices face, including apprentices from underrepresented groups, and develop actions to address those barriers.

In addition to identifying barriers from stakeholder input, Commission staff participate in Communities of Practice for both Indigenous and Black apprentices. These Communities of Practice include provincial and territorial representation and discussions about barriers, good practices, and recommendations on ways to support underrepresented group apprentices.

Gathering information from apprentices about potential barriers, including from apprentices from underrepresented groups, can assist the Commission in creating effective actions to attract, and improve the apprenticeship experience for, these groups.

2. We recommend the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission sufficiently engage with apprentices from underrepresented groups to identify barriers and develop sufficient actions to address them.

4.3 Actions Established to Address Most Key Barriers

The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission established key actions to increase underrepresented groups in the skilled trades. However, the Commission has not established actions to address all key identified barriers. It is also in the early stages of implementing its Innovation and Inclusion Strategy.

The Commission identified 16 key barriers faced by underrepresented groups’ apprentices. As shown in **Figure 5**, the Commission has taken action to address 13 of these 16 barriers. The Commission does not have an action plan or initiatives to address the following three barriers:

- Female apprentices experiencing greater child care responsibilities—the Commission could provide employers with resources on available daycare funding supports (e.g., early learning and childcare funding from the Ministry of Education)
- Apprentices experiencing sexual discrimination/harassment in the workplace—the Commission could provide employers with information on good practice on how to create a safe and inclusive workplace
- Lack of understanding of the Black Canadian experience in the skilled trades—the Commission could reach out to Black Canadian apprentices and obtain input on the barriers faced (see **Section 4.2**)

Figure 5—Identified Barriers and Actions/Initiatives

Barrier	Established Actions/Initiatives to Address Barrier
Barriers Common to all Underrepresented Groups	
Lack of awareness of skilled trades as a desirable career pathway	Advertising campaigns Saskatchewan Youth Apprenticeship program (described in Section 4.3.2)
Inadequate funding and high costs	Saskatchewan Apprenticeship Training Allowance ^A
Inadequate math and literacy skills	Apprentice Success Enhancement Strategy ^B IXL Learning membership ^C
Lack of available mentorship in the industry	Communications and mentorship added to technical training programs
Barriers for Indigenous Peoples	
Lack of training accessibility and job opportunities due to isolated living situations	Indigenous Apprenticeship Initiative program (described in Section 4.3.3)
Inadequate academic preparation (i.e., low math, science, and literacy skills)	IXL Learning membership Apprentice Success Enhancement Strategy
Lack of access to technology to use MyATC due to remote living locations ^D	Field consultants travel to northern regions Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology occasionally provides laptops to remote classrooms
Low enrollment in post-secondary institutions offering trade programs (e.g., Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies)	Advertising campaigns Indigenous Apprenticeship Initiative program
Barriers for Persons with Disabilities	
Learning disability reducing likelihood of successfully completing apprenticeship	Apprentice Success Enhancement Strategy
Barriers for Women	
Greater child care responsibilities	None – however, the Commission believes this is the responsibility of employers, not the Commission
Sexual discrimination/harassment in the workplace	None
Barriers for Visible Minorities	
Language skills (i.e., difficulties in understanding and communicating)	Established minimum benchmark for apprentices' English language skills (e.g., Canadian Language Benchmark 6) Refer those not meeting expected level to Saskatchewan Polytechnic or Open Door Society for additional English language courses
Lack of data and information on experiences of Black Canadians in the skilled trades	None
Poor perception of skilled trade careers	Saskatchewan Youth Apprenticeship program Career fair participation Advertising campaigns
Unclear pathways on achieving apprenticeship certification	Field consultants visit employer sites Commission staff visit schools enrolled in Saskatchewan Youth Apprenticeship program Communication via newsletters and website
Structural barriers (e.g., financial, transportation, immigration complexities)	Federal funding programs (e.g., Federal Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, Canadian Apprenticeship Loans) Saskatchewan Apprenticeship Training Allowance Website information on immigration process

Source: Adapted from Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Certification Commission records.

^A The Apprenticeship Training Allowance supports apprentices who need to maintain a second residence while attending technical training and their home residence is over 50 kms away from the training location (\$175 per week for northern Saskatchewan and \$125 per week for all other locations).

^B The Commission launched its Apprentice Success Enhancement Strategy in 2022–23 to improve Red Seal exam pass rates and better support apprentices by providing learning supports and accommodations for apprentices with learning disabilities when writing exams.

^C IXL learning helps people update their literacy and math skills online. The Commission's Assessment unit refers people to IXL Learning. Most commonly, referrals are for people who do not have the necessary entrance requirements or need to upgrade various skills during their technical training.

^D MyATC is the Commission's information technology system that apprentices use to register for technical training and exams, submit trade hours, and update personal information. saskapprenticeship.ca/myatc/ (29 September 2023).



Collaborating with industry associations to develop and provide resources for sexual harassment in the workplace may help to improve the work environment for apprentices, especially female apprentices in male-dominated trades (e.g., transport and heavy equipment). This may lead to more females seeking a career in these skilled trades.

Additionally, taking steps to address known barriers underrepresented groups experience can lead to increased access, participation, and completion of apprenticeship by members of underrepresented groups.

3. We recommend the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission establish appropriate actions to address all key identified barriers faced by underrepresented groups.

The Commission promotes the apprenticeship system through its communications and marketing efforts, including presentations, advertisements, and content posted to the Commission's website and social media channels. Target audiences include employers, experienced tradespeople, youth, and people from groups underrepresented in the skilled trades.

In addition, the following outlines three key actions the Commission used to increase underrepresented groups in the skilled trades.

4.3.1 Innovation and Inclusion Strategy

The Commission's Innovation and Inclusion Strategy is a five-year strategy that aims to increase, measure, and evaluate participation of underrepresented groups in the skilled trades. The Commission finalized the Strategy in August 2022, and is in the early stages of implementation.

The Commission's Inclusion and Innovation Branch works with Commission staff, training providers (e.g., Saskatchewan Polytechnic), Indigenous communities, and underrepresented groups to implement the Strategy.

The Commission should significantly improve the Strategy by:

- Formally assigning expectations of responsibilities to external stakeholders (e.g., employers, training partners) for increasing apprentices from underrepresented groups.

This ensures stakeholders are aware of, and accept responsibility for, their piece of the Strategy. It also helps to ensure that no gaps exist and minimizes overlap of responsibilities. For example, the Commission is responsible for marketing the skilled trades to underrepresented groups, but relies on employers and educational institutions to recruit and retain underrepresented group apprentices. The Strategy should include a requirement stating the type of information and the frequency of reporting each stakeholder (e.g., the Commission, employers, educational institutions) must provide.

- Revising language in the Strategy to be consistent with good practice. For example, “equity-seeking groups” (instead of underrepresented groups) is consistent with wording used by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.²¹

The Commission should consider defining terminology within the document so there is clarity for the reader. This helps to build a shared understanding and recognition of the role of equity within diversity and inclusion commitments.

- Incorporating both employers and youth as stakeholders in the Strategy to increase engagement.

Including employers and youth in the Strategy helps to ensure an understanding of their roles and promotes buy-in. These groups are key to promoting innovation and inclusion in the skilled trades.

An innovation and inclusion strategy that includes all key stakeholders, clear expectations and language consistent with good practice can help the Commission to achieve the desired outcomes of increasing underrepresented groups in the skilled trades.

4. We recommend the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission enhance and implement its Innovation and Inclusion Strategy to increase underrepresented groups in the skilled trades.

4.3.2 Saskatchewan Youth Apprenticeship Program

The Saskatchewan Youth Apprenticeship program is one of the main methods the Commission uses to attract youth to the skilled trades, including those from underrepresented groups. The Commission designed the program to help Grades 9–12 students discover the rewards of working in the skilled trades through hands-on experience.

The Commission’s Communications and Marketing Branch is responsible for implementing the youth program. The Branch makes presentations to Grades 9–12 students in schools across the province to raise awareness of apprenticeship and attract students into the youth program. The program consists of 12 challenges students must complete during high school that teachers administer and track. Students who complete all levels of the program, and register as an apprentice in a designated trade within five years of completing the program, receive the following benefits:

- Waiver of apprenticeship registration fee (\$250)
- No charge for Year 1 technical training tuition (between \$350 and \$880)
- 300 hours of trade-time credit toward their certification as a journeyperson²²

At May 31, 2023, of the 2,788 active youth participants, 20.2% self-identified as Indigenous, 31.1% as female, 4.1% as persons experiencing disability, and 6.7% as a visible minority.²³

²¹ www.saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/education-resources/employment-equity-program/ (18 September 2023).

²² www.saskapprenticeship.ca/what-is-sya/ (18 September 2023).

²³ Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission records.



The Commission appropriately uses its information technology system (MyATC) to track the success of those who complete the youth program. In May 2023, the Commission noted that 240 youth participants went on to register in an apprenticeship program out of a possible 418 eligible participants.²⁴

4.3.3 Indigenous Apprenticeship Initiative

The Commission uses its Indigenous Apprenticeship Initiative to increase Indigenous persons' awareness of apprenticeship and the skilled trades.

The Commission's Senior Indigenous Advisor, along with the Innovation and Inclusion Branch, are primarily responsible for implementing the Initiative.

Under the Initiative, Commission staff collaborate with First Nations' communities and training institutions to implement projects to attract Indigenous people into skilled trade careers. The Initiative accepts proposals for, and funds selected projects that support this objective.²⁵ **Figure 6** outlines options for projects.

Figure 6—Indigenous Apprenticeship Initiative Project Types

- New initiatives not previously undertaken
- "Introduction to Trades" courses
- A level of apprenticeship training
- Cost share – upgrade training for tradespeople with full trade time
- Job coaching for current apprentices
- Non-trade specific preparation courses for apprentices prior to apprenticeship training
- Projects resulting in a social benefit to the community
- Certificate and applied certificate programs under 30 weeks (considered on a case-by-case basis)

Source: www.saskapprenticeship.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Request-for-Proposals-IAI-2023-2024_VF_CS-Ext.-June-15-2023-Fillable.pdf (18 September 2023).

For example, in 2022–23, the program funded four projects totalling approximately \$440,000, including a try-a-trade carpenter program on the Pasqua First Nation and an automotive service technician program on the Cote First Nation.²⁶ These programs resulted in 16 Indigenous people gaining valuable employment skills in the carpenter and automotive service technical trades (24 Indigenous people enrolled in the programs).

In March 2022, the Research and Policy Unit performed analysis of Indigenous persons' progression through the apprenticeship program for the period 2012–16 to review the effect the Commission has on Indigenous apprentices. The analysis examined how likely an Indigenous apprentice would be successful based on how they performed on their first level of technical training. It found approximately 75% progressed in their apprenticeship, but less than 40% actually received certification.²⁷ The analysis did not identify the root cause of the low certification rate (see **Recommendation 7**). The report concluded that more research is needed to understand the adequacy of supports in place for Indigenous apprentices (e.g., upgrading education, accommodations, government funding). To date, the Commission has not performed any further research beyond the biennial apprentice surveys.

²⁴ Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission records.

²⁵ www.saskapprenticeship.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/IAI-Brochure-2023.pdf (18 September 2023).

²⁶ Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission records.

²⁷ Ibid.

Commission staff also conducted field visits to both high schools and apprentice employers, used social media to launch successful media campaigns featuring individuals from underrepresented groups, and issued newsletters to employers highlighting important information related to the apprenticeship program.

Creating adequate actions to address identified barriers faced by underrepresented groups increases the likelihood of underrepresented groups achieving success in their apprenticeship program.

4.4 Expanded Targets Required

The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission has set reasonable targets for apprenticeship program participation from underrepresented groups, except for apprentices self-identifying as female. In addition, the Commission needs to expand its targets to include key stages of the apprenticeship process.

The Commission's Research and Policy Unit establishes targets annually for active apprentices in underrepresented groups (see **Figure 2**). The Unit sets targets using previous years' data and consults with other units within the Commission to determine whether the targets remain reasonable. We found senior management reviews these targets and submits them to the Commission's Board for approval.

In its *2022–23 Business Plan*, the Commission added a new performance measure—Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Partnerships—and set a target for 2023–24 (i.e., establishing two new partnerships per year).²⁸ The EDI measure aims to increase diversity and inclusion of underrepresented groups in the apprenticeship system. It plans to do this by influencing employers to engage with and apprentice underrepresented groups.

We found the Commission has reasonable methods to obtain data on demand for skilled trades (both internally and from external sources). It includes performing its own apprenticeship demand forecasting annually during its business planning process, and obtaining information from the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training on five-year labour market projections. In addition, the Commission has reasonable methods to obtain data on the number of students registered in programs at post-secondary institutions. Tracking overall demand and supply of apprentices, including apprentices from underrepresented groups, can assist the Commission in providing local, up-to-date labour market information to both apprentices and employers. Tracking also helps to direct interested individuals to consider apprenticeship, highlight in-demand trades, or create new initiatives targeting certain underrepresented groups/trades.

We found the Commission identified relevant performance measures for underrepresented groups consistent with those identified by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission (i.e., Indigenous persons, visible minorities, females, persons with disabilities), and established associated targets. While we found most of these targets reasonable, the Commission's targets for apprentices self-identifying as female is too low and remained unchanged from the target established five years prior (i.e., 11%). While 11% of apprentices identifying as female is consistent with other provinces, setting a higher target demonstrates a provincial commitment to greater representation of women in the skilled

²⁸ Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission *Business Plan 2022–23*, p. 17.



trades. Additionally, we found 19% of Saskatchewan users of an online apprentice job search and employer-matching platform, self-identify as female.²⁹ This further supports the need for a higher target.

In order to meet the upcoming skilled trade demand mentioned in **Section 2.2**, the Commission needs to focus its efforts on attracting people from severely underrepresented groups, such as women. Given that 49.8% of the current Saskatchewan working population is female, this is a worthwhile demographic to draw upon for these missing resources.³⁰

5. We recommend the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission revise its targets for female apprentices to promote greater provincial representation of women in the skilled trades.

While the Commission established targets related to the number of active apprentices (i.e., those working through an apprenticeship program) for each underrepresented group, it has not established targets related to key milestones (e.g., exam completion rate) in the apprenticeship program specific to underrepresented groups.

We noted the Commission appropriately conducted research around underrepresented groups progressing through the apprenticeship program. The research identified what determinants lead to apprentices' success or failure in passing their first year of technical training and achieving certification. The research also analyzed progression of apprentices by various levels of completion (e.g., year 1, 2, 3, or 4 of their program).

The Commission's research found that apprentices who received credits (i.e., for prior learning and work experience) upon registration were more likely to complete their program than those who did not receive prior credit. Apprentices who received credits upon registration included those who participated either in the Saskatchewan Youth Apprenticeship program (see **Section 4.3.2**) or, pre-employment programs (e.g. Saskatchewan Polytechnic).

The Commission should use this research to expand its performance measures and targets for underrepresented groups in the apprenticeship program. For example, it could consider setting targets and analyzing results for underrepresented groups as follows:

- Percentage of underrepresented apprentices who successfully complete each year of apprenticeship (i.e., as apprentices progress in training)
- Number of Certificates of Apprenticeship Completion issued
- Number of exam completions (i.e., tracking pass/fail and the number of exam retakes)
- The number of years for each of the underrepresented groups to complete their program

²⁹ Apprenticesearch.com is a free, online job search and matching platform focusing on apprenticeship and skilled trades in Canada. The website connects employers and job seekers in the skilled trades, provides free resources on the skilled trades, promotes skilled trades as a career pathway, and provides support to employers and job seekers in the skilled trades. www.apprenticesearch.com/about-us/apprenticesearch (22 September 2023).

³⁰ www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810002001&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.111&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.1 (29 September 2023).

Figure 7 shows the five-year trend of underrepresented groups' registration in apprenticeship programs, active apprentices, and certifications. The figure shows that while female representation in new registrations and active apprenticeship has been increasing, the actual completion rate decreased. This is a demographic the Commission could benefit from setting additional targets and regularly measuring its progress toward attaining it. Doing so will help the Commission understand why the trend is occurring and create solutions for improving the completion rate, as this pool of underrepresented apprentices will help meet skilled trade shortages.

Figure 7—Five-Year Trend of Registrations, Active Apprentices, and Completion for Underrepresented Groups

	2022–23	2021–22	2020–21	2019–20	2018–19
Women in Trades					
New Registrations	288	205	189	211	247
Active Apprentices	656	649	606	686	673
Certificate Obtained	110	127	131	80	169
Visible Minorities					
New Registrations	47	115	81	59	77
Active Apprentices	410	335	270	263	291
Certificate Obtained	49	38	35	37	39
Indigenous Persons					
New Registrations	419	295	267	282	331
Active Apprentices	1,064	1,105	1,089	1,110	1,131
Certificate Obtained	101	111	112	76	151
Persons with Disabilities					
New Registrations	169	74	54	46	47
Active Apprentices	580	488	417	427	423
Certificate Obtained	101	67	75	45	79

Source: Adapted from Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Certification Commission records.

Not having sufficient performance measures and targets for underrepresented groups at key points in their apprenticeship program (e.g., registration, progression through levels, completion) increases the risk that the Commission does not know where underrepresented group apprentices experience difficulty. Tracking at the various stages (e.g., recruiting, program duration, exams) will also help the Commission determine where it can best focus its resources to help address issues for apprentices from underrepresented groups and be ready to meet industry demand for skilled trades.

6. We recommend the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission expand its performance measures and targets for underrepresented groups to include all key milestones (e.g., entry, duration, completion) in the apprenticeship program.

4.5 Formal Analysis on Achievement of Targets Needed

The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission does not conduct formal analysis of its results to increase apprentices from underrepresented groups in the skilled trades. Overall, the Commission established actions to increase apprentices from



underrepresented groups; however, it could strengthen its processes by evaluating the success of its actions.

The Commission provides monthly reports showing results compared to targets for key measures (e.g., female and Indigenous apprentices) to senior management and to the Board. These measures include the number of apprentice registrations from members of underrepresented groups. We tested three reports. While the reports included actual results compared to established targets, they did not include documented explanations for why the Commission had not met targets or identify specific actions to address results.

Commission management indicated they provide senior management and the Board with verbal analysis of the rationale for why it did not meet apprenticeship targets. As these updates were verbal, we could not assess the sufficiency of its analysis.

Additionally, the Commission reports the actual results versus established targets annually to the public in its annual report. This report also does not contain rationale for why it did not meet apprenticeship targets.

Documenting reasons for not meeting targets and actions taken to address (or respond to) them can help the Commission better measure progress in addressing root causes and achieving results. Further, documentation can continue to inform leadership when staff turnover occurs.

7. We recommend the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission formalize its analysis of reasons for not meeting established targets for underrepresented groups, and planned actions to address.

Additionally, the Commission did not analyze employer actions to improve underrepresented group participation in the skilled trades because the Commission has not established stakeholder expectations (e.g., reporting requirements) as stated in **Section 4.3.1**.

In 2022–23, the Commission created and ran marketing campaigns to target underrepresented groups to join the skilled trades. These marketing campaigns ran on social media. An external agency analyzed and reported on the results of the effectiveness of these campaigns (e.g., number of clicks, viewability).

4.6 Appropriate Revisions Made to Established Actions

Annually, during its strategic planning session, the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission and its Board review established actions to improve the success of underrepresented group apprentices and make recommendations for improvements.

Examples of changes to established actions noted during our audit period included:

- Lowering the entry age for the Saskatchewan Youth Apprenticeship program. In May 2022, Commission staff recommended lowering the entry age for the youth program from Grade 10 (15 years old) to Grade 9 (14 years old). Feedback from teachers who administer the youth program noted that lowering the entry age better aligns with the

Grade 9 curriculum. Additionally, introducing the youth program earlier raises students' awareness of the program sooner and gives those who register more time to complete the challenges. This change was implemented in September 2022.

- Creating the Apprenticeship Success Enhancement Strategy in 2022. While monitoring its results, the Commission noted a declining trend in the Red Seal exam pass rate for all trades. The Commission created the Apprenticeship Success Enhancement Strategy in an effort to improve exam pass rates, create opportunity for early intervention, identify and fill gaps in knowledge or skills, and provide supports and tools to struggling apprentices. Since the creation of the Enhancement Strategy, exam pass rates improved from 63% in 2020 to 68% in 2022.³¹

We found the Commission appropriately communicated these changes to its staff during regular staff meetings and to stakeholders (e.g., employers) in bi-monthly newsletters.

Regularly reviewing and revising actions as needed helps the Commission ensure it has adequate actions in place to support and provide the best chance for underrepresented groups' success in the skilled trades.

5.0 SELECTED REFERENCES

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³¹ Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission 2021–22 Business Plan, p. 15.

