

Province appoints advisors to help modernize trades, apprenticeship system

Angela Gismondi September 30, 2019



The Ontario government is looking to modernize the skilled trades and apprenticeship system by appointing two Training and Skills Advisors (TSA) to lead consultations with the industry and stakeholders and provide recommendations to make the system more efficient and easier to use.

Andrew Pariser, vice-president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario and Adam Melnick, director, government and community relations, Heat and Frost Insulators & Allied Workers Local 95, were appointed as the new TSAs on Sept. 23 for a period of two years.

“The goal is to provide recommendations that reflect what is currently happening across all sectors involved in skilled trades and apprenticeship today and provide recommendations that are going to put these trades and these industries in a strong position as things continue to innovate and modernize,” explained Melnick.

“The idea is to take the strong foundation of apprenticeship we have in Ontario and be prepared for the new challenges of today and the challenges we aren’t even aware of tomorrow... We want to create a framework that has some flexibility to adapt as things progress, change and get added.”

Their mandate is to consult with employers, apprentices, skilled tradespeople and training providers on issues related to the skilled trades and apprenticeship system, specifically portable skill sets and risk-based restricted activities. Following consultations, they will provide recommendations to Ross Romano, minister of training, colleges and universities.

It's about figuring out ways to improve access to the trades

— **Andrew Pariser**

Residential Construction Council of Ontario

“This is going to be about the future of work in Ontario, this is going to be about the future of skills training, understanding what are the needs of workers, unions, employers, the economy, young people and applying that to the core focuses of the review which are creating portable skill sets and restricted practices,” Pariser said.

This year's Ontario budget set out the vision for a modernized, client-focused apprenticeship and skilled trades system, said Pariser, and through that process came the idea to establish the advisors. In the spring, the government passed the Modernizing the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Act which provides the new legislative framework governing Ontario's skilled trades and apprenticeship system.

“The spring legislation set the foundation,” said Pariser. “In that they identified the government has moved to portable skill sets, they have moved to restricted activities and so this consultation will be about providing advice to the minister on how those things can be done. That's why there is such a focus on reaching out to stakeholders because we're here to provide the minister with advice on what stakeholders think and the solutions they see. ”

Over the two years, the advisors will create frameworks on portable skill sets and restricted activities in consultation with the industry and use those frameworks to provide advice to the minister on recommendations and an implementation plan.

“The first part is the development of a framework to support the ministers' role in prescribing portable skills sets and recommendations for what those skills sets could be,” said Pariser. “Essentially what we are looking at is the existing skills training that is available in the trades and looking to add to it. It's about figuring out ways to improve access to the trades, it's about looking at the future of work and it's about looking at how do people transfer from one trade to another as efficiently and easily as possible.”

The second part is the development of a risk of harm framework to prescribe restricted activities and recommendations on what activities should be restricted.

“We know that there is a myriad of skill sets inside every trade and what we are looking at with those skill sets is we're going to sit down with the stakeholders, we're going to sit down with representatives...and we're looking at risk of harm, we're looking at environmental impacts,

these are some of the things being floated around what a risk of harm framework will look like in determining the restricted skill sets,” said Pariser.

“It’s really key that we have this engagement with the industry.”

Pariser and Melnick will be examining all 144 trades, understanding the problems and opportunities in all four sectors: industrial, motive, service and construction.

“In order to get people the right jobs, we need to make it easy for them to get the right training — training that matches what employers are looking for,” said Romano in a statement. “Adam and Andrew will hear directly from people involved in the sector — employers, apprentices, skilled tradespeople and training providers. With their help, we can make meaningful changes to our current system and make it easier and faster to get people trained, certified and begin working in the trades.”

The advisors will release a discussion paper in the next few weeks and will be looking for stakeholders to engage in the consultation through in-person, telephone and video conferencing meetings.

“We know who some of the stakeholders are and we are going to be relying on them and really engaging a very wholesome and fulsome outreach for all stakeholders that are interested,” said Pariser. “We will also be going out to different parts of the province to understand geographic realities and differences.”