

# Understanding Apprenticeship Non-Completion

## A Survey of Current Apprentices

Peel Halton Dufferin Training Board  
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## Executive Summary

This project was initiated to determine the reasons why apprentices abandoned their program before writing their final examinations. Privacy legislation having prohibited the surveyors from contacting apprentices who had already abandoned their studies, surveys of current apprentices in apprenticeship programs were done through two community colleges: Sheridan and Humber. Distribution of survey forms was carried out by the colleges. The Ministry of Training Colleges & Universities, Apprenticeship branch in Mississauga had their Training Consultants facilitate information sessions to the participants who filled out the surveys.

A total of 482 completed surveys were analyzed for this report.

### Summary of survey results:

- Respondents were predominantly male, aged 20 to 30, and worked in small companies of 30 or fewer employees.
- The vast majority completed secondary school including 6% who graduated from college or university.
- A similarly large majority received their educations in Ontario.
- Most were registered as apprentices for three years or longer and had no trouble finding a job.
- The greatest reported reasons for having difficulty finding a job were lack of employers hiring their trades and lack of experience.
- Interest in the trades and salary or career opportunities were the two most popular reasons for entering an apprenticeship program and friends or relatives were the greatest influence in doing so.
- The majority received their training through the block format and a large majority of them found it satisfactory.
- Most respondents stated that their in-class equipment was up-to-date and that they had equipment in class to practice on.
- Most described the difficulty of their in-class training as average. The second largest group called it difficult.
- Two-thirds of respondents expected to write their licence or Certificate of Qualification examination in two years or less. Half of them anticipated writing it within the next year.
- The majority of respondents anticipated no problem paying the \$100 qualification exam fee.

## Introduction

This project was initiated to determine the reasons why apprentices abandoned their studies before completion. What were the barriers that broke their commitments to their own employment futures?

Privacy legislation prevented any contact between the surveyors and apprentices who had already dropped out of their programs. Therefore, to gather the information, surveys were distributed by Sheridan College in Peel Region and Humber College in Toronto to their current apprentices who had entered their programs between 2005 and 2007. The identities of the apprentices were protected from the surveyors, so no follow-up could be done to clarify answers or encourage more apprentices to complete the survey.

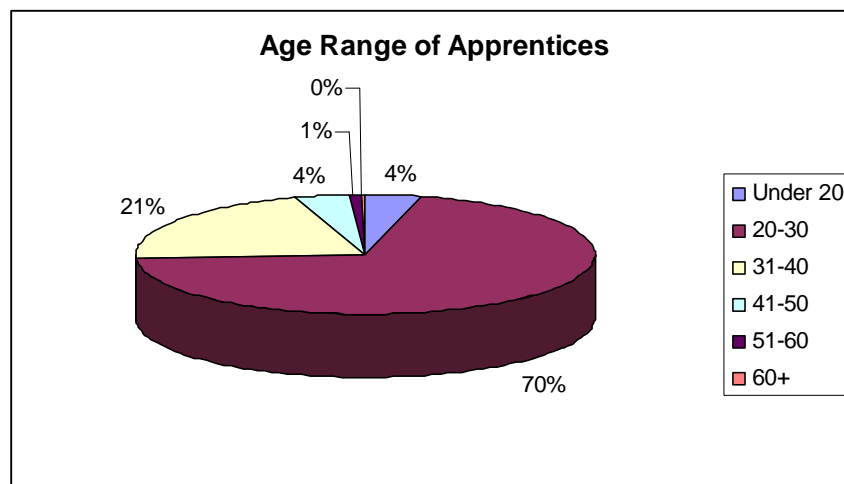
A total of 495 surveys were returned by the two colleges. Of these, 13 were returned blank leaving 482 completed surveys to analyze.

Those respondents, who stated the trade they were studying, were preparing to work as either electricians or machinists.

### About the survey respondents

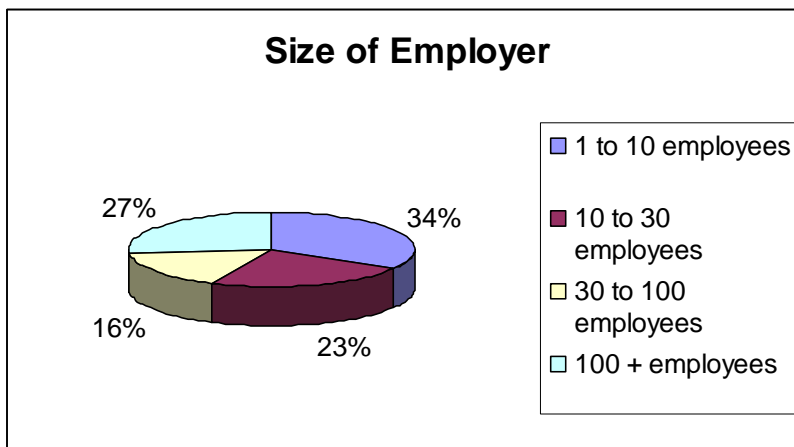
- The group of respondents was almost exclusively male (99%). There was four female apprentices that answered the survey.
- Almost all were from the Greater Toronto Area. Fifty-two percent were from the four communities of Brampton, Mississauga, Oakville, and Toronto. The most distant hometowns of respondents were London to the west, Perth to the east, Sudbury to the north and New York to the south.
- The great majority were young adults: 71% were in the age range of 20-30 years; an additional four percent were under the age of 20. Twenty-one percent were between ages 31 and 40, four percent between 41 and 50, four percent more between 51 and 55.

**Chart 1**



- Ninety-two percent reported completing at least secondary school, including six percent who completed college or university.
- Most respondents (92%) received their education in Ontario. Three percent were educated in other provinces and five percent in foreign countries.
- Fewer than 10% reported possessing licences or qualifications other than those they were studying.
- Most of the respondents worked for small companies. Fifty-seven percent were employed in companies having 30 or fewer employees including 34% who worked for companies having 10 or fewer employees. Twenty-seven percent worked in companies having 100 or more employees.

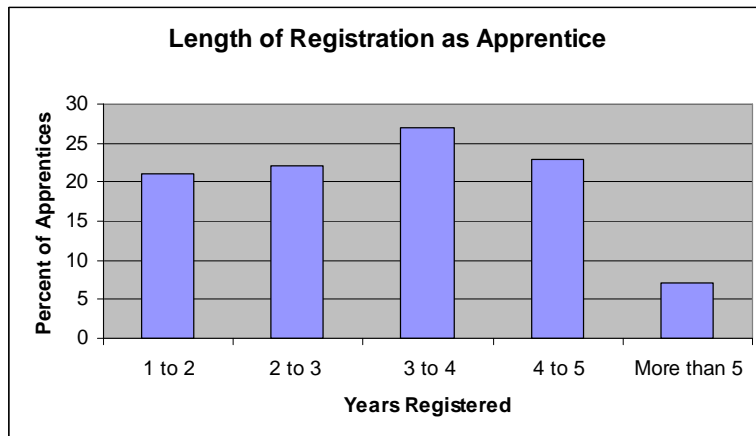
**Chart 2**



### Their involvement with the trades and apprenticeship program

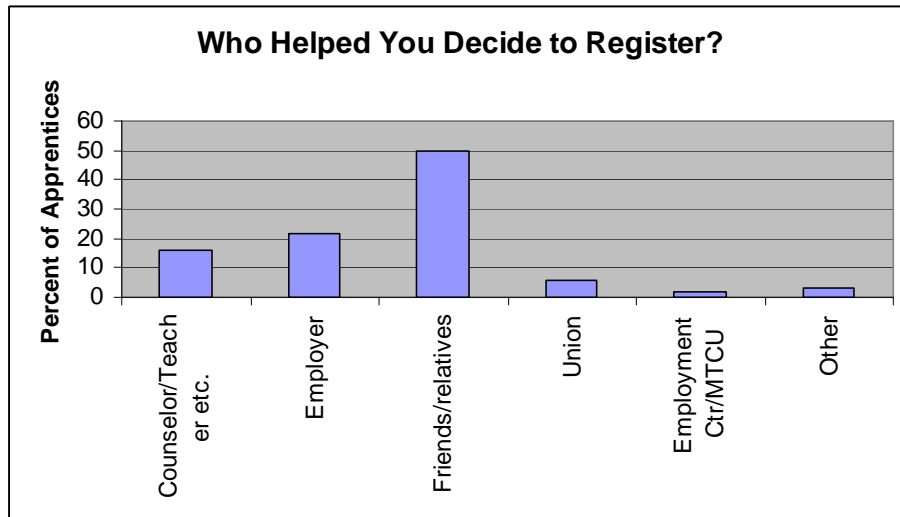
- Twenty-one percent of respondents had been registered as apprentices for one or two years, 22% for two to three years, 27% for three to four years, and 23% for four to five years. Seven percent were registered for more than five years.

**Chart 3**



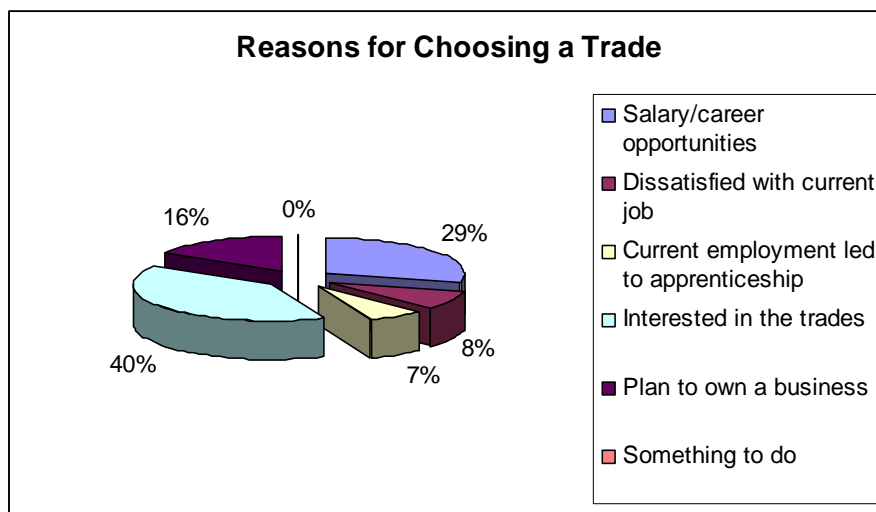
- Prior to registering for an apprenticeship, 98% of respondents were attending school. Of them, 34% attended either college or university. Another 64% were attending high school, including those in Co-op or OYAP programs.
- Friends or relatives (50%) were the most frequent source of help in deciding whether or not to register for apprentice training. Current employers (22%) were the second most popular source while counselors/teachers/Co-op or OYAP (16%) were the third.

**Chart 4**



- Respondents most often chose an apprenticeship program because they were interested in the trades (40%), liked the salary or career opportunities available (29%) or planned to own a business (16%). An additional 15% were led to apprenticeships by their current employment or through dissatisfaction with that employment.

**Chart 5**

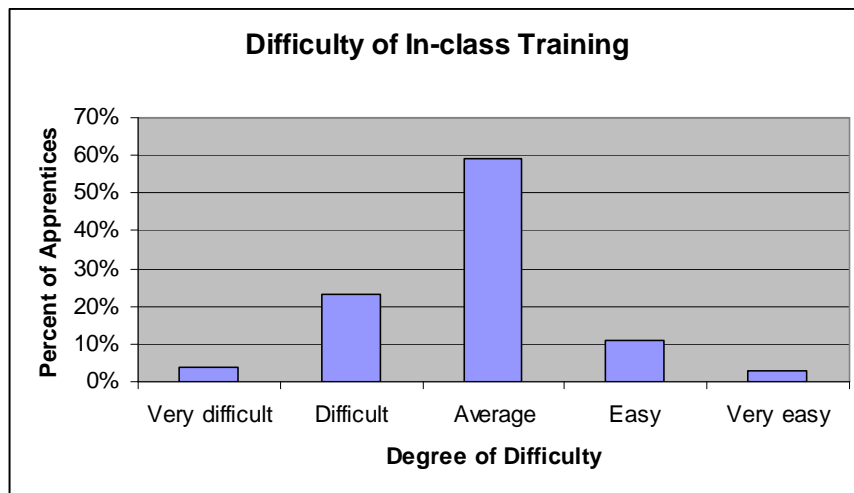


- The largest group of respondents (49%) claimed to have some knowledge of the trade for which they registered as apprentices. A small minority (11%) claimed to have a lot

of knowledge. More than one-third (39%) acknowledged having very little or no knowledge at all of the trade they chose.

- A majority of 71% received their training through the block format, in which they attended school for 8-10 weeks at a time rather than day release format in which they attended school only one day a week. Eighty-six percent of apprentices liked their training format.
- Equal proportions of the group of respondents found that the material they studied in school was related to their on-the-job skills (44%) or was somewhat related to them (44%).
- More respondents said their in-class equipment was up to date (51%) than said it was not (35%). The other 14% did not know.
- A large majority of respondents (80%) stated they had equipment in class to practice on. Thirteen percent stated such equipment was not available while eight percent did not know.
- The largest group of respondents (59%) described the difficulty of their in-class training as average. The second-largest group (23%) described their training as difficult. Twenty-seven percent (27%) classified their in-class training as difficult or very difficult. Fourteen percent (14%) called it easy or very easy.

**Chart 6**



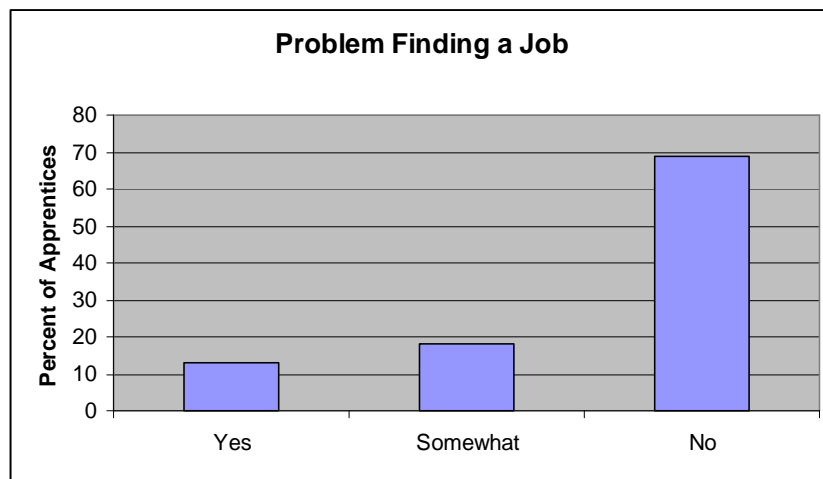
- The most common reason given (53%) for not working in the trades while registered as an apprentice was “other”. The second-most common reason (38%) was loss of employment. Four percent reported illness or disability and five percent reported family responsibilities as their reasons.
- Sixty-seven percent of respondents expected to write their licence or Certificate of Qualification examination in two years or less. That included thirty-three percent who anticipated writing it within the next year. An additional thirty-two percent expected to take two to five years to become ready to write the exam. There was also a two percent minority who did not intend to write the exam.

- Eighty-one percent of respondents stated that their employers supported their school learning although at least one specified that the support was non-financial.

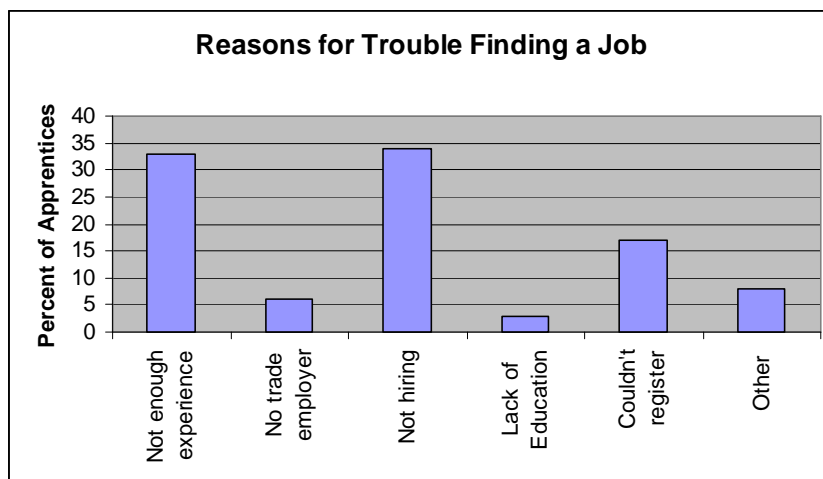
### Concerns expressed by the respondents

- Sixty nine percent (69%) of respondents had no trouble finding a job however almost one-third (31%) of respondents reported some degree of difficulty finding a job. The two reasons most frequently given for this difficulty were a lack of employers who were hiring their trades (34%) and possessing insufficient experience (33%). Another 17% reported that the current ratio of journeymen to apprentices did not allow them to register in their specific. That ratio varies from one trade to another.

**Chart 7**



**Chart 8**





- Their greatest concerns appeared to be money, time and the amount they must learn. Forty percent of respondents found the \$100 qualification exam fee to be a problem while 60% did not. Written comments suggested greater EI payments, incentive grants to apprentices who reached the advanced level and grants for buying books as preferred ways of relieving the financial burden on apprenticeship apprentices. Forty-six percent of written comments suggesting how the college or ministry could encourage apprenticeship completion requested some form of additional financial support over that now available.
- The most frequent complaint about time concerned early morning classes, a special problem for apprentices, especially single parents, supporting families.
- A number of comments concerned the school workload and the amount of homework assigned. Seven percent of written comments asking how the college or ministry could encourage apprenticeship completion asked for longer terms to allow apprentices to absorb the knowledge they were given.
- Complaints about teaching quality, although few, were most often about teachers either not knowing the subjects they taught or not teaching them well. Seven percent of written comments asking how the college or ministry could encourage apprenticeship completion recommended changes to the curriculum or the teaching process.
- Despite the above, more than 75% of respondents agreed that the curriculum was appropriate to their level of understanding.

## Conclusions

As stated in the introduction, no contact was permitted with apprentices who had already withdrawn from their programs. Therefore, their reasons for withdrawal had to be gathered through indirect contact with current apprentices. That contact did, however, make this study extraordinary, possibly unique. It gathered information from people who faced the same problems as those who dropped out.

By its nature, conclusions drawn from this study must be tentative. However, the data suggests the following conclusions.

- **Increased financial support for apprentices is needed.**
  - Financial concerns were shown to be the greatest source of difficulty for apprentices. In particular, apprentices expressed a need for both increased Employment Insurance payments and for prompt commencement of those payments.
  - Bonuses for reaching the advanced level of study were also frequently requested as were subsidies for textbooks.
  - Subsidies for travel would also be appreciated. A number of apprentices reported having to rise very early to reach classes on time, suggesting high costs for either fuel or public transportation.

- In addition, forty percent of apprentices declared the \$100 fee for writing the qualification exam was a problem. That problem, aggravated by the other financial restrictions, could be a barrier for some who stand on the brink of becoming qualified in a trade.
- A special bonus for obtaining the Certificate of Qualification would increase the incentive to persevere all the way to completion. Becoming a journeyman immediately increases the number of people qualified to supervise new apprentices. It also reduces the incidence of apprentices being unable to register.

- **Employers benefitted even while apprentices remained apprentices.**

- Many survey respondents wrote that their training made them better employees, more competent and able to do more jobs without supervision.

- **The news is not all bad.**

- Twenty-five percent of respondents reported no problems when asked what problems they were having in attending school. Several respondents highly praised their programs.

## Appendix 1: The Survey

### Apprenticeship Survey 2008

**Please complete this survey. The findings from this survey will be helpful for Sheridan College, Humber College, Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities and other stakeholders to determine what can be done to address any challenges that are highlighted.**

#### **Section A – Personal Information**

1. What trade and level of in-school training are you in?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. In what city do you live?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
4. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the size of your company?
  - a. 1-10 employees
  - b. 10-30 employees
  - c. 30-100 employees
  - d. 100+
6. Before you started this apprenticeship program, what was the highest level of education you had completed?
  - a. Some Secondary School (high school)
  - b. Completed Secondary School
  - c. Trade-vocational school (diploma or certificate)
  - d. Some college
  - e. Some University
  - f. Completed University
7. Where did you receive your formal education?
  - a. Ontario
  - b. Other province
  - c. Other country

#### **Section B – General Apprenticeship Information**

8. How long have you been registered as an apprentice?
  - a. 1 – 2 years
  - b. 2 – 3 years
  - c. 3 – 4 years
  - d. 4 – 5 years
  - e. More than 5 years

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9. Did you have trouble finding employment in your chosen field?
- Yes
  - No
  - Somewhat
10. If you had trouble finding an employer, what was the reason?
- Not enough experience in the trade
  - No employer for the trade in the area
  - The employers was not hiring
  - Lack of education
  - The current ratio did not allow me to be registered
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
11. Do you have a certificate of qualification/trades licence in another trade? (If yes, specify trade)
- No
  - Yes (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
12. Before registering as an apprentice, if you were going to school, was the program you were taking....(Mark all that apply)
- Co-op
  - OYAP (Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program)
  - High School
  - College/ University
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
13. Did any of the following groups help you decide to register in your apprenticeship program?
- Guidance Counselors/ Teachers/ Co-op/ OYAP Coordinator
  - Employer
  - Friends/Relatives
  - Union
  - Employment Resource Centre/ MTCU Staff
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
14. Why did you choose a career in this field? (Mark all that apply)
- Salary/ Career Opportunities
  - Dissatisfied with former job
  - Current employment led to apprenticeship
  - Was interested in the trades
  - Planned to own your own business
15. How much did you know about your trade before you registered in it? Would you say you knew....
- A lot?
  - Some?
  - Very little?
  - Nothing?
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## Section C – Training Period

16. In what schooling format are you enrolled?
  - a. Block (8 – 10 weeks at a time)
  - b. Day Release (1 day per week)
17. Do you like this schooling format?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
18. Is the material you are learning related to the skills you were learning on the job?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Somewhat
19. Is the equipment provided in class up-to-date?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
20. Is there in-class equipment for you to practice the skills taught?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
21. In general, do you find the in-class training....
  - a. Very difficult
  - b. Difficult
  - c. Average
  - d. Easy
  - e. Very easy
22. If you are still registered as an apprentice but are currently not working in the trades, what are the reason(s)? (Mark all that apply)
  - a. Loss of job
  - b. Illness or disability
  - c. Family responsibilities
  - d. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
23. When do you expect to write your trade licence/certificate of qualification exam?
  - a. Within the next year
  - b. 1-2 years
  - c. 2-5 years
  - d. Don't intend to
24. Does your employer support your in-school learning?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
25. Is the \$100 exam fee an issue in your completion plans?      a. Yes      b. No

**Section D – Discussion Questions – Please write your input below.**

**A. What do you hope to get from this training?**

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**B. How has this training benefited you? Your employer?**

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**C. What value is your College Certificate?**

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**D. What value is your Certificate of Apprenticeship?**

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**E. What value is your Certificate of Qualification?**

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**F. What problems are you having while attending school?**

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**G. Is the curriculum appropriate at your level of in-school training?**

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**H. What could the college/ministry do to encourage program completion?**

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**I. What advantages accrue from program completion?**

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**Thank you for your participation in this survey. The information gathered will assist us in making recommendations for the apprenticeship program. The findings from the survey will be reported in a final document and posted on the Peel Halton Dufferin Training Board website at [www.phdtrain.com](http://www.phdtrain.com)**