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Skills training

Stakeholders want change in College of Trades setup

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The proposed College of Trades and its recommended governance structure require changes to improve representation, Ontario education, labour and small business leaders said at a recent public hearing.

Bill 183, the Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act, proposes that the college be organized into four divisions representing construction, services, industrial and motive power. The self-governing body would also be governed by a board of 21 members appointed by an appointments council which would include four members from each divisions and five representing the public.

Linda Franklin, president and chief executive officer of Colleges Ontario, said that her organization should be designated to have one of the five public board of governor seats. With skilled labour shortage concerns, quality trades training which includes women, First Nations and other underrepresented groups is critical, she said.

Having Colleges Ontario on the board would help ensure a strong connection between the college and educators as they tackle skilled labour challenges, she said.

"This is an area where colleges have seen some success over the past few years and we are happy to help with our expertise as the College of Trades moves in that direction," said Franklin. "Public colleges view the College of Trades as an important strategy to advance skilled trades in Ontario to help meet those needs."

Franklin added Colleges Ontario believes the College of Trades will contribute to the "modernization of the apprenticeship system" but said it needs expertise and guidance from educators. The curriculum and education components of an apprenticeship should reside with the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and Colleges Ontario, she said. In her submission at the Sept. 17 hearing Franklin cited a letter of support from the Ontario General Contractors Association on Colleges Ontario's assertion it should have a seat on the board of governors.

Among the concerns expressed by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) was that small business are being shut out by the college's proposed structure. Satinder Chera, CFIB provincial affairs director, said that in his federation's experience "small businesses are always drowned out" when it comes to self-regulating agencies and that this would not change with the College of Trades.

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) said it is supportive of a governance structure for trades in Ontario but not necessarily a college itself.

The OFL proposes the governance structure be called the "Ontario Trades and Occupations Standards Board" to avoid confusion with existing professional colleges.

Linda Harris, secretary-treasurer of the OFL, said that after visiting Ireland and Germany to study their training of trades people, a governance model with equal representation from business, labour and government would be best.

Also, the proposed four divisions of the college should have the three of construction, industrial and service, said Harris.

The proposed division of motive power should change to a "certified occupations" division.

This would help "clearly distinguish" between trades and certified occupations, since "authentic trades" have apprentices who must acquire three to five years of primary hands-on supervised work experience to get their license, the OFL stated.