



# BRIEF

**Ensuring a High Quality  
Apprenticeship and Training System  
in Saskatchewan**

**Brief from  
Saskatchewan Government and  
General Employees' Union ( SGEU)  
to the  
Training System Review Panel**

**June 20, 2005**

## **About SGEU**

The Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU) represents 20,000 members who live and work in almost every region of the province. Our members are employed in many different kinds of workplaces, including: community service agencies; crown corporations; retail and regulatory industries; health; and government departments and agencies.

We also represent the academic and support staff at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), as well as employees of the Gabriel Dumont Institute, the province's regional colleges and the Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission.

## **Issues:**

SGEU believes that it is essential to maintain and enhance a high quality apprenticeship and training system that meets the needs of apprentices, trainees and employers, and that will ensure that our province has skilled trades and technical workers to meet future labour market demands.

Maintaining high standards of training is a priority and must be the foundation on which any new system-wide reforms are built. High standards can be achieved by ensuring the following:

- Training programs must be comprehensive, teaching a wide variety of skills rather than tailoring curriculum content to a specific workplace and a particular employer.
- Apprentices and trainees must have access to qualified, highly skilled instructors.
- Programs must offer comprehensive, up-to-date, quality curricula and resources.
- Apprentices and trainees must have access to all necessary equipment, tools, resources, materials and training facilities.
- Training must be sufficiently broad to ensure portability of training. For example, apprentices must be eligible for Canadian Red Seal certification.

The best way to guarantee high quality training standards is to complement and support workplace training through a publicly-delivered system of technical and theoretical skills training. A strong public technical and theoretical skill training core delivered through SIAST will permit us to enhance and support rural delivery of services.

While SGEU is firmly committed to the public delivery of training programs, we recognize that the current system must respond to the changing dynamics of our province.

Two challenges must be addressed. First, we must help sustain our rural communities by ensuring that their needs for skilled workers are met. Second, we must design programs that effectively recruit and train Aboriginal youth, both on reserve and in urban areas, to ensure that the province has a well-trained, work-ready labour force in the years ahead.

### **Challenges:**

Many of the challenges involved in the re-design of our provincial training system relate to the key goal of maintaining consistent, high quality programs. We are concerned that the response to a perceived shortage of training opportunities in rural areas will lead to the devolution of apprenticeship and other employment-related training. Where actual training needs are identified and linked to the labour market we should be delivering training through the highest quality delivery mechanism. This will ensure efficiency and avoid unnecessary duplication of training. This approach supports capacity building, strengthens links to training partners and makes effective use of resources. It should position the province to respond to new training demands and will also help avoid building unrealistic expectations in candidates who then flood or skew the local labour market. It also prevents disenfranchising learners and maintains industry's key stake in the process.

While it is important to consider alternative delivery models, we urge government to take the necessary steps to ensure that the training programs are high quality. Fractured, narrowly-focused training is of limited value to the student, to the employer, and to the future of the province. This type of training is not portable and often leads to costly re-training in the future. A recent Statistics Canada study indicates that public training institutes develop and deliver programs that are oriented to the broader labour market, while private career colleges offer programs that are very job specific.<sup>1</sup>

Quality public training offered through a strong SIAST core will lead to maintenance of quality standards. There are very real concerns that de-skilling, fractured and limited-scope training will lead to a reduction in quality. For example, the truck driving program when offered through SIAST was a five week course. A private trainer has reduced the curriculum and content of the program so that it now only takes five days to learn to drive semi-trailers and transports. Quality of training is clearly compromised, and as a result, public safety is jeopardized.

Training needs in rural areas can be effectively met if supported by strong core public training programs. A critical mass, both in terms of a qualified training team, and students, is needed to create a successful, interactive learning environment. Similarly, appropriate facilities, tools, equipment and resources must be available to instructors and learners. We must be careful about simply migrating programs out to rural areas without providing the high quality supports available through our public delivery system.

### **Opportunities:**

Quality training programs are predicated upon a sound and well-developed infrastructure. In Saskatchewan, we have a well-established public training infrastructure and strong partnerships with industry. Our comprehensive system of high quality, public training has a history of planning, organizing, developing and delivering quality, employment-related skills training to a wide range of diverse groups. We have a proud history of working with employers, industry partners and standards agencies.

Our public skill-training infrastructure is accountable to the public (unlike a private training facility that is accountable to its owners). Like other components of the public education system, SIAST, along with its skill training partners, has a mandate to ensure that programming is responsive and adaptive to changing needs.

SIAST educators are publicly recognized as an integral part of a competent, knowledgeable, skilled, and experienced training team. Their expertise is invaluable in ensuring that learners receive high quality, meaningful training. The reputation of our high quality public training system adds to the value of the apprentice or trainee's certificate.

SIAST is well-positioned to lead the way in advancing a new, re-vitalized, more flexible training system within the province. SIAST offers the comprehensive, quality training that students and employers need, and many learners are already living and working in rural communities. For example, currently approximately 90 per cent of apprenticeship technical training is offered under the auspices of industry-approved SIAST programs, and 60 per cent of registered Saskatchewan apprentices live outside the major urban centres of Regina and Saskatoon.<sup>2</sup> It is also important to note that apprentices and trainees have the right to choose the location of their training, so that all training programs, delivered in traditional or non-traditional locations, will need to maintain high standards in order to attract and retain students.

Improvements that will make training opportunities more accessible to a broader constituency are welcome. We need to focus on maintaining quality training programs that consistently meet high standards. Alternative methods of program delivery that are offered through public institutions, such as SIAST need to be developed, and SGEU's SIAST members will be pleased to participate in the process.

Ensuring that all training is comprehensive, consistent and high quality has several distinct advantages for rural Saskatchewan communities. Rural employers, and their customers, benefit by having qualified, well-rounded, highly skilled tradespeople. Their skills meet the practical needs of rural community members, and their wages contribute to the local economy, supporting other

small business and regional services. With a more comprehensive technical background, skilled workers will be less likely to be forced to relocate to a larger centre to find work, should they leave their current employment. Journey tradespeople, and other well-trained, skilled workers, are more likely to stimulate economic growth in rural communities, through, for example, starting small businesses.

**Recommendations:**

- SIAST, as the province's key, publicly-funded postsecondary technical institution, must continue to be the primary deliverer of apprenticeship and other employment-related, technical training.
- SIAST, along with representatives of SGEU members who work in the post-secondary education and training area, should participate in developing and delivering any alternative, flexible training programs in response to demands from rural and Aboriginal communities.
- Funding, such as bursaries based on need, should be available to students from rural areas to enable them to meet the additional costs associated with accessing apprenticeship or other skills training in a centre where they do not normally reside.

### **Sources**

<sup>1</sup> Orton, Larry. "A New Understanding of Postsecondary Education in Canada: A Discussion Paper. Statistics Canada, 2003. Cat. # 81-595-ME --No. 0011.

<sup>2</sup> Annual Report, Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, 2003-2004.