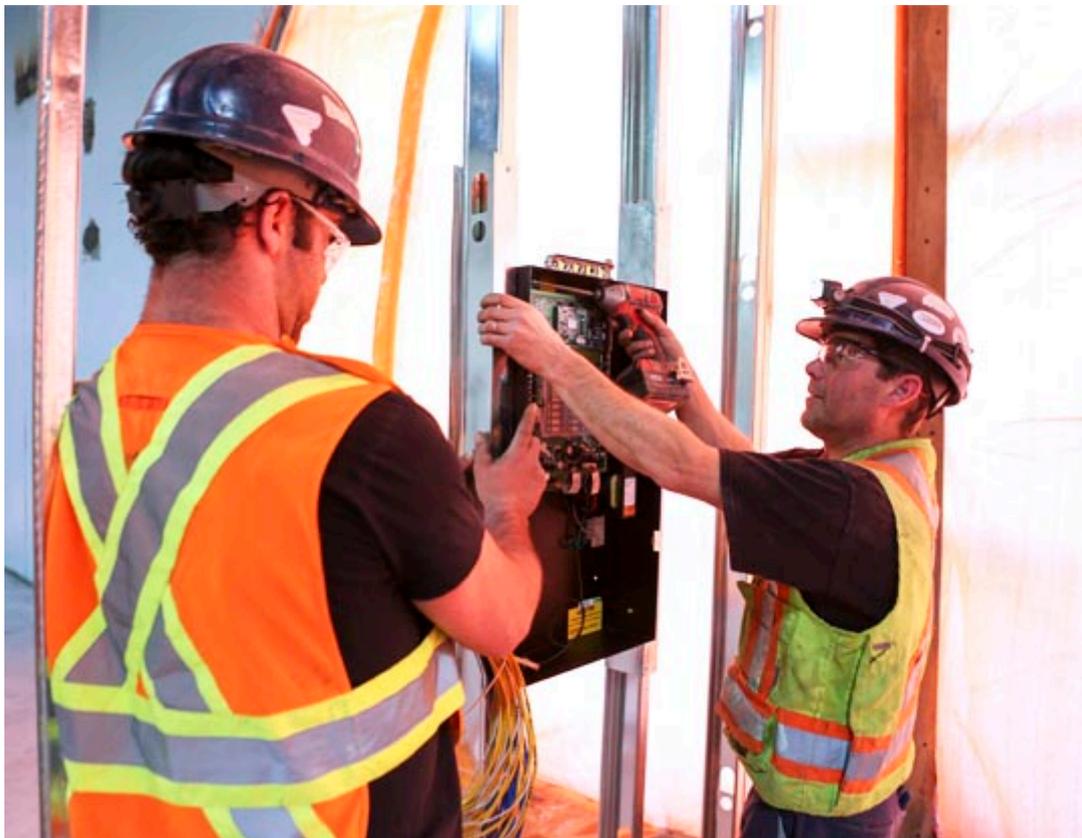


Publication Date: 07 January 2016

Nova Scotia to require apprentices on school construction jobs

As previously seen on CBC News : www.cbc.ca

Companies bidding on Nova Scotia's five school construction projects in 2016 will be required to participate in the provincial apprenticeship program if they want the job, Labour Minister Kelly Regan announced Wednesday.



The province's Liberal government said it may make participation in the apprenticeship program mandatory for bidding on all government construction projects by 2017 or 2018.

"It's a little carrot to help them make the right decision," Regan said after announcing the school construction pilot program at a construction site in Burnside.

"We know there are lots of businesses that are participating, we know there are lots not. We want to encourage them."

The government expects the initiative to result in the hiring of several hundred apprentices.

Keep young people home

The province says apprenticeships tend to keep skilled tradespeople at home, a critical issue in Nova Scotia, which has seen a steady stream of youth out-migration.

An apprenticeship kept Nick Deveau at home in Nova Scotia. He's a red seal carpenter who now works for national company Bird Construction, whose construction site served as backdrop for the announcement.

"It definitely helps to secure employment," Deveau said.

The Nova Scotia Community College graduate says Bird Construction guaranteed him work as he went through his apprenticeship program.

"They've helped me get through schooling, helped pay for the program and they maintain your job. As soon as you finish a [training session] block you're right back to work on a job site doing hands on stuff," he said.

Scott Boyd, an apprentice carpenter, is in the middle of his apprenticeship. He's also with Bird Construction.

"I want to stay here. Steady employment is really key. I have a lots of friends that went out West, they make big bucks and have great jobs. But I think that should be possible here too in Atlantic Canada," Boyd said.

Why Bird Construction is on board

Rene Cox, Bird Construction's vice president, sees the apprenticeship program as a way to attract and develop a skilled workforce, part of what he calls being an "employer of choice."



(Rene Cox, second from the left, Bird's vice president from our Halifax district)

Still, Cox acknowledges some companies avoid apprenticeships because of the risk apprentices can pull up stakes and leave.

"There is an element of investment and commitment. There is financial obligation and there isn't always a guarantee that investment will pay off in years to come," he said.

Take the case of Deveau.

"He's free to go. Hence our desire to want to make sure these people really want to live with us, stay with us and continue to grow in our organization," he said.

And Deveau is in no rush to leave.

"I'll most likely stay here, unless a real big opportunity came up. But I've always been employed for nine years now with Bird so they always have employment for apprentices and carpenters," said Cox.

Provincial plan

The school construction pilot project announced Wednesday was developed with the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, which publicly endorsed it.

Regan said the pilot will be judged in two ways.

"Are more apprentices being hired, number one, and number two was the apprenticeship agency able to get the approvals out in a timely fashion. We want to make sure it's as seamless as possible," she said.

The program applies to bids over \$100,000. There will be exceptions for smaller companies and those whose work doesn't fall within a designated trade.

The CEO of the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency, which manages the trades training and certification system in the province, said the goal is to see more private sector employers training young people for jobs in Nova Scotia.

To do that it wants more construction companies to participate in the apprenticeship program.

"If it's the unionized sector it would be 100 per cent. It's more in the non-union sector, open shop or residential sector where you won't see the big uptake of apprenticeships. And that's where we would like to move in to as well," Marjorie Davison said.

Video coverage below, skip to 14:20 to watch.
