

Publication Date: 07 January 2016

## School project bids in Nova Scotia to include apprentices

As previously seen on The Chronicle Herald : [www.thechronicleherald.ca](http://www.thechronicleherald.ca)

There are new rules for companies bidding on construction contracts for five Nova Scotia schools.

These changes, part of a new pilot procurement project, are aimed at getting more businesses to hire registered apprentices.



“This pilot salutes businesses that are already hiring apprentices, and we believe it will motivate new businesses to get involved,” Kelly Regan, provincial minister of labour and advanced education, said at a news conference Wednesday in Dartmouth.

The program will apply to contracts of \$100,000 or more in value related to construction of the high school in Eastern Passage, the Primary-to-Grade 9 school in Tatamagouche, the Primary-to-Grade 4 in Bible Hill, the Primary-to-Grade 9 in south Dartmouth and the Primary-to-Grade 12 in Bridgetown.

In order to qualify for these school construction contracts, firms doing construction work under the scope of designated trades under the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualification Act must “have all apprentices registered and have at least one apprentice registered any time within the last two years in any designated trade or have participated in a youth apprenticeship program.”

(An exception will be made to companies or contractors with fewer than three employees and those whose work doesn't fall under a designated trade.)

And "although preferred," the apprentices do not necessarily have to be registered in Nova Scotia and don't need to be directly employed at these job sites.

Scott Boyd, a second-year apprentice carpenter who works for Bird Construction and was at Wednesday's announcement, said this change could keep people like him from chasing jobs out west.

"When you're a proud Nova Scotian and you've got a lot of family here, you want to know that there's a good job here for you," said the 23-year-old from Cole Harbour.

"Knowing that companies are hiring ... makes that possible."

Rene Cox, Atlantic region vice-president for Bird Construction, said the pilot project "won't have a huge impact" on the firm, which has been hiring apprentices for several years.

But, Cox added, "I think it will work."



*(Rene Cox, pictured)*

"Whenever you put control measures in place, people tend to have a need to follow those. ... What's good for our competitors and for us is just good for our industry."

Duncan Williams, president of the Construction Association of Nova Scotia, which helped develop the pilot project, said these changes will persuade more people to enter the trades and provide increased opportunities for apprentices to learn.

The procurement pilot may also help to level the playing field for procurement and entice more companies to take part in Nova Scotia's formalized apprenticeship education program.

“We want to make sure that companies who invest are rewarded in some way for those investments,” he said.

The initiative is part of the province’s continuing work to bolster employment for young people in the skilled trades, which included the establishment of the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency in July. The agency works with trade councils to oversee the apprenticeship program and implement changes.

When the province started its work last year, only about 29 per cent of employers who could hire apprentices did so, Regan said.

Without those employers willing to take on apprentices, many people who want to pursue trades would have to go elsewhere, so the province is targeting those employers through the agency’s work with trade councils and new programs introducing students to the trades.

“Once a company makes a decision to hire a student or hire an apprentice, they find it’s not as difficult as they might’ve imagined,” Regan said after the news conference.

---