



**Policy Statement on
Students with Learning Disabilities in Apprenticeship Programs**

June 2011

WHEREAS:

- A large number of youth and adults with identified and unidentified learning disabilities (LDs) enter apprenticeship programs.
- The trades often attract ‘hands on’ learners, the very ones who may have not experienced success in previous education opportunities. Many chose a pathway that did not prepare them for the academic rigors required to access learning in today’s demanding trades curriculum.
- Many apprenticeship students don’t realize that they have a ‘qualified disabling condition’ and are eligible for supports. Despite a less than successful secondary education, they were often not identified as having LDs prior to leaving secondary school and did not receive supports required to compensate and be successful.
- Very few students come with psychoeducational assessments from previous educational settings. Students are usually out of their college apprenticeship program before testing can be completed to identify appropriate supports and accommodations.
- Many apprentices (especially in level 1) arrive with no knowledge of services and it takes time for them to identify that they need help and where to get it. Usually the apprentice is working right up until start of classes with little time to prepare.
- The tendency among apprentices is to not identify any prior academic difficulty, which may be one factor contributing to the lower completion rate of level 1 apprenticeship versus level 2 and 3.
- Classroom days are often full with little time for tutoring, assistive technology training or learning strategy support (especially if the apprentice is coming from a distance).

THEREFORE the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario recommends the following actions:

1. Creation of a curriculum and delivery approach based on universal instructional design principles, which will benefit all students.

Since colleges all share in the supports of these students, the Ministry might engage interested colleges in the development of learning tools to be distributed to all colleges such as:

- Videos demonstrating various techniques related to curriculum on YouTube for the use of all apprentices during and after course work.
- Videos describing college learning skills to support learning from textbooks, lectures and demonstrations to benefit all students.
- Videos demonstrating the use of assistive technology.

2. Creation of a more inclusive approach to tests and exams, which would benefit students who do not have formal documentation entitling them to accommodations, in addition to students whose first language is not English.

Tests could be prepared electronically with screen readers available for all students. In this way they will be able to hear the question which improves comprehension. If this is implemented as standard practice, students who have not been identified, often level 1 students, may have a greater likelihood of successful progress.

3. Distribution of information to apprentices and employers about learning disabilities and the availability of supports both in class and on the job.

Students, especially in Level 1, are often unaware of the supports available to students with learning disabilities. Low reading levels or reading avoidance makes it unlikely they will discover this information for themselves through websites, written information or brochures. Employers are by and large unaware of the supports that may be available to their apprentices even if they were aware that they were needed by some.

Information should be disseminated in a comprehensive way to employers and apprentices through the ministry at various points both in print and verbally. A video distributed to all employers and apprentices about the program, including the supports available should be standard.

4. Creation of a mandatory paid early orientation experience to promote knowledge of available supports and demonstrate strategies needed for effective learning in the college setting.

A more comprehensive orientation process may also prepare apprentices for all the supports they may need. An orientation day several weeks or even months prior to the start of the class activities would be a way of identifying students who had learning disabilities earlier, creating an opportunity to start the assessment and support process. This would be crucial to the Level 1 students.

BACKGROUND

Apprenticeship students arrive in colleges according to a schedule for level 1, 2, or 3 at various times throughout the year and generally stay for 8 week blocks.

Since 2008, additional funding for the Accessibility Fund for Students with Disabilities (AFSD) has been made possible through the Apprenticeship Expansion Strategy.

The Ministry is providing funding up to \$1.8M for Support for Apprentices with Disabilities to the 24 colleges on an in-year basis for 2010-11. The funding is allocated to the colleges based upon each college's relative share of apprenticeship activity.

Funds allocated under the AFSD may only be used for the following expenditures pertaining to serving the needs of students with disabilities who are apprentices:

1. Offices for Students with Disabilities (OSD)

- The provision of staffing for OSDs to support students with disabilities.
- The provision of staffing for students with a specific Learning Disability.
- Expenses related to the administration of the OSD to support students with disabilities (i.e., office supplies, printing, photocopying, telephone, etc.).

2. Equipment & Technology

- Expenses related to the acquisition and maintenance of equipment and technology related to meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

3. Support Services Provided Under Contract

- Consulting and diagnostic services (e.g., testing or assessment) related to meeting the needs of each student with a disability that are not provided by OSD staff.

- Support services provided under contract to support students with disabilities (e.g., tutors, note takers, proofreaders and sign language interpreters).

4. Professional Development

- The provision of professional development activities and opportunities for staff employed in OSDs to support students with disabilities.
- The provision of professional development activities and opportunities to inform all staff and faculty of the legal obligations of the institution, as well as the needs of students with disabilities, and the services which are available to assist students.

These services are provided by colleges in various ways, including:

- College learning strategies delivered 1:1 by Learning Strategists to assist apprentices to learn and organize new material
- Small learning teams with tutors and staff mentors to supplement class, lab and shop learning
- Library of laptops with text-to-voice and other software installed for use during apprenticeship training and returned at end of training period
- On line, live tutoring
- Creation of various YouTube-posted videos demonstrating various mechanical tasks which can be viewed repeatedly with captions
- Academic accommodations
 - a. Reader/scribe
 - b. Access to technology
 - c. Tutoring
 - d. Learning resources in alternate format
 - e. Adaptive technology loan
 - f. Disability screening/assessment
 - g. Test and exam accommodations (extra time, reader/scribe)

“The best thing I did was register with OSD the first day and I would recommend that to everyone” ...successful apprentice