

2021

National Best Practices Forum Summary

Helping Apprentices
Prepare for Examinations

About the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum – Forum canadien sur l'apprentissage (CAF-FCA) is a national, not-for-profit organization working with stakeholders in all regions of Canada. We influence pan-Canadian apprenticeship strategies through research, discussion and collaboration. Insights are shared across trades, across sectors and across the country to promote apprenticeship as an effective model for training and education. Our Board of Directors includes representatives from business, labour, the jurisdictional apprenticeship authorities, education and equity-seeking groups. Through our work, CAF-FCA has shed light on a number of key issues affecting apprenticeship, such as the perceived barriers to accessing and completing apprenticeship and the business case for apprenticeship training. For more information, visit the CAF-FCA website at www.caf-fca.org.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This report summarizes best practices related to preparing for examinations, improving pass rates and enhancing the learning experiences of apprentices. At the CAF-FCA National Best Practices Forum, a virtual gathering held on September 23rd, 2021, 144 representatives from colleges, labour organizations, equity groups and provincial/territorial and federal jurisdictions met to discuss best practices.

1.2 Relevance

Throughout their training, most apprentices will be assessed by examinations, one of the most common tools in their assessment process. Certain jurisdictions require apprentices to write a provincial examination.¹ Apprentices also write examinations during the various levels of their technical training, and as the final step in their apprenticeship process, they write a four-hour, multiple-choice examination with more than a hundred questions. Those individuals who achieve 70 per cent or higher earn their Certificate of Qualification.² The Red Seal, when affixed to a provincial or territorial Certificate of Qualification, indicates that a tradesperson has demonstrated the knowledge required to meet the national standard in that trade.³

Documenting the best practices for examination preparation is timely given the importance of certification in the development of a highly skilled and productive workforce. Achieving certification is significant not only for employers who want certified journeypersons as a core part of their skilled trades workforce, but also for individuals. According to research from Statistics Canada and CAF-FCA, individuals who achieve certification earn higher wages, access full-time work with benefits and are

well-positioned to become a mentor, supervisor or trades instructor later on in their career.⁴

Despite the benefits of certification for both employers and individuals, low completion rates persist. Based on CAF-FCA's Labour Market Information (LMI) analysis, the completion rate in 2019 was 43 per cent.⁵ Some apprentices leave their programs in their first and second year while others make it through their two-to-four-year program but are unable to pass the final multiple-choice examination. Data from 2011 to 2016 and from 2019 indicate that more than one in five apprentices who attempted the certification examination were unsuccessful.⁶ Barriers related to foundational skill gaps, disabilities and test anxiety prevent many apprentices from passing this final examination.⁷

1.3 The Pilot

CAF-FCA and its partners are committed to helping apprentices pass their final examination. Over the next five years, CAF-FCA, the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) and SkillPlan, a non-profit organization that develops essential skills resources, are creating an online resource for this.⁸ It will offer additional support to complement apprentice learning during technical training. Self-assessments, videos, practice exercises and virtual tutoring will help improve their foundational skills. Tips on how to manage anxiety and how to approach a multiple-choice examination will provide apprentices with strategies for success when they take their tests. To help shape the development of the resource, CAF-FCA hosted the National Best Practices Forum to learn directly from the frontline experiences of its stakeholders who teach and train apprentices on a daily basis.

1 One example is Alberta. Apprentices in Alberta are required to write a provincial examination. Yukon apprentices use the Alberta curriculum so they are also required to write the same examination.

2 CAF-FCA, "Alternate Technical Training Delivery in Canada: An Overview," Flexibility and Innovation in Apprenticeship Technical Training, *Canadian Apprenticeship Journal*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2017).

3 For examples of Red Seal trades see: [Red Seal Trades / Red Seal \(red-seal.ca\)](#)

4 See: Emily Jovic and Krystin Frank, *National Apprenticeship Survey: Canada Overview Report, 2015*, (Ottawa: Ministry of Industry, 2017) and CAF-FCA, *The Benefits of Skilled Trades Careers in Canada: Journeyperson Perspectives and Experiences*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2015).

5 CAF-FCA, *Completion Rates in Canada*, Fact Sheet published in 2021 based on research completed by Prism Economics and Analysis.

6 Data obtained from the Red Seal Secretariat from 2011 to 2016 and for 2019, but not from 2017 and 2018.

7 CAF-FCA, Career Entry, *Training and Completion in the Skilled Trades: Apprentice Perspectives*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA 2020).

8 See: <http://skillplan.ca/>.

1.4 The National Best Practices Forum Event Overview

Provincial, college and union representatives spoke at this event. Michelle Anderlini, Manager of Apprenticeship Completions at the Industry Training Authority (ITA) of British Columbia (BC) gave a keynote presentation about the approach in her province. In BC, data from failed examinations is reviewed and staff reach out to those who have failed and an in-depth interview is conducted. The apprentice's previous experiences with education, their learning styles, study habits and difficulties with examinations are discussed. Then, based on a determination of their needs, a customized individualized learning plan is created for the apprentice. Learning supports may include advice about specific learning strategies, possible accommodations or individual access to tutors, refresher courses and workshops in how to prepare for an examination. Retired trades instructors with trade specific knowledge also help to tutor apprentices. The ITA provides apprentices with assistive technology (AT) and various referencing tools including recording devices and various software programs (such as text-to speech, speech recognition), note taking and mind mapping. The ITA works closely with BC's network of Student Accessibility Centres across the province to provide apprentices with the accommodations they require.

Apprentices may also receive specific examination accommodations from the ITA, such as the opportunity of using a private room for the examination, time extensions, a reader who will verbally read out the questions to the apprentice during the examination as well as other visual displays of information. Refresher training is offered for trade qualifiers and apprentices.⁹ By offering apprentices these supports, BC has improved its pass rates.

Additional best practice insights were provided by a panel of representative participants from colleges and unions. The panel included Cris Brady (Learning Coach, Algonquin College), Lorna Harnum (International Representative, Canadian Region, IUOE), Kathleen Naylor (Personal and Career Counsellor, Nova Scotia Community College) and Joe Hudson (Academic Coach/Learning Strategist, SAIT). Participants shared their best practices during small group discussions. How apprentices prepare for the examination was linked to broader conversations about overall approaches to learning and how best to support apprentices with disabilities throughout their training. Offering tutoring, providing learning accommodations, facilitating peer-to-peer learning, having examination preparation workshops and taking the test immediately following a preparation week or in a familiar environment were identified as best practice strategies that apprenticeship stakeholders implemented. The key discussion points are summarized in 3.0.

To conclude the event, SkillPlan provided an overview of existing online resources that can help apprentices who are struggling with their foundational skills in areas such as mathematics, problem solving and literacy.

9 Feedback from provinces for CAF-FCA, *Apprentice Attitudes Towards Learning and Examinations*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2017).

2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 Overview

Before sharing the discussion findings from the National Best Practices Forum, information about Red Seal pass rates, barriers and other provincial and territorial exam accommodation practices is outlined in this section.

2.2 Red Seal Pass Rates

The Red Seal Secretariat oversees the final certification examination process in collaboration with the provinces and territories and provides the national standards for each Red Seal trade. The standard is either the National Occupational Analysis or the Red Seal Occupational Standard.¹⁰ The Red Seal Secretariat also collects data about apprentice pass rates.

Figure 1 outlines the pass rates from 2011 to 2016 and for 2019. These pass rates range from 76 per cent to 79 per cent.

FIGURE 1: Red Seal Pass Rates, 2011 – 2016 and 2019¹¹

Status	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2019
Completed Apprentices	78%	79%	77%	78%	77%	76%	76%

Source: Red Seal Secretariat

10 The National Occupational Analysis (NOA) has always been the foundation of the Red Seal Program. The NOA served as the base document for developing Red Seal examinations and for building apprenticeship training programs in the provinces and territories. The Red Seal Occupational Standard (RSOS) was introduced in 2015, replacing the NOA as standards are updated. The RSOS introduces broader industry participation in the development process and includes new features that support the development of informational, learning and assessment products that encourage greater consistency in provincial and territorial apprenticeship programs. These documents are found at: <https://www.red-seal.ca/initiatives/str.2n9th.2n.3ng-eng.html>

See: [Red Seal Exam Preparation Guide / Red Seal \(red-seal.ca\)](#)

[Red Seal Sample Examination Questions / Red Seal \(red-seal.ca\)](#)

[Red Seal Exam Breakdowns / Red Seal \(red-seal.ca\)](#)

11 CAF-FCA, *Apprenticeship in Canada*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2018), 47. CAF-FCA did not obtain the data for 2017 and 2018 but did obtain it for 2019. This data came from the Red Seal Secretariat. The percentages represent the number passed divided by the number of candidates.

Figure 2 illustrates how pass rates differ by trade.¹² In 2019, Powerline Technician apprentices had a 93 per cent pass rate while the pass rate for Carpenters was 64 per cent.

FIGURE 2: Apprentice Pass Rates, by Trade, 2019¹³

Status	%
Powerline Technician (voluntary)	93%
Automotive Service Technician (compulsory and voluntary)	87%
Hairstylist (compulsory and voluntary)	79%
Plumber (voluntary and compulsory)	79%
Industrial Mechanic/Millwright (voluntary, except Quebec)	77%
Construction Electrician (compulsory and voluntary)	77%
Welder (voluntary, except Alberta)	73%
Sheet Metal Worker (voluntary)	73%
Heavy Duty Equipment Technician (voluntary, except Quebec and Alberta)	73%
Cook (voluntary)	70%
Truck and Transport Mechanic (voluntary and compulsory)	69%
Steamfitter/Pipefitter (voluntary and compulsory)	69%
Carpenter (voluntary, except Quebec)	64%

Source: Red Seal Secretariat, 2019

2.3 Barriers to Completion

Barriers to successfully passing the certification examination have been documented by apprenticeship stakeholders. The British Columbia Labour Market Information Committee identified the difficulty of passing final or Red Seal multiple-choice examinations as one of the reasons for non-completion of apprenticeship.¹⁴ The North Superior Workforce Planning Board consultations revealed that apprentices and older workers also have difficulty passing examinations.¹⁵ The Elgin, Middlesex,

Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board identified barriers such as the lack of a time frame for completing the examination, time gaps between booking the examination and writing it, a lack of incentive, poor preparation courses and examinations that are not pertinent to the specific trade.¹⁶

12 Figure 2 highlights a selection of large trade programs. Exams may be written in more than 50 Red Seal trades.

13 These percentages represent the number who passed divided by the total number of candidates in that category.

14 R.A Malatest and Associates for the BC Labour Market Information Committee, *Apprenticeship and Completion Project Report, Phase 2*, (Vancouver: BC Government, 2008). This report is based on information provided by 3,500 survey responses from active apprentices, employer sponsors and apprentice completers and non-completers. The report identified barriers, reasons for non-completion, motivation to enter trades and apprenticeship supports.

15 Stewart Kallio, *Maximizing Apprenticeship Opportunities*, (Thunder Bay: North Superior Workforce Planning Board, 2015), 28, 31.

16 Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, *Barriers to Attracting Apprentices and Completing their Apprenticeships*, (London: Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, 2015), 34.

2.4 Test Anxiety

Managing test anxiety is another challenge for many apprentices. According to CAF-FCA's 2017 *Apprentice Attitudes Towards Learning and Examinations ePanel* report, the majority of apprentices feel nervous before examinations with 47 per cent saying they were "a little bit nervous," 24 per cent reported feeling "very nervous" and 15 per cent said they were "extremely nervous."¹⁷ In a 2020 *ePanel* survey about career entry and progression, test anxiety was a barrier to completion for 18 per cent of respondents.¹⁸ According to Elizabeth Stevenson's completion research in the hairstylist trade, interview participants discussed their feelings of fear and anxiety related to failing their examinations and not meeting the requirements. Apprentices need support from mentors and teachers to help calm their nerves. As one interviewee commented, "I think after a year of being out-of-school I think they get nervous about not being able to pass. ... I think there is a lot of fear."¹⁹

CAF-FCA's 2017 *ePanel* survey provided additional insights into preparation for examinations and apprentice study habits. Examination supports utilized by apprentices include trades-related information on the internet (54 per cent), the Red Seal website (29 per cent), study groups (28 per cent), tutors or instructors (26 per cent) and free online courses (19 per cent).²⁰ *ePanel* apprentices identified online examination preparation strategies (53 per cent), preparatory workshops (43 per cent) and relaxation techniques (30 per cent) as potentially useful resources.²¹

2.5 Provincial/Territorial Accommodation Practices

Although the National Best Practices Forum featured practices implemented in BC, other provinces and territories also offer examination related accommodations and support for apprentices with disabilities. A few examples illustrate the types of supports that are available elsewhere in Canada.

Nova Scotia's Apprenticeship Agency works with apprentices and identifies support services including refresher courses, tutoring, reader-assisted examinations, translators, extended time for completing an examination, private examination rooms and the development of specific learning plans. The agency's website provides information about examination preparation and various available resources and also has an FAQ section.²² The website also offers tips for writing multiple-choice examinations, videos including *Preparing for the Exam*, and links to practice examinations and sample questions for a number of trades. Apprentices with special needs are encouraged to self-identify during the application process in order to access suitable accommodations.²³

The Saskatchewan Apprenticeship Trades Certification Commission (SATCC) continues to explore how innovation and early intervention can be enhanced as a best practice for these issues. SATCC has a psychologist on staff who provides psychoeducational assessment services to aid in the identification of learning disabilities in apprentices who maybe struggling with their training or with the Red Seal Interprovincial Examination. The psychologist also assists clients with disabilities by liaising with training providers and/or employers to ensure that appropriate supports are in place for training and/or employment.²⁴

The Ontario government launched the Examination Preparation Supports initiative to encourage more apprentices and trade applicants to complete their training and/or their certification programs. After several years of delivery, program evaluation statistics indicate the Certificate of Qualification examination pass rate for Examination Preparation clients is about 13 per cent higher than for non-Examination Preparation clients.²⁵

In Yukon, labour market programs provide assessments and recommendations for apprentices who are seeking examination accommodations. *The Learning Resource Centre* personnel at Yukon College oversee

17 CAF-FCA, *Apprentice Attitudes Towards Learning and Examinations*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2017).

18 CAF-FCA, *Career Entry, Training and Completion in the Skilled Trades: Apprentice Perspectives*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA 2020).

19 Elizabeth Stevenson, "Factors affecting apprenticeship enrollment and completion in post-secondary hairstyling programs in Alberta," Master of Education thesis, University of Alberta, (2014), 47.

20 CAF-FCA, *Apprentice Attitudes Towards Learning and Examinations*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2017).

21 Ibid.

22 See: <https://nsapprenticeship.ca>

23 Feedback from provinces for CAF-FCA, *Apprentice Attitudes Towards Learning and Examinations*, (Ottawa: CAF-FCA, 2017).

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

any accommodations that are granted.²⁶

In addition to the examination accommodation policies and initiatives in each province and territory, pan-Canadian models are also being implemented to support apprentice learning, including addressing barriers related to studying and tests. One example is the Virtual Learning Strategist (VLS) program led by New Brunswick and also includes Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and Yukon. A component of this program is input from learning strategists who provide targeted informal assessments to identify any essential or digital skill gaps and learning disabilities. Work between the learning strategist and the apprentice may cover a wide range of topics such as test anxiety, individual factors affecting performance, deficits in study skills, motivational factors, and interventions to accommodate various sensory disabilities. Based on this work, the learning strategists develop customized learning plans for apprentices. These plans can

include support services provided directly or referrals that are made for more formal assessments and academic support.

In addition to supports provided by the provinces and territories, colleges across the country also provide examination and other forms of accommodation for students, including apprentices when they are on-campus.²⁷ Most colleges now have a Centre for Students with Disabilities, where learning coaches or learning strategists are available to assist students.²⁸ Some examples of the accommodations that are provided include course materials in alternate formats, assistive and adaptive technologies, extra time on tests, help with note taking, an interpreter, captioning, learning strategies and a reduced course load. Learning strategies such as time and task management, studying and test taking are also shared with students. Other supports may include referrals for psychoeducational assessments or on-campus health care.

3.0 DISCUSSION SUMMARY FINDINGS

3.1 Overview

The insights shared by the panel members and participants during the National Best Practices Forum are summarized below.

3.2 Approaches to Learning

Speakers and participants shared best practices related to approaches to learning.

- The principles of inclusion, multiple means and diverse methods of assessment can be integrated into curricula making content accessible for a variety of different learners.
- Some speakers and participants discussed moving away from a medical/clinical frame of reference to more of social model when diagnosing persons with disabilities. Putting less pressure on individuals to self-identify would enable a higher

number of apprentices to access the supports they need and this would lead to improved learning outcomes.

- An approach where upfront and preventative help is the focus builds learner confidence as skills gaps are addressed at the beginning of their program. Apprentices progress through the various levels of their technical training with greater confidence and are less likely to become discouraged and fall behind. This approach may reduce the number of apprentices who fail their examination and need remedial help.
- Understanding the concepts rather than memorization of facts and formulas helps apprentices learn. Purposeful learning means apprentices understand what they are trying to do and what they want to accomplish. To support this approach to learning, course outlines should link to course objectives and these objectives should

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ In 2018 and 2020, key informant telephone interviews were conducted by CAF-FCA with college educators across the country to learn more about pre-apprenticeship programs. See: CICan and CAF-FCA, *Inclusive Pre-Apprenticeship Pathways Environmental Scan of College and Institute Pre-Apprenticeship Programs in Canada*, (Ottawa: CICan, 2020).

²⁸ Ibid.

determine what is tested. When the apprentice knows what will be tested they can anticipate the questions that will be asked. Recognizing what they need to know but do not currently know is important, and enables apprentices to follow-up and address any knowledge gaps they have prior to their test.

3.3 Encouraging Apprentices to Seek Help

Some apprentices are reluctant to discuss their learning challenges. Speakers and participants shared practical strategies for reaching out to apprentices and encouraging them to seek help.

- It is important to reach out to apprentices during Level 1 to create awareness about different types of disabilities and available learning supports such as tutoring, assistive devices and accommodations.
- Encouraging apprentices to share their learning challenges informally in a one-on-one conversation with a trusted instructor or staff person makes it easier for some apprentices to share these personal struggles. Ideally, the instructors and staff are aware of the available supports at the college and can direct the apprentice appropriately.
- Because some apprentices will not come to a Centre for Students with Disabilities, staff must reach out to the apprentices in their classes in order to facilitate access to the available learning supports. By speaking to everyone in the class about the supports that are available, individuals who may be struggling feel less isolated and singled out from the rest of their class. These learners may feel more comfortable about asking for help. Speaking to the whole class also provides an opportunity for those who have not been formally diagnosed with a learning disability to learn about what supports may be available.
- Visiting apprentice classes and offering targeted 15-minute sessions about study strategies early in the technical training informs apprentices about useful study habits and effective ways to review content. Apprentices can then apply these strategies throughout their entire technical training level.
- Re-scheduling drop-in hours at the learning centre to align with free time in the apprentice technical training schedule will increase the number of apprentices coming into the learning centre. A breakfast study club with a 6:30 a.m. start time prior to classes starting has encouraged further apprentice participation. Providing after-class hours tutoring services is another strategy that increases apprentice participation.

- Offering preparatory classes helps apprentices get ready for their technical training and reduces the risk of them falling behind in class.
- In addition to in-person supports available on-campus, directing apprentices to online resources is useful. Apprentices can then review the content at a time that is convenient for them. The ePanel survey findings mentioned earlier indicate that apprentices rely heavily on online information sources when studying.

3.4 Offer Apprentices Essential Skills Help

Speakers and participants spoke about the importance of resources for essential skills and shared their observations.

- Having apprentices complete skill assessments at the beginning of their training identifies skill gaps. Upgrading or tutoring in Level 1 improves foundational knowledge that will help apprentices build upon this knowledge in subsequent levels. As pointed out earlier, although remedial help is available to apprentices who fail their examinations, addressing skills gaps at the beginning of the training is the preferred approach because it reduces learner frustration and, instead, builds up learner confidence.
- Resources that contextualize the learning in the skilled trades environment make the content more relatable for the apprentices. Videos of tradespeople explaining mathematical concepts in a real-life work context or enlisting tradespeople as tutors helps apprentices understand the material. Linking complex theoretical concepts to real-life scenarios in the skilled trades workplace is helpful because recalling a practical example during an examination can remind an apprentice of an otherwise theoretical concept.
- Offering in-person or virtual tutoring through an online learning platform can provide additional one-on-one support which is helpful during technical training prior to the examination.
- Keeping the apprentice-to-instructor ratio low offers more one-on-one time to the apprentices who may be struggling with the content and this is another way that apprentices can obtain help with their essential skills.
- Giving apprentices an opportunity to review their essential skills knowledge prior to writing their examination is also helpful as many apprentices require refresher courses in mathematics or reading skills. Many apprentices know the technical content, but struggle when applying a

mathematical formula or breaking down a complex multiple-choice question. Practice self-assessment exams can help apprentices identify areas where they require further review. Courses need to be offered regularly so that apprentices know these are available on an ongoing basis. Directing apprentices to the Red Seal website is also helpful because there they will find useful study guides and practice quizzes. As mentioned earlier, many apprentices already use the Red Seal website as a resource.

- Some learners are motivated to obtain help with their essential skills if they know this could also help them in other areas of their life, such as helping their children to do their homework. The apprentice needs to know why they are learning certain concepts and how it is applicable to their daily life.

3.5 Facilitate Peer-to-Peer Sharing

Speakers and participants talked about the importance of peer-to-peer sharing.

- Informally, apprentices may receive help from their co-workers and fellow apprentices. They can share study skill tips and strategies with each another. Some organizations may have more formal peer assisted learning programs.
- One participant has created a Facebook group for group chat so that apprentices can ask each other questions prior to the examination. This virtual connection was supplemented by in-person meetings after class where the apprentices would study together, share study strategies and identify topics that required further clarification. Apprentices in this group had diverse experiences in commercial, residential and industrial work environments, giving them expertise in different areas. Apprentices who were more familiar with specific content related to one particular work environment were able to explain key concepts to the other apprentices in the group.

3.6 Ensure Employers are Supporting Apprentice Learning

Employers also play a key role in preparing apprentices to succeed on examinations.

- Since 80 per cent of apprenticeship training is on-the-job, employers ensure apprentices are exposed to a variety of work tasks and have covered everything that is outlined in the Red Seal standard, which is the basis of the final certification examination. Apprentices who learn only a limited

set of tasks will not have enough knowledge to write this examination.

- If an employer does not have the capacity to offer the apprentice tasks that are covered in the examination, participants suggested employers could share their apprentice with another employer who could offer the apprentice more diverse work experiences. Other participants said this was a good idea, as long as the employers and other partners such as the unions agreed to the terms of such an arrangement.
- Employers support apprentice learning by ensuring their apprentices continue through to their technical training levels.
- Sometimes an encouraging word or prompt from an employer is enough to encourage the apprentice to write the examination.

3.7 Provide Additional Non-Learning Related Supports

Speakers and participants pointed out that not all obstacles to preparing for exams involve learning challenges.

- Sometimes learners require other forms of support, such as money for food and housing or childcare services. If possible, relieving apprentices of their financial worries will give them more energy to focus on studying for their examinations. Bursaries, emergency loans, grants or free childcare may be offered to apprentices.

3.8 Managing Mental Health and Well-Being

Research mentioned earlier in this report indicates that some apprentices experience test anxiety. Speakers and participants discussed the importance of helping apprentices manage their own mental health and well-being.

- Apprentices can support their own mental health and well-being by having positive daily practices and by using various anxiety reduction techniques.
- Often, explaining to learners how the brain and nervous system function can help them understand that situational anxiety is very common, and that they should not feel afraid that something is “wrong” with them. When learners understand their own nervous systems and responses, they can develop different neural pathways to maximize peak performance and prevent their stress response from becoming overwhelming.

- Emotional responses are a common barrier to learning. When learners understand why they might be experiencing certain emotions, they can use different strategies and tools to help them regulate these feelings.
- Developing a mind-set that sees an examination as an opportunity to “show what you know” can help learners shift their thinking to focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. Avoiding the triggering word “test” can also reduce anxiety for some learners.
- Learners need to practice anxiety reducing strategies in advance so they can use them effectively during the examination.
- Eating nutritious food, exercise and rest increase brain function and can reduce anxiety. It is helpful if apprentices integrate such healthy living habits into their daily life. It is especially important for them to get enough sleep the night before their examination and to eat a nutritious breakfast to optimize brain functioning and to sustain energy levels when writing it.
- Ensure the content of study guides is written in plain language and also identifies practical tips for tackling multiple-choice examinations.
- Make sure that apprentices obtain any appropriate accommodations they might require for their examination.
- Have apprentices write practice tests so they can familiarize themselves with the multiple-choice format and the test experience. Teach the apprentices how to deconstruct the multiple-choice questions. Encourage the apprentices to practice switching to different topics throughout the test. Go over the answers with the apprentices so that difficult concepts can be reviewed and any areas of confusion clarified.
- Encourage or require apprentices to participate in an examination preparation workshop prior to the test. Hold an examination preparation session one week prior and make the actual examination the final class. Avoid having a long gap between technical training and the examination so the material remains fresh in the minds of the learners.
- If possible, allow apprentices to take their examination in the classroom at the college or union training centre where they did their technical training. Avoid making them go to a separate examination centre where they would be writing their examination in an unfamiliar environment.

3.9 Preparing for Examinations

The speakers and the participants shared eight useful tips related to studying for and writing examinations.

- Introduce the Red Seal standards at the beginning of the training and refer to them throughout the training so apprentices are familiar with the standards that shape the content for the certification examination. The Red Seal standards break down major work activities, tasks and sub-tasks. Make sure that all the content covered in the Red Seal examination has been taught in class. If the Red Seal standard covers an aspect of the specific trade that apprentices have not learned, have the instructor go over it or, as referred to earlier, make sure the employer also teaches it on-the-job. Ensuring apprentices have learned all aspects of the trade is important. During the final year of training, give a comprehensive presentation about all the components of the Red Seal standard to review the content with apprentices. Explaining the weighting used in the examination will help the apprentice prioritize what content needs additional review.
- Have apprentices create a study plan that is practical, targeted and manageable.
- Studying requires clear notes. Teach apprentices about good note taking during their classes so their notes will become a useful resource when they study for their examination.

4.0 RESOURCES

Speakers and participants thought these resources were useful:

[Athabasca University - Mastering Exam Anxiety](#): This document helps learners understand examination anxiety and provides techniques for reducing anxiety.

[Newfoundland and Labrador Canada - Trade Specific Study Guides](#): These trade specific study guides based on National Occupational Analysis (NOA) or the Red Seal Occupational Standard (RSOS) help apprentices prepare for examinations.

[Red Seal - Exam Breakdowns](#): This document provides a breakdown of the trade examinations according to

topic so apprentices can understand what topics are covered on the Red Seal examinations and how they are weighted.

[Red Seal - Exam Preparation Guide](#): This guide helps apprentices prepare for the Red Seal examinations.

[Red Seal - Sample Examination Questions](#): These sample questions help apprentices familiarize themselves with the Red Seal format.

[Ted Talk - Barbara Oakley: Learning How to Learn](#): This Ted Talk discusses how to “change the brain” in order to learn differently.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Speakers and participants from across Canada shared their best practices when helping apprentices prepare for exams. Here are fourteen of the best practices they shared with and for fellow educators and trainers:

1. Intervene earlier rather than later. It's preferable to know what skills to address “before” rather than have to teach them as a form of remedial help later on in the program. Identifying these gaps at the beginning of the training will also help to build learner confidence as they progress through it.
2. Accommodate apprentices based on their actual schedules.
3. Visit apprentice classrooms to create awareness about the range of learning resources that are available and be sure to offer flexible drop-in hours.
4. Encourage apprentices to share any concerns they may have about their learning challenges in an informal environment.
5. Develop individualized one-on-one plans so that subsequent supports are tailored to the apprentice's specific and ongoing needs.
6. Ensure apprentices have access to online resources, tutoring and refresher courses so they will have the foundational essential skills they need, especially in reading, problem solving and mathematics. For example, when answering multiple-choice questions, apprentices must know how to break down a complex question into its components and to apply mathematical concepts and formulas when seeking a solution.
7. Make it relevant. Many apprentices have the technical knowledge and practical work experience but require upgrading for their essential skills. Linking theoretical concepts to real-life scenarios can help apprentices remind themselves of key concepts should they get confused during the examination.
8. Introduce the Red Seal standards at the beginning of the course and refer to them throughout their training so that apprentices are familiar with the standards that shape the content for the final certification examination.
9. Make sure apprentices understand how the examination is broken down and what weight is given to certain topics. This will help them to focus on what they need to study more closely.
10. Implement practice tests with apprentices so they become familiar with the multiple-choice format and the test experience. Go over the answers with the apprentices and clarify any content for any questions that were answered incorrectly.
11. Encourage or require apprentices to participate in a workshop on how to prepare for an examination.
12. Schedule their examination preparation session one week prior to the examination and implement the actual examination on the final day so the material is still top of mind.

13. Allow apprentices to take the examination in a familiar and comfortable environment.
14. Encourage apprentices to take care of their mental health and well-being by practicing self-care on a daily basis. Share effective test anxiety reduction techniques such as breathing and other mindfulness exercises.

The insights provided at CAF-FCA's National Best Practices Forum will inform the development of an online resource which will help apprentices prepare for their examinations. CAF-FCA, IUOE and SkillPlan will pilot the tool with apprentices and any valuable insights learned will be shared with apprenticeship stakeholders across Canada. It is hoped the pilot will lead to a model for examination preparation that will help higher numbers of apprentices pass the examination so they can benefit from the positive labour market outcomes that are associated with certification.