

## **TRAINING UPDATE**

**April, 2008**

### **Apprenticeship: Sacrifices Required of Employers and Apprentices**

Two issues in recent weeks have once again drawn attention to some of the difficulties in having successful apprenticeship programs. The first issue is the awkwardness for employers if their apprentices are required to attend in-school training, especially if the timing is inconvenient. The other is the sacrifice the apprentice has to make to attend in-school training, especially loss of income.

Employers in many sectors of construction have intact crews, often crews which work together over extended periods. This makes it difficult for them to (1) take on new or additional apprentices and (2) allow for their apprentices to be laid off to attend in-school training. Precast contractors, for example, would have to break up an existing crew to add an apprentice. Unless they have an actual vacancy due to, say, a retirement by a journeyman they really don't have that option. Adding a whole crew, by placing apprentices with existing crews and taking members of other crews to put a new one together is not an option except in exceptional circumstances.

When apprentices are called back to school for, typically, eight-week blocks, they can receive EI benefits while attending. This is usually less than half of their income when they're working. And sometimes they have to go without any income whatsoever for a two-week waiting period at the start of the program. These are individuals who have been working steadily for a year or two, at least, and often have mortgages and family responsibilities.

We recently had some apprentices complete in-school training, collecting EI while attending, who had expected to return to work with the course being over. For various reasons, it didn't happen. In one case, the whole crew had been laid off so there was no job to return to. In another, the employer had asked the Local for a replacement. To make a place for the returning apprentice, they'd have to lay off someone else. In addition to the consideration of fairness, the employer might expect better continuity by keeping the replacement at least for the duration of the most current project.

I recently read a report which was (typically) critical of employers not being willing to hire apprentices. It's not as easy as somehow getting a change of attitude. Hiring an additional apprentice sometimes means sacrificing an existing worker, sometimes another apprentice.

Elsewhere (June, 2007) I have written about the inflexibility of Employment Insurance rules. Reform of this wouldn't solve these problems, but would certainly help.