

*Making Better Connections:
Integration of Skilled Immigrants in the BC
Labour Market*

Final Report

June 1, 2004



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***Making Better Connections:
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I. BACKGROUND

Introduction

The Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services (CAWS), as part of its mandate on the Immigration file, is seeking additional input and advice in addressing the issue of labour market attachment of skilled immigrants in British Columbia. In particular, in its “Engaging Employers to Examine Labour Market Attachment for Skilled Immigrants” project, CAWS would like to have the views of employers from across BC in identifying attitudes and practices that positively affect the labour market attachment of skilled immigrants, and develop recommendations to enhance labour market attachment efforts. The Business Council of British Columbia, among others, has been asked to contribute to and inform this process. Specifically, the Business Council will collect and consolidate pertinent views, perspectives, attitudes and practices of major companies that positively affect – or could affect – employing more immigrants in the workplace including recommendations to enhance the labour market attachment efforts and related public policy. In what follows is the result of this undertaking.

Methodology

The Business Council of British Columbia, established in 1966, is an association representing approximately 190 large and medium-sized enterprises engaged in business in British Columbia. Our members are drawn from all major sectors of the provincial economy, including forest products, mining, manufacturing, transportation, agri-food, telecommunications, information technology, financial services, energy, tourism, retail, construction, healthcare, education and the professions. Taken together, the corporate members and the associations affiliated with the Business Council are responsible for one-quarter of all jobs in British Columbia.

The combination of the Business Council’s direct membership as well as its influence on a significantly large number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the

province, places us in an ideal position for bringing industry professionals together to discuss whether integrating skilled immigrants into the workforce has been successful and whether it will be feasible and/or what could make it feasible for other employers. The Business Council is known to provide leadership on many policy issues and work effectively with its members as well as other organizations to champion a cause. Beyond that, the quality of the Council's work and policy positions often has a demonstration effect on others in the province.

To carry out the task at hand, the following 4-step methodology was undertaken:

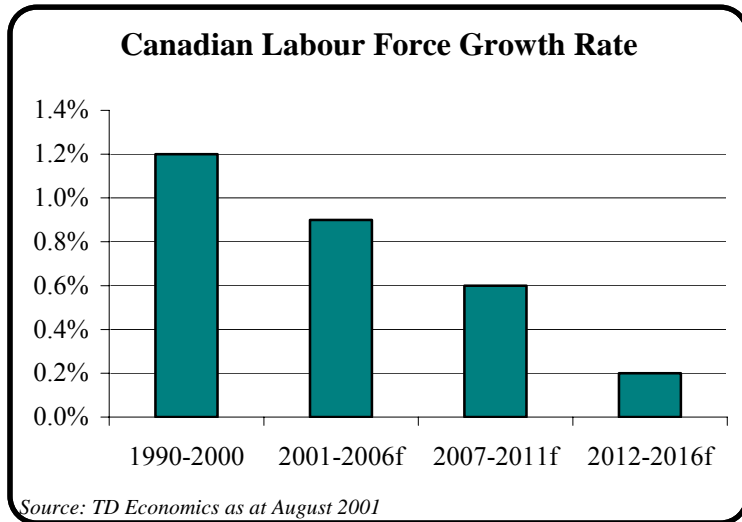
1. Preliminary research consisted of a 2-page survey sent to selected members of the Business Council to elicit their views. In some cases, there was a telephone follow-up. Results were compiled and a mini-report was created (see Appendix A) which accomplished two objectives: one, ascertaining which leading companies employed skilled immigrants and what process or programs they utilized to achieve this, and two, determining in a general fashion, employers' propensity to look to the pool of skilled immigrants as an alternative source of needed workers.
2. Capitalizing on the occasion accorded by the Business Council's annual leadership event, *Addressing Skills Shortages Conference*, held May 17-18, 2004, a focused discussion was undertaken by engaging employers, and other attendees, to examine the currently available immigration programs, challenges in the recruitment and integration of immigrant workers, and possible remedies to improve the process of labour market attachment of skilled immigrants. To help guide the discussion at this session, specifically crafted questions – aligned with preliminary data and research – were posed to ensure key issues were identified and debated (see Appendix B).
3. While in context, a detailed survey was distributed, completed by the participants in the session and collected at the end of the session (see Appendix C). This supplemental data – especially from non-Business Council member companies

and SMEs – helped to enrich the information previously collected from members via the mail survey and telephone follow-up.

4. All of the above was further enhanced by additional statistical analysis and secondary research. It is of interest to note that the 46 respondent companies who completed the survey questionnaire employ approximately 66,500 workers in the province of BC.

The Skills Gap in BC

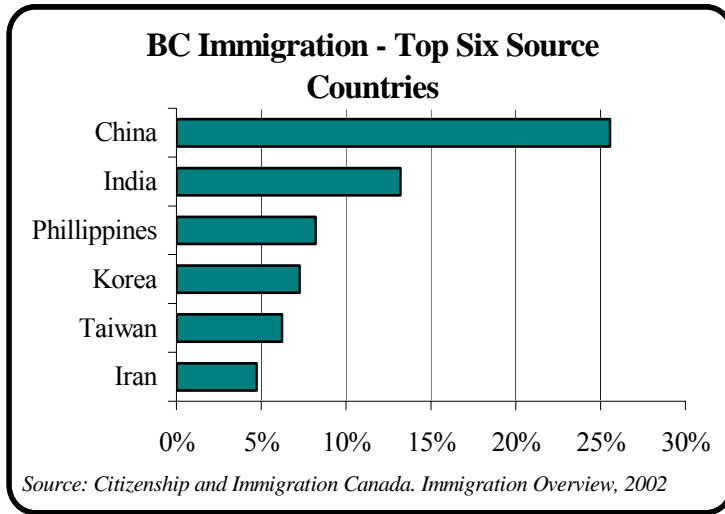
Much has been done to examine the issue of skills shortages to date; however, with the upcoming Olympics and increasing retirement rates, discovering how to incorporate alternative sources of labour, such as skilled immigrants, to fill skills



gaps needs to be addressed. The growth of the Canadian labour force is projected to slow to a crawl in the decade ahead. Between 1990 and 2000 the labour force grew at a rate of 1.2 per cent. It is projected to grow at a rate of 0.9 per cent from 2001 to 2006, 0.6 per cent from 2007 to 2011, and a mere 0.2 per cent from 2012 to 2016.¹ The imminent skills shortages will compel employers to identify alternate labour pools to equip themselves with the skilled workers necessary to stay competitive in today’s global economy. The population of skilled immigrants who have come to Canada, but have yet to establish Canadian citizenship, has been identified as one of the largest alternative pools for labour.

The opportunity to mitigate the skills shortages exists in BC. In 2002, 34,000 immigrants and 2,020 refugees came to British Columbia. 29,922 landed in Vancouver and 754 landed in Victoria. Fully 62.4 per cent were classified in the Economic category.

¹ TD Economics as at August 2001.



Of all the immigrants landing in BC, 44.2 per cent held a Bachelor’s, Master’s or a Doctorate degree, and 42 per cent were considered to speak English. A full 74 per cent emigrated from Asia and the Pacific with the People’s Republic of China providing the majority.²

Contributions Made by Immigrants

Canada’s rich diversity can be attributed to its history and the present practice of encouraging immigration. While applicants are classified as Family, Economic, Refugee or Other, each of these classes of immigrants contribute to the well-being of the country, be it economical, cultural or social. However, the composition of these classes has been changing dramatically over the past two decades.

The Economic classification consists of skilled workers (as defined by the National Occupation Classification), business immigrants (investors, entrepreneurs and the self-employed), live-in caregivers and provincial nominees. From 1985 to 2000, the percentage of immigrants who qualified under the Economic class climbed from 34.9 per cent to 58.7 per cent. As of 2002, 59.6 per cent of total immigrants landing in Canada were Economic class. If refugees are removed from the equation, Economic immigrants account for 67 per cent of all arrivals. This reflects the national policy of recruiting skilled immigrants to increase labour-market performance and bolster the Canadian economy. However, it is interesting to note that between 1985 and 2000, immigrants’ real earnings fell by an average of seven per cent.³ According to Statistics Canada, the wage gap between Canadians and immigrants has widened over the last decade from 11

² www.cic.gc.ca

³ CD Howe Institute. Immigrants’ Declining Earnings: Reasons and Remedies. April 2004. No. 81

per cent to 14.5 per cent. This suggests that immigrants may not be securing gainful employment or being remunerated at the level commensurate to their foreign credentials.

Between 1992 and 2001, visible minorities comprised 11 per cent of the labour force in Canada and accounted for 0.3 per cent per year of real gross domestic product (GDP).⁴ The remaining 89 per cent of the population generated 0.6 per cent of the labour force's contribution to GDP. It is forecast that over 18 per cent of the labour force will be visible minorities in 2016 and 80 per cent of visible minorities in Canada are immigrants.⁵ This illustrates the large contribution skilled immigrants bring to our economy. Underutilization and limited recognition of immigrants' skills and credentials are a key reason that recent Canadian immigrants have fared poorly on indicators of earnings and job market success. Improving the recognition of credentials and equivalencies is of vital importance in order to reap the benefits of integrating skilled immigrants into the growing economies of Canada and BC.

Normal Recruiting Practices of BC Employers

Typically, when BC employers go about filling a job vacancy, they turn to the marketplace to look for a candidate through conventional means such as a job posting or ad in the local newspaper.⁶ Usually, the most qualified individual for the position is hired. When conventional means do not produce a suitable candidate, employers turn to other alternatives. Some employers look overseas and bring in an immigrant worker to Canada; while others turn elsewhere including immigrant service organizations, in an attempt to tap the recently landed skilled immigrant pool. In fact, the vast majority of companies have yet to experience serious skills shortages and therefore, have not contemplated alternative recruitment methods nor are they aware of alternative labour pools. This latter reality has greatly affected our survey results, and in telephone follow-ups, we had to pose the survey questions about alternative recruitment programs on a hypothetical basis.

⁴ Calculated using three factors: size of labour force, level of fixed capital and technical efficiency.

⁵ Conference Board of Canada. *Making a Visible Difference*. April 2004.

⁶ See Appendix D for list of conventional means.

II. FINDINGS

There were two key issues identified as problematic. First, if the firm is pursuing the recruitment of skilled immigrants from outside the country, the government programs in place to facilitate the transfers are complex and expensive. Streamlining of the process is required. Second, those skilled immigrants who have already arrived in Canada are having difficulty finding job attachments to the labour market due to poor language proficiency and lengthy credential and qualification recognition processes. These two issues are reflected in the responses collected from the following questions used during the course of the research.

Six key questions were raised during the course of the research. These include the four questions outlined in the *Request For Proposal* plus two additional questions that augmented the analysis, namely:

1. Are employers open to the idea of hiring skilled immigrants?
2. What practices are currently in place for those employers who do currently hire skilled immigrants?
3. What are employers' main concerns with hiring skilled immigrants?
4. What do employers feel is necessary for a smooth transition of skilled immigrants into their respective workplaces?
5. Are currently employed skilled immigrants maintaining positions that are at a lower level than their foreign education would dictate?
6. For those employers who are not currently utilizing the identified applicant pool, what is their preferred method of accessing this pool?

1. *Are employers open to the idea of hiring skilled immigrants?*

Most employers in BC are open to the idea of hiring skilled immigrants (86%).⁷ The remaining 14 per cent are hesitant to hire skilled immigrants citing, as the number one reason, they have no need to tap into that pool as Canadian citizens are available to fill the positions. The other reasons given were the lack of confidence in the immigrant's qualifications and poor language proficiency.

⁷ preliminary survey, May 1-12., 2004

Seventy per cent of employers surveyed currently employ skilled immigrants. Of these, a great majority (77%) did not seek them out, rather, the immigrants applied to the employer through conventional means. Very few were recruited using formal methods such as contacting an immigrant service organization (6%) or engaging in intra-company transfers (6%). Eleven per cent relied on informal methods such as internal employee referrals.

On the positive side, the foremost benefit cited by a majority was the diversity that immigrants bring to the workplace and the differing perspectives that they offer. Many employers rely on this as a competitive advantage. The second most cited benefit was superior work ethic.

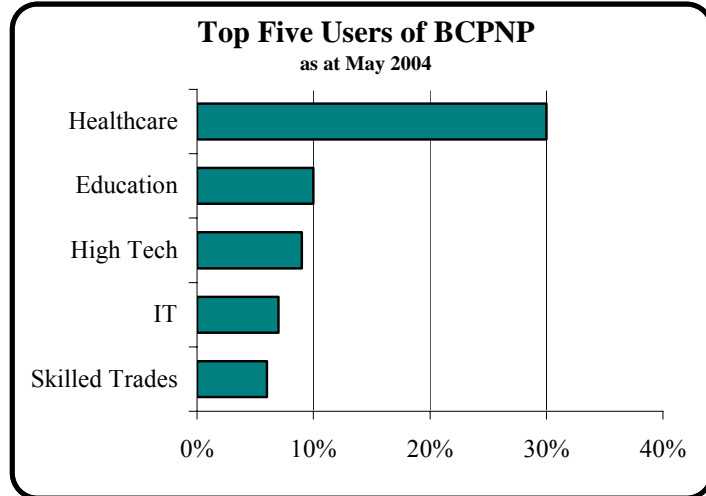
Posed with the situation of a severe skilled labour shortage, over one quarter of employers who would hire skilled immigrants had no idea how to tap into that applicant pool. Another 25 per cent said they would contact an immigrant service organization or the government, even though a full 70 per cent were not aware of any programs that are offered.

2. What practices are currently in place for those employers who do currently hire skilled immigrants?

A small percentage of employers (12%) actively seek out skilled immigrants as an alternative source of labour. Half of this group used intra-company transfers under NAFTA. The remainder contacted an immigrant service organization. Other informal practices identified were reliance on internal employee referral programs.

Nearly 84 per cent of employers have never contacted an organization or the government in search of skilled immigrants. Many SMEs were unaware of the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). Interestingly, 40 per cent of provincial nominees are nominated by the public sector, namely Healthcare (30%) and Education (10%). This may suggest that the public sector has greater access to a public program and that SMEs in the private sector are not receiving the intended information.

Of those employers who have utilized the PNP and employees who were subject to it, all state that the process is arduous. In fact, one panellist at the BCBC *Addressing Skills Shortages Conference 2004* revealed that he was forced to endure numerous rounds of fingerprinting and that various



government departments required different forms to be completed and different sized photos to be submitted. This is clearly a result of non-standardized processes. The PNP shortens the processing time from two years to close to six months yet this shortened time could be streamlined.

Under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Canada-Chile Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA), four specific categories of workers are exempt from the need to obtain approval from Human Resources & Skills Development Canada (HRSDC); however, the employment can only be temporary. Business visitors do not need a work permit but they must maintain their principal source of remuneration outside of Canada. Professionals must qualify to work in one of the professions listed in NAFTA, such as accountants and engineers, and require a work permit. Traders and investors must be in a supervisory or executive capacity and intra-company transfers require the transferee to work in a managerial or executive capacity. A handful of employers engage in intra-company transfers under NAFTA; however, these transfers are temporary and only apply to employees from the United States and Mexico and, under CCFTA, Chile. The United States ranks eighth as a source country of immigrants to BC accounting for just over two per cent. These agreements may be a practicable alternative to filling vacancies.

The General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) facilitates market access for certain businesspeople in selected service sectors. This agreement allows for business

visitors, professionals and intra-company transfers from 140 World Trade Organization member countries to enter Canada on a temporary basis without HRSDC confirmation. Only global companies are able to take advantage of these multilateral agreements.⁸

3. What are employers' main concerns with hiring skilled immigrants?

Well over half of employers surveyed (60%) believe that poor language proficiency is the major challenge in integrating skilled immigrants into their respective workplaces. All employers suggest extensive training in Canadian culture and higher standards of language proficiency are desperately needed. Employers would like to see immigrants trained in: how Canadians apply for jobs, what employers look for, and the nature of the Canadian workplace.

It was communicated that in the increasingly competitive business environment, cost containment is a priority. Corporately, additional capital and resources are not typically available for a comprehensive integration program that offers language and culture training, especially since there is government funded free training available to newly arrived immigrants. Employers would like to see government and/or immigrant service organizations prepare and train the applicant but stated that language training had to be improved to a much higher level. A handful of employers said they would take on the cost of training for specific licensing criteria if they could not fill positions with Canadians.

4. What do employers feel is necessary for a smooth transition of skilled immigrants into their respective workplace?

Many non-core business functions, such as recruiting, are being outsourced. Some employers surveyed rely on professional recruiting agencies and have confidence that those companies will look to the applicant pool of skilled immigrants to meet their client's needs. A majority of employers, when asked to place themselves in a skilled labour shortage situation, said they would probably seek out the services of a professional recruiting agency. Unfortunately, the main performance criterion that recruiting agencies

⁸ www.cic.gc.ca/english/pub.

are judged upon is the speed at which they can provide an appropriate applicant to the client firm. Immigrants, then, do not seem to be a feasible source of labour as the average immigration process time is two years.

Almost all employers feel that the credentialing process is a barrier to full employment in the applicant's respective position vis-à-vis their education. Professional associations are not providing streamlined qualifying tests and educational institutions have not created an efficient method of recognizing equivalencies. In spite of the fact that employers have assessed newly hired immigrants and conclude they are more than competent in their skills, they are wary to place them in the appropriate positions until the professional associations or regulatory bodies give their stamp of approval. Most immigrants must completely redo their education at a Canadian institution. This is neither an efficient nor a rational decision in the pursuit of having newcomers contributing to the BC economy.

5. Are currently employed skilled immigrants maintaining positions at their level of foreign education?

An unsettling statistic surfaced when employers were asked if the skilled immigrants they currently employ maintain positions that are at a lower level than their foreign education would dictate. A full 44 per cent said yes, they were not fully utilizing the knowledge of their skilled immigrant employees. Thirty three per cent were not certain of the foreign education levels of their immigrant employees. When asked why the employees were in lower level positions, the main reason (57%) stated accreditation issues with professional organizations and/or regulatory bodies.

According to the employers, the second barrier preventing either efficient attachment or efficient positioning is poor language proficiency. Effective communication in either technical/trade occupations or the professions is crucial to higher productivity.

The free language training provided to newcomers to Canada, referred to as Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) in some provinces but English Language

Services for Adults (ELSA) in BC, has been criticized by 40 per cent of employers as ineffective and unproductive.

6. For those employers who are not currently utilizing the identified applicant pool, what is their preferred method of accessing this pool?

The preferred method of accessing the applicant pool of skilled immigrants for both employers who currently employ, and for those who do not is through conventional means. However, when posed with the notion that conventional methods will eventually not provide a large enough applicant pool from which to choose, over 50 per cent stated that a centralized location in which to peruse potential applicants would be convenient. Many likened the idea to Monster.ca. It is preferred because they do not want to have to go to more than one source for applicants. Forty per cent maintained that conventional means would still be the most convenient yet realized that for this to happen, training and preparation for immigrants in job searching would be essential.

III. CONCLUSIONS

From an employer perspective, the barriers to integrating skilled immigrants, either landed or en route, are fourfold. First, the basic awareness of resources and programs available is low. Second, those who have hired skilled immigrants find the process to be time and resource-consuming. Third, once a skilled immigrant completes the application process, having their credentials or qualifications recognized is extremely difficult. Finally, employers state that the majority of potential immigrant applicants' level of language proficiency and cultural awareness at the point of hire is undesirable and their prior training ineffectual.

1. First Disconnect – Awareness

In an environment where competition is becoming more fierce, cost containment is necessary for survival. Companies will not invest capital where there is no evident return. Most industries surveyed are not experiencing any skills shortage presently, even though it is looming in the future for most industries. Therefore, most firms are not investing capital in alternative means of recruitment. Unless the skilled immigrants are

applying through the company's conventional means, most employers will not seek them out.

Of all the employers who stated they would be willing to hire skilled immigrants in the face of a shortage, the vast majority had little idea of "who" and "how" to contact this applicant pool. This, in part, is a result of the decentralization of information.

The overarching problem identified is that the relevant information is not centralized. There are different service organizations and government departments that require the employers to seek out information from different places. Given the lack of awareness, it is no wonder that these resources are not being tapped into. The research necessary to locate these resources is not feasible for the smaller firms. In other words, employers want the applicants extremely accessible without investing excessive time and resources in finding them.

Interestingly, while searching the website of CAWS, a directory of all immigrant service organizations in BC was provided just pages away from the PNP and IQP information. This finding substantiates the fact that information is being provided but employers are either not aware of it or do not know where to go to get it.

2. Second Disconnect – Bureaucratic Process

Employers who have used the PNP or have applied to HRSDC for a temporary foreign worker permit state that the required documentation is excessive and cumbersome and, thus, increases administrative costs. Depending on the occupation, various government departments and professional organizations are involved throughout the process and the employer must transact with all of them separately causing a redundant administrative burden.

One of the panelists at the Skills Conference (Nigel Banks, Vice President, Human Resources at MDS Metro Laboratory Services) spoke on his experience on importing a professional through the application to HRSDC for a temporary foreign worker permit.

He had to contend with 6 different organizations and regulatory bodies in the process, including credential recognition that took 4 years.

Another panelist (Steve Ogle, Chief Maintenance Officer, Westjet) recounted his personal experience with the process as an immigrant applicant. Applying through the Alberta PNP, the process took 2 years and \$10,000 in legal fees to complete. Much of the time was not spent on the standard and accepted security, criminal and labour market analysis, but on redundant administrative tasks resulting from non-standardization of requirements and the time consuming flow of information through many bureaucratic levels.

3. Third Disconnect – Credentialing

Credentialing has been cited as the top priority in improving the labour market attachment of skilled immigrants who are brought to Canada by employers. Notwithstanding that employers, from a range of industries, are adamant about maintaining the high standard of Canadian education, recognizing foreign education, competencies and qualifications without undue process is desperately needed to hasten the recognition process. This disconnect occurs within the professions (ie. Engineers) as well as in the trades (ie. Mechanics).

Skilled and educated immigrants, who are either in Canada or are planning to come to Canada, hit a barrier on the way to securing gainful employment in their respective fields. Often, they are required to complete the Canadian equivalent in its entirety rather than being assessed on their competency. In the new Industry Training Model, employers have pushed for a competency-based assessment.

At the moment, there are a number of organizations that assist immigrants in having their foreign credentials recognized. The International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES) determines comparable levels of foreign education in BC terms. The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) also conducts foreign credential evaluations. A wide range of employers, educational institutions, government services

and NGO's accept the evaluations of ICES and CICIC; however, if the education is in an occupation considered "regulated", such as lawyers, medical doctors, engineers, etc., then the professional association or regulatory body sets its own requirements for assessment and recognition. For example, the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of British Columbia (APEGBC) requires extensive testing of those immigrants who are internationally trained graduates in engineering or geoscience and once completed, professional status is still subject to a final review and approval from the Association. This system, only implemented January 1, 2004, and others similar to it, seems to grant the associations with far reaching authority and arbitrary judgement on assessing foreign credentials.

4. Fourth Disconnect – Language and Culture

It is evident that the level acceptable, as defined by the government, to attain language proficiency is too low. Employers have stated that, in spite of the qualifications, if an applicant's language skills are poor, other applicants with better English proficiency will be chosen over them. Employers do not have the resources to engage in internal language and cultural training, especially when the government already offers it for free.

The English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) is a provincial government funded program that provides basic English and cultural training for newcomers to Canada. All employers that are aware of this program voice discontent with its effectiveness. A disconnect occurs because employers who know people who have gone through ELSA still raise concerns regarding the standard of language and cultural training and its lack of effectiveness.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Awareness

There needs to be an improvement in raising awareness by focusing the marketing effort to those industries that are acutely affected by skills shortages. The fact that 40 per cent of users of the BC PNP are from the public sector may perhaps indicate that private enterprise employers are not receiving the information. Also, immigrant service

organizations must approach business rather than waiting for business to approach them. They also need to apprise immigrants on what employers need.

A solution to this problem would be to create a “one-stop shop” where, once employers in all sectors are made aware of it, they can log on to one site that centralizes recruiting information on an Internet accessible database. The database might include an applicant’s foreign credentials, full resumes, status of Canadian credential recognition, work experience, employer job postings, and licensing requirements of the skilled immigrants who are either in Canada or planning to come to Canada. This would act as a portal and clearing house where employees and employers can match skills to vacancies in the labour market. Employers would like to see the system managed by the government and immigrant service organizations. This way, immigrants who have already arrived in Canada as well as those who are seeking employment in Canada can be accessed quickly and painlessly. Labour market information should also be posted here.

2. Streamlining

With respect to employers who wish to bring skilled immigrants to Canada through the PNP, a solution to the complex and expensive process would be that the PNP incorporate the requirements from each involved regulatory body and act as the liaison for the employer.

For those employers who are applying to HRSDC for temporary foreign worker permits, it has been suggested that a new role titled “account manager” would facilitate the process. The account manager would then coordinate the participating regulatory bodies and act as liaison to the employer.

3. Credentialing

We recommend a system of credential recognition through competency-based assessment for both the professions and the trades. This way, as skilled immigrants enter Canada, or are already landed, their skills can be matched against Canadian standards. If there are any shortcomings, that individual can take the appropriate training so as to minimize

deficiencies and maximize attractiveness to the employer. If the skills are grossly deficient, then the individual should enrol in a full program offered at a relevant educational institution.

4. Language and Culture Training

There are a myriad of services across the nation that offer language and culture training to newly arrived immigrants. Unfortunately, employers are still puzzled by the difference between programs that are valid, reliable and produce results, and those that are ineffective.

Implementing standardized Canadian cultural and language training is necessary for skilled immigrants to enter the labour market. Employers would like to see knowledge and awareness of Canadian culture in the Canadian workplace. Training with respect to job searching and interviewing was identified as a partial solution. A more rigorous benchmark with respect to language proficiency must be established and training programs must be standardized to promote efficiency.

5. Self Initiative

A fifth suggestion gleaned from the research is the frustration employers experience when they would like to hire a qualified immigrant yet are unable to due to the applicant's lack of language proficiency or a certain skill. Over 70 per cent of skilled immigrants in BC come from cultures that employers believe to be collectivist and passive. Close to 45 per cent of principal applicants from the Economic class choose their settlement location based on proximity of family and friends compared to only 22 per cent who choose their location based on employment opportunities.⁹ It may be necessary for immigrants from these cultures to proactively buttress their existing skills with extra culture training programs. This would provide them with a firmer grasp of what is expected in the Canadian workplace, speaking to the fourth disconnect.

⁹ The Monitor. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Winter 2004.

Recapitulation

There is a vast talent pool of skilled immigrants made up of those seeking entry to Canada as well as those who have already arrived. Of the latter, while some have work, it is troublesome that many of them are not employed at the level commensurate with their foreign education and credentials. This is not an efficient use of talent in our economy and it stifles the cultural and social richness that the individuals bring to share with other Canadians.

It appears that there are four main identifiable disconnects that need to be addressed in order to improve the labour market attachment of skilled immigrants in BC. With the coordinated effort of government departments and immigrant service organizations, the recommendations suggested above should be instituted in order to bridge the gaps between skilled immigrants and employers in the labour marketplace. This will allow for better connections and hopefully, lead to better integration of skilled immigrants in the BC workforce.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal, and Women's Services and especially Mr. Collin Mercer, A/Manager, International Qualifications Program for the opportunity to undertake this research. At the same time, we would like to express our appreciation to the 46 companies, other CAWS officials, panelists and attendees at the Business Council of British Columbia's Conference on Addressing Skills Shortages: 2004 for their contribution. Finally, we are grateful for the thorough work of our two Analysts – Education Partnerships: Sarah Hofmann, who initiated the development, survey and research for this project and Valerie Foster, who completed the survey, research and write-up for this report. We welcome any comments you may have.

Ed Wong

Vice President – Education Partnerships

Business Council of British Columbia

APPENDIX A

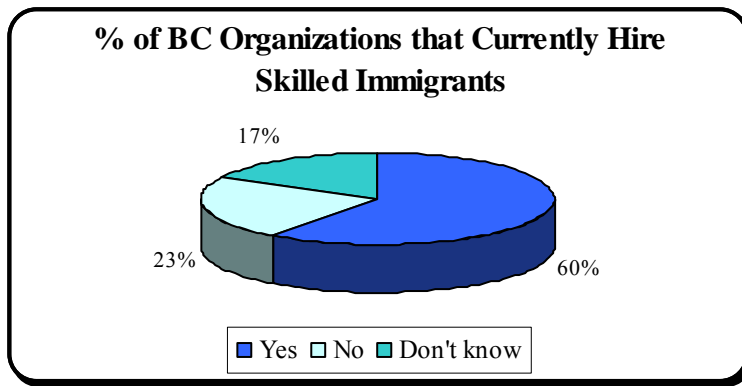
Preliminary Report

PRELIMINARY SURVEY RESULTS

Corporate Perspectives on Labour Market Attachment of Skilled Immigrants

1. (a) Does your organization currently employ skilled immigrants?
 (b)(i) If yes, how many?
 (b)(i) How do you employ your skilled immigrants?

60% said their organization hires skilled immigrants. However, of those, 57% do not



keep record of how many there are in the company. In partnership, *Canadian Business Magazine* and *OMNI Television* assessed 70 large Canadian companies to ascertain how immigrants are faring in

corporate Canada. A surprising proportion of companies responded as if interest in that subject was i-appropriate. Jim Rennie, public affairs manager at Enbridge Inc. stated, “We are committed to non-discriminatory practices throughout our organization but we don’t consider it appropriate to categorize our employees along those lines, and so do not maintain employee data on ethnic or minority status”.¹⁰ This is consistent with the message sent by some respondents.

Those respondents who do record immigrant numbers in their workforce claim a range of up to 10% representation with 0%-2% being most prevalent (24 per cent). The main reason cited for *not* hiring skilled immigrants are the constraints such as professional organizations and regulatory bodies not recognizing the foreign training.

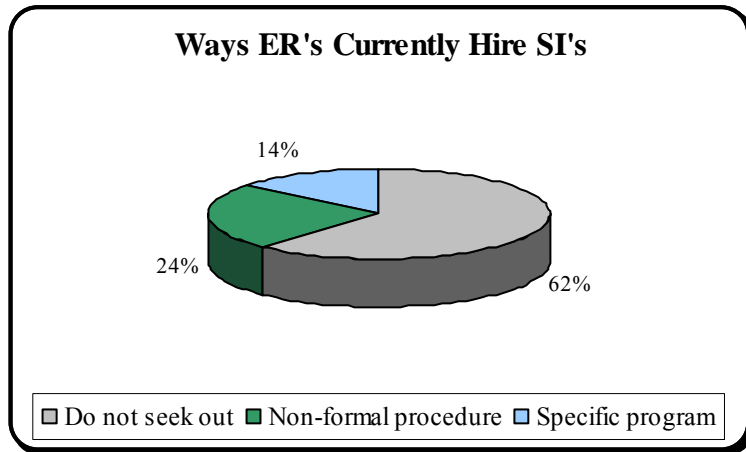
62% of organizations who employ skilled immigrants do not have a formal internal program nor do they make use of external programs to recruit these individuals. They were hired out of the applicant pool created through conventional methods

¹⁰ Canadian Business Magazine. *Why Diversity Pays*. March 29-April 11, 2004. p.38.

(advertisements, recruiting agencies, web postings etc). In other words, the skilled immigrants came to them. The remaining 38% use informal mechanisms to incorporate skilled immigrants into their workplace. For example, current immigrant employees are encouraged to refer other immigrants for job openings, partnership with immigrant service organizations to place economic immigrants and int'l students in either correct or transitional positions, partnership with schools and immigration service organizations that creates co-op's and practicum's, and intra-company transfers using the "L1" work visa.

2. (a) *In the case of severe shortages, would you look to the applicant pool of skilled immigrants?*
 (b) *If yes, how would you go about it?*

82% of the respondents stated that they would look to the pool of skilled immigrants, while 18% did not know if they would. All respondents qualified their answer by stating that all hiring is based on skill and ability first and foremost.



32% had no idea how to begin to tap into the applicant pool while 32% would invest in program participation but a full 75% of that group had no knowledge of existing programs and no knowledge of who to contact. 24% said they would look to this pool but expect to hire through conventional methods. This lends to the notion that there is a lack of knowledge on how to reach this cohort.

3. (a) *Does your organization have a diversity program?*

68% of surveyed corporations do not have a diversity program in place. The most prominent reason stated for lack of a program is that it is not needed due to the diversity that already exists in the workplace.

Of the 32% that claimed having a program, half referred to the *Employment Equity Act* as their diversity program – two corporations participate voluntarily. 30% of firms implement policies that attempt to attract Aboriginals.

4. *What would you suggest to the government in order to integrate more skilled immigrants into the workforce?*

The largest majority, at 45%, suggested that credentialing be improved. These suggestions include:

- removing re-certification processes and accept foreign credentials,
- promote/improve re-certification process (ie. RN refresher),
- have employers create equivalencies,
- streamline/fast track accreditation and recognizing qualifications and credentials,
- partner with foreign educational associations/institutions and create equivalencies so immigrants can make decisions prior to arriving; promote transfer credit scheme.

33% of respondents suggest the government should focus more on language proficiency measurements and increase the standard. Along with language issues, this group suggested more cultural training for immigrants; for example, what employers are looking for, how to contact them, and the best way to approach a job opening.

When asked what employers' largest concern is with hiring immigrants, language accounted for 50%, credentialing 36% and the length of time it takes for them to receive status accounted for the rest.

40% of employers want, and would use, an Internet portal where agencies (NGO's, Gov't) post who is available and their Canadian equivalence in education (similar to Monster.ca).

CONCLUSION

In most instances, the employer is making decisions *after* the skilled immigrant has already approached the company. Not one respondent referred to government programs as a tool to expand their applicant pool. Only 32% stated that in the face of

severe shortages would they invest in means to pursue skilled immigrants. The majority of companies would like to see a system where the immigrant is trained in language and culture and matched up to the needs of industry. The most widely held concern is lack of language ability.

The response of some companies is interesting when they refuse to acknowledge that they keep data on immigrants. There is a social construct that if immigrants, visible minorities, Aboriginals etc., are in any way categorized, regardless of the category, then discrimination has occurred. The immigrants and visible minorities that took part in the aforementioned *Canadian Business Magazine* Diversity article, provide insight into the existing barriers that they have had to overcome and offer advice to skilled immigrants.

STATISTICS & FINDINGS

According to Statistics Canada 2002 data, 60 per cent of the immigrants to Canada were deemed to fall under the Economic classification. Of those, 46.5 per cent held a Bachelor's degree or higher (Master's, Doctorate). Over 43 per cent spoke English.

In British Columbia in 2002, 34,000 immigrants landed making BC the third choice next to Ontario and Quebec. 18,674 were landed in the Economic Classification of which 44 per cent held a Bachelor's degree or greater and over 42 per cent spoke English.

Between 1980 and 1985 the percentage of immigrants in the Economic category was at 34.9 per cent. In 2000 it rose to 58.7 per cent, and 2002 to 60 per cent. This reflects the National Policy of landing skilled immigrants to increase labour-market performance and bolster the economy. Interestingly, real income for recent immigrants is lower than it was in the 1980's. What this suggests is that there is a chasm at the point where immigrants should be connecting with employers that recognize their skill set.

SOURCES & REPORTS

- Canadian Business Magazine. “Why Diversity Pays”. March 29-April 11, 2004.
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 - Statistics Canada. <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pub/facts2002/immigration>.
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APPENDIX B

Discussion Session Itinerary & Questions

PROPOSED PROCESS FOR “IMMIGRANT” BREAK-OUT SESSION
Skills Shortage Conference 2004

This proposed format and the listed discussion questions are designed to take this topic a step further than where we were at last year in identifying the challenges of labour market attachment of skilled immigrants. The issues identified in last year’s breakout session are as follows:

- Immigrants misinformed about job availability in Canada. Need to help them make decisions before they come.
- 3 biggest challenges: credential recognition,
lack of language skills and awareness of Canadian culture,
poor job search skills.
- Identified two programs: Provincial Nominee Program and the International Qualifications Program.

To spend excess time on re-establishing the basic issues would be ineffectual. The preliminary survey and subsequent analysis has revealed there has been no major shifts from the issues identified last year.

I believe these questions and the proposed format will elicit answers that will go beyond the identification of the challenges and arrive at some solutions and recommendations in an efficient and timely manner.

PROCESS

1. Session Survey handed to attendees as they enter the room. *T-zero*
2. Panel each speak for approximately five minutes. *30 minutes*
3. Floor opens up for questions to the speakers. *10 minutes*
4. Moderator poses Discussion Questions one at a time. Consensus on key questions will be recorded on a flip chart (for clarity purposes) and voted on for further statistical purposes. *70 minutes*
5. Session Survey will be filled out by attendees to be gathered when they leave. *10 minutes*
120 minutes

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

First, the Moderator must put discussion in context – the imminent skills shortage rather than “hiring tomorrow” mentality.

AWARENESS/ATTRACTING

1. Have you heard, or are you aware, of any programs that facilitate the labour market attachment of skilled immigrants?
2. How many of you have contacted an Immigrant Service Organization or the government in search of skilled immigrant labour?
3. How many *would* contact an Immigrant Service Organization or the government in search of skilled immigrant labour?

HIRING

4. What is your primary concern with hiring skilled immigrants?
5. Preliminary research shows that employers find the credentialing process the primary barrier to hiring and placing. Second to that are the low standards of language proficiency and lack of cultural training. What are some other issues you see as hindering the hiring process of skilled immigrants?
6. Suggestions to improve credentialing process?
7. Suggestions to improve language and culture proficiency?
8. Of those who employ skilled immigrants, how many are placed in positions that are lower level than what they are qualified for in their home countries?
9. Suggestions on improving other newly identified issues.
10. As employers, what would be your preferred method of reaching this applicant pool?
11. How would you like to see the process simplified in order to access this pool more readily?

INTEGRATION

12. Does anybody implement a Diversity Program in their workplace?
13. For those of you who employ skilled immigrants, what, if any, challenges have you faced in integrating them into your workforce?

APPENDIX C

Conference Survey



LABOUR MARKET ATTACHMENT OF SKILLED IMMIGRANTS

SURVEY 2004

Company: _____ # of employees: _____

Industry (circle one): *Trades & Services *Manufacturing *Health
 *Government *Metals & Mining *Education
 Contact: _____ *Finance *Construction *Food & Beverage *Energy
 *Forestry *Transportation, Communications & Other Utilities

For the purposes of this survey, "skilled immigrants" are defined as individuals who have education and expertise in a skill or skill area from their country of origin. These individuals have yet to establish Canadian Citizenship.

Q#1. Does your organization currently employ skilled immigrants? YES NO

If "Yes", continue to Question #2. If "No", skip to Question #7. If you are *not* an employer, skip Question #11.

Q#2. How did your organization hire these skilled immigrants?

- We do not specifically look for skilled immigrants; they came to us through conventional methods and were hired just as any other person would be.
- We have a general/informal procedure (eg. referrals), that we use to recruit and select skilled immigrants.
Explain: _____
- We have a specific/formal program that we use to recruit & select skilled immigrants.
Explain: _____
- We contacted a government agency.
- We contacted an immigrant service organization.
- We engage in intra-company transfers.
- Other: _____

Q#3. Do any of the skilled immigrants maintain positions that are at a lower level than their foreign education would dictate in their home country? YES NO

- If YES, why?
- Accreditation issues with professional organizations.
 - Inadequate language proficiency.
 - Other: _____

Q#4. Please state, if any, the foremost challenge in the workplace with your experience in employing skilled immigrants.

Q#5. Please state, if any, the foremost benefit realized in the workplace with your experience in employing skilled immigrants

Q#6. Please state, if any, concerns/problems you have had regarding the process of hiring skilled immigrants.

****SKIP TO QUESTION #9****

Q#7. If you do not currently employ skilled immigrants, why not?

- No need, there are Canadian Citizens who can fill the positions.
- Accreditation constraints with professional organizations and/or regulatory bodies and/or closed shop unions.
- Time/resource consuming process to establish work permits.
- The risk that they may only receive temporary work status rather than permanent.
- Other: _____

Q#8. (a). Assuming you experience a severe shortage of skilled workers would you then look to the pool of skilled immigrants to fill vacant positions?

YES NO

(b). If YES, how would you access that pool?

(c). If NO, why not?

Q#9. If faced with a shortage of applicants from conventional methods (eg. newspaper ads), what are your alternative means for recruitment?

(Place a "1" by you first choice, "2" by your second choice, "3" by your third choice and so on.)

- ___ Aboriginal service organizations.
- ___ Immigrant service organizations.
- ___ Foreign-educated skilled immigrants through foreign advertising (incl. foreign response to in-house websites).
- ___ Government to find out about programs available.
- ___ Professional recruiting agency.
- ___ Other: _____

Q#10. What would be your preferred method of gaining access to these applicant pools?

- Initiate individual employer/immigrant service organization cooperation.
- Use Internet portal maintained by government and/or agencies.
- Have the skilled immigrants apply through your conventional methods.
- Other: _____

Q#11. What would you suggest to the government in order to improve the process of labour market attachment of skilled immigrants?

Please indicate permission to follow-up if necessary.

Yes, you may contact me.

No, thank you.

Phone #: _____

Email: _____

THANK YOU.

APPENDIX D

Conventional Means of Recruitment

CONVENTIONAL MEANS OF RECRUITMENT

For the purposes of this paper, conventional means of recruitment is defined as the process by which BC employers traditionally approach the labour market.

- Newspaper advertisements (local or national)
- Internal job postings
- Employee referrals
- Networking/word of mouth
- Business, Industry or Professional Associations
- HRSDC job centres