

Job Hunting For New Immigrants – Part I

This is a fascinating topic as Canada was and still is a country founded on people immigrating and settling on its land. There is also a deep historical relationship between immigration and the BC labour market.

In the year 2001, Canada plans to accept between 200,000 and 225,000 immigrants, to meet our goals of economic benefit to Canada, family reunification, and humanitarian commitment.

Some of the most important issues to consider prior to immigrating and finding employment anywhere in the world are:

1. The quality of the credential assessment service
2. The local labour market and economy
3. Any issues of systemic discrimination towards new immigrants
4. Any communication barriers that may effect employment

Of course there are many other factors, however these seem to be crucial to the success of the transition to a new work environment.

1.The quality of the credential assessment service

Let us start by talking about the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) conventions on the “Recognition of Studies of studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education”, and the convention on “Technical and Vocational Education”.

Many people who come to live and work in Canada bring with them very high levels of education. Unfortunately, those who don't understand how international credentials compare to our provincial and national systems may not recognize their education. This is also true of working experience and skills acquired on the job. You may have heard employers say: “You don't have any Canadian work experience or credentials, so we can't hire you !!!”

These relatively new UNESCO conventions strive to solve such biases and create common standards for people who immigrate or look for work in new countries. Canada has only just recently begun to address these issues and is legally bound to continue removing these artificial walls.

The following are important concerns that originate from the UNESCO conventions:

- How to evaluate the credentials obtained in another country?
- How to compare the education from another country with requirements in Canada?
- How to know if an assessment of foreign credentials is credible and consistent with good practice?

A new Canadian organization was established in 1990 to take charge of these and other similar issues. It is called the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (<http://www.cicic.ca>).

- What is a main barrier for new immigrants?

Many immigrants to Canada arrive with qualifications in occupations for which licensure, certification, or registration is required in order to practise in Canada. To obtain such licensure, certification, or registration, they must satisfy the requirements of the organization or association regulating their trade or profession. Those requirements may include several components, including a period of internship, supervised on-the-job training, examinations, and demonstration of competence. This can be a lengthy process, and requires the person to overcome many barriers.

One of those primary barriers is that new immigrants could be quite qualified to perform in a new job, but may not always be aware of the requirement to obtain Canadian equivalency for foreign education or “how to” obtain it.

For example, it is not uncommon to find job ads that state requirements for qualifications that may be well beyond what is needed to perform in the job. When new immigrants don't seek after their Canadian equivalency they may be eliminated from the hiring process, even though they could perform well in the job.

- What is the solution?

New immigrants must make sure that they have Canadian equivalency documents when approaching any employer. All they have to do is approach a provincially mandated evaluation service like the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) (<http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/iqas/>), the International Credential Assessment Service of Canada (ICAS) (<http://www.icascanada.ca>), the International Credential Evaluation Service in Burnaby, BC, (<http://www.ola.bc.ca/ices/>), or one of many others to evaluate their formal foreign educational credentials.

These institutions generally charge a fee for evaluations, which varies from approx. \$100 - \$200. They normally require clear and legible photocopies of all original educational documents and precise word-for-word English translations of all foreign language documents. However, it is possible to obtain equivalency documents based on photocopied or incomplete documents, but some organizations may not accept those equivalencies. You can download an application form online from most of their websites. Just remember that any investment of time and money in this area will pay off in the end.

It is also important to ask questions before choosing a service, as the official standing of letters of evaluation will vary from province to province and from one institution to another. Different industries and organizations will have specific evaluation requirements, which may include supplemental reports at additional cost (sometimes up to \$125).

Don't wait until the last minute to have your credentials evaluated. It normally takes at least four to five weeks to complete an evaluation of your credential, and you will probably need them very soon when applying for a new job or schooling.

Next week – we will continue on this theme of assessing credentials for refugees and immigrants, looking at subtle differences between them, discover some more tips on finding the right place to have an credentials evaluated, explore industry specific information about equivalencies (i.e. Trades, Health Care, etc.), and understand some key labour market and economic points to consider when immigrating to Canada.