



TRIEC

Toronto Region Immigrant
Employment Council

New Realities. New Opportunities.

December 11, 2008

The Honourable Dwight Duncan
Ontario Minister of Finance
7 Queen's Park Crescent, 7th Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7S 1Y7

Dear Minister:

I am writing in response to the questions which you posed to TRIEC at the November 20 pre-budget consultation. Specifically, TRIEC was asked to outline the specific gaps in government programming that could be improved to address the current labour market failure where skilled immigrants are not effectively connecting with employers. While there are many possible areas where government could help improve the gap, the following are recommendations that should be priority initiatives.

1. Create workplace experience programs

Investment in new programs that provide skilled immigrants with direct interaction with employers should be an integral component to a long-term economic strategy for Ontario. With the recent Labour Market Agreement and available funding, there is an opportunity for the Ontario government to invest in workplace experience programs that could provide a range of incentives to employers, especially small and medium businesses, to increase their participation and ability to access the immigrant talent pool.

Currently, a large portion of the investment in labour market programming for those immigrants without previous labour market attachment is limited to job search supports. Studies have shown that skilled immigrants have demonstrated increased economic successes if there are early interventions to help link immigrants directly to employers. TRIEC's work has highlighted that more effective labour market integration occurs with programs that build social capital of skilled immigrants and provide them with the opportunity to gain valued Canadian work experience.

However, there are very few programs that offer these opportunities to newcomers. Existing programs are limited to employer outreach and engagement. In particular, while small and medium enterprises create a large portion of jobs in today's market, it is difficult to engage these employers in programs. This is an area in which the Ontario government should invest to ensure that the province is leveraging the talents and experience of skilled immigrants.

2. Develop high-level workplace communication skills training for skilled immigrants

TRÉC employer surveys and other research indicate that eighty per cent of employers state that communication skills are a concern in the hiring of skilled immigrants. In particular, workplace communication skills and familiarity with Canadian workplace culture are named as areas that could be improved. While there are many English as a Second Language classes available to newcomers, very few of them offer high-level workplace language and communication training.

There is an opportunity through the Canadian Ontario Immigration Agreement to expand the workplace specific language training currently offered through the school boards. This federal funding is available to develop language training tailored to employer needs. By capitalizing on this funding to expand the program to more school boards, while investing in an outreach promotion strategy for employers, more employers could be encouraged to recruit from the skilled immigrant talent pool.

3. Build the capacity of employers to retain and promote skilled immigrants

A diverse workplace culture is increasingly recognized as a competitive advantage. In particular, the inter-cultural openness and knowledge of global markets which skilled immigrants have will be invaluable as companies look to expand. As a result, opportunities to support employers for diversity, recruitment, retention and cultural competency will be imperative in building a long term economic strategy for Ontario.

One of the major concerns named by employers is employee retention and building effective teams within a diverse workplace. With the Government of Ontario's support, TRÉC and its partners work to enhance the HR capacity of employers to effectively integrate skilled immigrants into their workplace. Employer demand for these programs has been strong and steadily increasing.

With the new Employment Ontario transformative vision, there is an opportunity for the Ontario government to support employers in achieving more inclusive workplaces. The framework for the suite of services to be delivered through Employment Ontario now includes job retention as one of the five key service areas. In this area, the government can create a variety of initiatives for employers that would enable them to better integrate skilled immigrants. Cultural awareness and cultural competence are key both company management and its employees will be essential for immigrants to successfully integrate into a workforce and for employers to feel confident when they are recruiting, hiring and promoting immigrants.

These recommendations, combined with those in our formal written submission, contribute to a robust plan that has the promise of creating meaningful employment for new immigrants. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input and participate in the budget process. Please let us know if TRÉC can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Mchase
Executive Director