



Five Ideas for the Government of Ontario

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1. Create a new workplace experience program

Canadian workplace experience opportunities are the most effective way for skilled immigrants to find meaningful employment. Currently, there are very few programs that offer these opportunities to newcomers. Existing programs are limited in employer outreach and engagement. In particular, small and medium enterprises create a large portion of jobs in today's market; however, it is difficult to engage these employers in these programs

With the recent LMA and available funding, there is an opportunity for the Ontario government to invest in a new workplace experience program that could provide a range of incentives to employers, especially small and medium businesses, to increase their participation and willingness to be part of the solution.

2. Provide supports to employers that help them build their capacity to hire and retain skilled immigrants

a) Develop high-level workplace communication skills training for skilled immigrants

While there are many ESL classes available to newcomers, very few of them offer high-level workplace language and communications 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 specifically 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, this could help to encourage employers to recruit from the skilled immigrant talent pool.

b) Provide employee retention and diversity training for employers

One of the major concerns from employers is employee retention and building effective teams within a diverse workforce. The concerns focus on communications issues which can be addressed through language training, but also on "organizational fit".

There is an opportunity for the Ontario government to support diversity in the workplace by creating initiatives for employers that would enable them to better integrate skilled immigrants. Cultural awareness and cultural competence among 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. A diverse workplace culture is increasingly recognized as a competitive advantage. Opportunities to support companies in this way should be supported.

3. Ensure that mentoring investment is sustained

Mentoring has been extremely successful at providing skilled immigrants with exposure to professional networks and Canadian workplace culture, which supports effective linkage and integration into the labour market. The metrics are impressive:

- The Mentoring Partnership has 50+ corporate partners, with more than 3000 matches made since February 2005. 80% have found employment, of which 83% is in their own field.

There is an opportunity for the Ontario government to build on the success of existing programs by continuing its investment in mentoring and to expand the program across Ontario.

4. Look for opportunities for post-secondary educational institutions to better integrate skilled immigrants

The college system has demonstrated significant commitment to evaluating how it can better integrate skilled immigrants into the labour market. There is an opportunity for other post-secondary educational institutions to take an inward-looking approach and evaluate how their systems can better assist labour market integration of highly skilled newcomers. For example, there are approximately ten different universities involved in bridging programs in Ontario. However, each works in its own silo and there are currently no opportunities for universities to share best practices on these labour market integration initiatives.

As a first step, the Ontario government should support universities to implement a consistent approach to foreign credential assessment across the province. This would help the network take advantage of economies of scale and improve the overall integration of skilled immigrants into the labour market. It may also serve as a first step in building a province-wide approach to this issue by universities.

As well, the new federal Canadian Experience Class will have a dramatic effect on the career path for Ontario's international students. It is unclear whether Ontario's post-secondary institutions have considered the full impact of this change in federal immigration policy. Working with colleges and universities to consider the full spectrum of related issues and identifying necessary policy and program responses is critical.

5. Be a leader among Ontario's employers

As Ontario's largest employer, it is important for the Ontario government to lead by example. Through the Government's current internship program, the government is sending an important signal to Ontario businesses to tap into the talents of newcomers.

TRIEC hopes that the Ontario government will continue its commitment to the internship program and further enhance the opportunities for immigrants to gain Canadian work experience by becoming a partner in the Toronto Mentoring Partnership program.