

2.

Understanding and managing challenges

What are the challenges?

Newcomers to London are ready to work, but are employers ready to hire them? Some companies remain hesitant about hiring recent immigrants.

They may wish to benefit from advice offered by employers who have already started to diversify their workforce. Many are now specifically targeting newcomers as they recruit. Of course, not every employee works out, (whatever their country of origin) but employers report that newcomers are making their mark.

As a company begins to examine its reasons for not hiring newcomers in the past, it helps to realize that achieving cultural diversity doesn't happen overnight. There may be hurdles to overcome, some apprehension and a process of learning. But experience shows that the benefits of hiring newcomers most certainly outweigh the challenges.

Many highly experienced and talented immigrants often express the sentiment, "If only employers would give me the chance to show what I can do."



A good place to begin is to accept one or more recent immigrants on a placement from local employment support agencies. (See page 32.) You might also consider allowing a newcomer to job shadow or volunteer for a short period to gain experience and demonstrate their skills.

“London’s call centre sector has grown tremendously, so finding qualified workers isn’t always easy. Those who are Francophone or bilingual are in particularly high demand. While excellent English language skills will always be an essential hiring requirement in call centres, internationally trained workers also bring foreign language skills that allow us to serve customers in other countries.”

— Sheila LeClair
Owner, General Manager
Alliance iCommunications

Almas Goher,
a Production Worker
at Touché Bakery

Addressing Some Concerns

The concerns you may have about hiring recent newcomers are not trivial and they are shared by many other employers. For the most part though, those concerns can be overcome with some new approaches, and/or, a new understanding of the benefits of diversity.

Employer issues about hiring newcomers include:

Language skills – Will the worker be able to speak English well enough to perform their job? Will they understand instructions and safety rules? Will other workers understand them? Will they be able to communicate well enough to work in teams?

Lack of Canadian job experience – Employers who are accustomed to being able to check Canadian references or job experience are not always comfortable hiring a newcomer who has not worked in a North American company.

Evaluating international education – How does a degree or diploma from Shanghai or Bogota measure up to one from The University of Western Ontario? Does a steamfitter in New Delhi do the same kind of work as one in Strathroy?

Bringing many cultures under one roof – Some employers are apprehensive about what might happen when many different cultures come together in one workplace. Will everyone get along?

On the following pages, each of these concerns will be addressed in more detail.

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How important are language skills?

Communication skills are certainly a priority in hiring, whether your applicant is Canadian born or a recent immigrant. Many positions require an applicant to be able to communicate effectively, to speak English with some degree of fluency, and to read and write in the English language.

The good news is that many immigrants come to Canada with good language skills. English is taught as a second language in many countries and in Canada's point-based immigration system for skilled workers, language skills count for almost one-quarter of the total assessment.

For newcomers who don't arrive with strong English skills, language training is a priority. London offers many language programs for newcomers; some of them are free some are fee-for-service, and some may be delivered in the workplace.

Given the opportunity, most newcomers will work hard to make sure their English skills are where they need to be.

Keep in mind, an employer who hires skilled immigrants who are able to communicate effectively in more than one language, will have a business edge as local markets increase in diversity and international markets grow.

Language/communication barriers are worth overcoming. Here are some ideas to assist employers:

- **Language assessment** – Become familiar with ways of assessing a newcomer's ability to speak English. The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks offers an assessment tool. They can also help employers develop evaluation tools that are specific to an occupation or job. Visit their website at www.language.ca.

- **Language skills upgrading** – If an employee has difficulty with language skills, consider offering encouragement or financial support for the worker in attending an English upgrading program. Often with this additional training, you will have a loyal employee who is ready to accept additional responsibilities.
- **Occupation specific language training** – Many immigrants come with strong basic English skills, but they may not have mastered Canada's version of occupation-specific language. There are community based programs offered for some professions, such as engineers and health care workers, but this kind of training can also be provided by coworkers. You might consider teaming your new worker with another employee who can act as a coach, helping with occupational language. In a short time, most workers will pick up on the necessary vocabulary.
- **A strong accent** – A good question to consider is whether an accent will interfere with the ability of an employee to perform his or her duties. In many cases, the answer will be no. Many newcomers to Canada haven't had many opportunities to practice language skills, but when employed full-time in an English speaking environment, they quickly gain the ability to speak in a clear manner.

Many newcomers say employers make the mistake of thinking an applicant's English language skills reflect their ability to perform their job.

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Local Resources for Language Training

Employers may wish to refer newcomers to resources for improving language skills. The Government of Canada offers language training for newcomers. The program is called LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada). Assessment and referrals for LINC are conducted at the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre. Classes are taught at many London locations including through the Thames Valley District School Board and the YM-YWCA.

Fanshawe College also offers a one-year General Arts and Science program in English Language Studies and the Centre for Lifelong Learning offers English as a Second Language courses.

For information on Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) contact the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre at 505 Dundas Street, London or phone 519-432-1133.

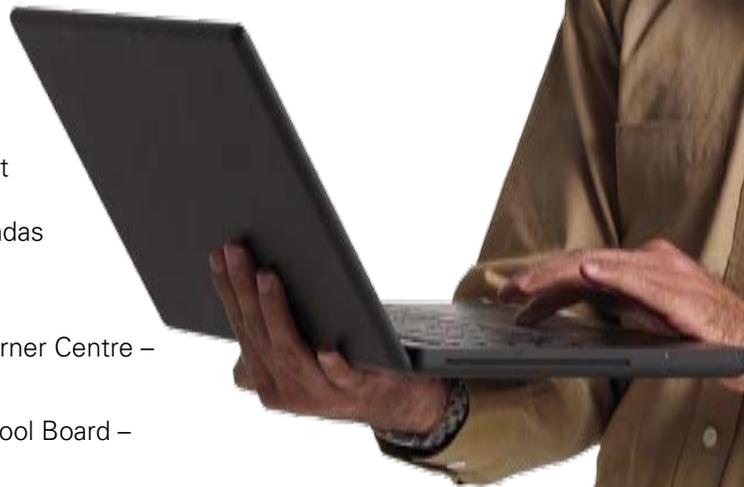
London Cross Cultural Learner Centre – www.lcclc.org

Thames Valley District School Board – www.tvdsb.on.ca/ace

Fanshawe College – www.fanshawec.on.ca

Centre for Lifelong Learning – www.cfl.on.ca

*Naved Altaf,
a Support Analyst at London
Health Sciences Centre*



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Is international work experience enough?

Newcomers to Canada hear it all the time:
“You must have Canadian work experience.”

Employers are sometimes uncomfortable hiring a newcomer who has not worked in a North American work environment.

You may want to explore the question, “Why is it important that this person has Canadian experience?”

“To make sure they are able to fit into a Canadian workplace environment.”

If this is your reason, you may want to hire the individual on a short-term contract, or through a work placement or internship. That will give you a chance to see them at work and give the employee a chance to show you their capabilities. Keep in mind you need to give the newcomer a chance to settle in and get to know how things work.

“To determine how their international work experience relates to our requirements.”

You might see if there is a way to determine the standard of work they do. For instance, there may be a test or some questions you might ask to establish their level of knowledge. Keep in mind that newcomers don't always know the Canadian version of occupational language, but that does not mean they are not highly skilled.

Although standards and practices vary greatly from country to country, by checking Web resources, you may be able to learn more about those standards through international certification bodies such as World Education Services.

“To be able to find out about former employers and check references.”

You might consider using Canadian references provided from language instructors and employment counsellors to help determine “soft skills”. Also, don't be afraid to make an overseas call if the applicant uses an overseas reference who speaks English. There are agencies that can help with overseas reference checks (see www.skillsinternational.ca).

Helping Newcomers Gain Canadian Experience

1. Offer a Canadian work experience opportunity to a newcomer. As both of you get more comfortable you can allow the employee to progress to a higher level of responsibility.
2. Offer a short-term contract position to allow you to determine where a newcomer may fit in.
3. Newcomers are often willing to accept positions and salaries that do not reflect their level of education and experience. Once they have proven themselves, you should ensure they are paid fairly or you risk losing them to another employer!

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How are international credentials evaluated?

How does a degree or diploma from Shanghai or Bogota measure up to one from The University of Western Ontario?

Many employers wrongly assume that immigrants are not well educated, yet never take a closer look at educational credentials to understand how they measure up. Indeed, one of the greatest barriers for employers in hiring newcomers, is finding a way to accurately assess the applicant's education, skills and experience.

World Education Services (WES), a leading evaluation service in North America, is the service authorized by the government of Ontario to provide credential evaluation services for immigrants. For a fee, WES will provide a service designed to reassure you of the authenticity of credentials, as well as showing how international credits and grades compare with Canadian credentials.

Increasingly, newcomers are seeking evaluation of their credentials. As an employer, you can expect to receive documents from applicants that have been evaluated by WES. As well, many professional associations, regulatory bodies, education institutions, government departments, recruitment firms and employers make use of the services of WES.

If an applicant has not had his or her credentials evaluated, you may refer them to WES.

World Education Services – www.wes.org/ca

World Education Services (WES)

- ▲ A recent analysis by WES showed that over 75% of the engineering, health care and technology degrees they evaluated from the top 10 countries of immigration including India, China, Pakistan, Russia and Romania were equivalent to a Canadian degree.
- ▲ WES maintains a proprietary database containing course content information from 42,000 academic institutions in 215 countries and jurisdictions. Founded in 1974, WES has extensive experience in calculating equivalencies to North American standards. WES performs nearly 60,000 evaluation reports each year.

— From the WES booklet, "Hire Smart"

*Andrew Fang,
a Production Engineer
at OES Inc.*



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What does it take to create an inclusive workplace?

Increasing the diversity of your workforce may require some adjustments that go well beyond simply hiring newcomers. It is encouraging to know that the steps you take to create an inclusive workplace will benefit all employees and will help you attract and retain a strong workforce.

Your goal should be to create an environment where people with diverse backgrounds, skills and perspectives feel valued and can contribute to your organization. Keep in mind that diversity encompasses more than just cultural backgrounds – it also reflects gender, age, marital status and other factors.

As steps are taken to create a more diverse workplace, both existing employees and newcomers may be apprehensive. That's understandable. They will have questions and concerns and you may find that as people adjust, actions or words may cause misunderstandings. This can be the beginning of an opportunity to build new awareness and understanding.

Management Leads the Way

The behaviour of managers sets an example for all employees about whether diversity is appreciated and respected, or simply tolerated.

The London Cross Cultural Learner Centre as well as some private providers, offers diversity training. See "Global Education" at www.lcclc.org.

There are many steps you can take to help ease the transition toward a more diverse workforce.

For existing workers:

- **Lead by example** – show an interest in other cultures and a respect for differences.
- **Offer diversity training** – even a short one- or two-hour workshop can help open eyes and replace apprehension and fear with curiosity and respect.
- **Seek the help and input** of employee groups, rather than mandate changes from the top.
- **Celebrate diversity** – for example, recognize and accommodate cultural and religious differences.
- **Open the lines of communication** to allow airing of concerns. If conflicts occur, listen to all views, work to understand the cause and find resolutions that are non-threatening to all parties.

For newcomers:

- **Pair a newcomer** with a willing and capable employee who can answer questions, show them around and introduce them to other workers.
- Ensure that **planning of events** and schedules is done with recognition of important holidays for people of different ethnic backgrounds and religions.
- Meet with newcomers to **discuss their experiences** and find out whether they have run into any difficulties.



Paul Hogendoorn, President and Julia Krajicek, Assembler of OES Inc.

Good morning in ten languages

OES Inc.

As Chair of the London Region Manufacturing Council, Paul Hogendoorn says the issue of workforce shortages has come up around the table among Council members a number of times.

“Many of these companies, like all businesses, are already beginning to feel the shortages in some areas of their workforce.”

Hogendoorn is also President of OES Inc., a successful London company that produces electronic control monitoring and timing systems. OES is ahead of many of other companies because OES has already discovered the excellent pool of workers available in the form of global talent.

“There are about fifty people who work for the company. When I make the rounds in the morning, I often say good morning in ten different languages. Of course “good morning” is just about the extent of what I am able to say in many of those languages, but it does put a few smiles on faces.”

Paul says the business case for hiring newcomers is clear – an available skilled workforce that brings international experience. As for challenges, Paul says, “Work ethic and skills are not a problem. Language and culture can be, but we take the time to make it work. For instance, in some cultures, businesses are much more hierarchical than here. This frequently takes more than verbal explanation; sometimes it takes intentionally role-modeling examples to illustrate the point that no one person is above any specific task, including myself. Although specific roles may have different values in an organization, as individuals, we are still equal.”

Paul says the talent on OES’s payroll is remarkable and he credits the talent, skill and enthusiasm of the skilled workers for the success OES has achieved in recent years.

“No matter what language you say it in, the contribution of a talented and dedicated workforce speaks for itself.”

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Taking steps to respect and celebrate diversity

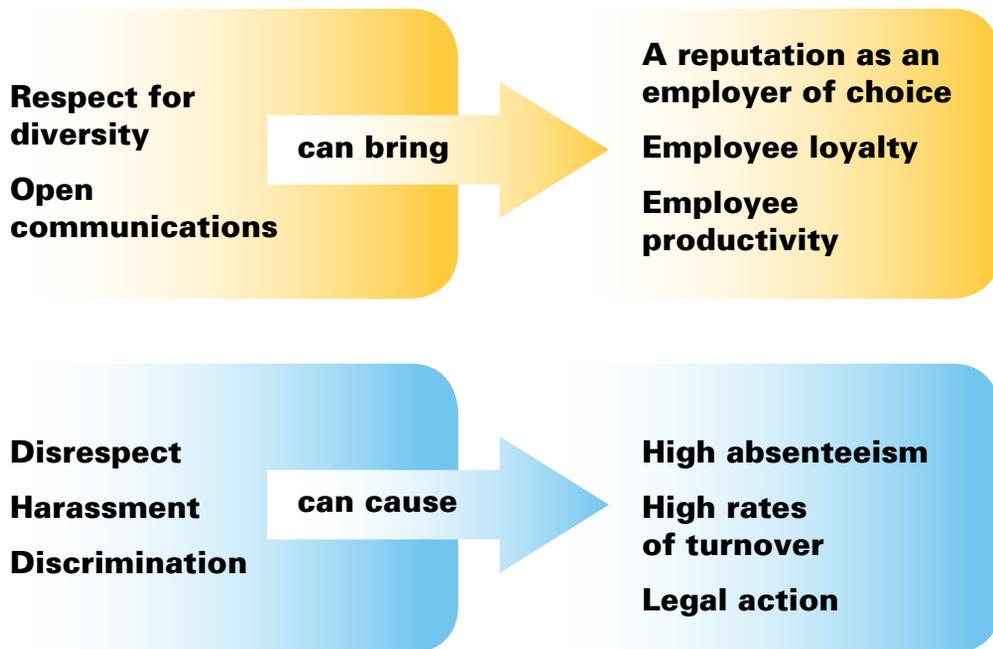
Here are a few steps that can help you move toward a more inclusive workplace:

- ✓ Post a calendar showing various ethnic and religious holidays – The University of Western Ontario offers an on-line multi-faith calendar that may be helpful – www.uwo.ca/equity/docs/mfcalendar.htm.
- ✓ Support flexible work arrangements that respect not only cultural differences, but also age, gender and family situations.
- ✓ Ensure that marketing and advertising materials reflect a range of age, sex and cultures.
- ✓ Offer opportunities for people to share information about their country of origin and their culture. Company social events are a great opportunity, for instance, for an international potluck.

*Joseph Eze,
a Quality Assurance Manager at EK3*

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Diversity pays



"Most businesses will have to increase their diversity if they are to thrive in the coming years, but it takes more than hiring more immigrants and people of colour. If you really want to be successful you will have to take steps to create a true culture of diversity, through training, leadership and great communications!"

— Dolores Bryant, President
Human Resources Professionals of London & District