

Hiring Immigrants in Hamilton

A Study of Employer Readiness

May 2013



Workforce Planning Hamilton
Planification de main d'oeuvre de Hamilton

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Project Design: Judy Travis, Executive Director

Research and Development : Sarah V. Wayland, PhD and Gerald Bierling

Project Management: Sharon Marafon



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CONTENTS

Project Overview.....	1
Immigrants in Hamilton.....	1
Description of Project	2
Objectives/Research Questions	3
Research Methods	3
Definitions.....	4
Research Findings	5
1. Employers are generally optimistic about hiring and growth.	5
2. Almost two-thirds of employers identified employee recruitment as a challenging issue; 6 in 10 cited difficulties recruiting employees with the required skills.....	7
3. Employers, even larger employers, rely heavily on informal methods of recruiting new employees.....	8
4. Hamilton employers are open to hiring immigrants, but most do not seek out immigrants in particular. The overwhelming reason why employers have hired immigrants is that they were the best qualified applicants. However, a significant portion of employers hired immigrants in order to realize new business opportunities or help diversify their client base.	9
5. By far, the main concerns that employers expressed about hiring immigrants related to language and communication issues..	12
6. Many Hamilton employers want to hire individuals who can speak other languages in addition to English, especially French.	14
7. Employers stated that most immigrant employees work in skilled positions, and 7 in 10 stated they do not find it difficult to evaluate educational credentials of immigrant applicants for skilled positions.....	16
8. Few Hamilton employers require or offer any specialized training, such as workplace language instruction, for immigrant employees in particular.	18
9. Almost all Hamilton employers feel that Canadian-born employees have integrated well with immigrant employees, and most are very satisfied with hiring immigrants.	19
10. Just under half of employers surveyed expressed an interest in supports from local agencies with sourcing and hiring immigrants. A similar percentage stated that they knew of local agencies that might help them.	21

Conclusions	24
Recommendations.....	26
Connecting immigrants to employers	26
Connecting service providers to employers.....	27
Improving employment readiness of immigrants.....	27
Improving diversity readiness of employers	28
Appendix A: Sampling and Survey Methods and Sample Profile.....	29
Appendix B: Immigrants in the Canadian Labour Market.....	31
Appendix C: Members of Advisory Team	36
Appendix D: List of Focus Group and Interview Participants.....	37

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Likelihood of Hiring at Least One New Employee Over the Next 12 Months, by Organization Size (blue) and Sector (beige) (%).....	6
Figure 2: Is Organization Currently Growing, Declining or Staying the Same? (%).....	6
Figure 3: Recruitment Challenges (%).....	7
Figure 4: Reasons for Hiring Immigrants (%).....	10
Figure 5: Reasons Preventing Organizations from Hiring Immigrants (%).....	12
Figure 6: Types of Positions in Which Immigrant Employees Work (%).....	17
Figure 7: Training Needs and Training Practices (%)	18
Figure 8: Integration of Canadian-born and Immigrant Employees (%)	20
Figure 9: Satisfaction with Hiring Immigrants (%).....	20

Table of Tables

Table 1: Methods of Recruitment (%).....	8
Table 2: Reasons for Hiring Immigrants, by Organization Size and Sector (%)	11
Table 3: Reasons Preventing Organization from Hiring Immigrants, by Organization Size and Sector (%).....	13
Table 4: Support Services that Organizations Would Find Useful, by Organization Size and Sector (%).....	22

Text Boxes

Text Box 1: Francophone Employers in Hamilton.....	15
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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Immigrant employment is an important issue for Hamilton, and it will continue to grow in importance as our labour force changes. Within two decades, approximately one in every three people in the Canadian labour force will have been born outside of Canada.¹ The ability of local employers not only to accommodate but also to benefit from changing labour force demographics will help determine Hamilton's future economic strength.

It is this context that Workforce Planning Hamilton has undertaken to consult with Hamilton area employers about hiring and employing immigrants. This survey is believed to be the first of its kind in Hamilton, and the results provide insight into our local context as compared with Canada-wide surveys and employer surveys in other cities.

Immigrants in Hamilton

Immigration to the Hamilton area increased in 2012, with just under 4,000 permanent residents "landing," an increase from 3,297 persons in 2011.² In fact, Hamilton experienced one of the only increases in the province, as permanent immigration to Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area declined over the same period.

Among recent immigrants to the City of Hamilton, arriving between 2006 and 2010, just under half (45.2%) were of prime working age (age 25-44), and more than half expressed their intention to work. The top countries of origin were Philippines, India, China, Iraq, and USA.

Immigrants to Hamilton have higher levels of education than the Canadian-born population, and these figures are generally on par with the average educational levels of immigrants to Canada for this period, with a few exceptions. Hamilton received proportionally fewer immigrants with university degrees, especially Bachelor's degrees. However, it received a slightly higher proportion of immigrants with doctorate degrees, most likely related to the presence of McMaster University.³ Working-age Hamiltonians are only half as likely to have a university degree as were immigrants living in Hamilton.⁴

1 Statistics Canada, Study: Projected trends to 2031 for the Canadian labour force, *The Daily*, August 17, 2011. These projections are based on Canada's permanent labour force and do not take into account temporary foreign workers.

2 Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Facts and Figures 2012 Preliminary tables*.

3 Sarah V. Wayland, 2010. *A Demographic Profile of Immigrants in Hamilton, Final Report*. Prepared for the City of Hamilton Immigration Strategy.

4 Calculated from 2006 Census, with data obtained from Workforce Planning Hamilton. At the time of writing, data from the 2011 National Household Survey (the successor to the Canadian Census) was not yet available.

Despite high education levels, immigrants are more likely to be unemployed and underemployed than their Canadian-born counterparts. In 2011, the unemployment rate for all landed immigrants was slightly higher than for residents born in Canada (6.6% vs. 6.2%) in the Hamilton area. Unemployment rates decrease with time in Canada: immigrants who have been here for 5 years or less have an unemployment rate of just over 10%, but this declines to 6.3% for immigrants who have been here longer.⁵ Immigrant women experienced lower unemployment rates than immigrant men, but their labour force participation rate was also slightly lower.⁶

In sum, immigrants to Hamilton on the whole have higher levels of education yet lower rates of employment compared to local Canadian-born populations. The underutilization of immigrant skills has costs that extend far beyond the well-being of immigrants: it costs employers, hinders innovation, and places unnecessary limits on earnings and therefore tax revenue. And each of these will only increase in importance with a growth in the share of immigrants in our local labour market.

Description of Project

This project was conceived from the desire to have a better understanding of employer readiness for hiring recent immigrants in Hamilton, including Francophone immigrants and the need for bilingual staff. It is viewed as essential background knowledge needed to inform the development of a local employer engagement strategy supporting immigrant employment.

The research was guided by a partnership between Workforce Planning Hamilton, the Francophone Immigration Network, and the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council's (HIPC) Employment Working Group. The HIPC Employment Working Group acted as the Steering Committee for this project which was placed on the agenda for the monthly meetings for the duration of the project, early November 2012 to April 2013. (A list of members is included as Appendix C.)

⁵ Hamilton Community Foundation, "Newcomers Key to Growth," *Vital Signs 2012*, based on custom data purchased from Statistics Canada.

⁶ The unemployment rate is the number of unemployed persons as a percentage of the labour force, while the labour force participation rate is the number of people in the labour force as a percentage of the population. That is, the unemployment rate only factors in people who participate in the labour force.

Objectives/Research Questions

This project had several interconnected objectives, each of which informed the research design:

- To summarize existing knowledge about recent immigrants within or seeking to enter Hamilton's labour force
- To identify current attitudes about hiring internationally trained newcomers among employers in the Hamilton area, including any barriers, and workplace experiences with recent immigrants
- To identify tools that employers need to support the hiring of internationally trained newcomers
- To educate employers about opportunities for hiring immigrants and working with local employment service providers
- To generate recommendations for improving local labour market outcomes for internationally trained immigrants

Research Methods

Research consisted of:

1. A brief literature review focusing on the most recent findings regarding the workforce integration of immigrants, including relevant survey research. The primary purpose of the literature review was to inform the development of the employer survey. The literature review forms Appendix B to this report.
2. A survey of employers, including questions about their experiences hiring and employing recent immigrants and the need to hire bilingual staff. A total of 318 employers responded to the survey which was administered by three trained telephone agents. The sample is representative of the overall employer population in Hamilton with respect to sector and size.⁷

Questions for the telephone-based survey focussed on employer hiring expectations, as well as attitudes, barriers and challenges regarding the hiring of recent immigrants, defined as people immigrating to Canada within the past 10 years.

⁷ See Appendix A for a more detailed description of sampling method and sample profile. All sub-sectors within the broader goods-producing and services-producing sectors were represented in the sample.

3. Focus groups and interviews with employers. Key themes identified in the literature review and survey results were used to generate some open-ended questions for employers. These questions were asked in four focus groups with a total of 33 employer participants and in supplemental interviews with 10 additional employers who were unable to attend the focus groups.

Each employer who completed the survey received an information and resource package developed by WPH and the HIPC to facilitate the hiring of immigrants. This package also contained contact information for local employment service providers.

Definitions

In this research, recent immigrants are individuals arriving in Canada within the past 10 years, unless noted otherwise. Recent immigrants enter Canada under various immigration categories, including in the economic class, family class, and as refugees. Many but not all immigrants are internationally-trained professionals.

In our analysis, employer organizations were categorized by sector and size. Under the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), the Canadian Economy is divided into five largely goods-producing industries – such as Manufacturing and Construction -- and 15 entirely services-producing industries, including Educational Services, Accommodation and Food Services, and Finance and Insurance.⁸ To analyze our relatively small sample, we used these broad sector divisions of goods-producing and services-producing industries.

Regarding employer organization size, small organizations are defined as having fewer than 20 employees. Medium-size organizations have 20 to 100 employees. Large organizations have more than 100 employees. A breakdown of the employer sample is found in Appendix A.

It doesn't matter if the person has an accent or is a little hard to understand. The number one issue is their ability to do the job.

- Hamilton employer

⁸ For further information about NAICS, please refer to the Industry Canada website: <http://www.ic.gc.ca>.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Key Finding 1. **Employers are generally optimistic about hiring and growth.**

To gauge the potential demand for hiring immigrants, employers were asked a series of questions related to current and anticipated hiring needs. On average, employers indicated that 14.5% of their current employees were hired within the past 12 months.⁹ Turnover was slightly higher in the service-sector (15.3%) and largest organizations (17.6%).

The potential for immediate hiring needs was highest among large organizations. While 58.2% of employers indicated that it was very likely they would hire at least one new employee over the next 12 months, almost all (97.1%) of the largest employers indicated that hiring at least one employee over the next 12 months was very likely. There was very little difference in hiring expectations on the basis of sector (Figure 1). The findings from this question relate to the answers employers gave when they were asked what percentage of their employees leave in a typical year. About 60% of employers noted that less than 5% of their workforce leaves in a typical year, and a further 14.6% indicated that 5 to 9% leave in a typical year.

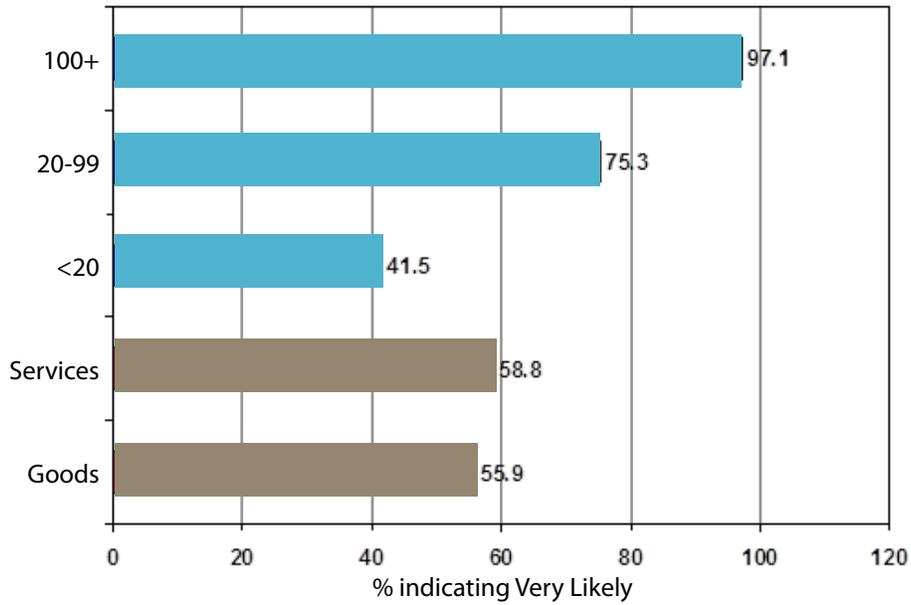
Employers had a fairly upbeat assessment of the Hamilton economy (and by extension potential hiring needs), with almost 40% of employers indicating that their organization was growing, and very few (4.4%) indicating decline. Larger organizations and those in the service-sector were most likely to indicate growth. Close to 20% of respondents overall, and 40.7% of goods-producing organizations, indicated that growth trends varied among specific parts of the organization.

Our firm recently hired someone because they spoke Mandarin and Cantonese.

- Hamilton employer

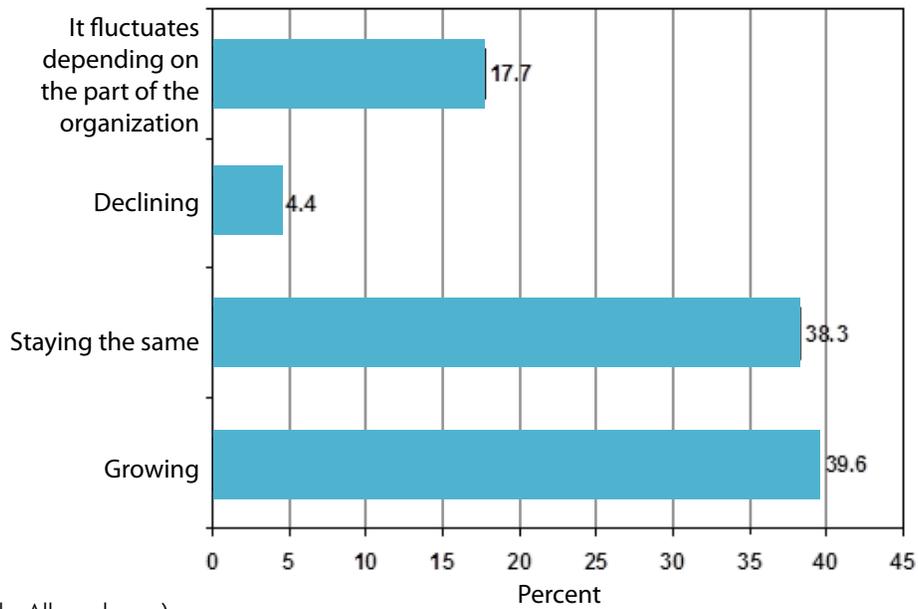
⁹ This is slightly lower than the 18.4% of employees in Ontario in 2012 who had been at their current job for one year or less (Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Table 282-0038.)

Figure 1: Likelihood of Hiring at Least One New Employee Over the Next 12 Months, by Organization Size (blue) and Sector (beige) (%)



(Sample: All employers)

Figure 2: Is Organization Currently Growing, Declining or Staying the Same? (%)



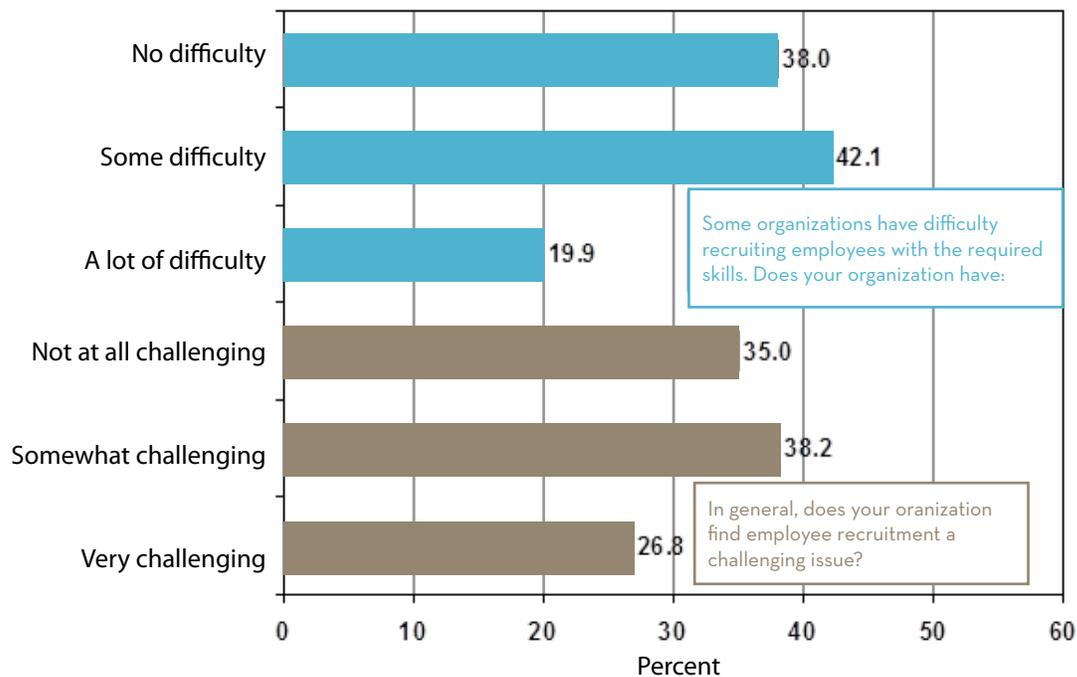
(Sample: All employers)

Key Finding 2. Almost two-thirds of employers identified employee recruitment as a challenging issue; 6 in 10 cited difficulties recruiting employees with the required skills.

Employers indicated the potential for job openings, but they also noted the difficulties with filling those openings. As Figure 3 indicates, just under two-thirds of employers indicated that they find employee recruitment a challenging issue, and that recruiting employees with the required skills is difficult.

Organizations in the goods-producing sector are slightly less likely than service-sector organizations to have difficulties and challenges in this regard. For example 45.8% of goods-producing organizations reported having no difficulty recruiting employees with the required skills, while 36.2% of service-sector organizations indicated no difficulties in this regard.

Figure 3: Recruitment Challenges (%)



(Sample: All employers)

One employer interviewed for this research stated that it was so difficult to find qualified employees that his organization has resorted to using a staffing agency to find and hire workers from other countries. The employer had recently hired someone from the Netherlands, noting that it had worked out “fantastic” and that he wished he could get more workers like him.

It is hard to find qualified people so we have had to bring in workers from other countries who have the mechanical skills.

- Hamilton employer

Key Finding 3. Employers, even larger employers, rely heavily on informal methods of recruiting new employees.

Informal methods (word-of-mouth and personal contacts) are the most commonly used methods of employee recruitment, even among larger employers, as shown in Table 1. The size and sector of the organization has an impact on the recruitment methods. Specifically, larger organizations and service-sector organizations are most likely to employ resource-intensive methods (such as company websites and co-ops) than are smaller and goods-producing organizations. They are also more likely to make use of government-funded employment service agencies.

We get a lot of applicants for positions, but they are not necessarily qualified for the positions they want.

- Hamilton employer

Table 1: Methods of Recruitment (%)

	Organization Size (# of employees)			Sector		All
	<20	20-99	100+	Goods	Services	
Word of mouth/employee networks	84.2	88.8	91.7	74.6	89.2	86.5
Personal contacts	77.6	79.6	83.3	78.0	78.8	78.6
Online job listing	72.1	77.6	97.2	66.1	79.2	76.7
Co-op students &/or interns	48.6	58.2	80.6	42.4	58.3	55.3
Your organization's website	36.6	57.1	91.7	27.1	54.4	49.4
Newspaper ads	35.0	41.8	47.2	44.1	37.1	38.4
Government funded employment service agencies	32.8	31.6	58.3	32.2	36.3	35.5
Social media	31.7	30.6	41.7	22.0	35.1	32.7
Staffing agencies	29.0	28.6	50.0	33.9	30.9	31.4
College/university job presentations	18.0	28.6	61.1	18.6	28.2	26.4
Other	20.2	22.4	25.0	35.6	18.1	21.4
Booths at career fairs	8.2	20.4	52.8	5.1	20.1	17.3
High school job fairs or presentations	3.8	9.2	22.2	10.2	6.9	7.5
Radio or television ads	1.6	4.1	11.2	1.7	3.9	3.5

Note: Employers could select more than one type of support service, which is why column percentages do not add up to 100%. The most commonly cited "Other" methods of recruitment are signs (on roads, in windows and on buses) and walk-ins (which is not technically a recruitment method).

(Sample: All employers)

Key Finding 4. Hamilton employers are open to hiring immigrants, but most do not seek out immigrants in particular. The overwhelming reason why employers have hired immigrants is that they were the best qualified applicants. However, a significant portion of employers hired immigrants in order to realize new business opportunities or help diversify their client base.

On average 7.1% of responding organization's current employees are recent immigrants (those who have immigrated to Canada within the past 10 years). This percentage is noticeably higher for large organizations (15.5%) than smaller organizations (6.4% for those organizations with fewer than 20 employees, and 5.8% for those with 20-99 employees).

We pick the most qualified applicant. Their background doesn't matter.

- Hamilton employer

Among the organizations that currently employ recent immigrants, almost one-quarter reported having hired 10 or more recent immigrants within the past decade. As would be expected (perhaps because large organizations hire more people), larger organizations report the highest percentage of recent immigrants hires. For example, 73.1% of the largest organizations reported hiring 10 or more recent immigrants within the past 10 years. However, only 7.7% of the smallest, and 16.7% of medium-size organizations reported hiring 10 or more recent immigrants in the past 10 years.

Service-sector organizations are more likely than goods-producing organizations to have hired at least 10 or more recent immigrants (25.9% compared to 16.7%).

The hiring practices of employers with respect to immigrants match their intentions for future hiring practices. **When asked if they plan on hiring immigrants to meet future and current human resource needs, almost 85% responded that they would do so. Many employers further noted that they would do so if the applicant was the best qualified. So while this finding may not indicate that employers purposely target immigrants for hiring, it does indicate their openness to hiring immigrants.**

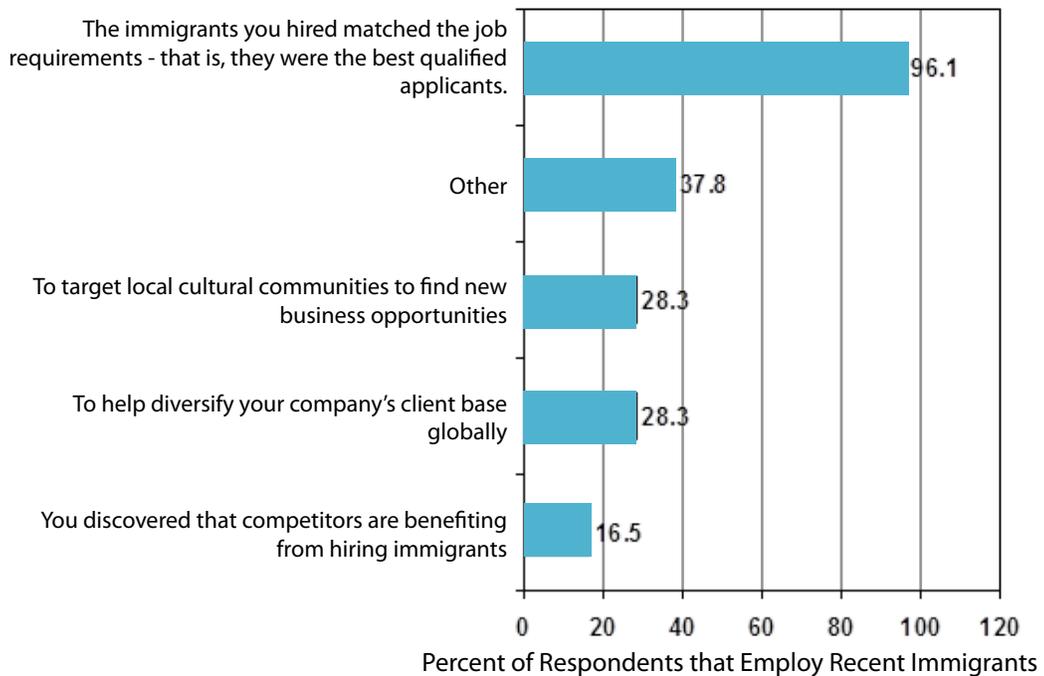
There are various reasons why organizations hire immigrants. Respondents who indicated that they employ recent immigrants were asked to select from a list some of the reasons that organizations would hire recent immigrants. As Figure 4 shows, almost all of them reported that the immigrants they hired were the best qualified candidates. This finding corresponds to results from the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council's (TRIEC) 2011 survey of GTA employers, and the Hiring Immigrants Ottawa (HIO) 2012 survey of Ottawa employers.¹⁰ In both those surveys employers were presented with scenarios under which they rated the likelihood of hiring skilled immigrants. The scenario "If they matched the job requirements" was the most common response, as it was selected by roughly 80% and 75% of employers respectively.

¹⁰ The wording of the question used in the TRIEC and HIO surveys was slightly different, so a direct comparison of results is not possible.

A significant portion of Hamilton employers also noted some of the benefits of having a diverse workforce (i.e., to help diversify their client base and realize new business opportunities). These results are also very similar to those found in the TRIEC and HIO surveys. Of those who cited 'Other' reasons, a good work ethic was the most common response, followed by the business benefits of having employees with non-English language skills.

Table 2 shows that larger organizations are more likely than smaller ones to indicate that immigrants would be hired to help them diversify their client base. Organizations in the services sector are more likely than those in the goods sector to indicate that "targeting local cultural communities for new business opportunities" is a reason to hire immigrants.

Figure 4: Reasons for Hiring Immigrants (%)



(Sample: Employers currently employing recent immigrants)

Table 2: Reasons for Hiring Immigrants, by Organization Size and Sector (%)

	Size (# of employees)			Sector	
	<20	20-99	100+	Goods	Services
To help diversity your company's client base globally	25.0	26.5	38.5	27.8	28.4
To target local cultural communities to find new business opportunities	28.8	26.5	30.8	16.7	30.3
You discovered that competitors are benefiting from hiring immigrants	15.4	18.4	15.4	11.1	17.4
The immigrants you hired matched the job requirements - that is, they were the best qualified applicants.	96.2	98.0	92.3	100.0	95.4

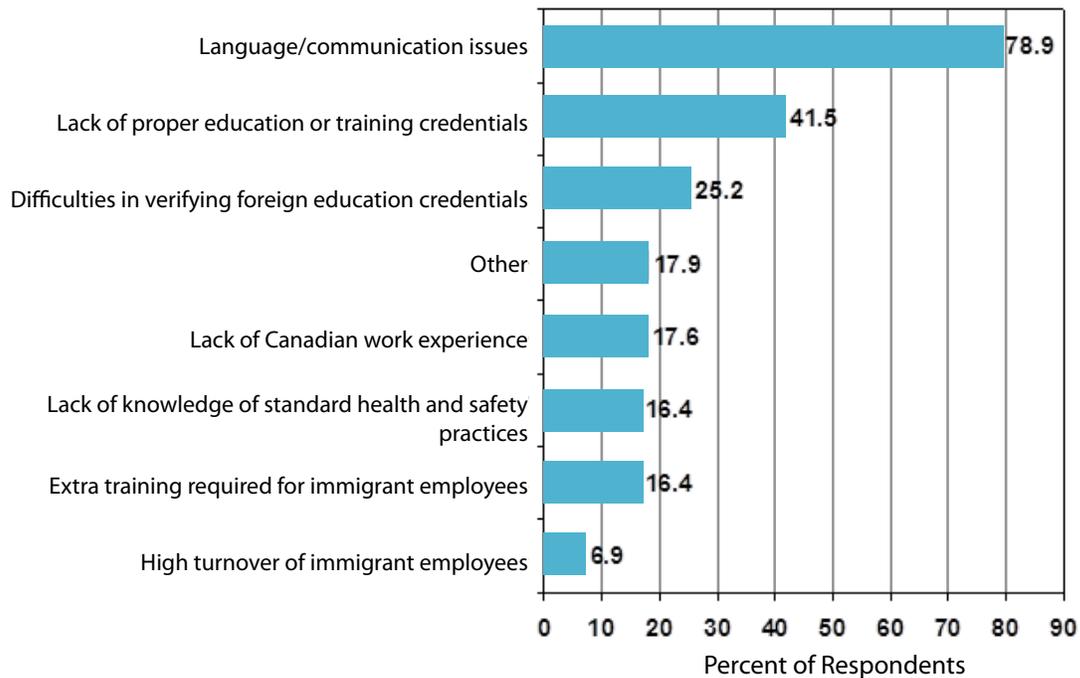
(Sample: Employers currently employing recent immigrants)

These findings were reinforced in the employer focus groups and interviews, with most participants stating that their organizations hired recent immigrants when they were the best qualified applicants. Participants noted various assets that immigrants brought to their organizations, including experiences they brought from other countries and their ability to connect with clients of the same cultural backgrounds. Someone from a staffing firm noted that employers sometimes requested immigrants because of their good work ethic.

Key Finding 5. By far, the main concerns that employers expressed about hiring immigrants related to language and communication issues.

Employers were also asked to indicate reasons that might prevent them from hiring immigrants. Figure 5 indicates that language/communication is the largest factor that might prevent organizations from hiring immigrants. While issues related to education and the evaluation of educational credentials are also important to employers, they are not as important as language/communication. Those who indicated “Other” barriers were asked to specify what those other barriers are. Most often, those further explanations repeated problems related to applicants not having the proper language/communication skills, and how that might be related to cultural awareness and practices in the workplace. However, a few employers noted that hiring is done only through the union. So if a recent immigrant is not a member of the union they cannot be hired.

Figure 5: Reasons Preventing Organizations from Hiring Immigrants (%)



(Sample: All employers)

Despite this barrier having figured prominently in Canadian literature and media coverage in recent years, “lack of Canadian work experience” did not figure greatly among employers’ concerns.

Table 3 indicates that the size of the organization has more of an impact than does the sector on the type of factors preventing organizations from hiring immigrants. More specifically:

- education issues (proper training; verifying credentials) would be more of a barrier to hiring for larger organizations as opposed to smaller ones; the same is true for “lack of Canadian work experience”
- language/communication issues are more of a concern to service-sector organizations

Table 3: Reasons Preventing Organization from Hiring Immigrants, by Organization Size and Sector (%)

	Size (# of employees)			Sector	
	<20	20-99	100+	Goods	Services
Language/communication issues	78.7	80.6	75.0	57.6	83.8
Lack of Canadian work experience	16.9	16.3	25.0	16.9	17.8
Extra training required for immigrant employees	17.5	12.2	19.4	15.3	16.6
Lack of proper education or training credentials	41.5	37.8	50.0	42.4	41.3
Difficulties in verifying foreign education credentials	20.2	29.6	38.9	27.1	24.7
High turnover of immigrant employees	8.2	5.1	5.6	8.5	6.6
Lack of knowledge of standard health and safety practices	18.6	13.3	13.9	16.9	16.2

(Sample: All employers)

In the employer focus groups, participants generally supported the survey findings, especially around the importance of language and communication skills. Some industrial employers noted that in the past they had been more concerned about workplace safety issues among immigrants, due to possible communication barriers, but that these had never translated into any real problems.

There is no such thing as a pure labourer job anymore, where someone just keeps their head down. They have to communicate and be able to read spreadsheets, etc.

- Hamilton employer

Some participants felt that employers were reluctant to invest in employee training, but others stated that their organization preferred to hire people with good “soft skills” (including communication) and train them in the workplace for the specific job skills. Participants noted that the nature of the job market has changed, with the decline of well-paying lower skilled jobs.

Many employers noted that hiring and orienting new employees is labour intensive, so they wanted to hire the right person for the job the first time around. Sometimes this made them less likely to take a chance on an immigrant, especially when they were not sure how to verify their international credentials. Other employers noted that immigrants are often overqualified for their positions, and this made them more likely to leave if they found something more commensurate with their skills.

Others expressed that they would like to diversify their workforce but did not know how to go about increasing diversity and connecting with immigrants. Some organizations were located in diverse neighbourhoods and faced challenges connecting with the local population and as such had not hired from the local community. One employer in the hospitality industry stated that their firm would like to do more hiring within the neighbourhood so that transportation to work would not be an issue for employees.

Key Finding 6. Many Hamilton employers want to hire individuals who can speak other languages in addition to English, especially French.

As shown in the previous section, this research indicates that language can be a barrier, if the employee does not speak the common language of the workplace well enough. Conversely, it can also be an asset, if the employee speaks more than one language.

Immigrant employees bring knowledge of a vast number of different languages to the workplace. In some cases, this knowledge provides essential communication to clients, customers, and patients. In the employer focus groups, examples of this were provided from different sectors, including healthcare, hospitality, financial services, and professional services. Several participants stated that their organization kept a list or database of multilingual employees and called upon them if the need arose.

Immigrants serve a very diverse demographic, and we promote the different languages they speak to be able to better serve our clients. Sometimes we look to hire someone with specific language skills, but we don't know where to find them

- Hamilton employer

In our sample of employers, just under 8% were deemed bilingual in that employees were required to speak some language other than English in the workplace. Among employers that had hired recent immigrants, 20% were deemed bilingual. French was by far the most commonly-cited second language required. (We refer to these as Francophone employers, and a profile of them is presented in Text Box 1.) Other languages cited as required by local employers included Cantonese/Mandarin, Italian, Spanish, East Indian languages, German and Korean. Based on the focus group and interview findings, many more employers see the benefits of hiring bilingual and multilingual individuals, even if this skill is not a job requirement.

French is a big one... employees who speak French would be amazing. We outsource some of our [telephone] lines, and if the customer can't speak English they are outsourced to a language line staffed by an interpreter.

- Hamilton employer

Francophone Employers in Hamilton

Of the 318 employers surveyed, 18 required employees to speak French. Among these 18, whom we refer to as “Francophone employers,” there were some noticeable differences from other employers. The differences noted below are based on differences of at least 10 percentage points from other employers. However, given the small number of cases, there is not enough data to run statistical significance tests.

Francophone employers are:

- more service-sector than goods-producing
- larger than other employers
- more likely to indicate that they are growing
- more likely to have difficulty recruiting people with the required skills
- more likely to have immigrant employees, and also are more likely planning on hiring immigrants in the future
- more likely to hire immigrants to:
 - help diversify their company's client base globally
 - target local cultural communities to find new business opportunities
- less likely to say that workplace integration has gone very well
- more likely to have cultural diversity training in the workplace
- more likely to cite the following as reasons for why immigrants might not be hired:
 - Language/communication issues
 - Lack of proper education or training credentials
 - Difficulties in verifying foreign education credentials
- more likely to want assistance from local agencies
- less likely to want access to an immigrant resume database
- more aware of local agencies providing such services
- more interested in mentorship

Key Finding 7. Employers stated that most immigrant employees work in skilled positions, and 7 in 10 stated they do not find it difficult to evaluate educational credentials of immigrant applicants for skilled positions.

In terms of education, a large majority of employers (71.4%) with immigrant employees noted that most immigrant employees had a post-secondary (or equivalent) level of education.

Most employers with immigrant employees (71.2%) reported that they don't find it difficult to evaluate the educational credentials of immigrant applicants.¹¹ This too is related to the size and sector of an organization:

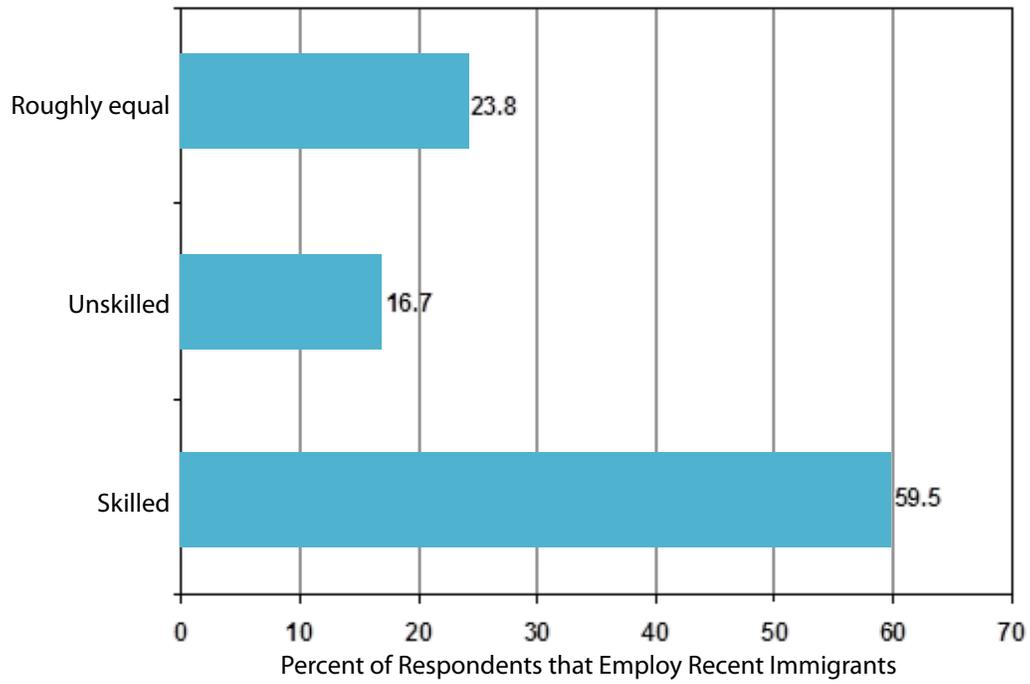
- the goods-producing sector is less likely than the service-sector to report having difficulty evaluating credentials (16.7% vs. 30.8%);
- smaller organizations are the most likely to report having difficulty evaluating education credentials (34%) compared to medium-sized (28.5%) and large organizations (19.2%).

Figure 6 shows that 59.5% of employers reported that their immigrant employees work in skilled positions, and a further 23.8% reported that these employees are equally divided between skilled and non-skilled positions. The key differences in terms of size and sector are that:

- the goods-producing sector is more likely than the service-sector to have immigrant employees working in unskilled positions (27.8% vs. 14.8%);
- smaller organizations are the most likely to have their immigrant employees to be working in skilled positions (68.6%); however, the largest organizations are the mostly likely to report their immigrant employees to be divided equally among skilled and unskilled positions (30.8%).

¹¹ This finding is based on organizations which currently employ recent immigrants and are hiring for skilled positions. The findings presented in Table 3 are for all employers, whether or not they employ recent immigrants, and for all hiring, not just skilled positions. In other words, the concerns expressed by employers around credential evaluation are not born out among employers who have experience with recent immigrants in skilled positions.

Figure 6: Types of Positions in Which Immigrant Employees Work (%)



(Sample: Employers currently with recent immigrant employees)

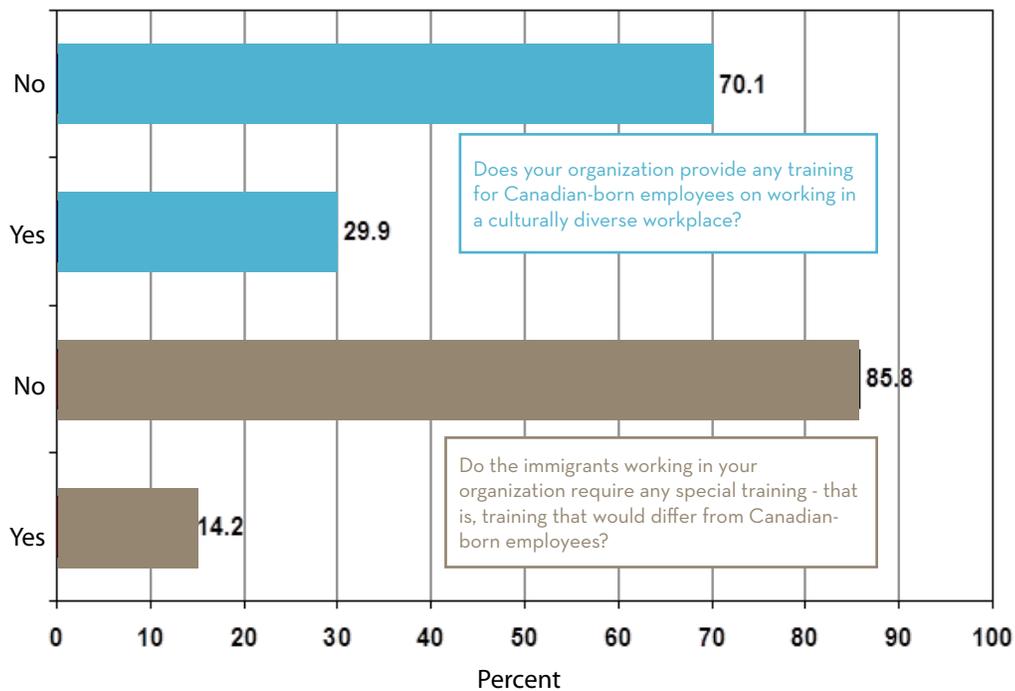
Key Finding 8. Few Hamilton employers require or offer any specialized training, such as workplace language instruction, for immigrant employees in particular.

Figure 7 shows that very few employers (14.2%) indicated that the immigrants working within their organization require any special training (that is, training that would be different than that required by Canadian-born employees). The need for special training was most acute in the service-sector (15.6%) and among the large organizations (30.8%).

Among employers noting that their immigrant employees require special training, the training most required related to job skills, cultural awareness and communication. Not surprisingly, language and communication issues were also cited most by employers as reasons that might prevent them from hiring immigrants.

Figure 7 also shows that approximately 1/3 of employers with immigrant employees provide training for their Canadian-born employees on working in a culturally diverse workplace.

Figure 7: Training Needs and Training Practices (%)



(Sample: Employers currently employing recent immigrants)

In the past, Hamilton employers that hired many immigrants such as Levi Strauss and Oak Run Bakery offered English classes in the workplace. This no longer appears to be the case. In the employer focus groups, few employers identified any training offered to immigrant or non-immigrant employees regarding Canadian workplace practices, diversity/anti-oppression, and the like. One employer stated that they “proactively” offered a two-day cultural competency training delivered by an external consultant. They found the training to be helpful.

We identified only a few Hamilton-area employers that offer specific training and supports to internationally trained individuals. The most comprehensive example is Hamilton Health Sciences’ Internationally Educated Nurse (IEN) and ESL Nurse Integration Project, funded by the federal and provincial governments. It is a partnership between Hamilton Health Sciences, Mohawk College, McMaster University, the Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses (CARE), and the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI).

We don't have training especially for immigrants, but if a new hire comes in as a labourer with no experience, we will train them. So far I have not seen the need for language training for any employees.

- Hamilton employer

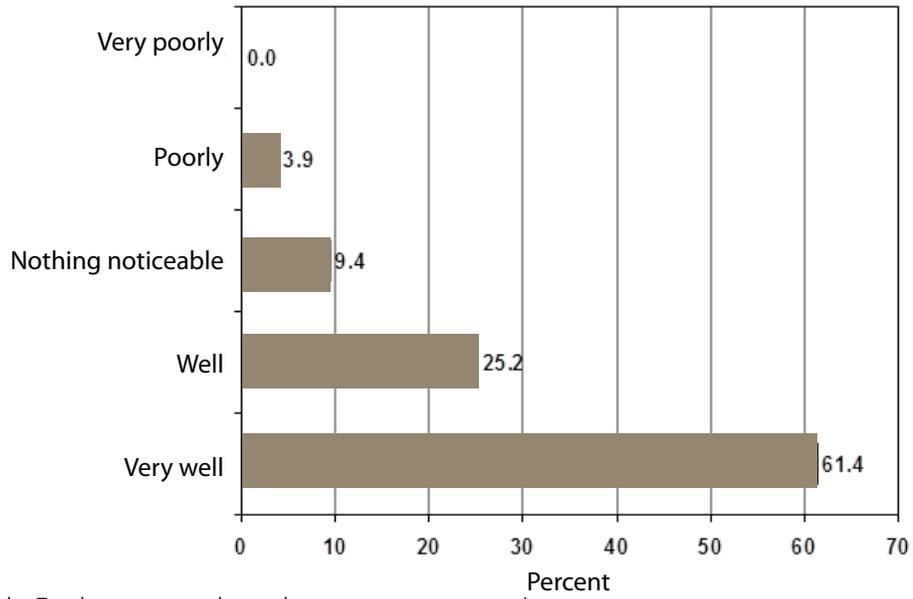
Key Finding 9. Almost all Hamilton employers feel that Canadian-born employees have integrated well with immigrant employees, and most are very satisfied with hiring immigrants.

As shown in Figure 8, almost all organizations, regardless of size or sector, feel that Canadian-born employees have integrated well with immigrant employees. This may help explain why organizations are so satisfied with hiring immigrants (Figure 9). These survey findings were reiterated by focus group participants, many of whom stated that immigrants had a good work ethic and were eager to learn new skills.

Half of our employees are immigrants. We pair up new hires with staff who speak the language to make their transition period with us easier.

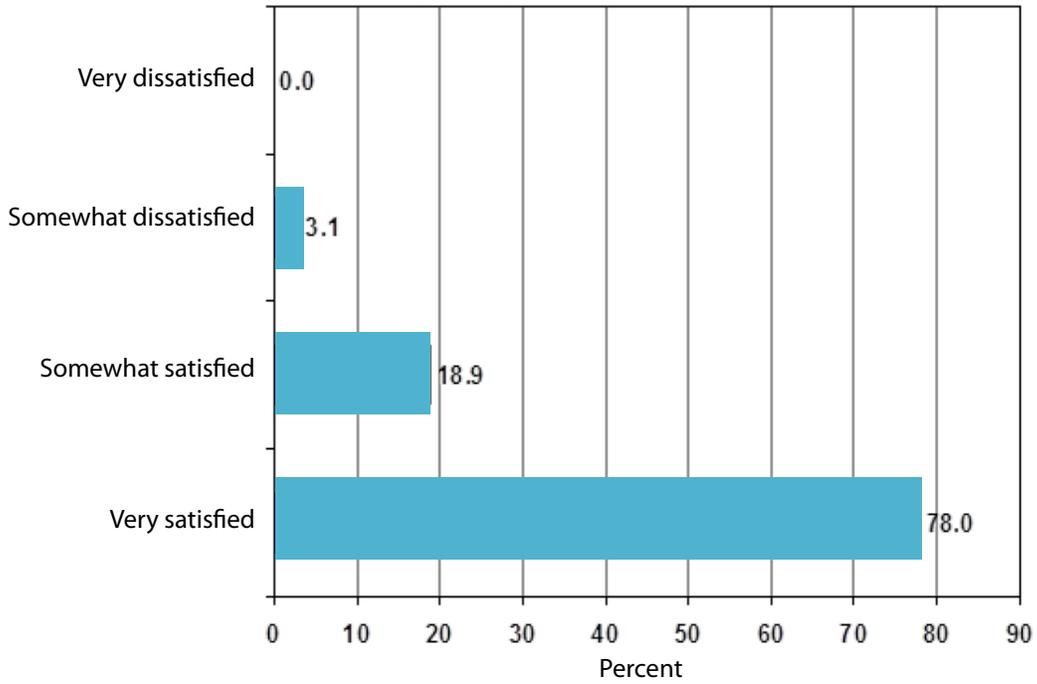
- Hamilton employer

Figure 8: Integration of Canadian-born and Immigrant Employees (%)



(Sample: Employers currently employing recent immigrants)

Figure 9: Satisfaction with Hiring Immigrants (%)



(Sample: Employers currently employing recent immigrants)

Key Finding 10. Just under half of employers surveyed expressed an interest in supports from local agencies with sourcing and hiring immigrants. A similar percentage stated that they knew of local agencies that might help them.

All employers were also asked a series of questions related to supports and services that might be able to help them hire recent immigrants and ease the transition of immigrants into the workplace. Willingness to make use of local agencies (such as Employment Hamilton, the YMCA, and Goodwill) to find and hire immigrants was almost evenly split, with 52.4% stating that their organization could use the assistance of local agencies for finding and hiring immigrants, compared to 47.6% who did not think their organization could use the assistance of local agencies. While there was little difference in responses in terms of organization size, sector type did have an impact. Service sector employers were more than twice as likely as good-producing to be interested in working with employment service providers to find and hire immigrants. Only 23.7% of good-producing organizations expressed an interest in making use of such services, compared to 53.1% of service-sector organizations.

Among the organizations expressing interest in such supports and services, they most commonly cited an interest in obtaining information on where to source immigrant talent, followed closely by an interest in accessing a database of immigrant resumes. As Table 4 shows, there are some differences in terms of organizational size, but fewer differences in terms of sector. Larger organizations were slightly more likely than smaller organizations to seek assistance in terms of information provision, such as access to a database of immigrant resumes. Smaller organizations were more likely to express an interest to have active assistance, including support with pre-screening immigrant candidates, language training from local agencies to assist them with finding, cross-cultural communication for employees, and hiring strategies to recruit and retain immigrants.

Employers were also asked to indicate if a program of financial incentives would increase the likelihood of their organization hiring recent immigrants. Opinion was close to being split, with 55.7% indicating that this would increase the likelihood.

We had a good experience using a placement agency which vouched for its candidates even though they could not confirm the foreign work experience. They provided a reference, and it worked out.

- Hamilton employer

Table 4: Support Services that Organizations Would Find Useful, by Organization Size and Sector (%)

	Organization Size (# of employees)			Sector		All
	<20	20-99	100+	Goods	Services	
Information on where to source immigrant talent	81.0	76.0	87.5	78.6	80.3	80.1
Accessing a database of immigrant resumes	77.4	78.0	81.3	78.6	78.1	78.1
Support with pre-screening immigrant candidates	70.2	76.0	56.3	71.4	70.1	70.2
Support with language training	69.0	56.0	50.0	57.1	63.5	62.9
Support with cross-cultural communication	58.3	56.0	50.0	71.4	55.5	57.0
Strategies to recruit and retain immigrants	57.1	56.0	50.0	64.3	55.5	56.3
Support with bringing someone into the organization and integrating immigrant talent	60.7	48.0	31.3	57.1	53.3	53.6
Other	9.5	12.0	12.5	0.0	11.7	10.6

(Sample: Employers expressing an interest in the use of support service agencies.)

The TRIEC and HIO surveys had somewhat different results compared to the responses of Hamilton employers.¹² In particular, Toronto and Ottawa employers ranked “language training” and “cultural communication” issues relatively higher than did Hamilton employers in terms of assistance that would be useful to them. Toronto employers were similar to Hamilton employers in that they ranked “where to source immigrant talent” as the most useful support service.

¹² A direct comparison of percentages is not possible, because the question was worded differently in the TRIEC and HIO surveys. Also, in the TRIEC and HIO surveys all employers were asked this question (i.e., not just those who expressed an interest in the particular service/assistance areas).

Just under half of the organizations (45.1%) were aware of any local agencies that provide such services. These organizations were then asked to list the local agencies they knew of. They named existing employment service agencies, settlement agencies, for-profit staffing agencies, and even some agencies that in fact do not provide employment-related supports to employers. These results indicate a general lack of awareness by most employers regarding local agencies that might be able to provide employment supports.

Half of the employers surveyed expressed interest in mentorship programs for immigrants, especially larger and goods producing organizations. Opinion was divided with regards to mentorship programs for skilled immigrants. When asked if they were interested in learning more about such mentorship programs, exactly 50% said yes and 50% said no. Interest was higher in the service-sector (52.9%) compared to the goods-producing sector (37.3%). It was also higher in the largest organizations (61.8%) compared to small (46.4%) and medium-sized organizations (52.0%).

CONCLUSIONS

In 2006, an initiative of Workforce Planning Hamilton (formerly called HTAB) named Hamilton Immigrant Workforce Integration Network (HIWIN) sought to identify and document existing employment-related services available to newcomers in the City of Hamilton and to identify collaborative actions that could improve immigrant workforce integration. A review of the research informing that initiative reveals that not much has changed overall: immigrants still struggle to find work commensurate with their skills, and many employers do not know how to connect with immigrant talent, nor do they know how employment agencies and other service providers might be of assistance.¹³ The need still remains to better “connect the dots” between immigrants, employers, and service providers.

This initiative, the Hiring Immigrants Project, provides further insight into the employer perspective in Hamilton. It is hoped that by incorporating this perspective into our existing knowledge base, we have further confirmation of the tools needed to improve the local employment outcomes of immigrants.

Stepping back from the individual, specific findings of this research, a bigger picture of employer attitudes and practices around hiring and working with immigrants, especially recent immigrants, emerges. By bundling some of these specific findings together, it becomes easier to identify ways to improve local immigrant employment outcomes. These findings form the basis of the recommendations.

First, almost two-thirds of employers identified employee recruitment as a challenging issue, and 6 in 10 cited difficulties recruiting employees with the required skills. Employers also rely heavily on informal methods of recruiting new employees, including word of mouth, personal contacts, and employee networks. Many employers do not know how to source immigrant talent, or to connect with local immigrants, yet some of them specifically wish to hire immigrants. Fewer than half of employers were aware of any local agencies that could support them in finding and hiring immigrants.

In both the survey and the focus groups, the general sentiment was that organizations hire the most qualified candidate, whether or not that person is a recent immigrant.

¹³ HIWIN, *Immigrant Employment in Hamilton: Connecting the Dots*. Prepared by Sarah V. Wayland (Hamilton: Hamilton Immigrant Workforce Integration Network, 2007).

The reasons why employers might not hire immigrants mostly focused on language and communication issues, and to a lesser extent on lack of credentials and inability to evaluate credentials. In the service sector, 84% of employers surveyed cited language and communication issues as a reason not to hire immigrants, compared to 58% of goods sector employers.

Employers had a wide variety of experiences with immigrants, but most were very positive. A few respondents noted that they may have experienced some problems with hiring immigrants, which mostly centred around language/communication issues and cultural differences. Some specific language-related problems included difficulties communicating with customers and co-workers, and managing filing systems. But other respondents also noted that knowledge of other languages can be an asset, depending on the type of clients the organization serves.

Interestingly, where some organizations might have noted a negative aspect associated with employing immigrants, an equal number made a positive comment on the same issue. For example, while a few organizations thought that immigrant employee turnover was high, the same number of organizations commented that immigrant employee turnover was low.

Employers did not consider “Canadian experience” to be an important factor in hiring immigrants. In the focus groups, in fact, numerous employers stated that they preferred to train people themselves, and that it was much more important that employees have good communication and human relations skills.

Fewer than half of employers were interested in or could even identify any employment service providers who could help them connect with immigrant talent. This finding, combined with the finding that employers overwhelmingly stated that they hire the most qualified candidates for a position, indicates how service providers can add value to the hiring experiences of local employers. If they can understand employers’ needs and connect them with qualified, suitable candidates, service providers will have gone a long way towards closing some of the knowledge and service gaps identified in this research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The HIPC Employment Working Group served as the Steering Committee for this project, and it will work to publicize the project findings and recommendations. The HIPC Employment Working Group will prioritize and work with partners to execute the recommendations found below.

Based on the findings described in this report, it is recommended that stakeholders in Hamilton work together to increase awareness of recent immigrants to employers and to support employers in hiring and retaining immigrants. It is recommended that collaboration and implementation focus on the following specific recommendations:

Connecting immigrants to employers

1. Develop an online database or connect with an existing one to feature local immigrant job-seekers with pre-screened resumes and credential evaluations.
2. Create a monthly profile of 3-5 recent immigrants seeking employment in Hamilton that could be distributed to the employer databases held by employment service providers and others, with contact information provided to employers who wish to connect with the job-seekers.
3. Create a mentoring program to match job-seekers with persons working in their intended field, focusing on larger local employers such as City of Hamilton.
 - 3a. Investigate and promote models for employers to follow, such as The City of Toronto model that allows employees 24 hours/year to devote to mentoring, or professional associations that award professional development credits for mentoring.
 - 3b. Create an “alumni” database and network of mentors and mentees to be used as a pool of potential mentors and spokespersons for mentorship, and also for “reunion” events that may be held in the future.
4. Create opportunities for immigrants to connect with employers in informal settings that allow for networking, e.g., professional meetings, professional and sectoral associations, professional networking events, even having employers act as facilitators at the citizenship ceremonies held at Mohawk College and elsewhere.

- 4a. Compile a list of professional and sectoral organizations and promote to recent immigrants.
- 4b. Encourage service clubs such as Rotary, Zonta, and Kiwanis to promote their organizations and membership opportunities within local immigrant communities.
- 4c. Identify the most common professional fields shared by recent immigrants (e.g., engineering) and organize events, projects, or recreational activities that can link them with appropriate professional and sectoral organizations. (Working on a common project or challenge helps to overcome cultural barriers, provides motivation not present in a “meet and greet” setting.)
5. Use neutral, community-based information sources (paper and web-based) to promote internationally-trained immigrants to employers. These sources should show employers how they can benefit from hiring international talent.

Connecting service providers to employers

6. Encourage job developers to develop solid relationships with employers so as to better understand their employment needs and promote recent immigrant job-seekers based on their knowledge of each employer.
7. Train employment service providers in employer-focused marketing and public relations, targeting the service sector in particular, including use of social media and local media to profile particular candidates and promote successes.
8. Follow up on employer packages that went out as part of this Hiring Immigrants Project, and use the feedback to strengthen and enhance services wherever possible.

Improving employment readiness of immigrants

9. Continue local provision of ESL and FSL at all language levels, especially in ways that can support job seekers in the service sector.
 - 9a. Advanced language courses should include a focus on workplace communication and culture.
 - 9b. In advanced language classes, investigate use of industry or sector research and cold calling of potential employers (as in Second Career).

10. Share HIP survey results with employment service providers such as employment counselors to motivate them to encourage immigrant clients to improve their “essential skills” and soft skills.¹⁴
11. Encourage development of “essential skills” and soft skills in all language and employment workshops.
12. Offer an event for front-line employment provider workers in which they can learn about the value of diversity in the workplace, for example, by bringing in a diversity expert such as Lionel Laroche.
13. Increase newcomer awareness of (and access to) employment services.
14. Make it easier for employers to access credential recognition programs such as ICAS and WES, perhaps by arranging for third party coverage of fees, for example from foundations.
15. Advocate for Smart Serve and other employment preparation training programs to be offered in languages other than English and French. (At present, Smart Serve is offered in Mandarin and Cantonese, with Korean and Spanish “coming soon.”)

Improving diversity readiness of employers

16. Promote existing options for diversity training to local employers, including group packages in which training is shared among several employers.

¹⁴ The Government of Canada defines the Essential Skills as Reading, Document Use, Numeracy, Writing, Oral Communication, Computer use, Thinking, Oral communication, and Working With Others. HRSDC, <http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/les/index.shtml>

APPENDIX A: SAMPLING AND SURVEY METHODS AND SAMPLE PROFILE

The employer sample was developed to reflect the sector and organizational size composition of the Hamilton economy as based on the June 2012 Canadian Business Patterns database. Survey questions were developed in partnership between the Hiring Immigrants Project team and the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council. As well, some questions in the survey were modified versions of the questions employed by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) in their 2011 survey of GTA employers, and the Hiring Immigrants Ottawa 2012 survey of Ottawa employers.¹⁵ The survey was pre-tested with two groups of employers in December, 2012, and subsequently modified to reflect the discussion at these focus groups.

Building on Workforce Planning Hamilton's existing employer database, new contacts were added to create a new database that is representative of Hamilton's economy by sector and employer size and that includes approximately 2000 contacts. The database includes sectors where employers are known to hire immigrants including bilingual or Francophone immigrants.

Invitations were issued to database contacts to participate in a telephone survey. Telephone interviews were conducted from January 8 to 28, 2013. The person interviewed at each organization was either someone employed in Human Resources, or an owner/partner.

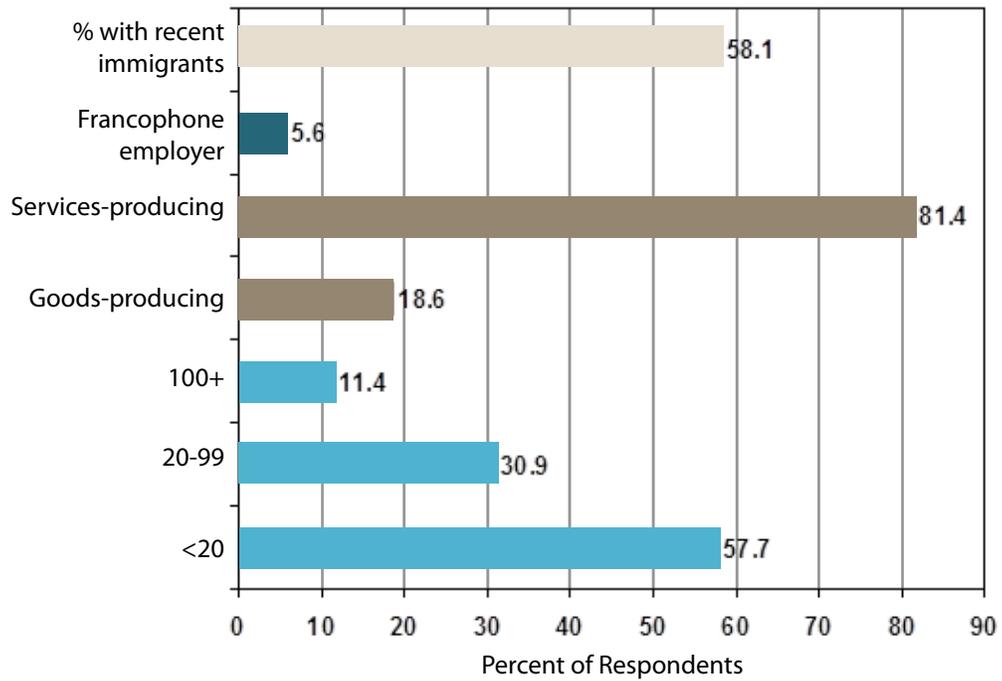
As shown in this figure, the sample profile contains several distinguishing features:

- just over half of organizations reported having employees who are recent immigrants; on average, 7.1% percent of the workforce is comprised of recent immigrants
- the responding organizations reflect the sectoral profile of Hamilton (eg. roughly 81% of all Hamilton employers are in the services-producing sector, as was the case in the sample as well)
- more than half of respondents have fewer than 20 employees

Francophone employers are those who indicated on the survey that they have employees who are required to use French.

¹⁵ The HIP team acknowledges the role of Peter Paul, Project Leader, Maytree Foundation, for sharing these survey questions.

Employer Sample Profile: Immigrant Employees, Francophone Employers, Sector & Organization Size



APPENDIX B: IMMIGRANTS IN THE CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET

This section provides a literature review on immigrants in the Canadian labour market, including previous surveys that examined employer attitudes towards hiring immigrants. The brevity of this review, and the fact that we had to reach back a decade to find relevant literature, reveals the paucity of recent Canadian research on this topic. It is our hope that this review also underscores the importance of the new findings reported in this current Hiring Immigrants Project report.

Declining Labour Market Outcomes for Recent Immigrants

The labour market outcomes of immigrants to Canada have declined in recent decades. Newcomers have had difficulty finding employment, and earnings have declined. A Conference Board of Canada report cites Statistics Canada research as finding that during the period 1991 to 2006,

the proportion of immigrants with a university degree in jobs with low educational requirements (such as clerks, truck drivers, salespersons, cashiers, and taxi drivers) increased [And even after living 15 years in Canada,] immigrants with a university degree are still more likely than the native-born to be in low-skilled jobs.¹⁶

According to data analyzed from the 2006 Census, the average unemployment rate for all university-educated immigrants is double the unemployment rate for their Canadian-born counterparts even though both groups have similar labour force participation rates. The poorest labour market outcomes are experienced by female immigrants with at least one university degree.¹⁷

Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey data indicate that the situation for recent immigrants has not improved since 2006. For example, in 2012 the unemployment rate for all recent immigrants to Canada (those who arrived within the past 5 years) with a university degree was 12.6%. For their Canadian-born counterparts the unemployment rate was only 3.5%. The rate for female recent immigrants with a university degree was slightly higher (12.8%) than it was for males (12.4%).¹⁸

¹⁶ Statistics Canada, "Immigrants' Education and Required Job Skills," cited in Vadim Kukushkin and Douglas Watt, *Immigrant-Friendly Businesses: Effective Practices for Attracting, Integrating, and Retaining Immigrants in Canadian Workplaces* (Conference Board of Canada, 2009), p. 7. Labour force data from the 2011 National Household Survey (the successor to the Canadian Census) is not yet available at the time of writing.

¹⁷ Valerie Preston, Nina Damsbaek, Philip Kelly, Maryse Lemoine, Lucia Lo, John Shields, and Steven Tufts, *University Educated Immigrants: What are the labour market outcomes of university educated immigrants? TIED! Analytical Report 8*, March 2010.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (Table 282-0106).

The Urgent Need to address Barriers to Employment for Immigrants

Immigrants' negative labour market experiences stem from various systemic barriers that prevent Canadian employers from effectively using their skills, knowledge, and abilities. These barriers include:

- the discounting of foreign credentials, qualifications, and international work experience
- language barriers
- differences in workplace cultures
- lack of Canadian work experience
- the lack of workplace-based integration and diversity programs
- discrimination in the workplace.¹⁹

According to a longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada, 70% of new immigrants trying to enter the labour force identified at least one problem with the process. The top three barriers immigrants cited were lack of Canadian work experience, transferability of foreign qualifications and language barriers.

For newcomers, finding employment is usually their most pressing need and the single most important determinant of their settlement experience. As noted in a recent paper on this topic, “how fast and well newcomers can find gainful employment in their initial settlement stage dictates their labour market integration in the long run.”²⁰

Moreover, these are not just “immigrant problems”: these barriers and difficulties may have a profound and growing effect on the labour market in Canada. In the wake of demographic shifts including the retirement of “baby boomers,” immigration is now estimated to account for 100% of net labour market growth in Canada. This was already the case in Ontario as early as the 1990s.²¹ The underutilization of a significant portion of the labour market costs employers, hinders innovation, and places unnecessary limits on earnings and therefore tax revenue.

19 Kukushkin and Watt, *Immigrant-Friendly Businesses*, p. 8; see also Naomi Alboim, Ross Finnie, and Ronald Meng, “The Discounting of Immigrants’ Skills in Canada: Evidence and Policy Recommendations,” *IRPP Choices* 11, 2, 2005.

20 Eric Nan Liu, *Access to Employment or Access to Employers: a Descriptive Study of Employers’ Attitudes and Practices in Hiring Newcomer Job Seekers*, A Major Research Paper presented to Ryerson University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Program of Immigration and Settlement Studies, Ryerson University, 2006, p. 4.

21 Clarence Lochhead, *Perspectives on Immigration: Findings from the Canadian Labour and Business Centre’s Survey of Canadian Business, Labour and Public Sector Leaders*. Submitted to Strategic Policy Division, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CLBC, 2003), p. 1. Available at: http://www.clbc.ca/FittingIn/Perspectives_on_Immigration.asp

Employer Attitudes towards Hiring Immigrants (Survey Results)

Despite the importance of immigration to the Canadian labour market, employers often have a “disconnect” between a concern about skills shortages and their interest in immigration. A 2002 survey by the Canadian Labour and Business Centre found that many employers, even those experiencing skill shortages in regions with traditionally high levels of immigration, did not view immigration as a way to fill current or future skills shortages.²²

In 2004, the Public Policy Forum retained Environics to survey 2,091 employers across Canada about their experiences with “recent immigrants,” defined as immigrants who arrived in Canada within the previous 10 years. Employers included business owners, managers, administrators, human resource managers and others responsible for hiring. Findings were confirmed and validated in 10 focus groups held in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Moncton.²³

The Environics survey yielded mixed results. On the one hand, employers were found to have a positive attitude toward immigrants and immigration overall: “Employers see many positives and few negatives in hiring recent immigrants and welcome the opportunity to participate in strategies that seek to better integrate immigrants into the workforce.”²⁴

However, according to the research, employers on the whole also failed to consider immigrants in their human resource planning; did not hire immigrants at the level at which they were trained; and faced challenges integrating recent immigrants into their workforce. As noted in the report, “Representatives of smaller companies who participated in the focus groups were more likely than larger companies to emphasize the importance of finding an employee who ‘fits’ into the organization.”²⁵

According to the Environics survey, a majority of employers who had hired immigrants (70%) stated that their actual experience with immigrant employees was about the same as they had expected. Twelve percent stated that it was noticeably less challenging than they had expected. However, when asked if they would follow a strategy in addressing their labour force needs, only 20% of employers indicated that they would very likely hire recent immigrants with foreign training, while 45% of the employers mentioned that it was somewhat likely that they would hire recent immigrants. But 82% could not name any organization that provided credential recognition services to foreign trained immigrants.

22 Lochhead, *Perspectives on Immigration*.

23 The Public Policy Forum, and Environics Research Group. 2004. *Survey of Canadian Employers and Human Resource Managers: Bringing Employers into the Immigration Debate*. November 4, pp.1-54. http://www.ppforum.ca/ow/survey_public_policy-en.pdf

24 Public Policy Forum, p.2.

25 Public Policy Forum, p. 6.

When asked about the training needs of immigrant employees, 77% of the survey respondents stated that the training needs of recent immigrants were about the same as those of Canadian-born employees. However, 14% of respondents stated that immigrant employees required training that was somewhat different from Canadian-born employees.

When asked about barriers to hiring immigrants, employers identified the following as challenges they faced: a language difficulty (mentioned by 18 % of the employers), communication difficulties (14%), verifying foreign work experience (14%), lack of Canadian work experience (13%), and cultural misunderstanding among staff or with customers (9%), additional training costs (8%), unreliable credentials (7%), and tension between immigrants and other employees (4%).

Indeed, fully half of survey respondents stated that Canadian work experience was either “a requirement for employment in their organization or that foreign work experience is not necessarily considered equal to Canadian experience.”²⁶ Moreover, based on the survey results, it was found that public sector employers were much less likely to accept foreign work experience on par with Canadian work experience.

Employers were also asked about the factors that would encourage them to hire more immigrants. The most commonly-cited factor, at 26%, was “skills shortage.” Other factors that would encourage them to hire more immigrants included better English/ French language skills among immigrants (13%), a better assurance on value of credentials to hire more immigrants (12%), experience/ job skills (6%), and financial hiring incentives for employers (5%). Just over one-fourth of the employers did not mention any factors.

A 2005 Canadian HR Report Survey came to similar findings in asking the question: “What, if any, challenges do you foresee in bringing a skilled immigrant into your organization?” The three most-cited challenges were language issues (40%); lack of Canadian experience; (18%) and not knowing the equivalency of international education credentials (17%).²⁷ The survey found that, among the employers who responded, 92% had received a resume from a skilled immigrant; 84% had interviewed a skilled immigrant; and 84% had hired a skilled immigrant. However, only 52% hired an immigrant to their first job in Canada.

26 Public Policy Forum, p. 4.

27 Cited in Liu, *Access to Employment or Access to Employers*, p. 8.

More recently, in 2011 TRIEC commissioned a poll of employers in the Greater Toronto Area on the reasons for hiring skilled immigrants. In all, 461 employers were surveyed in the Greater Toronto Area, with all respondents either having primary or shared responsibility for hiring.²⁸ The polling results are not presented in detail, but the following is cited on the TRIEC website:

- Almost 1 in 5 had hired a skilled immigrant:
 - o To target local cultural communities to find new business opportunities – of these 83% felt the skilled immigrants hired were effective in helping on this front
 - o To help diversify their company’s client base globally – of these 93% felt the skilled immigrants hired were effective on helping on this front
- 1 in 10 hired a skilled immigrant because they discovered that competitors were benefiting from hiring skilled immigrants – of those employers, 81% felt the skilled immigrants hired were effective.²⁹

In its 2011 white paper entitled *Welcome to Canada. Now what? Unlocking the potential of immigrants for business growth and innovation*, Deloitte found that many Canadian employers find it easy to put diversity and inclusiveness into a mission statement, but that it is more difficult to put them into practice. Based on a cross-country study of diversity practices called “Dialogue on diversity,” Deloitte found that the barriers to hiring immigrants had not changed even over the course of several decades.

28 Cited on TRIEC website, <http://triec.ca/research-policy/facts-and-stats/>

29 TRIEC website.

APPENDIX C: MEMBERS OF ADVISORY TEAM

Linda Button, City of Hamilton

Mbuso Dandato, Goodwill

Elizabeth Duval, Ministry of Citizenship & Immigration

Melissa Eberhardt-Markle, City of Hamilton

Maher Hamade, Hamilton Chamber of Commerce

Radenka Lescesen, Immigrant Women's Centre

Lily Lumsden, YMCA

Donna Melnick, City of Hamilton

Claudette Mikelsons, Collège Boréal

Leah Morris, Adult Basic Education Association

Evelyn Myrie, Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion

Linda Rogers, Mohawk College

Norm Schleeahn, City of Hamilton, Economic Dev.

Wally Stadnicki, Employment Hamilton

Hila Taraky, City of Hamilton

Stephanie Taylor, Wesley Urban Ministries

Aurelia Tokaci, YWCA

Judy Travis, Workforce Planning Hamilton

Tatiana Tudoran, vpi Inc.

APPENDIX D: LIST OF FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Maureen Barlow, Battlefield Advertising

Ed Beard, Ash Chimney Sweeps Inc.

Diana Belaisis, City of Hamilton

Dawn Blackbarow, Momentum Credit Union

Theresa Chabot, Jamesville Children's Centre

Sonia Di Giandomenico, TriOS College

Daniela Dijmorescu, Hamilton Health Sciences

Karen Dunn, TASUS Corporation

Len Falco, Centrex Human Resources

Jennifer Ferby, Answer Plus by Password

Milton Friesen, Cardus

Lois Galgani, Bertam Care

Janis Giftoupolis, CNIB

Arthur Greenblatt, Dundas Valley School of Art

Linda Grgurich, Mohawk College

David Gruggen, Dave Gruggen Photography

Maureen Hall, Ontario Early Years: Today's Family

Cathy Hannam, Aldo Electric

Tammy Hwang, Innovation Factory

Scott Jones, Micah House

Joanna Kopacz, Sheraton Hotel

Kim Majestic, Gordon Food Service

Rick Mason, G Mason Construction

Helen McLeod, Hamilton Literacy Council

Christine McMahon, Rosslyn Retirement Home

Erica Melarangeli, Manpower

Claudette Mickelsons, Collège Boréal

Michelle Obermuller, vpi Inc.

Ralph Pagliuso, Barton Truck Centre

Julia Peterson, Drake Staffing Services

Andi Pojandi, Carmen's

Rosalie Prokeopetz, Hamilton Health Sciences

David Quinn, The Career Foundation

Brent Rickert, Cable 14

Ken Rochweg, Wentworth Metal

Joanne Roth, CARE

Patricia Selway, Liuna Station

Reverend Ian Sloan, Centenary United Church

Scott Stanek, Augusta House

Mirela Teodor, TD Canada Trust

Jim Tiernay, CCAS

Bill Tufts, WB Benefit Solutions



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Workforce Planning Hamilton
Planification de main d'oeuvre de Hamilton

117-77 James Street North
Hamilton, Ontario, L8R 2K3
Telephone: 905- 521-5777

Fax: 905- 521-9309

Email: info@workforceplanninghamilton.ca

Website: www.workforceplanninghamilton.ca

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