

## Question 1: How can I determine whether or not an internationally-educated professional has enough English to do the job?

Increasingly employers are turning to internationally-educated professionals (ITP) to meet their demand for highly trained and skilled workers. Over 40% of immigrants arriving in the 1990s had at least 1 university degree compared to 22% of Canadians. This is good news for Canada, as our reliance on immigration grows. In fact immigrants are expected to account for 100% of Canada's net labour force growth by 2011 and 100% of net population growth by 2031.

There are credential assessment services available to employers to determine the Canadian equivalent levels of education and training. But what about language proficiency? And how much English do you need for a particular job anyway?

Language is one of the most significant challenges facing newcomers who speak English as a second language. Employers have limited means of practically and fairly determining language proficiency. "The tests used in the present system are often based on generic or academic content, and do not reflect the language demands of their professions or trades. Although internationally-educated professionals may have the language proficiency relevant to their specific profession or occupation, they may not be able to pass the required language tests. In other cases, candidates are set up for possible failure in the workplace, as they do meet the language requirements but do not have the language skills needed in their specific professional context."

There are 2 primary approaches that can be taken.

**Option 1:** A longer term solution is to have an expert in English as a second language (ESL) conduct a language benchmark analysis of key occupation(s) within the company to determine the level of speaking, listening, reading and writing required to carry out the tasks related to the job. There are models for this using the Canadian Language Benchmarks, the national language standard for describing, measuring and recognizing language proficiency for adult immigrants.

The ESL expert would typically analyze the position by:

- Reviewing a detailed job description to identify key tasks and job activities
- Examining samples of texts, documents and other materials used in this job
- Job-shadowing to observe and record communication activities carried out over the course of a day
- Meeting with the supervisor and others currently performing the job to seek information on the communication demands of the job.

This analysis would result in a determination of the Canadian Language Benchmark levels required for the job. Recommendations could be provided by the expert as to how the CLB level of candidates could be determined e.g. through an existing CLB assessment tool or development of an occupation or sector specific assessment tool. An example of this would be the language

benchmarking of the nursing profession in Canada and the development of the Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN). For more information visit [www.CELBAN.org](http://www.CELBAN.org)

An alternative methodology is available to develop an Occupational Language Analysis (OLA) based on language benchmarking of occupation-specific Essential Skill Profiles developed by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. To see examples of OLAs for tourism occupations visit [www.itsessential.ca](http://www.itsessential.ca)

**Option 2:** A more immediate solution is careful planning and preparation for the interview process. It is important that internationally-educated professionals are interviewed similarly to a Canadian-born professional. The following suggestions would apply equally to all applicants being considered for the position.

- Carefully review the job description and identify the key or primary tasks related to this position. What language skills are necessary to carry out these tasks – speaking, listening, reading or writing?
- Determine what language skills are required to do the job well. Is it more important that the person have excellent speaking and listening skills in order to consult with clients or lead project team meetings? Or will they be expected to write lengthy business proposals or reports? Does the job require referencing complex texts and documentation?
- Plan to include in the interview questions that address these key communication requirements. This will allow the employer to determine whether or not the response meets company standards or reasonable expectations. This measure of performance would apply equally to internationally-educated or Canadian born professionals. For example: - If writing plays a large part in carrying out the job duties, ask the candidates to provide samples of the types of texts that are written in the course of work. Or develop an activity such as writing a memo or an executive summary of a report. - If spoken language is most important to successful performance on the job, then include in the interview a role play or scenario. For example, if the position involves leading a project team, the candidate could be asked what they would say in a meeting with a member of the team who was repeatedly missing deadlines. Or they might be asked to role play talking to their supervisor to explain what is wrong with a piece of equipment and the time and cost involved in making the repair.

### **Question 2: How can I best support internationally-educated professionals in the workplace to ensure their success?**

It is good practice to provide support to any new employee and ensure that the transition is smooth and that challenges or barriers to their success are

addressed as soon as possible. For an internationally-educated professional there can be a number of language related challenges.

Providing a mentor to help support their successful integration into the workplace can help ensure that potential challenges and barriers are addressed in a timely way. If there are a number of internationally-educated professionals working in the company, it is also a good idea to have an ESL instructor conduct a needs analysis and offer ESL classes targeting those needs with clearly defined outcomes and performance measures.

- An internationally-educated professional may need support: Learning the Canadian vocabulary and terminology for equipment, tools or processes. This can be addressed with information about sector or job specific terminology. You can find out more about sector terminology at this website: <http://atwork.settlement.org/stic/home.asp> Your company may also have terminology and acronyms that are unfamiliar to new employees. It would be useful to have a list of these terms and their meaning available for any new staff person
- Understanding unnecessarily complex or convoluted texts. Companies that do not follow clear or plain language practices may find that many employees, not just the second language speakers, have difficulty understanding company manuals, or documentation regarding policies and procedures. For more information about clear language in the workplace see [http://www.abc-canada.org/workplace\\_education/clear\\_language.asp](http://www.abc-canada.org/workplace_education/clear_language.asp)
- Socializing effectively with other employees including understanding Canadian humour and being able to participate in general office banter. Formal language training may not have adequately prepared them for such casual or idiomatic uses of language. This can limit their ability to get to know their fellow workers and vice versa. A mentor can help to facilitate social integration, by “breaking the ice” (e.g. of an idiomatic expression) and set the example for trying to be more inclusive e.g. making sure they “get” the joke.

McNaughton, P. (2006). *Summer 2006: The internationally educated professional (IEP)*. Retrieved July 11, 2006, from the Canadian Society for Training and Development Web site:  
<http://www.cstd.ca/resources/expert/index.html>