

Special Feature: Occupations of Recent Immigrants to British Columbia

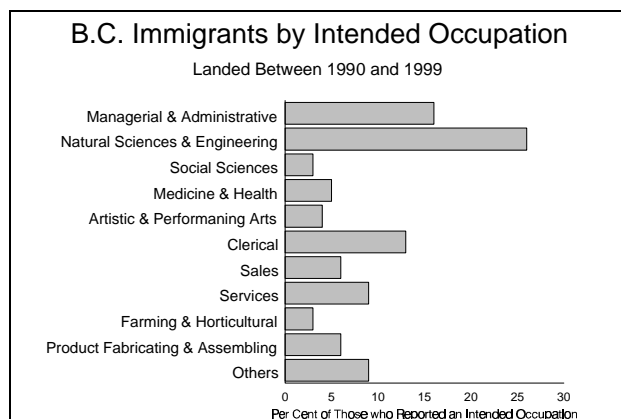
Immigrants have always been one of the important sources of skilled workers to Canada. "Brain Gain" through immigration is believed to have been making up for some of the "Brain Drain" resulting from skilled Canadians moving to work in other countries . . .

To make up short skilled labour supply through immigration has always been one of the major themes in Canada's immigration policy. While it is generally believed that on an ongoing basis Canada has been losing its highly skilled workers to other countries, particularly the United States, statistics show that a certain degree of this "brain drain" has been compensated by the arrival of skilled immigrants. However, precise information is not readily available to allow for an accurate analysis of this brain drain/brain gain situation at the provincial level.

Intended occupation as reported by an immigrant at the time of landing can be used as an indication of the immigrant's occupation prior to immigrating to Canada, and the occupation he/she is likely to seek after initial settlement in Canada. Figures collected from the federal immigration program show that during the period 1990-1999, approximately 77% of the 409,000 B.C. immigrants did not report an intended occupation. These immigrants were likely to be children, accompanying spouses or parents, and immigrants in the Retired Class or Family Class where occupation background was not a factor for admission,

Of the 93,000 immigrants landed in B.C. over the ten year period who stated an intended occupation, one in four were in the natural sciences and engineering occupations which mainly include systems/computer analysts and engineers. A high proportion (16%) was in managerial and administrative occupations. Approximately 9 per cent were in some kind of service occupation.

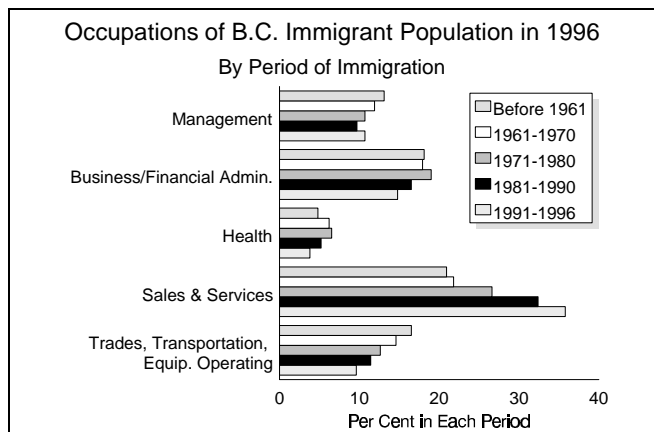
Table 1 below shows the number of B.C. landed immigrants by selected intended occupations reported by immigrants at time of landing. As can be seen from Table 1, there has been a significant number of trained professionals in various fields come to settle in the province. However, due to many possible factors such as job availability, credential/qualification recognition, and personal circumstances, a certain number of these skilled immigrants might have changed to an occupation different from the one they originally intended.



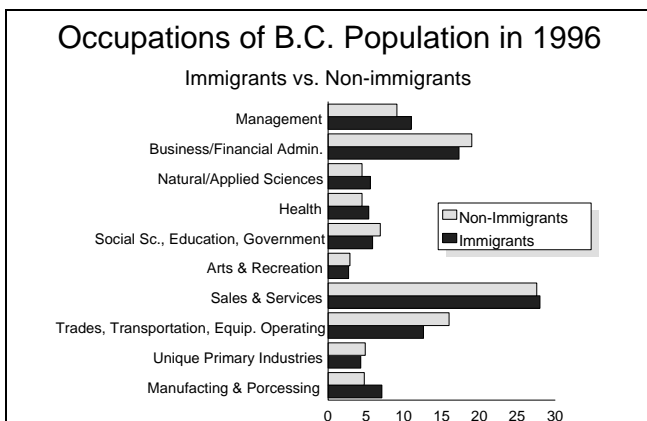
BC Immigrants by Selected Intended Occupation (Landed between 1990 and 1999)	
Secretaries & Stenographic and Typing Operators	6,465
System Analysts & Computer Programmers	4,482
Other Occupations	3,917
Management & Administration	3,619
Accountants, Auditors & Other Financial Officers	2,310
Chefs and Cooks	1,916
Farming, Horticultural & Animal Husbandry	1,914
Electrical Engineer	1,762
Personal Services	1,589
Civil Engineer	1,342
Mechanical Engineer	1,259
Nurses	1,039
Industrial, Farm & Construction Mechanics	939
Tailors & Dressmakers	700
Elementary & Kindergarten Teachers	549
Physiotherapists	508
Sewing Machine Operators	496
Physicians & Surgeons	492
Social Workers	484
Dental Hygienists	356
Pharmacists	262
Dentists	70

Census shows recent immigrants were more likely to work in a sales or service job than those who came earlier . . .

While no data are currently available for studying the immigrants' shift in occupation before and after landing, census information can be used to shed some light on the actual occupation of immigrants after they landed. Data from the 1996 Census indicates that there were a total of 1,960,660 British Columbians in the labour force, and about 26 per cent (or 507,160 persons) were immigrants. Of the immigrant population who reported an applicable occupation, a majority (28%) was engaged in service and sales occupations. Compared to their non-immigrants counterparts, immigrants were less represented in occupations related to construction trades, transportation, and operation of heavy equipment. Also, a relatively higher proportion of the immigrant population were in the managerial occupations.



While domestic job opportunities are believed to be one of the most important factors affecting an immigrant's choice of occupation, many other elements have also been identified as factors affecting an immigrant's career path in Canada. These elements may include considerations such as how Canada's immigration policy is formulated for the immigrant selection process, whether opportunities are readily available for an immigrant to upgrade their skills in Canada, and whether foreign qualifications/credentials are recognized by Canadian employers.



Further analysis on occupations of the immigrant population in B.C. reflects that recent immigrants were more likely than established immigrants to be engaged in occupations related to sales and services, and less likely in the field of health/business administration, and education/social sciences. More than one in every three working immigrants who arrived between 1991-1996 were working in a sales or service related job. Only one in every five immigrants landed before 1970 were engaged in similar jobs in 1996.

Also, it is important to note that a majority of immigrants did not report an intended occupation at time of landing due to the non-requirement for immigrants who were admitted under certain categories or who were accompanying family members. Many of these immigrants would have participated in the labour force after landing. Available data show that many immigrants who did not report an occupation intention are also highly educated when arriving in Canada. However, their contribution to the skill pool in the domestic labour market cannot be quantified readily due to the lack of relevant information. The federal government is currently conducting longitudinal studies on the immigrant population in order to better understand many settlement and performance issues about recent immigrants. Until further information becomes available, it is impossible to accurately determine where the country's position is on the longer term "brain drain vs. brain gain" equation.