

Public Report on the
Developing Integrated Programming for Immigrant
Professionals Project
&
The Pilot Program Entitled:
Integrated Bridging Program for Internationally Trained
Accountants and Auditors - 2004

EDMONTON MENNONITE CENTRE FOR NEWCOMERS
Public Final Report on
Developing Integrated Programming for Immigrant Professionals-2004
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The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, a community-based non-profit organization serving immigrants and refugees since 1981, received funding under the Integrate Language Training Program in 2004 to refine and develop the methodology and processes employed in its enormously successful Engineers' and Technologists' Integration Program (ETIP). The resulting (conceptual) model was then applied to the development of an integrated bridging program for internationally trained practitioners in the financial accounting profession. The first phase of this project consisted of the development of a conceptual model or template that could be used as a guide for the creation of a bridging program. The second phase included application of the model to the financial accounting profession, and development of all of the components required to implement the program. The third phase was the actual implementation of an integrated bridging program for internationally trained accountants and auditors.

Developing a “Best Practice” Model or Template for Bridging Programs for Internationally Educated Professionals (IEP’s)

The project proposed to address the immediate targets of Alberta Learning’s *Language Training Programs* as well as many of the issues around moving *immigrants into or significantly closer to their occupation in their home country or jobs that utilize the skills and experiences that immigrants bring* (LTP Guidelines...p.2)

The objective, more specifically, was to provide the immigrant-serving community with an effective model that could be used to develop integrated bridging programs for a wider range of occupational groups of immigrants. The vision behind this project was that a fully developed (and workable) model/template could be applied by government agencies and service providers to address increasing demands for new programs covering a range or variety of professions spanning *skill levels A and B* within the *Skill Type Categories* described in the *National Occupational Classification Matrix – 2001*.

Rationale / Need

Internationally trained Professionals are not making transitions into the labour market at a sufficiently high rate, nor are their skills being effectively utilized even when they do find employment. This results in a protracted period of economic and social integration and considerable financial loss for these immigrants and for the Public Finances.

At the same time, Statistics Canada reports on immigration indicate that the proportion of immigrants with university degrees and/or high levels of skills is increasing, and still other surveys and reports demonstrate that the economic performance of these immigrants is declining – and that some are even subsisting on earnings below provincial Low Income Cut-Off Levels (LICO's). In response to this, a variety of interventions have been implemented across the country. Researchers and career development workers from government as well as immigrant serving agencies have reported that IEP's are, in fact, benefiting from programs that encompass a broad range of informational services, access to assessment tools, some forms of *Prior Learning Assessment (PLAR)*, technical and other language courses, professional / technical courses and skills upgrades, as well as labour market transition assistance of various kinds and degrees.

EMCN's Engineers' and Technologists' Integration Project (ETIP) appeared to cover all of the recommended practices. It has also maintained a success rate (in facilitating employment for clients in the engineering field) of over 85% during the six years of its existence. The seemingly obvious conclusion drawn from this was that development, and subsequent application, of a conceptual model based on ETIP to other professions could help alleviate labour market access issues in other sectors and help IEP's, from a variety of professions, to find employment (in their fields) and integrate economically in meaningful ways. Internationally trained Accountants and Auditors had been identified as the professional group that would benefit most from a bridging program employing the ETIP integrational model. Accounting professionals appeared in significant numbers among recent immigrants and the projected demand for trained accountants, auditors, financial managers, investment professionals and bookkeepers was strong in Alberta.

Over 25,100 Albertans are employed in the "Financial Auditors and Accountants" occupational group, which is expected to grow 2.8 to 3.8 per cent each year from 2002 to 2007 (in Alberta). It is forecast that over 600 new positions will be created each year in addition to job openings created by employment turnover. In the Edmonton Region, among the top 20 occupational groups expecting the largest growth in the current year, three are in the financial and accounting sectors (NOC 143, 111, 123).

Description of project activities and implementation plan

In the first phase of this project, project staff conducted a review of research and other materials on the subject of integration of internationally educated professionals, and gathered information on bridging programs offered across the country. This body of information was analyzed and 'best practices' were identified. Possible barriers and

problems that could be encountered in the development and delivery of a program were noted. A conceptual framework for a model was drafted following a comparison, and blending, of other identified practices with the methodology of the ETIP program. This framework was reviewed by stakeholders in ETIP and subjected to further analysis and scrutiny before a comprehensive version of the conceptual model was approved. Once consensus had been reached, the Project Officers re-worked the model into a 'workable template' for bridging programs (for other professions).

This model was shared with stakeholders and other interested parties, including researchers, career development professionals, government staff, and academics. A number of presentations were made at conferences, a PDF file was placed on the EMCN website, and a paper-based informational booklet was published as part of the dissemination plan.

Phase II

In this phase of this project, Project Officers proceeded with the application of the model to the field of Business & Finance. Research and developmental work, requiring liaison with a number of regulatory / licensing bodies, educational institutions, immigrant communities and other important stakeholders, was carried out.

Essentially, the Project Officers:

- Identified and compiled the materials required to meet the informational needs of the IEP's.
- Gathered information on the *credentialing requirements* and *assessment* processes for certification (this included liaison with IQAS and the regulatory / licensing bodies.).
- Identified stakeholders and possible collaborators in this program. These included: NAIT, CGA, CMA, Saylor's & Associates Employment Agency, Alberta Learning, Alberta Human Resources and Employment and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.
- Gathered information on the language demands of the 'accounting workplaces' and their relationship to Canadian Language Benchmarks. In fact, language proficiency became a major consideration in the screening process for the actual program. It was decided that competence in the use of the English language would be best determined by means of the Canadian Language Benchmark Assessment (CLBA). However, for reasons of practicality (and the short recruitment period) the shorter / 'quicker' CLB Placement Test (CLBPT) was used. A score of '6' in all four testing areas was set as the minimum level for admission into the program.
- Met with the stakeholders to facilitate development of:
 - o a self-assessment instrument, a method of informal (agency and institutional level) verification / validation of *prior learning*.
 - o Formal assessment as part of the Alberta / Canadian certification process employed by a professional / regulatory association
 - o other means of identifying "bridging" requirements - including interventions that would facilitate labour market access and enhance development of employability skills (courses, workshops, etc)
- Met with potential employers (and stakeholders) for the purpose of exploring work experience / practicum and job-development avenues.
- Identified appropriate content and formats for the bridging components (including

technical/professional communications and other related courses).

· Addressed issues related to development of labour market research, job search and employability skills.

Essentially, all of the developmental work, partnerships and coordination of resources required for implementation of this integrated bridging program was completed in Phase II. Modifications to the template (developed in Phase I) were also completed. It should be noted that ‘corrections’ or modifications were made, as required, throughout the operation of the pilot program.

Phase III

The fifteen applicants selected completed a 10-month program comprised of the following components:

- ◆ 3 months (approximately 350 hours) of instruction in **Technical / Professional / Business Communication** (focused on English vocabulary, communication and relevant media for accountants and auditors. A major portion of this covered the requirements of the *Communications I* module of the CGA Program of Studies).
- ◆ 6 weeks (160 – 180 hours) of **Computer instruction** (including Word, Excel, the Internet, Simply Accounting (30 - 60 hours), – in order to fill the gaps between their, and the Canadian, workplace “experience”).
- ◆ 3 - 4 months – (11 - 15 weeks or 350 - 450 hours of class time; 30 hours per week; 5 days per week, Monday to Friday) of instruction in a compressed set of courses from the **Accelerated Accounting program at NAIT**.
- ◆ 2 weeks of **Supported Job Search** at EMCN (including counseling, resume preparation, Canadian work culture, and participation in *Job Club* activities – a form of *primary support and mentoring*).
- ◆ 4 weeks of **Work Experience** placement with Alberta Government departments, accounting firms, finance departments of local companies and requiring accounting, auditing and bookkeeping services. Most of the Work Experience placements led to full-time employment for the participants.

OUTCOMES

The results indicate that the program was an enormous success. Fourteen (14) of the fifteen (15) participants completed the program, and ninety-three percent (93%), or 14 out of 15, found employment in their field within the first six weeks after graduating. In addition, all of the graduates indicated that they are prepared to pursue the remaining ‘required’ courses in the CGA or CMA Programs of Studies and /or the *PACE Examinations*.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This successful application of the ETIP bridging model to another profession (financial/accounting), when defined in terms of its key elements – partnership buy-in, regulatory body recognition, technical bridging, language/communication skills enhancement,

knowledge/awareness of Canadian work culture, has had enormous implications, not only for EMCN but for government agencies and other service providers. The model works! The credibility of our own organization, as well as the Alberta Government's leadership in supporting development of quality bridging programs for IEP's, is now recognized nationally and regionally. Both, our clients and our job-developers find employers more willing to consider IEP's because we are able to bring objective evidence of the transferability of international training and experience. Also, the potential for partnerships in other areas is now more readily recognized by our partner - NAIT (and by other educational institutions), and this in turn, will open up more possibilities for the future.