

EXPRESS success

Is 'express entry' the solution to getting newcomers to settle in successfully faster? What about existing permanent residents who are still struggling to find work in their field? How will the new system change the face of immigration?

By Lisa Evans



Starting in January 2015, Canada's immigration system will undergo its greatest change this century. Called "express entry," the new system will allow Canadian employers to select skilled workers from a pool of candidates to fill jobs for which there are no Canadian citizens or permanent residents seemingly available. Candidates who are offered jobs will be on the fast track to Canada — their applications will be processed within six months!

The hope here is that they will come to Canada, integrate quickly and start contributing to the economy, for their benefit and that of the country's. According to a statement from Citizenship and Immigration Canada spokesperson Sonia Lesage to *Canadian Immigrant*, "Express entry will offer a faster and more effective way to help skilled international workers connect with Canadian employers and come to Canada on a permanent basis. It will also allow the Government of Canada to be more flexible and responsive to Canada's changing economic conditions and priorities."

Under express entry, applicants who meet the criteria of the federal skilled worker, federal skilled trades, Canadian experience class and provincial nominee programs will be accepted into a pool of potential applicants and ranked based on their skills, experience and other factors deemed important for economic success in Canada (such as English language skills). Those ranked highest will be "invited to apply," which is virtually guaranteed if they have an employer lined up ready to hire them. Candidates who do not already have a job offer can register with the Government of Canada's revamped Job Bank and are encouraged to promote themselves to employers using recruiters and private sector job boards. But, even without a job lined up, those who rank high may still be invited to apply. (There is no limit to the number of candidates allowed in the pool, but an individual can only remain in the pool for a year.)

It's good news for those who get the coveted invitation. Margaret Eaton, executive director of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) — an organization that seeks to connect employers with immigrant labour pools in Canada — says express entry will help newcomers get off to a more successful start. The major source of Canada's immigrant population struggles, she says, is the mismatch between skilled immigrants and the needs of the labour market, creating the PhD taxi driver phenomenon. "The idea that you could have the labour market much more closely match the labour force is a winning idea in a lot of ways," she says.

While on the surface, express entry seems to solve two of Canada's biggest immigration woes — finding jobs for skilled newcomers and filling Canada's labour market shortage needs — what does the new system mean for existing immigrants who are still struggling to achieve career success in Canada, not to mention the face of immigration as a whole?

New competition

Some fear this new generation of cherry-picked immigrants — who will have high English language skills, and may have previous Canadian connections, temporary work experience or education credentials — will present competition to immigrants currently in the country.

"The immigrants who are currently here, who came here in the last 10 years and who have not been able to find their footing in Canada, will have a very tough time because now they will have all these new foreign graduates who may have either worked or studied in Canada competing against them," says Toronto immigration lawyer Sergio Karas.

An Ipsos Reid study, commissioned by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2014, shows newcomers already in Canada aren't so enthusiastic about the new system for this very reason. "A number of participants wondered why the government was focusing on those who have yet to immigrate to Canada rather than those who have already immigrated," the study states. Those surveyed said they "have been frustrated by the lack of recognition of their credentials and their inability to acquire a sufficient amount of Canadian experience."

Jeffrey Reitz, director of ethnic, immigration and pluralism studies at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs, says although immigrants selected under express entry will have a leg up in the short run, that doesn't necessarily mean they will be more successful than other immigrants in the long term. "If you have a job in hand when you enter the country, then certainly, in the short term at least, that's going to give you an upper hand over someone who came in highly qualified but with no job," Reitz says. However, he points out that a great amount of Canada's economic success has come from skilled immigrants who have been unable to relocate or find jobs in their fields and end up opening their own businesses.

Pick and choose

Harald Bauder, academic director of the Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement, says while express entry may help alleviate a problem immigration researchers have identified for years — namely that of skilled immigrants who end up unemployed or underemployed once in Canada — he says the new immigration system isn't exactly



Illustration by Ainsley Ashby-Smyler

the response to the problem researchers had hoped for.

"I think researchers wanted to have a mechanism to recognize credentials and work experience rather than have employers select [who the immigrants to Canada will be]," he says.

Bauder, among others in the policy field, also worries that handing power over immigration to employers turns the immigration process into a private entity and can create a system ripe for cultural biases.

"Do we only get people with European and American degrees through express entry and no one from South Asia, East Asia or Af-

“A number of participants wondered why the government was focusing on those who have yet to immigrate to Canada rather than those who have already immigrated.”

rica?" he wonders. Although he says it's too early to tell how the new system will impact immigration, an immigration system that places greater control in the hands of employers creates a strong potential for personal bias that could alter every aspect of the selection system in terms of skill levels as well as countries of origin.

"Employers favouring immigrants from certain backgrounds is certainly going to create the possibility for cultural biases in immigrant selection," says Reitz, echoing Bauder's concerns.

Reitz cites research that suggests Canadian employers already exhibit a cultural bias. One study in which employers reviewed the resumé of individuals with Asian names or English names demon-

strated preference toward those with English names even though their qualifications were the same as those with Asian-sounding names.

Reitz adds that employers' candidate preferences may not be representative of what is good for the country as a whole and that placing greater power over the immigration process in the hands of employers assumes that employers' objectives and values are the same as those of the rest of Canadians. "We have to ensure that we're bringing in immigrants not just to serve the private interests of particular employers, we want people who are going to come and contribute to the country," says Reitz.

Changing the face of immigration

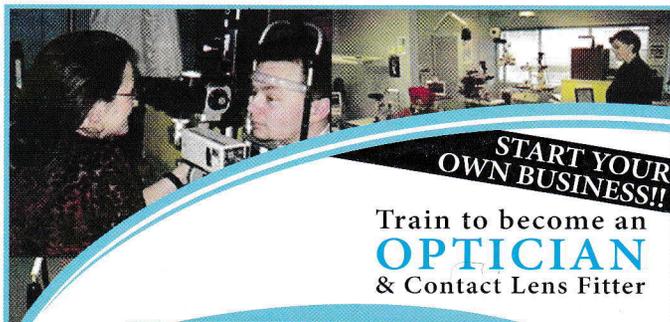
Although we will have to wait and see how exactly the express entry system will play out for both new immigration applicants and those already in the country, policy analysts, immigration lawyers, academics and those working on the ground with newcomers can agree on one thing: express entry will be a game changer in Canada. 🍁

Student concerns

While on the surface the new system seems to favour candidates who have achieved some Canadian experience through temporary work visas or schooling, international students have raised concerns about the new express entry system. Up to now, international students who study at a Canadian post-secondary institution and work in Canada for one year can apply for permanent residency under the Canadian experience class and their application is guaranteed to be adjudicated (although this could take some time). Under express entry, however, there is no longer a guarantee that one's application will be selected for an invitation to apply for permanent residency. And, if seeking a job offer, they will now also have to gain a labour market impact assessment (LMIA) from a potential employer.

"All applications will go through two filters. The first filter is an algorithm that ranks candidates, and the second filter is the number of applications. The government wants to move to a just-in-time system so they're not going to select more applicants than they can process," explains Toronto immigration lawyer Sergio Karas.

Applications will only sit in the system for one year and will then die, leaving unpicked international student applicants wondering whether their hard work and high tuition fees in Canada were worth it.



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