

Studying workplace barriers

Group looks at issues standing between new Canadians and professional careers

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Author: FRANK ETHERINGTON

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A Kitchener research study is examining ways to dismantle barriers erected by professional regulatory bodies that prevent skilled immigrants finding employment.

The study, which will be completed later this month, is being done by researchers at the non-profit Centre for Research and Education in Human Services for members of a Toronto-based coalition dedicated to making better use of immigrant job skills.

Senior researcher Rich Janzen said the study is attracting the interest of politicians who want to see changes made to professional and trade regulations that prevent internationally educated newcomers from finding jobs.

The four-month research project comes on the heels of a larger study that detailed how immigrant skills are going to waste because newcomers can't find suitable work.

Researchers who worked on the one-year project organized by Heritage Canada interviewed hundreds of skilled immigrants in Waterloo Region, London and the Brantford area where an estimated 22 per cent of the population is foreign-born.

Research showed 65 per cent were either unemployed or working in part-time jobs unrelated to their educational and professional backgrounds.

Before leaving their native countries, immigrants were told by Canadian officials their skills were needed and they would have no difficulty finding related jobs in Canada.

After the study was published, 285 people including politicians, community leaders and officials from immigrant work-placement agencies endorsed recommendations directed at governments, regulatory bodies, educational institutions and employers.

Janzen said the latest research work on regulatory bodies focuses on those who have the power to make changes.

The study scrutinizes detailed rules and standards established by 38 Ontario professional regulatory groups.

Janzen said 22 of the regulatory groups are in the health field while others maintain provincial standards for everyone from engineers to teachers and accountants to funeral directors.

The study looks at ways to preserve quality control and public safety, while at the same time allowing competent, qualified immigrants a better chance of having their skills and qualifications recognized in Canada.

"We're trying to put the onus on regulatory bodies to make sure there is no intentional or non-intentional discrimination," Janzen said. "The regulations should not just be there in the name of professional self-interest."

He said officials working for many of Ontario's regulatory groups are already considering changes to professional and trade regulations in the face of growing public demand

"They know it has become a larger public issue. . . They're recognizing something is coming down the pipe and they want to act," he said.

fetherington@therecord.com

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