



Official Submission to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

Response to the call for submissions on *Enhancing Express Entry through category-based selection to better meet Canada's evolving economic needs*

Introduction

We are pleased to provide our perspectives and feedback to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as the government considers immigration selection priorities for Express Entry to address economic and labour force needs.

The Business Council of Alberta (BCA) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization composed of the chief executives and leading entrepreneurs of Alberta's largest enterprises. Our members represent the majority of Alberta's private sector investment, job creation, exports, and research and development. We are dedicated to building a better and more prosperous Alberta within a strong Canada.

BCA and its members recognize that immigration is a key driver of Canadian prosperity and vibrancy. In light of climbing labour shortages and an ageing population, one thing is certain: we need more Canadians. Here in Alberta, labour shortages are currently the number one challenge facing businesses, and there are over 100,000 unfilled jobs in our province. As such, ensuring our immigration system and settlement services are responsive to our current and future needs is of utmost importance.

As the government seeks feedback on its Express Entry system, we offer the following broad observations, challenges to keep in mind, and recommendations.

Observations and perspectives

Several global forces and trends are converging to produce one of the tightest labour markets Alberta has seen in decades. BCA's most recent [Business Expectations Survey](#) shows that 60% of Alberta businesses report difficulty filling the positions needed to meet demand, and the majority of businesses (62%) expect their staffing needs to increase over the next year.

[Research](#) shows that businesses face the most difficulty hiring mid- and senior-level management positions, professional and scientific positions, and trades and technical positions. And while it is generally easier to hire entry-level positions relative to other positions, the greatest need for all businesses is these entry-level positions.

Businesses report that a lack of applicants, including those with technical and people skills, are major [barriers](#) to recruitment.

Against that backdrop, BCA strongly supports the government's proposed approach to prioritize Express Entry nominations through category-based selection.



On selecting candidates based on work experience in a particular occupation or sector

BCA supports the government's proposed approach to select candidates for Express Entry based on work experience in a particular occupation or sector where Canada and Alberta are experiencing labour shortages.

Labour and skills shortages are felt across businesses of every size and in every industry. However, [vacancy rates and numbers in Alberta](#) are particularly high in accommodation and food services (10.5%, 18K); construction (7.4%, 14K); and health care and social assistance (4.7%, 11K).

That said, it is important to recognize that labour market needs and labour shortages will vary from province to province, and any category-based selection based on work experience in particular occupations or sectors should be developed in close consultation with provincial partners to reflect those differences.

On transitioning international student graduates to permanent residence

BCA also supports increasing the number of international students who transition to permanent residence through Express Entry as a way to enhance Canada's ability to respond to current economic needs and priorities.

BCA recommends focusing Express Entry for graduates from in-demand fields—occupations where labour shortages currently exist (as discussed previously) and in sectors that will become increasingly important to Canada's economy.

For example, Canada's aging population, in concert with the tremendous strain the pandemic added to Canada's health care system, will continue to increase the number of workers needed in this sector.

Second, in recent years, Canada's technology sector has grown rapidly, but tech entrepreneurs struggle to find the skilled talent they need to expand.

And finally, fewer people are pursuing apprenticeship certificates in key skilled trades—posing serious challenges for industries such as construction and manufacturing that rely on those trades.

On transitioning temporary foreign workers to permanent residence

BCA supports increasing the number of temporary foreign workers who transition to permanent residence through Express Entry.

Businesses are best equipped to identify which workers best fill their labour force needs. And more importantly, temporary foreign workers already have valuable Canadian work experience, which removes an important hurdle many immigrants face when looking for work in Canada. As such, expanding the pathway to transition temporary foreign workers to permanent residence is a great system that will address Canada's current labour shortage challenges.



Challenges to address and recommendations

On express entry

1. Reducing application backlogs

BCA commends IRCC for making huge strides in reducing the backlog of permanent residence applications this year. That said, processing times for Express Entry applications still far exceed service standards.

With immigration levels, including those managed by Express Entry, increasing, IRCC's systems must be able to process applications in a timely manner to ensure people can enter Canada and fill vacant jobs promptly.

Recommendation: That the federal government dedicates the resources necessary and implements the solutions required to ensure IRCC can process new express entry applications within the 180 days service standard.

2. Recognizing provincial differences and responsibilities

As mentioned, labour shortages and labour market needs vary across the country. As such, BCA encourages the federal government to include strong provincial involvement in selecting immigrants to fill labour shortages.

Recommendation: To ensure that regional differences are reflected in immigration priorities, that the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration significantly increase the proportion of Express Entry invitations issued to candidates from the Provincial Nominee Program.

As immigration is a shared responsibility, it is important that the federal category-based selection does not unnecessarily duplicate similar labour-based immigration selection efforts by the Provincial Nominee Program. Rather, the two programs should work together cohesively.

Recommendation: To avoid unnecessary duplication, that the federal government work closely with provincial partners to ensure category-based selection and existing Provincial Nominee Program streams do not create inefficiencies in our immigration system.

Other immigration-related challenges

3. Improving foreign credential recognition

It is well documented that immigrants accredited for a regulated profession outside of Canada are less likely to work in that profession than their Canadian-born and trained counterparts.

Despite their expected contribution to the Canadian economy, immigrants can face barriers integrating into the labour market due to a lack of recognition of foreign credentials. As a result, immigrants face high rates of job mismatch, leaving their talents utilized.



Recommendation: That the federal government work with provincial partners and professional regulatory bodies to improve and expedite the credential recognition process for internationally trained individuals.

4. Building sufficient housing

Canada has a chronic housing shortage, and Alberta has the largest structural housing deficit amongst all the provinces.

As the government prepares to welcome up to half a million immigrants each year, demand for housing will increase, and we are already not building enough housing each year.

Recommendation: That the federal government work with their provincial and municipal governmental partners to ensure developers and builders can build accelerate housing starts.

Conclusion

BCA wishes to thank IRCC for the opportunity to submit comments during this consultation process. We look forward to working with the federal government to create a world-class immigration system that attracts the best and the brightest from all over the world to come live and work in Canada.