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TIP SHEET #3

ASSESSING SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

Refer to Summary of Resources
Tip Sheet #12 for a listing of
information sources.

diversity

An Employer Advantage

Alberta 

Tip Sheet 3: Assessing Skills and Competencies

A challenge for any employer is the acknowledgement and recognition of qualifications, education, and professional certifications of credentials received abroad. Be aware that this can also be a challenge for immigrant job seekers, particularly the case of refugees who were forced to flee their home countries with no supporting documentation and whose institutions might have no contact to the outside world. You may not be familiar with the organizations or schools listed on resumes and their job titles may be confusing, but these should not be reasons to screen-out a candidate. This tip sheet will provide you with some ideas on how to assess experience, skills, and competencies of skilled immigrants fairly and effectively.



1 Assess resumes differently:

- New Canadians often have the skills and experience that you need but their resume may not follow the same style or format as that of someone who has been working in Canada.
- For example: Some countries include a photo with their resume as a best practice. Or in some countries it is customary to include personal information, or even failures along with successes on their resumes.

2 Assess overqualified applicants:

- Many New Canadians find it difficult to gain employment in their field. They may apply for lower level roles because they were either advised by others or anticipate that it will be easier to obtain employment and "get their foot in the door" to a preferred organization.
- Use the interview process to explore the candidate's motivation to apply for a role in which they appear to be overqualified.

3 Clarify previous experience:

- Newcomers may modify their resumes to fit advice they received in-person or found online. Example: "Your resume should be no more than one page".
- Candidates may also make assumptions about an employer's understanding of their previous roles. Consider this before discounting the candidate.

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4 Create general procedures to include foreign credentials:

- Identify and document what information and/or credentials are critical for the position. For example: Is a First Aide Certificate necessary at the time of hiring, or can they acquire it once they start the position?
- Dictate the required level and type of credential(s) from Canada and then determine which is most comparable to the foreign credential.
- Determine whether similarities between foreign and domestic credentials are sufficient for recognition.



5 Assess academic credentials:

- Do not assume that academic credentials obtained overseas do not have value, or equivalent value, in Canada.
- Many overseas academic programs are extremely well respected and even more comprehensive than those offered in Canada. If a certain level of academic assessment is essential to the role, have a credential assessment service evaluate the credentials received overseas.
- First consider if an academic credential is necessary to perform the role. If no, then move on to assess the areas of the resume that address requirements.
- If yes, for the majority of occupations, the only way to objectively assess international academic credentials is through a credential evaluation service.
- IQAS (International Qualifications Assessment Service) provides an independent assessment of international academic credentials and can be done through organizations such as the Government of Alberta.
[IQAS for Canadian Immigration](#)

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6 Assess professional credentials:

- Determine in advance if the role you are hiring for is regulated in your province, then ask the candidate to provide an assessment by the relevant licensing/certification body.
- For non-regulated occupations, structure your interview questions to help assess if the candidate's previous education and experience are appropriate for the role.



7 Assess "fit" and workplace culture:

- Research the reputation and culture of an organization where the candidate has worked previously. Online research and news articles about the company can be useful in understanding a candidate's past work environment.
- Company websites can provide an understanding into their previous workplace values and culture.
- Interview questions can also give insights into candidates' prior work environments, plus indicate their desired work environment and culture.

8 Assess for all related experience, not just "Canadian" experience:

- Many employers look for Canadian work experience when reviewing resumes, but this can disqualify otherwise suitable candidates.
- Intentionally review prior experience, including volunteer roles, and assess skills the individual would have been required to have for previous roles.
- Assess for how something was done and what results were achieved rather than where the experience took place.
- For more considerations regarding "Canadian" experience, refer to the Interviewing and Selection Tip Sheet.

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Consider alternative assessment processes:

- Where it is difficult to compare foreign credentials, ask for transferable skills rather than screening on education and certifications. Attempt to create an assessment process that allows you to recognize experiences outside of Canada.
- Focus on competency-based hiring and try a working interview where candidates have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and abilities.
- Use individual interviews alongside expert panels or witness testimony to make up for missing documentation.

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Make use of a prescreening interview:

- New Canadians may not be aware of what information employers want to see on a resume. If the overall resume is strong, consider using a pre-screening phone interview to verify missing or vague information.
- Ask scenario-based questions to more immediately and accurately assess how they would perform on the job.
- Newcomers may have difficulty answering open-ended questions, specific questions can help focus their responses.

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Check references:

- Ask for character references if no local work references are offered or available. For example: ask for a reference from professional associations that applicants may be a member of, or seek references from a relevant supervisor if they volunteer somewhere.
- If international references speak English, and can be reached by phone, make the call. Consider sending the questions ahead of time by email so the reference has the time to review the questions and be better prepared to answer.
- In an effort to overcome language barriers or different time zones with references, an email can be sent. This enables the recipients to use Google Translate to answer the questions or answer the questions at a time that is suitable for them.

The percentage of foreign-born individuals in the Canadian labour force population has increased since 1991 from 18.5% to 21.2% in 2006. If recent immigration levels continue at this rate, that proportion could reach almost 33% in 2031.

~ Statistics Canada, Projected trends to 2031 for the Canadian labour force ~

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Helpful Tips

- **Be aware of the time it takes to have credentials assessed; allow for this in your hiring time lines.**
- **You can ask potential employees to have their credentials assessed as part of their job applications.**
- **You can inform applicants about credential assessment services in your job advertisement and put a link to these services on your organization's job posting.**
- **Consider recognizing the applicant's educational credential assessment (which they may have obtained for immigration purposes or as part of the application process for another job) rather than requesting additional documentation.**



For more tips and strategies to improve diversity in your workplace, check out our other Tip Sheets:

1. Job Descriptions
2. Recruitment and Job Sourcing
3. Assessing Skills and Competencies
4. Interviewing and Selection
5. Orientation
6. Onboarding
7. Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Work Environment
8. Training and Development
9. Communication
10. Employee Retention
11. Common Terms and Definitions
12. Summary of Resources

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