

## Who will fill all the jobs?

Ottawa must move fast to bring in skilled immigrants, conference told

By Louisa Taylor, The Ottawa Citizen  
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Photograph by: Chris Mikula



*Alberta Lawson, an immigrant from Ghana, spent four years and almost all her savings before being hired by Scotiabank at a higher position than she applied for. The recruiter 'really listened to me and saw what I could do for the company.'*

Ottawa is woefully unprepared to deal with the looming shortage of skilled labour, and business leaders and government need to get their heads out of the sand before it's too late, a meeting of business leaders heard on Wednesday.

The warning came from Carleton University professor Linda Duxbury, and from Rosemarie Leclair, CEO of Hydro Ottawa, on the second day of a two-day leadership summit, Addressing Ottawa's Talent Needs. The summit, organized by Hire Immigrants Ottawa, brought business

leaders and senior managers from the public sector together to learn about recruiting and retaining skilled immigrants.

While the City of Ottawa predicts that immigrants will be needed if every new job is to be filled after 2011, a large proportion of newcomers are unable to find work. Of the immigrants who join the Ottawa workforce every year, approximately 83 per cent have a university degree, but the unemployment rate among recent immigrants is eight-per-cent higher than for non-immigrants. Among those who have jobs, more than half are not working in their intended field.

Duxbury, professor of organizational health at Carleton's Sprott School of Business, warned Wednesday of a "profound disconnect," arguing that employers haven't caught up to the fact that simple demographics are propelling them rapidly from a buyer's market to a seller's market.

"We have simply not procreated in sufficient numbers to sustain our labour force," said Duxbury. "For every two people retiring, there is only one person in the pipeline to replace them."

Those retirees are workaholic baby-boomers, Duxbury said. The young people coming into the job market reject that generational addiction to long hours and poor work-life balance, "so really, we're going to need three people to replace two."

Duxbury argued that the attitude in business and in the public sector has long been that newcomers must adapt to the Canadian workplace. Now, says Duxbury, employers who hope to thrive will have to turn the Golden Rule on its head.

"It used to be, 'Treat people the way you want to be treated'," said Duxbury. "But diversity means 'Treat people the way they want to be treated'" -- see beyond cultural differences to find what they have to offer, and don't be afraid to make adjustments to the way you work.

One thing in Ottawa's favour is that parts of the city recognize there is a problem, Leclair said. Various groups, including the city and the United Way, supported the creation of Hire Immigrants Ottawa, which includes a 33-member council of employers and was recently named recipient of the national Arthur Kroeger College Award for Public Affairs.

"We have to make Ottawa the destination point of choice for skilled labour, and we have to do it now," said Leclair, co-chair of HIO.

Scotiabank, one of HIO's partners, was this week named one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers, for the second year in a row. At the Wednesday breakfast meeting, a Scotiabank senior personal banking officer told her tale of struggling to find work.

A trained banker with a master's degree from Carleton University, Ghanaian immigrant Alberta Lawson spent four years and almost all her savings on the search, until she attended a networking event a year ago, and met a Scotiabank recruiter who "really listened to me, and saw what I could do for the company." Lawson was hired for a position at a level higher than what she initially applied for, and now works at a Kanata branch of the bank.

**24%**

The proportion of Canada's employers indicating difficulty in filling positions during this recession

**2011**

The year experts predict all of Ottawa's net new labour will come from immigration

**4,853**

The average number of immigrants who come to Ottawa every year

**8%**

How much higher unemployment is among very recent immigrants (landed in past five years) than for non-immigrants.

**58%**

The proportion of recent immigrants who are not working in their intended occupation

**83.4%**

The proportion of immigrants with a university degree joining Ottawa's labour force every year

**9%**

The proportion of working-age immigrants coming to Ottawa with a graduate degree every year

Hire Immigrants Ottawa, Statistics Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Manpower Public Sector

Dennis Jackson, Scotiabank vice-president for Ottawa and West Quebec, said the company has in recent years focused on broadening its hiring practices, including trying alternative ways to assess credentials and more open interviewing techniques.

"We're a lot better now at looking below the surface and seeing the abilities, and seeing how minor adaptation can be a success for both the potential new employee and the bank and our customers," said Jackson, a member of the HIO employers' council.

"It took us a while but we've discovered we were missing some very important opportunities by not being more inclusive and more flexible in our hiring."

HIO also gave awards Wednesday to three local employers showing leadership in the hiring of immigrants: the City of Ottawa, Revera Health Services and the OCRI Talent Bridge program.

Adjusting the way employers recruit and retain immigrant talent "isn't the nice thing to do, it's the only thing to do," said Leclair. "We have to move beyond a notion of corporate social responsibility and see this is about the long-term sustainability of our economy, of our city."

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## Resources for employers and employees

### **Hire Immigrants Ottawa**

Networking events, workshops and guides for employers.

[www.hireimmigrantsottawa.org](http://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.org)

Phone: 613-228-6715

### **LASI World Skills**

Job-search workshops, resources and support for internationally trained professionals.

[www.ottawa-worldskills.org](http://www.ottawa-worldskills.org)

Phone: 613-233-0453, ext. 300

### **YM/YWCA**

Language, enterprise and employment services for newcomers.

[www.ymcaywca.ca](http://www.ymcaywca.ca)

Phone: 613-788-5000

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