

2012 LEADERS' SUMMIT ON IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT PROCEEDINGS

Morris J. Wosk
Centre for Dialogue
Vancouver, BC

September 18, 2012

Connecting Employers
to Immigrant Talent

MESSAGE FROM KELLY POLLACK

EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR
IEC-BC

The 2012 Leaders' Summit on Immigrant Employment, hosted by the Immigrant Employment Council of BC, gave employers from across the province an excellent opportunity to focus on the challenge and opportunities of our changing workforce. Attracting the right people at the right time has never been more of an imperative, as demographics shift and the competition for skilled talent increases globally. While skilled immigrants have been settling in British Columbia for a very long time and have been integral to our growth, their significance to BC's future prosperity has never been more striking.

These proceedings of the Summit held on September 18th, 2012 demonstrate that there has been a marked shift in the discussion from just a few years ago. Most BC employers recognize that skilled immigrants are not just a potential backstop for a static Canadian labour market, but a long-term asset in a competitive marketplace.

I am grateful to each of our presenters who, collectively, provided so many insights into the successful attraction and retention of skilled immigrants, including why doing a good job of managing a diverse workforce matters.

The Summit also afforded us the opportunity to hear the most current plans of both federal and provincial governments as they reach out to employers as part of building an even stronger, more responsive immigration system.

For IEC-BC, the success of the Summit was the contribution of all who attended and added their thinking and their voice to this important dialogue.

Thank you.

BACKGROUND



The 2012 Leaders' Summit is the first such event sponsored by the Immigrant Employment Council of BC (IEC-BC) since IEC-BC was launched in 2008 at the Metro Vancouver Leaders' Summit on Immigrant Employment. In recent years the global economy has dipped into recession and is only now on the mend. Along with the economic recovery comes a renewed focus on the challenge of finding and retaining skilled workers. Employers consulted earlier this year encouraged IEC-BC to provide new opportunities to continue the dialogue started four years ago.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The 2012 Leaders' Summit brought together 114 participants and included strong employer participation from across British Columbia. Held in Vancouver at the Wosk Center for Dialogue, the event built on recommendations from the IEC-BC Employer Consultation conducted earlier this year.

Experience has shown many employers that skilled immigrants bring far more to organizations than much needed skill sets. Diversity brings a measure of equity for some larger employers including public sector organizations, but it also broadens the experience and creativity of every workforce. IEC-BC Board member Fiona Macfarlane made the point that “a like-minded homogenous workforce is no match for a diversified, dynamic, and broadly experienced workforce.”

While the impact of changing demographic profiles and globalization is fueling the chase for skilled immigrants internationally, the solutions for attracting, hiring and retaining these workers require local strategies.

The morning's employer panel brought three quite distinct perspectives to light with presentations from Michelle Rolls, owner of Queensway Fix Auto Collision in Prince George and Dawson Creek, Dalbir Rai from Ernst & Young and Anne Nickerson from the City of Vancouver.

A point of consensus, also shared by other presenters in the afternoon workshops, was the crucial role of leadership to establish a corporate culture of inclusion and respect within a diversified workforce. That baseline requirement sets the foundation for the success of mentorship programs, manager toolkits and support for a culturally sensitive workforce.

Participants also heard updates on provincial and federal programs from Sohee Ahn, Executive Director, Policy and Stakeholder Relations Branch, Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training and Mark Davidson, Director General, International and Intergovernmental Relations Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Both senior levels of government are determined to find more effective engagement strategies to work with employers on the immigration system. Mr. Davidson detailed a new “Expression of Interest” initiative to match up skilled workers considering immigration to Canada with employers.

Ms. Ahn informed participants that the province was providing \$1.75 million to IEC-BC that will fund the development of innovative initiatives to help BC employers, and business and industry associations address challenges with hiring, integrating and retaining new immigrants.

The morning presentations and afternoon workshops showcased an impressive number of resources, tools and strategies. As many employers noted, however, the ingredients for success can look very different depending on the size, location and sector of each employer.

The guest speaker, Allan Gregg, reminded participants that patterns of immigration to Canada have undergone a significant transition, changing the workforce, as well as the foundations of the immigration system. Mr. Gregg made the case that successful integration of new Canadians into the workforce is critical to economic fortunes but also social cohesion.

As these proceedings demonstrate, a growing number of employers are actively engaged in the challenge of finding, hiring and putting to full use the skills and contributions of new Canadians.



Kevin Evans
IEC-BC Board
CEO
Industry Training Authority

THE CHALLENGE

Kevin Evans, event moderator and IEC-BC Board member, noted that there has been a significant shift in the conversation since the 2008 Summit. Employers are no longer focused on the 'why' of tapping in to skilled immigrant talent but are focused on the 'how'.



Gord MacDougall
Chair
Vancouver Foundation

Vancouver Foundation Chair **Gord MacDougall** welcomed participants to the Summit. The Vancouver Foundation hosts and supports the Immigrant Employment Council of BC. They recognize that the full integration of immigrants is dependent on their success in finding work and building new careers in BC, a critical factor of social inclusion.

Mr. MacDougall noted that with declining birth rates, and an aging workforce set against the province's tremendous prospects for economic growth, it is estimated that immigration will be needed to fill nearly 40 percent of the one million new jobs to be created by 2020.

While the future economic well being of the province is central to the discussion about hiring skilled immigrants, Mr. MacDougall also reminded participants that recent surveys of Vancouver residents have found a growing sense of isolation among too many recent immigrants unable to get traction in today's labour market.

Learn more about
IEC-BC at
www.iecbc.ca



Fiona Macfarlane
IEC-BC Board
Managing Partner
Ernst & Young

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The 2012 Summit was designed to provide information, showcase resources and highlight real world examples of employers demonstrating leadership and best practices in their efforts to attract and retain skilled immigrant talent.

Fiona Macfarlane, IEC-BC Board member and Managing Partner at Ernst & Young, put employers' challenges into a global context. As a firm with over 140,000 workers employed in 140 countries around the world, Ernst & Young is well placed to observe that skill shortages are certainly not unique to Canada.

Global population growth is still significant, but will be more narrowly focused on countries such as India, sub-Saharan Africa and some parts of the middle east. Countries such as Japan and Russia are already experiencing quite significant declines in their labour pools. Companies like Ernst & Young have realized that in a global marketplace it is a distinct advantage to have a diversity of experience, ideas and skills within their corporate workforce. "A like-minded, homogenous workforce is no match for a diversified, dynamic, and broadly experienced workforce."

As companies and countries implement strategies to respond to both the impact of demographic change and the benefits from a diversified workforce, the implications for BC are clear. Although Canada has earned and retains a reputation as a welcoming destination for immigrants, our recent track record of employment success for immigrants is slipping. Employers in BC have much to gain by working together to protect the province's reputation and ensure new Canadians are given the opportunity to contribute fully to the provincial economy.

"A like-minded, homogenous workforce is no match for a diversified, dynamic, and broadly experienced workforce."



Bob Elton
Chair
IEC-BC Board

SETTING THE CONTEXT

IEC-BC Board Chair, **Bob Elton** acknowledged the global challenge, but stressed the need to respond with a cohesive response that is tailored to the situation in BC. A recent province-wide employer consultation conducted by IEC-BC found employers eager to be engaged in the broader system for immigration. It is well understood that the challenge is complex, taking on a very different character depending on the sector of the economy, the region within BC and the size of the employer. As a result, there is already a level of confusion among employers as they try to navigate a plethora of programs and regulations.

Stronger inputs from employers into the immigration policies and programs would improve alignment between immigrant employment initiatives and other workforce strategies.

IEC-BC is using the results of their BC Employer Consultation in their strategic planning. They have also shared the findings with both federal and provincial governments.

Principles for Action

1. Move quickly beyond research and consultation to action.
2. Ensure that employers play a leadership role in solutions and program development for workforce integration.
3. Create clear outcomes and success metrics for pilot and demonstration projects.
4. Leverage and build on existing labour market programs, services and initiatives.
5. Concentrate scarce available resources on a small number of priority solution areas.
6. Align immigrant employment initiatives with other workforce strategies.
7. Facilitate improved coordination of the system to overcome employer confusion.

Read the full
Employer
Consultation
Report at
www.iecbc.ca

PROVINCE ANNOUNCES NEW EMPLOYER INNOVATION FUND MANAGED BY IEC-BC

Sohee Ahn, on behalf of the Provincial Government, informed the Summit participants that the Honourable Pat Bell, Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training, had announced earlier \$1.75 million for IEC-BC to design, implement and manage a new funding program to support BC employers, and industry and business associations to develop new initiatives and resources to address challenges with attracting, hiring and integrating new immigrants into our labour market.

Learn more about this announcement at www.iecbc.ca/about-us/in-the-news



BC EMPLOYERS SPEAK: LEADERSHIP AND BEST PRACTICES IN ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TOP TALENT



Michelle Rolls
Owner
Queensway Fix Auto Collision
Prince George and
Dawson Creek

The morning's employer panel discussion explored the challenge of attracting and retaining immigrant talent from three very different perspectives. **Michelle Rolls** owns and manages Queensway Fix Auto Collision with operations in Prince George and Dawson Creek. Her challenges stood in stark contrast to those of **Dalbir Rai**, Leader of Business Tax Services Group at Ernst & Young, a multi-national firm with a global footprint of a workforce and consumer base from around the world. Those two private sector stories were complemented by the public sector challenges presented by **Anne Nickerson**, Director of Equal Opportunity Program for the City of Vancouver.

IEC-BC video released "*Meeting the Demand for Skilled Talent: BC Employer Solutions*"

View at
www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOlcVdxNEd0&feature=g-upl



Dalbir Rai
Leader of Business Tax Services
Ernst & Young

Strategies to attract and retain workers must flow from the motivation of the employer. Ms. Nickerson noted that resolutions adopted by Vancouver's city council focus more on the imperative of diversity in the workplace.

Diversity is not just a political commitment to equity for the city's workforce, but recognition that city services can best meet the city's needs if their workforce is reflective of the city's demographic composition.



Anne Nickerson
Director
Equal Opportunities
City of Vancouver

In contrast, Ernst & Young has made a strategic determination that a more diverse workforce is central to the competitive advantage in the marketplace.

'Like minds' is not a winning option for a company that must offer creative solutions to align with vastly different market conditions across the globe.

For smaller employers, especially those in more remote locations, finding even one new person with a much needed skill set can require thinking outside the box, and looking outside the country.

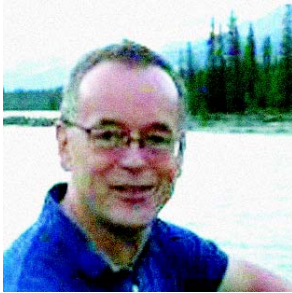
Despite these different motivational starting points, many of the techniques employed by each presenter were similar. For example, mentorship programs have played a crucial role in the success of both Ernst & Young and the City of Vancouver. The City has not only identified prospective employees, but also allowed the employer to tap into the wealth of experience and knowledge of the mentees. Mentors are keen to reprise their role as they enjoyed sharing their expertise and learning from the mentees.

Learn more about the IEC-BC mentoring program at www.iecbc.ca/our-services/mentoring

The panelists also found common ground on the 'on-boarding' challenge. The strategies, such as toolkits and manager training sessions, were common to the larger employers, but all three panelists talked of the need to establish workplace respect for the cultural differences among employees. In the case of Queensway Fix Auto Collision, the existing workforce went a step further by introducing their new co-worker from Jamaica to fishing and local activities and inviting him home for dinner on Sunday evenings.

Perhaps the most striking shared ground for panel members was the importance of reaching outside their own organization to find external resources. Organizations such as IEC-BC have been tapped for employer tools and resources. Community colleges have become key allies for Michelle Rolls as she tries to navigate the paperwork to accredit skilled immigrant workers.

While the panelists approached the challenges from different motivations and offered similar tactics, the key takeaway messages for the audience were clear. Strategies need to be tailored to meet the unique requirements of the employer. Mentoring tools, partnerships and on-boarding strategies are always critical markers for success. Finally, each of the presenters signaled that returns on their efforts to attract and retain immigrant talent more than justified a continuation of this labour force strategy.



Mark Davidson
Director General International
and Intergovernmental
Relations Branch
Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

GOVERNMENT ROLES AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Both senior levels of government continue to play key roles in the immigration process, seeking to match the skill sets of new arrivals with Canada's labour market needs. **Mark Davidson** reviewed some of the relevant CIC programs and detailed new initiatives that, in many instances, reflect the messages heard in the recent IEC-BC Employer Consultation.

The Consultation found employers to be concerned that, in too many cases, new Canadians were not measuring up in terms of language proficiency. Mr. Davidson noted this very issue is being addressed in draft regulations tabled in August 2012 for the Federal Skilled Worker Program.

The federal government has also recognized that many would-be immigrants are not being granted the points they deserve from work outside Canada and as a result, only one to two percent of immigrants arrive with skilled trades experience. A new 'skilled trade stream' is being introduced to overcome this administrative barrier.

Similarly, the government is taking a new approach in draft regulations to ensure that the quality of an immigrant's education is factored into assessments. The Government of Canada will now consider the quality of degree-granting institutions, and will reflect this in the points needed by applicants to earn entry to Canada.

This will be of value to the new immigrant, both in terms of entering the country and in assuring prospective employers that their qualifications measure up to Canadian standards.

A primary stream for immigrants coming to BC continues to be the Provincial Nominee Program. Mr. Davidson made the point that in comparative terms, the BC program is viewed as one of the best in Canada and serves as an example to other provinces.

Mr. Davidson noted that findings from the IEC-BC Employer Consultation aligned well with the new *Expressions of Interest* initiative. BC employers encouraged governments to learn from best practices in immigration strategies beyond Canada.

Mr. Davidson and his provincial counterpart, Sohee Ahn, recently returned from New Zealand where the *Expressions of Interest* program has received significant acclaim. Under this new program, an individual will signal their interest in finding work in a particular region of Canada and indicate the skills and qualifications they have to meet employment opportunities. Where a match can be found, with registered employers, the immigration process can be expedited to reflect the evidence of a skilled immigrant able to meet matching employer needs.

Expressions of Interest is still in the development phase and will be reviewed by employers in upcoming consultations across the country.



Sohee Ahn
Executive Director
Policy and Stakeholder
Relations Branch, Labour
Market Division
Ministry of Jobs, Tourism
and Skills Training

Sohee Ahn shared the provincial perspective on meeting the skilled immigrant challenge. Growth projections in the province are difficult to pin down as some large projects have moved forward more quickly than expected, while others are delayed by market conditions. However, it is expected that 35 percent of the one million job openings foreseen within the next decade will be needed outside of the Lower Mainland. This phenomenal growth is of particular concern, as only 10 percent of BC's population resides outside the Lower Mainland.

Attracting workers – Canadian or foreign-born – to job openings in fast-growing communities outside urban BC is an ongoing struggle. Ms. Ahn noted one example that stood out. In Kitimat, where Rio Tinto has had 2,000 job openings in the past two years, the lure of employment has only attracted eleven immigrants. The reasons for this are not easily explained, but clearly there is room for improvement.

The Provincial Government plays a particularly crucial role in the credential recognition process – a top concern of employers consulted by IEC-BC.

Ms. Ahn stressed the enormity of the credential recognition challenge, noting that there are 62 regulators in BC, managing some 260 occupations. The process typically involves far more than simply considering the actual credentials or the university post-secondary degree. Regulators must also factor in work experiences and other certificates and licences. The trend has been to look at competency assessments, language assessments and essential skills.

Employers need to know that an immigrant's credentials

assures competence and a license to work. The Province is responding. Competency based assessments allows the government to validate the skill set of each immigrant, and identify gaps that must be bridged to give that individual a green light for employer consideration. In addition, new efforts are being made to help immigrants with pre-arrival information, ensuring each person is fully aware of the documentation they will need to earn their Canadian certification.

Looking ahead, Ms. Ahn noted that new initiatives are being readied for introduction in March 2013. Once again, these new initiatives are very much aligned with the feedback IEC-BC received from their Consultation.

New toolkits and checklists are being developed to help employers with the hiring process. At their core, these new initiatives will provide pragmatic guidance to employers to recognize both the choices they may consider in finding a qualified skilled immigrant candidate and the process that each option entails.

Together, these two presentations underlined a very important marker in the response of senior levels of government to the challenge of engaging employers on key aspects of attracting and retaining skilled immigrant talent. Governments are no longer questioning the 'why' pertaining to engagement with BC employers but instead are making strides on the 'how'.



PLENARY SESSION

The morning plenary discussion allowed Summit participants to engage with presenters and add to the dialogue. A number of interesting ideas and initiatives were raised, along with some expressions of concern.

Attracting new immigrants is seen by the provincial government as a complement to, not a substitute for BC's resident workforce. Programs exist to help BC's workforce, be they First Nations, landed immigrants or others to identify training and qualification gaps needed to secure employment.

Kevin Evans noted that the Industry Training Authority has helped over 400 such immigrants living in BC with coaching, basic training and gap analysis to expedite their employability.

The complexity of the challenge and the breadth of initiatives related to meeting skill needs were evident in the plenary discussion. For many employers, finding a prospective employee can mean navigating multiple streams and overcoming unfamiliar regulatory hurdles.

Two questions were raised that address opportunities at both ends of the employment spectrum, and together underline the multifaceted nature of meeting BC's labour market needs with skilled immigrants. John Winter with the BC Chamber of Commerce noted that attracting more international students to the province's universities presents an under valued opportunity – as many university graduates may choose to settle in the province. Jim Sinclair, with the BC Federation of Labour, objected to the Temporary Foreign Worker program as being at odds with our history of giving immigrants a chance for a new life in Canada.

This session demonstrated that tough questions and core principles of the immigration system can easily be left hanging in doubt as immigrants, employers, trainers and regulators struggle to keep up with a dynamic and very complex immigration system.



Allan Gregg
Chair
Harris Decima Research

BUSINESS AND IMMIGRANT TALENT GUEST SPEAKER: ALLAN GREGG

Allan Gregg, well-known Canadian pollster and pundit, delivered a compelling presentation, rich with data points that underscored the dramatic evolution of immigration in Canada. Mr. Gregg challenged the audience to consider the implications for Canadian social cohesion as the need for skilled workers will grow Canada's population by nearly one percent a year – quadrupling the intake of immigrants from what had been the norm a generation ago.

A generation ago, up to 80 percent of immigrants came from white, Christian, European sources. Today that figure is 16 percent. Over 80 percent of today's immigrants come from Asia, Central/South America, the Caribbean and Africa. Seventy percent have a mother tongue that is neither English nor French. While approximately 40,000 new Canadians come to BC each year, 90 percent settle in the Greater Vancouver area.

From the employer's standpoint, these new Canadians arrive with impressive credentials and aspirations. The majority are university graduates, hard working and entrepreneurial. However, the disconnection between the immigrant's potential and actual employment history is growing – despite employers' struggles to find skilled workers.

Mr. Gregg noted that while satisfaction levels continue to rise from first to second generation white immigrants, the story is inverted among visible minority immigrants.

For a country whose economic fortunes are so closely tied with attracting and retaining skilled immigrants, Mr. Gregg made a forceful argument that Canada must consider that previously successful multicultural strategies are failing, and employers must be far more creative with their employment strategies. Perhaps most challenging will be strategies to offer more than a job to lure immigrants away from the Metro Vancouver area. These immigrants will be looking for a sense of community that will demand partnerships among employers, municipalities and service agencies.

View Allan Gregg's presentation at www.sfu.ca/tlcvan/clients/IEC/2012-09-18_IEC_BC_Employers_Summit_18796-Allan_Gregg.html

AFTERNOON WORKSHOPS



Jennifer Gervès-Keen
Facilitator

ASSESSING AND RECRUITING IMMIGRANT TALENT

Practical ideas for assessing and hiring immigrants were the focus of the first afternoon workshop.

Jennifer Gervès-Keen provided workshop participants with useful reference tools to help HR professionals and hiring managers see how an external accreditation stands up against those granted by better known Canadian institutions.

Once employers have made the determination to attract immigrant talent, they need to adapt their hiring practices. This challenge involves writing a job description that will eliminate bias against immigrants and ensuring that job opportunities are posted in media that attracts an immigrant following.

As an example, employers should focus on the tasks the position requires rather than how the result of that task is achieved. Likewise, employers can attract more immigrant talent by posting their opportunities in culturally diverse platforms. Examples included encouraging immigrants in the organization to assist with postings, using local service providers and advertising with ethnic media.

New challenges arise for employers once applications from immigrants arrive. Even getting beyond perceived hard to pronounce names can be a barrier for some human resource specialists and hiring managers. Filtering bias can also be triggered by an applicant's language, their work experience in foreign countries and different cultural norms in the job-hiring process.

Lack of familiarity with foreign training and educational standing can also work against a worthy candidate's application.

"Employers should focus on the tasks the position requires rather than how the result of that task is achieved."

See the IEC-BC New Canadian Assessment Resource at www.iecbc.ca/how-to-employ/hire-talent/assessing-new-canadian-experience



Ian Cook
Director
Research and Learning
BC Human Resource Management
Association

EMPLOYER TO EMPLOYER

Guest speakers for the final workshop included **Ian Cook**, Director of Research and Learning for the BC Human Resources Management Association; **Harry Watson**, President and General Manager of Metro Testing Laboratories; and **Cliff Yeo**, Human Resources Advisor for Canada Safeway.

Ian Cook made a forceful observation from his experience with a wide range of employers across the province. Over the past few years, employers have made a distinct attitudinal shift in their strategies toward attracting immigrant talent. A previous conviction that HR strategies 'ought' to consider hiring immigrants is now better characterized as 'crazy not to'.

"A previous conviction that HR strategies 'ought' to consider hiring immigrants is now better characterized as 'crazy not to'."



Harry Watson
President and
General Manager
Metro Testing Laboratories

In keeping with comments made by employers in the morning session, both Cliff Yeo and Harry Watson underlined the importance of employer leadership in changing corporate culture and emphasized the importance of diversity in achieving prosperity in today's economy.

Mr. Watson noted several specific initiatives taken by Metro Testing Laboratories, such as job postings that encourage applicants with multiple language skills; recognizing that new Canadians frequently place a special premium on career development opportunities; and establishing workplace policies that welcome the use of second languages by employees.

Canada Safeway has a strong history of attracting immigrants to their workforce. Mr. Yeo noted this has been a top-down corporate strategy to ensure their workforce reflects community demographics and leverages the diversity of experience and creativity to better serve their customers.



Cliff Yeo,
Human Resources Advisor
Canada Safeway

The workshop provided many examples of initiatives to attract and help new Canadians feel welcome in the workplace and to acknowledge that their contributions provide their employer with a competitive advantage in the marketplace.

SUMMARY

The 2012 Leaders' Summit updated participants on current and new initiatives being taken by the two senior levels of government, several of which place a new and important emphasis on employer engagement. There was also consideration of successful strategies by employers to attract and retain immigrant talent. While some elements for success resonate across a broad range of employers, the need to tailor strategies to meet very different circumstances was also clear.

The Summit provided a forum for presenters and participants to share research, experience and opinions. It also provided an opportunity for dialogue on how to situate the employment of immigrants in a much larger discussion about Canadian values, inclusion and social cohesion.





Kelly Pollack
Executive Director
IEC-BC

CLOSING REMARKS

The breadth of employers attending the event demonstrated, for Ms. Pollack, the momentum in BC to more fully utilize the untapped talent of new Canadians.

Ms. Pollack observed that the day's discussions demonstrated the complexity of the challenge and the need for tailored strategies to attract and retain skilled immigrant talent. From language skills, to corporate culture, to the very different regional circumstances faced by employers across multiple industry sectors, there is a need to recognize that no single initiative or strategy will suffice. The Summit did, however, showcase the potential of employers to explore, not just the challenges, but also solutions.

MOVING FORWARD

The need to find solutions that connect employers from all business sizes, sectors and regions to immigrant talent is clear.

We know that attracting immigrants to consider opportunities outside of Metro Vancouver presents new challenges for both employers and community partners. IEC-BC will need to explore more targeted engagement strategies and solutions in different regions of the province.

Allan Gregg noted that the integration of immigrants in the workplace is closely linked to broader societal issues of inclusion and social cohesion. Employers have much to contribute to this dialogue and opportunities should be seized to have their voice heard.

The complexity of the immigration system and the need to understand how it works and how it is changing was very evident at the Summit. Beginning in December 2012, IEC-BC will hold regional forums in BC and will continue to offer an annual Summit for Metro Vancouver.

Moving forward, IEC-BC will play a stronger role connecting employers with the right information, in the right format and at the right time.

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IEC-BC is an initiative of the
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