

The Talent Within

The immigration industry is at a crossroads, both through traditional migration streams, as well as overseas assignments in the expat world. There are various push pull factors at play in this market. Of note, these include, taxation laws, economic factors and the ever-increasing border protection undertaken by most western countries. However, there is no more important factor in immigration than the education and skills of the population.

Countries attracting migrants such as Australia (190,000), UK (200,000+), New Zealand (90,000), USA (approximately 1 million) and Canada (200,000), were at a high in 2015 for skilled immigration. It is expected that these numbers will decrease somewhat with the changing political and economic environments. Recently, the OECD reported a 6% decrease in worker migration over all of the OECD countries. These trends are expected to continue, meaning that businesses will become more reliant on the local population for skilled labour and existing labour sources.

It is easy to say that by building a wall, or putting more stringent rules around immigration, will most certainly affect the immigration industry, however, experience has shown that it is in fact the skills and education of the expat and migrant population that drives the real outcome of the migration programmes of each country. Political talk aside, businesses need skills, and no matter what the immigration policy of a Government is, it is clear that there are two straight choices - increase immigration, or increase the local population skills and education. Either way, the economy relies on it.

In Australia for instance, the Federal Government has a long standing approach to education and increasing education outcomes for the population. In today's environment, school children can achieve vocational outcomes as part of their secondary education, ensuring they are "job ready" upon graduation. Make no mistake, this is a deliberate approach to reducing migration numbers across this country. The more skilled the population, the less requirement is for skilled migration. This long-term approach is also followed in Canada and New Zealand, whilst in recent years the UK has reversed this policy.

When you combine the educated population with the ageing population in countries such as the UK, Australia and New Zealand, then the necessity will remain to keep immigration numbers high. Governments struggle with this regularly. Weigh up the needs of the economy against the perception of overseas workers "taking jobs", and this is a standard reaction across all western countries. It isn't new though, some Governments react with education and skills at the heart of their policy, whilst others build walls and rely on the population to be skilled already. For this, you must have confidence that the education system has been supported for many years prior.

International education migration has been a natural solution for some countries to get the best of both worlds. Welcome the income from education, whilst growing a skilled population. The "Bring One-Build One" model is effective. However, if the international student population does not have the ability to remain in country, post-graduation, then the outcomes are limited and the skill drain continues. International students are now the third largest contributor to the Australian economy. Whilst they make a large contribution in the UK, USA and New Zealand. Once started, the appetite to continue is strong.

Countries who undertake a skilled migration policy have a dilemma. Should they allow International Students to remain in country, post graduation or, operate a skilled worker programme from abroad? Or, as is the current posture, make the most of what is in front of them?

Of course, none of this is helped by the fact that there is no international agreement on education benchmarks for vocational and higher education. Yes, we have the Washington Accord and similar agreements at a regional level, but there is no true benchmark by which country immigration standards can attest to. Most western OECD countries will look to a skills assessment to prove the employability of the migrant applicant. However, if it is not instructed in English, or it is not at the same standard as the "Host Country", then the reality is that the education will not be recognised and the applicant will be limited, regardless of their skills. For instance, a person who has studied as a Registered Nurse in the Philippines, needs to undertake further education to gain entry as a nurse in most countries. A carpenter in the United Kingdom needs to undertake a skills assessment to prove their skills, regardless of their apprenticeship

certificates, for most countries they relocate to. There are many more examples of this. And of course, there is the English language requirements, asking a tradesperson to pass an English test at a level higher than a UK Surgeon Entrance Exam, to gain entry to some countries.

It is certainly reasonable for applicants to turn to immigration solicitors for advice and guidance. They are the only people who can wade through the legislative instruments, explain the process to guide and advise the applicant on a professional basis. Some countries only allow an Immigration Solicitor to assist applicants. This being said, legislation changes all the time and eligibility criteria change constantly. An applicant could be on a migration pathway and all of a sudden it is closed without justified explanation.

The issue of skills in the worldwide migration programmes continues to be exacerbated in an already exposed market. Until there is an international accord on skills and education and recognition by all countries of such a scheme and the outcome they provide, then the global workforce is and will remain limited to only the lucky ones.



CHRIS GALWAY

Chris has been involved in the Migration Industry for the past 11 years in numerous roles. These have ranged from Education Assessments, through to the invention of specific Insurance Products for Visa Holders and Expats from around the world. As an innovator in the industry, Chris has been a guest speaker at many international events specialising in the subject of global education and mobilisation. Chris was the developer and founder of the Immigration Industry Association. For further information contact Geraldine Collett, General Manager geraldine.collett@industryassociation.org or call +44 (0)7970 952620 Visit www.immigrationindustry.org