



## **Adaptability Key For Immigrants**

By Dr. Lorne Foster

The Immigration And Refugee Protection Act and the accompanying regulations came into effect on June 28th of this year.

Part of the new Act addressed Canada's immigrant selection system and revamped the criteria for the admission of skilled workers.

The overriding goal of the selection system has always been to conscript workers who supposedly will make the greatest contribution to the labour market and have the best opportunities for economic establishment. In recent years, however, there has been substantial sociological and economic literature that criticizes the commission's definition and understanding of "skilled" worker. Given that Canadian society is in the process of being re-tooled by an information economy that has produced a state of rapid occupational change - where the knowledge base is expected to double every eighteen months, and so, many of the jobs of tomorrow have not yet been invented - the ability to adapt to new skills is becoming increasingly more important than the acquisition of existing ones. In this regard, contemporary history has placed a premium on a learning-based rather than skill-based population; and future dividends are expected to be reaped through a prevailing focus on life-long learning strategies and "human capital" development.

Where does the new Act stand on human capital resources?

Independent immigrants who want to come to Canada as skilled workers are now accepted for entry on the basis of the number of points they score out of 100 in the following categories: education (25), age (10), language abilities (20), employment experience (21), arranged employment (10) and adaptability (10). These are some of the changes that have been made to the selection grid for skilled workers:

- Education increased from 16 to 25. More points have been allocated for applicants with a trade certificate or a second degree.
- More points have been allocated for language proficiency. The maximum number of points available for proficiency in both English and French combined has been increased from 20 to 24. Workers who are proficient in both languages will score more points. A new assessment level that recognizes "basic proficiency" has been added to the three existing levels (high, moderate and none). These changes are expected to result in more bilingual (English and French) workers being admitted to Canada.
- The total number of points available for "experience" has been reduced to 21 from 25, and more points will be awarded for one to two years of work experience. This

is expected to attract younger workers who may have higher levels of education but fewer years of experience.

- The "age factor" has been adjusted upwards, so that workers between the ages of 21 and 49 will score the maximum number of points (10 points). This is expected to make it easier for older workers to gain entry to Canada under the skilled worker class. And -
- The pass mark has been set at 75 points. Although this is up from 70, it is purported to respond to concerns raised by the provinces and territories and others that a high pass would bar many skilled immigrants.

It is of note, for the first time in recent history the new regulations do incorporate a broader notion of "human capital" beyond specific occupational designations. For instance, not only have points for education increased, but an applicant can also gain additional points if their spouse has a post-secondary education.

At the same time, thoughtful observers will recognize that Canada's new selection process still does not go nearly far enough in its attention to human capital resources.

It does not, for instance, take into account the barriers to formal education and skills acquisition that some ethno-racial groups and women face in source countries. It also excludes an appreciation of the different kinds of occupational experience and skills, such as those associated with "women's work" (child-rearing, kin-keeping, small-scale agriculture, market work, etc.). And licensed occupations, including medicine and dentistry, continue to impose restrictions and deny accreditation, which results in blocking the entry of immigrants with foreign degrees or credentials outside Canada.

In the end, the ultimate challenge of government and society in a rapidly changing world is to endorse creative and far-sighted measures that encourage inclusiveness and accommodation in an effective formula which maximizes the potential contributions of immigration to Canada's nation-building goals.