



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

International Experience Canada (IEC) 2019-20 Employer Study Executive Summary

Prepared for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

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For more information on this report, please contact Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada at:
IRCC.COMMPOR-ROPCOMM.IRCC@cic.gc.ca

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This public opinion research report presents the results of 60 qualitative in-depth interviews conducted by Earncliffe Strategy Group on behalf of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. The research was conducted in February and March of 2020.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Enquête de 2019-2020 auprès des employeurs du programme Expérience internationale Canada.

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Communications Branch
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
Jean Edmunds Tower South
365 Laurier Ave. W
Ottawa, ON K1A 1L1

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Executive summary

Earnscliffe Strategy Group (Earnscliffe) is pleased to present the following report to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) summarizing the results of in-depth interview testing of the International Experience Canada (IEC) employer study.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) mandates the International Experience Canada (IEC) program which gives youth (18-35) the opportunity to travel and work in one of their partner countries. As a bilateral program it also allows foreign youth the opportunity to travel and work in Canada. In order to ensure the program's success IEC implemented a targeted stakeholder engagement and promotion plan aimed at increasing awareness of the opportunities abroad and increasing Canadian youth participation. The research will be used to inform policy, targeted engagement and overall promotion of the program. The total cost to conduct this research was \$69,996.13 including HST.

The objectives of the research were to evaluate employers' and hiring managers' views of international work experience and to seek insights that would support IEC in its engagement and promotion of the program among target audiences.

To meet these objectives, Earnscliffe conducted a series of 60 in-depth interviews with employers and hiring managers across Canada between February 6th and March 6th, 2020. The interviews were conducted in both English (50) and French (10) and averaged 30 minutes in length.

It is important to note that qualitative research is a form of scientific, social, policy and public opinion research. Interview research is not designed to help a group reach a consensus or to make decisions, but rather to elicit the full range of ideas, attitudes, experiences and opinions of a selected sample of participants on a defined topic. Because of the small numbers involved, the participants cannot be expected to be thoroughly representative in a statistical sense of the larger population from which they are drawn, and findings cannot reliably be generalized beyond their number.

The key findings from the research are presented below.

- While employers prioritize relevant experience, education and required certifications or licenses, there were other attributes and elements, such as soft skills, flexibility, adaptability, critical thinking, and communication skills that they admitted often helped them distinguish among candidates who meet all of the key criteria.
- The tendency for those who have not hired people with the kind of international experience gained while traveling as a youth, was to assume that the information would not likely be shared with them unless it was directly related to the position for which the person was applying. Many wondered how they would even know if someone had IEC-type experience.
- Impressions of how this sort of international experience might affect someone's candidacy tended to be mixed. Some inferred that they would find the experience uniquely valuable, but initial thoughts were sometimes less enthusiastic. If the participant was thinking of foreign workers who gained experience working in Canada, the assumptions were generally that the experience was valuable for the individual and often beneficial to the employer. However, when considering Canadians who have gone abroad, particularly if the experience was during their youth, some felt this was valuable character development, but others initially wondered how the experience could matter to their hiring.

- For many, the initial response on the value of the experience was that it would depend on the nature of international experience: the specific work the individual did or the kind of company for which they worked; the part of the world in which they gained the experience; and/or, whether it was career-oriented or more of a leisure trip. Some unprompted benefits mentioned were self-sufficiency, independence, problem-solving skills and soft skills.
- None felt IEC-type experience implied anything negative about the individual, however some indicated that citing international work experience as proof of qualifications for certain jobs may, at times, be insufficient or inappropriate.
- Employers tended to say IEC-type experience was not something they usually looked out for and almost all were reluctant to say IEC-type experience would result in higher compensation in any initial offer, but many said it would help an applicant get noticed or short-listed; thus boosting a candidate's odds of being offered employment.
- Of the small number of participants (perhaps 2-3) who indicated they already hire youth coming to Canada under these kinds of arrangements, the existence of this type of program was appreciated and the value to their organization was fairly high. Typically, this was for seasonal employment in the hospitality service industry. These employers indicated some unique advantages of hiring these foreign youth including their work ethic, customer-relationship skills, and ability to help recruit more valuable foreign employees in their situation.
- When prompted with a list of nine specific traits or attributes, nearly all participants agreed that IEC-type experience would significantly improve someone's cultural awareness and most agreed that one's adaptability would also be significantly improved. The assumption was often that an individual who decided to go to the length of working abroad, even working while traveling, demonstrates a level of personal commitment and a requirement for that individual to make their own success happen.
- In terms of the awareness of programs, most were unaware of them. Some did indicate having some knowledge, but in many of these cases, further probing revealed they were not thinking of the right kind of program. For example, it was often confused for processes relating to temporary foreign worker visas.
- Given a brief introduction to International Experience Canada (IEC), reactions ranged from mildly positive to quite enthusiastic support. It was clear that for many employers, the benefits of youth gaining IEC-type experience was valuable, if positioned appropriately. Raising the profile of the program, encouraging alumni to ensure the experience was included on their resumes, and improving the ability for employers to know or contact alumni may be the kinds of efforts that could help ensure the experience was leveraged optimally and to the mutual benefit of employers and alumni.
- Many employers indicated that, if brought to their attention as evidence of a self-driven, character-building, initiative, it would be compelling evidence of the long-term promise of the individual that could certainly improve the chances of being offered employment, assuming they adequately met all other qualifications.

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I hereby certify as a Representative of Earncliffe Strategy Group that the final deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government

of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephanie Constable". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Date: March 13, 2020
Stephanie Constable
Principal, Earnscliffe