

2004

MIKE.

Millennium Issues *for the* Knowledge Economy

Immigration: Fueling Nova Scotia's future growth

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Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada



"There was someone from Bulgaria with 15 years of experience that we really wanted, but he wasn't able to wait out the approval process. He had a U.S. Green Card, so there were no problems there, and because of the delays, we lost him."

Jean-Paul Deveau,
President,
Acadian Seaplants Limited

"Our universities are key assets in Nova Scotia's immigration strategy - attracting an increasing number of talented international students, who may choose to become immigrants. We are working to provide more work opportunities, both during their studies and after graduation, so that they, and we, can benefit from their contribution."

Sheila Brown, President
and Vice Chancellor, Mount
Saint Vincent University

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M.I.K.E. dialogue allows leaders in business, government and education to exchange opinions and explore ideas among the province's sharpest minds. The provocative input received from our M.I.K.E. debates is the foundation upon which NovaKnowledge is building an action plan and setting targets to grow Nova Scotia's economy.

In June 2004, NovaKnowledge held two public debates to discuss hot issues: venture capital and immigration — issues critical to moving Nova Scotia forward and expanding our economy. Participants articulated the need to take a leadership role and we've turned the talk into action. This input provided materials for our annual Knowledge Economy Report Card and has stimulated CALL to Action activity. The following is a summary of issues raised in the debate:

M.I.K.E. Debate Results

Nova Scotia is at a crossroads in its history. While it is home to a highly educated workforce and a vibrant knowledge economy, the province faces major challenges in the coming decades as our population continues to age. Other regions will grow more competitive, attracting and maintaining talent to feed their prosperity. Faced with these challenges, NovaKnowledge invited leaders in business, government and education to join a public debate on immigration to address how we can keep the immigrants we have attracted to our province, and encourage more to come.

Consider the trends

People live where they were born

Nova Scotia is facing a significant demographic challenge. Our birth rate has fallen below the replacement level, our population is aging and immigration to our province is only one-quarter of what we were attracting. United Nations figures suggest only 3 percent of the world's population live outside the nation in which they were born. Without an increase in immigration, Nova Scotia's population will eventually lose relevance from a national perspective.

Nova Scotia had only a modest increase in its labour force between 1991 and 2001 — rising from 447,525 to 451,375, an increase of 3,850. However, net immigration to Nova Scotia over that decade was 4,770. Take away immigration, and our workforce would have declined.

Can we manage with a decreasing labour pool?

Unemployment rates, that have long been a preoccupation here, will plummet due to retirements and death within the Baby Boom generation. In Canada, the number of Canadians withdrawing from the labour force will exceed those entering it by 2015. That's only eleven years away. As the population ages, finding people to do the work will be the new challenge. Retirements will be delayed and staffing the health care field will be particularly problematic for an aging society.

Within Nova Scotia, about 80 percent of immigrants come to the Halifax area. Many other regions are seeing sizeable decreases in their population already; one percent a year is typical in some. Healthy businesses always grow; what does a decreasing labour pool mean to them? Will they stay — or grow somewhere else?



We're failing to attract and retain immigrants. Why are we falling behind?

Government policies make hiring talent difficult

Innovative knowledge economy companies import employees to gain research and market development expertise not readily available in this market. Unfortunately, federal government policies put our companies at a disadvantage when competing for talent. Approval can take months, and companies have to prove, through a nationwide search, that there is no one legally in Canada currently able to fill the position. Potential candidates, unable to wait out the delay, will accept offers from competing companies in other countries.

Intense competition for international students and faculty

There are many compelling reasons for Nova Scotia to attract international students, and faculty – cultural exchange; research expertise; economic benefits for our province and businesses; and they enhance our international profile as a great place to live and work. Given these benefits, it is no surprise that Nova Scotia is encountering considerable competition for international students and faculty. Because of the difficulties faced when obtaining a student visa or long approval process for faculty, Nova Scotia could fall behind.

Where do we go from here?

Define our attitudes on immigration

The culture of our province lacks a tradition of welcoming immigrants, resulting in some resistance to the idea. To be successful, we need to know how Nova Scotians feel about this issue, who we want to attract, how we will treat them when they arrive, and how to build welcoming communities.

Work closer with the federal government

The federal government makes the rules regarding immigration, however some immigration programs allow recognition of our province's specific economic, cultural and social needs. Nova Scotia must work collaboratively, as Manitoba has, to build its track record with the federal government, if we are serious about increasing immigration.

Make it easier for professionals to practice here

Many professionals who land in Nova Scotia find their credentials and experience in question, and wind up working in unskilled positions when they can, and should, be making a greater contribution to our communities. A fast-tracked international accreditation process is needed so newcomers can gain recognition for their credentials and go to work.

Be more welcoming to our immigrants

Nova Scotia is a close-knit community — a province of contacts. For a newcomer, it is hard to make connections quickly and build relationships that lead to business and employment opportunities. All Nova Scotians should extend a warm welcome to newcomers, since they also have contacts that can lead to new markets and new opportunities for our businesses.

The bottom line

Participants agreed that immigration is a path to growth for Nova Scotia, but there are considerable challenges to increasing the number of immigrants who choose to call our province home. The process is onerous, resources are limited, and the competition for skilled individuals is intense. In fact, our own homegrown talent is being targeted and lured away, as we attempt to attract people from other countries here.

It is clear that Nova Scotians from all sectors — business, government, education and non-government organizations — must come together, with a sense of urgency, if we want to improve our immigration track record.

"Whether it's tough immigration laws and their tedious processes, or the profound pull of the ties of home, the notion that the world is waiting, with bags packed, ready to come to Canada, is a myth."

Tom Denton, Co-Chair,
Manitoba Refugee Sponsors



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2004 Knowledge Economy Summit

The 2004 Knowledge Economy Summit will be held on November 1, 2004. This event also launches our 7th annual Nova Scotia Knowledge Economy Report Card. Join in as our province's leaders from business, government and academia examine the hot issues — Venture Capital and Immigration — and find out surprising data on where Nova Scotia ranks on a national scale!

Knowledge Economy Summit

Monday, November 1, 2004

8:00 am - 2:00 pm

World Trade and Convention Centre

Port Royal Room

1800 Argyle Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia

To confirm your attendance please register online at www.novaknowledge.ns.ca

or contact Dawn at (902) 494-1510 ext. 17

or e-mail events@novaknowledge.ns.ca by October 18, 2004