ABOUT THE GUIDE

This guidebook highlights the main sections of the
Internationally Educated Nurses: An Employer’s Guide
online resource, www.oha.com/ien, which is a leading practice
guide on the integration of internationally educated nurses (IENs)
into the workplace and is intended to assist employers of IENs.

IENs living in Canada come from many countries. Despite their differences, they face common problems adapting to and working in a health care system that is organizationally and culturally unfamiliar. IENs often require upgrading, need orientation to the Canadian health care system, and must pass a professional exam created for individuals with local experience and knowledge. With current and impending employee shortages in the health care sector, and an aging population that requires more care, it is essential to remove barriers for IENs entering Ontario’s workforce.

A Valuable Tool for Employers

Recognizing the value of these professionals and the challenges they face, the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) and the Nursing Health Services Research Unit (NHSRU), McMaster site, have created a guide to help employers hire, retain, and integrate IENs into the workplace.

Internationally Educated Nurses: An Employer’s Guide was funded by the Government of Ontario. This guide contains a wealth of information about issues related to workforce diversity, regulatory environment, bridging programs for foreign-educated nurses, as well as practical advice on orientation and recruitment.
Why Hire IENs?
- They reflect the diversity of the patient population
- They offer valuable experience and additional language skills
- They bring new skills and ideas to health care
- To meet requirements as the aging health workforce retires

Who Hires IENs?
Most immigrants settle in urban centres. In Ontario, IENs live primarily in Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton and London. Health care employers in these areas are actively engaged in hiring IENs and have strategies to ease their transition into the workplace.

Managing Diversity
Workplace culture in Canada encompasses many cultural styles and diverse management strategies. The goal of managing diversity is to:
- Enhance workforce and customer satisfaction
- Improve communication among members of the workforce
- Improve organizational performance
**Ethical Issues**

Ensure your organization is aware of the ethical issues associated with recruitment abroad. Many national and regional nursing associations, including the International Council of Nurses, oppose targeted recruitment of nurses abroad, especially from developing countries and countries with significant nursing shortages.

Visit “Recruiting Abroad” on www.oha.com/ien for more information and statements on ethical recruitment.

**Recruitment Strategies**

Health care organizations use the following strategies to recruit IENs:

- **Recruitment abroad:** Employers should evaluate their position on recruitment outside Canada
- **Accepting applications from abroad:** Organizations should be aware of migration and regulatory stipulations and processes
- **Targeting Canadian residents educated abroad:** Employers need to look at programs supporting the integration of IENs resident in Canada

**Recruiting Abroad – How to Prepare**

Targeted recruitment of IENs abroad raises complex ethical issues. If your organization is considering recruitment abroad, it is important to:

- **Investigate nursing education standards** and practices in targeted countries
- **Form partnerships** in the target countries
- **Be aware** of migration and regulation issues in Canada
- **Arrange integration** of recruits into the community, the organization and the profession
What Hiring Managers Should Know
Managers responsible for hiring IENs should be knowledgeable about:

- Migration and registration
- How to assess IEN experience and qualifications
- How to work strategically with HR within the mandate of the organization
- IEN-related supports and resources

Assessing IEN Education
Regulatory bodies are responsible for ensuring IENs have equivalent education before they are eligible to take the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE) or Canadian Practical Nurse Registration Exam (CPNRE).

Interviewing IENs
Recruiters should be trained in cross-cultural interviewing skills, and should be:

- Culturally competent
- Knowledgeable about diversity management
- Equipped with the skills relevant to interviewing in cross-cultural situations

IENs in Canada
Most IENs enter Canada as permanent residents before they apply for employment as professional nurses. Recruiters should refer IENs who do not have permanent or temporary licenses to the provincial regulatory body.

IENs Should also be Advised to:
- Consult the CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses
- Investigate educational institutions in their areas that have bridging programs for IENs
Mentorship & Buddy Programs
Mentors support IENs in their professional transition. Mentorship has been identified as critical to a successful transition for all IENs.

Buddies support the social transition of IENs. The main role of a buddy is to:

- Provide local information and advice on getting settled
- Familiarize the recruit with transportation, banking and shopping
- Help the new recruit get to know the hospital, facilities and paperwork requirements

Visit “Mentorship & Buddy Programs” and the “Resource Centre” on www.oha.com/ien for further reading.

Tips for Managers
Managers can work with college and in-house educators to:

- Determine the orientation needs of IENs
- Identify orientation goals
- Decide what additional skills or observational experiences are required
- Arrange to receive progress reports

The Role of Educators
Educators are responsible for the orientation of IENs and ensuring that clinical practice and communication problems are resolved.

Community Partnerships
Partnerships with organizations that help IENs meet professional nursing expectations are extremely important for employers. Areas in which IENs typically require assistance are clinical orientation, language and communication. Many hospitals with successful IEN employment emphasize the importance of partnering with CARE, Community Colleges, immigrant agencies, and other community-based organizations such as Hire Immigrants Ottawa and The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC).

Visit the ‘Resource Centre’ and ‘Useful Links’ sections on www.oha.com/ien for more resources on partnerships and supports available.
Here are a few ways recruitment teams can ease the transition for IENs:

• Become familiar with the culture of the recruits
• Provide community-specific orientation
• Organize a tour of the workplace
• Assist with completion of paperwork prior to orientation
• Arrange an introduction with their future managers and co-workers
• Check on their progress

Helping IENs Adjust: Top Tips

Here are a few things organizations can do to help IENs adjust:

☑ Explain how the system works
☑ Clarify slang and idioms when using them in practice
☑ Share the unit’s “cultural norms” and explain cultural aspects of care
☑ Encourage them to share health care practices from their home country
☑ Share good nursing resources
☑ Provide positive feedback and offer help
☑ Invite them to be members of the team
CULTURAL & LANGUAGE ISSUES

Research shows that the main issues IENs face include:

- Psychological stress
- Insufficient social support, leading to feelings of vulnerability and lack of confidence

Language & Communication

ESL nurses can find the subtleties of language challenging. Common problems include:

- Understanding colloquial language
- Abbreviated medical terms
- Issues with telephone interactions

Assessing Language Skills: CELBAN

The Canadian English Language Benchmark Assessment for Nurses (CELBAN) was designed to assess the communication skills of IENs whose native language is not English. It evaluates proficiency in speaking, listening, writing and reading.

Differences in Nursing Practice

Often, IENs find that they must adapt to practices that are different from their previous work. Nurses in Canada have more responsibility and greater liability than nurses in some other countries.

Competency Education

Organizations that develop cultural competency help IENs adjust and enhance collaboration with their colleagues. Competency education and cross-cultural skills are important for all employees – including managers and executives.

Visit the ‘Resource Centre’ and ‘Useful Links’ sections on www.oha.com/ien for more language and culture resources.
When hiring IENs, your organization should be aware of issues relating to equity and discrimination:

- **Lack of opportunity**: Some IENs belonging to visible or ethnic minorities feel unappreciated and lack development opportunities.

- **Lack of representation**: In Canada, nurses from some countries are more likely to be in administrative positions, and visible minority and ESL nurses are not proportionately represented.

**Career Development – Barriers**

In terms of career development, here are some issues facing IENs in the workplace:

- **Language**: ESL nurses are at a disadvantage.

- **Leadership**: If their health care system and culture is significantly different from those in Canada, IENs may be unprepared for leadership.

- **Career advancement**: When adaptation means taking a step back from their status as expert nurse, IENs may lag behind locally educated nurses.

- **Suspected discrimination**: If educational issues prevent career advancement, IENs may suspect discrimination.

**Steps Toward Inclusiveness**

To combat these issues, organizations need to:

- Develop strategies that allow culturally diverse health care teams to function effectively.
- Promote harmony and inclusiveness at all levels.
- Develop processes for handling conflict at the organizational level.
Adaptation programs such as that offered by CARE can have a positive effect on IEN confidence, skills and professional success. Research points to:

- **Upgrading**: Nurses who take upgrading courses are less likely to drop out of nursing than those who pass the exam without prior orientation to Canadian nursing.

- **Longer orientation**: IENs need a longer orientation than locally educated nurses.

- **Suitable adaptive period**: Without a suitable adaptive period early on in their employment, IENs are likely to face challenges later.

**Common Adjustment Issues**

These issues are most frequently related to unfamiliarity with:

- Local technologies
- Clinical practice
- Expected behaviours

**Helping IENs Succeed**

- **Support groups**: Affinity groups and employee resource groups can bring together employees who share a common cultural background and foster organizational inclusiveness.

- **Continuing education**: Access to remedial education may be beneficial to IENs after initial orientation, and workplace transition periods can prepare them for the differences they will face in their new jobs.

- **Collaboration with other organizations**: Organizations can collaborate with academic institutions and community agencies. IENs may benefit from courses on the Canadian health system, including those focused on language skills and specific clinical skills and procedures.

For examples of successfully implemented strategies for supporting IENs in the workplace, please visit the “Case Studies” section at www.oha.com/ien.
REQUIREMENTS FOR IENs

How to Register
IENs wanting to practice as Registered Nurses (RNs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) or Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) must register with the provincial college of nurses and be members in good standing. Like nurses educated in Canada, IENs must:

1. Submit an application and supporting documents to the provincial regulatory body
2. Obtain a current General Certificate of Registration

Temporary Registration
IENs wanting to practice while working to complete their registration requirements can apply for temporary registration. Rules vary by province, but in general an applicant must provide:

- Proof of citizenship
- Permanent residency or authorization to work in Canada
- Other requirements related to training, fluency and suitability to practice

Ontario Application Requirements
IENs in Ontario must demonstrate to CNO that they have met the 7 criteria required to become a nurse:

1. Completion of an acceptable nursing or practical nursing program (or equivalent)
2. Evidence of recent safe nursing practice
3. Successful completion of a national nursing registration examination
4. Evidence of fluency in written and spoken English or French
5. Registration or eligibility for registration in the jurisdiction where they completed their nursing program
6. Proof of Canadian citizenship, permanent residency or authorization under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (Canada) to engage in the practice of nursing
7. Good character and suitability to practice, as indicated by the CNO’s Declaration of Registration Requirements and a Canadian criminal record synopsis

Registration Exams
IENs can take the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE) or the Canadian Practical Nurse Registration Examination (CPNRE) after they have fulfilled the conditions set by the regulatory body.

Recognizing Qualifications
The Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, funded by the federal government, streamlines recognition of foreign credentials and experience. IENs who submit an application to be registered will be advised within a year:

1. Whether their qualifications will be recognized
2. What additional qualifications they need
3. What alternative occupations would be commensurate with their skills and experience
BRIDGING PROGRAMS

Most provinces offer bridging programs to help nurses become licensed and make other career-related choices. In Ontario, CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses provides education and support to nurses eligible for examination.

EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT & ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Exam Eligibility
Regulatory bodies are responsible for performing educational assessments of IENs and determining whether they are eligible to take the registration exam.

Upgrading Skills
Based on assessment results, the regulatory body informs applicants whether they are eligible to take the CRNE or CPNRE and what additional education they need. Applicants can then upgrade their skills in universities, colleges or other designated educational institutions.

Bridging Programs
Choice of bridging program is based on the applicant’s Letter of Direction (LoD) from the CNO, and placement is based on assessment requirements. Courses vary in length and may be taught in the classroom, lab, online or in a hybrid model.

Non-formal Education
- Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR) – PLAR refers to the acknowledgment of learning that occurs outside formal educational programs. Increasingly, educational and training institutions are accepting PLAR as a method of gaining access to or credit in formal programs.
- CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses – Funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, CARE provides nursing-specific language and communications courses, preparation for the CRNE, and workshops on job search techniques and clinical skills.

Language Resources
CELBAN is frequently used to assess the English language proficiency of IENs applying for licensure. Most academic bridging programs provide language and communications courses which let IENs reach the standards demanded by regulators.
CONTACTS & FURTHER INFORMATION

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References and Further Reading:


See the website’s ‘Resource Centre’ for a complete list of references, useful links, and resources related to hiring and supporting IENs. We also encourage you to complete our feedback survey on your experience using the site.

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