Sequencing the BioReady™ Path
From newcomer to biotech talent
BIOTALENT CANADA

BioTalent Canada™ is the HR partner of Canada’s bio-economy. Our engagement with employers, associations, post-secondary institutions, immigrant serving agencies and service providers has built a dynamic network that is strengthening skills, connecting job-ready talent to the industry and creating opportunities. Visit biotalent.ca for more information.

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President’s Message

Just as sequencing a genome opens doors for scientists looking to advance research and innovation, so does sequencing a path for newcomers who look to gain meaningful employment in Canada.

When internationally educated professionals (IEPs) are given the support and tools to demonstrate their skills and experience, the bio-economy benefits. Employers who hire IEPs gain more than a new employee, they gain fresh perspectives and improved innovation and creativity.

In 2017, BioTalent Canada launched its labour market report Paving the Way, where key challenges and opportunities in our industry were identified for IEPs to alleviate the challenges prospective employers face in onboarding new talent. Following the success of the report, we were approached to pilot a program to address these recommendations through an innovative program to integrate more IEPs into the bio-economy.

This report highlights the journey from newcomer to employed of 35 IEPs who went through the BioReadyTM Paid Internship Program – 80% of whom were hired permanently following the completion of their placements. We invite you to learn more about the paths they took to employment and the positive impact they had on their employers.

Despite the success of these individuals, more work is needed to ensure the talent coming to Canada to build a future isn’t left overqualified and underused.

For employers, we hope this report helps identify areas of opportunity within their organizations to strengthen innovation through diversity. For job seekers, we hope it provides some guidance on their paths to rewarding careers in Canada’s bio-economy.

With over 300,000 internationally-educated professionals arriving in Canada each year and that number set to increase substantially, in an economy which boasts the lowest national unemployment level in over four decades, biotech employers will have to enhance their ability to attract and retain this strategically valuable labour market if they are to ensure their deepening talent deficits do not sideline their business objectives. At the very least, we hope this pilot project and this enlightening report serve to that end.

Our thanks to the organizations, individuals and associations who contributed content and support to this report and the programs behind them, to the new hires and their employers who contributed to the data within.

Rob Henderson,
President and CEO, BioTalent Canada
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Biotechnology and other companies across Canada can now access new wage subsidies to hire. Get financial help to offset your hiring costs.
About this report

In August 2017, BioTalent Canada launched the BioReady™ Paid Internship Program, a pilot to help Canadian bio-economy companies tap into the country’s deep pool of highly qualified internationally educated professionals (IEPs). With the pilot concluding in November 2019, this report provides an assessment of its performance, shares lessons learned, and draws conclusions about how to ensure Canadian bio-economy organizations reap the full benefit of available IEP talent.

The BioReady Paid Internship program gave employers access to pre-screened “BioReady”¹ candidates and covered up to 50% of BioReady IEPs’ salaries for paid internships at Canadian bio-economy companies. Over the course of the pilot, 35 IEPs were placed in paid internships and another 80 obtained BioReady certification.

The project was funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Foreign Credentials Recognition Program.

A world of talent, often untapped

Bio-economy employers that hire IEPs often find they gain more than just an excellent and knowledgeable employee. IEPs bring fresh perspectives that reveal new and better ways of doing things. Their ideas contribute to teams’ innovation and creativity. Employers are also able to draw on IEPs’ understanding of the markets in their home countries, creating bridges for export relationships and international collaborations.

All of this is on top of the skills IEPs bring, which are often exactly in line with Canadian companies’ needs. Nearly two thirds of IEPs arrive with experience in research and development, and a quarter come with quality control/quality assurance skills — areas in which Canadian firms are experiencing the most severe skills shortages.²

Despite the clear benefits of IEPs for bio-economy organizations, many internationally educated professionals have difficulty finding work in their fields and Canadian employers continue to report skills shortages. Two-thirds of the IEPs surveyed for BioTalent Canada’s 2017 Paving the Way report said they were not currently working in the Canadian bio-economy, citing lack of Canadian work experience and the challenge of having their education and credentials recognized as top reasons.

¹ The BioReady designation is obtained through the formal process of the BioSkills Recognition Program.

Building on earlier insights

*Paving the Way* made three recommendations for helping connect IEPs with companies that need their skills:

1. IEPs must be recognized as skilled and experienced talent.
2. The bio-economy needs access to a standardized candidate pre-screening methodology.
3. ISAs should function as a referral channel for standardized industry pre-screening.

The *BioReady Paid Internship Program* was developed in response to these. It incorporated skills validation (through the *BioSkills Recognition Program*) as a preliminary step, and combined that with financial support to help employers onboard IEPs — and to help those IEPs gain Canadian experience. It also involved immigrant-serving agencies (ISAs) as conduits for referring IEPs both into the pilot and to open internships with bio-economy companies.

**Why Immigrant Serving Agencies (ISAs) are so important**

ISAs can give IEPs valuable background on the Canadian job market and workplace culture, steer them toward helpful programs, and connect them directly with potential employers. IEPs who take advantage of ISAs’ job search and employment preparation services usually find their integration into the Canadian workforce much smoother. Yet only 40% of IEPs reported working with an ISA.³ This points to the importance of raising IEPs’ awareness of ISAs and the services they offer.

**The diverse opportunities of the bio-economy**

The bio-economy includes all economic activity associated with inventing, developing, producing and using products and processes based primarily on biological resources. These include resources from agriculture, forestry, fishery-based biomass and organic waste.

At a high level, the bio-economy comprises four multidisciplinary sub-sectors: health, energy, chemicals and materials. Biotechnology plays a vital role in each, combining various engineering fields with basic sciences such as biochemistry, molecular biology, genetics, immunology, microbiology, pharmacology, fermentation and agriculture (see Figure 1.) As research and innovation push forward the frontiers of knowledge, the scope of the bio-economy is continually being redefined. BioTalent Canada’s upcoming national labour market information study will provide more details on the current definition of the bio-economy.

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Canada’s bio-economy is hungry for talent

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada launched six Economic Strategy Tables in fall 2017 to propose ways of strengthening key, high-potential sectors of the Canadian economy. One of those tables was made up of industry leaders in health and biosciences — two cornerstones of the bio-economy. After months of discussions, the Health and Biosciences Table proposed key areas of focus and, not surprisingly, developing and attracting talent was on the list.

That’s because the health and biosciences industries struggle with significant skills shortages, and expect to do so at least until 2024. The final report of the Health and Biosciences Economic Strategy Table, The Innovation and Competitiveness Imperative, is clear about why this is a problem: “...with rapid technological developments and exciting new research promising advances in the life sciences, we need new skills — and we need them quickly — to advance our sector.”

To address the issue, the table made a number of recommendations. Three in particular are directly relevant to BioTalent Canada’s programs and services:

Create a skills hub to drive change in skills and talent programs and equip Canadians for highly skilled jobs in the sector

Specifically, the table called for sector players, educators and the country’s federal, provincial and territorial governments to create an “empowered and accountable hub” to develop a roadmap for the jobs of the future, create an evergreen data collection strategy, expand work-integrated learning opportunities and update educational curricula to emphasize future-focused competencies.

Several ongoing BioTalent Canada initiatives contribute to these focus areas, including the National Occupational Standards for the bio-economy; a new Labour Market Information Study project that will provide up-to-date labour market information for the sector; and the Student Work Placement Program, which offers wage subsidies to help students gain valuable experience in the bio-economy.

Create a digital repository of skilled workers

BioTalent Canada’s efforts in this area were acknowledged by the Health and Biosciences Table, which noted that The PetriDish™ national job board is already helping bring together skilled workers and bio-economy employers. The PetriDish provides a dedicated space for candidates to find bio-economy jobs or create a biotech resume, and is complemented by the BioSkills Match™ database for employers: a searchable repository of bio-economy professionals available for work.

Reduce barriers to hiring highly skilled foreign talent and enhance the system for foreign credential recognition

The BioReady Paid Internship Program responds directly to this proposal of the Health and Biosciences Table by making it easier for IEPs to have their credentials recognized and valued, and to gain their first Canadian work experience — paving the way for them to integrate fully into the Canadian bio-economy.

Meeting the Bio-economy’s Human Resource Needs

FIGURE 2: BioTalent Canada programs

1. LABOUR MARKET INFORMATION (LMI)
   - Skills needed and talent supply

2. NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS (NOS)
   - Document job skills

3. PROFESIONAL DEVELOPMENT
   - Essential Skills Training
   - Technical Skills Training

4. SKILLS RECOGNITION
   - BioSkills Recognition Program

5. TALENT MANAGEMENT
   - The PetriDish™
   - The BioSkills Match™
   - Wage subsidies e.g.
     - BioReady Paid Internship
     - Student Work Placement Program
   - Compensation Guide

Evidence-based foundation upon which programs and services are created
Helping meet the need

Beyond aligning with the recommendations of the Health and Biosciences Table, BioTalent Canada’s programs and services continue to meet the broader needs of the bio-economy (as identified by foundational, evidence-based research) by helping connect employers and skilled job-seekers.

Foundational research

Bio-economy Labour Market Information Study

The bio-economy as a whole needs accurate and current labour market information about skills requirements, available talent and future needs to plan for successful growth. BioTalent Canada’s next national labour market information (LMI) study — to be carried out in December — will help meet that need, updating and expanding on the findings 2013’s major LMI study, Sequencing the Data. The new in-depth LMI will give an overview of how the bio-economy has evolved since then, identify talent sources and shed light on where it may be going.

Learn more:
biotalent.ca/LMIStudy

Competencies for a stronger workforce

Going from discovery to commercialization success in the bio-economy requires the right people with the right skills in key positions. Ensuring this happens means knowing what competencies are needed to plan recruitment, succession planning and professional development so the talent is in place.

The foundational step in this process is the creation of National Occupational Standards (NOS). Current skills profiles continue to support the sector by informing programs such as the BioSkills Recognition Program and the BioSkills Match™ database. But in the decade since their development, some occupations have changed and new ones have emerged. As a result, BioTalent Canada is creating National Occupational Standards to more accurately reflect bio-economy careers and provide more effective recruitment and retention planning for employers.

Learn more:
biotalent.ca/NOS

Professional development

Essential skills courses

In BioTalent Canada’s 2013 labour market study, more than 50% of companies reported skills deficiencies among their current and newly hired staff — above and beyond the sector’s overall labour shortages. To address this, BioTalent Canada is developing online essential skills courses and seminars on critical thinking, oral communication, working with others, reading, writing and document use. These will help employers onboard new staff and help job seekers enhance their skills and be better prepared for the workforce.

Learn more:
biotalent.ca/courses

Technical skills courses

Bio-economy employers have identified several technical skills that workers need to be considered job-ready. They’ve also observed that workers coming directly from post-secondary education often have not had the opportunity to develop these skills. To address these gaps, the following introductory online courses are being developed and will be available in 2020: Good Laboratory Practice, Good Clinical Practice, Good Manufacturing Practice, Scientific Report Writing and Introduction to Quality Assurance/Quality Control.

Learn more:
biotalent.ca/courses

Skills recognition

BioSkills Recognition Program

The BioSkills Recognition Program gives job seekers a way to have skills and credentials from other fields or other countries recognized for their value to the Canadian bio-economy. Experts in the industry review candidates’ ePortfolios to confirm they have the skills, education and experience to work in a specific biotechnology function. Recognized candidates receive BioReady™ designation, giving employers confidence to hire candidates even if they lack Canadian experience.

Learn more:
biotalent.ca/get-started

Talent management

Career placements / wage subsidy programs

Since 2013, BioTalent Canada’s wage subsidy and career placement programs have helped more than 2,300 students, new graduates and newcomers gain work experience in Canada’s bio-economy. With focus areas including green jobs, internationally educated professionals and professionals with disabilities, these programs have helped reduce the risk of hiring candidates with limited experience and helped build a more diverse pool of highly skilled bio-economy professionals. They include:

- BioReady™ Paid Internship Program for newcomers
- Student Work Placement Program for co-op students
- Science Horizons Youth Internship Program for STEM recent graduates
- Career Starter, a new program that will help recent grads overcome barriers to entering the workforce

Learn more:
biotalent.ca/wagesubsidies

BioSkills Match™ database

The BioSkills Match database provides another way for bio-economy employers and candidates to find each other. By filling out a profile — including BioReady status, if applicable — candidates can join a searchable talent directory and be found by employers looking to hire. Since its launch, BioSkills Match has identified more than 400 BioReady newcomers and helps match them with valuable opportunities.

Learn more:
biotalent.ca/BioSkillsMatch

Compensation Guide

To attract and retain top talent, employers need to know the market value of specific occupations. The annual National Biotechnology Compensation Guide easily provides the data employers need.

Learn more:
biotalent.ca/compensationguide

The PetriDish™

The PetriDish is a national, bilingual job board dedicated to bio-economy positions. Employers can post available jobs and candidates can search for postings using a variety of filters, including by companies that accept BioReady candidates. The PetriDish has recently been expanded to include some provincial-specific job boards, thanks to some of BioTalent Canada’s member associations.

Learn more:
petridish.ca
Overview of the BioReady Paid Internship Program

Of the 35 internationally educated professionals who received paid internships through the BioReady Paid Internship Program, 80% were hired permanently after their internships finished.

Step 1: Get BioReady

To be eligible for a paid internship, IEPs had to be deemed BioReady through the BioSkills Recognition Program. Candidates could go through the recognition program before starting their job searches or apply after receiving an offer. Being BioReady indicates to potential employers that a candidate is ready to fulfill a specific job function within the bio-economy.

Step 2: Confirm eligibility

In addition to becoming BioReady, candidates were required to meet additional criteria, including:

- Being a Canadian citizen, permanent resident or person granted refugee status in Canada legally entitled to work
- Being a new immigrant to Canada (within the past five years)
- Having no previous full-time work experience in Canada’s bio-economy
- Not receiving employment insurance benefits

Step 3: Submit forms

Candidates were asked to submit a Participant Application Checklist, Personal Information Form and resume. BioTalent Canada reviewed the application package and advised candidates whether they were eligible to participate in the BioReady Paid Internship Program.

Step 4: Find a job

Any job with a Canadian biotechnology company matching one of BioTalent Canada’s skills profiles was eligible for the paid internship program. Candidates could look for suitable jobs through The PetriDish job board, an immigrant-serving agency or any other means. For more understanding of the job market, participants were also provided compensation information, from BioTalent Canada’s Compensation Guide, for their BioReady function. Employers who wanted to take advantage of wage matching could apply to have up to 50% of a candidate’s salary covered to a maximum of $11,500 per year.
As newcomer in Canada, finding meaningful employment can be fraught with barriers. Through the support of BioTalent Canada and their stakeholders, IEPs who take the BioReady path to employment are able to stand out to bio-economy employers without having Canadian experience through their BioReady recognition.

Having support from ISAs, access to BioTalent Canada’s resources and connections to employers gives IEPs the employment tools for success along the path.
BioReady Paid Internship Program at-a-glance

35placements
26employers

ARE YOU HIRING THE PARTICIPANT?

80% said yes

Highest level of education

- Masters 74% (26)
- Bachelor 11% (4)
- PhD 11% (4)
- Diploma 3% (1)

PLACEMENTS BY PROVINCE:

- British Columbia: 8
- Alberta: 1
- Manitoba: 20
- New Brunswick: 1
- Newfoundland and Labrador: 4
- Nova Scotia: 1
- Prince Edward Island: 1
- Yukon: 1
- Northwest Territories: 1
- Nunavut: 1

* BioReady Paid Internship Program applications and surveys (unless otherwise indicated)
PLACEMENTS BY SECTOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Bio-health</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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AVERAGE AGE: 31 years
AVERAGE SALARY PER YEAR: $50,709
AVERAGE INTERNSHIP CONTRIBUTION FROM BIOTALENT CANADA: $9,788

GENDER

- **FEMALES:** 16
- **MALES:** 19
- **NO:** 19
- **YES:** 14
- **DECLINED TO ANSWER:** 1

VISIBLE MINORITY

Would the position have been created without the subsidy?

- **6%** Not sure
- **23.5%** No, it would not have been created
- **14.7%** Yes, it would have been created anyway
- **55.9%** Subsidy allowed additional placements, finances or resources

EMPLOYMENT

- **80%** of participants are employed
- **75%** are performing a similar job to what they did before coming to Canada
- **83%** perform tasks of a similar type or complexity as those they performed in their previous jobs

Number of years in Canada before placement

- **<1 year:** 29%
- **1-5 years:** 57%
- **>5 years:** 14%

PROGRAM IMPACT

- **52.9%** have access to new markets
- **70.6%** gaining a new perspective
- **17.7%** other (e.g., valuable new employee, positive impact on R&D)
- **97%** would participate again

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7 Ibid
8 Third party survey data from Social Research and Demonstration Corporation Canada

Sequencing the BioReady™ Path
Standing out from the crowd: BioSkills Recognition Program

The BioSkills Recognition Program and the BioReady designation were already well in place when the BioReady Paid Internship Program was established. BioTalent Canada built those elements into the internship project by requiring candidates to become BioReady to be eligible.

Through the program, internationally educated professionals are invited to complete an ePortfolio including educational background, work experience, language proficiency, and information about their competencies and transferable skills, as well as supporting documentation such as a resume or published research papers.

A panel of expert bio-economy professionals reviews each submission against a relevant BioTalent Canada Skills Profile to determine if the candidate’s background is sufficient to enable them to fulfil that function in the Canadian bio-economy.

Candidates deemed BioReady receive a certificate and can stand out from the crowd by using the official BioReady seal in job applications, resumes and online profiles. They are also added to BioTalent Canada’s BioSkills Match database, where they can be found by employers looking for skilled talent.

Since its launch in 2013 the BioSkills Recognition Program has been revamped to provide a better user experience and will continue to be updated with National Occupational Standards as required. BioReady recognition will continue to be available after the paid internship program has concluded.

BioSkills Recognition Program

FIGURE 3: The BioSkills Recognition process

Education
Experience
Language
Competencies
Transferable Skills
Documentation

ePortfolio
Choose Biotech function for which you want to be BioReady™
Reviewed

BioReady™
Skilled immigrants play a significant role in filling the labour demand. However, employment barriers:

- Unfamiliarity with the Canadian workplace
- Finding that ‘cultural fit’
- Lack of local industry connections

**FAST is a free set of online resources and services that can help you launch your biotechnology career in Canada.**

- Gain the essential skills needed to build a successful career
- Free bioskills recognition for biotech professionals (Valued at CAD$200)
- Industry connections through e-mentoring
- BC JobConnect: A free online tool connecting job-ready newcomers to BC employers

**FAST HELPS SKILLED IMMIGRANTS BUILD A CAREER IN CANADA**

**SIGN UP AT FASTBC.ORG NOW**
IMPACT STORY: IMMIGRANT-SERVING AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

Giving visibility to high-value talent

When the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia (IEC-BC) was founded in 2008, it was created to do things differently. While there were many immigrant-serving agencies working directly with newcomers to help prepare them for work in Canada, no one was helping employers see the talent in front of them.

Instead of focusing on what immigrants need to do to fit into the Canadian labour force, IEC-BC works with employers to help them understand the value of including newcomers in their organizations and make the changes required to facilitate their integration. It produces reports on the benefits of a diverse workforce and resources to help employers conduct bias-free interviews, create inclusive workplaces and more.

“Our goal is to fill the gap between what employers need and the talent skilled immigrants bring to the table,” says Iona Santos-Fresnoza, Program Coordinator for IEC-BC’s highly successful FAST program.

Highlighting the value of the BioReady recognition

FAST (Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent) focuses on areas with the most acute skills shortages. It offers a set of free online tools and resources for both skilled immigrants and employers looking to fill vacancies. And it works.

IEC-BC’s studies have shown that around two thirds of FAST participants land jobs in their fields within four weeks of arriving in Canada. Santos-Fresnoza says partnering with BioTalent Canada to expand the program (which initially focused exclusively on skilled trades) to include the bio-economy was an easy decision.

“The BioReady program gave newcomers a way to showcase their skills and recognition that would let employers know their skills, competencies and previous experience had been checked and evaluated,” she says. “That kind of a recognition was something we already wanted to offer, so it was a great fit.”

The partnership also helped the agency build connections with more bio-economy employers. Many weren’t familiar with IEC-BC but knew BioTalent Canada, and Santos-Fresnoza says that helped open doors.

“It helps companies better understand the value of what we’re bringing when we contact them,” she says.

Thanks to the partnership, more companies are starting to recognize the BioReady seal and understand what it means. Now, Santos-Fresnoza says she believes it’s helping clients get invited to interviews that they otherwise might not have, if an employer only looked at their Canadian experience.

A deep talent pool waiting to be tapped

Santos-Fresnoza adds that she looks forward to continuing to partner with BioTalent Canada to find more ways of connecting highly skilled immigrants with companies that need their talent.

“The biggest hurdle remains awareness and understanding,” she says. “The talent employers need is right there in a pool they already have access to. Programs like this help them see it and make it as easy as possible for them to leverage it.”
Abhishek Udawat is not inclined to wait around for opportunities to find him. After earning a bachelor of science degree at home in India, he went to the United Kingdom for his master’s, spent three years as a research assistant in Malaysia working on palm oil waste biofuel, tested entrepreneurial waters back in India by founding a travel company and an e-commerce business, then fell in love with a Canadian and decided he would jet across the ocean to make his home here.

He knew he wanted to work for a start-up, where he could have multiple roles and gain insight into how to run a successful small business. Realizing opportunities would be limited in the small city where his partner lived, he did extensive research and preparation before leaving India. When he found out about BioTalent Canada’s BioSkills Recognition Program, he immediately submitted his ePortfolio to start the process of becoming BioReady.

The right connections

“I sent in all my paperwork, but I had my doubts,” Udawat says. “It all seemed too easy, like there had to be a catch.”

The catch never came. Through his partner’s connections, Udawat got in touch with the New Canadians Centre, where a counsellor connected him to a few promising opportunities. With his BioReady recognition prominently displayed on his resume and online job profile, he quickly secured a job with food bioculture company Noblegen — thanks in part to the funding of the BioReady Paid Internship Program.

Udawat started as a plant operator in Noblegen’s production facility and impressed the company’s co-founder with his ability to understand the processes and even suggest improvements.

“The internship was really helpful,” says Udawat. “It helped me get my foot in the door and gave me the Canadian stamp of approval that my international experience didn’t.”

Creating his own opportunities

Today, Udawat is Noblegen’s Lead Fermentation Technician, supervising a cross-functional team of 10 that works closely with multiple departments, including research and development, engineering, and maintenance.

Looking forward, he hopes to keep building his career in the food production industry, eventually starting his own company.

“It’s a really exciting field with lots of opportunity,” he says, pointing to the growing awareness of what people are eating and how it affects the environment, which is leading to greater interest in developing more sustainable alternatives — from consumers, food producers and investors. “But for now, I’m going to keep learning as much as I can.”
Getting a foot in the door

The weather is not usually cited as a reason for moving to Canada, but after living in Singapore and Australia, Rasvinder Kaur was ready for a little less heat. Canada’s unparalleled diversity and the opportunities that go along with that convinced her this was the place she wanted to call home.

Caught between “too much experience” and “not enough”

Despite her highly valuable qualifications as a molecular biologist and more than a decade of experience as a researcher in infectious diseases, Kaur knew she might face challenges in finding a good job in her field in a foreign country. She started her search several months before moving and quickly discovered Canada’s life sciences industry was much smaller than Singapore’s — and her years of experience didn’t open as many doors as she’d hoped.

“It was a bit frustrating, because when I applied for an entry-level position, they rejected my application because I was overqualified,” she says. “But when I applied for a senior position, they rejected me because I had no Canadian experience.”

Undaunted, Kaur did some Internet research and found BioTalent Canada’s BioSkills Recognition Program. Being realistic about the challenges of gaining employment in a new country, she opted to submit as a research assistant — a career level lower than she was qualified for — and easily earned her BioReady status.

New skills in a new field

With that recognition and the support of an immigrant-serving agency to help her make contacts, Kaur was able to secure a paid internship with iProgen Biotech Inc. There, she worked in the tissue culture facility, where cancer treatment compounds are tested.

“The internship gave me a valuable opportunity to learn new skills and showcase my transferrable skills to my employer,” she says. “Although I have a lot of related technical experience, my background is in a slightly different field, so there was still plenty for me to learn about cancer research.”

Kaur was impressed with how easy the BioTalent Canada programs were to use and navigate, and she believes the BioReady status contributed to her finding a job in her field as quickly as she did.

After her internship ended, Kaur was hired permanently at iProgen as a senior research associate and given additional responsibilities, including managing research projects. For the moment, she says she’s very happy where she is and looks forward to taking on new challenging tasks in her role, but she hopes to eventually move back up to a more senior position.
IMPACT STORY: EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

Making farming more sustainable with international experience

Livestock farming can be a tricky business when farmers have little control over the sex of the offspring produced by their breeding stock. Balancing the ratio of males to females is key to management of the overall population. Fast Genetics is a Canadian company helping pig farmers maintain that balance, control costs and improve sustainability. When the firm lost a key team member, it needed to find a replacement who could get up to speed quickly with minimal training. A promising candidate from the United Arab Emirates mentioned he was deemed BioReady through BioTalent Canada’s BioSkills Recognition Program — and Fast Genetics human resources manager Eleanor Scharf was intrigued.

International experience, Canadian context

“We do a lot of international recruitment and there are great candidates, but it can be tough to confirm credentials and employment history,” Scharf says. “Just trying to get in touch with references is a challenge. Overseas long-distance charges are high, you have to manage time zones, and there are often major language barriers.”

BioTalent Canada’s BioSkills Recognition and BioReady Paid Internship programs were a powerful draw for Fast Genetics. The funding support made it possible to bring on a paid intern even with a tight budget. The candidate’s BioReady recognition meant his education and experience were confirmed suitable for the Canadian market and his references had been verified. Scharf was confident they’d be making a good hire.

She was right. The new hire quickly integrated into the lab, performing tasks from media preparation to cell sorting and analysis to equipment sterilization and maintenance. His experience with breeding programs in Dubai meant he came in with a better understanding of Fast Genetics’ work than most new hires and had little trouble transferring his knowledge to the sex selection program.

New perspectives support innovation

Scharf says the intern’s international experience was a bonus that provided additional benefit: “Internationally educated professionals bring new, diverse perspectives, which are especially valuable when you’re trying to innovate. Those new ideas, paired with his understanding of our industry, have been really great assets for our company.”

When his internship was over, it was an easy decision to hire him on permanently, and Scharf says the program was so straightforward and produced such a good result that she will be on the lookout for similar programs to help with future hiring needs.

“This program helped us hire an excellent employee,” says Scharf. “It was a great fit for us, and we hope it continues, because we’d love the opportunity to use it again.”
Helping internationally educated professionals take the first step

Nate Stepner knows firsthand the value of having someone in your corner. In the early stages of his career in the pharmaceutical industry, he was fortunate to work with a clinical scientist willing to be his mentor, who provided guidance and shared his enjoyment of drug development and research. Decades later, Stepner still credits that first mentor with helping him get his career off the ground.

That’s why he’s given freely of his time and expertise to help promising young scientists enter Canada’s life sciences industry throughout his career, and why he was pleased to get involved with BioTalent Canada’s BioSkills Recognition Program as a BioReady review board member.

“It’s kind of my way of giving back,” he says. “It’s especially important for internationally educated professionals who are new to Canada and don’t yet have the professional connections who can help them along.”

Connecting international experience and Canadian requirements

Stepner goes above and beyond to understand candidates’ experience and capabilities. He often seeks out more information about the companies they worked for and publications they produced in their home countries. This helps him better understand how a candidate’s qualifications relate to those required in Canada.

“Usually, you have HR managers looking at resumes, and they don’t have a lot of time for each one, and they’re looking for specific things that international candidates’ resumes may not have — even if they’re completely qualified,” he explains. “What I bring as a BioReady reviewer is the time and the knowledge to really dig into a candidate’s resume and background and draw the connections between their international experience and the requirements to work in the bio-economy in Canada.”

At the end of each review, Stepner makes a recommendation: the candidate either is BioReady or needs to fill some gaps. When not, he tries to suggest additional training the candidate might take — and is always pleased when he sees someone’s application come back with those suggestions taken, so he can deem them BioReady.

Putting in the work

While Stepner doesn’t get to meet the candidates whose applications he reviews, he has met and worked with plenty of IEPs. He says the most successful have usually arrived in Canada with realistic expectations and an understanding that qualifications in one country don’t always translate one-to-one into qualifications in another. He advises bio-economy professionals considering a move to Canada to be prepared to put in the work to make themselves stand out — and to find a mentor.

“The process doesn’t always move as fast as you’d like it to, and it can be easy to start to feel lost,” he says. “Having a mentor makes a huge difference, so I strongly advise seeking one out if you can.”
COMING 2020

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The BioReady Paid Internship Program successfully helped 35 internationally educated professionals gain their first experience in the Canadian bio-economy. Most are still working at the companies where they interned, doing jobs similar to those they had before coming to Canada. Almost 90% said they were satisfied with the program, and most said they would recommend it — or already had — to other skilled immigrants. ⁹

Many survey respondents said that, before finding the BioReady program, looking for a job in Canada was harder than they had expected it to be. Their education and experience were often undervalued, and their lack of a professional network made it difficult to connect with good opportunities.

“I appreciate the program very much,” said one survey respondent. “Without it, I wouldn’t have found a job within three months.” ¹⁰

Response from participating employers was also positive, with more than 96% saying they would participate again, given the opportunity. Employers that hired IEPs found them highly capable and able to transfer skills and knowledge from related fields to the benefit of the company.

In terms of challenges, a few emerged from the pilot:

• The skills shortages being addressed by the BioReady Paid Internship Program exist within the BioReady talent pool: BioReady candidates were snapped up quickly, leaving other employers with vacancies still to fill.
• Available jobs were not always in the same city where IEPs had settled, and family or other obligations sometimes meant those IEPs weren’t able to go where the jobs were — and so couldn’t take the internship.
• Employers and participants needed quite a bit of guidance to take full advantage of the program. There is an opportunity for BioTalent Canada to work with immigrant-serving agencies to bridge this gap — and to develop more resources to help IEPs integrate into the Canadian labour market and more tools to help employers onboard more effectively. These could include mentoring programs and professional development opportunities made available through immigrant-serving agencies and other employment counselling services.

¹⁰ Ibid.
Recommendations

BioTalent Canada recommends the following actions to build on the momentum started by the BioReady Paid Internship Program and fulfil the recommendations set out in *Paving the Way* and the Health and Biosciences Economic Strategy Table Report:

1. **Newcomers should take advantage of every career development and job search strategy available.**

   Many IEPs still don’t know where to start their job searches or how to find people and organizations to help them. They need support from immigrant-serving agencies throughout their career journeys, including professional development both while searching for jobs and after being hired.

2. **Employers should champion the hiring of IEPs with BioReady recognition.**

   Employers that have successfully integrated BioReady IEPs into their workforces can help alleviate the concerns of other Canadian firms about hiring internationally educated professionals and raise awareness of the benefits of the BioReady recognition throughout the bio-economy.

3. **Support employers with best HR practices and tools.**

   Many employers aren’t sure what they need to do or how the hiring process for non-Canadians is different, and that sometimes makes them hesitant to try. Ensuring they have access to best practices and other resources for recruitment, onboarding, job evaluation, mentoring and professional development for newcomers is key.

4. **Strengthen skills recognition.**

   The recognition of skills, competencies and education from another country remains one of the top barriers faced by IEPs. *The BioSkills Recognition Program* has been proven to help overcome that barrier, but more is still needed. All stakeholders, from bio-economy organizations to employment counselling services to governments, should actively work to find ways for IEPs to demonstrate their abilities that is rigorous enough to give employers confidence but doesn’t place an undue burden on IEPs or force them to prove themselves over and over.

5. **Support the role of immigrant-serving agencies and employment counselling services.**

   These organizations play a vital role in connecting skilled talent to companies that need it. Study after study shows IEPs who work with ISAs get hired in their fields faster and integrate more easily than those who go it alone. ISAs can also help by working directly with employers, warming them to the notion of hiring IEPs. Since most IEPs do not take advantage of ISA services, and since employers may not think of ISAs as a source of new talent, efforts are needed to raise the profile of ISAs.

   As Canada’s leading organization dedicated to bio-economy human resources, BioTalent Canada has the expertise and experience to help implement all of these recommendations.
GATHERING THE DATA

Program data was collected from application forms. Feedback and comments on BioTalent Canada wage subsidy programs were collected from employer and participant surveys after placements were completed. All other data sources are referenced.

THANK YOU

BioTalent Canada wishes to thank all the companies and participants who have participated in BioTalent Canada’s wage subsidy programs and those partners who have supported and promoted the programs. Through their support in hiring new graduates, students, underrepresented groups and internationally educated professionals these companies have helped to enhance the biotech talent potential and strengthen Canada’s bio-economy.

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Thank you to BioTalent Canada’s partners, who support all BioTalent Canada projects, programs and activities.

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