

Ukraine professionals looking to connect in southern Alberta

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Many professionals looking to find a new start in Canada have found that their credentials haven't been recognized, leaving them unable to find work unless they're willing to repeat their education. Fortunately for engineering technologists making their home here, the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET) can help.

ASET has made the decision to waiving all application fees for refugees seeking to become members and attain their designations, which could prove invaluable to recent newcomers such as those coming over from Ukraine.

This decision wasn't made in response to any particular influx of refugees, said Barry Cavanaugh, CEO. Instead, it was a look at how their policies could have barriers for those in need of help to get their start in Canada, and a decision to change.

What exactly ASET does, is much "So we're authorized by the government to certify and, and regulate people in the profession. In the engineering technician and technologist profession, there are some 21 disciplines, very similar to engineering disciplines. And people are working in perhaps up to 100 occupations within that the majority of them are in traditional engineering or engineering technology fields like civil engineering, technology, mechanical, electrical, and that sort of thing," said Cavanaugh. "There's a significant difference between professional engineers and engineering technologists, although they're often confused. The professional engineer is one thing we don't regulate, And, they typically work hand in glove with technologists."

In any engineering consulting firm that you see, probably at least half of the staff will be engineering technologists, who were either under supervision or independently doing engineering for various projects, said Cavanaugh. Chances are some of them are employed in our municipalities.

What ASET offers is an unbiased, competency-based assessment program, developed by hundreds of subject matter experts to help determine standards for those looking to work even if Canada doesn't recognize their qualifications. ASET helps these professionals get their designation, which is usually the certified engineering technologist designation also known as CET. Once they have their CET designation, employers will know they are fully qualified and ready to work in their field.

"We're still the only organization in the country who's done it. But the consequence is, and part of the reason we did it is we wanted to create a purely objective way of assessing applications.

And we wanted to settle a level playing field," said Cavanaugh. "So, if you came from Syria, or France, you'd be assessed in the same way. And without any difficulty. And at that time, we had consciously gone back and removed from all of our standards once we developed them, subjectivity in terms of language use, like call it colloquial language. Although you may need to be able to speak English, you shouldn't have to be, you shouldn't be expected to know the colloquial English and Calgary."

Their priority is being fair, said Cavanaugh, and recently they realized that another way to do this is to remove the financial barrier for those with refugee status, as they often are experiencing financial hardship.

"We just thought, well, for anybody with refugee status, will waive the application fees and examination fees, because we want to make sure that we don't add any burdens to people," said Cavanaugh. "There's no real distinction, just because of the Ukrainian thing. The timing, though, made us aware that we needed to deal with refugees in a more fair manner generally. And I would hope that other organizations would do the same."

This help would have been a great boon to ASET Member Mila Wagner, who had to repeat her civil engineering technology diploma at Lethbridge College after leaving the Ukraine in 2016 after Russia invaded Crimea.

"I'm just so happy to share my story and the people who've gone to Canada who's looking to start a new life here. That is definitely beneficial to know where to stand and where to go and definitely become fluent in English first, and reach out to ASET often as soon as possible. So, they will be able to mitigate those differences and help you get work if you have engineering tech experience and a degree from home," said Wagner. "I enjoyed and benefited from the actual education I received through the Lethbridge College's Civil Engineering Technology program. I believe that going through ASET's competency-based assessment program would have been a more efficient route for me as well."

The initial steps are largely available online for those looking to get their designation, and much of it can be done either alone or with the help of an advisor to input education and relevant professional experience.

"Most of what we need, you can provide to us online, and it'll be assessed and a beat basically, correspondence going on with our staff if you need more help, and so forth," said Cavanaugh.

"At some point, let's get all the material we need about your education and your experience. If you run into any difficulty along the way, we have application advisors who if there's there will be pop ups essentially in the process. If it looks like you're having trouble with something inviting you to press a button and get back access to an application advisor who's an experienced member who can help you work your way through."