

ASET waives fees for refugees, offers fast route into tech careers in Alberta

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Through two initiatives, the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET) is making it easier for engineering technology professionals who are refugees from war-torn countries to earn their professional designations and find work in their field without having to return to school.

Effective immediately, ASET is waiving all application fees for refugees seeking to become members and attain their designations (e.g. certified engineering technologist). These fees, which include the application fee, prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) fee, ASET professional practice exam fee, and certification exam fee, can cost up to almost \$1,000 per member over time. ASET recognizes that many applicants who are refugees from countries in crisis are also suffering significant economic hardship.

ASET's fee waiver for refugees reflects its overall commitment to welcoming and supporting newcomers. In 2016, it launched a program designed to offer foreign-trained and other engineering technology professionals a faster route to establishing careers: the competency-based assessment program. The first of its kind in Canada and pioneered by ASET, it enables them to gain purchase in their career fields without having to return to school full-time. ASET eliminated the Canadian work experience requirement, making it one of the few regulatory bodies in Alberta to do this.

After Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, single mother Mila Wagner made the difficult decision to leave her home and job in Ukraine and move to Alberta two years later with her three-year-old son, Nikita. When she arrived in Alberta in 2016, she discovered that her multiple engineering technology-related degrees from Ukraine did not translate in the Canadian employment market and no one would hire her. She had to take on menial work until she was able to earn a civil engineering technology diploma at Lethbridge College.

Had she known about ASET's competency-based assessment program, she could have been fast-tracked into earning an ASET designation -subject to having the required application documentation -and ultimately working in a career-related job in half to a quarter of the time required to complete an additional engineering technology diploma in Canada.

While she praises the excellent civil engineering technology education that she received at Lethbridge College where the instructors are top-notch and go above and beyond to help their students, she wishes she'd known about the ASET program.

“If I could have been accredited through ASET from my previous schooling in Ukraine, I could have been positioned in a job in my field sooner,” said Wagner, now an ASET member. “I think the competency-based assessment program combined with application fee waiver will be a game changer for refugees from Ukraine and other countries.”

“With our application fee waiver for refugees now in place and our competency-based assessment program already established and proven to help newcomers, ASET is making it easier than ever for refugees with tech backgrounds to get on the career paths for which they were educated in their home countries,” said ASET CEO Barry Cavanaugh. “Alberta and Canada as a whole need more people with the technical knowledge and experience to contribute to our province and nation and we value what these newcomers bring.”

How the competency-based assessment program works: Foreign-trained professionals who have passed an ASET-approved English language proficiency test and are seeking certification and an ASET certified engineering technologist (CET) or certified technician designation (CTech) now undergo a competency assessment. This includes submitting academic credentials, work experience documents -such as CV, competency summary, job descriptions, and references - confirming their work experience locally and abroad. They then complete a professional practice exam that tests them on Alberta-specific legislation and professional ethics, and the ASET certification exam (if applying for the CET designation) that tests them on their technical competency.

In some cases, foreign-trained professionals are not able to access academic documents. For example, if they are refugees from a war zone, their academic institution may have been destroyed. ASET's PLAR model allows foreigntrained professionals who are unable to produce academic transcripts to complete a work portfolio to demonstrate equivalency to the academic requirements.

Skills and knowledge obtained outside of an academic program are evaluated for the purpose of recognizing professional competence, and certification exams test for the educational standard.

About ASET ASET is the professional self-regulatory organization for engineering technologists and technicians in Alberta.

ASET currently represents over 16,000 members, including full-time technology students, recent graduates and fully certified members in 21 disciplines and more than 120 occupations across a multitude of industries.