

Look overseas to rebuild your career

Canada, New Zealand and Australia are recruiting workers to plug skills gaps, writes **Gabrielle Monaghan**

On a one-way flight to Canada in March 2009, Eugene McMahon was having doubts about uprooting his wife and seven-month-old daughter from Mungret, County Limerick, and moving them 4,000 miles away to Edmonton. But after being put on a three-day week by his previous employer, McMahon felt he had little choice but to emigrate.

"We felt we were pre-empting disaster at work but, sitting on the aeroplane, I wondered if it was the right thing to do: were we jumping ship too soon?" said McMahon.

Sitting on his suburban deck last week, cheered by the 28C morning heat, the 33-year-old now has few qualms about staying in Canada indefinitely. He has just overseen the safety management of a C\$300m (€216.4m) expansion of Edmonton international airport and is looking forward to moving to Nova Scotia, where he has been promoted to manage a project that covers an area bigger than Ireland.

McMahon was hired by PCL, Canada's largest contractor, after he found the company at a jobs fair in London. PCL will be recruiting up to 100 more Irish workers at the Working Abroad Expo at Dublin's RDS on October 1 and 2.

The Canadian company is among a slew of employers, recruiters and foreign government agencies that are mining Ireland's skilled workforce to fill job vacancies in Canada

due to a scarcity of suitable candidates at home. Almost half of the 42,300 people who moved to Ireland in the 12 months to the end of April were Irish residents returning home, mostly because their visas had expired, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) said last week.

Mike Olsson, the human resources manager at PCL's industrial division, said he is coming to Dublin to meet job candidates who have worked in the oil, gas and construction industries in Ireland and abroad. "We have successfully recruited people from Ireland to join our operation in the past and we know you have the talent here," he said. "We are open to a broad range of disciplines from the construction sector, with many of these positions being about transferrable skills.

"We are also looking for professionals with experience of large-scale projects, whether they be commercial, oil or gas, energy or power-related."

Some 600 jobseekers have registered for a roadshow that will take place this week in Cork, Limerick and Belfast, and that highlights jobs being offered by Australia's Northern Territory. Rob Knight, the region's minister for business and employment, expects the Northern

Territory to create 20,000 jobs over the next five years as it expands its oil and gas operations. "Our economy is booming and we now have the lowest unemployment rate in the country," said Knight. "While

we are keen to meet Irish construction and oil industry professionals, we are also recruiting right across the board, including doctors, nurses, social workers and teachers."

Knight's plans come in the wake of a visit by the state government of Western Australia to Ireland in July, when it sought to lure workers to fill the 150,000 job vacancies it expects to open up within five years.

More than 30,000 Irish visa-holders went to Australia in the year to the end of June, according to VisaFirst.com. However, 66% of workers arrive in Sydney in search of work, only to discover that the country's job opportunities lie much further afield, according to Stephen McLarnon, a migrant expert who helps organise the Working Abroad exhibitions and has just returned from a one-month stint in Australia and New Zealand.

"There are certain opportunities in Sydney and Melbourne, but there is a huge amount of rural opportunities," said McLarnon. "This is not a bad thing. Someone moving from the Irish countryside who may struggle to settle in a big city like Melbourne, may find it easier to settle in the Northern Territory."

The foreign recruiters' timing is more than apt. The International Monetary Fund last week reported that the Australian economy has more scope to adjust to the global financial crisis, buttressed as it is by economic strength in Asia.

CSO statistics show that more



than 3,000 Irish people are now leaving the country every month, the highest figure since the 19th century. This number of Irish people emigrating has more than doubled in the past two years, with an average of 111 departing every day.

“A year ago, it was more difficult for Irish people to find employment in Canada, New Zealand and Australia because they were also affected by the world economy,” said McLarnon. “The situation has now completely changed and this year the (Working Abroad) exhibition will have the biggest amount of jobs ever on offer.”

Ireland’s loss in the new wave of emigration is other countries’ gain. Migration Associates, an immigration advisory firm, last week predicted that as many as 3,000 skilled Irish tradespeople could find work helping to rebuild Christchurch after the New Zealand city was devastated by an earthquake in February this year.

The country needs a total of 150,000 construction workers over the next five years, including for reconstructing Christchurch at a cost of at least €12 billion. The country’s Earthquake Commission has said it is specifically seeking Irish workers because English is their first language and because of Ireland’s unemployment rate, which now stands at 14.3%.

Other skilled jobs in demand in New Zealand include engineers and mechanics to work at Hamilton Jet, the company known for creating the first jet propulsion boat, which will be one of the companies recruiting at the Working Abroad Expo.

Unlike Australia, which has an age limit of 45 for permanent residency applicants, New Zealand has an age cap of 55. However, Irish applicants do need a job offer before seeking residency. The Canadian government has just announced that it is to double the number of Experience Canada student youth visas to 5,000 for 2012 for jobseekers aged 35 and under.

Those who already have a visa can extend it for a second year.

“The Canadian programme is one

of the best out there because you can take dependents with you and you can be aged up to 35,” said McLarnon. “In Australia and New Zealand, you have to be under 30 for the working holiday programme and you can’t take anyone with you.”

In Edmonton, where McMahan and his family are now applying for Canadian citizenship, the bureaucracy and the cost associated with emigrating were one of the downsides of moving.

“The immigration process, which includes a medical examination, can cost between C\$1,000 and C\$2,000,” he said. “And Canada does not recognise an Irish driver’s licence as fully legal so you have to sit a computer test.”

But McMahan says it is not a big deterrent. “We have a 50-metre swimming pool down the road and in almost three years I have not seen one bit of the anti-social behaviour you would see in Limerick or Dublin. People don’t lock their cars and leave their house doors open.”





Christchurch needs construction workers to rebuild it following the February earthquake

