

EXECUTIVE

Indian workers welcomed

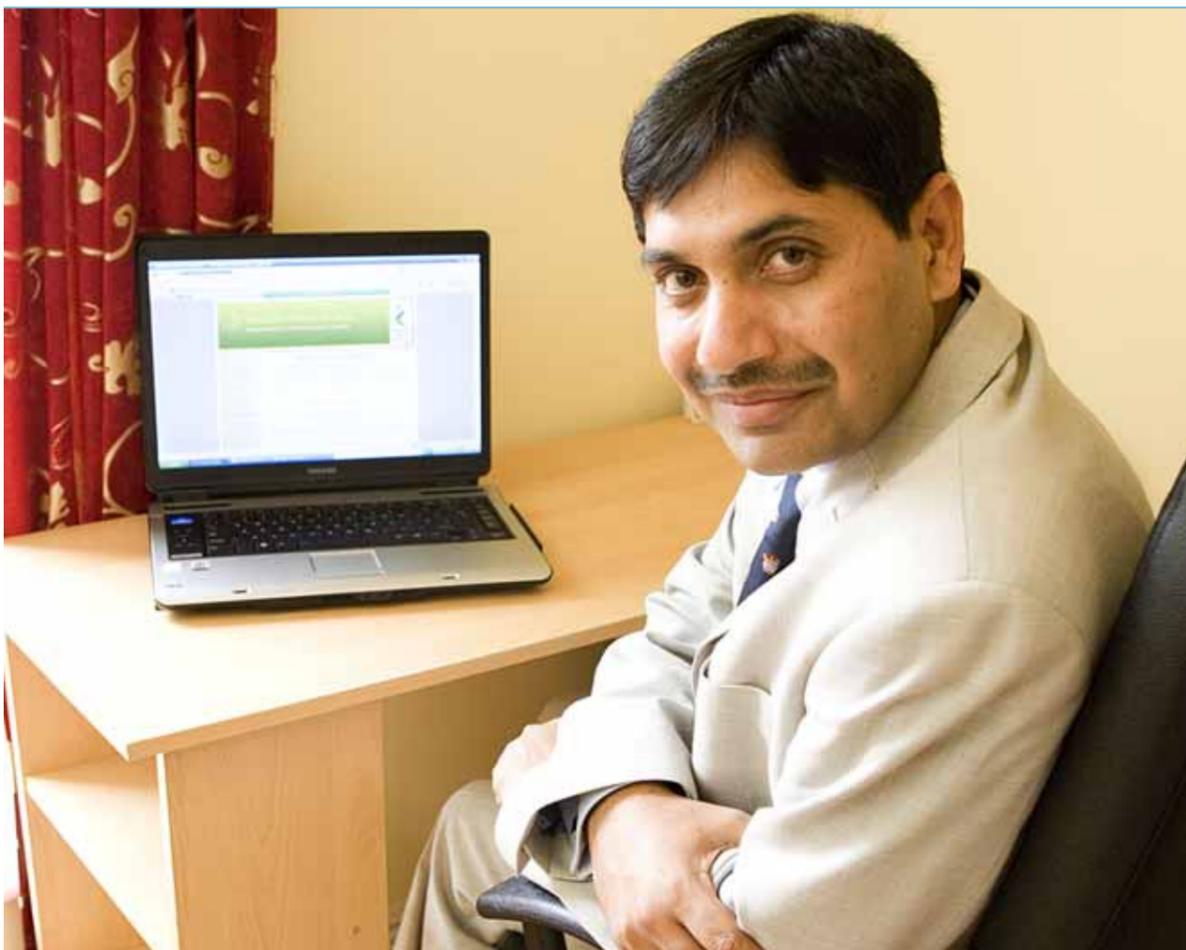
A recent conference in Trinity College Dublin addressed issues surrounding changes to employment legislation for Indian nationals living in Ireland. Lisa Matassa reports

IRISH employers will welcome recent changes to legislation concerning the employment of Indian nationals here, particularly as the skills shortage rages on and more Irish companies look to establish links with Indian organisations. The biggest change is the introduction of a green card system, applicable to those employed here in the €30k-€60k annual salary bracket. The fiscal category the person falls into will have a bearing on his or her entitlement to a green card.

The new rules were introduced at the start of the year, yet much confusion still surrounds them. A conference held on Thursday aimed to address these concerns and explain what the new legislation means, both for Indian nationals working here and Irish employers. Held in Trinity College Dublin, the 'Immigration and Integration in Ireland for Indian Nationals' event dealt with a number of issues, including the impact the new Immigration Residency and Protection Bill will have on Indian workers living in Ireland.

Irish-India relations continue to strengthen as more Indian nationals come to Ireland to study and work. The Ireland-India Council estimates there are in the region of 8,000 Indian nationals working here, with a further 1,700-1,800 studying in Ireland.

Prashant Shukla, trustee of the Ireland-India Council, estimates that 95pc of Indian nationals working here hold third-level qualifications. The most sought-after skills held



NEW LAW: Recent legislation brought in at the start of the year has gone some way towards better facilitating Indian nationals who want to work in Ireland but there are still areas to be addressed, says trustee of the Ireland-India Council Prashant Shukla

by this population continue to be in the areas of medicine, nursing and IT.

Exporting and breaking into overseas markets have always been priorities for Ireland but they have ramped up a notch in recent years, thanks to accession. According to a Forfás report last July, we currently export 80pc of our goods and services and are now the 13th highest exporter of services in the world.

Unsurprisingly, the desire to penetrate new markets has brought with it the need for

skills to facilitate new links.

Rebecca O'Brien, international marketing manager with Griffith College Dublin (who was also a panellist at the conference on Thursday), has noticed an increasing demand for graduates with these skills. Last year, one of the college's MBA graduates was taken on the Taoiseach's trade mission to China to break down barriers to entry. According to O'Brien, one of the participant companies put the securing of four new

contracts down to the presence of the graduate.

Support structures

However, much work still needs to be done to ensure the right framework is in place to allow graduates and people holding these necessary skills to fully integrate into working life in Ireland. Shukla says that in the case of Indian nationals, the new legislation has gone some way towards this but there are still many areas to be addressed.

Obtaining a work visa here seems to be relatively straight-

forward for Indian nationals, provided they are skilled in an area that is in demand here.

Work visas as opposed to permits can be more desirable as they allow more entitlements such as being able to change employer. The latter is not possible if you hold a work permit as this is issued to the employer (and paid for by him or her) rather than the individual.

The issue of visa renewal can be problematic. "If somebody gets a permit for employment, they shouldn't have to renew it every year," says Shukla. "Most Indian people think visa renewal should be long term." In addition, two different processes exist for visa approval and renewal and each is handled by a different government department. "We believe the two should be a single facility," says Shukla.

Difficulties surrounding family reunification can also be an issue for Indian nationals living here. In some cases, there can be a wait period before you are allowed to bring your family to Ireland if you come here to work. In Indian culture it is common for people to live in joint families, but again complications can surround obtaining visas for family members who wish to come and stay for a while.

"This is a very compelling issue," says Shukla. "If both husband and wife work here and want their parents or grandparents to visit, the maximum they can be granted is a three-month visa and they have to apply for that visa for every visit. We would prefer a system where you can get a long-term visa that allows multiple entry."

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