

Finding your way through Canada's innovative and successful Business Immigration Programme is not for the faint-hearted.

Murray Cornish looks at the programme, some of the problems it has been facing and asks the experts to give their advice for potential applicants.

RUNNING THE BUSINESS IMMIGRATION GAUNTLET

by MURRAY CORNISH

"Canada welcomes successful business persons seeking new challenges," begins the self-help guide to Canada's Business Immigration Programme. "Your interest in immigration to Canada to do business is welcomed and appreciated", adds the introduction to the programme's guidelines.

When the Business Immigration Programme was introduced some 15 years ago, it was hailed as an innovative incentive for entrepreneurs to qualify for immigration status by agreeing to set up a business in Canada. The programme enjoyed a great deal of success and in 1986, a second component was added which was called the "investor" category.

To qualify as an investor, applicants must have accumulated C\$500,000 and invest a minimum of C\$350,000 in one of a list of specified Canadian provinces.

Despite its success, the programme received its share of criticism right from the beginning, being criticized as a "buy-a-passport" programme by those who didn't bother or didn't care to consider the possible benefits to Canada's fragile economy.

Few critics could, however, deny that it got results. The investor category brought a reported C\$2 billion into the country in investment funds, and according to self-reported statistics from fund managers, generated a substantial number of jobs. The entrepreneur category also did well in terms of investment and job creation.