

A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

PROGRESS REPORT

November 2009 to December 2010



Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM)

The FLMM is an intergovernmental forum established to strengthen cooperation and strategic thinking on the labour market priorities of the provinces, territories and Canada. The FLMM is composed of federal-provincial-territorial ministers, deputy ministers and officials with labour market responsibilities.

A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

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MESSAGE FROM THE FLMM MINISTERIAL CO-CHAIRS

As Co-Chairs of the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM), we are pleased to present our first report on progress in implementing *A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications (Framework)*.

Since the *Framework* was launched in November 2009, its principles of fairness, transparency, timeliness and consistency have provided a guide for federal, provincial and territorial (F-P/T) governments to work collaboratively to enhance foreign qualifications recognition (FQR) processes across Canada so internationally-trained workers can more quickly put their skills to work in the Canadian labour market.

Recognizing that collaboration is key to continuous improvement in FQR, governments have worked closely with regulators and other stakeholders to lay a strong foundation for positive change. This report illustrates successful partnerships that were forged and progress to support the labour market integration of internationally-trained workers.

Through consultation with stakeholders, we are proud to acknowledge that regulatory authorities for the first set of eight target occupations – including architects, engineers, financial auditors and accountants, medical laboratory technologists, occupational therapists, pharmacists, physiotherapists and registered nurses – are currently meeting the pan-Canadian commitment to timely service. Internationally-trained workers in these occupations are informed, within one year, whether their qualifications will be recognized, if they need to meet additional requirements necessary for registration, or whether they may consider a related occupation commensurate with their skills and experience.

We are pleased with progress to date, but recognize there is still room for improvement. We are very encouraged by the dedication shown by regulators and other stakeholders to critically examine their processes

and identify innovative ways to enhance the integration of internationally-trained workers. Pan-Canadian action plans have been developed for each of the first group of target occupations that lay the foundation for ongoing improvements.

As we expand our focus to include a second set of target occupations – dentists, engineering technicians, licensed practical nurses, medical radiation technologists, physicians and teachers (K-12) – we are committed to ongoing collaboration, building upon successes and lessons learned, and continuing to take concerted action so that FQR processes and practices are fairer, more transparent, timelier and more consistent. This work is essential to meet long-term labour market demands and realize Canada’s full economic potential.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the leadership of the Foreign Qualifications Recognition Working Group. We thank the Government of Ontario for the funding it provided to support the pan-Canadian consultations. We also want to thank the many individuals, organizations and FPT ministries and departments that have contributed to making the first year of implementation a success.

The Honourable Diane Finley,
Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development
Canada, Government of Canada

The Honourable Dave Hancock, QC
Minister of Human Services
Government of Alberta

I. INTRODUCTION

A skilled and flexible labour force is crucial to Canada's long-term economic success. It is estimated that immigration will account for nearly all net labour force growth in Canada by 2016 and all net population growth in Canada by 2031.¹ Achieving Canada's economic potential therefore requires that immigrants are able to gain employment in a timely manner, in occupations that reflect their education, skills, and work experience.

Whether recent immigrants, or Canadians who are educated abroad, internationally-trained workers face a number of well-documented challenges integrating into the Canadian labour market. Key obstacles to finding employment in their chosen fields are: not enough Canadian work experience; language proficiency challenges; lack of professional networks; confusing foreign qualifications assessment processes; and difficulties accessing required supports and services. In order to meet the requirements to work in regulated occupations and skilled trades, internationally-trained workers often face a complex and lengthy qualification assessment and recognition system. There are nearly 500 regulatory bodies in Canada; at least five recognized credential assessment agencies; numerous professional associations, post-secondary and vocational institutions; and, of course, employers, all of which are involved in various aspects of qualifications assessment. While the primary focus of the Pan-Canadian Framework is to facilitate access to regulated occupations, it is important to note that internationally-trained workers also face challenges integrating into non-regulated jobs. Measures must also be taken to promote access to these occupations.

Significant progress to improve assessment and recognition processes within certain occupations has already been made, often in response to labour market demands. In fact, in a recent study comparing immigrant integration outcomes across 31 immigrant-receiving

¹ Statistics Canada (2007). *The Canadian Immigrant Labour Market in 2006: First Results from Canada's Labour Force Survey*.

countries, Canada ranked third overall.² However, governments across Canada agree that increased collaboration among all stakeholders and enhanced measures to improve foreign qualification recognition (FQR) are essential to better facilitate the successful integration of internationally-trained workers into the Canadian labour market and to realize the country's long-term economic potential.

This first progress report describes the pan-Canadian work that federal, provincial and territorial governments have undertaken during the past year, often in collaboration with stakeholders, to implement *A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*. Along with some 2009-2010 highlights, this report also includes examples of promising practices drawn from a number of jurisdictions³, as well as priorities for the coming year.

Did You Know?

According to *Looking Ahead: A 10-Year Outlook for the Canadian Labour Market (2006-2015)*, labour market demand in occupations typically requiring a post-secondary credential is expected to exceed labour market supply.

Immigrants are highly educated. According to a 2010 Statistics Canada study, 66% of recent immigrants to Canada (2001-2006), ages 25-64, had earned post-secondary credentials (certificate, diploma or degree).

² British Council and the Migration Policy Group (2011). *Migrant Integration Policy Index 2010 Results*. See <http://www.mipex.eu/canada>.

³ Before the *Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications* was released, activities were already underway to support improvements to foreign qualification recognition. These initiatives shaped the development of the *Framework*, and some of these examples are referred to in this report.

II. FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

The Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) was tasked with developing a principles-based, pan-Canadian framework to improve foreign qualification assessment and recognition processes across Canada. On November 30, 2009, governments responded by releasing *A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications (Framework)*.⁴ An ad-hoc Foreign Qualifications Recognition Working Group (FQRWG), overseen by the FLMM, was established to guide and support implementation of the *Framework*. Through the *Economic Action Plan*, the Government of Canada invested \$50 million toward this initiative. Provinces and territories are consulting their stakeholders and investing to support their own FQR objectives.

The *Framework* was an historic accomplishment. It marks the first time in Canadian history that governments have established a common vision which outlines principles to promote improvements to foreign qualifications assessment and recognition processes for all regions of Canada. While not legally-binding, the *Framework* is a clear public expression of the joint

What is Foreign Qualification Recognition?

Foreign qualification recognition is the process of verifying that the knowledge, skills, work experience and education obtained in another country is comparable to the standards established for Canadian professionals and tradespersons.

⁴ While the Quebec government has not endorsed the *Framework*, it supports its principles and agrees to share public reports already made to its citizens, notably those tabled at the National Assembly. Information on Quebec's FQR initiatives is presented in Annex 1.

commitments and priorities which governments share regarding the importance of integrating internationally-trained workers into the Canadian labour market. The *Framework* also provides the necessary flexibility to address challenges through a combination of jurisdictional and collective actions. It does this while recognizing provincial and territorial responsibilities, which are often delegated to regulatory authorities, to maintain occupational standards and ensure public safety.

The *Framework* is based on four guiding principles:

Fairness: That the criteria used for determining recognition of qualifications are objective and reasonable; the assessment methods are necessary and sufficient; Canadians and internationally-trained applicants are treated equally with regard to requirements; communication of assessment results involves clear explanation of the rationale for the decision that has been taken; and, that assessments are efficient and avoid duplication.

Transparency: That the requirements for applying to be licensed in a specific occupation, the assessment methods, and criteria for recognition are fully explained, easy to understand, and widely accessible to immigrants; and, where applicable, that the applicant is informed of other options if full recognition is not possible.

Timeliness: That the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, as well as the communication of assessment decisions, are carried out promptly and efficiently.

Consistency: In the spirit of promoting full labour mobility in Canada (as per Chapter 7 of the Agreement on Internal Trade), the methods for assessment and criteria which are used for determining recognition of qualifications for specific regulated occupations are mutually acceptable in each province and territory of Canada so that the results of the assessment processes are mutually recognized.

These principles form the basis of continuous improvement to achieve the *Framework's* pan-Canadian vision:

“A fair and competitive labour market environment where immigrants have the opportunity to fully use their education, skills and work experience for their benefit and for Canada’s collective prosperity.” [Framework, p. 4]

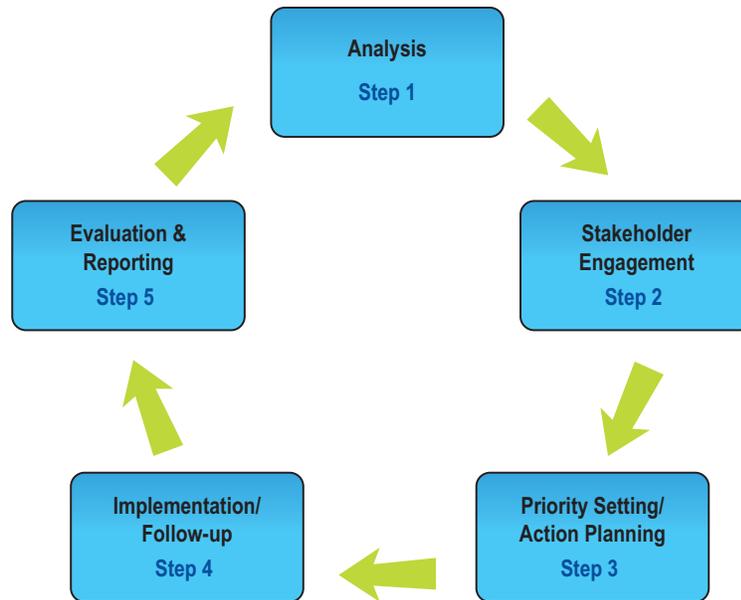


Figure 1: Promoting a Cycle of Continuous Improvement

Government of Canada Supporting Improvements to FQR Processes

The *Framework* is directly supported by three federal government departments:

The Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) co-chairs the FQRWG along with a provincial or territorial partner (currently Manitoba). In addition, HRSDC’s Foreign Credential Recognition Program (FCRP) directly supports implementation of the Framework. As the main source of federal funding for FQR initiatives, the FCRP supports provinces, territories and other stakeholders, such as national associations and regulatory bodies, to undertake projects that lead to better FQR outcomes for internationally-trained workers. Since its inception in 2003, the FCRP has funded 163 projects across Canada (completed and ongoing), and agreements are in place with 7 P/Ts to support regional improvements to FQR processes and capacity building.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s *Foreign Credentials Referral Office* (FCRO) provides pre-arrival information and supports for immigrants.

Health Canada’s *Internationally-Educated Health Professionals (IEHP) Initiative* supports projects focused on FQR improvements in health occupations.

Supporting a Cycle of Continuous Improvement

As parties to the *Framework*, governments across Canada are committed to providing leadership by engaging and supporting key partners and ensuring that valuable information is shared to improve foreign qualifications assessment and recognition.

As illustrated in Figure 1, federal, provincial and territorial governments are taking a reflective and collaborative approach to promoting continuous improvement. This approach is necessary due to complexities in FQR processes, and the number of different steps and decision makers involved. In addition, while common occupational standards may be adopted, provinces and territories have the constitutional right to set occupational standards, regulate occupations and establish education and training requirements.

The FQRWG, in collaboration with stakeholders, is promoting continuous improvement through the process described below:

Analysis: Review the steps to licensure and employment, identify potential barriers and challenges for internationally-trained workers, and consider options to improve processes;

Stakeholder Engagement: Validate these issues with the stakeholders responsible for each step of the pathway;

Priority Setting and Action Planning: Work with stakeholders to develop ways to address the barriers or challenges that have been identified (at either pan-Canadian or jurisdictional levels, or both);

Implementation and Follow-up: Support stakeholders to implement solutions; and,

Evaluation and Reporting: Evaluate the measures taken and report the results. If challenges remain, steps may be repeated and new measures implemented.

Provincial and Territorial Governments Supporting Improvements to FQR Processes

Provinces and territories also directly support the *Framework*, and have undertaken strategies and initiatives – some of which will be described in this report – to improve FQR processes. For example:

- ✓ Legislation has been enacted and Fairness Commissioners/Review Officers have been established in Ontario, Manitoba and Nova Scotia, which promote fair access to regulated occupations for internationally-trained workers;
- ✓ Strategic policy frameworks or implementation plans designed to encourage systemic changes that lead to better outcomes for internationally-trained workers have been established in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and a similar approach is under development in British Columbia; and,
- ✓ Multi-stakeholder working groups that promote better labour market outcomes for internationally-trained workers have been established in Nova Scotia. A similar working group is being established in Prince Edward Island. These groups are comprised of relevant government departments/agencies, regulatory authorities, immigrant-serving agencies and post-secondary institutions.

Target Occupations

The following occupations were selected as the initial focus for *Framework* implementation:

Target Occupations for 2010 are:

- Architects
- Engineers
- Financial Auditors and Accountants
(including Chartered Accountants, Certified General Accountants and Certified Management Accountants)
- Medical Laboratory Technologists
- Occupational Therapists
- Pharmacists
- Physiotherapists
- Registered Nurses

Target Occupations for 2012 are, at least:

- Dentists
- Engineering Technicians
- Licensed Practical Nurses
- Medical Radiation Technologists
- Physicians
- Teachers (K-12)

This also guides the approach to working with regulatory authorities and other stakeholders for each of the target occupations, which were selected to help focus governments' work.⁵

III. 2009-2010 HIGHLIGHTS

The *Framework* outlines several important commitments made by federal, provincial and territorial governments to work collaboratively to achieve better workforce outcomes for internationally-trained workers. Below are implementation highlights from 2009-2010 that correspond to each government commitment.

Leadership and Coordination: To promote an environment of respect and collaboration between governments and with stakeholders.

⁵ The *Framework* applies to all regulated occupations, and jurisdictions are free to supplement this list with additional occupations in response to local labour market conditions and priorities. In addition, advice will be sought from the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship on how best to apply the *Framework* to skilled trade occupations.

- ✓ In 2009-2010, governments engaged in intensive partnership building with stakeholders, focusing on regulatory authorities for the first set of target occupations. These partnerships provide the foundation

Occupational Action Plans – A Significant Achievement

During the reporting period, occupational action plans were established in collaboration with national associations and provincial and territorial regulatory authorities for each of the first group of target occupations. The action plans:

- Lay the foundation for ongoing improvements and define priorities; and,
- Contain information that can be used by governments and stakeholders to inform investments and policy development.

for ongoing improvements in FQR. In addition, the FQRWG consulted other national working groups such as the Labour Mobility Coordinating Group and the Advisory Committee on Health Delivery and Human Resources to coordinate activities where appropriate.

Ongoing Consultation and Engagement⁶:

Stakeholders and partner organizations such as provincial and territorial regulatory authorities, national associations, international credential assessment agencies, post-secondary institutions, immigrant-serving organizations, employers, and most importantly, immigrants themselves, are engaged throughout the implementation of the *Framework*.

- ✓ Priorities were established in consultation with regulatory authorities and action plans were developed for each of the first set of target occupations. Developing these plans was a key implementation priority for 2009-2010. They will be used by governments and stakeholders for planning purposes and to support ongoing improvements to make FQR processes, fairer, more transparent, timelier and more consistent.

Information-Sharing: Information and best practices are shared with jurisdictions and stakeholders.

- ✓ The FQRWG convened regular meetings where jurisdictions had the opportunity to share information and to learn from each others' promising practices. For example, the FQRWG heard presentations on such topics as fair access legislation, provincial stakeholder engagement strategies and FQR information resources. In addition, during consultations, stakeholders shared promising practices with governments and each other.

Continuous Improvement: Initiatives supported by governments, in the spirit of the Framework, are results-oriented and lay the foundation for continuous improvement.

- ✓ Regulatory authorities for the first set of target occupations have been working for several years to improve their assessment processes. They are examining their policies and procedures in light of Framework principles while upholding the standards of their occupation.
- ✓ Comprehensive funding agreements have been negotiated between the federal government and some provinces and territories to support FQR objectives.
- ✓ Pan-Canadian projects have been initiated to improve FQR processes within, and outside of, target occupations.

The One-Year Commitment to Timely Service is Being Met

This one-year period for initial assessment of qualifications begins once all documents and fees required to process an application are provided to the relevant regulatory authority. It ends after the candidate receives a decision related to the assessment of his or her qualifications. A key finding of stakeholder engagement is that **assessment decisions within the first group of target occupations are rendered within the one-year timeframe**. While undoubtedly positive, stakeholders did identify several ways to increase efficiencies and timeliness, which will help contribute to ongoing service improvements.

⁶ Costs for 2009-2010 consultations were covered by HRSDC and Ontario. Naomi Alboim and Karen Cohl facilitated the pan-Canadian consultations.

In addition to the highlights above, the following observations were made during consultations with stakeholders that will help guide future work⁷:

- One size does not fit all. Due to differences in regulatory processes across jurisdictions, solutions must be tailored to each province and territory's size, capacity, immigration levels and regulatory frameworks. Emerging best practice models need to be adapted to local circumstances and build on the extensive work already underway. Also, different priorities and solutions may be needed for each occupation and jurisdiction.
- The right parties need to be involved in implementing solutions. Organizations such as regulatory authorities, various government departments, assessment agencies, immigrant settlement agencies, post-secondary and vocational institutions, and employers, need to be involved in identifying gaps and solutions.
- There may be opportunities for internationally-trained workers to begin the application process, including writing some of the required examinations, while they are still overseas. Arranging to get required documentation to apply for licensure (e.g. transcripts, letters of good standing), is encouraged before individuals arrive in Canada.
- Opportunities were identified for both occupation-specific and cross-cutting work such as in health or business sectors. Participants recognized the importance of cost-effective approaches that build on best practices and reduce duplication of efforts. Areas for shared work to assist internationally-trained workers were language and workplace communication, better information on how the profession is practiced in Canada and improved workplace integration supports.

7 Alboim, N. (2010). A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications: Consultation Findings and Possible Next Steps, Presentation to the Canadian Network of National Associations of Regulators, November 2010, Toronto.

- Opportunities to assess internationally-trained workers on the basis of their prior learning and experience to better demonstrate competencies are encouraged.

Pan-Canadian Commitment to Timely Service

“Within one year, an individual will know whether their qualifications will be recognized, or be informed of the additional requirements necessary for registration, or be directed toward related occupations commensurate with their skills and experience.” [Framework, p. 7]

The more time individuals spend working in occupations outside of their chosen field, or meeting additional occupational requirements, the more difficult it becomes to re-integrate into an occupation that is commensurate with their qualifications.⁸ To help address this issue, the *Pan-Canadian Commitment to Timely Service* was established by governments to encourage the more-timely communication of assessment and recognition decisions. It is important to note that some jurisdictions have established their own guidelines for timely service, which complement the *Pan-Canadian Commitment to Timely Service*, to which regulatory authorities will need to adhere.

Through consultation, governments gained a deeper appreciation of the many challenges faced by internationally-trained workers, including how long the process takes and why. Regulatory authorities identified priorities to make their foreign qualifications assessment processes fairer, more transparent, timelier, and more consistent. These priorities are referenced in occupational action plans that are intended to promote ongoing improvements.

8 Lochhead, C. (2002). *Employment Sponsored Training Among Recent Immigrants*. Canadian Labour and Business Centre.

Reporting and Data Improvements

Governments agreed to report annually on pan-Canadian commitments and achievements, while acknowledging that each government is responsible for reporting to their residents on progress specific to their unique federal, provincial and territorial contexts and programs. Public reporting and data improvements form the basis of government accountability. Continuous improvement efforts must be founded on reliable and valid information. To this end, governments will work with regulatory authorities and other key stakeholders to improve the quality and availability of data over time.

Acknowledging that federal, provincial and territorial governments, as well as regulatory authorities and partner organizations, are at different stages in implementing data collection strategies, work is underway to develop appropriate mechanisms to measure progress. Governments have shared information on their existing

capacity and methods of collecting data and reporting. Some promising practices have emerged that could be instructive for ongoing data improvements, which could assist in planning to address specific challenges identified across the Pathways to Recognition (Figure 2).

Data Improvements: Examples of efforts to improve the availability of data are occurring in Manitoba and Alberta. Governments in those provinces are partnering with regulatory authorities to implement applicant tracking systems that allow for the collection of information on the number of applications received from internationally-trained workers, the time it takes to reach key decision points, and the general experience faced by international applicants as they move through the process. This information will serve to assist in program and policy development to address specific challenges faced by international applicants, and to assess the performance of these programs and policies over time.

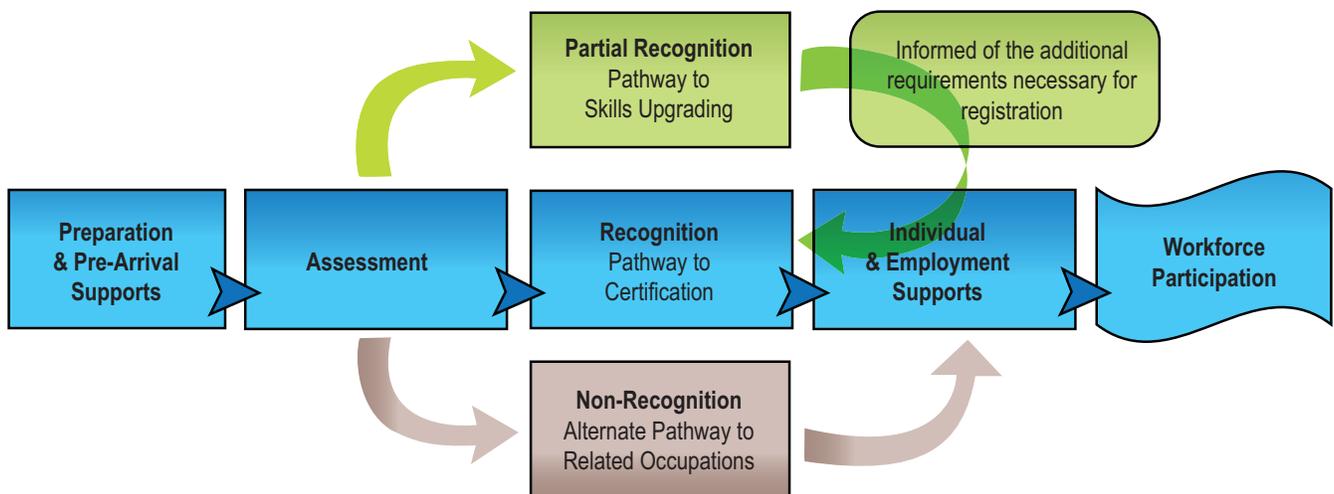


Figure 2 : Pathways to Recognition in Canada

Did You Know?

During the fiscal year 2009-2010, over 700,000 reports produced through the *Working in Canada Tool* assisted internationally-trained workers to find information about the labour market and licensing requirements to work in their field. This brings the total to over two million reports since its launch in 2007. Additionally, in an effort to make information more available to a wider audience, *Working in Canada* has also been active on social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

IV. PROGRESS ALONG FQR PATHWAYS TO RECOGNITION

In addition to the highlights outlined above, governments and stakeholders have been working for a number of years to make improvements across each section of the pathway. Figure 2 depicts the scope of the *Framework* as viewed through the eyes of an individual seeking to put his or her foreign qualifications to use within the Canadian labour market. It is important to note that different stakeholders have a role to play along different parts of the pathway. For example, while governments play an important role in providing preparation and pre-arrival supports, regulatory authorities and credential assessors are typically responsible for assessments and rendering decisions. Internationally-trained workers may encounter challenges along each step of the pathway. The *Framework* identifies desired outcomes that governments aspire to achieve as well as benchmarks of success for each of the steps.

Some promising practices are emerging to address barriers at the various steps and achieve the desired

outcomes. While not a comprehensive list, some examples of these practices are included below.⁹

Preparation and Pre-Arrival Supports

“As early as possible in the immigration process, immigrants will have access to reliable and accurate information and assessment services.”

[*Framework*, p. 7]

The pathway to recognition begins before an internationally-trained worker arrives in Canada. During this stage, the individual needs to have the most appropriate and up-to-date information to help make informed decisions.¹⁰ The *Framework* promotes the availability of reliable information, self-assessment tools, orientation services and other supports that will give internationally-trained workers a clear understanding of licensing requirements specific to their chosen occupations. Increasingly, these services are provided overseas. In addition, where possible, some stakeholders are offering qualifications assessment prior to arrival. The result is that internationally-trained workers are able to spend the initial months in Canada preparing for exams, gaining Canadian experience if necessary, and upgrading skills as required.

Promising Practices

There is an abundance of information available from multiple sources on occupational requirements. Governments and stakeholders are working together to ensure this information is updated, accurate, and linked

⁹ Some initiatives highlighted in this report may be intended to improve outcomes across more than one pathway step. In addition, similar initiatives may be underway in other jurisdictions, even if they are not referenced.

¹⁰ A recent survey by Sage Research Corporation, *Exploring Awareness and Perception of Foreign Credential Recognition* (2011), confirms the existence of a disconnect between the expectations of prospective immigrants and the reality they face upon arrival in Canada. This research suggests the necessity of further enhancements to pre-arrival information and supports, particularly those that provide information on occupational requirements.

to organizations or resources that can provide assistance to internationally-trained workers.

Pre-Arrival Information: The *Working in Canada Tool* (<http://www.workingincanada.gc.ca>) provides pan-Canadian and provincial/territorial information about regulated occupations, and includes links to regulatory and provincial websites and interactive tools. Individuals can generate customized reports with qualification recognition information, job descriptions, skills and educational requirements, and wages and job opportunities in specific regions in Canada. In 2010, Working in Canada began to include specialized information for the Professional Engineers of Ontario and the Medical Council of Canada. It also provides national and provincial occupational fact sheets. Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta have made their fact sheets available through the Working in Canada Tool and/or other sources.

Overseas Orientation Sessions: Some initiatives are underway to provide more direct support to individuals before they arrive in Canada. The Canadian Immigrant Integration Project (CIIP - <http://www.newcomersuccess.ca>), administered by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, provides pre-departure orientation sessions to economic-class immigrants from its offices in China, India, the Philippines and the United Kingdom, as well as through satellite sites elsewhere in Northern Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Individuals have face-to-face meetings with counsellors to facilitate settlement, foreign qualification recognition and early contact with mentors and potential employers in their chosen provincial destination. Some provinces such as Alberta and Nova Scotia are now providing specific provincial information to CIIP participants who have indicated their intentions to reside in those provinces. New Brunswick and Saskatchewan are also working with CIIP to pilot the provision of pre-arrival supports and labour market integration information to skilled workers planning on settling in those provinces.

Did You Know?

The Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada supports common assessment standards and mutual recognition of assessment decisions. Alliance members continue to contribute to important innovations that benefit internationally-trained workers. For example:

- The International Qualifications Assessment Service (Alberta) has developed *International Education Guides* with detailed information about education systems and credentials abroad. These guides are designed to assist regulatory authorities, post-secondary institutions and employers to better understand international credentials.
- World Education Services (Ontario) will store transcripts and evaluation reports for clients so that they may be sent to regulatory authorities or educational institutions at any time.

Online Self-Assessment Tools: Online self-assessment tools are being developed by a number of regulators to engage the prospective applicant in a realistic self-assessment of skills, including language, knowledge and practical skills. For example, Atlantic Provinces are collaborating to develop online self-assessment tools that will help internationally-educated licensed practical nurses, medical radiation technologists, midwives, occupational therapists and physiotherapists determine the skills and knowledge required for registration.

In Alberta, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA), has developed an online Internationally-Educated Nurses (IEN) Self-Assessment Tool. CARNA recommends that IENs complete this online self-assessment before applying to register with CARNA. In addition, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta (ICAA) has developed an FQR Pre-Assessment Questionnaire (PAQ), which is a brief questionnaire that is to be completed by internationally-trained accounting professionals before requesting official assessment of their international credentials. Based on the preliminary information provided in the PAQ, the ICAA will provide applicants with guidance and accurate assessment information.

Overseas Resources: In some cases, internationally-trained workers can participate in gap-training or orientation programs while still in their home country. Also, links to related occupations or alternative career pathways, as provided in some provincial information fact sheets, may suggest options that the individual had not considered previously.

Access Centres: Global Experience Ontario (GEO) is a multi-channel (phone, email, and in-person) access centre that provides information and referral services to internationally-trained workers to help them qualify for professional practice in Ontario. GEO also provides information on mentorships, internships, and other relevant programs. HealthForceOntario's Access Centre provides information and referral services to internationally-educated health professionals (IEHPs). In addition, the Access Centre offers individual case management services to thousands of IEHPs, has developed a comprehensive program for international medical graduates and coordinates over 50 profession-specific orientation sessions (including webinars) annually. The Centre recently piloted the first in a series of orientation to the Canadian healthcare system courses and will expand the scope of its programming in 2011.

Improving Exam Pass Rates: In Ontario, the *Occupational Therapy Examination and Practice*

Preparation Project helps internationally-trained occupational therapists prepare to write the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists certification exam. Similarly, in British Columbia, there is a program to assist internationally-trained physiotherapists prepare for the national competency exam. These types of supports address some of the cultural barriers that international candidates face in writing Canadian exams.

Assessment

“Methods used for assessing foreign qualifications will be reasonable and objective, and regulatory authorities will share information regarding the approaches they use with their regulatory counterparts in other jurisdictions.” [Framework, p. 8]

During the assessment phase of the pathway, an internationally-trained applicant's qualifications and experience are compared to requirements in Canada. This may be done by evaluating academic credentials and work experience. It may include language assessments, confirmation of good standing with previous regulatory authorities, written or practical examinations, or practice-based requirements. Regulatory bodies, as well as the agencies that provide credential assessment services, are becoming increasingly familiar with international occupational and educational standards and are working to implement tools and processes to



improve assessments. As these new tools and processes are developed and implemented, internationally-trained workers can expect to undergo assessment processes and receive decisions that are increasingly fair, transparent, consistent and timely.

Promising Practices

Many regulators use one of Canada's five provincially-mandated or recognized credential assessment agencies to assess academic credentials. These agencies have agreed to recognize each other's assessment methods and have created an alliance of members that abide by established standards. Other regulators complete their own credential assessments or depend on the assessment processes of their national association. Some regulators have developed their own database of international education programs. Maintaining these records allows them to more quickly review applications from those who graduated from the same institution during the same time period. It also ensures that consistent decisions are made. In addition, some regulators and national associations are undertaking work to review their assessment capacity and to ensure that their processes are fair and efficient.

Improving Assessment: The Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators has a project underway to examine its current system for assessing the education and work experience of internationally-trained physiotherapists. The Alliance will research best practices for credential and language evaluations and develop recommendations to streamline the overall licensing process for internationally-trained physiotherapists wanting to practice in Canada.

Engineers Canada has studied the experiences of international engineering graduates before and after they immigrate to Canada. This research has led to recommendations that are now being implemented to ensure that licensing requirements and decisions are communicated clearly, that there are national systems to support provincial regulatory authorities, and that appropriate methods of licensure are available which

enable international engineering graduates to obtain licensure faster, which can then help lead to employment in engineering.

Improving Fairness: The Ontario Fairness Commissioner has developed a guide, *Conducting Entry-to-Practice Reviews: Guide for Regulators of Ontario Professions*, to help Ontario regulatory authorities conduct reviews of their registration requirements and practices. Ontario's regulatory bodies can use this guide to ensure that their requirements are necessary and relevant and that the practices are transparent, objective, impartial and fair.

Improving Clarity: The Manitoba Fairness Commissioner has developed *To the Point: A Plain Language Guide for Regulators*, to support the clear communication of registration requirements and assessment decisions.



Fair Language Testing: The Government of Ontario, in partnership with the University of Toronto, Faculty of Pharmacy, is undertaking a language assessment validation project to improve language testing for internationally-trained pharmacists. Through this project, work is underway with the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities to explore the establishment of a national testing standard.

Validating Prior Learning and Experience:

The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada is developing a national system for assessing the qualifications of internationally-trained architects who have at least seven years of professional experience. This project is being undertaken in collaboration with provincial and territorial regulatory authorities and will contribute to a more efficient, fair and timely assessment process for internationally-trained architects.

Once the assessment step is concluded, the applicant will learn if the qualifications presented are sufficient to meet occupational standards, what further steps are required for full recognition or licensure, or if their qualifications may be better suited to an alternative occupation. The goal is for all recognition-related decisions to be clearly and comprehensively communicated in a timely fashion. There are three possible assessment decisions that can be rendered, and this is where applicants' pathways diverge: recognition, partial recognition and non-recognition.



Recognition – Pathway to Certification

If the applicant's qualifications are deemed by the regulatory body to be equivalent to the provincial standard, he or she can then proceed to certification or licensure.

Promising Practices

Provinces and regulatory authorities are increasingly finding ways to recognize prior learning and competencies acquired through both formal and informal learning and work experience. These practices help expedite recognition.

Facilitating International Mobility through Mutual Recognition Agreements:

Another promising practice that expedites recognition is the development of international *Mutual Recognition Agreements* (MRAs) between provincial regulatory authorities and/or national associations, and regulatory authorities abroad. International MRAs are most prevalent in engineering, accounting and architectural professions. Agreements may be between regulatory authorities or educational institutions. They may also specify graduation from certain colleges and universities. Because there is great variation in occupational scope between countries, international MRAs cannot be established in every occupation. However, where job requirements are similar and agreements would not compromise health and/or public safety (for example, chartered accountants trained in the United Kingdom), international MRAs have emerged as a positive trend to facilitate the timely assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications.

Validating Prior Learning and Experience:

Recognition of Prior Learning/Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition frameworks have been developed and are being implemented in Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Alberta. These frameworks provide guidance for implementing practical ways to assess and recognize prior learning. They encourage processes that recognize knowledge and skills gained through a combination of work experience, education and training.

Atlantic Collaboration: Through the IEHP Atlantic Connection, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, are collaborating to improve recognition outcomes for healthcare professionals across the region.

Partial Recognition – Pathway to Skills Upgrading

The regulatory authority’s assessment may identify specific gaps that need to be addressed before an applicant can proceed to full licensure. For instance, the international applicant may be required to perform certain duties in Canada that were not required in his or her home country for which he or she must acquire additional skills. Additionally, a regulatory body might require internationally-trained applicants to obtain a certain amount of supervised work experience prior to licensure, so that they acquire hands-on experience in applying their skills in a Canadian work setting. These kinds of requirements make up the “bridge-to-licensure” phase of the pathway to eventual licensure. Again, in some provinces and some occupations, the applicant may be eligible for a limited, partial or temporary license while they continue to move toward meeting the requirements for full licensure and recognition. Here, governments are working to achieve the following outcome, as expressed in the *Framework*:

“Immigrants are made aware of bridge-to-licensure and registration opportunities so that they may upgrade their qualifications as required for entry-to-practice.” [Framework, p. 8]

Consultations with stakeholders revealed significant challenges to be overcome in this stage, including, among others, program access and sustainability, and insufficient work placement opportunities for internationally-trained workers to gain necessary Canadian work experience.

Promising Practices

In some provinces and some occupations, the applicant may be eligible for a partial or temporary license while working towards meeting the requirements for full licensure.

Partial Licensing: The Saskatchewan Society of Medical Laboratory Technologists provides provisional licenses to international candidates who meet

requirements in one or more of five areas of practice. The College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Manitoba also offers a conditional license of up to 14 months for internationally-educated medical laboratory technologists who have been deemed equivalent but are still waiting to complete the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science certification exam. This allows internationally-trained medical laboratory technologists to work in the field while they address knowledge and experience gaps that they may have.

In addition, bridge-training programs have been implemented in most jurisdictions in response to labour market demand and individual needs.

Bridging Supports: *Bridge to Professional Accounting Pilot* - the Asper School of Business in Manitoba aims to prepare internationally-trained accountants to enter programs of professional studies for three designations: Chartered Accountants, Certified General Accountants or Certified Management Accountants. Participants are assessed individually by the program and the relevant professional accounting body to ascertain suitability for participation in a full-time program of studies. Extensive personalized learning supports, coaching and assistance are provided through the Asper School’s Career Development Centre.

Essential Components of Bridging Programs for Internationally-Educated Nurses is a project being led by the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing to



identify guiding principles and essential components for nursing-bridging programs. This initiative is improving the quality and consistency of programs offered across Canada.

The Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology's *Orientation to Nursing in Canada for Internationally-Educated Nurses* program delivers modularized gap training, consisting of both online and in-person courses. The program allows participants to customize their training to address gaps which have been identified through a competency assessment.

The Nurses Association of New Brunswick is developing a pathway for internationally-trained nurses and complementary bridging programs in both official languages.

The accessibility of bridging programs is also an important aspect of skills upgrading. For example, online bridging modules are now available to internationally-trained medical laboratory technologists and internationally-trained nurses in Ontario.

Much has already been accomplished to support skills upgrading. However, governments and stakeholders must continue to improve the ability of internationally-trained workers to access training and experience opportunities needed to become integrated successfully into the labour market.

Non-Recognition – Alternate Pathway to Related Occupations

Licensure in the intended occupation may not be a viable option for the applicant if significant gaps are identified in his or her qualifications. In these cases, the applicant should be advised of alternative occupations that may suit his or her skill set. During consultations, regulatory authorities indicated that this type of counselling or assistance is not typically part of their mandate. Often, it is immigrant-serving organizations, educational institutions or career counsellors who may provide this service. In some occupations, referral to an alternative

occupation may be built directly into the assessment process. For example, in engineering and architectural fields, candidates may be eligible to work as technicians prior to becoming fully certified. Information on alternate career options can help internationally-trained workers to make better informed decisions concerning their career options and planning.



Promising Practices

Provincial governments and stakeholders have undertaken many innovative measures to inform candidates who do not meet requirements of potential related occupations. Some initiatives involve including alternate pathways information in occupational fact sheets, or providing alternative pathways information after an assessment decision is rendered.

Alternate Career Pathways: BioTalent Canada is working to connect internationally-educated professionals with potential employers. It works closely with industry to identify the specific essential skills and competencies required in Canada's bio-economy, which also includes the field of medical laboratory sciences. Through the *BioSkills Recognition Program*, immigrants who are pursuing certification, or immigrants who are found ineligible for certification as

medical laboratory technologists, have the opportunity to put their skills to use in a related field, while at the same time being able to upgrade their skills if desired.

Newfoundland and Labrador offers various programs to support alternate career pathways for internationally-trained workers, including: a *Business Development Supports Program* which contains a business start-up resource kit, business pathway counselling, and online services and seminars; *Interest Free Small Loans Program* to establish businesses, to assist newcomers who require short-term training, certification or registration in a profession or skilled trade in Newfoundland and Labrador; and a *Portfolio Preparation Program* which includes a resource guide; and a *Mentoring Link Program* that matches newcomers with volunteer professional mentors to support and provide an opportunity for them to learn about their field and related fields in Canada.

Career Development Resources: Saskatchewan is preparing a toolkit of resources for internationally-trained workers and career counsellors to help determine if entrepreneurship is a good option.

Nova Scotia has a career options website that provides information and resources to internationally-trained workers and career counsellors (www.nscareeroptions.ca).

Career Counselling: Health Force Ontario's Access Centre for Internationally-Educated Health Professionals offers a range of free services to support internationally-trained health professionals to find the most effective path to practice, including alternative occupations.

Supporting Workforce Participation—Individual & Employer Supports

The final step in the pathway is successful integration of internationally-trained workers into the Canadian labour force. Here, the desired outcome that governments hope to achieve through the *Framework* is:

“Immigrants and employers are able to access required supports in order to bridge immigrants successfully into the workforce in a timely fashion.”

[*Framework*, p. 8]

Achieving this objective requires a range of approaches that respond to the particular needs of both the employer and the internationally-trained worker. Using existing labour market and career guidance information is important. Some of the possible supports that can be helpful include language upgrading and mentorship, job-seeking and networking skills, along with diversity training in the workplace.

Promising Practices

Governments have undertaken a number of successful measures to support employers in the integration of internationally-trained workers.

Employer Supports: The Government of Canada has developed the *Employer's Roadmap: Hiring and Retaining Internationally-Trained Professionals* (<http://www.credentials.gc.ca/employers/roadmap>), which provides step-by-step advice on recruiting, screening and integrating immigrants into the workplace. These resources include website links to sector councils, government departments, immigration information and regulatory bodies, as well as online tools for training, referral and support of immigrant employees. This past year, the Government of Manitoba has adapted the *Employer's Roadmap* to its own labour market context,



and other provinces and territories have been invited to do the same.

Employer outreach and supports, including workplace diversity training, have emerged as promising practices across the country. For example, in Alberta, the Centre for Race and Culture provides workplace diversity and cultural competency training to employers and employees across the province. This sort of professional development contributes to more inclusive workplaces that welcome the skills and innovations of internationally-trained workers.

Many supports for individuals are also available.

Individual Supports: Financial assistance for skills upgrading is available to eligible candidates in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. In Alberta, the *Immigrant Access Fund* is a low interest micro-loan program that allows individuals to cover education costs and some living expenses while undergoing professional skills upgrading. In Manitoba, the *Manitoba Credentials Recognition Program* provides financial assistance to immigrant professionals to pay fees required for assessment and recognition. In Ontario, the *Ontario Bridging Participant Assistance Program* provides bursaries of up to \$5,000 to cover direct education costs (tuition, books and equipment) for participants attending approved bridge-training programs offered by Ontario colleges or universities. And, in Nova Scotia, the *Career Access Fund* provides financial assistance to immigrants (no repayment required) to cover the costs of upgrading and tuition.

Professional practice and outreach seminars provide individuals with opportunities to learn more about job requirements and acceptable workplace practices. For example, professional practice seminars are available for a number of regulated occupations in Manitoba. These seminars assist internationally-trained workers to better understand occupational requirements and expectations.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, internationally educated workers can quickly and effectively link with

employers through a skills-matching database and website, *AXIScareers.net*. At the same time employers can post jobs, seek answers to immigration questions, obtain labour market information and access a whole range of services. In addition, the development of an *Occupational Health and Safety Essentials Resource Tool* is presently underway. The goal is to develop a practical and customized resource tool to mobilize knowledge and build awareness among immigrants about securing safe and healthy work environments.

Preparation for Employment: Saskatchewan is pilot-testing an orientation program for internationally-educated engineers that helps them understand professional and workplace expectations.

Expanding Professional Networks: Immigrant employment councils (IECs) offer services to help employers meet the challenges of a diversified workforce, while at the same time allowing immigrants to network through initiatives such as mentoring programs or employer engagement networks. For example, IECs in Ottawa, Toronto, Niagara, Kitchener-Waterloo, London, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver currently have programs in place that help immigrants expand their networks and gain valuable Canadian work experience.

V. MOVING FORWARD

The *Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications* represents a joint commitment by federal, provincial and territorial governments to work together to improve foreign qualification assessment and recognition in Canada.

Governments recognize that the many challenges related to foreign qualifications recognition are best addressed through a combination of jurisdictional and collective actions. Significant work has already been undertaken, yet many challenges remain. Governments are committed to continuing to reduce or eliminate barriers through ongoing work with regulatory authorities, post-secondary and vocational institutions,

immigrant settlement agencies, employers, and other key stakeholders.

In the first year of implementation, governments and stakeholders established a strong foundation for continuous improvement. Given systemic complexities, achieving desired outcomes will require the ongoing commitment of all parties involved and will take time.

In the coming year, governments will build upon successes and promising practices. They will continue to support ongoing improvements with the first group of target occupations, and begin focusing on the next group of target occupations: dentists, engineering technicians, licensed practical nurses, medical radiation technologists, physicians and teachers (K-12). Activities will include:

- Ongoing engagement with regulatory authorities and other stakeholders to identify priorities and actions that promote improvements across the FQR pathway;
- Government support for promising initiatives and projects that will help lead to better FQR outcomes for internationally-trained workers; and,
- The establishment of additional mechanisms to improve data collection and reporting.

Together we can build a fair and competitive labour market environment where internationally-trained workers will have the opportunity to utilize their education, skills and work experience for their benefit and for Canada's collective prosperity.

Annex 1 – Quebec’s FQR Initiatives

While the Quebec government has not endorsed the *Framework*, it supports its principles and agrees to share public reports already made to its citizens, notably those tabled at the National Assembly.

In recent years, the Government of Quebec and its partners have been undertaking several projects to facilitate access to regulated trades and professions for immigrants. These projects aim to better inform immigrants about requirements to work in regulated occupations, to support regulatory authorities in building capacity to recognize international qualifications, as well as to improve access to gap training. More than twenty regulatory authorities in Quebec have projects in place to work toward these objectives.

For example, online self-assessment tools and occupational competency profiles have been created to assist in the evaluation of foreign qualifications. Supports have been developed to help immigrants prepare for examinations. Occupation-specific language training in French is available to support immigrants’ integration into the workforce.

In addition to these supports, in 2010, Quebec established an office of the Commissioner for Complaints to receive and examine the complaints of internationally-trained workers who experience difficulties in having their qualifications recognized. (<http://www.opq.gouv.qc.ca/professionnels-formes-hors-du-quebec/le-commissaire-aux-plaintes-en-matiere-de-reconnaissance-des-competences-professionnelles/>)

Finally, the *France-Quebec Agreement*, signed in 2008, facilitates qualifications recognition and labour mobility for professionals and tradespersons moving between the two jurisdictions in 68 different professions and trades. (<http://www.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/fr/biq/paris/entente-france-quebec/index.html>)

To learn more about FQR initiatives in Quebec, please visit the Ministère de l’Immigration et des Communautés culturelles website (<http://www.micc.gouv.qc.ca/fr/dossiers/professions-metiers.html>).