

## **Case Study of Social Integration in Canada – Foreign Credential Recognition**

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### **The Challenge**

In Canada in 2005, over 19 per cent of the population was foreign-born, which is the highest proportion in the world after Australia. In recent years, the Canadian government has encouraged immigrants in the economic class, as opposed to those in the family class and in the refugee class. Economic class immigrants are those who have skills and qualifications that are needed in the workforce. As a result, in 2004, skilled immigrants constituted almost 60 per cent of the total Canadian immigration target in that year.<sup>1</sup> This priority is being driven by the demographic situation in Canada, where the fertility rate has dropped to 1.5 children per woman, well below the replacement rate. By 2011, it is estimated that immigration will account for 100 per cent of Canada's net labour force growth.<sup>2</sup>

Within the class of economic immigrants, about one-third hold professional qualifications, and about 50 per cent of this group work in fields that require some type of formal credentials in order to practice. For example, in 2001, immigrants comprised 50 per cent of all those working in the engineering field, 51 per cent in the information technology field, and 49 per cent in the architecture and building field.<sup>3</sup> Canada does not pre-screen immigrants' qualifications prior to their arrival in the country, and many are encountering barriers to obtaining work in their field. Low income rates for recently arrived immigrants have risen from 24.6 per cent in 1980 to 35.8 per cent in 2000 largely because many highly qualified immigrants are only able to find work in lower-paid jobs.<sup>4</sup> According to a recent survey, lack of Canadian experience (27 per cent) and foreign credential recognition (19 per cent) are perceived by new immigrants to be the most serious labour market problems they face.<sup>5</sup>

Foreign credential recognition is a complex challenge in Canada because of the many players involved in the process. Regulation of the professions is generally a provincial responsibility under the Canadian Constitution, and many occupations have been granted self-regulation responsibilities. The regulatory environment therefore includes five provincial assessment authorities, more than 400 regulatory bodies, and more than 200 accredited post-secondary institutions, industry sector councils and non-government organizations.<sup>6</sup> Many immigrants find this complexity a significant barrier to obtaining the foreign credential assessment and recognition required for them to practice in their field of expertise. In addition, many employers are frustrated by the difficulty in finding qualified candidates to fill specific jobs.

### **The Actions**

The provinces have often served as "laboratories" of social innovation in Canada, as specific measures have been introduced within one or more provinces, then adopted by other provinces, with the federal (national) government providing leadership or support. Foreign credential recognition is one area where all the stakeholders have been obliged to work together to address the social integration problems faced by skilled immigrants, and it has been in the provinces where some of the most significant actions were first taken.

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<sup>1</sup> Lesleyanne Hawthorne, "Foreign Credential Recognition and Assessment: An Introduction", p.3 at [http://canada.metropolis.net/pdfs/Hawthorne\\_intro\\_en.pdf](http://canada.metropolis.net/pdfs/Hawthorne_intro_en.pdf) (accessed July 3, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Hawthorne, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Hawthorne, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Hawthorne, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants, quoted by Hawthorne, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Hawthorne, p. 9.

In 2003, the federal government launched the Foreign Credential Recognition Program with a budget of C\$68 million over six years. Administered by the Human Resources and Social Development Canada, the Program is intended to work with “provincial/territorial governments, licensing and regulatory bodies, sector councils, employers and many other groups to improve the integration of internationally trained workers into the work force and society.”<sup>7</sup> The Program has focused first on areas of labour market shortage, including doctors, nurses, engineers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, medical laboratory technologists, medical radiation technologists, pharmacists, cardiology technologists and midwives.<sup>8</sup> In 2007, the federal Department of Citizenship and Immigration opened the Foreign Credentials Recognition Office to help immigrants begin the process of getting their credentials recognized before they come to Canada. In addition to an extensive website, the Office has opened branches in China, India and the Philippines.<sup>9</sup>

In 2003, the Province of Ontario introduced a Bridging Projects program intended to provide training and orientation for professional newcomers to help them get jobs in their field.<sup>10</sup> In 2006, the Province passed the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act*, which gave it the power to oversee and set provincial standards for the process of accrediting foreigners in 34 regulated professions. In March 2007, the Province appointed a Fairness Commissioner to conduct regular audits of professional practices and report to the provincial Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on the implementation of the Act.<sup>11</sup>

## The Results

Many of these initiatives are quite recent, and therefore it is too early to judge their results. However, an evaluation of the federal government’s Foreign Credential Recognition Program found that key stakeholders (the funders and several early recipients) gave the following ratings (on a 7-point scale) to program outcomes:<sup>12</sup>

Perceptions on the Prospects that the FCRP Will Achieve its Outcomes		
FCRP OUTCOMES	HRSDC Key Informants	FCRP Recipient Agencies
<b>Immediate Outcomes</b>		
Increased understanding, consensus and commitment on issues and potential solutions related to foreign credential recognition	5.7	6.0
Identification and dissemination of best practices that can be applied across Canada	4.9	6.2
Identification of future occupations/sectors facing critical	5.0	3.1

<sup>7</sup> Foreign Credential Recognition Program, *Backgrounder* at [http://hrsdc.ca/en/workplaceskills/credential\\_recognition/trasf/backgrounder\\_fcr.pdf](http://hrsdc.ca/en/workplaceskills/credential_recognition/trasf/backgrounder_fcr.pdf) (accessed July 3, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Hawthorne, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> “About Us – Helping foreign trained workers succeed in Canada” at <http://www.credentials.gc.ca/about/index.asp> (accessed July 3, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Katherine Hewson, “Credential Recognition Initiatives for Immigrants in Ontario”, *Presentation to the Conference Board of Canada Forum*, April 22, 2008, p. 5 at [http://www.conferenceboard.ca/LRI/conference/presentations/Katherine\\_Hewson\\_April08.pdf](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/LRI/conference/presentations/Katherine_Hewson_April08.pdf) (accessed July 3, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> “Ontario Names New Commissioner for Recognition of Foreign Credentials”, *Canadian Immigration News* at <http://www.canadavisa.com/ontario-names-new-commissioner-for-recognition-of-foreign-credentials.html>

<sup>12</sup> Human Resources and Social Development Canada, “Formative Evaluation of the Foreign Credential Recognition Program” at [http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/publications\\_resources/evaluation/2007/sp\\_ah\\_687\\_02\\_07/page06.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/publications_resources/evaluation/2007/sp_ah_687_02_07/page06.shtml) (accessed July 3, 2008).

shortages		
Enhanced national coordination and action with regard to foreign credential recognition	4.6	5.5
<b>Medium Term Outcomes</b>		
Standardization of Pan-Canadian foreign credential recognition processes in targeted occupations	4.3	4.4
Increased awareness and availability of tools and processes for employers/regulators to assess and recognize foreign credentials	4.9	5.3
<b>Long Term Outcomes</b>		
Improved ability of sectors/employers/ regulators to assess and recognize foreign-trained individuals	4.3	5.6
Reduced barriers to entry into the labour market by foreign-trained individuals	4.6	5.3
Sources: Key informant interviews with FCRP officials and the survey of funded projects. Note: Table entries are average responses (where 1 = to no extent, and 7 = to a great extent).		

Under the Province of Ontario's Bridging Projects program, the following results have been reported from the over 90 projects supported since 2003:

**Nurses** – 90 per cent of all project participants have found a job within three to six months of completing the CARE (Creating Access to Regulated Employment) for Nurses program

**Pharmacists** – a University of Toronto project has increased the success rate in the qualifying exam from 20 per cent to 90 per cent

**Accountants and bookkeepers** – of the 160 professionals in a project sponsored by the Halton Multicultural Council, 97 have gained employment in their profession and 51 are proceeding to obtain certification

**Doctors** – Over 1,000 foreign-trained doctors have entered practice in Ontario since 2003 under a program offering 200 assessment and training positions each year.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hewson, p. 6.