



THE RECOGNITION OF IMMIGRANT SKILLS

A SEARCH FOR BEST PRACTICES

Final Report – February 13, 2010
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Acknowledgments

The focus of this research was determined through the annual TOP consultation process and further refined by the Advisory Group that convened for this project. Thank you to the members of the Advisory Group, for their advice and support in the development of this report. The committee included Norm McLeod of the Region of Peel, Ilham Tamari of the Centre for Education & Training and Srimanta Mohanty from the Social Planning Council of Peel. A special thanks to Shalini Da Cunha, Executive Director of the Peel Halton Workforce Development Group who worked closely with the researcher and the advisory committee to keep the report on track.

The Peel Halton Workforce Employment Group is funded by Employment Ontario

INTRODUCTION

Immigration is a key factor in Canada's population growth and a major contributor to its economic success. In particular, the labour market integration of newcomers is crucial to Canada's future economic prosperity. Canada is increasingly turning to immigration as a source of skills, knowledge, and labour force growth. Localities and regions that lack opportunities for economic integration could face stagnant economic and population growth, and even out-migration ¹.

Despite this urgent need for labour market integration, many immigrants have difficulty obtaining employment that is commensurate with their skills and experience. Recent immigrants have not fared as well as their predecessors in terms of employment and earnings. Various factors contribute to poor labour market outcomes, many of which have been identified in relevant research. These include:

- Insufficient recognition for foreign credentials, particularly from non-traditional source countries of immigration
- Barriers to working in the regulated professions
- Lack of Canadian work experience
- Cultural differences and lack of knowledge of Canadian workplace practices
- Lack of access to appropriate settlement services
- Discrimination and lack of awareness about immigrants by employers
- Absence of professional networks
- Lack of pre-migration education about working in Canada
- Ongoing difficulties experienced by many people of colour in the labour market
- Barriers affecting women in particular

In sum, numerous factors influence the labour market integration of newcomers, including occupation, racialization, culture, country of origin, and gender.

The widespread inability to connect newcomers to work that suits their levels of skills and experience represents a failure of immigration policy, a loss to our own Canadian economy and society, and a waste of skills and talents held by workers who in many cases gave up livelihoods in their home countries to start over again in Canada.

In an effort to respond to this failure, the research described in this report focuses on the first barrier enumerated above: inadequate foreign credential recognition (FCR). Empirical analysis points to this barrier as a major reason for the unemployment and underemployment of newcomers. Individuals with foreign qualifications and experience need their credentials recognized and assessed to (1) work in the field for which they have trained, which may entail some type of upgrading, (2) to receive credit for studies already completed, or (3) to acquire license issued by the provincial regulatory body in order to work in the field. The procedures for acquiring these assessments vary from province to province and from occupational field to occupational field. In some cases, procedures for credentials recognition are in place, but the process simply takes too long to be of use to immigrants seeking work in their fields.

¹ Note: Quebec has jurisdiction over its own immigration. Discussion of immigration to Canada in this paper excludes analysis of the particularities of Quebec.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH

The research described in this report examines how credentials are assessed and employment found for immigrants for various Canadian jurisdictions. The objective of the research was to identify how other provinces enable skilled and regulated professionals to work in their professions, with a particular focus on the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP), and to glean “best practices” from other jurisdictions. Practices from Australia, which has comparable immigration streams to Canada, are also included.

Why focus on PNPs?

Successful applicants to a PNP are deemed to have the experience needed to make an immediate economic contribution to the province or territory that nominates them. They are distinguished from most other migration streams in Canada for one reason: applicants to most PNPs in various Canadian provinces are accepted upon condition that they have a permanent job offer in hand. Within a context of bumpy labour market integration for many newcomers, this linkage between employer and PNP applicant raises many questions: How do these applicants secure job offers? Who assesses their credentials, and how is it done so quickly? Are there learnings or best practices that could be gleaned from the PNPs in terms of recognizing foreign credentials and working with the occupational regulatory bodies that oversee entrance to the regulated professions?

This short-term, exploratory research project scanned existing practices that have been adopted by provinces that are highly motivated to attract and retain immigrants. The Canadian provinces with the largest and most established PNPs tend to be places that have an immediate need for new immigrants.

It is also important to learn more about PNPs because they are rapidly growing in importance as an immigration stream in Canada. From fewer than 500 nominees in 1999, the number grew to over 22,000 in 2008. Provincial nominees comprised 9% of the immigration flow to Canada in 2008, and more than 70% of migrants to Manitoba, the province with the most established and largest nominee program (Bucklaschuck, Moss and Annis 2009: 65). In some communities such as Winkler and Steinback, Manitoba, more than 90% of immigration consists of provincial nominees and their dependents (Gurlock 2009:

15). In BC, PNPs make up 8.3 % of all immigrants. According to a key informant, the increase in PNPs in BC is compensating for the decrease in the number of Federal Skilled Worker Applicants. Indeed, on a Canada-wide scale, “federal projections indicate that provincial nominees could completely overtake the federal skilled worker program within two years” (Alboim 2009, fact sheet). It is important to know more about the screening process for this rapidly growing group of immigrants to Canada.

Research tasks

The research process proceeded in several steps:

1. Preliminary interviews with key informants in the area of immigration and employment, to further distill focus of research
2. Web-based searches of five Provincial Nominee Programs: Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and New Brunswick. These were followed up by email and telephone contact with key informants in provinces with programs of interest.

A standard list of questions was sent to contacts in the provinces. This was followed by key informant interviews with two representatives in BC, and the receipt of written responses from key informants in Alberta and Manitoba.

3. Literature search on PNPs via (1) University of Toronto's electronic journals database, which includes major academic databases and journals including magazines, and (2) Metropolis, CERIS, and other websites to find grey literature, articles and reports.
4. Literature search of other immigration programs, including temporary foreign workers in Canada, Canadian Experience Class, and recent publications about immigration policy in Australia which has a similar model but which has enjoyed stronger labour market outcomes for newcomers over the past decade.

(This fourth step was added to the research process when it was felt that a focus on PNPs alone would not yield as many "best practices" as had been anticipated. For one, PNPs are relatively new to the Canadian immigration scene, and there have been few studies of how they operate and what their impact has been. It was difficult to obtain even the basic data on provincial nominees that was essential to this research, namely how many PNPs were working in regulated professions and the breakdown of high-skill v. low-skill nominees. We have a better understanding of the PNP process and some outcomes, but these are not central to the questions of interest in this paper.)

CONTEXT: A CHANGING IMMIGRATION POLICY

Before turning to the details of our findings, it is helpful to have an overview of immigration to Canada and how immigration streams have been changing in recent years. This context sets the stage for many of the new initiatives that have emerged that seek to better connect newcomers to employment.

Canada has long accepted immigrants under a variety of categories. Permanent migration is divided into economic, family and humanitarian immigration streams. Federal Skilled Worker Immigration was considered to be the most attractive category in terms of attracting immigrants who would most quickly integrate into Canadian economy and society. At present, close to 60% of immigrants enter Ontario as economic immigrants, including family members of the principal applicant who is a skilled worker, business immigrant, or live-in caregiver. Skilled workers are chosen for their ability to become successfully established in Canada. They are assessed according to a selection grid (point system) that emphasizes education, language ability and skilled work experience.

Points-based selection dates to the 1970s in Canada, but it was modified in 1997 to give more weight to education as opposed to specific occupational competencies. It was thought that well-educated, experienced individuals would be able to fill various, changing needs of the labour market in a knowledge economy. This shift toward a human capital model of migration was validated in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA), which came into effect in 2002. Above all else, IRPA emphasizes education, work experience, and official language proficiencies in the selection of skilled worker applicants. The emphasis on human capital in Canadian immigrant selection meant that newcomers to Canada in the 1990s and early 2000s were more highly educated and skilled than previous immigrant cohorts.

Declining economic outcomes of skilled migrants since early 1990s have led to a variety of changes. Members of the settlement sector and other stakeholders demanded the implementation of better processes for foreign credential recognition. In response, resources were devoted to creating and building up credentials assessment services, e.g., International Credential Assessment Service of Canada (ICAS), World Education Services, and Comparative Education Service at the University of Toronto. The federal government followed with its own initiative, the Foreign Credentials Referral Office (FCRO). As announced at the time of its launch in May 2007, the FCRO would “help people navigate through the complex system of foreign credential recognition in Canada.” This would include:

- in-person services and a dedicated phone service operated by Service Canada at 320 outlets across the country by fall 2007;
- an expanded online service that will help individuals identify occupations in Canada for which they may be qualified, provide them with detailed labour market information, and refer them to the appropriate regulatory body; and
- increasing employer awareness of the processes for, and benefits of, hiring internationally trained and educated professionals (Government of Canada news release, Toronto, May 24, 2007).

To facilitate access to the 35 regulated professions, Ontario created the Office of Fairness Commissioner. This arm’s length agency has a mandate “to ensure that certain regulated professions have registration and licensing practices that are transparent, objective, impartial and fair.” The first provincial agency of its kind in Canada, it was established in April 2007 under the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006.

While various levels of government were working on foreign credential recognition through formal credentialing processes, foundations and not for profit organizations took up the cause by directly approaching employers. This series of employer-focused initiatives made the business case for hiring immigrants, such as the website and clever ad campaign on www.hireimmigrants.ca. In addition to making the business case, there were initiatives that directly engaged employers through various practical and work place initiatives such as internships, and improving social networks via mentoring, mostly promoted by the Maytree Foundation and its offshoot TRIEC.

In Ontario, another line of attack on the FCR issue was the introduction of bridging programs and enhanced language training for immigrants who were already here and needed some upgrading in order to become “job ready.” These intensive programs gave participants Canadian occupation-specific training to supplement their existing credentials and skills.

Simultaneously, however, and largely unnoticed by the general public, provincial and federal governments started shifting their focus away from permanent skilled migration with its declining economic outcomes. Governments began to look at other options such as temporary foreign workers, provincial nominee programs, and overseas recruitment to fill specific labour market gaps. Most recently, and directly following similar measures taken in Australia, the Canadian government in September 2008 introduced the Canadian Experience Class which created a pathway to permanent migration for foreign students and skilled temporary workers in managerial, professional, skilled and technical positions. This two-step migration process in effect devolves responsibility for credential recognition from the federal government to the universities who screen foreign students and to the employers who are assessing the qualifications of worker applicants. These various streams have grown rapidly in a short time. In a significant departure from the past, since 2007, Canada has been receiving more temporary migrants than permanent residents.

In sum, attempts to solve problems related to labour market integration of newcomers have emerged in a variety of forms, including creating more organizations for recognizing credentials, helping newcomers build on their credentials with Canadian training, and educating employers about the value of hiring skilled immigrants. Most significantly, however, has been the introduction and growth of new streams of immigration which devolve responsibility for credential recognition from the federal government altogether, charging provinces, employers, universities, and third parties such as immigration lawyers and consultants with the task of credentials assessment for new immigrants. These are further explored in the subsequent section. In many cases, it appears that the migration is not skilled, and that no credentials assessment even occurs.

RESEARCH RESULTS

This research sought to find examples of best practices in foreign credential recognition. In effect, however, as described above, many of the growing immigration streams have created ways of by-passing the need for FCR. None of these depend on FCR alone to assess newcomer education and skills.

What follows is a more elaborate overview of the immigration stream/policy and who it affects. It is a conceptual overview or typology of ways that migrants are screened for the possibility of employment. Wherever possible, we attempt to pull out the pieces of foreign credential recognition that could be useful.

Provincial Nominee Programs

These programs allow provincial and territorial governments to actively participate in the immigration process, and to identify and designate immigrants who will meet their local economic needs. Nominees must meet federal health and security admission criteria, but they are not subject to the skilled worker selection grid that determines eligibility. As such, provinces are given the opportunity to promote immigration to their regions and fulfill particular local labour market needs.

While the impetus and significance of the PNP programs across the provinces may vary (e.g., meet labour shortages, specific skill shortages or population shortages), their goals are the same: The main objective of PNPs is to assist individuals already living and working in their provinces to obtain permanent residence. Though the programs are not explicitly presented in this way, an examination of the criteria for eligibility makes it clear that, for the most part, only foreigners already living and working in the relevant provinces will qualify as nominees. In most cases, individuals need to have a permanent full-time job offer from an employer in order to be eligible to apply². In Manitoba, for example, International and Employer direct stream applicants need to be currently working in Manitoba and have a long-term, full-time job offer from a Manitoba employer as well³. Even the lowest priority general stream requires a minimum of six months work

² This requirement is different from the Canadian Experience Class, which only requires work experience in the province in order to apply.)

³ According to the Manitoba website, (www2.immigratemanitoba.com), there are steps to determine if someone is eligible to apply for PNP.

Step 2: Are you a skilled worker who is employable in Manitoba?

You must be able to provide proof that you have the training (including any licence or certification), work experience and language ability to find employment in your intended occupation in Manitoba, soon after you arrive. (The MPNP does not guarantee employment to successful applicants in their intended or other occupations.)

Yet the page goes on to explain that there are different streams of applicants, and that priority assessment streams (for applicants who can demonstrate the strongest potential to settle successfully and permanently in Manitoba) are assessed before applications under the General stream. The criteria for the two main categories of priority assessment streams (Employer Direct and International Student) are (1) to have an offer of a long-term, full-time job in Manitoba, (2) a work permit issued by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and (3) be currently working for the Manitoba employer that has offered you the job and been working there for at least six months.

experience in Manitoba. In British Columbia, there is a relatively new low skill stream PNP program that began as a pilot project two years ago. Even these low skilled applicants need to have nine months of work experience in their occupation working for the same employer in order to demonstrate a strong labour force connection.

While the numbers of months of experience required varies by province, ranging from three to nine months, most applicants are already living and working in their provinces. In British Columbia, three in four applicants are already living in the province at the time of application for provincial nominee status. Most applicants arrive in their provinces on temporary work permits.

In this context, little additional credential assessment is needed. While applicants do submit their transcripts, certificates and past employment references, there is for the most part no novel assessment of these conducted at the government level. In British Columbia, informants stated that the BC government does not further evaluate applicants' credentials as they are satisfied that the employer has done their due diligence by evaluating if the applicant is qualified to perform the job. BC authorities will check that the applicant has the documented credentials but not perform any assessment of them. Only once in eight years was an applicant's credentials sent to an external assessment service to be evaluated. What matters is that the employer is satisfied. Based on the key informant interviews, BC appears to have built the strongest relationships between employers and the nominee program.

In Manitoba, the findings were quite similar. If an applicant is already working, their credentials are already satisfactory for employment in Manitoba, and so the government generally sees no risk in fast tracking the application. Indeed, in most cases, employers submit applications on behalf of individuals employed in their firms. Under this scenario, why would any additional assessment of credentials be made? The province wants the immigrant, the employer wants the immigrant, and the immigrant wants to become a permanent resident. Why slow down the process?

Of the three provinces, Alberta appears to be the most stringent. In Alberta, if the credential submitted is issued by a foreign institution that is already known as reputable and government-sanctioned to the person processing the application, the credential is not assessed further. In cases where the credential is not familiar, it will be sent to an international qualification assessment service, the appropriate provincial regulatory body, or even the Canadian Embassy in the country in question.

One key informant was very candid about the extent to which third parties assess credentials. According to this person, employers do little assessment of credentials themselves. Either no actual assessment is conducted, or an assessment is done by a third party representative. The informant stated:

We also find that many third party representatives leave a lot to be desired when it comes to assessing candidate credentials. We find the higher the skill level required of the job and the higher the responsibility it involves, the more likely the employer or an employer representative will undertake an assessment of credentials. In most cases the lower skill level of the job the less credential assessment employers and their third party representatives do. We do not rely on the employers alone. (interview)

Third party representatives include employment agencies or brokers, immigration consultants, and immigration lawyers⁴.

⁴ Though it was beyond the scope of this project to pursue this angle, a more comprehensive understanding of credentials assessment should entail collecting the practices of these third party representatives.

If an individual is applying to work in a regulated profession or certified trade, they must already have the certification to practice or the provisional license from the provincial regulatory body. As such, the provincial governments rely on the regulatory bodies' assessment process. One key informant stated that their province was adding more regulated occupations to the nominee program umbrella. This way, regulatory bodies can assess credentials, and the provincial government will not need to do so.

Employment outcomes of PNP

According to standard employment data such as employment rate and income, the outcomes of PNPs are quite promising. In BC, for example, income data from taxation records indicates that a BC PNP immigrant earns over 260% of what an average immigrant earns. In Manitoba, evaluation numbers indicate that there is a high employment rate: 80% of PNPs were employed. However, a recent survey of principal applicants to PNPs found that many of the nominees wished to change jobs (Carter 2007). The most common occupations held by principal applicants after their arrival were welders, truck drivers, computer programmers, machine workers and accountants. Among those surveyed, 50% indicated they were not working in their area of expertise and training, and approximately 20% had experienced periods of unemployment since arriving in Manitoba. Though most PNP streams require proof of permanent employment as a condition of acceptance for applicants, about half the principal applicants did report some problems finding jobs, perhaps because they were changing jobs, wanted to change jobs, or did not arrive with employment in hand. Nominees reported these difficulties: 52% mentioned problems with credential recognition, 30% expressed disappointment that Canadian experience counted for so much, and 29% also mentioned lack of language ability as hindering their settlement (cited in Carter, Morrish and Amoyaw, 2008: 173).

Temporary foreign workers

As stated above, most applicants to PNPs appear to be in Canada as temporary foreign workers. This is particularly apparent in some communities. For example, Maple Leaf Foods employs hundreds of employees who are TFWs and PNPs. More than half of the TFWs employed with Maple Leaf Foods in Brandon, Manitoba have been approved for provincial nominee status, while the other half are in the process of applying (Bucklaschuck, Moss, and Annis 2009: 65). Once they receive provincial nominee status, a process that usually occurs within 12 to 18 months after their arrival, TFWs can bring family members to Canada.

How, then, are the credentials of TFW's assessed? The Temporary Foreign Worker Program is a federal program. The process includes specific steps that employers must follow, including an unsuccessful search for a Canadian to fill the position. The employer makes an offer of employment to the foreign worker who then applies for a work permit in their country of residence (outside Canada).

In this process, the employer identifies and hires the foreign worker. The credentials assessment is left to the employer, not the government. If the position is in a regulated profession or in a compulsory trade, then the applicant must take steps to become licensed to work in his or her field. Otherwise, it does not appear that any assessment of credentials is required at all. The employer makes the hiring decision. If the foreign worker subsequently applies to become a provincial nominee, then credentials are generally not required to be recognized or evaluated again.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES

The above description of PNPs and temporary foreign workers gives us insight into these programs, but it does not present us with much in the way of best practices for credential recognition. According to this research, best practices are to be found in very specific programs that have been designed to fill a particular skilled labour shortage. Some examples follow.

Health Match BC, Physicians stream

Health Match BC is a recruitment agency for Nurses, Physicians and Midwives. (Here we focus on the physicians stream because of the particular knowledge held by our key informant.) Health Match BC helps all applicants for licensure in these professions, not only those in the PNP stream, though it helps persons apply for the PNP as well.

Health Match BC is the first point of contact for internationally educated physicians. It works with them both prior to arrival and after to help them get their licenses to practice from the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Health Match BC representatives travel overseas to actively recruit physicians from UK and Ireland through information sessions and directly interview potential applicants at these sessions.

In terms of pre assessment, Health Match BC reviews applicants' documents to determine if they are eligible for a restricted/provisional license in BC. Their expertise allows them to evaluate whether or not the College would accept them. Then Health Match BC applies to the College on the applicant's behalf. It has a very good relationship with the College, and in fact the College refers applicants to Health Match BC now as well. (The College seems to appreciate this service as it reduces their receipt of incomplete or unqualified applicants.) Despite receiving thousands of applications each year, Health Match BC responds to applicants within 24 to 48 hours. It informs applicants of all the requirements for licensure as well as the costs and timeframes involved. (It typically takes about nine months from the point of contact to arrival in BC, including three months for the ruling from the College and six months to get a work permit.)

When determining placement of the applicant, Health Match BC asks the applicant about career expectations, specific expertise and qualifications to determine if he or she is a good match for the employer. It considers an applicant's culture, ethnicity and religion to see if there are support groups, religious organizations, or places of worship in the neighbourhood's vicinity.

In addition to pre-screening applicants, Health Match BC will also help applicants find a sponsor (a supervisory physician), which is a requirement for licensure. This alleviates a major challenge for newcomers who rarely have the professional networks to find such a person. Health Match BC also assists with spousal needs whenever possible. The Health Match consultant for example would advise the spouse to apply for an open work permit and connect them with supports in the community to help the spouse get a job.

Health Match BC has been in existence for 10 years and as a result claims to know the communities very well. Each consultant has his or her own portfolio and goes out to conduct site visits of the workplaces to get first hand knowledge of the community. In this way, consultants get to know what the community's culture is and can make good matches between employers and applicants. According to the key informant, it is this understanding of both sides' needs that contributes to the success of the program.

If an applicant is not eligible for the provisional license, Health Match BC refers the applicant to the IMG (International Medical Graduate) program, a bridging program for internationally educated physicians. There

are similar programs in Ontario, Alberta and Nova Scotia, though each has a slightly different focus.

Health Match BC places 200 physicians each year, one half to two-thirds of whom are internationally trained. There is no fee for the service.

The Philippines Nursing Recognition Initiative, Manitoba

The Philippines Nursing Recognition Initiative is a joint initiative between Manitoba Health and Manitoba Labour and Immigration in partnership with Manitoba's regional health authorities (employers) and the College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba. The framework for the recruitment of the initiative was developed jointly. The initiative was announced in June 2008.

Nurses who come through the Philippines Nursing Recognition Initiative are not part of the permanent immigrant flow. The nurses come initially as temporary foreign workers, but could apply to the Manitoba PNP after working for a period of time. As in other streams of the MPNP, temporary foreign workers are eligible to apply to the MPN after working in the province for six months and with a permanent job offer from the employer.

A pilot recruitment initiative took place in the Philippines in November 2008 where the provincial recruitment team made conditional offers of employment to 132 nurses. The recruited nurses are currently working for various regional health authorities as graduate nurses until they complete the registration process to work in Manitoba, which includes passing the Canadian Registered Nurses Examination.

A support system has been developed to assist the recruited nurses to meet Manitoba's licensing requirements, as required by the CRNM. Upon arrival in Manitoba, all of the nurses participated in a settlement orientation program (building upon the content of Manitoba's successful Entry Program). The nurses also participated in a lengthy workplace orientation, including classroom content and work-site mentorship.

To prepare the nurses for the exam, they are being provided with free tutoring sessions and exam preparation workshops. To date, 117 nurses have written the CRNE and 102 have been successful on the exam, a pass rate of 87.2%. Nationally, the pass rate for internationally educated nurses on the Canadian Registered Nurses Exam is 65.81%.

The success of the program does not seem to be in the assessment of credentials but in the supports provided upon arrival. The individuals are assessed by the provincial nursing regulatory body, then a Temporary Work Permit helps them obtain the work experience needed for the license. They are only able to apply to the PNP once they are registered with the College of Nurses.

We were not able to obtain information on how credentials are assessed as part of the initial screening process for selection into the program.

Internationally Educated Engineer's Qualification Program (University of Manitoba)

This recently-created project is delivered by the Faculty of Engineering with the support of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba. Containing both an academic component and paid work placement experience, the program provides participants with certification in Canada. This program shortens the typical three-year period that an internationally educated engineer would need to meet Canadian standards to one year, and it facilitates their transition into the work place (Carter, Morrish, and Amoyaw, 2008: 175)

OTHER ASSESSMENT INITIATIVES

This recently-created project is delivered by the Faculty of Engineering with the support of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba. Containing both an academic component and paid work placement experience, the program provides participants with certification in Canada. This program shortens the typical three-year period that an internationally educated engineer would need to meet Canadian standards to one year, and it facilitates their transition into the work place (Carter, Morrish, and Amoyaw, 2008: 175)

Manitoba Provincial Credentials office

Manitoba Labour and Immigration offers The Credentials Recognition Program – a service that provides financial assistance to immigrants who are working toward getting their profession licence. The Credentials Recognition Program provides wage assistance to employers who provide program clients with full-time professional or technical work related to their educational background.

Federal action on internationally-educated workers in certain professions

On November 30, 2009, the federal government announced a new Pan- Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications. Under this framework, internationally-trained workers who submit an application to be licensed or registered to work in certain fields will be advised

within one year whether their qualifications will be recognized. The framework will initially be implemented in eight occupations by the end of 2010: Architects, Engineers, Financial Auditors and Accountants, Medical Laboratory Technologists, Occupational Therapists, Pharmacists, Physiotherapists, and Registered Nurses.

By December 2012, the framework will be implemented in six more occupations:

Dentists, Engineering Technicians, Licensed Practical Nurses, Medical Radiation

Technologists, Physicians, and Teachers (K-12). Governments will work with regulatory bodies, post-secondary institutions and other key partners to implement the framework.

Australian policies

Australia increasingly relies on two-step immigration, especially for international students: they first gain entrance to the country as foreign students, then they apply to immigrate at a later date. By 2005, more than half of the country's economic migrants were former international students with Australian degrees. Many of these were Principal Applicants from India and China who initially came to Australia at their own expense.

Also, over the past decade, Australia has implemented a more stringent pre-screening of English language, even for family-skill categories. As a result, many more immigrants come from UK/Ireland and South Africa when compared to immigrants to Canada. An increasing number of Principal Applicants at perceived risk of delayed or de-skilled employment have been excluded from economic migration to Australia at point of entry, either due to language testing, mandatory credential assessment, or the range of additional modifications to the points selection process (Hawthorne 2006: 4). It is difficult to determine if the stronger labour market outcomes for immigrants are due to language and other pre-screening or the fact that, as a result, Australia receives many more white immigrants who may face less work-related discrimination.

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

The above policies and programs are examples of how motivated jurisdictions have facilitated credentials recognition and the placement of internationally trained professionals into employment. They illustrate how accreditation can move more quickly than it has on the federal level.

In conclusion, this research set out to find some best practices in foreign credentials recognition from other jurisdictions, with a particular focus on Provincial Nominee Programs in select Canadian provinces. Although we did not find a lot of transferrable best practices, we did discover a few programs that have been successful in placing immigrants into skilled professions. We also found that these do not depend on credentials assessments alone but rather on providing a range of supports to newcomers. On its own, foreign credentials recognition does not appear to be a solution to the labour market challenges faced by newcomers to Canada.

The key findings of this research can be summarized as follows:

1. The balance of immigration in this country is shifting towards temporary workers and provincial nominees. The number of provincial nominees is rapidly growing, and Canada now receives more temporary migrants than permanent residents each year. Much of this growth can be attributed to inadequacies in the Federal Skilled Worker Program, including issues of foreign credentials recognition.
2. Foreign credential recognition is gradually improving through the introduction of various initiatives such as the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications. Under the new framework, however, the process will still take too long. In our rapidly changing job market and economy, one year is too long to wait for credentials recognition. (In contrast, Health Match BC has an average turnaround time of three months.)
3. At the same time, a growing number of immigrants find employment in Canada without coming into contact with any government-led credential recognition. Federal and provincial governments have devolved responsibility for credential recognition to employers, universities, provincial licensing bodies, and third party assessors such as immigration consultants and lawyers.
4. Provincial Nominee Programs require an existing offer of employment for the immigrant applicant, and for the most part they assist individuals already living and working in their provinces. As such, administrators of PNPs are only minimally involved in credentials assessment.
5. Where there is a will, there is a way. Jurisdictions that are motivated to find workers to fill labour shortages are devoting resources and finding ways to fill shortages. Provinces like Ontario that have received high levels of immigration have been slower to act.
6. Employment initiatives that successfully place skilled immigrants into quality employment rely more on supports provided upon arrival than on credentials assessment.

GLOSSARY OF IMMIGRATION CATEGORIES

Canadian experience class: Created in 2008, this new class of economic immigrants allows qualifying international students and highly skilled temporary workers to apply for permanent residence from within Canada. Applicants must meet language requirements and intend to live outside Quebec.

International students must have graduated from a full time Canadian postsecondary educational program of at least two years duration or a one-year masters program and an additional prior year of education in Canada. Applicants must also have one year of full-time (or equivalent) work experience in Canada in a skilled occupation. The work experience must be gained within two years of applying.

Temporary workers must have at least two years of full-time (or equivalent) skilled work experience in Canada, defined as managerial, professional, skilled and technical positions.

Provincial nominee program: These programs allow provinces to select individuals for permanent residence in Canada. Each province determines its own criteria for selection based on its demographic and labour market needs and priorities. Once selected by a province, immigrants receive expedited permanent residence as long as they meet federal health and security requirements. There is no requirement to be assessed under the federal skilled worker point system.

Originally designed to attract immigrants to provinces with aging populations and shrinking labour supplies, all provinces now have provincial nominee programs.

Skilled workers are selected as permanent residents based on their education, work experience, knowledge of English and/or French, and other criteria that have been shown to help them become economically established in Canada.

Temporary foreign worker: Administered by the federal government, this program allows eligible foreign workers to work in Canada for an authorized period of time, if employers can demonstrate that they are unable to find suitable Canadians or permanent residents to fill the position. Temporary workers can arrive through the general foreign worker program or under a sector-specific program such as the Canadian Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program and the Live-in Caregiver Program.

LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

1. Re: focus of research

- Diana MacKay, Director, Education and Health, Conference Board of Canada
- Joan Atlin, Director, Operations, TRIEC
- Rodel Imbarlina-Ramos, Manager, Corporate and Stakeholder Relations, TRIEC Peel / Halton
- Ted Richmond, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration

2. Re: Provincial Nominee Programs

- Brad Trefan, Director, Alberta Immigrant Nominee Program
- Margaret Kennedy, Senior Consultant, Physician Services, Health Match BC
- Benjamin Amoyaw, Province of Manitoba
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