
FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

Roundtable Discussions on the
Recognition of Foreign-Earned Credentials,
Skills and Work Experience
in Alberta

WHAT WE HEARD
SUMMARY REPORT
August 2007

FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

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Executive Summary

The Government of Alberta is developing a Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) Action Plan to promote the full recognition of the educational credentials, skills and work experience that immigrants bring to Alberta. To support the development of the Action Plan, Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (AEII) engaged stakeholders in a series of roundtable discussions to explore the challenges and solutions for FCR in our province.

Eight roundtable discussions were held in May 2007 with a total of 70 representatives from immigrants and immigrant-serving organizations, post-secondary institutions, professional licensing bodies and employers. The main objective of the roundtable discussions was to identify actions or initiatives that would help to *make significant progress and achieve substantial results* toward the following desired outcome:

Immigrants will have the opportunity to fully utilize their education, skills and work experience for the benefit of themselves and the Alberta economy.

To facilitate the discussion, a series of potential actions were presented to participants prior to the workshops in the form of a Roundtable Discussion Guide. Over 24 hours of rich dialogue has been synthesized in this What We Heard Summary Report.

During the discussions, stakeholders expressed the following key themes:

- **Improved immigration system:** While the focus of the roundtable discussions was on skilled immigrants who are already in Alberta, participants strongly stressed the need for mechanisms that would enable potential immigrants to make more informed decisions before coming to Alberta. Many indicated the importance of ensuring that we have a federal immigration system that selects immigrants that have the right skills and knowledge to fit into the Alberta labour market. In addition, there was a general feeling that significantly more preparatory work should be done by immigrants in the pre-immigration stage.
- **Effective coordination and streamlining:** Many stakeholders indicated that the process for FCR is overly onerous. Many employers, immigrants and educational institutions expressed frustration that there are no clear pathways for the recognition of foreign-earned qualifications in Alberta and that it is an extremely complex and time consuming process.

- **Improved information tools and resources:** All stakeholders expressed support for better information tools and resources that would help both individual immigrants and stakeholders navigate the FCR process in Alberta. All stakeholders supported a centralized repository where prospective immigrants and immigrants already in Alberta could map out a career path and learn what is required to pursue a specific career or further education in Canada.
- **Importance of an Alberta FCR Action Plan:** Many stakeholders felt that Alberta is in the opportune position to develop and define a competitive advantage for our province. They told us Alberta must collaboratively learn how to effectively integrate skilled immigrants into the Alberta economy and increasingly treat them as a valuable component of the labour talent pool. Alberta has the opportunity to differentiate itself by *“defining the path for immigrants and making it straighter and shorter”*.
- **Importance of collaboration:** All stakeholders identified the need for improved leadership and coordination in the area of FCR. Stakeholders indicated that for an Alberta FCR Action Plan to be successful there needs to be a high level of collaboration between and across stakeholder groups. Although stakeholders indicated that government needs to take a leadership role in some areas, all stakeholders expressed the importance of a consultative and collaborative process. To support this collaboration, some roundtable participants suggested multi-stakeholder provincial advisory committees and forums.

The specific action items that some stakeholders felt would make the most substantial difference to FCR in Alberta included:

- One-stop resource centre for skilled immigrants
- Resource tools for stakeholders
- Good practice standards for the assessment of foreign qualifications
- International educational guides
- E-portfolio or ‘qualifications passport’, focusing on how the skills, knowledge and work experience gained in another country link to competencies required for employment in Canada
- Flexibility and innovations in licensing and accreditation requirements (while maintaining Alberta standards)
- Internship and Canadian work experience programs
- Restricted practice or provisional professional licensure
- Employer tool kit and resources to support employers in the integration of immigrants into the workplace
- Mentoring program
- English language training
- Developing a business case for employing foreign-trained professionals

In response to the question, “*What specific actions will result in significant improvement in the FCR process?*” stakeholders were clear that it was more than just about a few actions. Participants in the roundtable discussions stressed success will be realized by developing a fundamentally different system and approach that makes a practise of optimizing the value that foreign-trained professionals can add to the Alberta labour force and by supporting foreign-trained professionals in the journey to success.

Next Steps

The results of these roundtable consultations provide a rich foundation for the development of the FCR Action Plan for Alberta. Over the coming months, the Alberta government will continue to collaborate with stakeholders and analyze the comments made in these roundtable discussions to develop an effective and coordinated FCR Action Plan for our province.

Introduction

In May 2007, Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry (AEII) convened eight roundtable sessions with stakeholders to discuss issues and challenges related to the recognition of foreign credentials, skills and work experience in Alberta. In total, there were 70 representatives from immigrant and immigrant-serving organizations, post-secondary institutions, professional licensing bodies and employers who participated in these roundtable discussions (see Appendix A for a complete listing of participants).

The main objective of the roundtable discussions was to identify actions or initiatives that would help to *make significant progress and achieve substantial results* toward the following desired outcome:

Immigrants will have the opportunity to fully utilize their education, skills and work experience for the benefit of themselves and the Alberta economy.

To facilitate the discussion a series of potential actions were presented to participants prior to the workshops in the form of a Roundtable Discussion Guide.

The Roundtable Discussion Guide solicited stakeholder input in the following four strategic areas:

1. **Specialized information:** Immigrants have easy access to current, accurate and understandable information on the steps required to obtain recognition of their foreign credentials. Immigrants are aware of the programs and services available to assist them in the FCR process.
2. **Assessment tools and resources:** The assessment of foreign qualifications follows principles of transparency, fairness and accountability. Assessments are based on accurate and current information.
3. **Bridging to fill the gap:** Assessments indicate where there are gaps in qualifications and the steps that need to be taken to address these gaps. Timely and accessible bridging and mentoring courses/programs are available to address those gaps.
4. **Coordination:** Information related to FCR is shared within and across stakeholder groups. FCR processes are streamlined and coordinated. Levels of accountability are clear and outcomes are measured.

Over 24 hours of rich dialogue has been synthesized in this What We Heard Summary Report. This document represents the statements and ideas that were expressed by participants in the various roundtable discussions. The report

does not necessarily represent a consensus opinion from discussion participants but rather, identifies general themes.

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS BY STAKEHOLDER GROUP

This section provides an overview of the discussions with the four stakeholder groups listed in Appendix A. Each group sub-section contains a brief introduction, a summary of the key challenges perceived by each group and their responses to the FCR actions identified in the Roundtable Discussion Guide.

While the focus of the roundtable discussions was on FCR for skilled immigrants who are already in Alberta, participants strongly stressed the need for mechanisms that would enable potential immigrants to make more informed decisions before coming to Alberta. Many indicated the importance of ensuring that we have a federal immigration system that selects immigrants that have the right skills and knowledge to fit into the Alberta labour market. In addition, there was a general feeling that significantly more preparatory work should be done by immigrants in the pre-immigration stage.

Stakeholders indicated that before skilled immigrants arrive, they need to have accurate and current information on the challenges they may face. They need to have information on the labour market and the required assessment processes so they can make informed choices before coming to Alberta and have realistic expectations about their employment possibilities. Many participants felt that dealing with these issues would reduce many of the problems with FCR in Alberta as immigrants would be arriving in a more job-ready state.

Group A: Immigrants and Immigrant-Serving Organizations

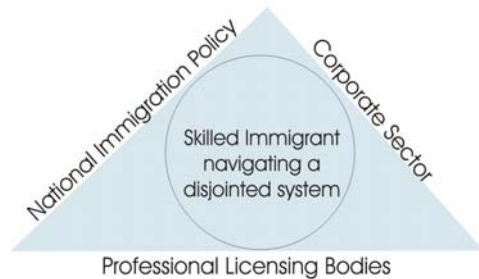
Two sessions were held with immigrants and immigrant-serving organizations - one in Edmonton and one in Calgary— with a total of 18 participants. In addition, mail-in comments were received from an additional immigrant-serving organization. All participants in this group had affiliations with immigrant-serving organizations.

Key Themes and Challenges

- The surprise factor: The expectation by skilled immigrants that foreign

credentials would be acknowledged, transferable and valid in Canada and surprise that this is not the situation.

- The wild goose chase: Difficulty in obtaining (or knowing where to obtain) quality, reliable and consistent information about all facets of working in Canada and getting credentials recognized.
- The resource drain: The time, energy and money it takes to meet onerous and often redundant FCR processes.
- The solitudes of decision makers: Key players have existed in solitude and do not communicate or collaborate—like a triangle with three sides facing each other but not connecting.
- Lack of national continuity: Differences in provincial standards and lack of portability of credentials.
- Closed doors: Perception of the attitude of some professional licensing bodies and employers. Some participants felt that some organizations use FCR as an excuse for not hiring foreign-trained professionals.
- Distracted by survival: Immigrants and immigrant-serving organizations noted that skilled immigrants will take basic labour jobs to support themselves and their families and this significantly reduces the likelihood they will then pursue work in their professional field.
- Limited access to programs: Historically, the requirements or parameters for admission to employment programs were onerous and did not respond to employing immigrants in their field of expertise as soon as possible.
- The delivery of bridging programs: Agencies rely on funding on a project-by-project basis for small numbers of immigrants. This situation does not give them adequate resources to provide general employment counselling to foreign-trained professionals.



“Based on our experiences, we feel clients are able to find appropriate employment and have credentials recognized, when they have access to a centre or clearing house that will give them all the information needed to:

- fast track them
- keep them focused
- tell them what is needed
- show them their options”

Group A: Strategic Actions- Specialized information

A-1 One-stop resource centre for skilled immigrants

- Create a one-stop shopping resource that would help immigrants who need to know the rules and steps to get accredited. It should provide a face and a human voice as immigrating to Canada is a challenging and

“Government needs one independent body that would do assessment of my portfolio and give me advice on where I need to go—focus my efforts in the right direction so I don’t have to go to multiple places to get information.”

complex process. Services could also include: English language testing and courses, integration and educational opportunities. The services should be provided by an organization that does not have a vested interest in FCR.

- In addition to an information centre for immigrants, participants also suggested the option of a FCR information and support centre for employers.

Group A: Strategic Actions-Assessment tools and resources

A-2 E-portfolio or a qualifications passport

- Portfolio information needs to link to or respond to employer requirements and therefore might need to be occupation-specific.
- This would potentially be a useful tool to facilitate recognition of credentials, skills, knowledge and work experience.

A-3 Good practice standards for the assessment of foreign qualifications

- One authority to provide assessment for non-regulated professions.
- Standards would need to be enforceable and relevant, and be seen as a tool.
- Provide some form of incentives.
- Standards would provide for accountability and increase compliance and participation.
- Good practice standards can support attraction and retention of people to Alberta if they know there is a fair and transparent assessment process.
- Recommendation that the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) make information on good practice standards available to employers and professional licensing bodies. A standard information repository that indicates how international credentials compare to standards in Alberta would be useful.
- Standards may need to be regulated or legislated—will not happen by good will.
- There needs to be accountability for transparency and fairness—may want to consider Fairness Commissioner and the professional accountability legislation recently introduced in Ontario.
- Ensure broad representation of stakeholders in establishing standards.
- Consider establishing immigrant employment councils where immigrants are involved.

Group A: Strategic Actions-Bridging to fill the gap

A-4 Education for small to medium-sized employers on diversity, inclusion and initiatives; need support to build and maintain infrastructure

- Have/train liaison or outreach workers to implement the tool kit (could operate on a cost-recovery or profit basis).
- Develop a web site that employers can use to obtain information on workplace integration strategies for immigrants (some employers don't have the resources to do this on their own).
- Develop resources for employers to help them provide orientation for immigrants to the Canadian workplace culture and not just work experience.

A-5 Internship or work experience programs

Immigrants and immigrant-serving organizations were emphatic about the benefit of and the need for foreign-trained professionals to enter the workforce in a field relevant to their training. Many participants felt the most effective method for supporting foreign qualification recognition was by facilitating the opportunity for immigrants to prove themselves in jobs relevant to their profession.

Some of the benefits they outlined were:

- These programs provide an opportunity for demonstration of skills and knowledge.
- It minimizes the risk to the employers.
- People retain their skills and stay up to date.
- Immigrants are doing meaningful work—they feel valued and are earning income, and are integrating more fully and quickly by learning about the culture and increasing their language skills.

Some suggestions regarding internship programs included:

- Restricted practice or temporary licensure.
- Expanding collaborative initiatives that support job placement with a broader range of employers.
- Long-term committed funding for programs.
- Mentoring by people in similar situations—professional peer support.

Group B: Post-Secondary Institutions

One roundtable discussion was held in Edmonton with registrars and assistant registrars (primarily) from 10 post-secondary institutions throughout the province.

Key Themes and Challenges

- Streamline the system: There is a need for a single FCR assessment for basic admission to all Alberta post-secondary institutions. Almost unanimously, stakeholders from post-secondary institutions saw significant potential benefit in developing a single foreign education assessment for foreign students. They realized this would require coordination and some give and take but felt the benefit to foreign students in having their prior learning assessed once, and the reduced costs and streamlining benefits, made this a worthwhile goal.
- Fluency in English communication: English fluency skills are significant factors affecting student success. In the area of employment, language proficiency affects safety and is a key job readiness competency that cannot be underemphasized.
- Redundancy in the system: Participants felt immigrants arriving in Alberta should only be required to complete one FCR assessment for admission into any Alberta post-secondary program. The redundancy of systems that consume resources of time, money and energy by both institutions and immigrants need to be reduced if not eliminated.
- The independence of post-secondary institutions: Historically, Alberta's post-secondary institutions have prided themselves on individuality and unique identities. This has led to a variety of assessment standards for admission.

Group B: Strategic Actions-Specialized information

B-1 One-stop resource centre for skilled immigrants

- Create a repository where prospective immigrants and immigrants already in Alberta could map out a career path and learn what is required to pursue a specific career or further education in Canada.
- A process roadmap or a flow chart could be provided detailing required credentials and documentation, career options (e.g. technician, technologist, or professional engineer), cost and estimated time required, and links to appropriate institutions in Canada. This should be available for use prior to and after arrival in Canada.
- Provide a centralized information resource and place this resource on one portal—for example, the Alberta Post-secondary Application System (APAS) or something like it—for stakeholders (immigrants, post secondary

institutions, professional licensing bodies, etc.) to obtain consistent information about career paths, requirements, equating foreign education with the job market, professional licensing bodies and Alberta's educational system.

Group B: Strategic Actions-Assessment tools and resources

B-2 International education guides

- Create a common, current and well-maintained database on educational systems in other countries and how credentials compare to educational standards in Alberta.
- Build on the work of IQAS and make the information available to stakeholders through various, multi-layered portals. The database could be used by post-secondary institutions for admission to under-graduate programs but not for transfer of credit. This information would also be accessible by the corporate sector as well as immigrants (for preliminary self-assessment).

An expanded IQAS system would:

- create a foundation/repository of common information so decisions/assessments are made from a common base;
- support consistency and transparency in the system because the same information is provided to everyone;
- serve as a marketing tool for recruiting foreign students;
- provide everything in one spot for institutions; and,
- be helpful to service centre counsellors who work directly with immigrants.

This group also acknowledged significant challenges would need to be addressed in the development (design, planning and resourcing) of such a broad repository. Challenges included keeping it simple enough to maintain ease of access and use, accessing the resources required to maintain it, and keeping it current. Advantages include:

- Centralized, robust, information on Alberta's educational system to be accessed by all stakeholders and immigrants.
- Assessment tools and resources to handle the diversity and complexity of the applications received would be important.
- Single assessment of foreign credentials for basic undergraduate admission so organizations and post-secondary institutions would not have to create their own databases and individual assessments.

B-3 E-portfolio or qualifications passport

It was felt an e-portfolio or a qualifications passport would be an effective tool for prior learning assessment. An e-portfolio would summarize the

competencies for transfer of credit and would standardize the presentation of information.

Group B: Strategic Actions-Bridging to fill the gap

B-4 English language training

- Provide one consistent ESL system for the province—map out standards that enable comparison of the English standards of other countries to those of Alberta, and have common ESL benchmarks that are portable across the system.
- Provide occupation-specific language training and integrated language training in a way that supports competency development.

All sectors need to know that English language training is critical and requires meaningful attention.

Group C: Professional Licensing Bodies

The roundtable discussion with professional licensing bodies took place in Edmonton with 12 organizations represented.

Key Themes and Challenges

- All organizations said they are experiencing increasing numbers of requests for licensing from foreign-trained professionals. In fact, last year one college had more applications from foreign-trained professionals than it did from Alberta-trained professionals. They are also receiving applications from a greater variety of countries.
- Like every other group, professional licensing bodies stressed the need to improve information given to immigrants before immigration and throughout the immigration process.
- Role of professional licensing bodies: Participants agreed the primary role/purpose of professional licensing bodies is to ensure Alberta's professional and safety standards are met. Due diligence is a core function of professional licensing. However, there are mixed views as to the role of professional licensing bodies in facilitating the integration or bridging process of foreign-trained professionals.
- Some organizations are actively involved in programs that support the transition process for immigrants to achieve professional designation. Others see 'bridging' or 'transitional' programs as outside their mandate and potentially in conflict with their purpose.
- Some organizations are facilitating professional licensing by incorporating competency-based assessments and restricted practice or provisional licensure to allow a candidate to demonstrate what they know and can do.

The following quotes give a sense of the diversity of opinions regarding this matter:

“When a candidate applies, they receive a candidate handbook that walks them through the process including the evaluation sheets that outline competencies. They can see what they need to do to be successful.”

“As regulators, we are set up to regulate the professions and not be educators.”

- Potential for increased interaction: Regulatory bodies indicated that they do not often have the opportunity to come together in a forum to discuss FCR and that the consultation roundtable discussions illustrated the potential benefit of meeting more often to share information on best practices and issues of common concern. Some work is being done in this area at the national level.
- National systems: Some professional licensing bodies are linked to national standards. Any FCR initiatives with these bodies would need to align with those standards.
- Difference in capacity: Smaller organizations are challenged in adequately assessing foreign credentials (some use IQAS). Assessment of credentials for professional licensing is a complex process with profession-specific requirements and there is a hesitation to endorse actions without more in-depth discussion and increased understanding. There is also concern that some actions may create more work for organizations without providing a clear and substantial benefit.
- English language proficiency and occupation-specific fluency.
- Information available in the country of origin: A strong theme identified in this session related to information being readily available and accessible to licensed professionals before they come to Canada.

“Immigrants want to have and need to have correct information before they make the decision to come and before they get here.”

Group C: Strategic Actions-Specialized information

C-1 Guidelines for increasing transparency in FCR

- Participants expressed some openness to the concept of increased transparency guidelines for the provision of licensing information to immigrants, but they voiced strong concerns about being mandated to meet additional standards that might contravene the protocols and established processes of a specific licensing body.
- Professional licensing bodies recognized there was room for improvement in the information given to applicants about the licensing process and they were willing to consider a set of guidelines. Some suggestions were:

- A resource guide with best practices and examples of openness and transparency would be helpful.
- Guidelines must be guidelines only and cannot be so specific that the role of a self-regulated profession is jeopardized.
- Guidelines should serve as a model to both regulated and non-regulated professions.
- They must be developed collaboratively to share practices and build system capacity.

C-2 One-stop resource centre for skilled immigrants

- Consistent with every other stakeholder group, professional licensing bodies identified the need for a centralized information repository (virtual or actual) that would help foreign-trained professionals navigate the complex path of immigrating, the assessment of their credentials and getting access to the required bridging support to become fully employed in their chosen profession.
- This group stressed that the repository should be developed through a consultative process—to identify specific requirements, provide complete information that is helpful, and ensure the right information is presented in a coordinated manner. They also stressed that it must be resourced to effectively manage demand and must maintain current information—recognizing that it would be the defined role of information providers to keep their own information current.

Suggested components of the repository are:

- A process map that explains to immigrants the path they need to follow and in what order for FCR and other settlement issues.
- Career path mapping tools.
- Links to the professional licensing bodies and professional associations.
- Links to immigrant accessible information.
- Information on settlement services and skills courses—English conversation, information on costs, requirements, exams, etc.
- Staffed with real people who are knowledgeable and could direct people to the correct service.
- Employment opportunities, labour market information and housing.

The Canadian Council of Professional Engineers has video vignettes on their web site explaining the registration process for foreign-trained professionals who wish to come to Canada. There are also stories from individual immigrants on the Potential to Prosperity web site.

Group C: Strategic Actions-Assessment tools and resources

C-3 Good practice standards for the assessment of foreign qualifications

The group expressed concerns about the need for, or usefulness of, the features of good practice standards for assessments (as presented in the Discussion Guide). This was based on the different interpretations of the roles of professional licensing bodies and on concerns about their autonomy and the province mandating how they would manage their specific professional licensing and assessment processes.

Some of the comments or concerns were:

- Licensing bodies did not want to be obligated to provide remediation for applicants who did not meet licensing standards.
- Duplication of systems already in place—should build on the work already done or started. For example, the Federation of Regulated Health Professions of Alberta has done some work on establishing a framework around substantial equivalency assessment.
- Implication on National standards—any FCR action plan must take into account the national standards of some professional licensing bodies.

C-4 International education guides

- Some licensing bodies already utilize the IOAS assessment service and saw the benefit of an expanded and accessible information repository on educational credentials in other countries and how they compare to standards in Alberta. Others have their own database of equivalencies which are very specific to their profession and didn't feel they would use it.
- Many licensing bodies questioned the usefulness and appropriateness of developing a database on international credentials, as the evaluation of credentials is very specific to each licensing body.
- There was some agreement that some smaller licensing bodies may benefit from assessment tools and resources to handle the diversity and complexity of the applications.
- While some participants saw the merit of foreign-trained professionals having the ability to assess their credentials for Alberta equivalencies, there were concerns that it may create false expectations among immigrants on the recognition of their qualifications for licensing.

C-5 E-portfolio or qualifications passport

- Licensing bodies expressed general support for the development of e-portfolios or qualifications passports that incorporates a standardized prior learning assessment and enables immigrants to understand how their qualifications match Alberta requirements.

Group C: Strategic Actions-Bridging to fill the gap

C-6 Restricted practice, temporary or provisional licensure

Some organizations already utilize some form of limited licensure and others are looking at ways it might work within their specific profession. Those directed by national standards didn't see how this might work unless the national body initiates it.

There was major hesitation from health professions due to safety and liability concerns.

Participants stated that even if they did use limited licensure, the major issue was for foreign-trained professionals to find jobs in that capacity. They felt there is a need to create a system with employers under which this would work.

C-7 Support for bridging programs

- Participants agreed that bridging programs are essential to fully integrate foreign-trained professionals into the Alberta workforce and some licensing bodies support a broad range of bridging programs that are both profession-specific or deal with the 'soft skills' side of job readiness. Some helpful bridging programs would aim to:
 - Improve English language, and interpersonal skills, including accent reduction.
 - Provide information in the language of origin from the primary recruitment countries to ensure there is a clear understanding of requirements— some licensing bodies have opted to do this.
 - Provide bridging programs based on the Alberta health care context for all Alberta health care professions.
 - Make available opportunities for professionals to transition from a bridging program to a job, such as: prep courses for exams, voluntary study sessions and mentoring.
 - Increase active recruitment of supervisors for provisional licensees.
- Some professional licensing bodies very clearly did not see bridging as part of their role. Although they saw it as a key service for foreign-trained professionals, they saw bridging programs as being delivered more appropriately through other organizations (e.g., educational institutions).

Group D: Employers

Four roundtable discussions were held with 27 employers—two in Edmonton and two in Calgary, with representatives from Red Deer in both sessions. Participants included both employers and representatives of recruiting and placement agencies.

Key Themes and Challenges

- The immigration disconnect: Like other stakeholders, employers strongly indicated that the federal immigration system needs to be better linked with the actual labour market realities in Alberta. Employers felt the federal selection of skilled immigrants is not aligned with the requirements for skilled and job-ready workers or for labour force needs. Employers emphasized the need to intervene in the pre-immigration stage to ensure immigrants had the skills and competencies to be successful in Alberta.

“The current system doesn’t work. We are getting most of the people in the door by going around the system. Formal processes with the onerous requirements, and time it takes, are simply not working; and we need to recognize that it isn’t working. Then we need to work together to create a system, not work against the system.”
- Preaching to the converted: Participants cautioned government that the people attending these sessions were typically organizations that already embraced the idea of integrating foreign-trained professionals into their workforce. They strongly suggested further outreach is required to engage employers who are not consciously and strategically employing foreign-trained professionals.
- Employers are pragmatists: A number of employers strongly felt the most effective way to find people to meet their immediate employment and skill needs was to recruit foreign-trained professionals who were able to “hit the ground running.” They did this through recruiting agencies, actual recruiting missions and through networks of their current immigrant employees.
- The overly onerous process is a deterrent: Especially for small and medium-sized companies, FCR is a complex and time consuming process. The current economic climate and labour shortage permeates the entire corporation and many employers stated they don’t have time or resources to engage in the process. This was emphasized by the fact that employers didn’t know where to get information, received inconsistent answers, couldn’t find a person to talk to and gave up in frustration.

“Alberta is way behind in recruiting skilled trades. Australia is recruiting from foreign-trained pockets of workers at other international sites.”
- Canada’s image abroad: A recruiter told us, “Canada is getting a bad reputation in foreign countries because of unfulfilled expectations. We are no longer the destination of choice. And, there are many more choices today.”
- Layers of excuses: Advocates of using foreign-trained professionals claimed a segment of the Alberta labour market continues to be biased against integrating foreign-trained professionals into the workforce and the system uses layers of excuses to filter them out rather than finding ways to screen talent and resources in.

- Not enough understanding or information on the quality of foreign education/training. There is an assumption/arrogance that Alberta sets a high standard or benchmark. Highly skilled tradespeople, for example, are coming and struggling to get their credentials recognized. Alberta needs to find innovative ways to recognize the skills and knowledge of foreign-trained people without affecting safety standards.
- Language is a barrier in utilizing skills/credential assessments tools.
- Understanding the impact of a unionized labour force and inter-provincial agreements.
- The ever increasing requirements for academic requirements/standards will make it more difficult for foreign trained professionals to get accreditation.

Group D: Strategic Actions-Specialized information

D-1 One-stop resource centre for skilled immigrants

Employers felt a centralized information resource would serve both immigrants and employers or corporations. Currently, there is an abundance of information but it is scattered, often inconsistent and takes too much time to find. Some concepts or components suggested by participants:

- A multi-lingual immigrant phone line (e.g., immigration 311) tied to a coordinated information resource for immigrants to obtain the information they need from basic settlement through to the FCR and employment process.
- A package with relevant links so new arrivals have good information when they arrive (as in British Columbia).
- A centralized location for people to access information. *“We operate in silos, solitudes and there needs to be more integration, cooperation, cross-pollinating—with real people to talk to.”*
- Information on specific requirements for being accredited. Provide honest, realistic information, such as the length of time it will take to go through the program/process to dovetail with the qualification process. Information about requirements, salaries, timelines and options.
- Foreign-trained professionals should not only be able to understand what their qualifications mean in terms of Alberta standards, but also to understand potential career opportunities and the choices inherent in each—such as the requirements or trade-offs for each one. Employers said this would not only provide a sense of direction for immigrants but also create realistic expectations.

“We have a hard time finding information ourselves. For a foreign worker it must be intimidating. Lay out a case study for a specific profession. Tell the stories.”

Group D: Strategic Actions-Assessment tools and resources

D-2 Flexibility and innovation in licensing and accreditation requirements (while maintaining safety and liability standards) to support the success of skilled immigrants

Employers told us that some government or professional licensing requirements can be insurmountable barriers for skilled foreign-trained professionals.

One idea (but certainly not the only way flexibility and innovation could be incorporated into the accreditation process) was to extend the time period for the accreditation for tradespeople who have the technical skills required but who do not have the English language proficiency to pass the required exams within six months. Companies would like to retain these workers but find it difficult. Solutions to this situation included:

- Provide another form of temporary licensing.
- Allow people who have the required equivalencies to take the exams in their native language or with an interpreter.
- Do the basic orientation training (to Alberta standards and practices) in the language of origin (i.e. some companies who bring in a group of foreign workers from a specific country also hire a supervisor who speaks the language and can interpret standards to the workers).

D-3 Good practice standards in the assessment of foreign credentials

- Good practice standards are important. There needs to be support and resources to enable their application and enforcement.
- Fair and transparent accreditation processes with clear pathways.
- Do not use an all or nothing perspective on FCR. One participant said that it shouldn't be a "you are in or out" approach.
- Need to be clear on how international standards match to Alberta standards.
- An independent third body to translate standards.
- Professional licensing bodies may not be in the best position to provide counselling and remediation.

D-4 International education guides

Employers indicated that having a database that shows how a foreign-earned credential compares to educational standards would be a useful tool that they could use to inform their recruitment and hiring practices.

D-5 E-portfolio or qualifications passport

Employers felt the development and implementation of a standardized qualifications portfolio that contained an assessment of foreign credentials and experience in terms of equivalency and other relevant information would be a significant tool in the hiring of foreign-trained professionals.

“It is important and should be based on Canadian Workplace Essential Skills.”

Some thoughts around the development and implementation of this tool were:

- There needs to be substantial communication to employers. Both the concept of a qualifications passport and its practical application would need to be promoted.
- Must be kept simple and accessible by all levels of employers and all foreign-trained professionals. Therefore, the developers need to be very careful not to over bureaucratize it.
- Need to test the system first and build on it.
- Begin by building the information resource (credentials database) and then move down into the e-portfolio process.
- For this to work, it must benefit both employers and employees.

Group D: Strategic Actions-Bridging to fill the gap

D-6 Internships and on-the-job transition training

Employers who had experience with internship and on-the-job training opportunities stressed it was an intensive process that required mentoring and support for the foreign-trained professional which took time away from already stretched supervisors. However, one employer cited that once the idea caught on, they were oversubscribed with ‘buddies’ who were willing to not only support the employee in his professional transition, but also the immigrant families in the settlement process.

D-7 English language fluency and competency

The communication gap was cited in every workshop with employers telling us of the mutual frustration of having a skilled employee whom they could see had the required knowledge, skills or experience but whose English ability was not sufficient to pass the licensing exam.

A major component of transition training that larger companies are using is on-site language training for both English fluency and occupation-specific language. They also supported transition by having a multi-lingual supervisor who could assist foreign-trained workers in making the connections and applying their skills. There was strong support for having trades certification exams translated or interpreted into other languages.

D-8 Employer tool kit for creating multi-national work environments

Employers said they need support in their ability to recognize experience and education (substantial equivalency or competency assessment) from other countries. But, as mentioned above, employers stressed the need for support in not only assessing foreign credentials and qualifications but in increasing the effectiveness of integrating foreign-trained professionals/tradespeople into the workplace.

Some larger companies who have extensive experience in this area confirmed it took, “a will to create a culture of acceptance and significant resources.” They felt an employer tool kit would be beneficial but stressed that it is just as important to have organizational support in the utilization of tools and resources.

Diversity versus assimilation: as the need to use foreign-trained professionals grows, workplaces will need to become more accepting of diversity. This presents the challenge of educating employers and creating a new culture in the workplace as opposed to previous assumptions that the employee must assimilate.

“We are moving from exclusion to tolerance, and we have a long way to go to acceptance and valuing talent.”

D-9 Develop a business case for employing foreign-trained professionals

Several participants stressed there was a need for a fundamental shift in attitudes in HR departments and moreover, the need for a ‘champion’ in a senior leadership position—who would be willing to invest time and resources in creating a healthy multi-national workplace.

The government, in conjunction with corporations successful in building a multi-national environment, needs to develop a clear and compelling business case demonstrating the benefits of using foreign-trained professionals as part of the labour market solution.

The business case would need to be comprehensive and include the risk factors, cost factors, need for return on investment, spin-off effects of fully employed professional immigrants, and impact on the skills shortages. It is critical that this be strategically communicated and participants felt that one of the most effective ways to do this would be to share the stories of Alberta corporations who have been successful.

Summary of Recommended Actions

This section provides a summary of the actions and initiatives supported by stakeholder groups.

Recommendation	SUPPORTED BY:			
	Immigrants and Agencies (group A)	Post-Secondary Institutions (group B)	Professional Licensing Bodies (group C)	Employers (group D)
Specialized information				
One-Stop Resource Centre for Skilled Immigrants: Provide clear, accurate and current information to immigrants on their career options and all the steps and processes they need to go through to obtain recognition of their qualifications. Provide a career roadmap for immigrants. A-1, B-1, C-2, D-1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resource Tools for Stakeholders: Provide resource tools that employers, educational institutions, professional licensing bodies and immigrant serving organizations can use to provide clear and accurate FCR counselling to immigrants. A-1, B-1, C-2, D-1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Assessment tools and resources				
Good practice standards for the assessment of foreign qualifications: Clearly articulated guidelines and reporting mechanisms to ensure transparency, fairness and accountability in the evaluation of foreign qualifications. A-3, C-3, D-3	✓	Not discussed	Reservations expressed	✓
International Education Guides: An on-line information repository that outlines how educational credentials obtained in other countries compare to educational standards in Alberta. A3, B-2, C-4, D-4	✓	✓	Reservations expressed	✓
E-portfolio or Qualifications Passport: Provide a comprehensive evaluation of the foreign educational credentials, skills and work experience using prior learning assessment principles. Educational qualifications are	✓	✓	✓	✓

	SUPPORTED BY:			
Recommendation	Immigrants and Agencies (group A)	Post-Secondary Institutions (group B)	Professional Licensing Bodies (group C)	Employers (group D)
recognized and presented in a format that is easily understood by stakeholders. A-2, B-3, C-5, D-5				
Standardized processes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single FCR or prior learning assessment process and resources; • One English language standard and a single English fluency test. A-3, B-2, C-6, D-5	✓	✓	Limited opportunity	✓
Flexibility and innovation in licensing and accreditation requirements: Immigrants, immigrant-serving organizations and employers indicated that there needs to be increased flexibility in the professional accreditation processes (while maintaining standards) A3, D-2	✓	Not discussed	Reservations expressed	✓
Bridging to fill the gap				
Internship and Canadian work experience programs: Immigrants have the opportunity to work in occupations matched to their foreign qualifications to gain work experience, learn about the Canadian workplace culture and develop occupation-specific language skills. A-5, C-6, C-7, D-6, D7	✓	Not discussed	Reservations expressed	✓
Restricted or provisional licensure: Enabling professional licensing bodies to issue restricted licensing that allows immigrants limited practice in their field. A-5, C-6, D-2	✓	Not discussed	Reservations expressed	✓
Employer tool kit: Resources developed to support employers in the integration of immigrants in the workplace. On-line resources and workshops are developed to help employers gain a better understanding of how immigrants can contribute and add value to the workplace. A-4, B-1, D-8	✓	✓	Not discussed	✓
Mentoring program for immigrants. A-5, C-7, D-2, D-6	✓	Not discussed	✓	✓

Recommendation	SUPPORTED BY:			
	Immigrants and Agencies (group A)	Post-Secondary Institutions (group B)	Professional Licensing Bodies (group C)	Employers (group D)
English language training: Emphasis on fluency in English for foreign-trained professionals including occupation specific training. A-1, B-4, C-7, D-7	✓	✓	✓	✓
Develop a business case for employing foreign-trained professionals. A-4, D-9	✓	Not discussed	Not discussed	✓

Coordination

All stakeholders indicated that leadership and coordination were the keys to creating an open and effective environment for the successful integration of foreign-trained professionals into Alberta's labour market. They suggested that a provincial advisory committee/employment council or a skilled immigrant/foreign-trained professional employment council would be useful.

Participants generally felt government has a leadership responsibility in convening and facilitating the development of functional partnerships and action groups without becoming overly bureaucratic, and all stakeholders have a shared responsibility in contributing to success.

Some ideas for coordination included:

- A few employers suggested that a coordinating body could operate under similar parameters to the Apprenticeship Board that is consolidated in a governing body and is adequately staffed.
- The key purpose to build awareness and momentum around full utilization of foreign-trained workers to address labour market needs.
- The coordinating structure could serve as a repository of information. Industry and other employers would have a place to go to get all information.
- Some professional licensing bodies indicated that it would be useful to have a forum for licensing bodies to come together to discuss issues related to FCR and to share information on best practices.
- Some employers indicated that regionally based economic employer-immigrant councils, following a model similar to the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) would be useful.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This consultation was intended to help define which actions need to be taken, by whom, to ***make significant progress and achieve substantial results*** toward the following desired outcome:

Immigrants will have the opportunity to fully utilize their education, skills and work experience for the benefit of themselves and the Alberta economy.

Alberta, Canada, and the world are in an increasingly competitive situation to attract and retain skilled workers in every aspect of the labour market. Other industrialized countries are competing in the recruitment of skilled immigrants and many stakeholders felt that they were doing a considerably better job than Canada in attracting and welcoming them.

Many stakeholders felt that Alberta is in an opportune position to develop and define a competitive advantage for our province. They told us Alberta must collaboratively learn how to effectively integrate skilled immigrants and increasingly treat them as a valuable component of the labour talent pool. This will require a significant change in how Alberta, the corporate sector and Albertans think about immigrants and the value they can bring to our province. Alberta can differentiate itself by ***defining the path and making it straighter and shorter.***

We asked, “*What specific actions will result in significant improvement in the FCR process?*” We were told it is about more than a few actions. Participants in the roundtable discussions stressed success will be realized by developing a fundamentally different system and approach that makes a practise of optimizing the value that foreign-trained professionals can add to the Alberta labour force and by supporting foreign-trained professionals in the journey to success.

“We have created an (false) illusion about how idyllic Canada is; but we have not told immigrants that “we need them” and we certainly don’t treat them that way.”

To make this a reality, all stakeholders identified the need for improved leadership and coordination in the area of FCR. As well, all stakeholders recognized that to be successful there needs to be a high level of collaboration between and across stakeholder groups. Although some stakeholders indicated that government needed to take a leadership role in some areas, all stakeholders expressed the importance of a consultative and collaborative process. To support this collaboration, some roundtable participants suggested multi-stakeholder provincial advisory committees and forums.

Next Steps

The Government of Alberta recognizes the importance of shared responsibility and coordinated action on Foreign Credential Recognition. To support the development of the Action Plan, government engaged stakeholders in these roundtable discussions to explore the challenges for FCR in our province and what stakeholders see as the most important actions for Alberta.

These roundtable consultations provide a rich foundation and represent an important step in the development of a future FCR Action Plan. Over the coming months, the government will be developing a Foreign Credential Recognition Action Plan for Alberta that will strengthen, target and coordinate FCR activities in our province.

Further Information

For further information on these consultations, please contact Immigration Policy and Programs, Employment, Immigration and Industry at (780)422-5081 or (780)427-2655.

APPENDIX A – PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRANT–SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Bredin Institute - Foreign Trained Professionals
Calgary Catholic Immigration Society*
Calgary Immigrant Aid Society
Calgary Immigration Educational Society*
Catholic Social Services*
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers*
YMCA Immigrant Settlement Services

* *Staff and immigrant clients*

POST SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Athabasca University
Bow Valley College
Grant MacEwan College
Keyano College
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)
NorQuest College
Red Deer College
SAIT Polytechnic
University of Alberta, Registrar's Office, International Education
University of Calgary, Faculty of Graduate Studies

PROFESSIONAL LICENSING BODIES

Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists
Alberta College of Pharmacists
Alberta College of Social Workers
Alberta Education, Teacher Development & Certification
Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA)
Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists (ASET)
College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta
College of Alberta Dental Assistants
College of Alberta Psychologists
College of Physical Therapists of Alberta
College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta
The Law Society of Alberta

EMPLOYERS

Air Spray (1967) Ltd.
Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association
Alberta Research Council
ATCO Structures Inc.
BOWEN Workforce Solutions
Canadian Natural Resources Ltd.
Canonbie
Capital Health
City of Calgary
City of Edmonton, Office of Diversity and Inclusion
Collicutt Energy Services
Construction Labour Relations—Alberta
CoSyn Technology
David Thompson Health Region
Dynamic Personnel International Corp.
Executive Millwork Inc
Flextronics
Jacobs
Manpower Services
Standen's Limited
Talent Pool Development Society
