

A Pan-Canadian Framework

for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

AN ACTION PLAN FOR BETTER FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS RECOGNITION

November 2014



Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM)

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

A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications_ An Action Plan for Better Foreign Qualifications Recognition

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the launch of **A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications** (*Framework*) in 2009, its principles of fairness, transparency, timeliness and consistency have guided the collaborative efforts of federal, provincial and territorial (F-P/T) governments. These principles continue to enhance foreign qualifications recognition (FQR) processes across Canada so that internationally trained individuals (ITIs) can more quickly put their skills to work in the Canadian labour market.¹ Recognizing that collaboration is paramount to continuous improvement in FQR, governments have worked closely with regulators and other stakeholders to design effective assessment and recognition pathways to improve outcomes for ITIs.

Following five years of *Framework* implementation governments are realizing new opportunities to build on the momentum of past work and advance changes in immigration systems to support faster processing for ITIs. Moving beyond 2015, governments have developed a renewed plan of action that: prioritizes pre-arrival supports and effective assessment approaches; improves linkages between partners and stakeholders; ensures the skills and experiences of ITIs are fully utilized in the workplace; and improves evaluation and reporting processes that keep Canadians informed of progress in FQR systems.

Since 2009, governments have worked with key stakeholders in the *Framework*'s 14 target occupations² to identify current and future

priorities for advancing FQR. In 2014, an additional five professions and five skilled trades were announced under the *Framework* for engagement³. In addition to the occupation-specific approach, governments have explored key FQR related issues that affect multiple occupations, including pre-arrival supports and alternative career options.

What is Foreign Qualifications Recognition?

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

While advancements in FQR systems can be attributed to a number of factors, including the individual efforts of governments, regulatory bodies, and other stakeholders, to date the *Framework* has contributed to progress in FQR systems. Most notably,

- many regulators and other stakeholders are using the *Framework* to guide their FQR improvements;
- since *Framework* implementation, collaboration and information-sharing amongst governments and key stakeholders has improved. This collaboration will show continued improvements in resource sharing, development of FQR expertise to

Occupational Therapists, Pharmacists, Physiotherapists, Registered Nurses, Dentists, Engineering Technicians, Licensed Practical Nurses, Medical Radiation Technologists, Physicians and Teachers (K-12)].

³ New target occupations include: Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists, Midwives, Geoscientists, Psychologists, Lawyers, Carpenters, Welders, Electricians (industrial and construction), Heavy Duty Equipment Technicians and Heavy Equipment Operators.

¹ The Quebec government has not endorsed the *Framework*, but supports its principles and is an active member of the FQRWG.

² The initial 14 Target Occupations from 2009-2012 all meet the one year timeliness goal [Architects, Engineers, Financial Auditors and Accountants, Medical Laboratory Technologists,

tackle complex issues and efficiency improvements; and

- stakeholders have reported that funding and capacity support is assisting them to build better FQR systems, which many are now beginning to use in their assessment of internationally trained applicants.

On July 11, 2014 the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) reiterated the importance of integrating new Canadians into the labour market. Ministers agreed to launch an F-P/T Action Plan to renew efforts under the *Framework* and continue to address remaining challenges. Recent data suggests that incidences of over-education for employed immigrants between the ages of 25 to 64 years with post-secondary education is 52.7% for very recent immigrants compared to 29.8% for non-immigrants.⁴ This data suggests the continued need for targeted interventions. Moving forward, governments will undertake collective efforts to improve assessment processes and outcomes. While pan-Canadian initiatives must be coordinated at the F-P/T level, the responsibility for occupational regulation and implementation, as well as workforce integration programs rest within the jurisdiction of provinces and territories (P/Ts).

Consultations were held with key partners and stakeholders, including regulatory authorities and national occupational contacts between August and November 2014. Input from some Offices of Fairness Commissioners was sought through P/T governments. This input confirmed the following four priority areas for renewed collaboration:

1. Pre-Decision Information and Assessment Processes;
2. Workforce Participation and Integration Supports;
3. Monitoring and Evaluation; and

4. Communicating FPT Actions to Stakeholders.

This Action Plan builds upon the *Framework's* activities since 2009, as well as identifies goals for improvements. The *Framework* continues to guide governments' collective efforts to improve FQR through the principles of fairness, transparency, consistency and timeliness.

⁴ Source: National Household Survey, 2011.

II. PRE-DECISION INFORMATION AND PRE-ARRIVAL ASSESSMENT

The 2009 *Framework* established a goal that as early as possible in the immigration process, ITIs will have access to reliable and accurate information and support. Readily available information is key in order for potential immigrants to make informed choices, including prior to their decision to apply for immigration to Canada. Information and assessment tools can help immigrants take early steps towards licensure and connect with the appropriate regulatory authority. Information is currently available on application procedures, self-assessment tools, and in some cases, direct access to qualification assessment processes for licensure. While a significant amount of assessment and registration information is now available online, further efforts are needed to address content gaps, establish clear contact points and navigation of processes, while improving overall guidance for immigrants.

Governments have a role in informing immigrants about the demand for their skills and credentials before they arrive in Canada. Regulators have a central role in providing authoritative registration information that can be accessed both pre- and post-arrival by ITIs and immigrant-serving organizations. Collaboration on these two areas is needed to address gaps and improve the quality, standards and effectiveness of pre-decision information.

Pre-Arrival Assessment and Alignment with Immigration Processes:

In addition to providing early information, there is a need to increase access to assessment and recognition processes prior to arrival in Canada. Starting the licensing process prior to

immigration is intended to reduce applicants' time away from professional practice and, in conjunction with many workplace integration services, result in labour market attachment at a level commensurate with their skills. Consultations indicated a readiness among many regulators to conduct earlier initial assessments. While a number of occupations already have this assessment capacity, there is a need to align early regulatory assessment with **immigration** processes. In many cases, immigration education credential assessments are not valid for licensing process purposes. Progress can be achieved by clarifying the purposes and roles of these assessments, while respecting the legal responsibilities delegated to the regulatory authorities. There is also a continued need to review the effectiveness of newly established self-assessments, examination preparation and examinations to support the alignment of pre-arrival assessment with immigration processes.

Collaboration of governments, regulators and assessment agencies is required to better align information, supports and assessment in the licensing process with changes to the immigration selection processes, including the launch of the Express Entry system in January 2015.

Collaborative Actions:

- Continue to improve FQR assessment methods and processes to align with the *Framework* principles and promote initiatives that remove potential barriers related to documentation, timeliness, costs, requirements for professional experience and Canadian experience, as appropriate.
- Continue to improve early and assessment-related information to ensure it is accurate and readily available to help inform immigration decisions. Additionally, that it meets the *Framework* principles of fairness, transparency, consistency and timeliness.

- Support the development of effective self-assessment tools, preparation and navigation supports as well as early FQR assessment processes as part of overall effective assessment approaches.
- Identify and promote effective training and supports that assist ITIs in bridging to occupational licensure requirements.
- Work with F-P/T governments, regulatory authorities and assessment agencies to better align immigration selection processes and systems with assessment processes.

previously acquired training, where appropriate.

- ITIs are able to make contact with regulators or be easily directed to the appropriate regulatory authority prior to arrival in Canada.
- Assessment processes for licensure are timely, fair, reasonable and transparent, and where possible aligned with immigration processes to eliminate duplication.

Pre-Arrival Commitment

An internationally trained individual, destined to Canada, will be able to apply to an appropriate regulatory authority, or designate, prior to arriving in Canada and receive a timely response regarding initial assessment, and be informed of additional requirements for registration.

Outcomes:

- Governments support improved assessment and recognition processes through relevant research and targeted initiatives.
- Preparation supports and effective assessment steps (self-assessments, credentials assessments, examinations, where possible, etc.) are accessible pre-arrival.
- Comprehensive and clear information on assessment requirements and steps to licensure is accessible online prior to arrival in Canada (through potential single points of access, where appropriate), to better inform immigration and other decisions. This could include information specific to costs, timelines and employment prospects
- ITIs are able to acquire relevant pieces of upgrading with minimal repetition of

III. Workforce Participation

To ensure Canada has the workforce needed to support economic growth, it is essential to fully utilize the skills and experience of ITIs. Effective integration supports require collaboration and coordination of efforts for well integrated accessible services where newcomers are destined to settle. Governments and their relevant stakeholders can cooperate to provide clear information, resources and supports to transition ITIs' skills and experience into gainful employment opportunities.

This work includes supporting the development of and/or improvements in:

- Bridge-to-work programs;
- Occupation-specific language training;
- Orientation programs to Canadian workplace culture and practice; and
- Mentorship programs.

Alternative career options may be a stepping stone to full integration or a means to utilize skills and experience in different or related fields for those ITIs that choose not to or are unable to achieve full recognition of their qualifications. Having employment options are important to maximize contributions of ITIs.

To facilitate the integration of ITIs in the workplace, tools and resources are needed to support employers. Approaches may include diversity and inclusion awareness, retention activities, and the application of these practices into the workplace and organization. Facilitating a diverse and inclusive workplace expands access to new skill sets, new connections with potential markets, and fresh perspectives.

Collaborative Actions:

- Identify initiatives and share information on tools and resources for successful workplace

participation, integration and retention of ITIs in regulated occupations.

- Identify alternative career supports and resources in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.
- Through collaboration with stakeholders⁵, identify and share information on initiatives that remove barriers for ITIs to gain employment at levels commensurate with their skills and education.
- Work with stakeholders⁶ to ensure labour market information and career guidance is available early and throughout the immigration and settlement process.

Outcomes:

- Employers can access tools and resources that facilitate their ability to hire, integrate and retain ITIs in regulated occupations, including, diversity awareness, workplace receptivity, readiness, and retention practices.
- Labour market integration supports are available to ITIs, including language upgrading, career counseling, mentorships, internships and bridging programs.
- ITIs have access to information regarding career alternatives.

⁵ Stakeholder engagement will occur within jurisdictions, and information/findings may be shared at the pan-Canadian level.

⁶ Ibid.

IV. Monitoring and Evaluation

In 2013, a strategy for monitoring and evaluating FQR progress across Canada was launched by F-P/T governments⁷ to:

- understand progress, gaps and challenges to inform policy and investment decisions;
- monitor and assess, over time, the status of FQR systems with respect to the *Framework's* key principles including fairness, transparency, timeliness and consistency; and
- measure FQR outcomes for ITIs and understand the impact and functional value of the *Framework*.

Some of the challenges of pan-Canadian evaluation include the limited capacity in some occupations and jurisdictions to collect and report on data. Moreover, differences in terminology and variability in process can make it difficult to accurately measure data and evaluate progress in and across target occupations.

Moving forward, governments will need to address these challenges by working more closely with regulators and stakeholders to identify effective and efficient strategies for data collection within each target occupation. Efforts will be made to ensure that pan-Canadian data collection systems respect the legislative authorities and requirements that exist in some jurisdictions, particularly those who already have well-developed reporting systems in place. Pan-Canadian efforts will build upon the lessons learned where data collection and monitoring systems are already in place.

⁷ Considering its existing accountability mechanisms, Quebec does not participate in the monitoring and evaluation strategy. Rather, Quebec agrees to share public reports already made to its citizens, notably those tabled at the National Assembly.

Collaborative Action:

- Strengthen the FQR Working Group's monitoring and evaluation strategy to streamline data collection and target pan-Canadian reporting on key measures of progress, through collaboration with jurisdictions, regulators and other stakeholders.
- Develop measurable benchmarks of success and reporting timelines regarding the impact of FQR initiatives on licensing and employment of ITIs.

Outcomes:

- Governments, regulators and other stakeholders work together to define measurement criteria, monitor FQR progress over time and demonstrate progress in FQR pathways.
- Governments can demonstrate progress in FQR systems over time.

V. Communicating F-P/T Actions to Stakeholders

The primary goal of a shared communications strategy is to raise the level of awareness and utilize existing and future information, tools and other supports offered by jurisdictions and key stakeholders. Coordination and improvement of information provision will increase timeliness, accuracy, efficacy and accessibility of the information for Canadians including ITIs, regulators, employers and other key stakeholders.

Communication of F-P/T activities may include:

- strategic announcements and awareness campaigns;
- development and dissemination of targeted information products; and
- support for collaboration, engagement and exchange of FQR best practices.

Collaborative Actions:

- Develop a strategy for enhanced communication with regulators, stakeholders, Canadians and ITIs on FQR.
- Strengthen engagement and collaboration with regulators and stakeholders through forums/workshops and inter-occupational work groups.

Outcomes:

- Regulators, stakeholders and Canadians receive timely and accessible information on initiatives that support enhanced FQR processes.

VI. Implementation

The collaborative actions outlined in this plan focus on improving licensure and employment outcomes for ITIs. The actions stem from the lessons learned since the *Framework* was launched in 2009, and are informed by our consultations with regulatory authorities and stakeholders.

While the regulatory environment for each of the *Framework*'s occupations is unique, many regulators are facing similar challenges in assessing and recognizing the qualifications of ITIs. Governments will focus on collaborative improvements to the complex challenges that affect multiple occupations, while recognizing and respecting the characteristics within occupation-specific processes. Moreover, governments will foster inter-occupational exchange and learning to continue building on expertise and proven results. In addition, future collaborative work will aim to build upon proven approaches while respecting the varying capacities and labour market needs. Moreover, governments will establish the appropriate mechanisms for input on FQR initiatives, including input from Fairness Commissioners where legislative mandates and authorities exist, to ensure that pan-Canadian initiatives, like pre-arrival assessment, compliment their efforts and work toward the highest standard in FQR.

Governments recognize the importance of communicating to Canadians and will report on the implementation of the Action Plan as part of the *Framework* annually. Moreover, governments will report on progress within FQR systems in accordance with the Action Plan and the renewed monitoring and evaluation strategy that will be developed in collaboration with regulatory authorities and stakeholders. It remains the responsibility of each government to report to

their residents on progress relevant to their unique contexts and programs.

With this Action Plan, governments renew their commitment to strengthen FQR processes. The implementation of these collaborative actions will mobilize the coordinated efforts of a range of partners to advance our common goal that newcomers gain timely licensure and meaningful employment across Canada.