

A Pan-Canadian Framework

for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

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Making Progress Together

2013 Progress Report



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

Progress Report, 2013

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I. Introduction

Recognizing that the successful integration of newcomers into the labour market is important to Canada’s long-term social and economic success, A *Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications* (Framework) was released in November 2009. The Framework was a significant milestone whereby federal, provincial and territorial governments agreed to a principles-based framework to improve the fairness, timeliness, transparency and consistency of foreign qualifications recognition (FQR) systems in Canada.¹

PAN-CANADIAN VISION

A fair and competitive labour market environment where immigrants have the opportunity to fully use their education, skills and work experience for their benefit and for Canada’s prosperity.

The Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) – an intergovernmental forum established to strengthen cooperation and strategic thinking on the labour market priorities of the provinces, territories and Canada – oversees Framework implementation. Day-to-day coordination and Framework promotion is handled by the federal, provincial and territorial Foreign Qualifications Recognition Working Group (FQRWG). As parties to the Framework, federal, provincial and territorial governments have committed to working together and in partnership with key stakeholders to improve FQR systems and outcomes. In turn, this will promote prosperity and a more efficient Canadian labour market in which newcomers are able to help address the country’s skills needs.

The primary focus of the Framework is on improving FQR systems² in regulated occupations. As a result the FQRWG has focused on working with regulators in a number of target occupations. The collaborative approach takes into account the primary authority of provinces and territories in regulating occupations.

DID YOU KNOW?

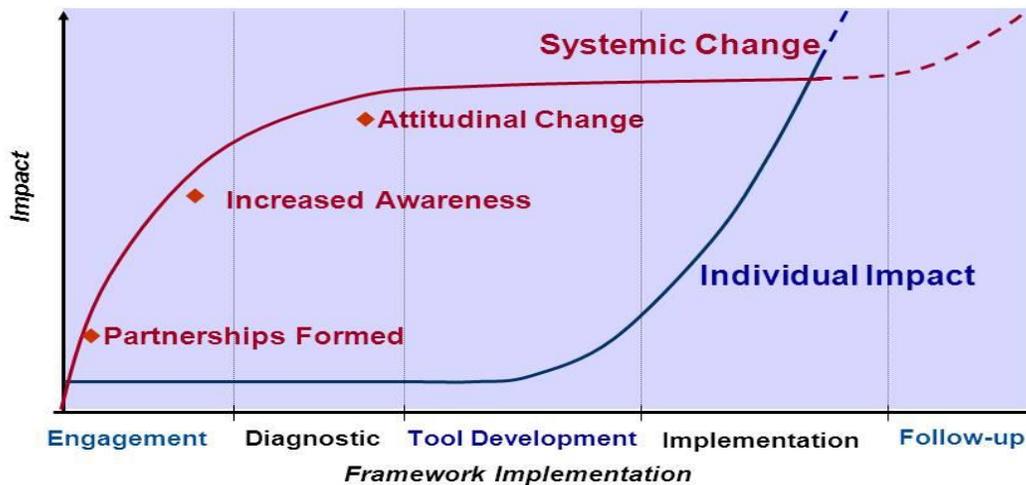
The Framework defines FQR as, “*the process of verifying that the knowledge, skills, work experience and education obtained in another country is comparable to the standards established for Canadian professionals and tradespersons.*”

This definition is more encompassing than terms such as “foreign credential recognition”, which usually refers only to educational credentials such as degrees or diplomas. Although having foreign educational credentials evaluated and compared to Canadian credentials is important and necessary, the broader definition promotes an understanding that individuals must often demonstrate competencies in a profession or trade, which may include assessing formal education, training, skills, abilities and/or experience in order to gain licensure/certification and/or employment.

¹ The Quebec government has not endorsed the *Framework*, but supports its principles and is an active member of the FQRWG. Information on projects implemented by the Government of Quebec and its partners to facilitate foreign qualifications recognition is available here: www.micc.gouv.qc.ca/publications/fr/dossiers/AccesProfessionsMetiers-Projets.pdf.

² FQR systems are the collection of processes by which internationally trained workers have their qualifications assessed and recognized for licensing in regulated occupations.

Since the Framework was released, key partnerships have been established with regulators and other key stakeholders to identify priorities for future work in each of the 14 target occupations across the country. By focusing first on forming partnerships, increasing awareness and changing attitudes to improve FQR systems so that they adhere closely to the Framework’s principles, governments are expecting the eventual improvement of licensing and labour market outcomes for internationally trained workers (individual impact), as illustrated below:



DID YOU KNOW?

Since the Framework was released, the FQRWG has worked with the following 14 target occupations: architects, engineers, financial auditors and accountants, medical laboratory technologists, occupational therapists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, registered nurses, dentists, engineering technicians, licensed practical nurses, medical radiation technologists, physicians and teachers.

TIMELY SERVICE: AN IMPORTANT BENCHMARK

All of these occupations have confirmed that they meet the Framework commitment to timely service. This means that regulators in these occupations, upon receipt of a complete application, are able to review the qualifications of internationally trained applicants and, within one year, provide a decision as to whether they meet the standards for registration, if they need to meet additional requirements, or if their qualifications are better suited to an alternative occupation that is more closely linked to their skills. Many regulators have reported they are able to communicate decisions in a matter of weeks.

ACTION PLANS: PROMOTING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Another important achievement was the development of priorities for action with regulators for all 14 target occupations. These planning documents identify several action items, many of which are aimed at promoting ongoing improvements to FQR processes and outcomes for internationally-trained applicants. The FQRWG will continue working with regulators and other stakeholders to follow up on and update action plans so they remain relevant and meet emerging needs.

II. Highlights

In 2012, input was gathered from all provinces and territories, three federal departments (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Health Canada), four national regulatory association contacts and three provincial Fairness Commissioners.³ This input has informed an overall assessment of progress. Notably:

The Framework has changed mindsets and inspired stakeholders to action

Regulators and other stakeholders are using the Framework as a model on which to base their FQR improvements.

Collaboration and information-sharing have increased and improved

Through pan-Canadian collaboration, governments have created the conditions necessary to promote complementary FQR systems and approaches. Over time, it is believed that this will improve efficiencies and reduce duplication of initiatives and investments.

Funding from governments and other sources are increasing stakeholders' capacity to act

Stakeholders have reported that support is assisting them to build better FQR systems which many are now beginning to use in their assessment of internationally trained applicants. As a result of these first three findings, benefits for individuals are just starting to be realized.

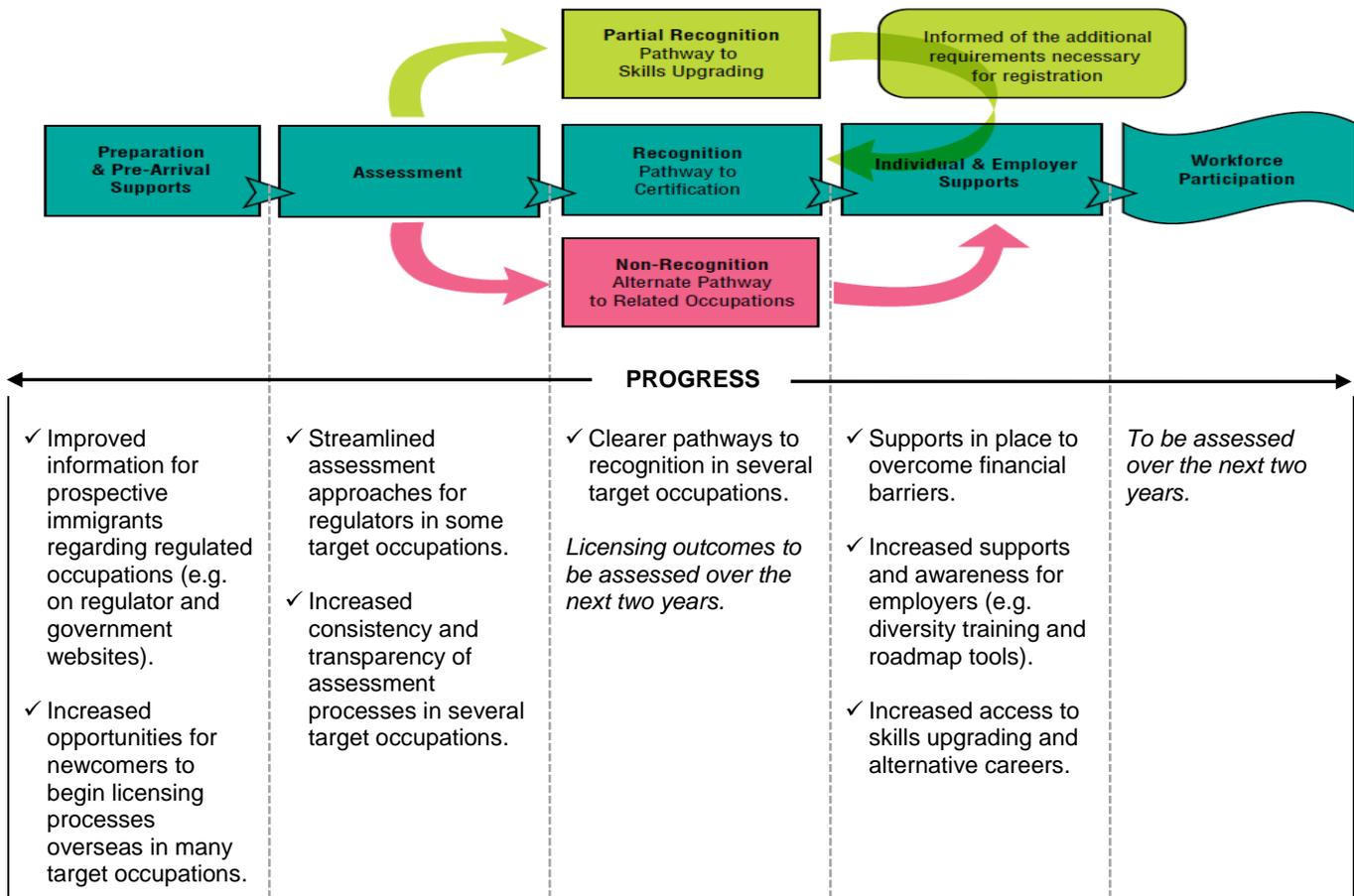
Stronger monitoring and evaluation will be central to promoting further improvements for internationally trained workers

The FQRWG has developed a monitoring and evaluation strategy to assess the licensing and labour market outcomes of internationally trained workers.⁴ Complementing provincial and territorial data collection mechanisms through Fairness Commissioners or legislation, implementation of this strategy will provide concrete evidence of the results and outcomes of collective FQR efforts. It will also contribute to greater transparency through enhanced public reporting.

³ Fairness Commissioners (FCs) or similar offices have been established in some jurisdictions to monitor regulatory processes and promote fair access to regulated occupations. FCs in Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia provided input. National regulatory association contacts for registered nurses, engineers, pharmacists and medical laboratory technologists also contributed to the analysis.

⁴ 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.

The Framework includes a pathway to recognition diagram which provides a general overview of FQR steps for internationally trained professionals and tradespeople. At every step, there are multiple decision makers and numerous factors that can contribute to an individual's success. Below is a high level summary of progress along the pathway.



While good progress has been made, it is important that the FQRWG maintains momentum in order to fully realize the potential of the collaborative actions that have been undertaken to date. While regulators in target occupations have done a great deal of work to improve FQR systems, ongoing collaboration and follow up is needed to ensure continued improvement across provinces and territories and, to the extent possible, to enable access to assessments pre-arrival.

An important lesson learned from engaging the first fourteen target occupations is that one size does not fit all. Regulatory requirements often vary across occupations and jurisdictions. Each region in Canada has unique labour market needs and varying capacity to undertake FQR initiatives. As a result, success requires a combination of jurisdictional and pan-Canadian action.

III. Succeeding Through Collaboration

The Framework has influenced action in a number of areas. Even where activity began before the Framework's release, stakeholders have reported that their initiatives have been strengthened by the Framework. Some highlights of where government and stakeholder collaboration is leading to results:

- **Outreach:** The FQRWG is active in promoting the Framework and strengthening partnerships with the regulatory community. The FQRWG has seen significant benefits from participating in events such as the annual Canadian National Network of Regulatory Associations (CNNAR) conference. At the 2012 event, the FQRWG organized a workshop on alternative career pathways for internationally trained workers. *Pathway steps impacted: all.*
- **Alternative Careers Research:** In cases in which internationally trained workers may not be eligible for full licensure without significant retraining, an alternative career pathway can provide a meaningful and fulfilling experience whereby an individual can use their existing knowledge, skills and abilities to make a positive contribution to Canada's economy. Through work with the FQRWG and input from key stakeholders such as regulators and immigrant serving organizations, research has recently concluded and recommendations were developed to build a principles-based framework for alternative careers and to establish stronger linkages across various sectors. The intended result is smoother integration into the labour market for internationally trained professionals. *Pathway steps impacted: Non-recognition, individual supports and workforce participation.*
- **Financial Support for Newcomers:** A key challenge identified during consultations with the first group of FQR target occupations is the financial barrier to credentialing faced by many internationally trained professionals. Responding to the need for improved access to financial resources to meet education and regulatory requirements for licensure/certification and employment, the federal government in 2012 launched the Foreign Credential Recognition Loans Pilot Project. The pilot is a three-year \$18M initiative that funds community-based, non-governmental organizations in delivering low interest, repayable, microloans as a measure to help internationally trained workers with costs related to obtaining licensure/certification to work in their occupation. *Pathway steps impacted: Recognition, individual supports and workforce participation.*
- **Physicians:** The Medical Council of Canada and Federation of Medical Regulatory Authorities of Canada have partnered to develop a single, national application system for medical registration in Canada. This new streamlined system makes the licensing and registration process more accessible, fairer and more consistent across Canada. *Pathway steps impacted: Assessment and recognition.*

- **Nurses:** Regulators responsible for registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses and licensed practical nurses have reached consensus to establish a National Nursing Assessment Service to streamline the assessment and registration process for internationally educated nurses (IENs) wishing to practice nursing in Canada. Once implemented, the Service is expected to make the assessment process fairer, faster, more transparent and more consistent and will also enable IENs to begin the process while they are still overseas. *Pathway steps impacted: Preparation and pre-arrival supports, assessment and recognition.*
- **Engineers:** Regulators for the engineering profession have developed a streamlined qualifications assessment system for internationally trained engineers. This will provide a uniform standard by which experience will be assessed based on a competency assessment. The system will also include self-assessment tools to allow internationally trained engineers to determine their ability of becoming recognized in Canada. An online version of the competency assessment tool will be the next phase of the regulators' work. The new assessment process for engineers will accelerate the licensing timeframes for internationally trained engineers. *Pathway steps impacted: Preparation and pre-arrival supports, assessment and recognition.*
- **Accountants:** Chartered Accountant regulators from across Canada have worked together to develop a national website to provide timely and accurate information on the FQR process for internationally trained accountants (www.becomeacaincanada.ca). The Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants is currently developing a consistent program for internationally trained accountants to have their knowledge, skills and work experience assessed. It is expected that the assessment, in conjunction with flexible bridging opportunities, will enable internationally trained accountants to become Chartered Accountants, as well as Chartered Professional Accountants (Canada's emerging designation) more quickly. *Pathway steps impacted: Preparation and pre-arrival supports, assessment and recognition.*
- **Dentists:** Prior to the Framework, internationally trained dentists from countries other than the United States and Australia (where mutual recognition agreements already existed) had a choice between a two-year degree completion program or a four to five year full degree program, both at a substantial cost to the applicant. As a result of collaboration between dental regulatory authorities, changes were initiated in 2010 to allow internationally trained dentists to demonstrate their qualifications through a combination of multiple choice, clinical and written exams administered by the National Dental Examining Board of Canada (NDEB). These applicants are now able to be authorized to challenge the NDEB written and objective structured clinical exam within one year of beginning the process, requiring a smaller financial investment. The overall impact is that internationally trained dentists are able to become licensed more quickly than prior to the changes, for a fraction of the cost. *Pathway steps impacted: Assessment and recognition.*

IV. Moving Forward

In order to sustain momentum over the next couple of years, governments will undertake work in several key areas:

Area 1: Promoting Policy Alignment

There are various factors that influence the labour market integration of internationally trained workers. A key priority for governments moving forward will be to examine the policy implications of changing FQR systems as they relate to changing immigration requirements. With the introduction of a mandatory Educational Credential Assessment requirement for the Federal Skilled Worker Program (FSWP), applicants will have to submit their foreign educational credentials to a Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)-designated organization for assessment to establish comparability to Canadian educational credentials. Currently, this assessment is for immigration purposes *only* and is not done for registration purposes. Some internationally trained professionals in regulated professions will be required to have more in-depth assessments of their foreign qualifications for registration and entry into the Canadian labour market. If CIC has designated a professional body for a specified regulated occupation, applicants applying under that occupation must obtain an educational assessment from that professional body. Currently, one professional body, the Medical Council of Canada, is designated by CIC to assess foreign medical degrees for applicants who indicate Physician as their intended occupation. With further changes to immigration programming expected, it will be important for the FQRWG to keep informed of upcoming policy work in this area and identify FQR implications and potential synergies.

Area 2: Promoting Continuous Improvement Through Follow Up

The FQRWG is committed to following up with the first 14 occupations to promote continuous improvements. As a first step to support this objective, a Focus Group was held on March 18, 2013 and several priorities for ongoing engagement were identified. These include enhancing pre-arrival supports, improving occupation/sector-specific language assessment tools, promoting referrals to alternative related careers where appropriate and streamlining occupation/sector-based competency assessments. The FQRWG will follow up on these priorities.

Area 3: Monitoring Progress

Implementation of the Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy will enable the FQRWG to identify further areas that need to be addressed. Beginning in 2013, data will be collected that allows the FQRWG to measure progress and identify trends. Regular data collection and analysis will provide the FQRWG with the opportunity to assess changes to FQR systems, licensing and labour market outcomes for internationally trained workers and, ultimately, to determine the degree to which Framework principles and expectations are being achieved.

Some of the indicators, which are expected to enhance future reports, include:

- Availability and quality of pre-arrival information, supports and processes
- Availability and quality of bridging and alternative career supports
- Timelines for regulators to reach assessment decisions for internationally trained applicants
- Timelines for internationally trained applicants to become fully registered
- Proportion of internationally trained applicants that become fully registered
- Labour market outcomes for internationally trained workers
- Trends in collaboration and information sharing.

Area 4: Engaging New Target Occupations

The FQRWG will begin working with a new set of target occupations which respond to pan-Canadian and regional labour market needs. This new list includes five professions and five trades:

Professions (5)	Trades (5)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists • Geoscientists • Lawyers • Midwives • Psychologists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carpenters • Electricians (construction and industrial) • Heavy Duty Equipment Technicians • Heavy Equipment Operators • Welders

The engagement of these new occupations will occur in 2014/15. Reflecting the variety of needs observed across Canada, the provinces and territories will engage with occupations based on their own needs and interests. Parallel with this work is a major FQR project for the trades, led by the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship (CCDA) with support from some FQRWG members.⁵ The FQRWG will take lessons learned from the CCDA trades project to identify complementary priorities that facilitate the integration of internationally trained tradespeople into the Canadian labour market.

To ensure alignment of FQR efforts with broader labour market priorities, the FQRWG will continue to build on linkages with partners such as the Labour Mobility Coordinating Group, the Internationally Educated Health Professionals Taskforce and the Committee on Health Workforce. These complementary efforts are essential to the Framework's success.

⁵ The project is to develop and test pilot a streamlined (and more consistent) assessment and recognition process for internationally trained tradespeople to become certified in Red Seal trades.

V. Conclusion

Stakeholders and governments have accomplished several objectives set out in the Framework and have much to be proud of in the area of FQR. However, there is more work left to do to achieve all of our FQR goals. By building on the strong foundation that is already in place, through improved monitoring and evaluation and by working with the new target professions and trades, the FQRWG will continue to promote FQR improvements across Canada. Not only will these efforts promote better opportunities for newcomers; they will also promote a more vibrant and prosperous Canada for present and future generations.