

# Improving Pre-Arrival Information Uptake for Internationally Educated Professionals

Prepared for the Foreign Qualifications Recognition Working  
Group of the Forum of Labour Market Ministers

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***Disclaimer: The findings and recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not reflect official policy or positions of the FLMM.***

#### **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 federal, provincial and territorial governments of Canada. The FLMM is composed of federal-provincial-territorial ministers, deputy ministers and officials with labour market responsibilities. The FLMM was tasked with developing a principles-based, pan-Canadian framework to improve foreign qualifications assessment and recognition processes across Canada. On November 30, 2009, governments responded by releasing *A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications* (the Framework)<sup>1</sup>.

The Foreign Qualifications Recognition Working Group (FQRWG), overseen by the FLMM, was established to guide and support the implementation of the Framework. The FQRWG, which commissioned this report, consists of representatives from provincial and territorial ministries responsible for the workforce integration of internationally trained individuals, and representatives from the FLMM Secretariat, Employment and Social Development Canada, Health Canada, the Committee on Health Workforce, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> While the Quebec government has not endorsed the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, it supports its principles and contributes to its work.

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## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Executive Summary.....	6
Introduction .....	9
Scope and Limitations.....	11
Key Informant Interviews.....	12
Key Informant Interviews - Methodology.....	12
Pre-Arrival Interviewees .....	13
ECA Provider Interviewees.....	13
Key Informant Interviews - Findings .....	13
Desired Effects of Pre-Arrival Supports .....	14
Efforts to Improve Access and Understanding of Pre-Arrival Information.....	15
Marketing Efforts: Proactive vs. Passive – “Push” vs. “Pull” .....	16
Assessing Efficacy .....	17
General Advice from Key Informants.....	18
Education Credential Assessment (ECA) Providers.....	19
Canadian Immigrant Integration Program .....	22
Focus Groups.....	25
Focus Groups – Methodology .....	25
Research Objectives .....	25
Methodology & Recruiting.....	25
Focus Group Composition.....	26
Focus Groups - Findings .....	27
Opinion of Currently Available Information and Supports .....	27
Summary and Conclusions.....	34
Recommendations .....	37
Clearly Define Responsibilities.....	37
Make Use of Existing Infrastructure .....	37
Structure Messaging in a Tiered Fashion .....	38
Formalize a Two-Staged Approach to Credential Assessment .....	39
Keep Pre-Arrival Resources Free of Charge .....	39
Appendix A: Pathways to Recognition in Canada .....	42
Appendix B: Key Informant Interview – Questions.....	43

Key Informant Interview (General Pre-Arrival) – Questions.....	43
Key Informant Interview (ECA Providers) – Questions .....	44
Appendix C: Focus Group Moderator’s Guide and Recruitment Material .....	45

## Executive Summary

Over the past decade, Canada has admitted an average of 250,000 immigrants annually. In recent years, nearly two thirds of these individuals have arrived through various “Economic” classes, many of whom intend on working in professions which legally require a license in order to practice. It is of paramount importance for these individuals to truly appreciate the differences in the nature and scope-of-practice of their professions in Canada relative to their home countries, as well as the steps involved in obtaining a license prior to departure. Failure to do so can result in application processing delays, lost income, personal frustration, and disappointment.

A preponderance of confusing, disjointed and sometimes misleading information is accessed by individuals as they attempt to gather practical career and licencing information. For many, the true realities associated with meeting entry-to-practice standards, upgrading technical and language skills, and securing meaningful employment are very different than originally assumed. The provision of timely pre-arrival resources, accessed throughout the immigration process can help to better align the perceptions skilled immigrants have of working in Canada (while in their home countries) with the realities they face on arrival. When suitably acted upon early, these resources can also greatly expedite the assessment, licensure and employment processes.

Research commissioned by the Foreign Qualifications Recognition Working Group (FQRWG) under the Forum of Labour Market Ministers, builds upon previous work conducted on this topic in 2014 where an inventory of many existing pre-arrival supports (centralized online information, exam preparation modules, self-assessment tools, mutual recognition agreements, etc.) in Canada was provided. While the focus of the previous report served to illustrate the breadth of pre-arrival resources offered by regulated professions, this study looks to deepen our collective understanding on how to improve the uptake and effectiveness of these resources.

The research conducted was qualitative in nature, consisting of a series of focus groups with newcomers and one-on-one interviews with key informants. A total of five focus groups (three virtual and two in-person) were carried out in March, 2016. Both the one-on-one interviews and the focus groups were conducted in English. Participants included immigrants who arrived in Canada within the past five years and are either currently employed, or looking to work in a “target”<sup>2</sup> regulated occupation. Feedback gathered from these groups was complemented by telephone interviews with 26 key informants representing 17 national organizations involved in the design and delivery of pre-arrival supports. These individuals were selected under the guidance of the FQRWG based on their ability to offer insight into the successful marketing, delivery, and maintenance of resources aimed at ensuring the greatest possible uptake by prospective immigrants to Canada.

The research and analysis contained herein is intended to identify best practices related to the uptake of pre-arrival information and supports for regulated professions in Canada. Some limitations should be noted pertaining to the scope of the report. Not all target professions or types of pre-arrival supports are mentioned or represented. The research, findings and recommendations focused primarily on the

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<sup>2</sup> Target occupations include: Accountants, Architects, Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists, Dentists, Engineers, Engineering Technicians, Geoscientists, Lawyers, Licensed Practical Nurses, Medical Laboratory Technologists, Medical Radiation Technologists, Midwives, Occupational Therapists, Pharmacists, Physicians, Physiotherapists, Registered Nurses, Teachers

Federal Skilled Worker Stream. Where appropriate, the language through which the services and resources are made available was also accounted for. Pre-arrival information, supports and services available through provincial and territorial programs and regulators are not captured unless otherwise noted.

Findings suggest that skilled immigrants often do not carry out pre-arrival research related to their chosen professions in an orderly or systematic way. For many, there are a number of motivations for immigrating to Canada that are equally, or more important, than career considerations. Moreover, when research is undertaken, there is a tendency to rely on personal contacts (family, friends and colleagues) for professional and licensure information, rather than official sources such as regulator and government websites.

Small tweaks to the content or structure of current pre-arrival supports will not significantly induce greater uptake of these resources. Individuals are unlikely to access pre-arrival information in a comprehensive manner without appropriate guidance. As such, a passive marketing strategy that relies on immigrants to seek out the right information at the right time will not be effective. Instead, a proactive approach involving pushing key messages and resources through reliable and official channels is called for. To this end, a number of recommendations for future activity have been proffered.

***Clearly Define Responsibilities*** – There are two components involved in promoting uptake of pre-arrival resources: i) the development of accurate, relevant and accessible information, and ii) the successful, targeted delivery of that information to an overseas audience. Regulatory bodies are, and should be, responsible for creating and developing content. By comparison, the IRCC and its partner organizations are better positioned to effectively transmit this information to prospective skilled immigrants around the world.<sup>3</sup>

***Make Use of Existing Infrastructure*** – Building on the first recommendation, there are already a number of excellent mechanisms in place for delivering key pre-arrival information to immigrants overseas. Educational Credential Assessment (ECA) providers and the Express Entry system are often the first points of contact for skilled immigrants planning on immigrating to Canada through the Federal Skilled Worker stream. It is recommended that these interfaces be enhanced to proactively push profession-specific information to applicants at key points during the immigration process.

***Structure Messaging in a Tiered Fashion*** – Both key informants and focus group participants noted that key messages are often lost when too much information is provided. Focusing pre-arrival resources around two or three central points will help to ensure that the most critical and actionable pieces of information are received and assimilated by target audiences.

***Formalize a Two-Stage Approach to Credential Assessment*** – Much confusion exists among newcomers regarding the practical value of an ECA within the licensure process. A clear delineation between credential assessments carried out as part of the Federal Skilled Worker immigration stream versus those for professional licensure is required. It is therefore recommended that a formal, two-stage

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<sup>3</sup> Under the *Canada-Québec Accord relating to immigration and temporary admission of aliens* (1991), Québec is responsible for selection of refugees and for their integration. The government of Québec is responsible of all programs needed for their integration, including integration to the labour market. For this reason, the government takes actions at different levels and there is a continuum of services between Immigration and Labour Market departments to make sure actions are consistent and efficient.

approach to credential evaluations be implemented, whereby a generic assessment (carried out by a designated ECA provider) is tendered pre-arrival and findings from that assessment pertaining (at a minimum) to the validity of the documentation presented and the status of the educational program and institution be recognized by regulators. In this way, duplicate documentation would not have to be sourced by the applicant and the preliminary, generic assessment would serve to expedite the credential assessment carried out for the purposes of licensure.<sup>4</sup>

***Keep Pre-Arrival Resources Free of Charge*** – There are a number of pre-arrival resources which were initially developed with external funding provided by federal and provincial/territorial governments. Many of these pilot phases have ended forcing regulatory bodies and national associations to charge individuals to use these tools in order to cover hosting, maintenance and updating costs. This trend will inevitably result in a reduction in the overall use of certain pre-arrival resources and an applicant pool with less knowledge about the licensure and practice environment. It is therefore strongly encouraged that long-term, public funding be made available to ensure unrestricted access of these important resources.

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<sup>4</sup> A model of this exists in the *Évaluation comparative des études effectuées hors du Québec*, an assessment done by Québec's Ministry of Immigration, which is asked from immigrants by regulators.



## Introduction

The demographic challenges facing many developed countries are well-documented. An aging workforce coupled with low domestic fertility rates are leading to underfunded pensions systems and pending skilled labour shortages in many parts of the world. Canada is not immune to these pressures. Canada's total fertility rate of 1.6 childbirths per female presently stands well below the natural replacement rate of 2.1.<sup>5</sup> By 2020, over one-fifth of the population is expected to be 60 years of age or greater.<sup>6</sup> Many sectors are already feeling the effect of these trends. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business reports that "about a third of businesses surveyed... [have] experienced skills shortages limiting their expansion". Similarly, the Canadian Manufacturing Coalition indicates that one-half of their members face "immediate labour and or skills shortages".<sup>7</sup> Over the short and medium term, immigration is expected to be the sole source of net new labour market growth<sup>8</sup> – a vital requirement of a strong and growing economy.

Canada is remarkably fortunate in this regard. Admitting an average of 250,000 newcomers each year over the past decade (the highest among G7 countries on a per capita basis), we are able to add to our population by approximately 0.7% annually with some of the world's best and brightest.<sup>9</sup> The last decade has also seen an increasing focus on "Economic" immigration. Permanent residents admitted through this class have grown from 121,046 in 2003 to 165,088 in 2014<sup>10</sup> – an increase of over 35%. A focus on economic immigration necessitates a complementary strategy aimed at assessing and recognizing international qualifications and integrating individuals into the workforce in an expeditious manner. Failure to do so increases the risks of losing the benefits a human-capital approach to immigration is intended to yield. In its recent report "Brain Gain", the Conference Board of Canada points to the substantial costs of not fully recognizing immigrant qualifications. They estimate that over 524,000 individuals with international credentials face learning recognition challenges (through unemployment and underemployment) at a cost of approximately \$15,000-\$20,000 annually per newcomer.<sup>11</sup> This lost income is a significant detriment to the immigrant population and to the Canadian tax base.

Recognizing this imperative, the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) released "A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications".<sup>12</sup> The Framework "describes

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<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada (2015), "Fertility: Fewer Children, Older Moms". See: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2014002-eng.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada (2009), "Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories". See: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/91-520-x/91-520-x2010001-eng.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Department of Finance, Canada (2014), "Jobs Report: The State of the Canadian Labour Market". See: <http://www.budget.gc.ca/2014/docs/jobs-emplois/pdf/jobs-emplois-eng.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Centre for the Study of Living Standards (2013), "Labour Market Information for Employers and Economic Immigrants to Canada: a country study". See: <http://www.csls.ca/reports/csls2013-01.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> A target of 300,000 total immigrants has been set for 2016. See: <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1038699>

<sup>10</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (2014), "Facts & Figures 2014 – Immigration Overview: Permanent Residents". See: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2014/permanent/01.asp>

<sup>11</sup> Grant, Michael (2016), "Brain Gain 2015: The State of Canada's Learning Recognition System". *The Conference Board of Canada*.

<sup>12</sup> While the Quebec government has not endorsed the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications, it supports its principles and contributes to its work, acting within its

the ideal steps and processes that governments aspire to build in order to address the current gaps to successful immigrant labour market integration”.<sup>13</sup> A vital component of the Framework involves the provision of “pre-arrival” supports to prospective applicants looking to become licensed in a regulated profession (see Pathways Diagram – Appendix A). This component, and encouraging immigrants to use these types of supports, is the focus of this research project.

The research and findings described herein is built on previous work conducted on this topic in 2014.<sup>14</sup> That study provided an inventory of pre-arrival initiatives undertaken by the then 14 regulated “target occupations” designated by the FLMM. The report also provided an account of promising practices for specific categories of pre-arrival supports including: clear and accessible information, self-assessment or readiness tools, mutual recognition agreements, personalized support, and other initiatives aimed at expediting the assessment process (e.g. documentation policies, certification exam preparation, offshore exam administration).

In 2015, additional work on this topic was commissioned by the Foreign Qualifications Recognition Working Group (FQRWG) under the Forum of Labour Market Ministers. As the 2014 report served to illustrate the breadth of pre-arrival resources offered by Canadian regulatory bodies, this work looks to deepen our collective understanding on how to improve the uptake and effectiveness of these resources. To this end, special attention has been paid to:

- Collaboration among stakeholders within a given profession to provide a single point of contact for prospective immigrants/applicants.
- Marketing initiatives which have encouraged skilled immigrants to access information and supports while still overseas.
- Data collection and analysis for the purposes of evaluating the effectiveness of pre-arrival tools.
- Opportunities for further enhancements of delivery channels through cooperation and coordination among groups involved in the immigration and professional licensure processes.
- Effective contact or communication points with prospective immigrants in the pre-arrival phase.

Two pieces of qualitative research form the core of this report:

- A series of one-on-one key informant interviews (KIIs) with national associations of regulators in targeted professions, educational credential assessment agencies (designated by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) and other stakeholder organizations that support immigrants’ entry into regulated professions.

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exclusive jurisdiction with regards to immigrant integration under the Canada-Québec Accord Relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens.

<sup>13</sup> Forum of Labour Market Ministers (2009), “A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications”.

<sup>14</sup> Bauman B. & Johnson, K., (2014) “On the Current State of Pre-Arrival Supports among Canadian Regulators”. Prepared for the *Best Practices and Thematic Task Team*.

- Five focus groups conducted with recently-arrived, skilled newcomers looking to work in a targeted, regulated profession.

This report provides a synthesis, summary, and analysis of this research divided into four sections. The first section sets out the methodology and findings associated with the one-on-one key informant interviews (KIIs). The second provides a similar account associated with five focus groups carried out with recent skilled immigrants. In the third section, a summary of overarching themes and implications from both pieces of primary research is provided. The report concludes with a series of recommendations aimed at improving the utility and uptake of pre-arrival resources for prospective immigrants still in their home countries.

### Scope and Limitations

The research and analysis contained herein is intended to identify best practices related to the uptake of pre-arrival information and supports for regulated professions in Canada. With this objective in mind, individuals were selected under the direction of the FQRWG for their ability to reflect on, and provide insight into, the successful management of these types of initiatives. As such, not all target professions, regions of Canada or types of pre-arrival supports are mentioned or represented in the research described. Provinces and Territories are developing or have developed a range of important pre-arrival information and resources for the settlement and integration of immigrants. However, this research does not speak to specific jurisdictional initiatives, but rather to pre-decision/pre-arrival initiatives provided by a number of target regulated professions. Information related to the design and delivery of successful initiatives gained through key informant interviews and focus groups is used to provide guidance and recommendations to other regulated professions, policy makers and related stakeholders on how to improve the overall efficacy of their pre-arrival efforts.

A second caveat relates to the nature, purpose and limitations of qualitative research. Focus group research is designed to be directional in nature. Results from qualitative research cannot be projected or generalized to particular populations or geographic areas in the same way quantitative research can. Qualitative research seeks to be inclusive of research audiences, as opposed to being representative of them. Results from this research can provide directional guidance and can be used in conjunction with the key informant interviews which also form a fundamental part of this research project.

## Key Informant Interviews

### Key Informant Interviews - Methodology

A brief environmental scan was conducted at the outset of the project to develop an initial list of initiatives and organizations which warranted further examination. An internet-based search of all 19 “target occupations” was conducted. Both national associations<sup>15</sup> and provincial regulatory websites were reviewed as part of this initial phase - although only national bodies were ultimately selected for further analysis based on their relatively more developed suite of pre-arrival supports. Special attention was paid to those organizations with pre-arrival supports meeting the following criteria:

- Espouses relevant “promising practices” set out in the 2014 report;
- Appears to have been well directed or marketed to applicants overseas;
- Has had pre-arrival tools in operation for a sufficient period of time to have allowed for the collection of statistics and website analytics;
- Provides examples of regulators working together to provide a single portal of information and resources to prospective immigrants or applicants.

Efforts were made to ensure that a variety of professions, as well as different types of pre-arrival supports were represented (clear and accessible information, personalized support, exam preparation, self-assessment tools, etc.). Note however, that the intent of this work is not to provide a comprehensive survey and account of all of the initiatives undertaken by the target occupations in this area of study - this was the focus of the 2014 report. Rather, the purpose of these key informant interviews is to distill best practices from select groups or professions on how to successfully market, deliver and maintain pre-arrival supports to ensure the greatest possible uptake by prospective immigrants to Canada while in their home countries.

To provide a more holistic appreciation of potential delivery mechanisms for pre-arrival information, it was felt that interviews should also be conducted with current providers of educational credential assessments (ECAs). These organizations (along with IRCC) are often the first point of contact for individuals applying to immigrate to Canada through the new Express Entry system.<sup>16</sup> As such, it was felt that their perspective, and perhaps future ability to transmit relevant and actionable information to individuals abroad, would serve to inform future action in this important area.

Suggested interview participants were reviewed with the FQRWG to arrive at a final list. Interviews were 30-45 minutes in length and conducted by telephone. Interviewees were sent a list of questions to consider in advance of the call. Separate sets of questions were developed for “Pre-Arrival” and “ECA” interviewees (see Appendix B).

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<sup>15</sup> Note that the term “national associations” is used frequently in this report. This term is intended to refer to pan-Canadian consortia or alliances of regulators who work collectively to deliver pre-arrival resources to an overseas audience. In some cases, these organizations are professional associations which perform regulatory activities such as credential assessment and administration of national, entry-to-practice exams.

<sup>16</sup> Under the *Canada-Québec Accord relating to immigration and temporary admission of aliens* (1991), Québec is responsible for selection of immigrants and for their integration.

Interviews with 26 individuals representing 16 organizations were conducted from January 5<sup>th</sup> to March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016; a summary of these is provided in the table below.

#### Pre-Arrival Interviewees

Name	Organization	Date
June McDonald	Atlantic Connection	January 7, 2016
Kelly McKnight	Atlantic Connection	January 7, 2016
Maha Surani	Canadian Immigrant Integration Program	January 14, 2016
Kate Logan	Canadian Immigrant Integration Program	January 14, 2016
Sylvie Moreau	Canadian Immigrant Integration Program	January 14, 2016
Joanie Durocher	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	January 14, 2016
Christine Nielsen	Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science	January 4, 2016
Elaine Dever	Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists	January 13, 2016
Katya Masnyk	Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators	January 14, 2016
Diana Sinnige	Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators	January 14, 2016
Doretta Thompson	Chartered Professional Accountants, Canada	January 6, 2016
Nancy Foran	Chartered Professional Accountants, Canada	January 5, 2016
Celeste Bernie	Canadian Architectural Certification Board	January 6, 2016
Kim Allen	Engineers Canada	February 4, 2016
Katheryn Sutherland	Engineers Canada	February 4, 2016
Jasmine Singh	HealthForce Ontario	January 7, 2016
Theresa Schopf	National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities	January 6, 2016
Jack Gerrow	National Dental Examining Board	January 7, 2016

#### ECA Provider Interviewees

Name	Organization	Date
Phil Schalm	Comparative Education Service	January 25, 2016
Monica Chong	Comparative Education Service	January 25, 2016
Sherron Hibbitt	International Credential Assessment Service of Canada	January 27, 2016
Sarah Ledwidge	International Credential Assessment Service of Canada	January 27, 2016
Jeff Stull	International Qualifications Assessment Service	February 29, 2016
Jolanta Slaska	International Qualifications Assessment Service	February 29, 2016
John Pugsley	Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada	January 27, 2016
Tim Owen	World Education Services	January 11, 2016

#### Key Informant Interviews - Findings

An analysis of the key informant interviews conducted with national associations of regulatory bodies suggests categorization in a number of distinct themes: desired effects of pre-arrival supports, efforts to improve access and understanding of pre-arrival information, marketing efforts, assessing efficacy, and other general advice. Findings related to each theme are described below. Feedback provided by ECA providers and the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program<sup>17</sup> (CIIP) have been summarized under their own headings.

<sup>17</sup> CIIP is one of the pre-arrival services funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

### *Desired Effects of Pre-Arrival Supports*

At the outset of the interviews, key informants representing regulated professions were asked to comment on the effect they hoped pre-arrival supports would have. Associated findings were similar to those outlined in the 2014 report with responses falling into three major categories: setting and managing expectations, understanding practice in Canada and providing individuals with actionable information.

#### *Setting and Managing Expectations*

Many immigrants planning on working in a regulated profession arrive in Canada with a limited understanding of the licensing process that is required. For many, there is also an assumption that admission to Canada – based in part on their education and experience in a specific field – automatically translates into the ability to legally work in a regulated profession. According to some informants, this perception has been further reinforced by the requirement to have an Educational Credential Assessment (ECA) completed as part of an application to immigrate (under the Federal Skilled Worker stream), which can appear to be an official IRCC-sponsored recognition of credentials. As a result, there is a feeling among many key informants that new arrivals to Canada are often surprised and disappointed to find that their credentials are not automatically recognized by licensing bodies, educational institutions or employers. As one respondent opined, when it comes to working in regulated professions in Canada, many immigrants “don’t know what they don’t know”. As such, effective quality pre-arrival supports can help to clarify the nature of the regulatory environment and set individuals’ expectations as to what is required to become licensed and practice in Canada.

#### *Understanding Practice in Canada*

Representatives of regulated health professions were emphatic in their insistence that prospective immigrants need to be better educated overseas on the nature of practice in Canada. While the nomenclature associated with certain positions is fairly standard globally (e.g. “physician”, “nurse”, “laboratory technologist”) scopes-of-practice, work environments, professional culture and terminology are varied. These differences can be significant. Educational remediation, retraining, and support during the professional acculturation process may be required for individuals to become truly ready to work safely in Canada. Quality pre-arrival information or supports can help to emphasize the extent of these differences and educate individuals on the nature of Canadian practice. Respondents indicated that self-assessment tools are an invaluable resource in this regard. In addition to encouraging applicants to compare their qualifications to entry-to-practice standards, these tools often include video vignettes, examples and testimonials from other immigrants, which can provide a brief but important glimpse of how a given profession is practiced in Canada.

The majority of those consulted were of the opinion that self-assessment tools need to be free-of-charge to the user to be truly effective. International professionals still unsure of whether to immigrate to Canada or apply to work in a regulated profession (i.e. the target group for self-assessment tools), will likely be hesitant to pay for a self-assessment. One organization now charging for this service (after it was offered for free previously in a pilot phase) reported a significant drop in usage. This will inevitably result in applicants who have less of an appreciation of the licensure and practice environment than they would have after undergoing a self-assessment – a detriment to both the regulator and applicant. In the same vein, some regulators also felt that a self-assessment should be a mandatory part of the application process for licensure. In this way, a period of self-reflection is essentially ‘forced’ before the assessment for licensure process begins.

### *Providing Individuals with Actionable Information*

Undertaking certain basic activities involved in the assessment and licensing process before departing for Canada can save immigrants significant amount of time, money and frustration. Many of those interviewed see successful pre-arrival mechanisms as those which encourage individuals to take specific actions before they leave. These can include: obtaining and translating academic documents, obtaining letters of reference from employers, improving language skills and taking necessary language proficiency tests, gathering labour market data and applying to have credentials evaluated. As many informants noted, the longest part of the assessment process often relates to collecting the necessary documents in the correct format. While waiting to become licensed to practice, individuals are often unemployed or working in subsistence jobs to make ends meet. During this time, their professional skills, knowledge and motivation can atrophy. Effective communication on the need to undertake specific activities before leaving for Canada can greatly reduce processing times and get immigrants working in their chosen professions more quickly.

### *Other Potential Benefits*

In addition to the three categories described above, informants indicated a number of other desired outcomes from effective pre-arrival information. These included:

- Understanding the importance of improving general and profession-specific language skills.
- Clarifying the steps and duration of the licensing process.
- Directing immigrants to other related services (settlement organizations, notaries/translators, micro-loan providers, etc.).
- Reducing the number of email inquiries from prospective applicants – saving staff time.
- Understanding the purpose and format of competency-based tests.

### *Efforts to Improve Access to and Understanding of Pre-Arrival Information*

In order to maximize the efficacy of pre-arrival resources, materials must be clearly presented, easy to navigate and accessible. Respondents indicated a number of strategies aimed at promoting the development and maintenance of quality supports:

- Communication materials written using “plain language” principles with accompanying diagrams or infographics where appropriate.
- Availability of information in English and French, but also in those languages spoken in major source countries.
- Tailoring communication materials to a specific audience based on an analysis of website analytics and user demographics.
- Full-time staff specifically dedicated to fielding inquiries from prospective international applicants.

- Scalable online tools which are functional on smart phones and similar portable devices.
- Real-time webinars (WebEx, GoTo Meeting) providing individuals with relevant information based on their specific needs or situation.
- Tracking and coding of email and telephone questions used to update the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section of websites.
- Ongoing focus groups with end-users (i.e. skilled immigrants in a given profession) to ensure the clarity and utility of pre-arrival information and resources.
- Core funding set aside for periodic review and revision of resources.

A number of those interviewed also felt that in some cases, their international audiences can face too much information. As a result, some vital messages are lost among others that are less crucial. There is a general feeling that a good pre-arrival support emphasizes no more than two or three important points – any more than that may only serve to confuse or cloud the central purpose of the resource. Suggested content in this regard included:

- Make sure to source required documents before you leave.
- Understand what your profession is called in Canada and whether you need a license to practice.
- Research the steps involved in obtaining a license to practice and the time and costs involved.
- Have a contingency plan in case you are unable to become licensed – alternate career planning.

#### Marketing Efforts: Proactive vs. Passive – “Push” vs. “Pull”

Key informants were asked to comment on efforts they have made to market pre-arrival resources to prospective applicants overseas. Based on the information gathered, two types of marketing efforts are evident. *Proactive* techniques consist of those efforts made by national associations to “push” out information to a specific audience prior to departure to Canada. *Passive* techniques rely on the creation of quality resources and referral networks aimed at “pulling” interested individuals to relevant tools and websites.

#### *Proactive (“Push”) Techniques*

A few proactive marketing techniques were noted by key informants. Some of the larger professions consulted have budget allocations to purchase advertising space in periodicals often accessed by newcomers or prospective immigrants (e.g. Canadian Immigrant Magazine, The Globe and Mail).

Professions with internationally-mobile workforces (e.g. Accounting, Architecture, Engineering) indicated ongoing work with international partner organizations to make them aware of the pathways to licensure in Canada; in many cases these have been articulated in mutual recognition agreements.



Some of the organizations have developed formal partnerships and referral networks (with regulatory colleges, immigrant-serving organizations, etc.) to drive international audiences to pre-arrival resources. A few of the professions researched as part of this work indicated that they work with the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP – discussed later in more detail) to field specific inquiries from individuals abroad.

Fewer than half of those interviewed noted social media strategies directed at an international audience, encouraging them to make use of pre-arrival information and tools hosted on their websites. Nearly all groups employed search engine optimization techniques to promote their sites on Google and Yahoo, with some even making use of paid advertisements to ensure a high ranking.

#### *Passive (“Pull”) Techniques*

While some regulatory bodies are administering proactive techniques to market the use of pre-arrival resources, the vast majority of those interviewed indicated a strong reliance on passive techniques to encourage uptake. The most common response proffered by regulators to the question, “what efforts are made to market the site/tool/support to an overseas audience?” is that applicants “have to come to us eventually to get licensed”.

Collaborative efforts seemed most successful in this regard. Informants noted that in most cases, individuals abroad think about immigrating “to Canada” and not necessarily a specific Province or Territory. To this end, the majority of professions consulted have developed a central pan-Canadian site (usually managed by a national association of regulators) where supports, information and links to provincial regulators are housed. Immigrants are referred to these central sites via content and links on partner sites, reducing the need to update information in a variety of places. This approach is in line with the findings of the recently released “Survival to Success” report which recommends the development of centralized, occupation-based, pan-Canadian portals for licensing purposes<sup>18</sup>.

In general, those regulatory bodies interviewed recognize their responsibility in the *development* of quality pre-arrival information, as it serves to educate applicants on the assessment process and sets expectations in regards to the timelines, costs and challenges involved. With that said, they do not necessarily regard the proactive *delivery* of this information (to specific audiences overseas) as within their mandate or something they are able to do effectively with the resources and communication channels available to them.

#### *Assessing Efficacy*

Key informants were asked how they gauge the efficacy of pre-arrival supports. Most of those consulted are making the collection and analysis of this type of data an organizational priority. As the majority of supports offered are Internet-based, website analytics are the primary mode for collecting information on user behavior. Metrics commonly cited in this regard include:

- Number of unique/repeat visitors to a given site or resource each month (then compare trends over time);

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<sup>18</sup> Panel on Employment Challenges of New Canadians (2015), “Survival to Success: Transforming Immigrant Outcomes”. *Government of Canada*.

- Ratio of international versus Canada-based hits on given site or resource (over time the ratio of international hits should be increasing if uptake overseas is improving);
- Analysis of user behaviour – how long are users spending on specific tools/resources relative to others; and
- Analysis of browser locations and languages – can be used to tailor message to specific international audiences and source countries.

A number of organizations will also periodically survey users of pre-arrival supports. These surveys are kept brief to encourage strong participation and completion rates. Typical areas of inquiry relate to: how the resource was initially found, the overall clarity and utility of the resource, specific actions that were taken based on using the resource, and aspects of the resource that could be improved. Survey fields are usually a combination of Likert scales and free text to allow for both quantitative and qualitative feedback.

Finally, all of the national associations consulted allow for internationally educated individuals to submit required documents and begin the assessment/licensure processes overseas. Many of these groups look to the number or ratio of credentialing applications initiated outside of Canada as a general indicator of the success of pre-arrival supports. One informant noted an average of a 2% annual increase in this regard; as an organization they consider a goal of 50% (of applications initiated offshore) over the medium-term to be both desirable and attainable.

### General Advice from Key Informants

Key informants were also given the opportunity to provide general advice to those groups looking to develop or enhance pre-arrival resources. Suggestions in this regard included:

- Determine the two or three central messages your organization wants to “drill home” and focus communication materials around those. Immigrants are inundated with information and are not likely to absorb everything that is provided.
- Work collaboratively as a profession to provide information. It is far easier and more cost-effective to keep one central site/resource/tool updated than many separate ones. General information on the licensure process and associated requirements can be posted centrally, with more specific jurisdictional nuances covered separately on individual provincial or territorial regulator websites.
- Implement a system to gather ongoing feedback from end-users (e.g. through surveys or focus groups) and adjust information and supports accordingly.
- Do not build and pilot any tools or resources that you cannot afford to keep current through core funding.
- Labour market conditions for most professions in Canada vary by region. Make continual efforts to gather and share current and actionable labour market information with those looking to immigrate and settle in Canada.

- Encourage government(s) to host profession-specific licensing information on their websites as this is often the first point of contact for those looking to immigrate to Canada.
- Develop resources in phases and ensure that there is sufficient time to pilot, test and refine them based on user feedback.
- Share real-life success stories with audiences. “This is what made other immigrants successful” is a catch phrase that seems to resonate with international applicants.
- Recognize that not everything can be automated. There is a real need to provide customized responses to individuals based on their specific needs. Regulatory bodies should dedicate human resources for this specific purpose.

### Education Credential Assessment (ECA) Providers

Since May 2013, IRCC requires that primary applicants of the Federal Skilled Worker Program stream of immigration include an Educational Credential Assessment (ECA) as part of their application. Presently there are seven agencies officially designated to provide this service.<sup>19</sup> Key informants from five of these were interviewed as part of this research owing to their unique perspective as an initial point of contact for prospective immigrants still in their home countries (see Appendix A for questionnaire). Collectively, the five ECA organizations consulted completed approximately 120,000 ECAs in 2015, making them an extremely important and potentially valuable channel for transmitting pre-arrival information.

### ECA Reports

ECA providers generally felt that the reports they issue do provide individuals with a clear understanding of the “comparability” of their educational credentials in the Canadian context. That aside, they also indicated that clients are less clear on the actual “value” of their credentials from the perspectives of regulators and employers.

As a related question, ECA providers were asked if they provided any supplemental information along with the ECA report to clients aimed at helping them better understand the work and regulatory environment in Canada. At present, limited material is sent other than the ECA report itself. Two agencies encourage ECA clients to sign up for an organizational newsletter which provides information on working and settling in Canada. Another invites individuals to participate in a series of webinars on topics geared to an international audience. But in general, complementary information provided at this point is scarce and not tailored to specific professions.

### General Advice from ECA Providers

A number of ECA interviewees feel that additional messaging is required (provided jointly by IRCC and ECA providers) to help situate the ECA within the greater context of becoming licensed and working in Canada. Suggested ideas in this regard included:

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<sup>19</sup> Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, “Have your Education Assessed: Skilled Immigrants (Express Entry)”. See: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/skilled/assessment.asp> (accessed March 25, 2016).

- Greater clarity regarding the scope and purpose of the ECA (i.e. immigration-versus-licensure distinction).
- Statements around the fact that an evaluation of educational qualifications is only one part of the licensure process.
- Links to specific national associations of regulators based on the types of credentials presented for assessment.
- Information on the Canadian regulatory environment (i.e. the role of a provincial/territorial regulatory college).
- Links to relevant bridging programs.
- Links to professional and regional labour market information.
- Links to alternate career information and supports.

Likewise, functional modifications were suggested to help expedite the assessment and recognition process, including:

- The ability to share assessments and educational documents with select stakeholders (i.e. licencing bodies, Provincial Nominee Program partners, employers) – limiting the number of times immigrants have to source and submit official documents.
- Greater acceptance regarding the transmission of electronic diplomas and transcripts among regulatory bodies, educational institutions, employers and government departments.
- The introduction of a preliminary, low-stakes questionnaire for ECA clients, in which they are asked to demonstrate they have carried out some research related to: whether their desired profession is regulated or not, the regions in which they might live, availability of settlement/language services, basic labour market information.

#### *Assessments for Immigration versus Licensure*

A central issue raised by most informants relates to the important difference that exists between a credential assessment for immigration and an assessment for licensure. According to many providers, there still remains confusion among ECA clients regarding the purpose and limitations of an ECA assessment. Despite fairly clear messaging to the contrary, some ECA applicants consider a generic report which cites the relative comparability of international education in Canadian terms an acceptance to practice in a given regulated profession. As such, there is often frustration and disappointment when a second assessment, by a regulatory body, is required before a license to practice is granted. This opinion was echoed in the focus groups conducted with recent immigrants, discussed in the next section.

There has been a move in recent years to combine assessments carried out for immigration purposes, with the licensing process. The introduction of profession-specific ECA providers (i.e. Medicine –

Medical Council of Canada, Pharmacy – Pharmacy Examination Board of Canada) allows for applicants to be granted immigration points along with an official declaration as to the value of their credentials per licensure or exam eligibility requirements. A second ‘Request for Proposals’ for additional ECA providers launched in March 2015,<sup>20</sup> may see more national associations of regulatory bodies added to the designated list of agencies. While the inclination to better align immigration and licensure assessments is regarded as laudable by ECA providers, opinions on how this is best achieved varied.

#### *ECA costs and capacity issues*

Interviewees noted that there is a marked difference in the time and resources required for an ECA for immigration versus an assessment for licensure. At present, fees for an ECA range from \$200 to \$550.<sup>21</sup> This includes those carried out for regulated professions (i.e. medicine and pharmacy), which are only a starting point on the road to becoming licensed. Passing thresholds related to exams, language proficiency, local experience, and currency of practice also typically need to be met before a license to practice is granted. By comparison, a full competency-based assessment for licensure (now used by most regulators), is a much more expensive and involved process. Costs for these can add up to thousands of dollars before eligibility for an entry-to-practice exam (where required) is determined.

Moreover, the processing capacity of most regulatory bodies is such that the additional volume of ECA requests, (beyond what is currently carried out strictly for licensure proposes) may be very difficult to manage. All those consulted stated that the most resource and time-consuming part of the assessment process is the verification and authentication of documentation provided by the applicant; the actual determination of comparability can be done reasonably quickly owing to extensive databases of post-secondary institutions and programs and precedent files. As such, it was suggested that new resources dedicated strictly to processing ECAs, used mainly for the purposes of immigration, may detract from the central mandates of regulators – protection of the public through setting entry-to-practice standards, ensuring continuing competency and investigation of complaints. Providers also pointed to the fact that a significant proportion of ECAs are commissioned by individuals who will never arrive in Canada. That is to say, many individuals will set up an Express Entry profile, request an ECA to improve their overall point score, but never be invited to apply or choose to drop out of the process altogether. Hence an in-depth assessment of an individual’s educational background for purposes of licensure may be misallocation of resources at such an early and tenuous point in the immigration process.

#### *A Two-stage approach*

When these realities are considered together, there is a palpable sentiment among ECA providers that perhaps a two-stage assessment process, for those in regulated professions, may be the most efficient and cost-effective mechanism for recognizing international credentials. Per this system, an initial ECA is proffered by designated, generic assessment agencies for the purposes of immigration. Regulators should then be encouraged (or perhaps required) to recognize certain findings of ECA reports as part of the licensure process (i.e. in verifying documents, focus of study, status of program/institution) and include it as a first step in their assessment processes rather than starting from scratch. In this way, turnaround times (for immigration assessments) are maximized and the resources of regulatory bodies are focused on assessing individuals who truly intend to seek licensure in Canada.

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<sup>21</sup> Based on a review of current designated ECA provider fees.

### Canadian Immigrant Integration Program

The Government of Canada funds a number of virtual and in-person services aimed at providing prospective immigrants with personalized immigration and career information in their home countries.<sup>22</sup> One of the longest-operating is the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP) which offers direct, customized support to individuals prior to departure. The aim of the program is to give Economic Class immigrants the right information, tools, and Canadian contacts while they are preparing to move to Canada. Those admitted to Canada, but still in their home country, are provided with customized guidance and advice based on their specific circumstances.

Launched in 2007 as a pilot project and transformed into a full-fledged program in 2010, the CIIP is an initiative between the Government of Canada, Colleges and Institutes Canada (formerly the Association of Canadian Community Colleges), and a network of partners across Canada. The program provides a free, pre-arrival orientation to Federal Skilled Workers, Provincial Nominees, and their spouses and adult dependants, while they are still overseas during the final stages of the immigration process.<sup>23</sup> A recent partnership with International Organization for Migration (IOM), -- which administers the Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) program -- has allowed CIIP and COA to deliver a consistent curriculum worldwide and offer a more holistic suite of services to those preparing to settle and work in Canada. The name of the joint service is called *Planning for Canada*.<sup>24</sup>

CIIP is free of charge to users and offers programming in English and French, in-person and online worldwide. Major supports include:

- A full-day Group Orientation session on Canada's labour market and settlement.
- A personalized one-hour planning session on career and settlement.
- Connections to Canadian organizations through Focal Point Partners (e.g. colleges, immigrant-serving organizations, employment-support agencies) for additional pre-arrival guidance and support post-landing.
- Access to specialized online information sessions and workshops (known as the CIIP Platform).
- Administration and invigilation of certification/licensure exams with cooperation from Canadian regulatory bodies (e.g. Federation of Law Societies of Canada, Tourism HR Council).

CIIP also aims to create communication and referral channels with groups in Canada (including regulatory bodies) that can provide additional information and assistance to individuals preparing to move to Canada.

Participants are surveyed on all aspects of the program as part of CIIP's continuous quality improvement approach. While the survey data gathered is extensive, two pieces are worth citing given the objectives of this report.

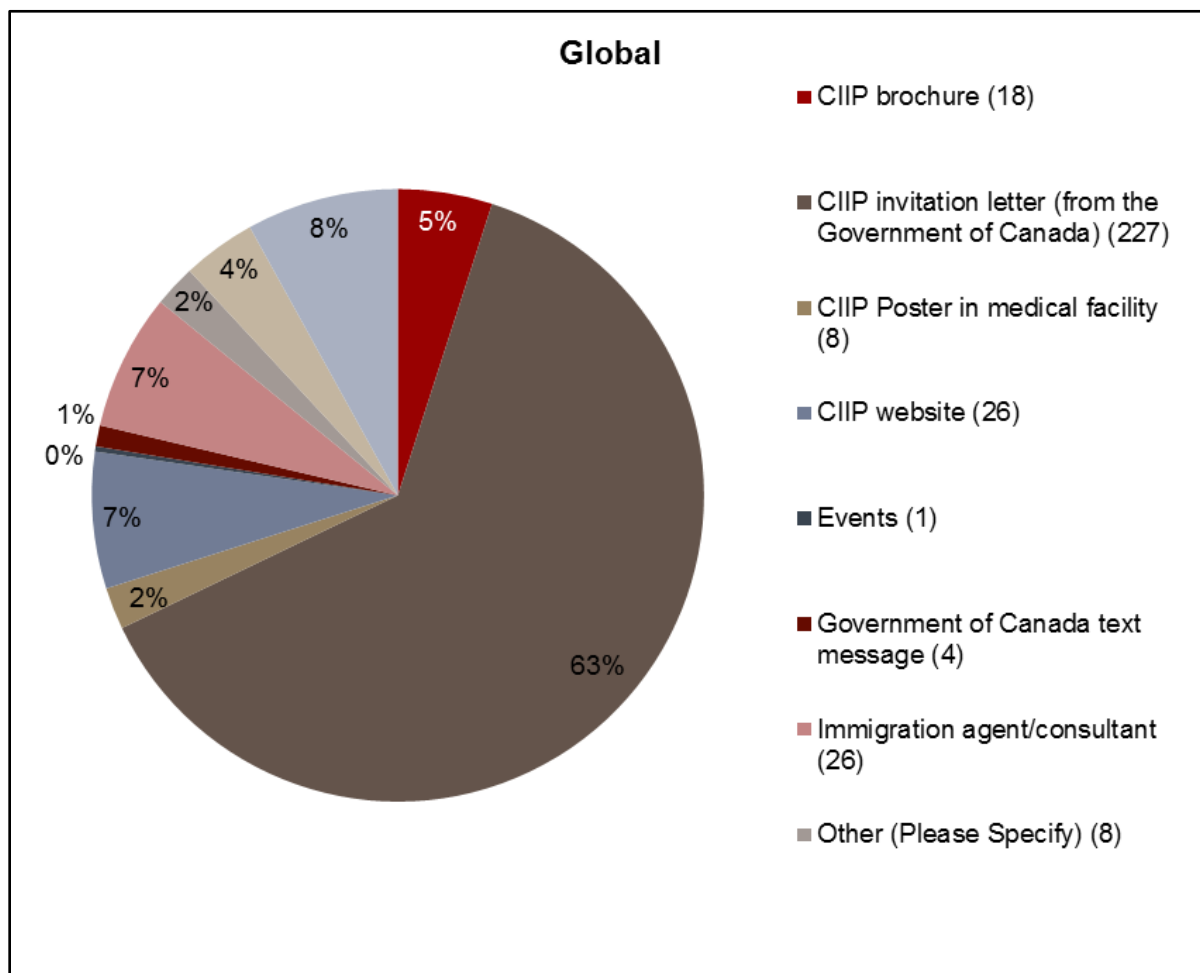
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<sup>22</sup> See Government of Canada, "Get help before arriving in Canada – Pre-arrival services: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/before-services.asp> (accessed May 19, 2016)

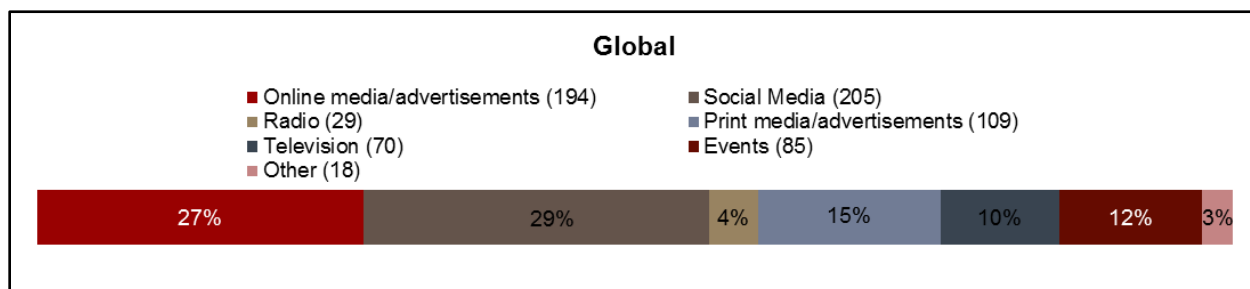
<sup>23</sup> Canadian Immigrant Integration Program, "What is CIIP" <http://www.newcomersuccess.ca/index.php/en/about-ciip> (accessed March 24, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> News Release – COA & CIIP (December 1, 2015) "CICan and the IOM join forces to support immigrant integration"

The first relates to how participants became aware of the program. As per the chart below, the vast majority of respondents heard about CIIP via an invitation letter from the Government of Canada.<sup>25</sup>



In the second question, CIIP users were asked: *In terms of attracting more prospective immigrants to use CIIP services, which media outlet(s) would work best in the country where you registered for CIIP services? (Select all that apply).*



<sup>25</sup> In September 2014, a CIIP online survey was sent to around 2,000 CIIP graduates to seek their feedback on how to maximize outreach efforts. Of these, 366 completed the survey for a response rate of just over 18%.

This data speaks directly to immigrant perceptions on the best ways or channels to market CIIP services and, more broadly, pre-arrival services in general. Much of the rich information collected by CIIP is publically available on their website.<sup>26</sup> It is strongly recommended that all levels of government, regulated professions and other stakeholder groups review this data on a regular basis to better understand the demographic characteristics of their intended audiences and to inform or justify the development of new resources.

CIIP users are very positive about the utility of services provided. A few metrics from their most recent service report are worth citing.<sup>27</sup>

- 90% of users considered CIIP services to be “very useful”.
- 99% indicated that CIIP “increased their understanding of the specific requirements for their intended occupation”.
- 96% planned on taking “pre-arrival action” with 63% planning on requesting a credential assessment and 31% planning on applying for licensure.

Beyond highlighting CIIP’s slate of services and value to skilled immigrants, two more points are also worthy of mention in the context of this report.

The first relates to the overall use of CIIP services. Since its inception in 2007, CIIP has served over 35,000 clients, nearly 40% of who work in regulated professions.<sup>28</sup> While admirable, this figure is far lower than the number of Economic Class immigrants who would have been eligible for their services in the past nine years. As a result, there have likely been numerous individuals who would have benefited from participation, but were unaware of the program or how to access it.

A second point speaks to the need for greater cooperation between an excellent information delivery service like CIIP and those responsible for professional regulation in Canada. The vast majority of national associations consulted stressed the value their organizations place on providing pre-arrival information to individuals overseas. CIIP actively seeks out referral partnerships with these types of organizations to augment the information they are able to provide to clients. Per this arrangement, interested clients are referred to a contact at a partner organization for more information on a specific profession or how to become licensed. Yet, CIIP administrators note that these types of relatively informal partnerships have only been established with a minimal number of regulated professions to date. To truly maximize the value of this program for those looking to work in regulated professions, all individuals should be put in contact (at a minimum) with the appropriate national association in Canada before departure. Enhanced cooperation and coordination between regulatory bodies and pre-arrival service providers could make this an extremely effective reality.

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<sup>26</sup> See CIIP “Reports and Publications” - <http://www.newcomersuccess.ca/index.php/reports-a-publications> (accessed March 28, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (2015), “CIIP Quarterly Statistical Report: October 1 – December 31, 2016”. See: [http://www.newcomersuccess.ca/images/stories/reports/CIIP\\_Q21\\_Stats\\_Report\\_October-December2015-v0201.pdf](http://www.newcomersuccess.ca/images/stories/reports/CIIP_Q21_Stats_Report_October-December2015-v0201.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., CIIP.



## Focus Groups

### Focus Groups – Methodology

#### Research Objectives

The main objective of the focus group research is to understand from newcomers, what would encourage prospective skilled immigrants to use pre-arrival information related to their professions while still resident in their home countries. A number of approaches were implemented to address this objective:

- Directly asking participants what would have encouraged them to use existing pre-arrival information.
- Gauging overall awareness and use of pre-arrival information used by newcomers for immigration and integration into their professions.
- Investigating what motivated them to access pre-arrival information -- what they expected to find and why they actually took the time to sit-down and research their profession in Canada.
- Understanding how participants found the information they accessed -- what did they search for, who told them about the information and what expectations did they have?
- Understanding how the information they accessed helped them pursue their profession in Canada -- what was helpful and what was missing?
- Asking what information participants wish they had in their home country after having the experience of integrating into their profession in Canada.

#### Methodology & Recruiting

Five focus groups were conducted for this study, with two focus groups done in-person (Toronto, ON) and three focus groups being conducted over the telephone so that individuals from across Canada could participate. The focus groups were approximately two hours in length and had between 4 and 13 participants in each. A screener (included in Appendix C) was used to ensure that participants met the criteria to participate. All participants had to reside in Canada, work in one of the current slate of target professions, and have immigrated to Canada in the last five years. Attempts were made to ensure some representation by province, type of profession, and country of origin.

The sessions were facilitated by a professional moderator who specializes in conducting research with newcomers to Canada integrating into regulated professions. A semi-structured approach was used, where the moderator developed and used a focus group guide to elicit discussion in the groups (see Appendix C). However, the moderator also asked questions based on responses given in the group and allowed participants to discuss topics amongst themselves as a way of gathering further qualitative data. The focus groups were conducted in March 2016 and recorded. Participants were recruited from three different sources:

- World Education Services (WES): WES, a credential assessment agency, contacted approximately 2,000 recent clients who had credential evaluations conducted in the past five years. Those

interested in the focus groups were asked to fill-out an online screener to determine their eligibility for the groups. Qualified and selected participants were contacted via email and phone and invited to attend. Participants were selected to ensure a good representation of professions and length of time in Canada.

- WoodGreen Community Services: A Toronto-based immigrant serving organization agreed to host the focus groups and contribute participants to the groups from their client base. WoodGreen approached individuals to participate in the groups and directed them towards the online screener. Qualified and selected participants were contacted via email and phone to participate.
- Eastern Canadian Employment and Immigrant Serving Organizations: Organizations in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia selected clients that met the focus group criteria and provided contact information to the researcher. The researcher contacted participants by phone to both invite and pre-screen participants for the focus groups to ensure they met the criteria.

## Focus Group Composition

### By Recruiting Source

GROUP	RECRUITING SOURCE			TOTAL
	WES	WoodGreen	East ISO	
Toronto, March 1	7	6	-	13
Toronto, March 2	4	-	-	4
Phone, Early March 10	6	-	-	6
Phone, Late March 10	7	-	-	7
Phone, March 23	-	-	7	7
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>37</b>

### By Profession

Profession	# of Participants
IMG (International Medical Graduate, Physician & any specialists)	11
MLT (Medical Laboratory Technician, Technologist or Assistant)	5
Dentistry	5
Engineer	5
Teacher	3
Accounting/CPA	2
Psychologist	1
Dietician	1
Geologist	1
Physiotherapist	1
Nurse	1
Computer Programmer (non-regulated) <sup>29</sup>	1

<sup>29</sup> For the Eastern Canada focus group, recruiting was done directly by staff at local Immigrant Service and Employment Agencies, who were instructed to recruit from the targeted regulated professions. While the majority

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>
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#### By Province/Territory

<b>Location of Participant</b>	
Ontario (in-person Toronto Focus Groups)	17
Nova Scotia	4
Alberta	3
Saskatchewan	3
New Brunswick	3
Ontario (Phone-In Groups)	2
British Columbia	2
Manitoba	1
Quebec	1
Outside Canada <sup>30</sup>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>

### Focus Groups - Findings

As in the case of the key informant interviews, an analysis of the feedback received from key informants lent itself to categorization across a number of themes summarized below.

#### Opinion of Currently Available Information and Supports

Some participants reported that accessing information about the registration process has yielded positive results. They indicated that content on government and regulatory websites provided the right information to help them plan for the process of entering their profession. It also allowed them to make important decisions about their careers and provided encouragement for them to pursue their profession in Canada. Particular positive feedback was given for:

- The use of exam materials or sample exams to help ensure that immigrants are ready to challenge exams that they will need to take in order to enter their chosen profession. Some felt that such exam resources gave them confidence to continue to pursue their professions in Canada.
- Looking at videos of successful applicants who have made it into their professions, and seeing what they did to succeed. Videos such as this provide hope for participants, which they feel is an important emotional component to entering a profession in Canada.
- Using flowcharts and info-graphics to describe the licensure process. Participants found such diagrams to be helpful in showing the steps, timelines and requirements necessary to integrate into a profession. A few participants said they had used such flowcharts to plan their activities

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participants for this group were vetted by the moderator prior to the group to ensure they were in the target professions, due to timing issues, others were not.

<sup>30</sup> A requirement for participation was Canadian residency. This participant indicated their residence as Ontario on the screener, and thus qualified. However, during the session, the participant indicated that she resided outside of Canada, but was kept in the group.

and have been pleased with the fact that their experience has generally been what was described.

Even if participants did not make use of specific pre-arrival supports to form detailed career plans, many rated information that they did see moderately highly, saying that it provided clear information about planning for their careers in Canada. Some comments included:

- Pre-arrival information pointed them in the right direction to regulators. That is, they accessed IRCC or other government websites that provided useful referrals and links.
- Pre-arrival information gave them an overview of the regulatory environment in Canada, understanding for example that a provincial regulator licenses people to practice a profession, but a national organization administers an exam.
- Pre-arrival information informed them of document requirements for the assessment and licensing process.

### Participants Indicate a Number of Pieces of Information that Would Have Been Helpful to them in their Home Countries

Participants were asked a number of times in the sessions what information they wished they had known while they were in their home countries given the experience they had in pursuing their professions in Canada. Some very consistent themes emerged from the discussion.

#### Documentation requirements

Documentation requirements were a major issue for many, especially because virtually all participants agree that gathering documents is best done while still in one's home country. In some cases, these requirements are well-communicated. In other cases, participants just knew to bring with them everything they felt might be important, and were lucky in that they took what was needed. However, there were some participants in most of the groups that were caught off-guard and almost angry at the myriad documents required throughout the assessment/licensure/employment process they were not initially aware of. Specifically, some were surprised at the different credential evaluations and/or documents required if they moved provinces, took education or changed careers into a related field. Getting original, translated, certified and directly-delivered documents proved to be very challenging for many participants.

The focus groups revealed that document requirements are highly individual in nature. That is, as individuals took different paths, investigated different options, moved throughout Canada, applied to different schools or programs, their documentation needs became so unique that participants agreed they could not anticipate all the documents they would need while in their home country. This speaks to the fact that immigrants need to better plan or consider their intended career, potential alternate careers, and the province they will settle in, as they all have an effect on document requirements.

#### Total costs

Some participants indicated that knowing the total cost of gaining entry into the profession would be useful, and other participants seemed to agree. Participants said that even if regulators posted fees (which many did not), extra courses, ESL training, courier and travel costs were unexpected expenses for

which they did not account.

#### *Alternative career information*

Participants wanted to know more about alternate careers. They generally understand that it will take a long time to obtain a license or certification in their chosen profession. As such, they seek employment in other occupations that are similar to their field to gain experience that can be used when they ultimately become licensed. In other words, alternate careers are a preferred option to jobs totally unrelated to their field. Second, most participants do want and need a career to fall back on. Some individuals realized, even in their home country, that they are unlikely to successfully pursue their chosen profession in Canada, or that doing so would not be worth the effort and expense. As such, knowing as much as they can about alternate careers is useful while in their home country. Note that of all professions represented in the groups, International Medical Graduates (IMGs) were most likely to want to know more about alternate careers.

#### *Work experience and language proficiency*

Participants were surprised, and in some cases shocked, that their previous international experience might not be valued by regulators or employers. It is important to note that this is not an egotistical stance where participants felt as if they should have an easier time, or are “owed” something because of their previous experience. Rather, they are simply surprised that their experience appears to count for little in regards to gaining entry into their chosen profession.

Some participants were surprised at the emphasis placed on English language proficiency during the application/licensure process. They indicated that had they known they would have to improve their English to meet proficiency thresholds, they would have taken necessary courses or tests in their home country so as to avoid doing so in Canada.

#### *Accessing services*

There were some focus group participants living in smaller communities or pursuing licensing in occupations that did not have extensive infrastructure and support available. Those participants indicated that a lack of information and support left them on their own in terms of determining document requirements and taking the proper steps to enter their profession. They found shortages of help including: workplace experience, upgrading opportunities, and ESL classes, as well as a lack of understanding of immigrant challenges. However, other participants in smaller communities and provinces reported excellent support from immigrant service organizations that helped them plan their routes to integrate into their professions.

#### *Participants Report Relying on Friends, Colleagues and Job Sites for Information*

The previous section indicated that participants do indeed access information from regulators and governments, and that when this information is accessed it is considered useful. However, participants in all the groups indicate that they may equally consult, or even give preference to information from friends and colleagues and job websites.

In all focus groups and among virtually all professions, participants indicated that they consult friends and colleagues (in Canada and abroad) about pursuing their profession in Canada. In many cases these information sources were given as much credence as information from government and regulators; for some participants, these sources were consulted first and exclusively. For the most part, these individuals indicated that information received from friends and colleagues has been useful, and often

these sources point immigrants to the right regulatory authority for their profession. A majority of participants stated that friends and colleagues generally provided accurate information, but there were instances in the groups where these sources gave incorrect information about which regulated profession to pursue. Participants generally did not realize the risks involved in relying too much or solely on these sources of information. Finally, most appreciate the fact that friends and colleagues provide emotional support by imparting a sense of hope and caring in the way other sources of information cannot provide.

Many focus group participants reported consulting job sites to see if there was demand for their profession in Canada and if employers were likely to value their previous experience. Some indicated a heavy reliance on this information and in some cases it was the only source of information they accessed regarding entry into their chosen profession. They may access job sites in order to investigate jobs in their existing profession or those in related fields. While in their home countries, participants did not realize that many of the jobs they saw (either in their own field, or in alternate/related careers) were regulated. In fact, many participants indicated surprise and even dismay at discovering that an alternate career they had seen on a job site, or elsewhere, was regulated.

Based on feedback from the focus groups it may be advisable to carry out the following to improve uptake of pre-arrivals information.

- While potentially difficult to administer, consider informing friends and colleagues (i.e. recent immigrants to Canada) that they should tell anyone who asks about pursuing a regulated profession in Canada to consult the proper authority in the right province, along with a list of immigrant service organizations that may be useful to advancing a career. Specific messaging could be developed to help well-meaning personal contacts support newcomers to Canada with the right information as well as emotionally. This could be done through organizations or clubs with members from specific countries of origins/professions (e.g. Afghan Society of Canadian Engineers) or enhanced coordination with immigrant serving organizations in Canada to encourage their users to direct friends/family/colleagues overseas to official resources.
- Investigate whether job listing sites can display messages to visitors with foreign IP addresses to consult the relevant regulator and to clearly indicate that the profession can only be practiced by regulated professionals.

It should also be noted that a few participants stated that they consulted with immigration agents and/or lawyers about entering their profession or about jobs available in their profession in Canada. Only a small number of participants indicated this was the case compared to consulting with friends and family. However, these sources also need to be informed about providing prospective immigrants with quality information.

#### *Some Participants Indicated that Messages from IRCC were Very Effective in Encouraging them to Use Pre-Arrival Information*

Some individuals indicated that they had received emails and letters from IRCC that encouraged them to consult pre-arrival information, or to do more research on their careers prior to leaving. Some participants who arrived in the past year received emails from IRCC which indicated that if an immigrant's profession is regulated, it is the responsibility of the immigrant to do all the research necessary to be prepared to meet regulatory requirements to practice. A few participants who received

these messages stated that they felt strongly encouraged to do the research on their professions and gather as many documents as possible prior to leaving.

#### *Participants Indicated they do not Plan for Entry into their Professions in the way Regulators and Government may Expect*

One of the main findings of this research is that many participants in the groups stated that they simply do not access information on their professions in an ordered or consistent manner - the way regulators and government may expect. Similarly, some participants do not place as much importance on the process of pursuing licensing in their own profession as expected. This is due to a number of reasons:

- Immigration status (e.g. if coming in as a refugee or as a part of a family class).
- Participants having other responsibilities to take care of when they immigrate.
- Participants getting side-tracked with irrelevant information, or lacking a holistic appreciation of the licensure process. For example, many participants will focus just on one aspect in detail (e.g. exams, documents) at the expense of looking at the process more broadly.
- Participants simply do not expect the process to take as long or to be as involved. That is, when they look at information in their home country regarding the assessment and licensure requirements, they expect that it will be like what they experienced in their home country, or that their years' of experience will help them through the process. Specifically, a few accountants and engineers in the groups felt that having worked for firms that have very broad international experience, with offices throughout the world would help them enter their Canadian professions with little difficulty.
- Participants tend not to access, or view all information about entering their career at one time. Rather, they look at it, or piece it together, at different times in their integration process. As such, it is difficult for them to understand or conceptualize a broader plan for integration into their profession - including that certain parts of the integration process can only be completed when they arrive in Canada.

#### *Participants Feel that to Improve Pre-Arrivals Uptake, they Need to Be Told about the Challenges they will Face*

When the topic of "challenges" was raised in the groups, many participants offered suggestions that would help others better plan for their careers in Canada and make better use of available resources. Improving pre-arrivals uptake of information would include:

- Directly and overtly encouraging immigrants to "better plan" for the entry into their profession in Canada. When looking back at their experience in Canada, there are a number of things participants wished they had known or done differently. In short, those consist of being better prepared, especially in terms of finances, alternate career selection and documentation requirements. Many individuals said that they would feel better about pursuing their profession in Canada if they had known about these issues and how to plan for them. Participants basically did not realize the planning that had to go in to addressing the challenges that they would face.

- Participants expressed a desire for messages to help them understand the challenges that they will face pursuing their chosen professions in Canada. Such messages could include the length of time the assessment/licensure/integration process takes, the success rate and the cost. Participants indicated that the more specific this information is, the more they would pay attention.
- Clearly articulate that as many documents should be gathered in their home country as possible. Newcomers pursuing professions in Canada also need to understand that their plans may change and that their document requirements may change too. Newcomers should be told to thoroughly plan for a number of documentation scenarios, should their situations change.
- One of the reasons participants did not plan as much as they could is because they thought their experience would assist them in integrating into their profession – in that it may either help them obtain their license or secure employment. Having participants understand the role Canadian experience plays and how potentially difficult it is to obtain initially, will likely motivate them to use pre-arrival information. Canadian experience needs to be understood on two levels – the first the experience necessary for licensure (e.g. internships, residencies, articling, placements, or currency hours necessary in Canada to obtain a license) and the second is actually gaining employment in the field.
- Participants indicated that they need to better plan for upgrading their skills, taking courses, and possibly going back to school. While participants indicated that this was somewhat mentioned in materials they accessed, they did not understand the extent to which these would be involved in the process of becoming licensed in their profession in Canada. They also described courses costing a significant amount of money, or not being offered in a timely manner.

While these are fairly common concerns among immigrants seeking entry into regulated professions, what must be noted in the context of this study is that participants indicated that knowing about these factors while in their home country could have significant implications for pursuing their professions in Canada. As noted by one participant, “If I knew how difficult it would have been in [home country]... if that message was put out there, I would ask my licensing institution what would make it difficult... that leads to better preparation”.

Hence, the responsibility for the immigrant to engage more fully in pre-arrival supports and activities is a two-way street. Immigrants must certainly take the initiative to use existing supports – and results from these groups show that they may not take as much initiative in this regard as they should or could. However, if they are made to understand the challenges that are involved in accessing their careers through proper messaging from knowledgeable authorities, they will likely be more inclined to carry out relevant research before coming to Canada.

Results also show that regulators, governments and other interested organizations must promote the message that a great deal of planning and care is necessary to pursue a profession in Canada. In other words, it is not sufficient to simply provide information to immigrants - rather pre-arrival supports must be placed in the context of the necessity, time and effort required to fully plan for a career in Canada. Focus group participants indicated that messaging which effectively conveys the level of effort and planning involved in becoming licensed and integrated in a given profession would encourage prospective immigrants to access existing information more thoroughly than they typically do now.



Being encouraged to plan better also mentally prepares newcomers for the difficulties that lie ahead of them when they arrive in Canada to pursue their careers.

#### *Participants Spent an Exceptional Amount of Time Discussing Alternative Career Information*

Given that newcomers need to be told the importance of planning all aspects of entry into their profession, participants indicated that they would have liked to have known more about alternate careers in their home countries. This is perhaps one of the most important findings of the study, and can help encourage uptake of pre-arrival information by providing information that will be exceptionally valuable to newcomers pursuing professions in Canada. While in their home countries, some participants did not feel they had to do any pre-arrival work regarding an alternate career because they realize it was regulated, or that it would be easy to enter. This was further reinforced by exposure to help-wanted ads on employment websites. When participants, who did not prepare well for alternate careers in Canada attempted to pursue them:

- Some were very surprised when they found they were not qualified to practice or it would take too long for them to become eligible to practice in Canada, so they felt as if they had nowhere to turn and had to start all over again.
- Others felt that they could pursue an alternate career as their primary career, but they did not seek out additional information thinking that it would be easy to access.
- A few felt they would engage in an alternate career while pursuing licensure in their desired, regulated career. They would have appreciated knowing more about their relevant alternate careers in their home country.

#### *Most Participants did not know about the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP)*

Participants were asked specifically about their awareness of, and experience with the CIIP program as it may have been a pre-arrival service they could have accessed. While the pool from which participants was drawn likely included a few individuals from countries and time periods where services were not offered, for the most part, awareness (and use) of CIIP was fairly low. Only one or two participants indicated that they may have attended a program that could have been a CIIP session and found it to be positive and worthwhile, providing them with information they considered useful. Such information included contact information for regulators, labour market statistics, details regarding the integration process, and how to obtain employment in their given or related field.

#### *Participants Generally Felt Regulatory Bodies Were Fair, Responsive, Communicative and Transparent*

For the most part, participants had positive experiences dealing with regulatory bodies associated with their respective professions. Even though regulators may appear to place restrictions and roadblocks, individuals feel as if these organizations are fair and responsive. Timeliness was generally viewed in a positive manner. There were some instances where a few participants reported that regulators did take a while to evaluate documents or return communications, but for the most part the consensus was that turnaround times were reasonable. Participants also mentioned that they generally understood the requirements the regulators had for documents and other criteria.

## Summary and Conclusions

Comments gathered from newcomers and key informants consulted as part of this research suggests that setting expectations from the outset of the immigration process is of paramount importance. Many focus group participants indicated a reliance on informal or unofficial sources when planning to immigrate and work in Canada. As a result, a preponderance of confusing, disjointed and sometimes misleading information related to career and licensing requirements is collected and acted upon. Immigration agents, friends, family, and to an extent government communications convey a message to prospective immigrants that their specific skill set and abilities are in need and they will have no problem securing meaningful employment on arrival. For many, the realities associated with meeting licensing standards, upgrading technical and language skills, and securing meaningful employment are often startlingly different than originally anticipated.

The provision of timely, coordinated and accurate information at numerous points throughout the immigration and assessment process, along with opportunities for self-assessment, personal reflection and creating a full profession integration plan can help to align an immigrant's expectations with the realities of the labour market. This is particularly true in the case of those looking to access regulated professions where the requirements, costs and timelines associated with becoming licensed are unfamiliar to many applicants. When emphasis is placed on proper and prudent planning for entry into a profession, immigrants can make more informed decisions regarding licensure in a given profession or perhaps consider an alternate career, either on an interim basis or as a final career choice. With that said, the true utility of these learning opportunities is only realized when they are actually accessed and acted upon by individuals overseas. Hence, understanding and implementing strategies aimed at promoting user "uptake" are critical.

A synthesis of the key informant and focus group findings suggest that the successful uptake of pre-arrival resources is four-pronged in nature: i) quality information and supports are made available for prospective immigrants or applicants; ii) intended audiences access these resources in their home countries; iii) individuals gain an enhanced appreciation of what is involved in becoming licensed and working in their chosen profession, iv) and then take specific actions prior to departure aimed at expediting the assessment/licensure process.

The introduction of the "Pathways to Recognition" (see Appendix A) has been instrumental in focusing the efforts of regulated professions on specific components associated with the integration of skilled immigrants into their respective workforces. With that said, there are aspects of the Pathways (including certain pre-arrival activities) that do not fall strictly within the traditional purview of provincial/territorial regulators.

This fact is borne out in the feedback gathered from the key informant interviews. While clearly describing the steps and policies associated with the assessment and licensure process is most definitely a core activity, the transmission of that information to a nebulous international audience may be outside the mandate and ability of most regulators. The vast majority of those consulted rely on referrals and the fact immigrants "have to come to [them] eventually in order to become licensed to practice" as a means of promoting uptake. Similarly, most key informants see the benefits and regulatory relevance of offering self-assessment tools, while other activities such as helping applicants pass certification exams (with preparation support and practices tests) and providing in-person support and counselling are not universally viewed as core regulator activities.

Consider also the feedback provided by focus group participants. The research undertaken by immigrants in their home countries prior to departure was generally *ad hoc* in nature. Many of those consulted relied at least equally, if not more so on friends, family and colleagues for information compared to regulators and government websites. In many cases where research was undertaken, more time was spent seeing if there were current job openings in their fields (i.e. through Workopolis and Monster website searches) than understanding the regulatory environment and how to become licensed.

When formulating future initiatives in this area, it is unreasonable to expect skilled immigrants to behave as mechanical economic units. There are varied reasons why, upon arrival in Canada, some skilled immigrants may choose not to pursue licensure or work opportunities in the regulated professions. That is to say, just because an individual works as a physiotherapist (for example) in their home country, it does not mean that their sole focus when immigrating is to practice physiotherapy. As shown in a recent survey of 3,181 ECA clients (i.e. skilled immigrants applying under the Federal Skilled Worker Program), there are a number of motivations for immigrating to Canada that are equally, or more important, than career considerations. These include: better standards of living (i.e. safety, comfort), political stability, family circumstances (i.e. reunion, marriage, divorce), and better educational opportunities<sup>31</sup>.

Ideally, individuals working in a given regulated profession would fully research the requirements to become licensed in Canada. Ideally, they would then gather all necessary documentation and begin the assessment process overseas. Ideally, all would arrive in Canada licence-ready, fully aware of labour market conditions and employer expectations. But the fact is that immigrants (skilled or otherwise) are humans and have priorities that often transcend career concerns.

A holistic appreciation of these findings points to the need for a collective acceptance among policy makers that prospective immigrants cannot be solely relied upon to undertake comprehensive research related to accessing and working in regulated professions. At the very least, government authorities and other reliable sources of information, such as service provider organizations, need to strongly encourage individuals to create a professional integration plan to inform and guide their integration into the Canadian workforce.

Proactive or “push” strategies seem necessary to ensure that two to three fundamental messages are delivered to skilled immigrants while overseas. Focus group feedback suggests that a reliance on passive strategies in this regard (i.e. links or informal referrals to quality resources) is unlikely to reach an overseas audience and yield desired benefits. In general, the national associations consulted have developed an excellent suite of pre-arrival resources but, by their own admission, have a difficult time implementing proactive marketing strategies to an international audience. By contrast, Express Entry and ECA providers have a direct connection with skilled workers looking to come to Canada – and by their own admission, are offering little in the way of professions-specific pre-arrival content. Moreover, participants in the focus groups are reaching out to friends, colleagues and even job sites as sources of information that they perceive to be as, if not more credible than regulators themselves. Enhanced coordination between regulators and an already developed communications infrastructure can help to

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<sup>31</sup> World Education Services (2015), “Considering Canada”. See: [https://www.wes.org/ca/info/WES\\_Considering\\_Canada\\_report.pdf](https://www.wes.org/ca/info/WES_Considering_Canada_report.pdf)

push quality information out at key points in the immigration process resulting in significantly improved uptake.

To this end, a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities is required. This pertains to the entire Pathways to Recognition generally, but also specifically to the development and delivery of pre-arrival resources. It is unlikely that a defined division of labour related to this issue will emerge organically. Instead, leadership, direction and funding provided by the Government of Canada and its immigration partner organizations will be essential in ensuring that pre-arrival resources are kept current by regulatory bodies and that key messages are delivered proactively to skilled immigrants abroad through established channels.

## Recommendations

The following five recommendations are aimed at improving the uptake of pre-arrival information at key points in the immigration process. These are directed at a specific audiences including: The Government of Canada, ECA providers, regulators and national associations.

### Clearly Define Responsibilities

The national associations consulted as part of this investigation are committed to providing clear and actionable information to prospective immigrants/applicants in their home countries. An abundance of useful content and interactive tools have been developed in this regard. Less evident is the responsibility and ability of regulated professions (of different sizes and with varying degrees of resources) to effectively push this information out to individuals considering immigrating to Canada and working in a given profession. Focus group participants indicated that the type of pre-arrival research they undertake can be fragmented – key messages related to the regulatory environment and nature of practice in Canada are often missed. Quality information needs to be paired with a reliable delivery system to ensure a healthy uptake of pre-arrival resources. To best achieve this, regulators should be accountable for creating and maintaining pre-arrival content and the Government of Canada and its immigration partner organizations responsible for delivering that content to the intended overseas audience.

### Make Use of Existing Infrastructure

There are already a number of excellent communication channels in place which could be used to actively push profession-specific, pre-arrival information to an international audience. Educational credential assessment (ECA) providers and the Express Entry interface are often the first points of contact for those planning on immigrating to Canada. At present, much of the information associated with these channels travels one way – from the applicant to the assessing agency. These channels could be enhanced to allow for a two-way flow of information. At a minimum, processes could be adapted whereby the entry of certain NOC codes or submission of certain credentials (which may require a license to practice) would automatically trigger a short message about regulated professions and links to the appropriate national associations. Having then navigated to the appropriate website, users would be encouraged to learn more about the profession in Canada and the steps required to become licensed.

On a related note, additional uptake of existing pre-arrival services funded by federal and provincial governments (for example CIIP) be encouraged. As noted, the vast majority of users find the program instrumental in advancing their understanding of the assessment and licensure process in Canada – client satisfaction ratings are consistently high. And yet historically, the program has been significantly undersubscribed when compared with the number of eligible skilled workers admitted to Canada over the past decade. It is recommended that publically-funded pre-arrival programs be aggressively marketed to those admitted to Canada<sup>32</sup> to encourage improved uptake. Moreover, all national associations representing regulated professions should partner with organizations delivering pre-arrival

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<sup>32</sup> Under the *Canada-Québec Accord relating to immigration and temporary admission of aliens* (1991), Québec is responsible for selection of immigrants and for their integration. The Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion offers information sessions on living, working and studying in Québec as well as Québec's immigration procedures. These free sessions are designed for people who plan to immigrate or stay in Québec. They are given in several languages by a ministry counsellor. They are offered online and in person in certain countries.

services overseas as a means of fielding profession-specific inquiries and encouraging individuals to begin the licensure process as soon as possible.

### Structure Messaging in a Tiered Fashion

Key informants recommend that pre-arrival information should be focused around two or three key points; any additional detail is likely to confuse individuals and detract from these central messages. Focus group findings support this contention. There is generally enough information available to immigrants who choose to access to it, but digesting it in an orderly and meaningful fashion can be difficult. Putting this information into some sort of context or plan can help individuals take meaningful action and make appropriate decisions.

Structuring messaging in a tiered fashion can help in this regard as it provides applicants with specific, critical, bite-size pieces of information without overwhelming them. Based on conversations with key informants and newcomers to Canada, a hierarchy of key points seems to exist. The following suggests three tiers of messaging that should be considered when preparing communication material directed at a pre-arrival audience.

#### Tier 1

- You need to make a plan on how you intend to pursue your career before you leave for Canada.
- Determine the time, cost and effort involved in pursuing your career. Consider availability of educational courses and upgrading, as well as the availability of internships and Canadian experience necessary to obtain licensing and employment. Investigate your primary career and equally investigate an alternate career – be fully prepared to pursue both.

#### Tier 2

- Becoming licensed to work in a regulated profession can be very challenging in terms of time, money and effort.
- Many skilled immigrants do not end up working in their chosen careers – you should also research and consider alternate careers in your field.
- You need to gather all relevant documentation before you leave (transcripts, diplomas, employment letters, references, etc.) – this will be much harder to do when you are in Canada. Gather documents for your planned career and any alternate careers.
- Find the provincial regulator of your profession, the body that administers the licensing exam for your profession, educational institutions that teach your profession, and courses you may need to take. Determine their documentation and qualification requirements. Ask the provincial regulator about the likelihood of working in your profession.

#### Tier 3

- Determine where you plan on living and research labour market conditions in that area – Canada is made up of a number of very different regions each with their own set of economic conditions.
- Investigate your economic situation and how it will influence pursuing your career.

- Learn what the practice of your profession in Canada looks like, including Canadian practice requirements, English/French language requirements and cultural expectations regarding practice.
- Research settlement and language services located in the area in which you plan on living.

### Formalize a Two-Stage Approach to Credential Assessment

The assessment of educational credentials is a very important and valuable form of pre-arrival support. The notion of having immigrants as ready as possible to work in their chosen professions (regulated or otherwise) on arrival in Canada is also an admirable and intelligent policy goal. With that said, the provision of a full assessment of credentials by a regulatory body as part of the immigration process may not be the best allocation of resources. Most generic evaluations can be carried out in a matter of days and at a relative low cost to international clients. By comparison, assessments for the purposes of licensure are far more time-consuming, resource intensive and expensive as the protection of the public is involved. At present, most regulatory bodies simply do not have the resources to assess individuals for immigration purposes in addition to their current workloads. Add to this the fact that a large proportion of international applicants who request an education credential assessment will never be admitted to, or choose not to come to Canada and the question is begged: how much effort should be spent on individuals who may never immigrate here?

A two-stage process is therefore recommended whereby immigrants applying under the Federal Skilled Worker stream would obtain a generic assessment of their educational credentials from an IRCC-designated agency for determining immigration points. Licensing bodies should then be required to recognize, at a minimum, the findings of the assessment pertaining to the validity of the documentation presented and the status of the educational program and institution. In this way, duplicate documentation would not have to be sourced by the applicant and the preliminary, generic assessment would serve to expedite the credential assessment carried out for the purposes of licensure. In short, assessment agencies and regulators should focus on doing what they do best - the former confirming the authenticity of diplomas/transcripts and offering an opinion on its Canadian comparability and the latter performing a detailed review of educational content and previous related work experience for the purposes of licensure.

### Keep Pre-Arrival Resources Free of Charge

As noted by one key informant many international applicants seeking licensure in Canada simply “don’t know what they don’t know”. Pre-arrival information is designed to help address this deficiency and allow prospective immigrants to make educated decisions on where and how they fit into the Canadian labour market. According to many of the national associations consulted, online self-assessment modules have been very successful in encouraging applicants to assimilate this type of information. These tools need to be updated periodically to ensure their continuing relevance. Administrators of a number of these resources, initially developed with pilot funding (now expired), are now resorting to charging applicants in order to recoup maintenance costs. This has had the effect of reducing overall usage and inevitably resulted in applicants who have less of an appreciation of the licensure and practice environment than they would have had after undergoing a self-assessment. It is therefore strongly encouraged that governments continue to fund the development and ongoing maintenance of this type of resource. In comparison with other forms of immigration programming, supporting the

development and dissemination of pre-arrival information is inexpensive and can yield significant benefits to skilled newcomers, regulatory bodies, governments and the Canadian economy as a whole.



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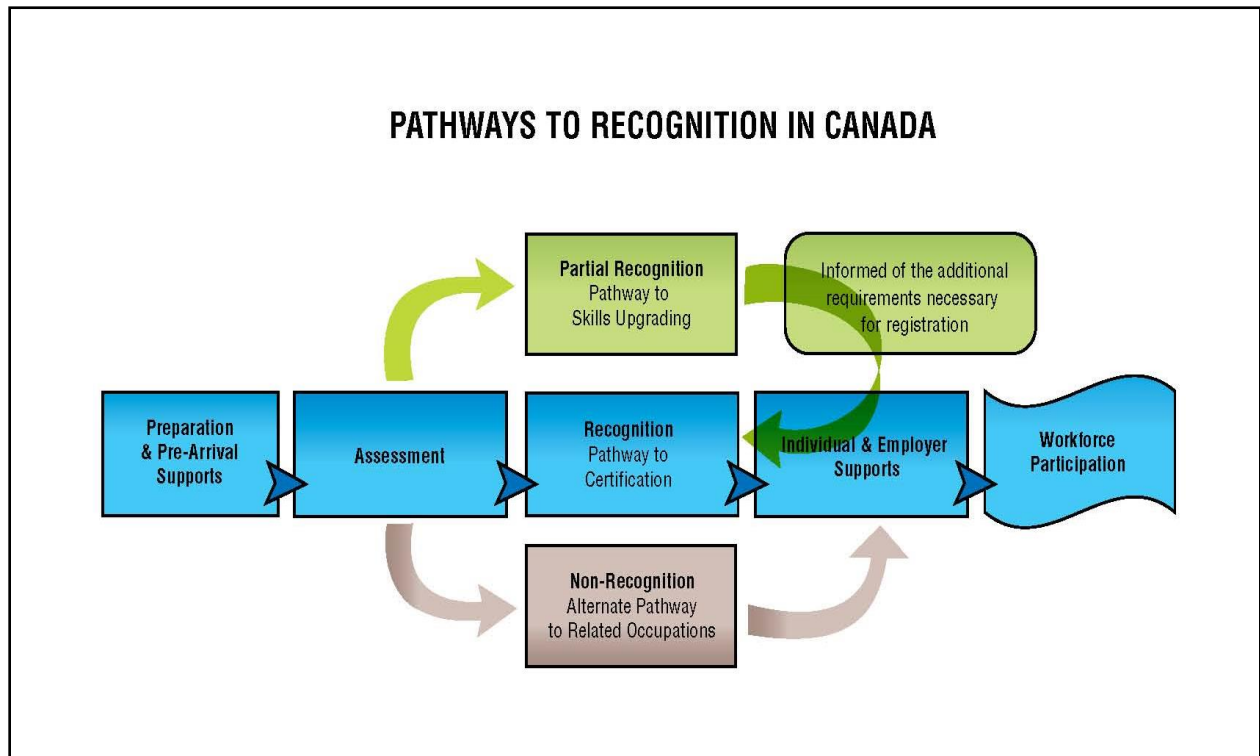
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## Appendix A: Pathways to Recognition in Canada

(from the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications)



## Appendix B: Key Informant Interview – Questions

### Key Informant Interview (General Pre-Arrival) – Questions

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Name/Type of Pre-Arrival Support</b>
<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Question 1:</b> How did you design the site/tool/support with immigrants in mind? What examples, if any did you use?	
<b>Question 2:</b> What results or measurable outcomes do you hope to realize from individuals using this pre-arrival site/tool/support while still in their home country?	
<b>Question 3:</b> What efforts were made to ensure that the site/tool/support is easy to navigate and access? Is it linked/connected with other similar resources?	
<b>Question 4:</b> What measures have you taken to improve use/uptake? What efforts are made to market the site/tool/support to an overseas audience?	
<b>Question 5:</b> How do you know your site/tool/support is having a desired effect and reaching its intended audience? Do you have website statistics that you monitor and can share with us?	
<b>Question 6:</b> Do you have any changes or modifications planned in the future to improve the overall uptake of this resource? What kind of help would you benefit from in this regard?	
<b>Question 7:</b> How have you ensured the long-term sustainability of the site/tool/support both in terms of financing/cost and keeping associated content current?	
<b>Question 8:</b> What advice would you have to other regulated professions looking to develop pre-arrival resources for international applicants?	

## Key Informant Interview (ECA Providers) – Questions

<b>Organization</b>	<b>ECA Provider</b>
<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Question 1:</b> How many ECA assessments do you conduct annually?	
<b>Question 2 (for generic providers only):</b> Are there specific professions/credentials you are seeing a lot of?	
<b>Question 3:</b> Do you provide any additional information (i.e. licensing requirements, Canadian standards, labour market conditions) to applicants along with their assessment?	
<b>Question 4:</b> Do you feel that the current form of the ECA does a good job of setting individuals' expectations in regards to the "Canadian value" of their credentials? Yes/No – why?	
<b>Question 5:</b> What modifications could be made to the ECA system to provide relevant and actionable information to individuals in their home country?	
<b>Question 6:</b> Can you comment on the alignment between the ECA and the licensure process for regulated professions? What can be done to enhance this?	
<b>Question 7:</b> Do you have any changes or modifications planned in the future to improve the overall effectiveness of this service? What kind of help would you benefit from in this regard?	
<b>Question 8:</b> What advice would you have to other organizations and regulated professions looking to become CIC-designated ECA providers?	

## Appendix C: Focus Group Moderator's Guide and Recruitment Material

### Introduction

- Brian Bauman, Thinklounge Research
- Focus Groups are a type of Market Research. They allow us to understand what people think and feel about a subject on a more in-depth basis. I have a set of questions, but where the real magic in focus groups happens is when you talk to each other, and ask each other questions, and I in-turn have the opportunity to ask you questions based on what I hear.
- I'm called a **moderator** as opposed to a leader, because my job is to **moderate** the discussion – to make sure that I hear from everyone in a fair and unbiased way.

### Subject of Focus Groups

*What we are going to talk about today is the quality of information you received in your home country regarding the profession you are pursuing in Canada. We are going to talk about this in three broad areas:*

- The information you received in your home country – more specifically the type of information you received, where you received it and what you think was missing.
- How the information you received (or did not receive) has impacted you as you pursue your career in Canada.
- Suggestions from you based on the above two regarding information that should be presented to immigrants considering pursuing professional careers in Canada.
- *One important note – you are from different countries and pursuing many different professions. I am aware of this as I moderate the groups. My goal is not so much to get specific information for a specific profession, but rather get information that could be applied to all professions generally across Canada. So if we talk about a particular profession and some information that could be provided for that profession, I may ask and be interested in seeing if that information could be useful for other professions.*

### Standard Elements of Focus Groups

- I am not selling anything
- All information is kept confidential. Don't release names, or refer to anyone in a report.
- You can exchange information if you wish
- Groups are being recorded but not observed. Recording is just for me. Not used in any way.

### In Home Country

- What, if anything, did you think about in regard to pursuing your profession in your home country? What thoughts did you have? What questions did you have? Where did you turn for answers? What did you know about pursuing your profession in Canada?
- Where did you look? Who did you consult (Probe – CIC, regulator, friends, family, gov't websites, job search sites, others...)? How did you find-out about these sources?
- How useful was this information/tool/activity/support to you?

- What was missing? What information did you not have? What questions were still left unanswered in the information you had?
- How easy was the information/tool/activity/support to access? How easy was the information to understand?
- Did any profession offer something like exams in your home country? Seminars in your home country? Training in your home country? Applications online that you could complete? Accelerated programs? Someone you could talk to directly at the regulator/college?
- Did anyone get a letter from Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC) discussing a program called CIIP (Canada Immigrant Integration Program)? Did you use CIIP? How helpful was it?

### ***In Canada***

- What I would like to do now is go briefly around the room and have each of you just spend two minutes and have each of you tell me where you are in your process. **[Moderator to pull-out and question based on resources that could have been helpful to participants as they tell their stories]**
- Once you came to Canada, how useful was the information/tool/activity/support to you? How did it help? Did it hinder in any way?
- Where are you now as a result of the information that you had?
- Given where you are now, what information was missing from your home countries? What do you wish you had in your home countries in terms of:
  - Information
  - Tools
  - Activities
  - Other supports
- When you look at where you are now:
  - Do you consider that the regulator that you applied for certification/licensure provided a clear explanation of the rationale for their assessment decision?
  - Do you think the decision was fair, objective and reasonable?
  - Do you consider that the assessment processes required for your professional certification/licensure were efficient and timely?

### ***Assessing the Value of Specific Pre-Arrival Supports***

- Document gathering requirements/processes
- Costs of licensure
- Pass rates, country-specific issues, knowing a path for each country/school
- Self-assessment tools
- In-country exams
- Courses you can do in your home country
- Language, culture training
- Alternate career information
- Information about exams
- Information on the length of time it takes to become licensed

- Given what you have experienced in Canada, and based on the information you had accessed in your home country...
  - How useful would it have been for you? How would you have used the support in your home country? When you came to Canada?
  - What decisions would it allow you to make?
  - Who should tell you about this support? How should it be communicated?
  - How can it be improved?
  
- Based on everything we have discussed, what pre-arrivals supports do you wish you would have had in your home country to help make entering your profession in Canada easier? What else can you think of?
  
- What would get you to read the material that we have discussed, or the material that is available to you in your home countries. Discuss:
  - Awareness
  - Messages (bring-in relevant information from other parts of discussion. Discuss attitudes that have to shift.)

## **INTRODUCTORY LETTER**

Are you new to Canada and pursuing a regulated profession? If you are, we'd love to hear your experiences. Thinklounge Research, a consulting firm with significant experience advising on integrating Canadian newcomers into regulated professions is holding **[both in-person and telephone]** focus groups, so that everyone regardless of location can participate. We'd like to hear people's opinions from all across Canada. The focus groups will be held in early March.

The focus groups are two hours long, and we want to speak with individuals who have been in Canada for a few years. If you qualify, we will invite you to participate in one of four focus groups where you will have an opportunity to discuss your experiences pursuing a professionally regulated occupation in Canada. Within the groups, you will have the opportunity to meet other newcomers to Canada who are also pursuing similar occupations. Your participation will help outcomes for other newcomers seeking to enter regulated professions in Canada.

Those who qualify and attend the groups by phone or in person will be compensated for their time.

Space in the groups is limited. For more information, and to sign-up to attend, please visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/wes-newcomer>

## **Reminder Letter**

If you are new to Canada and pursuing a regulated profession, we would like to remind you about the focus groups we are holding in early March. Space is filling-up quickly, but if you want to participate please visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/wes-newcomer> to register.

Participation is open to everyone across Canada, as we are holding both in-person groups and telephone groups. Those who are chosen to participate and who attend will be compensated for their time. Your participation will help outcomes for new Canadians seeking to enter regulated professions.

Our cut-off for registration is February 26 – just two days from now, so please visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/wes-newcomer> to register and find out more.



## **ONLINE SCREENER**

Thank you wanting to sign-up for and attend a focus group for recent immigrants to Canada pursuing regulated professions. During the groups we want to hear about what your experiences have been like pursuing your profession, including some of the information you may have received about your profession while you were in your home country. To help us select the right people for these focus groups, please fill-out the following information. If you are selected, we will contact you via phone and email to provide details of the focus groups.

This is your opportunity to improve outcomes for those entering regulated professions and to discuss your experiences with other individuals like yourself!

- 1) How many years have you been in Canada?

Under 1 year

At least 1 year, but less than 2 years

At least 2 years, but less than 3 years

At least 3 years, but less than 4 years

At least 4 years, but less than 5 years

5 years or more

I do not live in Canada at the moment **TERMINATE**

- 2) In your home country, which of the following professions, if any, were you licensed to practice...

Architecture, Audiology/Speech Language

Pathology, Dentistry, Engineering, Engineering

Technology, Financial Auditing, Accounting, Geoscience

Law, Nursing, Medical Laboratory Technology,

Medical Radiation Technology, Midwifery,

Occupational Therapy, Pharmacy, Medicine,

Physiotherapy, Psychology, Teaching

Other occupation

**TERMINATE**

- 3) Are you actively pursuing **[Insert Profession from Q2]** in Canada?

Yes

No

**Terminate**

- 4) Which of the following best describes your progress to date in pursuing your regulated profession?

I am licensed/certified and am now working in my field  
I am licensed/certified but not working in my field  
I am challenging my final tests/exams for licensing/certification  
I am doing practical/supervised work necessary to enter the profession  
I am taking a bridging program/Canadian courses necessary to enter the profession  
The regulator/College is evaluating my application  
I am gathering documents necessary to submit to the regulator/College for my application

- 5) When you were in your home country, prior to arriving in Canada, did you **actively** research or access information about pursuing your profession in Canada?

Yes, I actively researched information about my profession in Canada from my home country

No, I did not actively research information about my profession in Canada from my home country

We would like to invite you to attend a focus group with us.

The focus groups will be held on the following days and times (**either in-person or on the phone**) Please select the ones you wish to attend. **NOTE** - you may select as many as you want, but you will only attend one. Groups 1 & 2 are in-person in Toronto. Groups 3 & 4 are telephone groups, and anyone throughout Canada can participate.

Group #1, March 1 6:30pm - 8:30pm EASTERN TIME, In-Person, Toronto on Danforth Ave

Group #2, March 2 6:30pm – 8:30pm EASTERN TIME, In-Person, Toronto on Danforth Ave

Group #3, March 3 10:00am – Noon EASTERN TIME, Conference Call Phone Group

Group #4, March 3 8:00pm – 10:00pm EASTERN TIME, Conference Call Phone Group

Please provide us with the following information so that we may extend an invitation to the focus groups to you.

First Name:

Last Name:

Best Phone Number To Reach You:

Alternate Phone Number To Reach You:

Email Address:

Note that the above information is used only for the purposes of administrating these focus groups. It is not given to anyone else. It is stored securely and deleted when the focus groups are completed.

If you wish to contact us with any questions about the focus groups, you may do so by contacting:

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