FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION AND ASSESSMENT: AN INTRODUCTION

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The scale of recent skilled migration to Canada[1]

By 2005, 19.2% of the Canadian population was foreign-born, the world's highest proportion following Australia (24.6%). As early as the 2001 Census, the nation included 3,374,057 degree-qualified[2] immigrants and 3,801,118 with post-secondary diplomas or certificates (see Table 1). Between 1996 and 2001, newly arriving immigrants were more than twice as likely as the Canadian-born to be degree-qualified (37% compared to 15%). While male immigrants to Canada were much more highly educated than females (41% with degrees compared to 33%), both far exceeded the credential norm for the domestic workforce (15% of males and 16% of females respectively). As Kustec et al. show in this volume, credential recognition matters disproportionately to such skilled immigrants. Within the past decade, 1.2 million immigrants have reached Canada with the intention to work. Of the one-third who hold professional qualifications, at least 50% target fields requiring some type of training or formal credential. While just 15% of Canadians work in regulated occupations, this proportion rises to 34% when we look at the landed immigrants who arrived by 1996 and 2005 and for whom "intended occupation is known."

Table 1: Canada-born and foreign-born persons holding degree- and diploma-level qualifications, immigrants grouped by time of arrival in Canada, 2001.

Origin	Arrival	Degree or higher	Post-sec. diploma or certificate	Post-sec., no diploma or certificate	High school or less	Number
Canada-born		15.0	19.0	20.1	46.0	16,009,426
Foreign-born	Pre-1991	20.8	19.9	18.7	40.7	2,657,064
	1991-1996	22.1	17.1	18.5	42.3	719,443
	1996-2001	36.6	14.9	14.2	34.3	726,880
Foreign-born	Total	23.8	18.5	17.9	39.8	4,103,387
Total						20,112,813

Editor's note: These data are drawn from a sample of immigrants who entered Canada under the provisions of the former Immigration Act.

Source: 2001 Census (Canada), prepared for *Labour Market Outcomes for Migrant Professionals: Canada and Australia Compared*, L. Hawthorne, Statistics Canada, 2007 (forthcoming).

In 2004, Canada selected 133,746 people in the economic migration category and, in particular, substantial numbers of points-tested degree-qualified principal applicants (PAs). Skilled immigrants constituted 59.6% of the total planned intake at this time (224,346 people), greatly exceeding the targets set for the family (51,500-56,800) and refugee and humanitarian (30,800-33,800) categories, which also include workers with skills. By 2005, economic flows had risen to 156,310; this included skilled workers, business immigrants and provincial and territorial nominees (Cardozo and Guilfoyle, this volume).

Unprecedented numbers of these incoming immigrants held professional credentials. As early as 2001, immigrants constituted some half of all degree-qualified workers in the fields of engineering (50%), information technology (51%), and architecture and building (49%) (see Table 2). For example, between 1991 and 2003, there were 85,363 engineers who entered Canada as PAs in the economic category (CIC 2005),[3] and they were subjected to a degree of pre-migration screening for job-related attributes, including host country language facility and qualification level. Of the total 95,285 engineers in all categories accepted at this time, just 10% (9,922) had arrived through the non-economic family or humanitarian programs. Comparable trends applied in IT, with 91% of degree-qualified arrivals selected through the economic categories.

By contrast, it is important to note that teachers, nurses and doctors typically reached Canada through non-economic intakes, with minimal pre-migration screening occurring from 1991 to 2003:

- Teachers: 37% migrating in economic categories, compared to 63% in the family or humanitarian categories;
- Nurses: 38% in economic categories, compared to 62% in the family or humanitarian categories;
- Doctors: 58% in economic categories, compared to 42% in the family or humanitarian categories (See Table 3).

It seems reasonable to assume that such arrivals would experience greater difficulty securing appropriate Canadian work, given their lack of pre-migration "filtering" by points-based criteria.

The transforming source countries of skilled immigrants

The proportion of very recent (1996-2001) landed immigrants arriving in select professional fields is particularly striking. By 2001, 22% of the total Canadian IT workforce had arrived in the previous five years, in addition to 20% of all engineers, and 16% of architects and builders (16%). The suddenness of these inflows posed a clear risk of "flooding the market," had their professional credentials allowed them to be immediately absorbed.

Principal applicants' regions of origin however ensured that this would not be the case. From 2001 to 2003, China (22%), India (12%), Pakistan (6%) and the Philippines (5%) dominated economic category flows, compared to just 2% of economic principal applicants selected from the United Kingdom and Ireland (see Table 4). When major regions of origin are also considered, the top eight source countries and regions for economic immigrants to Canada between 2001 and 2003 were:

1. China: 21.7%;
2. North West Europe: 17.8%;
3. Other Africa[4] and Middle East: 16.7%;
4. India: 12.2%;
5. Other South and Central America: 6.5%;
6. Other Asia and Pacific: 6.3%;
7. Pakistan: 6.1%;
8. The Philippines: 4.6%.

The latest available data show an even higher dependence on Asia, with primary source countries for economic principal applicants in 2004 being China (18%), India (11%), the Philippines (7%), Pakistan and Romania (4% each) (Hiebert 2006).

As demonstrated in a forthcoming study (Hawthorne 2007), markedly different groups were likely to achieve ready transition to professional employment in the first five years post-migration. These include, most notably, those from South Africa (with over 60% working in their own or another professional field), Australia and New Zealand (close to 60%), United Kingdom and Ireland (over 50%), North West Europe (over 50%) and the United States (close to 50%). Put simply, employers favoured immigrants derived from English-speaking background (ESB) or western countries, characterized by training systems directly comparable to those in Canada. Despite this, from 1996 to 2001 ESB migration to Canada was reduced to negligible levels. For example, just 6% of all medically qualified arrivals, 4% of nurses, 2% of engineers and 2% of IT professionals were immigrants derived from English-speaking background countries (compared to 30%, 43%, 22% and 18% respectively to Australia).

In terms of this economic migration, Canada selected a large number of country of origin groups that are at risk of experiencing unemployment levels three to five times the national norm, including immigrants from China and India (respectively 18% and 12% unemployed in the first five years post-migration). Increasingly, economic immigrants have also possessed first languages other than English or French. According to Hiebert (2006), this is now the prime determinant of differential employment outcomes in a knowledge economy (see also Ferrer et al.). Compounding these problems, unprecedented numbers of new economic immigrants had secured their qualifications in radically

Table 2: Canadian professional workforce (2001) by qualification level and field, birthplace and year of arrival, percentages.

Degree or higher, arrivals by field	Canadian -born	Foreign-born				Number
		All foreign-born	By year of arrival			
			Pre-1991	1991-1996	1996-2001	
Information technology	49.1	50.9	19.4	9.4	22.1	109,292
Engineering	49.6	50.4	21.9	8.7	19.8	287,723
Architecture and building	51.3	48.7	23.7	9.2	15.9	76,749
Medical studies	64.7	35.3	20.9	5.5	8.8	208,140
Nursing	76.6	23.4	15.3	3.5	4.6	91,337
Teacher education	84.8	15.2	11.4	1.8	2.1	515,503
Accounting	64.7	35.3	19.0	6.8	9.6	152,245
Rest of management/commerce	72.7	27.3	14.7	5.0	7.6	384,653
Society and culture, creative arts	75.7	24.3	15.5	3.6	5.2	1,106,842
Natural and physical sciences	64.5	35.5	19.9	5.8	9.8	312,154
Other	77.8	22.2	11.9	3.8	6.5	129,420
Total	**71.0**	**29.0**	**16.4**	**4.7**	**7.9**	**3,374,057**

Editor's note: These data are drawn from a sample of immigrants who entered Canada under the provisions of the former Immigration Act.

Source: Hawthorne 2007 (forthcoming).

Table 3: Canada landed degree-qualified immigrants by category and occupation, 1991-2003 arrivals.

Category	Occupation	Arrival years			Total
		1991-1996	1996-2001	2001-2003	
Economic immigrants, p.a.*	Information technology	6,909	15,940	8,788	31,635
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Engineering	13,224	42,883	29,258	85,363
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Architecture and building	4,446	10,832	6,693	21,970
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Medical studies	3,219	3,625	2,671	9,513
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Nursing	2,417	126	293	2,834
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Teacher education	3,019	2,304	2,360	7,682
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Accounting	3,560	7,113	3,473	14,145
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Rest of management/commerce	10,331	14,908	9,917	35,154
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Society and culture, creative arts	4,261	7,135	4,334	15,728
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Natural and physical sciences	5,125	13,179	6317	24,619
Economic immigrants, p.a.	Other and no occupation code	132,113	107,088	54,149	293,349
Subtotal		**188,619**	**225,127**	**128,247**	**541,992**
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Information technology	989	1,227	632	2,847
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Engineering	4,127	4,010	1,785	9,922
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Architecture and building	2,111	1,519	697	4,326
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Medical studies	3,090	2,349	1,345	6,783
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Nursing	2,330	1,475	874	4,678
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Teacher education	6,637	4,169	2,189	12,994
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Accounting	2,048	2,233	1,236	5,516
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Rest of management/commerce	7,053	4,773	2,356	14,181
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Society and culture, creative arts	3,279	2,587	1,331	7,197
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Natural and physical sciences	1,792	1,633	561	3,985
All other immigrants with an identified occupation	Other and no occupation code	1,072,537	794,902	434,445	2,301,883
Subtotal		**1,105,989**	**820,875**	**447,449**	**2,374,312**
TOTAL		**1,294,607**	**1,046,001**	**575,696**	**2,916,304**

* p.a. refers to Principal Applicants.
Editor's note: These data are drawn from a sample of immigrants who entered Canada under the provisions of the former Immigration Act.

Source: Compiled from landed immigrant arrivals data provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005, Hawthorne 2007 (forthcoming).

different and often under-resourced training systems (as noted by Lemay in this volume, many of those defined as "engineers" would be deemed to be technologists in terms of the educational equivalence to Canada). Initial training differences were exacerbated by what I have previously termed "technological fit" or the degree to which immigrants' post-graduation experience was rooted in comparably advanced systems. Examples of this would be mechanical engineers with hands-on computer-aided design expertise or doctors and nurses experienced in western pharmacology and high-tech medical systems (Hawthorne 2005).

The human capital model of economic migrant selection

It is important to note that the human capital model has dominated Canada's recent selection of economic immigrants, allowing them to arrive prior to having their credentials screened, which is in marked contrast to the system now operating in Australia. As described in a recent report:

> While education level matters for Principal Applicants, field and place of qualification do not, in a context where labour market demand is seen as hard to predict and 'individuals can expect to have several careers over their working lives'. According to Hiebert (2006) the prevailing Canadian view is that 'well-trained flexible individuals... who have experience in the labour force' should be able to 'adapt to rapidly changing labour market circumstances'. In consequence 'general' rather than 'specific' competence is

sought – Canadian selection criteria admitting Principal Applicants with limited host country language skills, non-recognised qualifications, and in fields of minimal labour market demand on an equal basis to those with more immediately sought after attributes. (Birrell, Hawthorne and Richardson 2006, 130-131)

In Australia, by contrast, perceived "employability" has determined economic applicants' eligibility to proceed with migration since 1999. Employability is determined, in part, on the basis of a credential assessment, and principal applicants qualified in regulated fields have been required to apply for pre-migration screening by the relevant national or provincial/territorial licensing body. This is a strategy designed to avoid years of forced labour market displacement or skill discounting due to non-recognition of qualifications. Reflecting the existence of niche economies, 20 bonus points are allocated to applicants qualified in fields in demand, which is a measure associated with highly beneficial outcomes. Given the importance of host country language ability, candidates have been required to achieve "vocational" or higher level scores on the independently administered International English Language Testing System (or approved equivalent), which is administered globally by the British Council for a modest fee. Within two years of Australia's abandonment of the human capital model of selection, 81% of economic immigrants were securing work within six months of arrival (compared to 60% in Canada), a figure rising to 83% by 2006.[5] Far greater proportions of economic immigrants in Australia than in Canada now use their credentials immediately to secure employment, access professional or managerial status, and earn high salaries. Vastly improved outcomes have been achieved by principal applicants from visible minorities or otherwise disadvantaged groups, including older immigrants and females (Hawthorne 2007 forthcoming).

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Differential training systems

Fair assessment of foreign credentials is a difficult and expensive task, which is the reason competency-based bridging programs are often a highly effective solution (Hawthorne 2002). In medicine, for instance, the latest available data show courses to have proliferated globally in the past 30 years, principally in Asia (India, China and the Philippines) and Africa. By March 2005, the International Medical Education Directory listed 1,981 such schools across 170 nations. However, to date, minimal information is available on the calibre of curricula, clinical training, student selection, or the length of training across many Asian and African courses (Boulet et al. 2005).

Such informational barriers affect many regulated fields, as is illustrated in the following case study of nurse education in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, which has in the past decade been the source of substantial internationally trained nurses for the West. For one single geopolitical nation, the credential research process required correspondence and documentation in six languages across 13 states within the newly constructed nation. Wholesale educational change had occurred between 1991 and the present, when the country began to be increasingly influenced by the European Union. Within this decade, nurse training had been transformed by war, partition and urgent health service shortages, which in some periods led to a serious abbreviation of study, followed by reversion to training norms after peace. Despite the researchers' best efforts, in-country nursing bodies had been difficult to locate, with attempts to secure credential information eliciting minimal or no response. A further complication concerned the division between "elite" and baseline nurse training institutions (both awarding "registered nurse" credentials in the Former Yugoslavia Republic in the past), as well as the relative calibre of the university compared to college and hospital systems. Within a context such as this, it could be impossible for credential recognition bodies to secure details about the calibre of curricula, clinical training, subject range, level of supervision, or immigrants' expertise at specific points in time. Unless a Canada-based competency-based protocol is to be adopted (Hawthorne 2002), these data are essential for assessing the registerability of individual nurses (Henry 2005).

The latest available global rankings confirm a substantial gulf between the stature of tertiary institutions in "developed" and "developing" nations, correlated with length of academic tradition and, more importantly, the availability of financial resources. In August 2006, the highly regarded Shanghai Jiao Tong University ranking system, which is viewed as relatively unbiased, categorized the top 500 world institutions as follows:

- 206 in Europe (overwhelmingly located in North West Europe), including 43 in the United Kingdom, and 40 in Germany;
- 197 in the Americas (167 in the United States, 22 in Canada, and just 7 in all of Central and South America [including 1 in the top 150]);
- 92 in the Asia-Pacific (32 in Japan, 16 in Australia, 14 in China [none ranked in the top 150, and with 2 of the top 4 ranked institutions in Hong Kong], 9 in South Korea, 7 in Israel, 5 in New Zealand, 4 in Taiwan, 2 in Singapore, and just 2 in India [neither ranked in the top 300]); and
- 5 in the Africas (4 in South Africa, 1 in Egypt, with no other African or Middle Eastern country listed). (Shanghai Jiao Tong University 2006)

Very comparable patterns were evident in The Times Higher Education Supplement Top 200 (2006) and the Top 100 Asia Pacific Universities rankings (Shanghai Jiao Tong University 2005). Such data suggest the quality of education to be highly variable in terms of major economic migrant source countries to Canada, despite the intellectual calibre and adaptive capacity of incoming immigrants (Sweetman 2005). As Adams affirms in this volume:

> As the number of foreign-trained professionals in Canada increases, professional bodies are faced with an eclectic array of practitioners with training that may differ substantially from our own. There is no guarantee that they possess the skills, background and approach deemed essential by practitioners in Canada. Standards remain a concern.

Faced with this, regulatory bodies and employers typically adopt "risk-adverse" and at times prejudicial strategies (Adey, this volume). According to Kustec et al. (this volume):

> The extent to which various factors are related to credential recognition problems is not well understood. Factors may include: newcomers' lack of knowledge about how to have skills recognized, employers' lack of knowledge about foreign credentials themselves, and a lower quality of foreign credentials relative to domestic qualifications versus market barriers caused by professional association protectionism and broader societal discrimination.

The increasing significance of foreign credential recognition to Canada

In the light of recent research findings, growing debate exists in Canada on the effectiveness of the human capital selection system (Sweetman 2005 and 2006, Sweetman and McBride 2004, Ferrer et al. 2004). A substantial literature now documents skilled immigrants' deteriorating employment outcomes, including their level of economic marginalization, differential wage rates, unemployment and risk of "skills discounting" (e.g. Thompson and Worswick 2004, Picot and Hou 2003, Picot 2004, Reitz 2005). As demonstrated by Kustec et al. in this volume, low income rates for recently arrived immigrants soared from 24.6% in 1980 to 35.8% in 2000. Immigrants may take 20-28 years to reach wage parity with comparably qualified Canadians (if ever), with little value generally ascribed by employers to non-western experience. Severe disparities are evident in select locations; for example "a staggering 52% of recent immigrants...[are] living in poverty" in Hamilton Ontario (Orme, this volume). The latest available data confirm the shocking finding that economic immigrants are now "more likely to enter low-income and be in chronic low-income than their family class counterparts," at a time when the face of the "chronically poor immigrant" has profoundly changed to "one-half... in the skilled economic class, and 41% with degrees... up from 13% in the early 1990s." (Picot et al. 2007).

Within the knowledge economy, evidence suggests that Canadian employers are placing increased rather than diminished emphasis on the recruitment of professionals perceived to be "job-ready." The risk of de-skilling is greatest for visible minority groups, in a context where 73% of immigrants arriving in Canada in the 1990s now fall into this category (in this volume, see Esses et al.; Grant). Without question, the failure to screen credentials pre-migration is a major contributor to negative outcomes. As demonstrated by the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, in the first two years of arrival, lack of Canadian experience (27%) and foreign credential recognition (19%) are perceived by new immigrants to be their most serious labour market barriers, with skilled principal applicants reporting these to be particularly serious (respectively 27% and 24%) (Kustec et al., this volume).

The impact of demographic transition

Canadian concern for immigrants' credential recognition has been galvanized recently by the strength of labour market demand. Equally importantly, it has been spurred by demographic contraction in the context of a "looming war for skills" where there is likely to be unprecedented global competition for workers.

As demonstrated by Sohail Khan (this volume), Canada's fertility rate has dropped to 1.5, and "when the median age in Canada hits 42.5 in 2020, in Europe it will be 52." The consequences of this demographic shift are already being felt across Canada. According to Aleksanian (this volume), for example, between 2002 and 2006, Quebec required 640,000 new workers, "over half of which were to replace retirees." The province aims to increase its annual immigrant intake to 48,000 per year, beginning in 2007, which represents a vital labour force component. In Hamilton, 82% of current labour force growth is dependent on immigrants (Orme, this volume). In Newfoundland and Labrador, almost half of all physicians and almost one third of all specialists are now internationally educated, with their presence being essential to the maintenance of adequate health service provision (Baldacchino et al.).

Table 4: Canada annual flows of permanent economic immigrants by select country and region of birth, 1991-1996, 1996-2001, 2002-2003 (by rank order).

Category	Country of birth	Arrival years			Total
		1991-1996	1996-2001	2001-2003	
Economic immigrants,	China	16,215	42,739	25,711	84,664
principal applicants	India	5,723	18,159	12,680	36,561
	Philippines	16,199	5,606	3,928	25,732
	Pakistan	2,432	12,666	5,956	21,054
	Hong Kong	9,537	4,653	351	14,541
	UK and Ireland	6,042	3,833	1,995	11,870
	Taiwan	2,510	6,256	999	9,764
	Lebanon	4,409	1,683	1,608	7,700
	USA	3,370	2,395	875	6,639
	South Africa	1,556	1,560	698	3,814
	Malaysia/Singapore	1,069	698	450	2,216
	Australia	551	415	220	1,185
	Iraq	428	783	481	1,692
	Indonesia	133	581	423	1,136
	New Zealand	283	159	131	572
	Vietnam	252	189	115	555
	Other Europe	32,531	38,555	21,274	92,360
	Other Africa and Middle East	15,541	24,429	18,910	58,879
	Other South and Central America	12,498	9,588	7,249	29,334
	Other Asia and Pacific	5,937	10,874	6,718	23,528
	Not stated	264	192	42	497
Subtotal		**137,476**	**186,009**	**110,809**	**434,293**
All other immigrants with	Hong Kong	11,477	5,961	304	17,741
an identified occupation	China	3,812	4,578	2,120	10,509
	India	3,594	4,969	2,969	11,531
	Philippines	4,246	3,489	1,936	9,670
	Pakistan	1,092	3,166	1,878	6,135
	UK and Ireland	1,933	1,067	386	3,385
	Taiwan	1,030	2,012	249	3,290
	Lebanon	1,582	467	389	2,437
	Vietnam	1,263	150	22	1,434
	South Africa	528	510	158	1,195
	Malaysia/Singapore	523	245	128	896
	Iraq	309	368	160	837
	USA	194	101	16	310
	Australia	34	23	2	58
	New Zealand	15	8	8	30
	Indonesia	94	109	63	265
	Other Europe	8,054	3,186	1,571	12,810
	Other Africa and Middle East	3,826	4,196	2,532	10,554
	Other South and Central America	4,609	2,079	1,142	7,830
	Other Asia and Pacific	2,738	2,335	1,405	6,478
	Not stated	195	103	6	304
Subtotal		**51,143**	**39,118**	**17,438**	**107,699**
TOTAL		**1,294,607**	**1,046,001**	**575,696**	**2,916,304**

Editor's note: These data are drawn from a sample of immigrants who entered Canada under the provisions of the former Immigration Act.

Source: Compiled from landed immigrant arrivals data provided by Citizenship and Immigration, Canada, 2005, Hawthorne 2007 (forthcoming).

According to Ikura,

> ...by 2011, immigration will account for 100% of Canada's net labour force growth and all net population growth in the next 25 years... Attracting and retaining the best talent, including those with foreign education, training, and work experience, and ensuring that they are able to reach their full potential, is critical to the country's long-term economic success and prosperity... The pressing need to improve the quality, quantity and efficiency of the Canadian labour force is further intensified by the shrinking pool of labour that has resulted from an ageing population... To ensure that Canada has the labour resources that it needs to compete in the international marketplace we will need to look to other sources of labour, including internationally trained professionals.

Effective use of immigrant skills has become a high stakes issue that is critical to Canada's economic competitiveness and efficiency, as well as a social justice imperative. As Donaldson (this volume) notes, solutions to the under-utilization of migrant skills must be found, in a context where "immigration and integration have become mainstream policy concerns in public and private jurisdictions alike" and Canada faces "an emerging challenge with respect to power sharing between native-born and immigrant professionals." This volume is designed to make a timely and catalytic contribution to this solution-finding process. At the same time, the "transferability gap" is inevitably a challenge to anyone who moves globally:

> (T)ransferability depends on the similarity between a migrant's country of origin and (the host nation) as regards labour market requirements, social and cultural conditions, and language... The low value attached to pre-migration work experience does not necessarily imply discrimination. The skills some immigrants bring... may (genuinely) not be as useful to employers as similar skills acquired in (the host country). Some skills are firm-specific, and for that reason lost with change of job. Others, such as knowledge of professional practices and regulations, can be country-specific and therefore lost through migration... Employers might find it hard to evaluate the job record of a migrant with little or no local experience. In addition, immigrants may not have sufficient knowledge either about the labour market or the range of contacts to fully utilise the opportunities that arise (Bureau of Labour Market Research 1986, 7, 115).

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Credential recognition challenges and solutions

The 34 papers contained in this volume highlight a number of debates on credential recognition, while presenting a range of Canadian strategies intended to provide solutions.

The history of regulatory body requirements

It is first essential to acknowledge the uniqueness of the Canadian credential recognition context. According to Adams (this volume), "Canada differs from many nations... in the extent of its legislation, the number of occupations covered, and the number of professions granted self-regulation." Historically, Canadian legislators have been "more likely to embrace professional regulation than their counterparts in England and the United States," with regulation "generally a provincial concern." For example, the field of engineering is tightly regulated in Canada, yet only semi-regulated in the United Kingdom and Australia[6] (Walker, this volume, provides an overview of different international recognition processes).

The legacy of this Canadian history is a credential assessment maze involving an extraordinary array of stakeholders. Ikura's excellent article (this volume) maps the rights and responsibilities of the Government of Canada compared to provincial and territorial governments, in a context where the nation also includes five provincial assessment authorities, 400+ regulatory bodies, 200+ accredited post-secondary institutions, industry sector councils, NGOs, and a "myriad of employers each of which has a distinct role in foreign credential recognition and assessment" (with the power to recognize credentials *not* being vested in governments). Immi-grants are often unaware of this complexity, including the extent to which jurisdictional differences will determine "their ability to secure licensure or approval to work in a particular profession."

The "legitimacy" of credential assessment

Sharp division remains among Canadians on the legitimacy of the credential assessment process, including the extent of any desirable reform. In the view of regulatory bodies (particularly those governing access to public safety fields such as medicine, nursing and engineering), detailed scrutiny of the status of past training is legally essential as well as fair (e.g. Dauphinee; McLennan; Lemay). For example, medical qualification document verification is deemed a vital first step, rather than discriminatory:

> (T)he need to valid(ate) the documents presented is not to challenge them, but to verify two issues from the granting medical school. First, is this person a valid graduate of the school and, second, is this an authentic document? Quality assurance and continuous quality improvement are not barriers. They are constructive processes to improve outcomes for the public (Dauphinee, this volume).

The prevalence of prejudice and professional protectionism

At the same time, as a range of articles in this volume affirm, Canadian assessment of foreign credentials has frequently flouted notions of equity, including the entitlement of immigrants to expect fair and consistent judgments, to mount appeals, and to secure adequate assessment of specialist as well as baseline qualifications. "Equivalence" to Canadian standards may *not* necessarily mean top calibre training.

Guo (this volume) contests the prevailing "deficit model of difference" in Canada, including the pervasiveness of a "democratic racism" he views as designed to absolve Canadian governments of their obligation to liberalize assessment processes. Esses et al. (this volume) view prejudice against visible minorities as the primary issue, although this does not take into account the relatively good outcomes achieved by select recent Commonwealth Asian groups (e.g. from Hong Kong and Singapore).[7] Candy Khan (this volume) highlights the significance of conflict theory, the existence of segmented labour markets and, most importantly, the potential impact of professional protectionism in relation to immigrant outcomes; she suggests it would be disingenuous to believe that regulatory bodies are simply disinterested partners in the screening of international competitors or outsiders.

As noted by Freidson, professional groups have traditionally been "the creators and proponents of particular bodies of knowledge," in a societal context where "knowledge becomes power, and (the) profession stands as the human link between the two." In utilizing such power, regulatory bodies may come to exert "a pervasive social control" masked by "benevolence" – separating knowledge into credentialed and uncredentialed forms, and endorsing the norms it has become appropriate to value. In Friedson's view, the professions' goal in this is invariably self-serving, despite claims to protect the public and serve its interests. In fact, it is to gain a "secure and privileged place in the economy" of host countries through the formation of an "exclusionary shelter in the market in which (members once) had to compete with rival occupations." In line with this strategy, associations typically laud their members' attitudes and skills, promoting them "as honoured servants of public need', dedicated to occupations "especially distinguished from others... through the schooled application of their unusually... complex knowledge" (Freidson 1986, x, 1, 6, 33, 28). A notion of skills hierarchy is integral to the process: the assignment of superior or inferior status to different qualifications, whether acquired in-country or from overseas.

Goldberg goes so far as to refute the need for public discourse about "standards, accountability and measurement." Challenging the notion that skilled immigrants' "transferability gap" should be addressed, she argues that "the focus on immigrant professionals as 'foreign trained' devalues their skills and experience as unknown and not 'up to Canadian standards'", creating a "binary mentality" designed to distort reality while "justify(ing) racism against the other and unify(ing) the dominant group." Within this framework, credential bridging courses may be viewed as "assimilatory" in that they become an undue burden on participants to succeed. Additional research is clearly needed on such issues (see, for example, in this volume, Grant; Janzen and Buhel). The legislative reality, however, is that Canadian regulatory bodies control recognition, and employers cannot be forced to recruit unrecognized immigrants to work. Within this context, as multiple authors attest, employment bridging programs play a vital role in identifying and overcoming the labour market barriers that immigrants face, with many facilitating the achievement of excellent outcomes.

> In the view of regulatory bodies (particularly those governing access to public safety fields such as medicine, nursing and engineering), detailed scrutiny of the status of past training is legally essential as well as fair... medical qualification document verification is deemed a vital first step, rather than discriminatory.

Foreign credential recognition strategies

Human Resources and Social Development Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition (FCR) program has spurred experimentation with diverse credential assessment and bridging models since 2003, and many are documented in this volume. The FCR program's mandate is to provide "an integrated, comprehensive strategy in which over 14 federal departments work together to address the barriers to working in Canada that internationally trained workers face," as a key component of the government's "broader Internationally Trained Workers Initiative' (Bourgeault, this volume). Through this program, $68 million has been allocated over six years for various initiatives, which has been boosted by significant provincial and territorial funding (most notably in Ontario). Bodies likely to "achieve systemic improvements" have been targeted, focused first on areas of labour market shortage (doctors, nurses and engineers, since expanded to physiotherapists, occupational therapists, medical laboratory technologists, medical radiation technologists, pharmacists, cardiology technologists and midwives, as well as select non-regulated fields).

According to Ikura, key FCR measures include credential verification, skills and language assessment "to determine any gaps," résumé writing support, Canadian workplace orientation, and experimentation with new information provision modes (e.g. the Going to Canada Immigration Portal). Multiple experiments are underway, responding to unprecedented immigrant and institutional demand for unemployment solutions. It is critical to note that this occurs in the context of high labour market demand. Diverse stakeholders have been engaged, including federal departments (including Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Health Canada, and Canadian Heritage), provincial governments, regulatory bodies, language industry sector councils, educational institutions, employers, NGOs, and language testing providers. Funding investment by field is considerable, with examples including:

- $75 million allocated by Health Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada for a five-year plan designed to integrate "up to 1,000 physicians, 800 nurses and 500 other health care professionals into the Canadian workforce";
- $5.8 million over three years by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities "to support 15 bridge training programs," with "the Ontario government and the federal government... jointly investing $3.4 million over two years to support 13 projects under the Enhanced Language Training Initiative" (Crutcher and Mann; Bourgeault; McLennan; Goldberg);
- $341,050 allocated by Human Resources and Social Development Canada to the Medical Council of Canada for self-assessment exams and delivery systems, $545,145 for the diagnostic assessment of nurses, $300,000 for the National Midwifery Assessment Strategy and $599,915 for a two-year orientation program for nurses and allied health professionals to the Canadian health care system.

Examination, re-training and bridging course trends

According to Janzen and Buhel (this volume), a 2006 scan conducted by Capacity Canada and the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services showed the operation of 55 initiatives Canada-wide, 16 at the national level and others in six select provinces. Such interventions fell into 10 types, all represented in this volume:

1. Credential assessment;
2. Licensing and regulation;
3. Partnership development (including comprehensive community initiatives);
4. Employer engagement;
5. Internships/mentorship programs;
6. Research, planning and design;
7. Language training;
8. Funding;
9. Information development and sharing;
10. Other labour market support (e.g. bridging programs).

Different occupations use different FCR means, ranging from examinations to competency-based assessment and the provision of industry-specific training. A series of case studies are provided in this volume, defining procedures and select outcomes across national or provincial and territorial jurisdictions for medicine (Dauphinee; Crutcher and Mann; Bourgeault), nursing and allied health (Baldacchino et al.; Bourgeault), the medical laboratory field (McLennan), pharmacy (Mohr and Crandall), engineering (Lemay), the construction trades (Desnoyers; Mitchell), and environmental employment (Moss and Trump).

Lively debate concerning future strategic focus is evident, with successive authors raising:

- Whether credential assessment and advice should commence pre- or post-migration, including the extent to which e-solutions should be used (Murray);
- Whether credential screening is best conducted by the "neutral" private sector (Owen), professional and trade associations (Lemay; Savard; Dauphinee; Mohr and Crandall; McLennan; Desnoyers; Mitchell), or public sector bodies and, if the latter, whether these should be developed at the federal (Dauphinee; Moss and Trump) or provincial and territorial levels (Kelly-Freake; Adams; Ikura; Crutcher and Mann; Aleksanian);
- Whether specific types of providers are best placed to offer credential-related interventions, including the university or college sector (Alboim and Cohl; Murray), regulatory bodies (see above), industry sector councils (Cardozo and Guilfoyle) or regional NGOs, including those capable of incorporating employers (Crawford; Adey; Kelly-Freake; Career Edge);
- Whether re-training and exam preparation represent important and timely strategies (e.g. Lemay; Crutcher and Mann; Bourgeault; Desnoyers; Mohr and Crandall), or unfair demands for immigrants to satisfy the host society's "homogeneity" norms (Goldberg);
- Whether bridging course interventions should be funded as pilot projects or as ongoing educational offerings, and if the latter, who should pay: the migrant, the province, or the employer? (For example, Mohr and Crandall point out that fees in the range of $7,500-$13,000 are required to cover the costs of the University of British Columbia's excellent pharmacy bridging course model);
- Whether employers should be embedded within the process, with mentoring as well as new technologies engaged (e.g. screened net-based databases designed for outreach to employers) (Crawford; Career Edge; Sohail Khan);
- Whether legal reform represents the best solution, such as the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act*, which was passed in Ontario in December 2006 (Janzen are Buhel[8] are positive about this, while Donaldson is less sanguine);

- Whether quality assurance standards should be formalised and, if so, whether these should be based on national, international (e.g. UNESCO) or regional Canadian standards (Morrow).

The most common strategy identified was "information development and sharing" with the major benefits being the heightened visibility of the issues and that national or regional initiatives appeared "less siloed than in the past." Despite this, it is important to note that few partnerships have yet been developed across provinces, great variation remains, "a depth of policy response" is still lacking, and there remains uncertainty of ongoing funding, which is critical to immigrants' forward planning to participate in bridging courses. Multiple authors affirm the necessity of engaging employers and industry sector councils in the FCR process, variably through internship, mentoring, and web-based human resource outreach schemes. As Esses et al. note, credential assessment remains complex relative to local workers, with immigrants often left in an invidious situation long after credential recognition has been achieved:

> The evaluation of foreign credentials differs in several ways from that of domestic credentials. First, often those who make hiring decisions need to invest more effort in evaluating foreign credentials. Second, even with additional effort, the evaluation of foreign credentials is associated with greater ambiguity than the evaluation of Canadian credentials. Decision-makers may believe they do not have, or they may actually not have, sufficient information... to make informed decisions, leading them to feel that they have to make judgment calls. Third, even if they have sufficient information, decision-makers may still feel less confident in their decisions about foreign-trained employees than about Canadian-trained employees.

The legislative reality is that Canadian regulatory bodies control recognition, and employers cannot be forced to recruit unrecognized immigrants to work. Within this context, employment bridging programs play a vital role in identifying and overcoming the labour market barriers that immigrants face, with many facilitating the achievement of excellent outcomes.

The imperative for further reform

In conclusion, it is worth noting that a range of macro issues emerge in this volume.

First, the current strength of Canadian labour market demand appears the primary spur to credential recognition reform, raising the question of FCR's sustainability should an economic downturn occur (see Crutcher and Mann; Cardozo and Guilfoyle; Mitchell; Moss and Trump).

Second, minimal consideration has yet been given to global mutual recognition trends, despite important contemporary developments, in the European Union in particular. For example, no mention is made of the Canadian and Australian Medical Councils' current pooling of Multiple Choice Question examination items for pre-migration administration to medical immigrants, a strategy with clear potential to be administered in a range of additional occupations. More analysis of this option seems required.

Third, decentralized settlement represents a persistent barrier to immigrants' capacity to access expert credential assessment, reliable information, or bridging courses in the cities or towns where they lack critical mass (Baldacchino et al.; Moss and Trump). There is scope for further exploration of the merits of e-information and e-assessment strategies which could be used.

Fourth, many FCR initiatives have been resourced as pilot rather than ongoing programs (a critical issue for individual immigrants and workforce planning). Moreover few resources have yet been invested in assessing FCR program outcomes, with many papers lacking hard evaluation data, despite the authors' conviction that they have developed nationally relevant and reproducible solutions (McLennan).

Fifth, as noted above, credential recognition is just one among many barriers confronted by skilled immigrants. Even where recognition has been gained "the results... are often treated very skeptically by academic institutions and employers," compounded by views on the presumed value of past professional experience (Moss and Trump). As noted by Orme, greater consciousness-raising among employers is an imperative, in a context where "Research indicates that... employers generally have a very poor understanding of the nature and magnitude of the worker shortages that will threaten their very existence in the near future."

Finally, while the number and range of initiatives defined in the current volume should be lauded, Canadian stakeholders continue to pull in different directions (Bourgeault notes that "governments do one thing, educational institutions do another, and regulatory bodies do a third"). The challenge in the period ahead will be to sustain the momentum of the national as well as provincial and territorial FCR reform process, which must be supported by adequate funding. This will not be an easy task, in a context where participants call for "integrated actions and policies" while championing the appropriateness of their own best practice.

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Notes

[1] The information in this section is derived from *Labour Market Outcomes for Migrant Professionals – Canada and Australia Compared*, Lesleyanne Hawthorne, Statistics Canada, 2007 (forthcoming), a study commissioned by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Statistics Canada and Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

[2] "Degree-qualified" refers to all immigrants who hold university degree level qualifications, as recorded by the Census or Citizenship and Immigration Canada's landings data.

[3] All information on Canadian immigration flows is derived from the author's analysis of data provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2005. *Editor's note: Landings data referred to in this article are drawn from a sample of immigrants who entered Canada under the provisions of the former* Immigration Act. *New legislation, the* Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, *came into force in 2002; it includes a stronger focus on "human capital" attributes rather than occupation-based criteria.*

[4] "Other Africa" excludes data from South Africa in the Census analysis.

[5] In the mid-1990s, before Australia's policy change, new immigrants to Canada had achieved slightly better outcomes than those in Australia: respectively 64% compared to 57% in work six months post-arrival in the main economic category.

[6] In Australia, as early as a decade ago, some 80% of migrant engineers were awarded immediate "professional engineer" status (Hawthorne 1994).

[7] See *Labour Market Outcomes for Migrant Professionals – Canada and Australia Compared*, Lesleyanne Hawthorne, Statistics Canada, 2007 (forthcoming).

[8] According to Janzen and Buhel, Ontario's Bill 124 "will require Ontario's 34 regulated professions to adopt registration practices that are fair, transparent and expeditious. This legislation will standardize licensure requirements of Occupational Regulatory Bodies. This includes appropriate and timely information supply about requirements, improved communication practices and appeals processes. A Fairness Commissioner will also be appointed for oversight and auditing, and an Access Centre for Internationally Trained individuals will be established as central clearinghouse of information". However Donaldson describes likely limitations to the Bill with some critics calling it a "lost opportunity" for more radical reform, "fall(ing) short of creating a mechanism to recognize foreign work experience," and "fail(ing) to address concerns in the immigrant community over systemic discrimination against credential recognition applicants from certain countries."