



Over-qualified, Underemployed

Accessibility Barriers to Accreditation for Immigrant Women with Foreign Qualifications

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My support came mostly from my husband and my ethnic community. I got information from friends and from university literature. My friends suggested I go to the university. I have an LLB from India, and they thought I would have to take a few courses and then I would be qualified to practise law.

I applied to the Faculty of Law, and they accepted a lot of my courses. At the same time, I got a Bachelor of Education, thinking it would help guarantee a job. I didn't realize I would have to do a year of articling with very little money. I was not really that young and I had to take care of my kids and my home. Time and money were real issues.

In the end, no one was willing to give me a job as a lawyer or a teacher. I think discrimination was a factor, because I am a woman and an immigrant. I am working as an insurance salesperson and I don't like it. The hours are long and it is all commission. I don't get as much time with my children as I would like. However, I get a good benefits package for me and my family. The people I work with are really competitive but nice.

I feel cheated. I thought I could take a few courses and then be able to practise law. They need to be more open and need to have more information. The universities need to be open with information. They need to have more compassion and they need to provide job leads. After spending so much money, one should get something back.

1.0 Introduction

Many women who immigrate to Canada are professionals—engineers, accountants, medical doctors, teachers and so on. Despite their education and credentials, many of these women find it difficult or impossible to work in their profession. Several factors conspire to keep these women from working in their chosen profession.

Canada's immigration policy assumes a traditional family model, with only one adult entering the country in the independent class. The other family members enter as dependents. An immigration officer contacted during this survey explained that the independent family member is "the man of the family."

This is a problem for professional women. Despite their education and qualifications, immigration forces them into a dependency role. Independent class immigrants can access government-administered training programs and training subsidies, while sponsored immigrants cannot. As a result, these women lose their livelihood and their ability to purchase the tools that would allow them to regain their independence. Translations cost money. Assessments cost money. Exams cost money. To compound the money problem, these women are often mothers, who are now unable to afford child care. Or, since their husbands are also struggling for accreditation, they are forced to take low-paying jobs just to support their families.

Beyond these personal barriers, our assessment services lack credibility. The International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) is a provincial government service which opened its doors in 1994. Women who have IQAS assess their education find that employers do not recognize IQAS. These women spend \$150 or more for IQAS assessments, only to discover the IQAS documents are worthless.

Immigrant women approach IQAS, their professional association and the universities, only to receive confusing and conflicting information. In addition, many must write special exams that appear to be English exams, not assessments of one's professional skills, knowledge and experience.

The Alberta/NWT Network of Immigrant Women studied the personal and professional barriers to accreditation. The study focuses on Alberta women who received their education in foreign countries. *Over-qualified, Underemployed* provides the findings of that 1999 study.

I brought my transcripts from Punjab University. I have a Bachelor of Arts (1986), a Master of Arts (1990) and an advanced Diploma in Clinical Psychology. I talked to the University of Alberta and they said I could either take undergraduate courses and later enter the graduate program or I could go to IQAS for a full assessment.

I applied to IQAS for a full assessment and they said the combination of a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts generally compares to a four-year Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology. They recommended I take my documents and their assessment to the University Co-ordinating Council, and I did. I was told this Council would decide if I needed to write a test or take some extra courses.

The University Co-ordinating Council recognized my degree as a Masters. The Council recommended that I apply to the College of Alberta Psychologists. The College sent me an information package. Within a year, I needed to work 600 hours under a chartered psychologist supervisor. When I finished the 600 hours, I would have to write a test.

I applied to the Foothills Hospital and was told that they only took top PhD students from Alberta universities. I was referred to the Children's Hospital where I was given a name and phone number. I tried to phone that number but it was only an answering machine and they never phoned back.

I don't think I will be able to find a workplace where I can work under the supervision of a chartered psychologist. I don't have the financial support to pay a supervisor. I need a living allowance while I am doing my practice or I need to get paid for my work during my practice. I don't have the money to pay child care. I have a two-month old baby now and need to take care of her. Who will look after my kid while I am doing my practice? So far my husband has paid for everything, but it is impossible for him to pay a supervisor and day care and support the family....

2.0 Methodology

The study involved telephone and face-to-face interviews with 150 women, now living in Alberta. The telephone surveys allowed researchers to quantify the problem, while the face-to-face interviews allowed for a qualitative, storytelling approach. Combining these two methods allowed researchers to collect the necessary data then answer questions about the how and why of the employment problem.

Between 1981 and 1991, Canada received at least 300,000 immigrants with non-Canadian post-secondary education and training. Foreign-trained professional women aren't necessarily included among those 300,000. Since many professional women enter the country as sponsored immigrants (not independents), they are often uncounted and not included among professional and skilled immigrant workers. Without clear data on how many foreign-trained professional women are currently underemployed, we could not determine a representative sample size and sample randomly.

As an alternative, the study looked for women who met certain characteristics—foreign-trained women with college diplomas or university degrees. Using a random (snowball) method, researchers contacted agencies that work with immigrant women, as well as employers with foreign-trained staff. Through the immigrant aid agencies, researchers could contact women actively seeking help. Through employers, they could contact women unaware of programs and aid agencies, as well as women who had attempted accreditation, given up and settled for underemployment.

The women who took part in the surveys ranged from very young women under 24 to professional women over 55. The women were single, married, widowed and divorced.

Under 24	8 %
25-34	32 %
35-44	32 %
45-54	25 %
55-65	3 %

Married	70 %
Single	20 %
Divorced or separated	6 %
Widowed	4 %

....I've been recognized as having a Masters but for what? I can't work as a psychologist. My credentials were recognized but not totally. It is impossible to work without a licence. I need a licence from the College. To get the licence I have to work for 600 hours (now 1,600 hours) and pass a test.

The people I dealt with were sympathetic but they didn't respond properly. They see us as different people. In some cases, I felt discriminated against. The university and the agencies have to co-ordinate their work with each other. I got a different assessment from the different bodies. Why don't they agree? The university and the colleges should have the same criteria. They should understand the differences between the education system here and other countries. Why send me to the undergraduate program?

The professional organizations should be more helpful. They shouldn't just say go and find a place to do your practice. They should have information about where to go or agreement with workplaces for practices.

Eighty-four (84) of the women were from Edmonton. Fifty-five (55) were from Calgary. Three (3) were from Red Deer, two (2) from Grande Prairie and six (6) from Medicine Hat.

The women had come to Canada from Europe, Africa, Asia, South Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. They had come to Canada looking for safety and economic opportunities.

Immigration

Immigrants can enter Canada as:

- **Family class**—Family class immigrants are sponsored by a relative who is either a Canadian citizen or permanent resident (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1997).
- **Refugees**—Refugees can enter the country if they meet appropriate conditions and are sponsored by an organization (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1997).
- **Independent class**—Immigrants who enter as independent class have passed a points-based assessment system which evaluates education, vocational experience, occupation and knowledge of an official language (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1997).

Twenty-four (24) per cent entered Canada as independent immigrants. Another 39 per cent were sponsored by family. A sponsor can be a spouse, parent, grandparent, child or another family member. However, when one family member is classified as independent, it is common practice for this spouse to sponsor the other family members.

In total, the 58 per cent that were sponsored immigrants were:

Sponsored by family	39 %
Sponsored by government	15 %
Sponsored by a church	4 %

I applied as a foreign medical graduate. I sent my degree, transcript and statement of purpose, resume and references. They asked me to pass a test. I bought the standard books and studied eight hours a day for a year. It was like being a full-time student.

To be accredited, you have to pass three tests. The first and second are only for foreign doctors. The third one is for everybody. It consists of 12 classes where you role-play and they observe you to see how you work with patients. Once you pass the second test, you can apply for a one-year internship. However, no one has been able to find a place to intern.

I took the test in Saskatoon, since Alberta doesn't offer the test, only B.C. and Saskatoon. It was a two-day test. The first day was about basic science, the second day about clinical science. After, I received a letter saying I had failed. They didn't mention my marks, just I had failed. When you don't know the results, how can you know where your problems are? There is no way to appeal. No way to know your marks. No explanation. Nothing.

I quit because I was under a lot of stress. My husband had decided to start a new career. He didn't believe he would ever get his studies accredited so he went back to school and I worked to support the family. I took two part-time jobs, one at the University of Calgary and another at Alexandra Community Health Centre. I had no time to study, no money. I needed at least \$1,500. At that time, you could take the test once a year and you had to apply six months in advance.

My friend took the test three times, then quit. The test is a special test for foreign doctors. Why is there a different test for us? It tells me they don't want to accredit us. They should use the same test for foreign doctors as they use for Canadians. I knew English, but the test uses sophisticated English. It is not a medical test. It is like an English test.

Country of Origin

The majority of women trained in their country of origin. Of the 150 women surveyed, 147 responded to this question. One woman had trained in several countries and therefore did not list her country of origin.

Latin America	44
Brazil	2
Columbia	5
Cuba	1
Ecuador	1
El Salvador	14
Guatemala	6
Honduras	2
Mexico	7
Nicaragua	4
Peru	1

Asia	31
Brunei	1
China	5
Hong Kong	6
Japan	3
Korea	1
Philippines	12
Taiwan	2
Vietnam	1

Eastern Europe	31
Albania	1
Bosnia	9
Bulgaria	1
Croatia	2
Former Yugoslavia	6
Kyrgyzstan	1
Moldavia	1
Poland	5
Romania	1
Russia	3

South Asia	15
Bangladesh	1
India	10
Pakistan	2
Sri Lanka	2

Africa	13
Congo	1
Kenya	1
Madagascar	1
Nigeria	4
Rwanda	1
Somalia	1
South Africa	1
Sudan	1
Uganda	1
Zimbabwe/Zambia	1

Mediterranean	5
Egypt	3
Iran	1
Turkey	1

Caribbean	6
Bahamas	1
Barbados	2
Jamaica	2
Trinidad	1

Western Europe	4
England	1
Germany	1
Italy	1
Northern Ireland	1

Education

The women had diplomas, undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees and PhDs. Of the women interviewed, 143 indicated they had a college diploma or a university degree. Of those 143, 84 per cent had taken additional training in Canada. Fifty-five (55) per cent had taken English as a Second Language (ESL) training.

Diplomas & Certificates	30
Accounting	3
Secretarial	4
Business	2
Commerce	1
Computerized Drafting	1
Computer Technician	2
Culinary Arts	1
Education	3
Engineering Technician	1
Other Technician	2
Other Diploma	10

Bachelor of Arts	27
General BA	23
Economics	1
English	1
Mass Communications	1
Psychology	1

B Com & Degrees in Business	15
Accounting	4
Bachelor of Commerce	7
Business Administration	2
Economics & Commerce	1
Economics	1

Education Degree	15
BA Education	15

Engineering Degree	10
Bachelor of Engineering	2
Chemical Engineering	2
Civil Engineering	2
Electrical Engineering	1
Electronic Engineering	1
Land Surveying & Engineering	1
Plastics Engineering	1

Bachelor of Science	7
Agriculture	1
Bachelor of Science	4
Nutrition	1
Pharmacy	1

Dentistry & Medicine	5
Dentistry	1
Medical Degree	1
Medical Doctor	2
Medical Specialist	1

Computing Degrees	3
Bachelor in Computer Analysis	1
Bachelor in Computer Engineering	1
Bachelor in Computing Science	1

Law	3
Bachelor in International Law	1
Bachelor of Law	2

Social Work	2
Bachelor of Social Work	2

Masters & Doctorate Degrees	21
Master of Arts	10
Clinical Psychology	1
Doctor of Philosophy	1
Doctor of Philosophy (Education)	1
Masters of Education	2
Masters in Nursing Education	1
Psychology	3
Speech Pathology & Audiology	1
Urban & Regional Planning	1

Masters of Science	5
Masters of Science	3
Educational Psychology	1
Pharmacy	1

I wanted to see if I could study here because I didn't think I would be able to use my skills and my studies from my home country. I went to the College of Psychologists and they made me an appointment to see a professor, an educational psychologist at the University of Calgary. He recommended that I register as a psychologist. He gave me different addresses and phone numbers and recommended that I call them.

I submitted my application for a Masters degree to the professional examination board of the University Co-ordinating Council. Six months later, I received an application package from them. I applied to them and received a letter saying I needed to take a two-semester course, Professional Ethics. I took the course from October 1996 to March 1997. When I finished, I sent my transcripts to University Co-ordinating Council. I then received a letter saying I needed to ask the university to send my score directly to them.

On February 1, 1998, the Council recommended me to the College of Alberta Psychologists to be registered as a chartered psychologist. I asked the College to send me an application package. In April 1998, I applied to the College, asking if they could consider the experience from my home country or the training I had done under a social worker, through the Multicultural Therapy Program.

In June 1998, I phoned them asking for an answer. They told me I needed to do 1,600 hours of practice under a chartered psychologist supervisor. My practice must be done in Alberta within a year. After my practice, I will need to pass a test. I searched for a placement and for funding for living expenses but couldn't find either. I bought materials to study for the test. The materials are from Academy Review in New York and they cost \$500. They rent materials for \$200 for six months. But who knows when will I be able to take the test? The test is facilitated twice a year, but first I have to do my practice....

3.0 Accessibility Barriers to Accreditation

Newcomers to Canada who wish to practise their profession in Alberta may seek review of their professional credentials in three places:

1. The International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)
2. A national or provincial professional council or association
3. A post-secondary academic institution

In its 1993 document, *Occupational Standards and Certification: Issues and Trends*, Employment and Immigration Canada defines accreditation as “the process by which an agency or association grants public recognition to a training institution, program of study or service which meets certain standards.” Most professions have established associations or councils responsible for the registration, certification and licensing of practice in the province. Many professions are governed by provincial legislation. Therefore, accreditation by the professional association is often mandatory.

Typically, the process of accreditation involves assessment by IQAS and the University Co-ordinating Council, followed by accreditation by the professional association. With an assessment, IQAS and the University Co-ordinating Council compare foreign educational documents and credentials to Canadian ones then issue certificates that may help immigrants enter the labour market.

Of the women interviewed, only a small percentage had applied for accreditation and assessment.

Applying for Accreditation and Academic Assessment

Academic Institution	36 %
Professional Association	12 %
IQAS	16 %

Forty-eight (48) per cent of those who applied for accreditation or assessment had their qualifications certified as matching Canadian standards. Of those who applied to IQAS, 64 per cent had their foreign credentials certified. Of those who had their qualifications certified and were accredited, only six (6) indicated that accreditation had helped. This statistic points to an underlying problem. Removing the barriers to accreditation may involve addressing some of the underlying attitudes and prejudices that characterize the Canadian workplace.

....The University Co-ordinating Council did not explain its procedures to me. I wasted time sending them my transcript instead of asking the university to send it to the Council. Some people made me feel inferior because of my language abilities. They made me afraid of the big test. I was told I needed to be fluent in English.

The process cost \$300 for the assessments, \$275 for the university courses, \$115 for the application and \$500 for the study materials. I paid for it all myself.

In the end, they recognized my credentials but the College won't license me until I do my practice and pass a test. I can't work because I don't have the licence. I work as a social worker.

The university should process applications more quickly, and they should respond in writing. It doesn't matter if it is positive or negative. We want to know. They should provide a list of all the institutions we can approach for a placement for our practices.

Personal barriers

The majority of women faced personal barriers that prevented them from applying. These personal barriers included cost, time, language problems and lack of information.

Personal and Social Barriers to Accreditation*	
Cost	84
Time	76
Discrimination	56
Language	53
Lack of Information	52
Personal Problems	14
Cultural Differences	9

** This was an open question with no prompting or a list of choices from the researchers.*

The barriers of cost, time, language and lack of information point to some of the underlying problems immigrant women face in Canada. Cost becomes a problem when one is underemployed or unemployed. For women, time usually becomes a problem when there is no one to help with child care. Language barriers add to the isolation one is already feeling in the new country.

Lack of information becomes a barrier when women are alone and isolated and cannot access the information that may be available. Only 46 per cent of the respondents had heard of IQAS. Those who had heard of IQAS had learned about the service through friends or a social agency, indicating how important it is to be connected to community.

Thirty-three (33) or 22 per cent of the respondents had no support here in Canada. Another 10 (7 per cent) relied solely on their husbands for support. Twenty-eight (28) turned to their ethnic community for support.

Only 20 or 13 per cent had extended family in Canada.

The Alberta Vocational College gave me a brochure about a workshop facilitated by the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society (CIAS). In the past two years, CIAS has helped professionals get accredited or start small businesses. I am a speech pathologist, and they said I needed 60 hours of professional practice in my profession. I needed to present transcripts and a certified curriculum for each course.

I participated in a CIAS workshop, where I learned how to write all the papers needed. CIAS paid for all my translations and wrote to the professional organization on my behalf. I studied English, took the TOEFL and got my documents from my university in Colombia. I then applied for accreditation.

It was a long process, from 1989 to 1992. No one knew what to do because I was the first person looking for accreditation for a university degree in speech pathology. The Alberta Association said it should be the Canadian Association and vice-versa. Finally, the Alberta Association, and later the Canadian Association, approved my accreditation.

They accredited me as having a bachelor which is much lower than my education. I had studied five years, plus a year for my thesis. In the middle of the process, I got a job. I had started volunteering at the Children's Hospital. It gave me the opportunity to show them the need for somebody like me. I wrote a proposal for them to have Speech Language Pathology for Spanish-speaking school children. They got the funding and after two years of volunteering, they hired me.....

4.0 Accrediting Bodies

The International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)

The Alberta Government established IQAS to help individuals educated outside Canada. IQAS assesses international educational documents and compares them to education credentials in a Canadian province. It also issues certificates that “may help immigrants enter the labour market, gain membership in professional licensing associations and admission to post-secondary institutions.”

Assessment Process

IQAS operates on a fee-for-service basis and provides three types of assessments and certificates:

1. **A Basic Assessment** for people seeking employment. This IQAS certificate indicates the level of education achieved outside Canada and how that education compares to Canadian credentials.
2. **A Detailed Assessment.** This includes a certificate with basic assessment information and an additional listing of courses completed and credits earned.
3. **An Assessment for Post-Secondary Admission.** This is an evaluation for admission into specific post-secondary education institutions in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

In all cases, the applicant must provide original certificates, diplomas, degrees and transcripts or marksheets from their institution, along with detailed assessment documentation, showing courses taken and the number of study hours required. Documentation not in English must include a complete, word-for-word translation in the same format as the original. Basic and detailed assessments take about eight weeks to process while assessments for post-secondary admission take 15 working days.

Cost

Basic Assessment - \$100

Detailed Assessment - \$150 for the first credential and \$75 for each credential thereafter

Assessment for Post-Secondary Admission - \$100

There are other costs for specialty services. Any additional costs (e.g., translation of documents, interpretive services) must be borne by the applicant.

...In my home country, I had 17 years experience. They recognized those 17 years as equivalent to one Canadian year, so I got paid as a beginner. The hospital's director wanted to pay me according to my whole experience but Human Resources opposed.

In 1990-1991, the law changed, and they decided to accept only Masters degrees, so they could not accredit me. I appealed. The agencies and the Children's Hospital where I was working supported me. The appeal was successful and the association accepted me.

I am now a member of the association but I am not certified. I need to pass a test first. I have taken it twice but failed because of my English. The test is made for people whose first language is English. It seems to be an English test, not a Speech Pathology test.

They did not recognize the value of my education as a whole. They tried to avoid any responsibility, delayed the process and transferred responsibility from Alberta Association to Canadian Association. There is a very high English language requirement. They don't believe other cultures or studies are good.

Canadians have a cold mentality. I was seen as a weird person. At the beginning, when I started working, I was totally isolated. It took me a lot of time to make friends and to make them to understand my work. To do that I used parent support letters.

I am not sure about my future in Canada. I see potential problems because of my language barriers. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to work because of my accent. So far I have worked without being certified but I am afraid I would have problems in the future. I need to have a Masters, to have a 600 TOEFL score.

Accessibility

The IQAS main office is located in Edmonton, Alberta. Applications should be mailed there.

Applications can be dropped off at the Edmonton office and at the Career Development Centre in Calgary.

The office is accessible by telephone, fax or electronic mail through the IQAS Web site. Toll-free access can be obtained through the Government of Alberta's Rite Line and Saskatchewan residents can access the office through a toll-free, 1-800 number.

Recognition/Influence in the Community

Assessments are "advisory only and do not limit a professional association or educational institution from making its own determination of educational levels and credits earned."

Applicants are warned that some professional associations and educational institutions do not recognize IQAS assessments at all.

IQAS states that professional associations may require more than proof of equivalent education for the purposes of being certified for practice in Alberta and Canada.

The Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA)

APEGGA was incorporated in 1920 and states as its mission "To serve society by regulating, enhancing and providing leadership in the practice of the professions of engineering, geology and geophysics." Under provincial legislation APEGGA is responsible for registering, disciplining, enforcing and setting practice standards. The organization also provides member services such as workshops, salary surveys, insurance programs and a newsletter.

Assessment Process

Only Canadian citizens or landed immigrants can become professional members. Others must apply for registration as a foreign licensee. Each applicant must complete an Application for Registration and pass the Professional Practice Exam.

Applicants with foreign qualifications from the US and UK are generally held in high regard. Their credentials are checked against a list of accredited academic institutions in these countries (prepared by the Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board, or CEAB). If an applicant's institution is on the list, she is expected to just write the Professional Practice Exam.

I talked to a lawyer about how to apply to the Medical Council of Canada (MCC). They said they could accredit me but they wouldn't guarantee me a job. I studied all the basic subjects and prepared to take the tests. I am now ready but they only offer it twice a year. I am waiting.

MCC told me in advance that I might not be able to find a job as a doctor. They tried to discourage me from the beginning. This is the big problem. If you are told that everything you do won't work, what can you do? To go through the whole process without a hope? Even though I will go for my accreditation, I hope that one day I will work as a doctor here.

Thirty years experience to them is nothing. I am a gynecologist/obstetrician recognized by the World Health Organization. I worked in a hospital for seven years. I worked in Iraq for three years and in Saudia Arabia for 12. I've worked in medical schools and in hospitals. My husband is working outside Canada as a doctor to support our son and me. He might pay for my accreditation. Examination fees are \$1,000 and books about \$200.

I don't feel I was treated fairly. They ignore my experience. They see me as a fresh candidate, as if I am new in the field.

Evaluation is okay. I agree they need to know if we are qualified. But they could find that out with a simple test and some supervised practice. Engineering, for example, is opening doors. Some engineers take a short exam that requires two weeks preparation. This exam allows them to qualify for a job. Then they can apply to a job. Doctors should have a similar opportunity. They should consider foreign experience and give us the opportunity to work for five months under supervision, I mean an internship program with evaluation.

For foreign applicants trained outside the US and UK, APEGGA uses the Foreign Degree list (also created by the CEAB) to check credentials. If the institution is on the list, the applicant must pass three technical exams and the Professional Practice Exam. APEGGA also completes an academic review of transcripts. If APEGGA deems it necessary (and this often occurs for applicants whose institutions are not on the list) the applicant must write between nine (9) and 28 technical exams.

When immigrants have professional experience, APEGGA takes this experience into account during the accreditation process. Applicants with experience may be exempt from writing some exams. It is the applicant's responsibility to describe her experience fully and provide references who can confirm her experience. To become registered, foreign applicants must also have one full year of North American experience.

Cost

Application fee - \$165

Professional Practice Exam fee - \$50

Kit to write Professional Practice Exam - \$105

Technical Exam fee - \$80 for each exam

Annual Registration fee - \$165

Additional costs for translation and interpretation are to be borne by the applicant.

Accessibility

APEGGA's head office is in Edmonton, Alberta. There is also a Calgary office. There is a toll-free, 1-800 number for residents outside the Edmonton and Calgary areas. All APEGGA information is published in English. The organization has no special programs to support or help applicants with foreign qualifications.

Recognition/Influence in the Community

It is mandatory to be registered to be able to refer to oneself as a professional engineer (P. Eng.). Not all employers require their employees to be registered professional engineers. An APEGGA representative says this gives immigrants the opportunity to gain North American experience without having to be professionally registered.

APEGGA has a resume referral service to assist engineers seeking employment. Employers recognize professional registration.

A counselor at an immigrant resource centre discouraged me from trying. He said the process was too long and complicated and recommended I look for another type of job, such as mail delivery or retail.

The University of Alberta referred me to an assessment agency that accredited all my degrees and courses. I sent all my papers to the Canadian Student Council (now IQAS). After they recognized my degrees, they told me I could start the process of chartering hours and take the exam.

I did the first test and got 64 per cent. I needed 65 per cent to pass. I appealed. No answer. I phoned and they told me that I should try again and that they would facilitate the test in Spanish.

I prepared myself to take the test in Spanish, but three days before the test they told me they were not able to prepare the test in Spanish. I could take it in English if I wanted. I did the test again and got 64 per cent again. I didn't want to appeal again because I was afraid they wouldn't accredit me because of my complaints. I prepared myself for the English test, did it for a third time and passed.

Student Council evaluated my degrees and courses. I did my 600 hours of practice at the East Side Family Centre. (At that time, the requirement was 600. Later it became 1,000 and now 1,600.) I worked as a chartered psychologist in Guatemala for 10 years and they didn't accept any of those years.

The Certified General Accountants Association (CGA) of Alberta

Assessment Process

Admission to CGA Association is generally granted to permanent residents who meet one of the following education requirements:

- university or college graduates;
- current professional designation in accounting; or
- mature student, 21 years or over, with a minimum of two years acceptable business experience,

Transfer credits may be granted to students who have completed related courses at recognized universities and colleges. The degree must be equivalent to a three-year Canadian bachelor degree. The first time the association sees a specific international degree, it asks IQAS to assess the degree. CGA Canada keeps a database of all degrees that have been assessed.

The association requires official transcripts or evidence of a professional designation for all transfer credit evaluations. Students without advanced standing can commence the program at Level 1 or complete transfer credits at Canadian institutions.

The CGA Act in Alberta requires that applicants be Canadian citizens or permanent residents. However, the CGA designation is awarded in China, Hong Kong and a number of jurisdictions in the Caribbean. Women planning to immigrate to Canada can work toward the designation while still in their home country. CGAs from these jurisdictions must complete a Canadian law course and/or a Canadian tax course within one year of transferring their membership to CGA Alberta.

The association also recognizes work experience, providing that the experience meets the Alberta requirement.

Cost

There is a \$100 (plus GST) transcript evaluation fee.

Accessibility

The CGA office is located in Calgary. There is a 1-800 number and a Web site that allows you to register and take courses on-line.

Recognition/Influence in the Community

The accounting profession in Canada consists of three distinct groups: the Certified General Accountants Association (CGA), the Institute of Chartered Accountants (CA) and the Society of Certified Management Accountants (CMA). Under Alberta law, only CGAs, CAs and CMAs may conduct audits and reviews.

I came to Canada from the Philippines. At first, I didn't really worry about accreditation. But then I got tired of doing cleaning jobs. I talked to my husband but the only thing he knew was university. After talking to the immigrant women's centre, I found there were several agencies I could go and talk to.

I went to IQAS, and they told me to get my documents translated. They thought I wouldn't have any problems getting my credentials recognized since I am a nurse, and nurse duties are the same everywhere.

I sent my documents to be translated and applied at IQAS. It cost \$150 but since I was working as a cleaning lady, I didn't have any problem paying the money. It took a long time to get the documents translated. A long time. I felt like I was getting the run-around.

While IQAS was evaluating my application, I went to the University of Alberta. The university said I had to go back to school. I had a Masters in nursing, so I didn't understand why I needed more schooling. I felt the university was not giving me the credit I deserved. They were making me go through a lot of hassle. IQAS seemed like they were just in it for the money. It was a very impersonal process. I did end up taking university courses, using Student Financing. IQAS accredited my qualifications, and the university recognized some courses. The IQAS certificate did not help me get a job, but now after taking some university courses, I am working as an RN at Grey Nuns.

Work gets hard sometimes because of the stress and long hours, but it's not bad. I am making good money—\$28 an hour. I am part of a union and I get the full benefits package. I don't feel too accepted by my co-workers, but I have other Filipinos at the hospital for the support. IQAS should charge less and take a more personal approach. After the qualifications are accepted, IQAS could provide job leads. The university should give assessment tests to check out how qualified one is rather than making judgements based on what country you are from.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA)

The CPSA is responsible for licensing the practice of medicine and for accrediting medical facilities in the Province of Alberta. A physician can only practise medicine in Alberta when she or he is registered with the CPSA.

The CPSA does not provide member services. That is the responsibility of the Alberta Medical Association (AMA).

Assessment Process

There are two main classifications of registration:

1. Registration with the Alberta Medical Register to conduct a general medical practice in Alberta; and
2. Registration for specialty practice in five areas:
 - Conditional non-specialty practice for the purpose of conducting general medical practice in a specified rural community;
 - Conditional defined practice for the purpose of conducting a medical practice limited to the activities of a specialty discipline in a specified practice setting;
 - Military practice;
 - Administrative medical practice; and
 - Provisional practice registration for the purpose of practising medicine in a community designated as having an emergency requirement by the Minister of Health.

Each area of registration comes with particular requirements, but each shares some requirements in common. Each applicant must:

- Provide evidence that the applicant is a Canadian citizen or meets the immigration or entry requirements set by the Government of Canada;
- Be registered with the Medical Council of Canada (MCC). (To become licensed through the MCC, applicants with foreign credentials must write a three-part exam. Canadian or US applicants need only complete a two-part exam);
- Hold certification from the College of Family Physicians of Canada or the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, as evidence of satisfactory completion of a period of postgraduate training; and
- Satisfy the registrar that upon registration the applicant will immediately commence the practice of medicine in the Province of Alberta.

I had a degree in art history and was a curator of an art gallery in the former Yugoslavia. I came to Canada as a refugee. At the time, I had little concern for employment. My only concern was survival.

I needed time to understand what it was like to live in Canada but my friends kept telling me to get a job in my field. I started a job search but without any formal recognition of my credentials, it was unsuccessful. I did get a job as a salesperson in a gallery. The position paid minimum wage or a little higher.

Since I didn't feel comfortable with the English language, I felt that jumping into my profession would be impossible. A sales job would be okay at first. I took some time to get comfortable with the English language and culture. Now that I feel comfortable, I have begun the IQAS process.

The different countries have different standards of professionalism. My approach is very different. The biggest problem is to figure how my degree fits within Canada. Art history is not a technical degree. The problems are not the formal degree requirements. The problem is the acceptance of education from other countries and the acceptance of cultural differences.

People expect immigrants to do dirty jobs just to survive. People have a perception that immigrants should take what they can get. They don't accept educated immigrants. I took whatever jobs I could to survive financially but there was a psychological barrier as well. Canadians have to accept that immigrants are educated.

There is no professional organization for art historians. I have looked into the Alberta Visual Artists Association but it's not relevant to my profession. With IQAS, the main problem is people's attitudes and biases against immigrants. People feel that accents mean that immigrants are less educated and unable to do the job. This needs to change before anything else can change.

In specialty practice, the applicant must also provide evidence of:

- ▶ Being a graduate of an approved North American medical school or a school of medicine listed in the Directory of the World Health Organization and having carried on a medical education program for more than 10 years and medical training of at least 48 months in duration; and
- ▶ Having completed a period of peer assessment and a period of supervised integration into the practice of medicine in Alberta, satisfactory to the registrar and in Alberta.

Cost

Writing the Medical Council of Canada Exam - \$100 document processing fee and \$1,000 exam fee.

Registration with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada - \$300.

Registration with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta - \$50 documentation fee, \$200 registration fee and \$790 annual dues.

Any additional costs associated with registration such as translation of documents or interpretation are expected to be borne by the applicant.

Accessibility

The office of the CPSA is located in Edmonton, Alberta, with a satellite office in Calgary. The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons is located in Ottawa, Ontario, with a chapter office in Edmonton. The College of Family Physicians of Canada is located in Mississauga, Ontario, with a chapter office in Edmonton. The Medical Council of Canada is located in Ottawa, Ontario, and CPSA hosts writing of the exams periodically in Edmonton.

The national organizations provide service in Canada's two official languages, but no special support services are available to foreign applicants.

Recognition/Influence in the Community

It is illegal to practise medicine in Alberta without necessary registration and licensing through these organizations.

I came to Canada in 1974 as a refugee from Bosnia. I have a Bachelor degree in economics and was the manager of a government agency that invested money for highway construction. I left to escape the war and was unconcerned about finding a job in my field and more concerned about safety. I brought my degree and copies of transcripts but did not realize the process of recognition would be so difficult.

I didn't talk to anybody about degree recognition. In my culture, it is shameful to try and sell yourself. It is simply not done. The process of getting a degree recognized is a step beyond shame. I needed to adjust to the culture and learn to accept it.

I took a job as a life insurance sales representative. It was a good job but I only stayed three months. I then took a job within Calgary Settlement Services (CSS) as a settlement worker. It allowed me to use my skills. I speak several languages and my degree wasn't an issue.

My major problem was cultural. I didn't want to sell myself because it was shameful. Information was difficult to obtain and very confusing. People did not take the time to explain the process. Finances were an issue. It was very expensive to go through the IQAS process and to return to school. I looked at all my options. School was very expensive and I knew I would have to upgrade my degree. The school system in Canada is very confusing, so I chose to work instead. I decided to look at my skills instead of my profession and to find a career to match. I am now an employment program manager which is different work but many of my skills are the same.

I attended NAIT to get a management certificate. I only did so for Canadian certification. I didn't learn anything but it allowed me to get my foot in the door for employment purposes.

The Alberta Association of Registered Nurses

Assessment Process

To become a registered nurse in Alberta, applicants must have held registered nurse status in the country where they completed their nursing education program.

They must have graduated from a nursing education program in General Nursing. All nurses are required to have theory and clinical practice in medical, surgical, obstetric, pediatric and psychiatric nursing. If the basic nursing program or subsequent courses did not include the required content or clinical practice, applicants must complete a qualifying course in each area of deficiency at an approved school of nursing.

Applicants will have to provide a Verification of Registration as a Registered (General) Nurse from each jurisdiction where they have been registered in the last five years. In addition, they must ask the Registrar's office at the school or university where they completed the nursing program for a nursing education transcript. The transcript must be sent directly to the AARN.

All nurses whose first language is not English must provide proof of fluency in speaking and understanding the English language. They must complete a:

- test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) with a score of at least 231;
- test of Spoken English with a score of at least 50.

The TOEFL and TSE exam scores will be accepted only if taken within the last two years. Applicants may request, in writing, that the TOEFL and TSE requirements be waived, if they:

- have been employed for at least 1125 hours in the past five membership years in a setting where English is the first language; or
- have undergone education that was conducted in the English language, in a country where English is the official language.

Cost

The application form and assessment fee - \$107.

Annual registration fee - \$246.10 (required to finalize registration).

I saw an ad in the paper for a speech therapist, but the supervisor said my English wasn't good enough. I went to IQAS and they reviewed my general qualifications. I paid \$150. I received a statement from IQAS that my degree was equivalent but the employer said IQAS equivalency was not good enough. They said I could be an assistant but I was not an audiologist. Later the employer changed the story and said I needed a Masters degree. I called the Speech Therapist and Hearing Association of Alberta. The Association said to go back to IQAS for a detailed study. I went back and that cost another \$100. The Association approved me and said I can work as an audiologist or speech therapist. I am now also a member of the Canadian Association of Speech and Language Pathologists, but I am still not getting jobs.

The person at IQAS said I could get a job without their approval. They wouldn't stick up for me by calling the employer. Employers made me feel frustrated and devalued. I sent out 100 applications and received four interviews. My friends and family thought I wouldn't be accredited and they were shocked when I was. They discouraged me from my pursuits. I defied conventional wisdom and got certified.

IQAS took 40 days which is a long time to wait. We need to educate the community and professional employers about what IQAS really is. We need to clarify when IQAS is needed and when it is not. We also need to educate the immigrant community about IQAS and when and when not to approach IQAS.

Accessibility

The office is located in Edmonton. There is a 1-800 number and a Web site.

Recognition/Influence in the Community

To legally practise nursing in Alberta, you must be registered or hold a valid permit with the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses.



5.0 Conclusion

The current Immigration Act was passed in 1976. The Act uses a points-based system to evaluate those applying as Independent Class immigrants. The system awards a maximum of 16 points for education, a maximum of 18 for specific vocational training, a maximum of eight for experience and a maximum of 10 for occupation.

The points-based system selects for highly educated immigrants. In October 1999, the Canadian media learned of a new federal government blueprint that would continue this shift away from skilled tradespeople to highly educated immigrants, better able to adapt to the Canadian global economies.

Unfortunately, immigration policy is out of sync with professional practice in Canada. While the policy selects for highly educated immigrants, universities and professional bodies set up barriers that prevent these immigrants from using their education and experience. As one respondent stated:

“People expect immigrants to do dirty jobs just to survive. People have a perception that immigrants should take what they can get. They don’t accept educated immigrants. I took whatever jobs I could to survive financially but there was a psychological barrier as well. Canadians have to accept that immigrants are educated.”

The situation is particularly difficult for immigrant women. Canadian women educated in Canada experience many social and professional barriers. Canadian women are just beginning to take their rightful places as doctors, dentists, engineers and so on. These barriers compound the problem for immigrant women.

Professional immigrant women have much to contribute. Changes to accreditation programs and immigration policies would remove the desperate frustration many of these women experience and, at the same time, allow Canadians to benefit from their medical, business, teaching and other professional expertise.

Recommendations

- 1. Develop a consistent accreditation policy, so the University Co-ordinating Council, IQAS and the professional associations agree on what is required.**

To oversee the process, establish an independent committee made up of foreign professionals and other stakeholders.

- 2. Remove the cost barrier that prevents women from having their education assessed and their professional credentials accredited.**

Only a small percentage of women actually apply for an assessment and accreditation. The number one barrier these women face is cost. IQAS charges \$100 for a Basic Assessment, \$150 for a Detailed Assessment and \$75 for each additional assessment. IQAS is a provincial government service supported by tax dollars. Therefore, IQAS fees are an unnecessary and burdensome user fee. In addition, professional associations charge for exams. The Medical Council of Canada, for example, has a \$1,000 examination fee that acts as a serious barrier to accreditation.

- 3. Develop an IQAS marketing plan so employers and immigrants become aware of the service and its significance.**

Only 46 per cent of the respondents had heard of IQAS. Those who had heard of the service had learned about it through friends or a social agency. Since there is no public marketing strategy, one must be in the know to be aware of IQAS.

The first time the Certified General Accountants Association sees a specific international degree, it asks IQAS to assess the degree. However, other professional associations do not seem as aware of IQAS. As one respondent explained, "I paid \$150. I received a statement from IQAS that my degree was equivalent but the employer said IQAS equivalency was not good enough."

- 4. Review exams for foreign professionals to ensure that they test professional skills rather than English-language skills.**

All professional exams should be in plain language. In addition, there must be a process for appeal and some feedback mechanisms so when immigrants retake the exams, they have a better chance at success.

5. Allow foreigners to work towards certification before they immigrate to Canada.

Professional associations could follow the example of the CGA. The CGA designation is awarded in China, Hong Kong and a number of jurisdictions in the Caribbean. Women planning to immigrate to Canada can work toward the designation while still in their home country. CGAs from these jurisdictions must complete a Canadian law course and/or a Canadian tax course within one year of transferring their membership to CGA Alberta.

6. Recognize foreign work experience.

Professional associations could follow the example of the CGA and APEGGA. When immigrants have professional experience, APEGGA takes this experience into account during the accreditation process. Applicants with experience may be exempt from writing some exams. The CGA association also recognizes work experience, provided that the experience meets the Alberta requirement. In addition, it may be possible to create apprenticeship programs that allow foreign-trained professionals to work towards accreditation. As one respondent stated, "They should consider foreign experience and give us the opportunity to work for five months under supervision. I mean an internship program with evaluation."

7. Give sponsored professionals access to all training programs and subsidies available to independent class immigrants.

The model that designates the man of the house independent and makes his family his dependants may have been appropriate in the past. However, as immigration strategy moves towards attracting professionals, this is no longer appropriate.

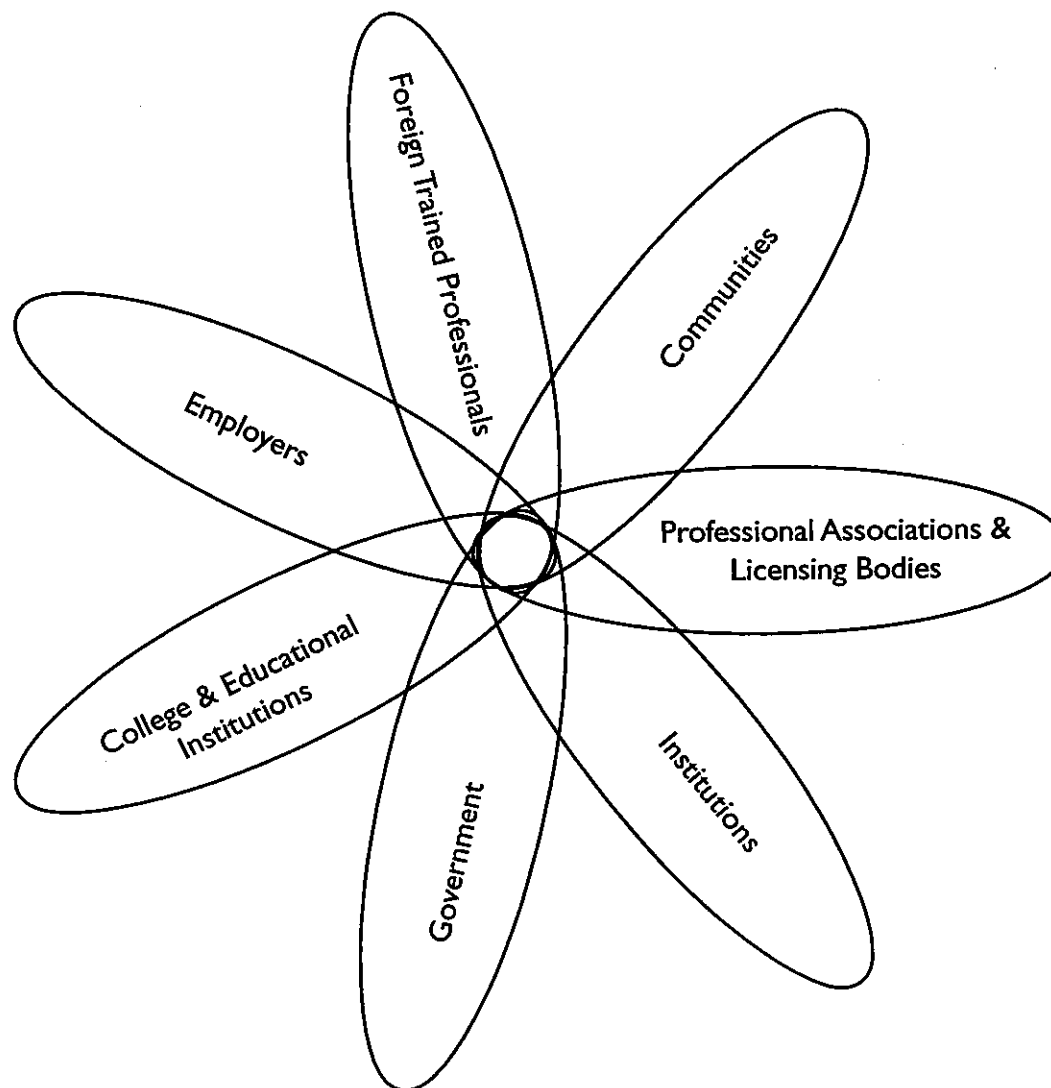
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Implementing the Recommendations

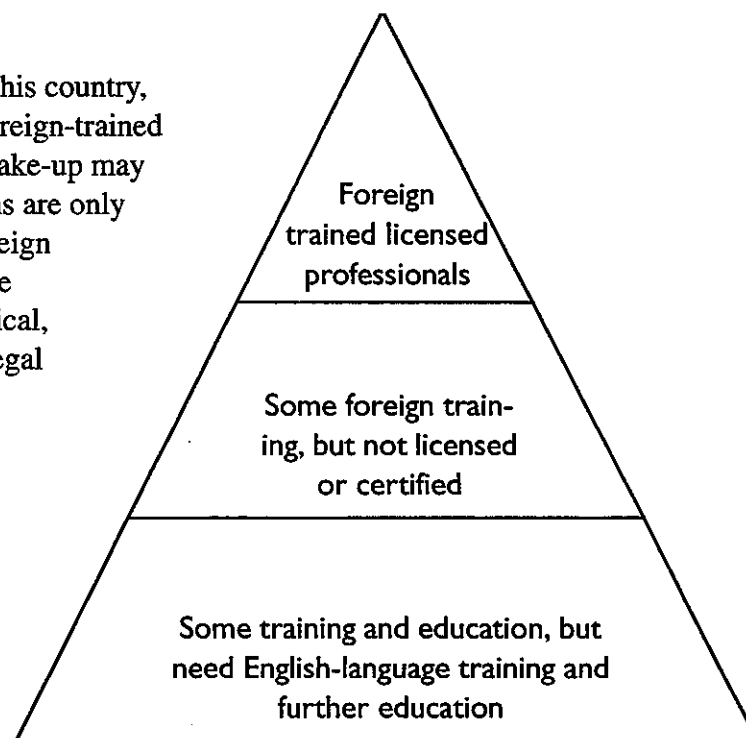
The recommendations are a long-term strategy that depend on governments, universities, employers and the community. The change process requires a community-development approach whereby stakeholders become aware of the issue and begin to advocate for change.

At present, foreign-trained professionals and the community agencies that work with them are acutely aware of the problem. As a result, it is seen as an immigrant problem. In May 2000, the Business Council of Manitoba, Canada West Foundation and the Council for Canadian Unity released the results of an Angus Reid survey. The results showed that 59 per cent of Canadians subscribe to the view that immigrants contribute to Canada's economy. Most (73 per cent) disagree that new immigrants "take away too many jobs from Canadians." Eight in 10 (82 per cent) agree that Canada's cultural make-up is "one of the best things about this country."



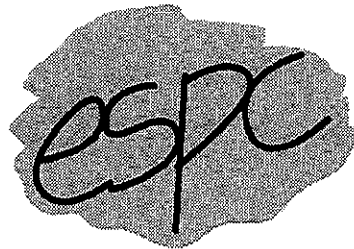
Although Canadians value the contributions immigrants make to this country, barriers to accreditation make it very difficult or impossible for foreign-trained professionals to contribute on a professional level. Our cultural make-up may be “one of the best things about this country.” However, Canadians are only experiencing that “best thing” on a superficial level. We enjoy foreign cuisine and take part in heritage festivals. But at the same time, we prevent foreign-trained professionals from contributing their medical, accounting, business administration, engineering, high-tech and legal expertise.

A community-development approach would involve developing partnerships and raising awareness among educational institutions, licensing bodies, professional associations, employers and the community. Change will begin to take place as these organizations and groups become aware of the problem and how it is limiting their scope and preventing them from reaching their own strategic goals.



Foreign-trained professionals enter Canada at many different levels. Some are experienced licensed professionals with a command of the English language. Others may be trained but not licensed or they may be trained and licensed and have language barriers that prevent them from working in Canada.

The immigration model assumes that most foreign-trained professionals need additional training or ESL training. More than half the women interviewed had taken ESL training. In addition, 84 per cent had taken additional training in Canada. In other words, there is adequate support for women with language barriers and women who need additional training. However, there is little recognition of the fact that many women are already experienced, licensed and capable of speaking and writing English. Efforts to change the status quo, therefore, should focus on removing barriers to women who are professionals, well-trained and ready to work in Canada.



e d m o n t o n

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