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Discussion Paper

Questions for discussion regarding the proposed Canadian Agency for Assessment and Recognition of Credentials

The new federal government has committed to establish a Canadian agency for assessment and recognition of credentials. The federal budget of May 2, 2006 announced the following

Many immigrants to Canada, though well-educated and highly skilled, still face barriers in obtaining recognition of their qualifications, training and experience. In this budget, the Government is moving forward on its commitment to create an agency to ensure foreign-trained immigrants meet Canadian standards, while getting those who are trained and ready to work in their fields of expertise into the workforce more quickly.

Under the leadership of the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, consultations with the provinces and territories and other stakeholders are underway on the mandate, structure and governance of the agency, and the Government will proceed on the basis of the advice received. To facilitate the consultation process and to take the first steps toward the establishment of a Canadian agency for assessment and recognition of credentials, this budget sets aside \$18 million over two years.

This plan was earlier announced by the Honourable Diane Finley, Minister for Human Resources and Social Development and the Honourable Monte Solberg, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration at a conference in Toronto on March 19 & 20, 2006. The Honourable Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance announced in the budget that the government would set aside \$18 million to help in the consultation and development phase. The promise for such an agency was first contained in the platform of the Conservative Party of Canada during the recent election.

The need for more efficient and more accurate assessment of foreign credential and experience has long been discussed. As skills shortages increase across a growing number of sectors of the economy, and as the growth in the labour market will increasingly come from immigration, the need to get newcomers to work quickly becomes more pressing for immigrant and employer alike.

This proposal is an interesting and timely one that has got the attention of immigrants and immigrant-serving organizations, provincial governments, professional associations, regulatory bodies and sector councils. Some in support of the idea, others questioning how it will help the system. The budget also noted that HRSDC is in consultations with the provinces and will consult with other stakeholders in the months ahead. This is a good time to discuss how such an agency will be structured and focused.

The following are questions and issues being set out to help guide how such an agency can be created.

1. General considerations and options

Role & administration

- What is the best way for a federal or national agency to make the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials more efficient, timely and reliable?
- Can it have co-ordination functions between the federal and provincial governments and among all the players currently involved in assessment and recognition?
- Should it perform the following functions:
 - i. information provision and referral, being a pathfinder or navigator through the system of assessment
 - ii. clearing-house of information and research
 - iii. commissioning and gathering research
 - iv. assessment and recognition
- Can the agency effectively conduct assessments for professions where assessments are currently taking place?
- Should it focus on non-regulated occupations?
- What are the shortcomings or challenges to confidentiality and personal security of such efforts?
- Should this agency require legislation ?
- How can the administrative aspects of such an agency be open to and inclusive of concerned organizations?
- What information and services can be presented on line through a web site of the Agency.
- To what extent should services be offered in non-official languages to increase accessibility to newcomers?

International cooperation:

- Should the agency build up a data base on key *bona fide* educational institutions and diplomas/degrees in countries from where most immigrants come, and build working relationships with such institutions to enhance the ability to verify credentials?
- Should the agency undertake research on international comparisons of how assessment is handled elsewhere?
- Should it maintain regular communications and relationships with other immigrant-receiving countries that also engage in foreign credential recognition?

Assisting the immigration system

- How can the agency assist in the “pre-assessment” of credentials before the immigrant arrives in Canada?

- How can the agency work with Canadian immigration staff overseas so as to link immigrants and immigration applicants to pre-assessment services?
- Can the agency provide input into the immigrant selection process, providing key labour market information on current and projected needs of employers?

Domestic issues

- How can immigrant serving agencies be involved, and how can sharing of information among them be enhanced?
- How can the agency assist with mobility of workers across Canada?
- How can the work of such an agency relate to the work of prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) of Canadian education and experience?

The private sector

- How can the comfort level of employers be increased beyond what it is today with regard to foreign credentials and competencies – thereby lowering the perceived risk of hiring newcomers?
- How can unions and guilds be included in the work of the agency?

2. Regulated professions

- How can the provincial governments be involved in establishing and running such an agency?
- How can existing regulatory bodies be involved in establishing and running such an agency?
- How can existing assessment organizations be involved in establishing and running such an agency?
- What are the steps that need to be taken to ensure that regulatory requirements are maintained should the assessment agency be involved in assessment of regulated professions?

3. Non-Regulated professions

- How can the provincial governments be involved in establishing and running such an agency?
- How can existing assessment organizations be involved in establishing and running such an agency?
- How can the agency meaningfully include concerned industry and sector councils?

4. Consultations in preparation of an Agency

Sector councils have extensive links with employers and employee groups from a broad range of sectors of the economy in addition to educational institutions.

- How can sector councils assist in the development of this proposal?
- What are the best means of consultation for such a process?

Sector Councils and FCR

The Alliance of Sector Councils has prepared a highly informative and timely report entitled “**Who does what in FCR**” which describes the range of organizations and governments involved in assessing and recognizing foreign credentials and competencies. This report will be very useful for all interested parties.

Various sector councils are actively working to identify the key immigration and foreign credential issues relevant to their sectors, are identifying barriers to full participation, and are developing mechanisms to recognize foreign credentials and competencies. These include the Construction Sector Council, the Canadian Plastics Council, the Software Human resources Council, the Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council, the Textiles Human Resources Council and the Council for Automotive Human Resources.

The Environmental Careers Organization has developed a designation that has begun to verify foreign credentials and allows newcomers to gain Canadian designation and provides guidance for professional development. The Canadian Tourism Human Resources Council is completing a series of research studies on various key aspects including educator engagement and review of existing credential recognition and the assessment of non-regulated occupations.

The Canadian Council of Professional Engineers has published a landmark study, *From Consideration to Integration*, a project that determines ways to more efficiently integrate graduates into the engineering profession and workforce, and has a record of providing assessment and recognition of foreign credentials.

A partial solution for the increasing labour shortages is immigration and of course efficient and timely foreign credential recognition. The shortage is critical in some sectors and is becoming increasingly so in others. Sector councils are more than research bodies, they are actually dealing with alleviating shortages and are actively facilitating solutions in training, certification and credential recognition – sector by sector. They want to see the situation improve and are willing partners in all realistic solutions.

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