



The AAISA Research Bulletin has been developed to provide information to members and community partners around a wide range of policy and legislation trends and implications affecting immigrants and immigrant-serving agencies in Canada and Alberta. Our goal is assisting Albertan settlement agencies to work in and understand changes impacting the sector.

Foreign Qualification Recognition in Alberta

Alberta could experience a cumulative labour market shortage of 96,000 workers by 2023, according to Alberta Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.¹ This projected shortage, along with low birth rates, results in the province's need to attract and retain internationally-trained professionals (ITPs). However, despite the demand for skilled workers, a good percentage of ITPs in Alberta struggle with economic integration. These struggles come in the form of underemployment, challenges in securing work in their field of expertise, or fulfilling licensing requirements. The process of Foreign Qualification Recognition (FQR) plays a critical role in facilitating the successful labour market integration of newcomers, through the verification that internationally-acquired skills, experience and education meets Canadian standards.² This bulletin will briefly examine the accomplishments and difficulties involved in the process of recognizing foreign credentials in Alberta.³

The table below presents a few statistics on the labour market integration of immigrants.

Snapshot of Immigrants in Alberta ⁴	%
Alberta-bound immigrants possessing post-secondary education	63
Alberta immigrants reporting over qualification for current position	64
Alberta immigrants reporting work/education qualifications were unrecognized	49
% of immigrants in Alberta's working age population	20

¹ Alberta Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. (2014). Alberta's occupational demand and supply outlook 2013-2023. <http://work.alberta.ca/documents/occupational-demand-and-supply-outlook-2013-2023.pdf>

² Government of Alberta. (2014). A Foreign Qualification Recognition Plan for Alberta: Progress Report 2011-2013. <http://work.alberta.ca/documents/progress-report-2013-fqr-for-Alberta.pdf>

³ This bulletin was based on the following three sources:

- The presentations from the *Foreign Qualification Recognition: Building Bridges All Stakeholder Forum (FQR Forum)*, an event held by the Government of Alberta in November 2014
- Government of Alberta. (2014). A Foreign Qualification Recognition Plan for Alberta: Progress Report 2011-2013. <http://work.alberta.ca/documents/progress-report-2013-fqr-for-Alberta.pdf>
- Government of Alberta. (2008). A Foreign Qualification Plan for Alberta. <http://work.alberta.ca/documents/foreign-qualification-recognition-plan-for-Alberta.pdf>

⁴ Government of Alberta. (2008). A Foreign Qualification Plan for Alberta. <http://work.alberta.ca/documents/foreign-qualification-recognition-plan-for-Alberta.pdf>



Challenges⁵

The primary decision-makers in the FQR process are professional regulatory organizations (PROs), academic institutions and employers.⁶ Partnerships between these actors have been difficult, as there are over 50 PROs and 25 academic institutions in Alberta. Each of these decision-makers has their own perspective and impact on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications. However, it is critical that these stakeholders collaborate to reduce information gaps and maintain consistency in the evaluation and acceptance of foreign credentials. Collaboration could take the form of knowledge transfer and coordination of the FQR process for the targeted profession.

Information sharing is particularly important for employers, who may not have the capacity to conduct fair and timely assessments on how foreign qualifications translate to Canadian standards. Another complication is that Alberta receives immigrants from all over the world, with each jurisdiction possessing distinctive educational and occupational standards. Despite the creation of International Education Guides, some of these standards may not yet have been assessed against Canadian benchmarks.⁷ These obstacles, along with the emphasis on “soft skills”, can lead to employer’s noticeable preference for the so called Canadian work experience.⁸

Success: Internationally-Trained Dieticians

To address the challenges in the FQR process, the Government of Alberta established the Innovation Fund to help employers and PROs in the assessment and recognition of internationally-acquired qualifications.⁹ One example of a successful initiative under this fund is the FQR process for Dieticians in Alberta. Among the factors contributing to its success are:

- Strong partnerships between decision makers (Alberta Health Services [Employer], University of Alberta and the College of Dietitians of Alberta [PRO])
- Strict admission criteria to ensure that students upgrading their skills or on the pathway to certification all possess the same knowledge base

⁵ This section was based off of: Government of Alberta. (2008). A Foreign Qualification Plan for Alberta. <http://work.alberta.ca/documents/foreign-qualification-recognition-plan-for-Alberta.pdf>

⁶ Government of Alberta (n.d.). A Foreign Qualification Recognition Plan for Alberta: At a Glance.

⁷ The International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) has created International Education Guides (IEGs) to provide PROs, employers and academic institutions with information on foreign education systems and how the qualifications from these systems compare with Albertan and Canadian standards. There are currently IEGs for the following countries: China, Colombia, Former USSR/Russia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, South Korea, United Kingdom, and United States of America. Government of Alberta. (2012, March 15). International Education Guides. Retrieved from <http://work.alberta.ca/immigration/international-education-guides.html>

⁸ As Philip Mondor, Senior Vice President of the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, highlighted during his presentation at the FQR Forum, employers can lack an understanding of how an immigrant’s skills will transfer and how they will integrate into the workplace. Often, what employers are seeking is an understanding of Canadian culture and a demonstration of Canadian “soft skills” when they are asking for Canadian experience. Examples of these soft skills can include workplace communication and networking.

⁹ Government of Alberta. (2014). A Foreign Qualification Recognition Plan for Alberta: Progress Report 2011-2013.



- Mentorships and internships to obtain feedback, industry knowledge and practical learning experiences

Next Steps

Overall, there are many challenges in the assessment and recognition of foreign credentials. One of these difficulties is the multitude of decision-makers, which can be countered by strong partnerships among all actors. Another difficulty that immigrants face in the recognition of their qualifications is the employer preference for Canadian experience. In order to address this preference, newcomers can explore internship and mentorship opportunities. With these opportunities, newcomers will not only be able to obtain industry knowledge, but also the soft skills which employers are seeking. These opportunities are significantly provided throughout Alberta's settlement and integration agencies. Although the settlement and integration sector is not a primary decision-maker in the recognition of foreign credentials, it offers many bridging, mentorship and internship programs which provide instruction in areas such as: Canadian workplace culture, specific occupational training and job search skills.¹⁰ Apart from partnerships and labour market integration services, there have been several recommendations made to improve the FQR process, such as:

- Occupation-specific language training rather than strictly focusing on general language proficiency¹¹
- Increased diversity training for employers and organizations to promote the inclusion and retention of newcomers in the workplace
- Strong pre-arrival services and information on the FQR process, such as a list of alternative career pathways

These suggestions¹², as well as the indicated solutions, can facilitate the FQR process so that newcomers will be able to contribute to Alberta's labour market by fully applying their knowledge and skills.

¹⁰ Examples of these programs are found in the links below:

- Calgary
 - Alberta Human Services. (n.d.). Immigrant Bridging. <http://humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/calgary-etcs-immigrant-bridging-excerpt.pdf>
 - Alberta Human Services. (n.d.). Immigrant Training and Employment Programs and Services (Calgary Region). <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/Calgary-etcs-immigrant-training-excerpt.pdf>
- Edmonton
 - Alberta Human Services. (n.d.). Immigrant Bridging Programs. <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/Edmonton-etcs-immigrant-bridging.pdf>
 - Alberta Human Services. (n.d.). Immigrant Training and Employment Programs and Services (Edmonton Region). <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/Edmonton-etcs-immigrant-employment.pdf>

¹¹ Occupation-specific language training enables newcomers to acquire knowledge on technical terms related to their profession. Government of Alberta. (2014, November 24). English for Employment: Occupational Language Training <http://www.albertacanada.com/opportunity/working/education-language-training.aspx>

¹² These suggestions were gathered from the presentations at the *Foreign Qualification Recognition: Building Bridges All Stakeholder Forum* (FQR Forum), an event held by the Government of Alberta in November 2014



Disclaimer: This report has been drafted, compiled, and reviewed by the AAISA Research Committee and staff person. It has not been sanctioned by any government agency representatives and should be confirmed as appropriate.

A MESSAGE FROM



AAISA is dedicated to providing current, evidence-based research and policy updates to its Alberta member agencies and stakeholders. The Research and Policy Brief project serves to offer a detailed account regarding the issues directly facing the settlement sector across our province. Our goal is to offer our members and stakeholders the best information available to enhance and inform their practice.

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