



Association of Canadian Community Colleges

**Canadian Colleges and Institutes –
Supporting Foreign Credential Recognition and the
Labour Market Integration of Immigrants**

**Submission to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills
and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

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Association of Canadian Community Colleges

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) is the national and international voice of Canada's 150 publicly-funded colleges and institutes. With campuses in 1,000 urban, rural and remote communities, these institutions educate learners of all ages and from all socio-economic quarters. They partner with small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to share expertise in applied research and innovation.

Colleges are the advanced skills educators of choice. Aligned with the needs of employers, and operating on the leading edge of skills identification, economic trends, and market shifts, colleges solicit business and industry input into curriculum development through Program Advisory Committees. They support business growth and sustainability by supplying graduates with advanced skills, re-skilling displaced employees, offering customized education, and providing applied research and development support. They have a pivotal role in increasing the access of the disadvantaged to post-secondary education and supporting the integration of immigrants into the labour market.

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Introduction

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) commends the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities for undertaking the study entitled: *A Framework for Success: Practical Recommendations to Further Shorten the Foreign Qualification Recognition Process*. This review of what has been done to date and what more can be done to accelerate foreign credential recognition (FCR) is very timely given the growing importance of immigration to address existing and future advanced skills shortages in the Canadian labour market.

ACCC welcomes the opportunity to present its views and perspectives on the integral role of colleges and institutes across the country in supporting FCR processes and the integration of immigrants into the labour market.

Colleges contribute to FCR through the delivery of targeted assessment, advising and support services, employment-oriented education, and bridge training for immigrants in Canada. ACCC manages the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP), a three year project (2010-2013) funded by the Foreign Credentials Referral Office (FCRO) of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). This brief draws on the experience of colleges in serving the needs of immigrants in Canada and on the CIIP experience to identify ways colleges and institutes can support federal government efforts to accelerate FCR.

The Role of Colleges and Institutes in Supporting Immigrant Integration

Colleges and institutes have long been collaborative partners of immigrant settlement agencies, governments and regulatory bodies for the provision of advising and assessment services, language training and bridge training programs for labour market integration.

Advising and Assessment Services

The advising services colleges and institutes provide are key to directing immigrants to the services and programs that support their transition to employment as quickly and efficiently as possible. Advising services include referrals to college assessment services such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), external assessments including through regulatory bodies, bridge training programs, full- or part-time education programs, language training and financial assistance.

RPL services involve a systematic process that includes the identification, documentation, assessment and recognition of learning (skills, knowledge and values) acquired through formal and informal study and workplace learning. These services are offered to provide students with advanced standing and/or course exemptions and are key for immigrants seeking a Canadian credential to top up their international credentials. Eighty percent of colleges and institutes report they offer RPL services, however the scope and reach varies across provincial/territorial systems. In some jurisdictions, the high costs required to conduct RPL assessments limit the extent to which colleges can offer them. Increased support for institutions to deliver these services will help to streamline the FCR process by identifying the knowledge, skill and competency gaps, and provide credits to shorten the time required to complete a Canadian credential. RPL services would also be useful for providing more streamlined and targeted bridge training programs.

Colleges have developed self-assessment tools for certain professions. These tools enable immigrants to self-test to identify the training needed to transition to employment in Canada. For example, through funding from Health Canada, Nova Scotia Community College has partnered with the Nova Scotia government to develop self-assessment tools for health occupations.

Language Training

Challenges with language proficiency in English or French are one of the biggest barriers that prevent immigrants from accessing meaningful employment in their occupations of choice. Over 70 colleges and institutes across the country offer English and French as second language training, including the federally-funded Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) or Cours de langue pour les immigrants au Canada (CLIC), English and French for Academic Purposes and Occupation-specific Language Training.

The occupation-specific language programs are key to moving beyond the basic levels addressed through LINC and improving outcomes for skilled immigrants. Colleges and institutes deliver occupation-specific language programs that typically require a Canadian Benchmark Level 6 to 8 to enter, and combine occupation and workplace terminology and language usage with socio-cultural components.

Employment-oriented Education

Colleges offer a diverse range of education and training programs that enable immigrants to top up their international credential with a Canadian one in a short timeframe. The one year post-graduate diploma programs widely offered by colleges are an excellent example. These programs require a college diploma or a bachelor's degree as a prerequisite and provide a practical learning experience oriented to employment. Colleges offer extensive support mechanisms to facilitate immigrants' entry into and completion of mainstream certificate and diploma (1 to 3 years) programs.

Colleges are leaders in essential skills initiatives focussing on the integration of immigrants. An ACCC-managed project funded by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) enabled colleges to develop tools and practices for immigrants to enhance their employability skills by improving their main essential skills in both English and French: reading text, document use, writing and oral communication.

Bridge Training Programs

Colleges and institutes deliver bridge training programs for internationally-trained nurses, health professionals, engineering technicians and technologists, and tradespersons. These programs are typically developed and delivered in collaboration with regulatory bodies and are funded through provincial project-based funding models. Institutions cannot continue these programs once government funding ends. A sustainable, mainstream bridge training model is needed. It should be developed through a collaborative process between the federal government, provincial governments, employers, regulatory bodies and post-secondary institutions.

A main success factor for bridging programs is the provision of financial assistance so that immigrants can take advantage of the programs without compromising their family responsibilities. The financial assistance pilot project introduced in Budget 2011 to help internationally-trained workers cover costs related to the FCR process is a welcomed initiative. Participation in bridging programs should be an eligible cost within this pilot project.

Wrap-around Support Services for Immigrant Learners

Colleges are mandated to serve disadvantaged populations and are structured to assist learners in overcoming the complexity of barriers many face. Through a 2008 survey, colleges and institutes identified a wide range of wrap-around support services offered to address the varied needs, challenges and barriers many immigrant learners face. These include learning skills supports; mentorships for language training and labour market transitions; information about financial assistance, daycare and transportation; and personal, diversity and cross-cultural counselling. The full range of support services are identified in the *College/Institute Process Model for Immigrant Integration* provided on the last page of this brief. This is a framework showing the key services and programs colleges should have in place to address the needs of immigrant learners in a holistic manner.

International Students' Pathways to Canadian Citizenship

Through the Canadian Experience Class Program, more international students have the opportunity to become Canadian citizens. There is a need to understand better the intentions of international students towards immigration and their awareness and experience with the Canadian Experience Class Program. The role of post-secondary institutions in supporting international students' pathways to permanent resident status should be defined more clearly. Institutions would also benefit from enhanced capacity so they can more effectively support international students through this transition.

The Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP)

Many aspects of credential recognition processes can be undertaken before an immigrant arrives in Canada. The ACCC-managed CIIP helps to build the connections to make this possible. CIIP enables Federal Skilled Workers and Provincial Nominees, including their spouses and working-age adult dependants, to meet foreign credential requirements better and achieve labour-market integration in Canada.

CIIP operates through regional offices in China, India, the Philippines and the United Kingdom, and offers itinerant services in Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Finland, Indonesia, Ireland, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal, Norway, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen upon demand.

CIIP overseas services consist of:

- A one-day group orientation on labour market integration and foreign credential recognition through in-person and/or virtual sessions;
- An individual (or couple) planning session leading to the development of a personal action plan to guide the steps in the integration process;
- Immediate referrals to Canadian organizations that can assist in the implementation of that plan by providing online advice and resources, as well as on-arrival transition support;
- Access to and support in using online tools and other relevant resources.

CIIP further offers a functional platform in each field office to facilitate outreach, support, and collaboration among Canadian organizations involved in immigrant integration (e.g. federal/provincial/territorial governments, regulatory and credential assessment bodies, sector councils, educational institutions, immigrant-serving agencies and employers).

CIIP was built upon the success of an earlier ACCC-managed pilot phase (2005-2010) funded by HRSDC. A third-party evaluation provided quantitative data that participation in CIIP led to faster acquisition of appropriate employment and qualitative evidence that CIIP graduates:

- Had a more realistic understanding of the opportunities and challenges in Canada;
- Made better informed choices about their integration process; and,
- Were better equipped to gain meaningful employment through preparatory steps such as skills assessments, foreign credential recognition, language skills assessments and training, employability training and focused job-search.

Since the start of CIIP services in 2007, including both the pilot and CIC phases of the program, 22,000 clients have registered for CIIP services and 14,000 have graduated.

CIIP and Regulatory Bodies

Regulatory bodies work to support the successful integration of immigrants while maintaining the standards and processes designed to protect the health and safety of Canadians. They recognize that Canada's prosperity depends on attracting, integrating and retaining newcomers with professional expertise and skilled labour in occupations experiencing current or future shortages. Many have signaled a willingness to re-examine licensing and other requirements to facilitate this process. Some have already taken significant steps in that direction.

CIIP provides the ideal platform for regulatory bodies to reach out to prospective immigrants pre-arrival. ACCC has collaborated with a number of regulatory bodies so that CIIP clients can learn more about occupational and licensing requirements, access self-assessment tools linked to licensing processes and even initiate the licensing process from their country of origin.

Supporting CIIP Clients' Transitions in Canada

CIIP collaborates with post-secondary institutions to provide information and access to Canadian training and education opportunities. CIIP Focal Point Partners (FPPs) are located at colleges in each province and have a dedicated advisor that provides resources to newcomers pre-arrival and serves as a point of contact upon arrival. This includes information and advice on education and training options, advising on professional and career goals, and referrals to other colleges and universities, professional bodies and online supports, based on the client's specific occupational needs and destination.

Opportunities for Colleges and Institutes to Contribute to Federal Government Efforts to Accelerate FCR

ACCC recommends the federal government tap into and invest further in college and institute capacity to support immigrant integration and accelerate FCR in the following ways:

- Enhance college and institute capacity to deliver targeted advising services for immigrants to increase awareness about learning options for immigrants already in Canada.
- Build on college and institute expertise in the delivery of RPL services and increase support for institutions to deliver these services.
- Expand Occupation-specific Language Training to better meet the language training needs of skilled immigrants.
- Develop a sustainable, mainstream bridge training model in collaboration with provinces/territories, employers, regulatory bodies and post-secondary institutions.
- Maintain and expand overseas pre-departure orientation and advising services.

These measures would go a long way towards accelerating FCR processes by ensuring immigrants are better informed, gain a Canadian credential more efficiently, if required, and improve language and inter-cultural skills to perform well in Canadian workplace settings.

College/Institute Process Model for Immigrant Integration

