

# BRITISH COLUMBIA'S Foreign Qualifications RECOGNITION REVIEW



Ministry of  
Jobs, Tourism  
and Skills Training

**FOREIGN QUALIFICATION RECOGNITION (FQR)** refers to the process of having education, skills and work experience from outside of Canada recognized as comparable to Canadian standards. For many occupations internationally trained workers need to have their qualifications recognized to be certified, registered or licensed to work in their chosen profession. The Province of British Columbia delegates authority for regulating over 280 occupations to 67 provincial regulatory bodies.

# British Columbia's Foreign Qualifications Recognition Review

This report summarizes British Columbia's Foreign Qualifications Recognition (FQR) Review (the "Review"). The Review consisted of an investigation over the Spring and Summer of 2012 into FQR barriers experienced by immigrants for nine high-demand occupations: mechanical engineers, civil engineers, engineering and applied science technologists and technicians, and five key trades—carpenters, construction electricians, heavy duty equipment technicians, industrial mechanics (millwrights), and metal fabricators. The occupations were selected based on the latest available quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrating the future occupations in demand by employers in British Columbia.



The Review employed an innovative methodology for its investigation by working in direct collaboration with organizations responsible for regulating professions—called “regulatory bodies”—rather than undertaking a formalized audit. This new innovative approach allowed for the analysis of actual FQR application, assessment, and recognition outcomes with regulatory bodies and as a result, uncovered invaluable and previously unavailable insight into FQR processes. For example, the Review investigated, empirically validated, and consequently differentiated FQR barriers that are real—issues that represent true underlying impediments to immigrants’ successful labour market integration—from those barriers that are perceived, which have arisen through media attention and/or other influences.

*The key result of the Review is 24 recommendations to support internationally trained workers in fully utilizing their skills in the Canadian workplace as well as improving the time, ease and efficacy of recognizing international skills, qualifications and experience.*

Recommendations from the Review help to advance the primary immigration objective of the Province—as established in the *BC Jobs Plan* and the *Premier's Immigration Task Force Report*—to increase the number of skilled immigrants choosing to work and live in British Columbia.

The Review is well timed to support this objective, as skills shortages are now upon employers in British Columbia and by all accounts they are expected to deepen. It is projected that one-third of the approximately one million job openings in the province over the next decade will be filled by internationally trained workers. Combined with the fact nearly 80 per cent of all job openings will require some post-secondary education, the need for skilled immigrants and an effective FQR system to support their labour market integration becomes abundantly clear as a labour market and immigration priority.

## Objectives of the review

It is vital for British Columbia to provide every opportunity for immigrants to fully utilize their skills, qualifications and experience when coming to work in the province. The benefits for doing so are considerable, both to skilled immigrants in terms of higher wages and improved labour market integration, but also to employers who have greater access to a tremendously valuable resource: global human capital. To this end, improving qualifications recognition outcomes for internationally trained workers was the overarching purpose of the Review as it is recognized as one of the most effective ways to improve economic outcomes for new immigrants and grow a vibrant B.C. economy.

Objectives employed to fulfill this purpose include:

- Identify and provide quantitative and qualitative evidence for real and perceived barriers to FQR for nine high-demand occupations.
- Work in direct collaboration with three regulatory associations—Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC (ASTTBC), the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of BC (APEGBC), and the Industry Training Authority (ITA)—to review FQR processes and outcomes and develop occupation-specific recommendations to improve identified FQR barriers.

## Innovative methodology

The success of the Review is a direct result of the trust and collaboration between the provincial government and the three regulatory and certifying bodies involved. These organizations and their leadership should be commended for sharing information on applications, assessments, and other details of their FQR processes as well as their commitment to continuous improvement. It should also be acknowledged that these organizations have demonstrated a commitment to carry out their FQR processes in a fair, equitable and responsible manner which allowed the methodology to focus on further improvements of already well-functioning systems. Without such disclosure and commitment, the Review could not have uncovered and provided recommendations to some of the most important FQR barriers. In the spirit of retaining this trust and collaborative partnership, it is at the discretion of APEGBC, ASTTBC, or the ITA to disclose the occupation-specific reports for occupations they regulate.

The Review included six main components:

- **A literature review** was undertaken on barriers to FQR to provide a background within which to understand the potential barriers that may exist for internationally trained workers coming to Canada and provide a comparative context for the status of FQR processes with provincial regulators.
- **Analyses of recognition data, case studies and assessment process summaries** were reviewed with representatives of each agency at the outset of the Review. This ensured that baseline outcomes data and assessment process details were accurate and could effectively serve as a base for assessment of barriers faced by international applicants.

- **Interviews with 20 subject matter experts** were conducted to seek input into the identification of barriers. Subject matter experts included representatives of educational institutions, immigrant serving organizations, federal government agencies with interests in labour market outcomes of international workers, and employers with experience hiring internationally trained workers.
- **Three collaboration-focused panel meetings** included regulatory bodies, representatives from the provincial government, and in some cases one or more of the aforementioned subject matter experts. Panel meetings involved the validation of barriers identified through the interviews and literature review as well as round-table conversations to develop initial responses to the identified barriers. Subject matter experts' participation in these sessions provided valuable perspective from outside the regulatory bodies.
- **An analysis of Essential Skills gaps**—with English language ability and other aspects of essential skills cited as a common barrier for immigrants' successful integration into the labour market, an essential skills assessment of internationally trained workers was conducted. Using an online occupation-specific Essential Skills test which has generated invaluable information about the essential skills gaps of those seeking certification, as well as an occupation-specific Essential Skills test for applicants who had recently applied for certification.
- **Occupation specific reports**, including relevant occupation labour market forecasts, assessment outcome data, barriers and recommended actions were developed for each of the three regulatory bodies. Each agency had an opportunity to read and validate its respective report, in keeping with the collaborative approach to the Review.

## Key findings and recommendations

As the Review was based on actual FQR application and assessment outcomes, it was possible to uncover and organize FQR barriers into two areas: “real” barriers that genuinely impede FQR outcomes for immigrants and those that are “perceived” that have no quantitative or qualitative evidence to support they are indeed barriers for immigrants. Indeed, it was revealed that some of the perceived barriers that are in the control of the regulatory bodies were found not to be valid, such as lengthy processing times for certification, while others, such as lack of English language proficiency, were found to be real and affect the ability of internationally trained workers to integrate into the workplace and professions. Having evidence for both types of barriers is important information on the potential areas for action to assist regulatory bodies, governments and other stakeholders improve their practices and thereby improve recognition outcomes for internationally trained workers.



Each occupation-specific report has considerable detail on analyses undertaken and recommendations; however, below is a summary of overall real barriers and key recommended actions followed by perceived barriers and some of the key insights from the investigation process.

## REAL BARRIERS:

1. Lack of information or misinformation about licensure processes and current occupation-specific labour market demand.

### ACTIONS:

- *Develop pathway to recognition process maps and related careers matrix to provide information on recognition expectations and enhanced labour market possibilities for immigrant skills.*
- *Encourage expansion of pre-arrival assessment options.*

2. Lower English language skills negatively impact certification outcomes.

### ACTIONS:

- *Support language testing relevant to occupational requirements.*
- *Expand delivery of professional/technical English language training.*

3. Requirements for Canadian work experience make it harder for internationally trained workers to reach full certification or licensure.

### ACTIONS:

- *Define expected outcomes of Canadian work experience; identify equivalent ways of achieving those expectations. Reduce, where possible, standard time-based Canadian work experience requirements.*

4. Gaps in technical knowledge, understanding of Canadian business practices, soft work skills and Essential Skills make it harder for internationally trained workers to find and retain work.

### ACTIONS:

- *Support broader use of Essential Skills testing in assessments and gap training to address skills enhancement.*

## PERCEIVED BARRIERS:

1. *Many skilled immigrants do not apply for certification or registration even in a field where a license is required to practice.* It was found that application intake data compared against declared intended occupation indicates landed immigrants are applying for licensure.
2. *Regulatory bodies are biased against particular source countries.* There was no evidence of bias in the process of applicants relative to any source country. Where application outcomes appear skewed, the analysis showed that the reason for lower outcomes is poor English language skills.
3. *Decision making and processing timelines are lengthy.* Decision-making and certification timelines are typically completed well within the one-year timeline

established in the Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications. Elements of the decision-making process for which the regulators have no control, such as providing all required documentation to begin assessment and scheduling the required exam, can add to the overall timeline for certification.

4. *Foreign Qualifications Assessment processes are costly.* The costs for registration and/or certification with the regulators and occupations under review were not excessive. Costs for each occupation's requirements were well within funding available through FCRO loans and program supports available to eligible candidates through Skills Connect. These findings are particular to occupations analyzed and may not apply to all occupations.

## Implementing recommendations

The Review was not intended to stop at investigation. On Nov. 3, 2012 the Province of B.C. announced a \$4.6-million investment for FQR to implement recommendations from the Review ([http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news\\_releases\\_2009-2013/2012JTST0038-001708.htm](http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2009-2013/2012JTST0038-001708.htm)). Highlights of the investment plan include:

- Building on WelcomeBC.ca, creating new online tools and supports to help immigrants find work that fully utilizes their skills in BC's economy.
- New interactive Career Options Tool with another 120 occupational guides to help immigrants assess their qualifications before arriving in B.C., so they can start working in jobs that match their skills as soon as they arrive.
- New competency-based assessments for high-demand occupations that are identified in the review to make it easier and faster for skilled immigrants to have their qualifications recognized by B.C. regulatory occupation authorities.
- New occupation-specific language programs for high-demand occupations with the focus on B.C.'s priority sectors to improve workplace success and retention.
- Investing in a performance management system for FQR in B.C., whereby FQR applications, outcomes, and process timelines will be measured for continuous improvement.





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