

EXPANDING FOREIGN PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION TO ADDRESS OUR LABOUR SHORTAGES AND SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH

Opening Statement

B.C. is expected to have 861,000 job openings between 2019 and 2029 and the government has acknowledged that this cannot be filled with local, domestic labour. Immigration is and will continue to be a major source of our workforce in BC. However, we are selling our businesses, our newcomers, and our economy short if we continue to allow foreign credentials to be devalued and under-recognized.

Background

The BC business community is facing a labour shortage and the number of job vacancies is only expected to rise. According to the BC Chamber of Commerce's own Mindreader Report – Labour Market Issues in British Columbia “2/3 of BC businesses report having had positions that were difficult-to-fill in the past year” and “employers in most regions and industries of the province are challenged with recruiting.”¹

To fill this labour gap, BC will have to rely on newcomers to our province as immigrants are expected to fill nearly 30% of future job openings. However, many of these newcomers attracted to our province find the recognition and appropriate valuation of their foreign professional credentials a problem that is undermining their economic success and holding back our local business community.

In BC, over 200 occupations are regulated professions, from dentists to nurses to architects.² Employees in these professions must be licensed, certified, and/or registered by the appropriate regulatory body to practice the profession in the province. However, the time, effort and expense it takes some newcomers to have their foreign professional credentials recognized in some fields is leading them to take positions more junior than they are qualified for, or to seek work in unrelated fields or in sustenance positions. This undercuts their own personal economic potential and leaves our business community without the skilled workers needed for key positions.

According to a Vancity and Angus Reid Global survey of 400 new Canadians in BC, more than 2/3 of newcomers say that their international work experience and professional qualifications are “less respected than the Canadian equivalents, leading to economic difficulties and employment exclusion.”³ In this same survey, “among those who have sought employment in their chosen field in B.C., only half (49%) say they were able to find jobs at levels that match their workplace credentials. The rest say they took work in junior positions (27%) or found work in different fields (24%).”⁴

This difficulty facing newcomers is not just an irritant or obstacle for them personally—it has significant macro-economic impacts. One Conference Board of Canada report found that 844,000 Canadians are unemployed or underemployed because of their credentials not being adequately recognized, a job shortfall worth as much

¹ BC Chamber of Commerce Mindreader Report – Labour Market Issues in British Columbia, The British Columbia Chamber of Commerce, 2018. Accessed online:

<http://www.bcchamber.org/sites/default/files/Final%20MindReader%20Labour%20Market%20Report%2008.21.2018.pdf>

² Trade Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement, *List of British Columbia Regulatory Authorities*. Accessed online:

<http://www.tilma.ca/pdf/bcregulatoryauthorities.pdf>

³ Vancity Savings Credit Union, *Recognizing the Problem: Workplace credentials and the newcomer experience in B.C.* (June 2019)

⁴ Vancity, *Recognizing the Problem*

as \$17 billion annually in lost earnings.⁵ And in BC, newcomers with similar credentials and language skills as native-born Canadians earn 9% less in wages, which represents \$4.8 billion in forgone income and \$1.3 billion in income tax to government.⁶

Unrealized potential of newcomers, forgone economic growth, ongoing job vacancies, and tax revenue left on the table --- these are the results of not prioritizing foreign professional credential recognition, and the provincial government needs to take action to expedite a solution.

Currently, there are programs and supports for newcomers to have their credentials assessed and evaluated. However, they are complex, costly, and time-consuming. The BC government's own website for newcomers lays out the daunting task of getting professional credentials recognized. They outline six steps, including: finding and contacting the right regulatory body for the more than 200 applicable professions; completing application processes and providing transcripts from educational programs and schools, references, employment history and resumes; paying for your educational credentials to be evaluated; taking exams and performing interviews with the regulatory authorities; and paying fees, dues and other costs to the regulatory bodies and others. The last step in this process, as laid out by the provincial government is to be patient, with the government acknowledging that its own labyrinthine process "can be complex...[requiring] patience and determination."⁷

The provincial government must work with the professional regulatory bodies, each of which is created through provincial legislation and within provincial jurisdiction, to expedite and ease the recognition of foreign professional credentials to help fulfill the promise of our newcomers and help satisfy the needs of our business community.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the provincial government, working where appropriate with the federal government and professional colleges and regulatory authorities

1. Reduce the wait times, cost, and complexity for professional and trades qualification assessments by expediting the necessary processes and expanding the available placements for testing, residencies, and skills demonstrations
2. Develop clear and easy-to-understand guides for professional credential recognition, and make them widely available to newcomers both upon arrival and before coming to Canada
3. Consult and liaise with the BC Chamber of Commerce and the business community on additional ways of ensuring newcomers are able to fulfill current and expected labour market needs

Submitted by the Burnaby Board of Trade

⁵ The Conference Board of Canada, "*Brain Gain 2015: The State of Canada's Learning Recognition System*"

⁶ Vancity, *Recognizing the Problem*

⁷ Government of British Columbia, WelcomeBC website Accessed online: [https://www.welcomebc.ca/Work-or-Study-in-B-C/Work-in-B-C/Foreign-Qualifications-Recognition-\(FQR\)](https://www.welcomebc.ca/Work-or-Study-in-B-C/Work-in-B-C/Foreign-Qualifications-Recognition-(FQR))