

## SUGGESTED SPEAKING POINTS

### Introduction

- Thank you, Brad, for your insights into labour mobility and the recognition of qualifications. My thanks also to World Education Services, the Canadian Bureau for International Education, and the Metropolis Project for organizing this symposium. It is a great pleasure for me to be here today and to participate in this session.
- In responding to Brad's paper, I hope both to provide Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's perspective on the issues of labour mobility and the recognition of qualifications and to briefly outline my department's activities in this area.
- As Brad has noted, professionals and academics have an established history of regulating entry into their respective fields. This restricted entry serves a number of goals, including safeguarding professional and academic quality and integrity, protecting the public interest and ensuring public confidence.
- I must also agree with Brad that the public and the media may often not be aware of the complexity of the issues surrounding labour mobility and the recognition of qualifications.

## The Need for Improved Recognition of Qualifications

- HRSD recognizes the need for standards for the recognition of qualifications, as well as the long history of self-regulation in the professions and the academy. At the same time, the context in which we live and work is changing, and it is more important than ever that qualified individuals are able to put their skills to work in their chosen profession.
- Our population is aging and we are beginning to see skills shortages in some sectors. For example:
  - According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the 'real' physician-population ratio, adjusting for population aging and physician demographics, declined 5.1% from 1993 to 2000;<sup>1</sup> and
  - Following the same trend, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada estimates that its members will need to recruit approximately 3,000 additional professors annually between now and 2010.<sup>2</sup>
- As a result of demographic shifts, immigrants are expected to account for all net labour force growth in Canada by 2011.<sup>3</sup> At the

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<sup>1</sup> "From Perceived Surplus to Perceived Shortage: What Happened to Canada's Physician Workforce in the 1990s?", Benjamin TB Chan, MD MPH MPA, CIHI 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, *Research File*, March 2000, Volume 4, No. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, (February 11, 2003,-- using 2001 Census data)

same time, Canada faces a global market for skills. People with advanced skills are in high demand around the world and individuals are willing to move across borders to find employment.

- Canada's economic growth depends on increasing the productivity of our economy. In the knowledge economy this includes attracting and retaining a high quality labour force as competition for highly qualified people intensifies.
- Not only does Canada need the skills of our immigrants, but we have an obligation to ensure that individuals who come to Canada seeking a better life are able to put their skills and training to work. The challenges of adapting to life in a new land are sufficient without the strain of being unable to work in their chosen field.

### **Government of Canada Initiatives**

- The 2003 Budget invested \$40 million over 5 years to improve foreign credential recognition and the 2004 Budget committed an additional \$5 million per year, beginning in 2005/06, to address foreign credential recognition issues in non-regulated occupations.
- In the recent Speech from the Throne the Government of Canada promised to redouble efforts, in cooperation with the provinces and professional bodies, to help integrate immigrants into the workforce.

- Through its Foreign Credential Recognition Program, HRSDC partners with provinces and territories, regulatory bodies, learning institutions, sector councils, and employers to develop foreign credential recognition processes and approaches that are fair, accessible, and rigorous in both regulated and non-regulated professions.
- In the regulated professions, we are working in partnership with regulatory bodies to create a foundation for consistent approaches to regulation while respecting their authority over their respective professions.
- We are focussing initial efforts on engineers based on the numbers of engineers immigrating to Canada, and on physicians and nurses based on severe shortages.
- We have been working with the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers on the development of a strategy to improve foreign credential recognition for International Engineering Graduates. Consultations with key stakeholders on the engineering Council's action plan are currently underway with the goal of completing an implementation strategy.
- We are also participating in Health Canada led work to address issues relating to the integration of international medical graduates into the Canadian labour market. To date, HRSDC

has negotiated agreements with the Medical Council of Canada to:

- create an on-line assessment tool that will help international medical graduates determine their readiness to apply for licensure in Canada; and
  - expand access to the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination, the first step in the licensing process for international medical graduates, by making it available on-line in additional countries.
- My department is also partnering with the Canadian Nurses' Association to complete a diagnostic project that will identify and assess current practices and policies relating to the licensure of internationally trained Registered Nurses (RNs), Licenses Practical Nurses (LPNs), and Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs).
  - To improve the recognition of qualifications in the non-regulated professions, HRSDC is working with sector councils and other employer groups to eliminate barriers to credential recognition and labour market integration where skills shortages exist.
  - The department is also supporting the development of a Going to Canada Immigration Portal, an Internet service that will provide seamless access to timely and targeted information and tools for prospective immigrants and new Canadians.

## **Policy on Foreign Academics**

- Through the Foreign Worker Program, HRSDC has a policy unique to academics, which outlines specific advertising requirements for academic positions, and explicitly mandates that Canadian and permanent residents who meet the qualifications for a position are given priority for appointment.
- This policy ensures that academic employers are able to address skill shortages by hiring faculty from outside of Canada as necessary while giving consideration to the career development needs of Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

## **Improving Labour Mobility within Canada**

- While we are working to ensure the recognition of foreign credentials, we are also continuing to work to ensure that all Canadians are able to move freely within Canada and to practice their profession regardless of their location.
- As a signatory to the Agreement on Internal Trade, HRSDC plays an important role in the effort to remove or reduce interprovincial barriers to labour mobility.
- Since 1997, HRSDC has offered funding assistance to consortia of regulatory bodies to support their compliance with the Labour

Market Chapter of the Agreement on Internal Trade. This funding allows regulatory bodies to meet to compare their standards and work toward mutual recognition agreements among regulators from different provinces and territories. Provincial governments and regulatory bodies have acknowledged that without this funding assistance, it would have been much more challenging to make progress towards compliance with the Chapter.

- HRSDC has also been influential in ensuring that foreign-trained workers who are already qualified to practice a profession or trade in one province/territory also have access to employment opportunities in other jurisdictions in Canada. In this way, HRSDC is helping to address the issue of foreign credential recognition within the context of the Agreement on Internal Trade.

## **Conclusion**

- Let me conclude by saying that, without disputing the complexity of the issues, improving labour mobility and the recognition of professional and academic qualifications is essential to the successful integration of immigrants and to Canada's continuing prosperity.
- It is possible for professions to regulate professional standards and protect the public interest without creating an impenetrable barrier to individuals possessing foreign credentials.

- I would encourage everyone active in this area to consider what they can contribute to the development of foreign credential processes that are fair and consistent as well as rigorous.
- I would also encourage consideration of how you can support broader public commitment to this issue.
- We have begun to make progress and I believe with continuing collaboration we can enable immigrants to realize their potential and fully contribute to the Canadian economy and society.