



MOSAIC

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON
CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

*A Submission re
Recognition of the International Experience &
Credentials of Immigrants*

By

MOSAIC

April 7, 2005

SUBMISSIONS TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION ON THE ISSUE OF INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED PROFESSIONALS AND TRADESPEOPLE

Dr. June Francis
Board Member of MOSAIC

“If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.” Margaret Mead

Certainly that thought would apply to efforts of the organization, MOSAIC, which I am representing today. MOSAIC is a multilingual non profit organization dedicated to helping immigrants “find a fitting place” in Canadian society. We believe, immigrants will strengthen Canada’s society overall given how vital they are, have been and will be to Canada’s success. The successful integration of internationally trained individuals into Canada’s work force is of vital importance to MOSAIC. It is only when an immigrant and her/his family are allowed to contribute to their full potential that we will finally achieve the benefits as a society. We are here today because many internationally trained professionals and trades people continue to experience enormous difficulty in “finding a fitting place”. They cannot find work that utilizes the very skills and training we Canadians considered when we allowed them entry. How can any country allow this waste of potential in areas we lack proper supply? Rene Dubos answers this question with the following statement “Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival.” We, Canadians, need to realize that this ‘tolerance’ Mr. Dubos spoke of is not just the passive tolerance we all know but is an active tolerance which allows people to open doors which bureaucratic bodies seek to close in an attempt to protect their interest.. MOSAIC has undertaken a number of initiatives to open these doors:

1. In an innovative partnership with VanCity Savings Credit Union, we work with skilled immigrant professionals who need training upgrading in order to access their professions. MOSAIC does the assessment and career planning while VanCity provides the professional with a low interest loan to cover their school fees.
2. We are supporting foreign credential advocacy groups such as the BC Internationally Trained Professionals Network to assist them in their efforts to gain acceptance of their credentials and experience.
3. We are funding consultants to evaluate the legal impediments to internationally trained professionals accessing licensure through regulatory bodies.

Internationally trained professionals represent a competitive advantage to Canada. They bring with them training and experience that Canada has not financed but stands to gain from. Whether we gain from their expertise or end up at a net loss depends on the doors we open for them to practice in their field of expertise. While I am addressing the needs of immigrants and refugees because that is MOSAIC's primary focus, it should be understood that these same issues apply to professionals, trained abroad, who are Canadians, the children of Canadians as well as new Canadians who arrive as immigrants and refugees.

Immigrant professionals usually arrive in Canada with the expectation that the training and experience they bring with them will be able to be utilized in their adopted country. Unfortunately for many professional this is not the case.

At the most fundamental level they are unable to have their accreditation certified once in Canada. Ironically, many of these same qualifications have had to be verified during the immigration process in order to qualify them for entry into Canada in the first place. It is therefore not surprising that these new Canadians often only find out after arriving that their qualifications may not be recognized. The immigrant who comes motivated to work and who is highly skilled, often with a family to support, suddenly finds him/her self unable to work in his/her field of expertise. In my experience, most immigrants are willing to accept some reasonable set of expectations that need to be fulfilled in order to assume their role in the society. If they have the misfortune to be from regulated professions such as medicine, they find provincial bodies whose regulations range from almost impossible to unrealistic. Without attacking the motives of any particular professional regulatory body, I think it is important to recognize that self regulating bodies can be expected to act in the interest of their current members. Where this interest conflicts with the public good then some mechanism needs to be put in place to ensure the public good is given priority. This is the rightful place of government and I dare say this committee needs to be challenged to make sure the good of Canadians are served. It is easy to be deflected by assertions that these regulations are there to ensure standards. We all applaud the need for standards but we must ensure that it is in fact failure to meet necessary standards and not other discriminatory factors that keep them from contributing in their chosen fields.

As Ghandi said "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stifled. I want all the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible."

I will digress here with an anecdote to illustrate the human face of this of how walled in we sometimes appear to foreign trained individuals who desire to contribute their skills to Canada. I suffer from a condition that scared me with the possibility of blindness. Knowing this I sought the advice of my sister, who by the way practices neurology in the US, because she was unable to work here in Canada for the reasons we are making this submission. She consulted her colleagues at the Mayo clinic and suggested I come to the US for consultations. Later I learnt that the world's leading professional was practicing in

Vancouver. When I saw him for a consultation, I recounted the high esteem with which he was held by his US colleagues as one of the world's experts. He recounted a story to me that clearly still riled him. It was a story of the difficulties he faced when he first applied to practice here. His training is from a university that is arguably the top medical school in the world. He indicated that he would have given up on his wish to practice in Canada had it not been for his wife who desperately wanted to live and raise their children here. I need not underscore what a loss this would have been for us. This story is particularly poignant because, this doctor is Canadian and also from the dominant race. Think what greater obstacles an immigrant would have faced. The key question that you have to ask is "Can professional bodies be left alone to ensure the public good?"

I believe the public good for Canada has to be considered alongside the interests of these necessary professional bodies. We should not accept that it is a given that these professional bodies can operate in isolation. The role of government is to provide an environment whereby an optimal solution can be reached for all concerned. This involves weighing the legitimate concern for safeguarding standards while providing access point for entry for those trained abroad. The following are some specific recommendations proposed by MOSAIC

1. The Credentialing Process needs to be Efficient, Transparent, Fair and Consistent

Improvements need to be made in the efficiency, transparency and fairness of the recognition of non-Canadian credentials where such process exists and to institute processes where none exists. A variety of initiatives through direct funding or funding formulae seem appropriate here to encourage provinces and regulatory bodies to come on-side. Estimates indicate this is of vital economic importance to many sectors with heightened awareness being afforded the health care sector. One study indicates that the loss to unrecognized foreign credential in health care for the province of Alberta alone is between \$34 and \$65 Million per year (Emery, 2004). As a comparator indicating what immigrants can contribute when their credentials are not fettered by unnecessary obstacles is the business class of immigrants who were estimated to have contributed approximately 2.6 Billion to the GDP between 1986 and 1992 (Kunin, 1995).

2. Upon arrival, limited educational grants to speed the process of credentialing would assist immigrants who have to assume additional training. Financial pressures such as providing for their families are obstacles to timely completion of credentials.

3. Funding supplied to assisting regulatory bodies in developing mechanism and processes to streamline the process may be appropriate. Third party agencies like, MOSAIC, involved in settlement services could provide valuable services both seminal and peripheral to the process. An example of a positive move in this direction has been the federal government's efforts in its latest

budget to commit resources to advanced language training. This appears to be a vital area as this is often a major obstacle to employment.

4. **Funding national and international organizations to create pan-Canadian and international equivalencies in credentials is a vital part of achieving fairness in the system.** The documented differences and obstacles to provincial equivalencies create difficulties for even Canadian-trained individuals wishing to cross provincial boundaries. This situation is indicative of the kind of barriers internationally trained persons have to overcome. One indication of the global competition for trained professionals and trades people is that UNESCO has taken the initiative to create international equivalencies. If we wish to compete successfully in this global marketplace it would be highly advantageous for Canada to participate in the UNESCO initiative so we are on the cutting edge.
5. **We need to urgently address the information and attitudinal issues that discourage employees from hiring foreign trained professional.** One study indicates that 40% of employers admitted screening out individuals based on their foreign credentials. I remember having to purposely disguise the university I was from, despite earning the top place in my class, simply to get interviewed. I believe that was largely responsible for me getting my first professional job. Later I almost lost the job because I was given a knowledge test that was quite irrelevant to the job, one that only a Canadian could have passed. Fortunately they realized I had failed the test only after giving me the job offer. To the credit of that company, they revised the test.
 - a. Employers need to be provided with information assuring them of equivalency of training
 - b. Strengthen and expand work-bridging programs that fund spots for employees.
 - c. Employers need to be exposed to the advantages that come from hiring foreign trained workers such as the language skills and cultural knowledge they bring. This is especially important as a source of firm innovation and in international expansion plans.
6. **Improving the information and recourses to immigrants prior to and after arriving in Canada to speed the acceptance of their credentials is also key** to improving the situation. The recent web-portals being proposed by the federal government is an excellent means to accomplish this. However there are still many details that need to be addressed to make this useful. Many users of such systems indicate that information is usually presented in a fragmented way and is difficult to follow and act on. Also, sometimes the information lacks legitimacy. To make these portals truly useful, the information provided needs to be clear, legitimate and actionable. It is therefore vital that funding be provided to help governing bodies actively assist the process of credentialing through this medium. Many of these processes, such as getting recommendations and documentation, may be better done while the immigrant is in his/her home country. This may also result in opportunities to target deficits in training prior to arrival.

Integrating internationally trained professionals is clearly a difficult one. Many different constituent interests have to be balanced in order to find an optimal solution. However it is clear that Canada needs to find solutions if it is to continue to attract the brightest and most talented individuals from this global market place for professionals and trades people. This is perhaps one of the most critical issues we must face if we are to reap the benefits of our immigration policies.

Thanks you for this opportunity.

References:

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