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Chair

Mr. Ed Komarnicki

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): I'll call the meeting to order.

We have a number of new participants with us today. I'd like to say that we'll be doing two panels of three witnesses each today. The first panel will be with us for one hour. Representatives from the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, the Certified General Accountants Association of Canada, and the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters will be making presentations.

Each of you will make a presentation, and then we will have some questioning rounds from parties in the committee. I ask that as you make your presentations you speak slowly. The interpreters need to interpret, and at times that gets a little difficult. So keep that in mind as you're presenting. I'll indicate when you're coming near the end of your time.

With that, Ms. Thompson, could you start?

Ms. Doretta Thompson (Principal, Education and Communications, Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm Doretta Thompson. I'm a principal in education strategy and communication with the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. Over the last two years, I've been the CICA's liaison with HRSDC on our international credential recognition initiatives. With me is Jylan Khalil, the CICA's director of qualification. Jylan is an expert in the assessment of international qualification processes and the negotiation of mutual recognition agreements. We appreciate the opportunity to share with you our ongoing initiatives, made possible through HRSDC's foreign credential recognition program, to improve the labour market outcomes of foreign-trained individuals.

The CA profession is regulated at the provincial level. Our provincial institutes have the constitutional responsibility for qualification and admission to the profession, including the admission of internationally trained professionals. The CICA's role is to work closely with the provincial institutes, through inter-institute committees, to set national standards, which all CAs must meet. Consequently, CAs have full mobility across Canada. And all our international credential recognition initiatives are being developed within this framework and require full provincial support.

Like most professions, ours faces an imminent demographic challenge. The demand for CAs is expected to grow, just as a

significant portion of our membership begins to retire. Internationally trained accountants will be an important source of new CAs, and many will need to upgrade their education or experience.

Our goal, consistent with that of the pan-Canadian framework, is to ensure that internationally trained accountants have access to timely, fair, and transparent assessment processes that give full credit for the knowledge and experience they bring to Canada; to guarantee timely assessment of their credentials; and to offer accessible, affordable, focused bridging programs that will enable them to meet Canadian standards more quickly than is possible today.

As pointed out by HRSDC in its recent testimony, the process for recognizing credentials is complex, costly, and lengthy.

We received our first grant from HRSDC's FCR program in September 2009. With it, we created a pan-Canadian web portal to provide internationally trained accountants with clear information on the requirements for becoming a CA in Canada. When we began this initiative, each provincial institute had its own application and assessment process, and the information available varied significantly from province to province, creating confusion among potential applicants both in Canada and abroad.

This grant enabled us to conduct focus groups to better understand the information needs of internationally trained accountants who had become Canadian CAs; to create an interprovincial team to produce a harmonized online application process; and to create a web portal that's easy for applicants to use, provides answers to the most commonly asked questions, and provides information for employers of internationally trained accountants.

While the launch of our "Become a CA in Canada" website will happen next month, the soft launch early this summer is already resulting in a smoother application process for internationally trained accountants, and reduced calls, letters, and e-mails to the CICA and to the provincial institutes. The site has already had almost 9,000 different visitors. About half are from other countries, the top three being India, Pakistan, and the U.S. And completed applications are beginning to come in. We're pleased to provide committee members with screen shots of two introductory pages of the website. To see the full site, you can visit www.becomeacaincanada.ca, or www.devenircaauCanada.ca.

Ms. Jylan Khalil (Director, Chartered Accountants Qualification, Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants): The website captures current processes and streamlines the application process, but it will also provide the launch point for four exciting new initiatives. Over the next three years, federal funding will enable us to create a sophisticated assessment tool and three bridging programs to help internationally trained accountants qualify as Canadian CAs. Many of them will be able to begin the process before they even arrive in Canada.

The first initiative is a CA qualification assessment tool. This is a computer-based tool that assesses the credentials, designation, relevant professional development, and work experience of an internationally trained accountant against the CA profession's qualification requirements. The unique feature of this tool is that it will award academic credit for experiential learning. Applicants will receive a detailed report identifying the specific requirements they lack, and information on how these gaps can be bridged. It will outline the minimum necessary and sufficient bridging programs required for CA qualification. This important tool is scheduled for completion in 2014.

The second initiative is the CA reciprocity education program that will replace the current examination with online courses. This program targets members of the 14 international accounting bodies with whom we have mutual recognition agreements, MRAs. Currently these accountants are eligible to become CAs by passing examinations in Canadian tax, law, and in CA ethics. Each year, approximately 150 people take this exam. Preliminary research indicates that there are many more people eligible.

We believe that online courses, which can be taken at any time and from anywhere in the world, will be a more attractive option. Other international bodies with whom we have MRAs are also replacing their equivalent exams with such courses, and we expect this program to be mutually agreed upon as part of the 2012 MRA renewal process. The examination would be maintained for those seeking a licence to practice public accounting. Development of this program is now under way, with a pilot project planned for November 2012 and program launch in March 2013.

The third initiative is the CA executive professional program that will prepare internationally trained accountants with seven or more years of experience to write our uniform evaluation. This eight-month, executive-style, part-time program will cover the professional qualities and skills of our competency map. Currently these experienced professionals must complete a domestic education program, a process that can take up to two or more years. Preliminary research with employers indicates significant interest in this program for internationally trained staff. We expect to pilot this project in September 2013 and launch it in September 2014.

Our final initiative is an evaluation of experience targeted at very senior internationally trained accountants with twelve or more years of experience, five of which must be in a senior role. They will be asked to demonstrate how they have developed the competencies expected of a qualified CA through a rigorous evaluation of their professional experience. Successful completion of this evaluation will qualify candidates as Canadian CAs without writing our final evaluation. We currently have no pathway to the profession for these

senior business leaders. Development of the evaluation of experience is also well under way, with a pilot planned for March 2012.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead.

Ms. Doretta Thompson: We've been asked to comment on our experiences in applying for funding under federal government programs, and working with HRSDC and FCRP. Having spearheaded our application efforts, I can say that the proposal process is straightforward, the criteria are clearly articulated, and the staff with whom we've worked are knowledgeable and helpful. Reporting requirements are easily understood.

In terms of the impact of funding, I would say that it enabled us to focus on initiatives we had identified as important, but did not have the staff resources to undertake on a priority basis. Further, these projects enable us to work in partnership with our provincial institutes in a very positive way. Complementary programs, like language training and mentoring, are being developed at the provincial level, and will be shared more effectively on a national basis.

Finally, I'd like to say that in the two years we've participated in these programs, we have also appreciated the opportunities to work with other professional and regulatory bodies. The opportunity to share our experience through initiatives such as the federal government's international qualifications network website, of which we're early adopters, is also helpful and informative.

We'd be very happy to answer any questions or discuss any of our initiatives further.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. There will be an opportunity for questions.

Next, Mr. Wilson, are you presenting?

Mr. Mathew Wilson (Vice-President, National Policy, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Mathew Wilson, and I'm with the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters.

The CME is Canada's largest trade and industry association. We represent about 10,000 member companies from across Canada, and we're the chair of the Canadian Manufacturing Coalition, which represents 47 of Canada's largest sectoral associations. This year is actually our 140th anniversary.

Foreign workers have always been important for CME, as well as for Canada's labour force. However, while immigrants were once relied on for physical labour, today they are relied on to fill the variety of critical labour positions across almost all sectors of the economy. Using the immigration system in an efficient manner as a key source of highly productive and highly skilled labourers is critical to the success of Canada's economy moving forward. Quite simply, without access to foreign workers, Canadian companies will not be able to design, produce, and create the innovative products necessary to remain globally competitive.

The challenges in the current immigration and skill certification system, however, are causing many industries in Canada today to fail. In many provinces and sectors, there are significant shortfalls in attracting or training skilled workers. This is often a result of companies not being able to find the right people with the right certifications in their province, and the current immigration skill certification system, which is not efficient enough at helping companies fill the gaps. Canada must do a better job of developing our domestic talent, improving immigration for focused skill shortages, and properly dealing with foreign credentials.

• (1545)

The Chair: Excuse me, but could you slow up a little bit? This would be helpful to the interpreters here.

Mr. Mathew Wilson: Sure thing.

In short, Canada must focus its efforts on simplifying and removing the unnecessary paper and other burdens in the current processes. This is not about reducing competencies or sacrificing skill sets or safety requirements; it is about improving the way that evaluations and assessments are made. If someone with foreign training has the necessary skills, we should implement an evaluation process that would allow this to be determined so that companies in Canada can have access to these people. We need to remove the artificial barriers and focus on the real issues—ensuring that the person has the skills necessary to do the job properly and safely.

The steps taken by governments of all levels to support the needs of industry in this regard have been impressive to date. That includes the creation of the pan-Canadian framework for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications, and the Canadian immigrant integration program. But much more must be done by both industry and government. The members of the CME have several recommendations in this regard relating to skills certification and the immigration process.

First, we must expand existing industry-government partnerships on job and skill matching. CME, HRSDC, the foreign credential recognition office, and the Society of Internationally Trained Engineers of British Columbia have created a pilot program called E-MAP—the engineering matching and placement program—which is a technical job-matching program to facilitate the employment of internationally trained engineers into B.C.'s growing manufacturing sector. This partnership between industry and government should be expanded into a nationally funded and supported program.

Second, governments, the industry, regulating bodies, and colleges and universities must work together to create a national database of skills credentials and educational institutions that have already been assessed internationally so that we know, and can determine, Canadian equivalency. Many organizations, including many of the human resources sector councils federally, have been doing this work individually, but it needs to be centralized and made publicly available.

Third, a process for the recognition of prior learning must be created for Canadian companies and governments to have better assessment of an individual's formal and informal learning, such as computer courses, management workshops, and communications skills. This should include work-based certifications, which use recognition of prior learning systems created by sector-driven

standards, rather than academic standards as the basis for assessment and the development of evidence.

Fourth, we must expand the work of the pan-Canadian framework to cover skills that are in demand by industry across Canada. The occupations that are covered today and that will be covered in the coming years are an excellent start. However, most of the professions covered today do not cover the skill sets required by industry—for example, construction millwrights, industrial mechanics, ironworkers, structural metal fabricators and fitters, welders and related machine operators, steamfitters, pipefitters, insulators, sheet metal workers, and carpenters.

Fifth, current quota allowances must be increased for provincial immigration nominee programs to allow provinces to quickly adapt to their local industry needs.

Sixth, we must continue to identify ways to improve the labour market responsiveness of the federal skilled worker program and allocate points towards factors that are valued by employers and have been shown to influence success of immigrants in the labour market.

Seventh, we must expand the work of the Canadian immigrant integration program in foreign consulates beyond Manila, Guangzhou in China, and New Delhi in India.

Finally, we must work to improve the immigrant visa program to shorten the timeframes and costs associated with hiring foreign workers. Currently it can take up to four to six months to arrange a work visa, and that's after a company has found a suitable candidate for a vacant position. That is simply far too long. And this time is in addition to the significant cost involved in completing the process through Service Canada, which now requests complete corporate HR plans and detailed results of local recruitment efforts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present here today. I look forward to the discussion.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sure there will be questions relating to that subject matter.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Carole Presseault (Vice-President, Government and Regulatory Affairs, Certified General Accountants Association of Canada): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I want to thank you for the invitation on behalf of Certified General Accountants of Canada, or CGA Canada.

We are a professional association representing 75,000 CGAs in Canada and abroad, including China and the Caribbean.

I am pleased to see that our colleagues from the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants are joining us today. This way, together, we can provide you with an overview of initiatives in qualification recognition for accountants. That profession is still highly in demand, as my colleagues pointed out.

[English]

CGA Canada has been welcoming foreign-trained accountants for many years through a number of different paths. Today I want to speak about four distinct strategies that ensure timely, accessible assessment and recognition of foreign credentials.

The four things I want to talk about are mutual recognition agreements. My colleagues have spoken a bit about that, so I won't go into many details. The principle is the same. I want to talk to you about the new pilot program to offer CGA examinations and locations overseas, an online self-assessment tool enabling foreign-trained accountants to compare and assess their credentials with CGA requirements, and a harmonization project that will enable provincial CGA licensing bodies to access the same assessment data, leading to faster, more consistent assessments. These last two strategies were funded through the federal government program.

For many years foreign-trained accountants have been attracted to the CGA program because of its flexible delivery options. Although all candidates must meet the same internationally recognized high qualification standards, they can study on a part-time basis while working full-time and establishing themselves in their new communities. For this reason, foreign-trained accountants have played a big part in the tremendous growth of CGA designation over the years.

Today, about one-third of our membership in Ontario is foreign-trained, and in British Columbia 45% of our students say they have taken a significant portion of their studies outside Canada.

The first and likely the most direct path for having your professional qualification recognized is through mutual recognition agreements, achieved with comparable accounting bodies. And in some cases the only additional qualification requirement is to pass an examination in Canadian tax and business law.

To date, CGA Canada has negotiated mutual recognition agreements with four leading international accounting bodies. They are in Ireland, Australia, France, and the U.K., the last of which operates on a global basis and is one of the largest accounting bodies in the world.

One of the challenges foreign-trained accountants face is that they must wait until they arrive in Canada to begin the process of qualifying for a Canadian accounting designation. Until now we've been unable to offer qualification examinations overseas due to concerns about ensuring that there is integrity of highly confidential materials and that all candidates write exams under the same stringent conditions. However, a program of the Foreign Credentials Referral Office is helping us overcome those obstacles.

We are currently offering an opportunity for Philippines certified public accountants to earn the CGA designation from their home country. The first examination will be offered in Manila in March 2012. If the program is proven to be successful, we hope to extend it to New Delhi, India, very shortly after.

China, the Philippines, and India are the three largest source countries for immigrants. By adding these overseas examination centres in New Delhi and Manila to our existing operations in China, we will have avenues in all three countries for foreign-trained

accountants to begin the process of earning a Canadian accounting designation before they arrive in Canada.

I'll now turn to our foreign credentials recognition national harmonization project.

Funding received from HRSDC last year will assist in addressing two main challenges: credential assessment and gap analysis.

The project will be done in two phases. Phase one is construction of an online self-assessment tool that can be used by foreign-trained accountants to assess their credentials. For the foreign-trained accountant, the online self-assessment tool provides a single interface that will provide consistent initial assessment results. It will assess both their university studies and their professional credentials and will provide them with a clear sense of where they would begin within the CGA program. Since they can access the tool from their own countries, they can get that initial assessment before they immigrate—before they even apply, in fact.

Now I must point out that this online self-assessment tool does not provide an official assessment of the accountant's credentials and will not provide specific results for all of the world's accounting programs. A provincial CGA association must still conduct an official assessment in order to admit a person into the CGA program. However, the online tool will enable many foreign-trained accountants to get a good sense of their standing much earlier in the immigration process, when they are making their initial plans and decisions.

Phase two involves detailed comparisons of various foreign qualification requirements against the high CGA qualification requirements. The results are being entered into a knowledge base that will serve as the back end of the online self-assessment tool.

As has already been addressed by other witnesses before this committee, challenges arise from the fact that foreign credential assessment is a matter of provincial jurisdiction. For the foreign-trained professional, this can lead to confusion and perhaps even the possibility of inconsistent assessments from one jurisdiction to another, not to speak of the cost of these assessments. For the provincial licensing bodies, such as our provincial CGA associations, it can result in duplicated effort and resource challenges as each jurisdiction struggles to conduct the same types of assessments. The national harmonization project addresses both issues.

For the provincial CGA associations, the knowledge base reduces the labour involved in evaluating credentials and provides the means for timely, consistent, and fair assessments of foreign prior learning. The project involves systematically identifying, assessing, and codifying the foreign accounting designations deemed of high importance. By that we mean that they are based on the volumes of applicants.

An additional benefit of this project is that it will help us identify potential partners for future mutual recognition agreements. MRAs provide the most direct path for foreign-trained accountants to qualify in Canada.

The project is proceeding as planned, and the online self-assessment tool is scheduled to launch at the end of this month.

• (1555)

We are very excited about this new web-based tool. As additional data is added to the knowledge base, the self-assessment tool becomes even more useful over time. What we mean is it will be current and it will keep on growing.

There are still outstanding issues in the process, including interprovincial mobility issues. Since most accountants work outside the regulated occupation of public accounting, their biggest challenges are often related to securing suitable employment rather than obtaining a Canadian accounting designation.

In conclusion, the importance of recognizing foreign credentials is well understood and appreciated by all parties, but it does not have a simple solution. It requires federal-provincial cooperation and it requires the collaboration of diverse stakeholders, including the professions, regulatory bodies, education providers, immigrant services agencies, and employers. The foreign credential recognition program has helped to bring these stakeholders together to share knowledge, to build partnerships, and to address systemic barriers. The momentum that has built up over the past few years is achieving results.

[Translation]

Thank you for your attention. It would be my pleasure to participate in the discussion and answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation. We certainly appreciated it.

I've heard about a gap analysis and a bridging tool. It would be good if you had both at the same time and in the same area. In any event, we're going to open it up to questions.

Mr. Patry, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank those who came here to make these presentations.

Mr. Wilson, since I became a member of this committee, you are the first to talk about trade employees and the labour shortages you anticipate. I was a factory worker, so I am especially affected by trades such as steel erector, stationary engineer, boiler operator, mechanic and metal pourer. What do you see happening in those trades?

In addition, you said that you represent 10,000 companies in Canada. Are we talking about large companies? You probably don't only represent trade employees. What other professions do you represent? Could you please explain the situation to me?

• (1600)

[English]

Mr. Mathew Wilson: Our members are in most cases the employers of the trades. They represent all sizes of manufacturers and exporters throughout the country, from mom-and-pop shops to

multinationals, in almost every sector: automotive, agriculture, aerospace, and natural resources.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry: In your presentation, you suggested that quotas be increased, and you talked about the problems related to the length of work permits.

Where I live, a company brought 100 welders from abroad—I'm not sure which country exactly—to help out. What are the quotas? What kind of interprovincial agreements are in place?

In the past, a trade employee from Quebec could not work in Saskatchewan. Could you explain that to me?

[English]

Mr. Mathew Wilson: That's a good question. I can't explain why it happens. I can only explain that it does happen and confirm what you're hearing as well.

We hear it regularly from our members right across the country, especially when there are short time-windows and gaps created because of excess demand for materials or for projects. It happens on a regular basis. The inability of workers to move between provinces still exists. People will say it doesn't, yet you can't actually hire the people to bring them in.

It's a real problem and it's not one sector. Nor is it the unions. It's nothing like that. It's a structural problem that we face in Canada. For some reason, we can't trust people from other provinces to be able to deal with welding a pipe together or something like that. I've even heard of examples in Alberta where the certification requires written tests so that they can't use robotic welders, which of course can't write.

It's a little bit ridiculous sometimes how tightly controlled some of these are, and it's a real challenge for industry to adapt in the face of this when we're confronting such critical labour shortages.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry: According to your documents and your line of thought, there will be quite a shortage. I am also hearing about this more and more from the employers in my riding.

What are your figures? What are your projections? What do you think will happen?

[English]

Mr. Mathew Wilson: I guess I'd say a couple of things. One is the labour mobility within Canada has to change. We have to be able to bring skilled workers across Canada from different parts of Canada to where the labour shortages exist. But that is only going to go so far.

Look again just at Alberta, because that's where a lot of the economic growth is right now, and it's pulling a lot of the rest of the Canadian economy with it, which is good because it benefits everyone. They have a skill shortage of about 300,000 workers coming over the next decade, 300,000 new, additional workers to everything they have today. That's really difficult to fill with the local labour pool, given that they only have a population of about three or four million people in Alberta, and unemployment is already at incredibly low levels.

Their ability to continue those major projects and continue to push and pump the Canadian economy is really challenged as a result, and manufacturers are challenged as a result as well. So we need to allow people to move in from within Canada, and we probably need to look at some of our closest allies. There are some big unemployment problems in the United States. Maybe we need the ability to move workers up from the United States on a temporary basis. I know it has been done. When there have been really critical shortages, they've allowed in the range of 1,000 or 1,500 workers to come up on a temporary basis to do welding and things like that. They gave them temporary certifications. Those types of things need to be done as well.

In the longer-term sense of things, we should trust that someone certified in the United States to weld a pipe or to be a carpenter or a plumber is probably safe enough for a Canadian to employ as well, and let the employers be the judge of whether the skills are adequate.

When you look at the broader global scale and what we bring in, we need to do a better job of categorizing and analyzing what's out there, of recognizing the credentials that people have on their way in, before they ever get here, so we can speed up that process a lot more.

We can't have companies waiting. If you're trying to build a plant, any type of project, or some type of consumable good, and have to wait four, five, or six months after you've done an interview process on a candidate, that's a really long time in the business world. You lose a lot of business if you're holding up a production process while you're looking for one person. We need to shorten some of those timelines down as well.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move on to the next questioner, Mr. Butt.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for being here today.

I want to congratulate the two accounting associations in particular for your presentations. It sounds like you've already done a heck of a lot within your accreditation process to recognize foreign credentials for individuals to practise in Canada, and you've done it electronically. You've set it up through websites and all these other wonderful things, which we should be doing, living in the 21st century. Someone who's in India right now, and wants to come to Canada to be an accountant, should be able to go online in India and find out what they need to do.

I think I'll split my time for my questions, Mr. Chairman, between the two accounting associations and the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters. So whoever is best to answer, or wishes to answer, should feel free to jump in when I ask my question.

What are you finding in the typical applicant from a foreign country with foreign credentials in accounting, at whatever level it happens to be, whether it's CA level or CGA level? What kinds of general credentials are you finding? Are they relatively close to what we would be looking for and what would be required in Canada, or is there a lot more to fill in? In other words, are most of them who apply 80% of the way there—you mentioned a number of countries

that seemed to have more applications than others—or are they quite far apart? How long is it taking for that individual to get from where they are, with the credentials they have in the country they're coming from, to the level of certification we're looking for in a Canadian context?

Whoever or both, do you want to answer that?

Ms. Jylan Khalil: What we're finding when we review other countries' professional designations is that there are three levels of designations. There are the South American countries, where the designation is usually issued by the universities, so you graduate with a university degree and that gives you the designation. Another format is the European format, which is similar to ours: you get the university degree, you have a professional program, and you have professional experience. Then there's the Asian model, which is very knowledge-oriented: although they have a practical experience component, a large part of the designation is based on knowledge testing. Each of those has different ways for us to approach them.

What we're doing with our initiatives—the evaluation of experience, for example—is trying to look at a candidate who's maybe ten or twelve years out and saying through their experience they've learned all the skills we try to put into our students. Let's figure out a way to measure that and give them credit for it.

Right now, if a candidate were to come with either the knowledge-based designation or the university-based designation, it would take them probably three years here in Canada to upgrade their skills. What we're trying to do with our evaluation of experience is take them right into the evaluation and have them obtain their CA within three or four months.

Mr. Brad Butt: Very good.

Did the CGA want to comment?

Ms. Carole Presseault: In terms of full disclosure, I'm not personally involved in the evaluation, but I can tell you that according to HRSDC data there are about 1,200 to 1,500 immigrants each year who self-identify as financial auditors or accountants. So there are quite a few.

I think for us, the CICA has described the assessment process very well. I think that's part of the problem as well. You have folks coming from many places with a very different background. We're able to take them at whatever their level and complete the missing requirements through the CGA program. Our requirements include, as well as three years' practical experience at a senior level, one year at a very senior level, and that one year at a very senior level has to be obtained in Canada. That becomes part of the challenge, to find that high quality job that will give you that year.

• (1610)

Mr. Brad Butt: This may be for the CME. The second thing I hear from constituents who've been into my office is maybe they've completed the credentials—they have it or they're almost there—and the next phase is that they don't have any Canadian work experience. So here's the question for the employers: what are you doing or have you done, or maybe we can help you—that's what this study is all about...? How can we get more people to get that experience working for your members so they get direct Canadian experience?

Maybe they're a welder—they've got their certificate—but they can't get the Canadian experience to get them to the next level. Maybe you have already done some of this through your outreach with your members and so on. What are you doing to help fill that gap, especially in those skilled trades you were referring to earlier, which obviously are very important to your members?

Mr. Mathew Wilson: I think programs like E-MAP, the engineering matching and training program that we're running in B.C., is a really good place to start looking. It's been very successful from an engineering perspective. It's filled, I think, in the range of 10,000 engineering positions in B.C. over the last five or six years. It's been really successful in doing some of that initial integration and getting people working.

Those types of programs are good, but we do similar programs working with provincial governments in different places and promoting.... We have a number of government programs that we operate directly ourselves in Ontario, Quebec, and Manitoba that try to match new immigrants with employment opportunities and different skills. We're doing quite a bit, but obviously more can always be done. A lot of the time it's finding the right people and matching them to the right companies. With programs like E-MAP, if you expand that beyond B.C. and make it beyond engineering, you could have a really successful program.

Mr. Brad Butt: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll move now to Ms. Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Thank you.

I think this is great, because you have certainly brought more recommendations to the fore.

Mr. Wilson, you indicated there was red tape, as you called it, and that you'd have to get rid of some of the paperwork. I wonder if you could elaborate on that a little more. You mentioned that in your recommendations. That's what we're here to hear: your recommendations on how to improve the current program.

Mr. Mathew Wilson: Maybe it would just be to look at the existing programs and things like the Service Canada recognition, under getting a work visa for a foreign worker in the four- to six-month timeframe. As for the request by Service Canada for a full HR plan, future product plans, and all the rest of that, what do they know about the company? If the company needs the workers, isn't it the best one to actually determine that? I don't even know who it would be within Service Canada. Why is a bureaucrat trying to analyze what a company needs, what the company says is necessary? Those are some of the things, I think, from a purely paperwork perspective.

Considering the amount of time it takes to do those types of things, that would be a real benefit.

A lot of the other ones I think are outside of the government's control, at least outside of the federal government's control. A lot of them are within the hands of provincial bodies that regulate the skilled trades. I'm guessing you're probably in most cases not looking to go after some of those through this, but I think it's important recognition that the paperwork process and the certification process for a lot of those skilled trades are very difficult and very time-consuming for employees and employers.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: I just want to interject a little bit. I think part of that is to ensure that employers are not just going to try to get immigrants to come in when there could be work for Canadians. I understand the process is lengthy, and I think we do need to look at that, but I think that it also needs to be interjected here that it is also about protecting Canadian jobs for Canadian workers.

I know that Mrs. Presseault wanted to add something.

Ms. Carole Presseault: I just wanted to speak on the regulated professions' point of view on this. You heard the word "harmonization" said I don't know how many times in my script and in the other script. That's because that's kind of the crux of the issue here—that the professions are regulated provincially.

A lot of the work we've done was to bring everyone around the same table, to have everyone using the common tools. It really sounds like a no-brainer, but it isn't. It's complex. It's difficult. These bodies have been given the obligation to regulate their profession. They have to meet a certain provincial standard. They're not going to give that up, and neither should they. They're required by law to do so. So a lot of the work was to bring folks together, to get people to agree on common tools, and have people build from there. To even try to think there could be only one single entry point...it just won't happen.

• (1615)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Before I ask my next question, I was just wondering if there were any other interjections from anyone else with respect to improvements that need to be made to the program. We heard how the program has been benefiting, or what direction you're going in, but how can the recommendations be improved?

Ms. Carole Presseault: That's a good question.

We certainly are now really fully employed. What it's done so far is to help build capacity in our own organization to do this kind of work. We wouldn't have been able to do that without the program. We've had a very generous contribution toward doing that. We need to work on that.

I was very fortunate to be part of a workshop in Melbourne, Australia, earlier this year on this topic. We brought together Australians and Canadians to look at the problems. Not all the players, as I said to Mr. Wilson, were at the table. The employers need to be at the table.

I think that's the work going forward—to bring people together. I think that's going to be the key. Once every group has their tools out there, then how do you make them work, how do you keep them current, and how do you bring everyone as part of the equation together? That would be our main recommendation.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: My colleague Marc-André would like to ask a question at this point.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): I want to ask Mr. Wilson what he thinks about this situation. I myself have the impression that the employers' requirements are often too specific.

I want to share the example of the biochemist who drove me from the station to Parliament in his old taxi cab. He is a biochemist from a Middle Eastern country. He taught at a university in Italy. He must have a certain level of expertise. In Canada, he drives a cab for Blue Line. He told me that, whenever he tried to find a job in his profession, workplace experience in Canada was required.

I wonder where we are headed with such requirements. No one will be able to satisfy those criteria.

Shouldn't employers review their requirements a little bit?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. You certainly make a comment there. I know Mr. Butt raised that issue as well. I don't know if anyone wishes to respond to that.

A fairly short response, if you could, Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Mathew Wilson: I agree with everything you said. The work experience is a real problem. A lot of times companies are restricted from hiring those individuals to get the work experience because they can't get the certification. It all loops around, unfortunately. That's why I said in my remarks that it's so important to look beyond the academic standards in a lot of these professions and look towards the real, tangible trades.

I'm not talking about accountants or doctors. I'm talking about welders and sheet fitters—real, tangible hard skills that people have. We need to be able to find a way to get around the academic credentials in a lot of these and look at the hard skills themselves so that they can be at least put into some type of apprenticeship program so they can get those without having to start from ground zero, which is typically the case today.

The Chair: Thank you.

And we'll move to Mr. Daniel.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

I have some general questions first.

Both the accounting groups have done an exciting prospect of going right across Canada with their qualifications. It can't have been easy. What was the process, and how did you manage to get all the provincial associations on board to actually make that happen? Clearly, worker mobility is one of the big issues we have to face. We have nearly 1.7 million unemployed and the ability for them to move across Canada would be one way of assisting in reducing the numbers of unemployed.

● (1620)

Ms. Doretta Thompson: From the point of view of the CA profession, we've had complete Canadian mobility for a very long time. The government's structure of the profession focuses on those kinds of national standards, provincially implemented. Every CA in Canada writes the same exam at the same time. Everybody works towards the same goal. We have a protocol agreement with the provincial institutes. All major decision-making is on that basis.

To give you an idea, for the international credential work that we're doing right now for the portal, and as we work forward with the other projects, we literally took the leading expert in that area, in the provinces that have the most immigration. We put them together in a room. We looked at the processes they had. We shared everything and we came up together with a process that worked for everybody. That's how we do it.

Ms. Carole Presseault: I'd say there is a real incentive for all provincial bodies to work together. We have a national qualification program. We have the same national exams from coast to coast to coast. We have the same educational requirements. For the largest numbers of years, within the CGA profession, we've had full mobility.

Let's look at it from the perspective of someone who's foreign-trained or comes into Canada under one of our MRAs, our mutual recognition agreements. If you take an individual who's achieved his ACCA designation from India, for example, and arrives in British Columbia, once he's accepted, once he becomes a CGA, that individual will have full mobility in every province of Canada, with the exception of public accounting; there is still restricted mobility into Ontario on the public accounting issue. On accounting, within the CGA organization, they have full mobility.

I wasn't at the table when that was negotiated a long time ago, over ten years ago. There was a real motivation to do it, because these are timely and costly processes. Since we have the national uniform standards qualification program, it was quite easy to get together.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Thank you.

I don't mean to put you on the spot, Mr. Wilson, but from a manufacturing and exporting point of view, that doesn't seem to exist within your organization in terms of getting a pan-Canadian standards set, either at the trades level, at the technologists and technicians level, or at the engineering level. Are you working on it? Do you plan to work on it?

Mr. Mathew Wilson: We'd like to work on it, I guess I would say. We're actually trying to look at some of the models that have been developed out of the human resources sector councils. The automotive human resources sector council, in particular, has done some great work on skill certification matching. They're not looking at titles, they are looking more at functional equivalencies of jobs.

We're actually starting to work with them right now. What we would like to do is use the work they have done and expand it outside of automotive and bring in more sector councils to create a pan-Canadian approach to some of this to start breaking down some of these barriers. Even simple things like the job title can sometimes make a difference in who can compete for the job, even though the actual skills are the same. The answer is yes, it's a problem, yes, we want to do more, and maybe we can through the human resources sector councils.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Is there anything the government can do to assist you in getting that off the ground and moving?

Mr. Mathew Wilson: Can I come back to you on that? There may be. We're in the very early stages of discussion. There are some big changes coming to the sector councils.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Mr. Wilson, one of the things you commented on in your eighth point was the time it takes to get skills into the country. Do you have any ideas on how to reduce that time? My suggestion is to qualify the businesses, based on their experience of bringing people in, so if they need more people there's some trust level put on them, knowing that the skilled workers will come in and leave as appropriate, whether they're temporary or anything else

• (1625)

Mr. Mathew Wilson: That's a great idea, which we'd certainly support—any way to speed it up.

I agree with the point about Service Canada representatives looking at HR plans. It obviously needs to be done to some degree, but is there a way to maybe put in place a service standard that says it's a two-week turnaround on some of these things? So maybe some of the service standards could be improved, and maybe the level of detail could be ratcheted down.

It should be enough if a company says "We need a chemical engineer in painting, and we've searched. This is our ad in the paper and we haven't come up with anyone reasonable." They shouldn't have to submit a mountain of paperwork to anyone. The Canadian government needs to take the word of the companies that are trying to do the job. If you can't get that one person in, it could create unemployment for dozens of others. So it's a bigger problem.

Those are a couple of things, if that's any help.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Cuzner for the concluding five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here today.

Mr. Wilson, the people you represent have such a broad spectrum of skill needs, and there are so many moving parts in the sector you

represent. Recognition of international credentials is a challenge, when I see that it continues to be a domestic problem.

The two largest employers in Cape Breton are Suncor and Sycrude. We have a very mobile workforce in my community. Kudos to people in Alberta who are accommodating eastern workers now, who do three out and a week home, a month out, or whatever it might be. But it's a matter of trying to get those credentials recognized. If we have problems doing that from province to province, I would imagine that from other countries.... You may have a bigger animal to eat than the CAs and CGAs.

Is there a province that's doing better than other provinces, and is there a skilled trade group doing better than others in how quickly they're able to respond?

Mr. Mathew Wilson: To be honest with you, I haven't heard of many people doing it well. That's unfortunately the bad news. There may be some, but it's kind of a big animal. There could be provinces that are doing it very well, but we hear a lot of complaints from our members right across the country in all different sectors. You don't tend to get people praising other people often. People don't call up and say, "Hey, these guys are great".

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Yes, we know a little bit about that.

Mr. Mathew Wilson: I know you know.

So we hear a lot of complaints. We haven't done a full analysis of every sector, but we hear the complaints, and they're pretty much universal across the country.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: So you're not really seeing a best practice or anything.

Mr. Mathew Wilson: Unfortunately, no.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: On the CAs and the mutual recognition credential agreements, with the pilot project that's coming up in 2012, there 14 different countries you are engaged with right now.

Ms. Jylan Khalil: Yes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Do you anticipate that once this is complete there will be almost immediate recognition of those credentials? Will Canadians be able to leave to work in the States, and will Americans be able to work in Canada?

Ms. Jylan Khalil: We already have that. We have a bilateral agreement with Mexico and the U.S. The only thing we're trying to change is the examination requirement to a course requirement with some testing in it, but not the full examination the way we have it now.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: That would apply to Canadian students studying in those countries as well, would it?

Ms. Jylan Khalil: Yes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Okay.

You mentioned a number of good points, and it's probably off what Carole had asked as well. You identified some of the good points, Ms. Thompson, that you feel in some areas. Hopefully, we're able to forward you some recommendations that will be helpful going forward. Is there one thing that really grinds your gears? Is there something that you think could help expedite the process?

● (1630)

Ms. Doretta Thompson: The actual process?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Then I'll pass that on to you guys as well.

Ms. Doretta Thompson: We're relatively new to this. As I said, we're barely two years into it. The most interesting thing is that the program was very consistent with what we had already identified as our needs, right to the point where our report was actually called "Pathways Report", as well. Even our terminology was the same.

I know that over time there have been a lot of improvements. I think we're an organization that's really benefited from those improvements.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I would like to ask you the same, Ms. Presseault.

Ms. Carole Presseault: As I said in my remarks, one thing to expedite the process would be to complete our work in identifying bodies across the world, and achieving more mutual recognition agreements. We have four in place.

Accounting is very different. There's a high degree of harmonization, not only in Canada but internationally, with international reporting standards. There are some very important distinctions with regard to how people are trained, but you have to look at outcomes more than outputs, or the process of those. That is something, for us, that we would pursue aggressively.

What we haven't really talked about is how we can successfully integrate foreign-trained accountants into the Canadian workforce and ensure that they will be successful, and that's through high-quality employment, as I mentioned. That one year of experience has to be at a high level, and there have to be the jobs for those opportunities, so they acquire the Canadian experience.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Wilson, were you going to make a comment? If you do not, then we are ready to conclude. You can make a short comment, if you like.

Mr. Mathew Wilson: I would say two things, because there never can be one, I guess.

One is starting to break down the provincial barriers in some of the skilled trades. We talk about it quite a bit in Canada. CME has talked about it. Parliament has talked about it for a long time. We need to find a process to do that. Maybe the model as expressed here today by the accounting groups is a model we can take a look at with a group like CME. Trying to pull together some of these trades from across Canada and working with some of the labour unions would be number one.

The second one is that programs like E-MAP have been really successful in matching. You talked about that first job experience. Programs like that can be hugely successful in getting the right people in the door of Canada and getting them the right jobs to

support the industry. Anything we can do to get those types of programs broadened out beyond, say, engineering in B.C. would be probably a huge benefit.

The Chair: Thank you very much. And thank you for your recommendations and your suggestions for improvement. We'll certainly take them into consideration.

With that, we'll suspend for about five minutes for the next panel.

● (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1640)

The Chair: We have to get under way. We want to hear from the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities, and the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators.

I know that each of you will be making a short presentation. And again, if you're going to be reading from notes, try to slow down a bit so that the interpreters are able to keep up for the benefit of the rest of us here. There will be questions after from various members of the committee.

With that, is Ms. von Zweck going to start? Go ahead.

Dr. Claudia von Zweck (Executive Director, Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists): Good afternoon, members of the committee.

My name is Claudia von Zweck and I am the executive director of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. I represent over 12,000 occupational therapists from across Canada. I will share some thoughts with you today about ensuring adequate levels of health human resources through sustainable support of internationally educated health professionals.

As you may be aware, Canada is not self-sufficient in producing enough health professionals to meet the growing need, and has long relied upon graduates from international education programs as a partial solution to meet health human resource shortages. However, many professionals who come to Canada become marginalized in their attempts to work in their areas of expertise.

For our profession, this was a major concern. Shortages of occupational therapists currently do exist in Canada and therefore recruitment and retention of our health workforce is of paramount importance. Internationally educated health professionals, or IEHPs, provide a vital resource to address workforce needs yet continue to face challenges in their attempts to work in Canada. Long-term funding is not available to assist IEHPs to access bridging and mentorship programs as well as support networks set up to expedite their transition into the workforce.

One recommendation that I'd like to share with you today is to assist with funding issues so that IEHPs could apply for student loans. We find, however, that participants in most bridging programs do not qualify for existing student loan programs. Many IEHPs cannot afford the cost of participating in valuable bridging programs that would integrate them sooner into the workforce, where they could contribute to the economic well-being of the country.

Before speaking to some of the solutions, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the federal government for initiatives assisting internationally educated occupational therapists to work in Canada that are already in place or are under way. They include, first, an environmental scan we completed in 2006, which indicated that internationally educated occupational therapists who wish to work in Canada must successfully manage an integration process that is complex and involves several steps, including meeting Canadian immigration requirements, fulfilling professional entry-to-practice criteria, finding employment, and then relocating and settling in Canada.

Following the environmental scan, we completed an access and registration framework that outlines the entry-to-practice process for internationally educated occupational therapists. It maps the process among the various and differing jurisdictions and stakeholders of occupational therapy within Canada.

Our next initiative was the internationally educated occupational therapist web portal, which is an online electronic information gateway that centralizes information regarding living and working in Canada as an occupational therapist.

Our current initiative is the national occupational therapy examination and practice preparation project that is developing and implementing a national curriculum to assist internationally educated occupational therapists to work in Canada. Part of this project involved the development of a pilot trial occupational therapy exam and other resources that provide internationally educated occupational therapists with practice to prepare for the national occupational therapy certification exam.

These initiatives have made a difference, but there are still significant issues. We found in our experience that the learning needs of the internationally educated occupational therapists vary greatly and we need to have flexibility in our course offerings. Certainly the availability of time, funding, and commitment to program involvement influences participant success and it may be adversely influenced by the many competing responsibilities they face in their daily lives.

In a study undertaken for five health professions, including occupational therapy, it was found that the average internationally educated health professional requires three to five years to become certified and employed in their profession in Canada. During that time, they frequently work in survival jobs. A properly financed bridging program would cut this period down and would benefit a quicker integration of these valuable resources.

● (1645)

At the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists we certainly recognize that a sustainable and effective integrated health human resources workforce is essential to respond to the health

needs of the Canadian population. All people of Canada should have access to the right professionals at the right time in their communities throughout their lifetime.

To achieve this, CAOT asks the committee to support the following recommendations. First is to increase the availability of profession-specific bridging programs, mentorships, and peer support programs. Secondly, address training programs and support that would address issues such as language and communication and the Canadian culture, Canadian practice standards, certification examination preparation, continuing education to address profession-specific skills and competencies, and how to secure a job in Canada. Lastly, promote and disseminate among health care employers best practices for hiring and integrating internationally educated health professionals.

This completes my presentation. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share the thoughts and concerns of occupational therapists, and I'm ready to consider your questions.

● (1650)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll proceed to the next presenter, Ms. Duvalko.

Ms. Katya Masnyk Duvalko (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators): Thank you.

Good afternoon. My name is Katya Masnyk Duvalko, and I am the newly minted CEO of the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators. I am just starting my third month with the organization, with still a great deal to learn, but what I have learned I am happy to share with you.

I am very pleased to be here to share my thoughts on the experiences we have had with the Canadian framework for success and with the framework's administering agency, the HRSDC.

The Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators, also known as the alliance, is the umbrella organization, a national federation of provincial and territorial physiotherapy regulators committed to the development and improvement of regulatory standards of practice for physiotherapists. The alliance, on behalf of most of the physiotherapy regulators—the one exception is Quebec—administers the physiotherapy competency examination to determine a candidate's readiness for safe, effective, independent physiotherapy practice, and establishes whether the education and qualifications of internationally educated physiotherapists, IEPTs, are substantially equivalent to that of their Canadian counterparts.

Currently there are approximately 18,000 registered physiotherapists practising in Canada, the majority of them in Ontario and Quebec, followed by British Columbia and Alberta. The most recent statistics reported by CIHI, which include 2009 data, indicate that 12% to 15% of registered physiotherapists are educated outside of Canada. The top five countries for training in order of frequency are the U.K., India, the United States, Australia, and Poland. There have been a few changes in that rank ordering in the current report, but it's more or less the same.

The highest proportion, by province, of registered physiotherapists who were internationally trained are found in Ontario, where almost one-fifth of the registered physiotherapists were trained internationally; British Columbia, where 16% were internationally trained; and Alberta, where 15.5% were internationally trained.

As mentioned, the two main lines of business of the alliance within its evaluation services mandate are administering the physiotherapy competency exam and credentialling internationally trained applicants.

First I will provide a few words about our exam process. The physiotherapy competency exam is a national exam that includes both a written component and a clinical component. The written component is administered six times a year and it can be taken during the last term of education, while the clinical component is administered twice a year and must be taken after the completion of all physiotherapy training. Furthermore, a candidate cannot challenge the clinical component until they have passed the written component.

Each year, approximately 1,000 physiotherapy candidates challenge the exam. Of those taking the exam, 60% are Canadian educated and 40% are educated internationally. Overall, 85% of the candidates pass. However, the pass rates vary significantly between Canadian and internationally educated candidates. In recent years Canadian-educated candidates have passed the clinical component of the exam, on average, 96% of the time—so almost all of them—compared to only two-thirds, 68% of the internationally educated candidates. The disparity is even greater for the written component of the exam, where on average 94% of Canadian-educated candidates passed compared to only 53% of the internationally educated. There is quite a big difference.

The other main line of business of the alliance is the credentialling of all internationally educated physiotherapists to determine if their education and qualifications are substantially equivalent to their Canadian-educated counterparts and whether the candidate has the necessary knowledge and skills to challenge the exam. The physiotherapy profession is one of only a few health professions that has a coordinated pan-Canadian credentialling program. Pharmacy is another health profession that has a pan-Canadian approach, although others are moving in this direction.

Each year the alliance receives approximately 600 applications for credentialling from internationally educated physiotherapists, half of them from India. Other common source countries are the Philippines, Australia, the U.K., the U.S., Egypt, Iran, and Brazil.

● (1655)

Of all the credentialing applicants seen and completed in recent years, about 40% are eligible to move directly to challenging the competency exam. An additional 40% are eligible for what's called the prior learning assessment review, which takes a look at their work experience learned outside of education. They will eventually take the exam. Further research is needed to assess what percentage of candidates, and with which training and education characteristics, are successful in the exam and are successful in integrating into successful physiotherapy practice in Canada.

The alliance has been working diligently to research opportunities for improvements in its evaluation services processes, and HRSDC has been a valuable partner in this process. We have been able to count on their financial support for many years, starting with the first mutual recognition agreements process in 1999, designed to support compliance with labour mobility, and continuing to our current proposal for support, which is to develop an updated rubric for the assessment of credentials, a data analytics capacity, and a variable-pathway approach to credentialing.

The alliance is a small organization with only 12 staff and a member-funded budget of around \$3 million. We could not have done nearly as much as we have without your support.

As a result of our initiatives, the alliance has seen improvements in its processes and in its communication with IEPs. For example, with HRSDC funding, we've been able to revise our website and to review and update all of our documents to follow profession-specific and plain-language guidelines. We've been able to train our staff in cultural sensitivity and improved communication. This has led to increased effectiveness of our candidate support and increased satisfaction among our applicants.

In addition, the alliance completed an HRSDC-funded comprehensive review of the full spectrum of credentialing activities, resulting in numerous recommendations for updating policies, procedures, and strategies in credentialing. We are currently in the process of implementing these recommendations.

The alliance's experience with the granting and financing process administered by the HRSDC has been a positive one. Staff have been accessible and responsive, providing support in a timely fashion. This support and guidance allowed for the efficient and effective completion of funded projects, and efficient tracking of project progress, without undue administrative burden on our very small staff.

A few key challenges remain, especially as we move from addressing the structural and process challenges that have been our focus to date and we turn to dealing with challenges with outcomes. The alliance is mindful of the ever-changing national and international educational landscape for physiotherapists, and the need to update our credentialing framework to keep up with these changes.

Our biggest priority at this time is the development of an analytical plan that would link credentialing information with exam results, and then in turn with practice outcomes. We really need a clearer understanding of what barriers remain to the successful integration of IEPTs into the Canadian workforce, and we need to identify variables that predict success. This will allow us to develop further training and apprenticeship programs and continue to build on appropriate bridging programs to support those internationally educated candidates most at risk.

• (1700)

The Chair: Do you have a lot more to go?

Ms. Katya Masnyk Duvalko: I'm on my last paragraph.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Katya Masnyk Duvalko: Sorry if I'm over time. I'm trying to speak slowly.

The alliance, like other smaller organizations, has been hampered in its work by insufficient technological supports. Contemporary information management systems and updated technology could greatly increase both the effectiveness and efficiency of our credentialing and examination processes, including empowering applicants to self-manage their credentialing and exam registration processes through the increased use of web-enabled technologies.

Looking to the future, we would like to see increased coordination of projects across the country and increased information-sharing across professions. Much duplication still exists. The alliance staff and board feel that we're missing important opportunities to learn from others who have successfully addressed credentialing challenges in different ways than we have. Additional workshops, discussion fora, electronic information exchanges, and the like would help address remaining barriers.

Thank you for the opportunity to come and speak with you today. We look forward to ongoing fruitful partnerships and collaborations.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

Ms. Bouchard.

Ms. Carole Bouchard (Executive Director, National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, *mesdames et messieurs* and members of Parliament.

It is my great pleasure to appear today before the committee. Our association understands that the committee is looking for feedback on foreign credential recognition, particularly in our experience with the foreign credentials recognition program of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Let me first explain to you who we are. NAPRA is our acronym and it stands for the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities. It is a not-for-profit organization that was established over 15 years ago and represents all provincial and territorial pharmacy licensing authorities, whose mandate is, as you know, the protection of the public. Our membership also extends beyond the traditional geographic border to include the Canadian Forces pharmacy services. One of the fundamental goals of the organization

is to enable our members to take a national approach in addressing common issues.

Our members play a key role to ensure that optimal regulatory practices are in place for a safe practice environment for the benefit of all Canadians. Over 33,000 pharmacies are licensed by our members across the country to practise pharmacy and operate within specific regulatory practices and requirements. NAPRA members are responsible to set the licensing requirements for the practice of pharmacy in their respective jurisdictions. They also have to ensure that the persons seeking licences qualify and meet core practice requirements. These core practice requirements are set by our members and can be found in our association's mobility agreement for Canadian pharmacists, which was renewed in 2009.

With regard to the internationally educated pharmacists, in addition to the need for meeting the core practice requirements they are also encouraged to first familiarize themselves with the way in which pharmacies practise in Canada. They can then move to the first mandatory step, which is the evaluation of the individual's educational background, which is conducted by the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada, or *l'Ordre des Pharmaciens du Québec* for candidates applying in that province.

Once the candidate's documents are evaluated and the education level and knowledge area successfully compared against the Canadian pharmacy program, the internationally educated pharmacist will determine the most appropriate next step. For instance, some individuals may wish to immediately apply to write the national examination administered by the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada. However, for others, perhaps pursuing the mastering of English or French language skills might be more appropriate to do next. Pharmacy bridging programs, geared specifically for internationally educated pharmacists, are also offered in a few locations throughout the country for people who wish to strengthen their knowledge and skills prior to writing the national exam.

Taking a step back for a moment, I mentioned that while NAPRA's members worked on the renewal of the mobility agreement for Canadian pharmacists, they also identified a need to examine issues surrounding internationally educated pharmacists who definitely want to become licensed to practice pharmacy in Canada. During this time our members had access to a report generated as part of the initiative, entitled "Moving Forward: Pharmacy Human Resources for the Future". This initiative was led by our colleague association, the Canadian Pharmacists Association, with funding from the federal government. This report specifically examined at that time the barriers and facilitators for the integration of international pharmacy graduates into the Canadian pharmacy workforce. In order to overcome the challenges observed regarding the integration of internationally educated pharmacists into the pharmacy workforce in Canada, specific recommendations were formulated in this report.

In building upon those recommendations found in the report and the need to look at approaches to continue improving our members' licensing processes, particularly in the context of labour mobility, NAPRA applied to the foreign credentials recognition program in 2009 to seek funding for the project we call the "International Pharmacy Graduates' Gateway to Canada Project".

●(1705)

This is the only project NAPRA has under this program, although we have had others under the labour mobility component of HRDC. The filing of our association's application coincided with the development of the pan-Canadian framework on the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications developed by federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

I would like to provide you with some information about the project and our experience with the program. The project's overall goal is to help our members continue to provide a fair, accessible, transparent, and rigorous service that will continue optimizing the effectiveness and efficiency of registering the international pharmacy candidates. The project also aims to standardize or streamline the processes on the path to licensure.

The project consists of developing a plain-language website that functions as the single point of access for international pharmacy graduates wanting to become licensed to practise pharmacy in Canada. The funding also provides for the development of on-line self-assessment tools to help international pharmacy graduates evaluate their skills and make decisions to determine whether they are ready to initiate the licensure process.

In addition, a national, shared database is being developed that will serve to create an applicant file, collect general information, and provide reporting statistics. At this time, it's too early to speak about the results of the project, as it is set to conclude by the end of June 2013. I can, however, mention that the benefits of this project will be important, as the gateway is designed to offer a single-window and pan-Canadian approach to licensure, to provide quick access to clear and up-to-date information on licensure requirements, to help our internationally educated pharmacists to manage their expectations with regard to the reality of Canadian pharmacy practice and the licensure process, and to help them identify any skills gaps that they may have.

Our experience to date with the foreign credential recognition program is very positive. I can point to the excellent guidance provided by government representatives throughout the entire process. We have not had any problems navigating through the process, including the program's requirement for rigorous reporting and audits.

Our association is appreciative of the opportunity we have, under this funded project, to undertake this innovative initiative on behalf of our members. This initiative would have probably not been possible otherwise. We look forward to continuing to work with HRDC as the project evolves.

Before closing, I'd like to take a look at the future. We believe there should be a constant re-examination of the labour market's information on supply and demand. It's currently being discussed among pharmacy organizations and it's been recently communicated to the foreign credentials referral office of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Health Canada that although the issue of labour shortages was previously identified for pharmacists in Canada, recent developments appear to have had an impact on the labour market.

Two examples of these recent developments are the expansion of the scope of practice for pharmacists and the increase in the number of students accepted into our Canadian pharmacy programs. We believe that an ongoing pharmacy manpower study would be useful in understanding the impact resulting from these developments.

In conclusion, we would like to thank you again for giving us the opportunity to speak about the program. Thank you, and I'm pleased to answer any questions.

●(1710)

The Chair: Thank you. We appreciate the presentation.

Keeping time in mind, we'd like to give everybody a round and finish with Mr. Cuzner.

So let's start. I'll give you a bit of a heads-up as we get closer to the time limit.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Perfect.

Thank you very much for your presentations. We don't get to ask all the questions we would like to ask because of the time allocations, but I was just wondering what the shortage is, given the fact that you're integrating people into the profession to our standards, basically.

I come from Elliot Lake, in northern Ontario, where there are a lot of seniors. Elliot Lake is a retirement community, and I know that the province had been pushing and the federal government had been working to try to limit wait times for operations and stuff. Some of the big frustrations arise because although we're doing all these hip and knee replacements, when people are coming out the services just aren't there to help them heal properly and quickly.

Could you explain the shortage to me and explain how much of this program has been implemented, how many of those people are being integrated into that workforce, and whether there is something that is preventing Canadians from going into that professional field?

Dr. Claudia von Zweck: Thank you. I appreciate your recognition of the value of the profession, and I agree that there are shortages of occupational therapists.

When we look at the distribution of occupational therapists in Canada, we see that about 95% of occupational therapists work in urban areas. When you go to smaller northern communities, you're not going to see many occupational therapists. So there is an issue in terms of distribution.

How can we facilitate internationally educated occupational therapists going into some of these areas? We've been looking at what kinds of resources we can provide that would allow them to participate, if they do go to an area, to help them so they don't have to be in an urban setting to be able to access resources. The bridging program we have been working on is available online, but we also try to set them up with mentors in their community to allow them to be able to develop their skills where they are.

I think that is important. We don't have that many people coming into the country. We have probably about 50 to 100 people coming each year, so we really try to centralize and have one common curriculum and one common program across the country, and to provide it online, because if we tried to do a separate program in each jurisdiction, it would be very difficult to manage in terms of costs. If we make it as accessible as possible, people can participate.

• (1715)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Could each of you answer as to whether there's a shortage in your profession right now?

Dr. Claudia von Zweck: I would say there are pockets of shortages, certainly in rural areas, and there are shortages in particular provinces that don't have a good supply of seats for occupational therapy education programs, such as British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland.

Ms. Katya Masnyk Duvalko: In terms of physiotherapy, there are huge challenges to measuring the appropriate supply of physiotherapists and determining whether or not there are actually shortages. The CIHI project on human resources for professions outside of medicine and nursing is still fairly new. It has taken some time to develop the proper definitions and the proper way of collecting this information. I think we have really good information about supply but not about demand, and you need to have both elements of that equation to determine whether there's a true shortage. That being said, as is the case with occupational therapists, we are seeing real issues with the distribution of physiotherapists, so that rural and remote areas will have only one or two practising physiotherapists and urban areas will have significantly more.

I would say that the alliance would really support further work on health human resources planning for the professions we've been talking about, just as my colleague Carole mentioned, because right now that data is not there. There isn't a definitive answer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Masnyk Duvalko.

We will move on to Ms. Leitch.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you very much for your presentation. It is greatly appreciated.

I have two questions that maybe I could ask all three organizations to comment on.

First, in your interactions with HRSDC and with CIC, do you have any recommendations with regard to whether there should be a single organization or separate organizations? As you know, we have the FCRP with HRSDC, and the foreign credential recognition office. Would it help if it were one-stop shopping?

Second, as a health care professional myself, I know about the challenges some of the fellows I've met have had when they hit Canadian soil. They wonder why they can't get a job. Should we be doing more pre-certification and pre-licensure in countries of origin so people are better prepared once they make it to Canadian soil?

Ms. Carole Bouchard: I'm going to go first.

I think you asked for feedback about the two organizations, HRDC and also CIC. I would say that so far I have not encountered any issue in dealing with the two, but definitely, having one-stop

shopping could be a benefit to our activities. Knowing exactly who does what and in which circumstances could also be useful.

With regard to the second question, on the pre-certification and pre-licensure and maybe doing that overseas, we are all working in a very complex area. If I look at what we are developing under the international pharmacy graduate project, people from overseas will have access to the gateway and also to the online tools, which will allow them to at least elaborate on the expectations for the licensing process in Canada, but also to have an indication of the skills gap they have before coming.

Another organization in Canada, the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada, is looking at examination. I know I cannot speak on behalf of them, but this is probably one area they will be examining with regard to administering exams overseas. Again, this is not my specific organization, so I cannot really speculate on where they are going.

Dr. Claudia von Zweck: Speaking to your first question with regard to HRSDC and CIC, we've worked very cooperatively with both of them. I feel that although they provide complementary services, our experience has always been very positive.

In relation to your second question, I would very much agree that the more information you give to people before they come to Canada, the better. I think it's very, very important.

We see that there is some difference in the educational qualifications in occupational therapy around the world, so people do need to be prepared if they are coming from some source countries to do some extra preparation to work in Canada. We have developed a web portal and put on a number of different resources. We have a self-assessment tool. We have videos of occupational therapists, showing what they do in their daily practice. As I mentioned in my presentation, we're now working on a mini version of our certification exam that would give people instant feedback as to how they would do on an exam that is similar to the certification exam.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you have a brief comment, Ms. Duvalko? If not, we will close.

Ms. Katya Masnyk Duvalko: I don't have anything further to add. I agree.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

We will move on to Mr. Patry.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Bouchard, I see that the funding for your website is \$3.7 million. That's quite a website.

I would like to know how many foreign pharmacists want to work in Canada and how many of them use that tool. I also want to know whether, once they decide to come to Canada, they are allowed a transition period—a period of supervised learning to prepare them for working as pharmacists here in Canada.

Ms. Carole Bouchard: Yes. I would be happy to answer you.

I just want to clarify something first: our project is not completed. So the website is not up yet.

There will be many other components besides the website. I mentioned that assessment tools and a database will be available to candidates. The fact of the matter is that the project's value covers many subcomponents.

As for the number of foreign-trained professionals who come to Canada, given that the association is made up of colleges of pharmacy, it has no direct information. Actually, there are other organizations people can use to take the national exam and have their documents assessed. However, I can tell you that, based on the statistics compiled by the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada, the number of applications submitted annually as part of the first step has increased. That step consists of document authentication and comparison with the Canadian program on pharmaceutical competencies. That number, which was slightly over 800 in 2007, went up to 1,651 in 2010. There are other steps that follow, but this still gives you some idea.

[English]

The Chair: Mike.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you for coming.

Ms. von Zweck, in your presentation you suggested that for five health professions, including occupational therapy, the average foreign-educated professional requires three to five years to become certified, and that a properly financed bridging program would cut this period down to as little as one year.

Can you explain how that works, and whether it's true of occupational therapists that they all need three to five years? Or is that just an average of those five professions?

Dr. Claudia von Zweck: Not all occupational therapists would require three to five years, but as I mentioned before, there are, for some source countries, people who do have to do some upgrading in order to practise and they do struggle in order to meet entry-to-practice requirements. So during that period of time they may not be able to work as an occupational therapist, so they're working in a number of different types of jobs. We often see people who are working in child care or in the service sector carrying two or three jobs, sending money home, taking care of family, and they just don't have the time to commit to the types of bridging programs that we're offering. That's why we're suggesting that if they would be able to have funding to participate in those programs and they would not have the extra stress of having to earn income at the same time, it would allow them to concentrate on their studies and to integrate.

On the same study, the preliminary findings have indicated that once people are in the workforce, they do very well. The difficulty is that transition time. And if we can facilitate that, we anticipate they would do very well in the long term.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to maybe do another four minutes with Mr. Cuzner, and with that we'll conclude.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I'll just throw a question out here and let you take us home.

Ms. von Zweck, you had mentioned in your comments that we are just not producing enough people in your field to accommodate the demand.

And Madame Bouchard, you had indicated that you've increased the number of seats within your profession so that there are more students who are coming out and you're still not able to meet the demand.

Where can we go? When we have a youth unemployment rate of 18%, how can we address this? Yes, we need professionals, but where's the disconnect among the young people in this country, the job opportunities that are there, and the educational institutions that are charged with the responsibility of impacting these young people and developing these young people? Where's the disconnect? Are we getting good cooperation from the educational institutions? What's going on?

Could I just get your views on that?

Dr. Claudia von Zweck: I would say that we have seen a growth in the number of seats in occupational therapy in Canada.

For example, in the province of Quebec two new programs have started up in the last two years; in Ontario a number of the programs have increased their seats. But there are still some provinces in which there are no programs, and there are some programs that have a very small number of seats, and they are really at a disadvantage.

Among the issues, I guess, is that because these are expensive seats to fund, it's a matter of sometimes people feeling that it may be easier to bring people in from other countries—that is one solution—or to bring people in from other provinces. This is something we are working on with those jurisdictions, working with governments to understand the need for more people in the profession.

Ms. Carole Bouchard: To add to your question, in a sense this brings us back to the issue of health human resources planning and how important it is to know exactly what we need and how it can be monitored on an ongoing basis and assessed and then re-corrected, if necessary. To clarify the point so that I'm not misunderstood, I have mentioned that yes, as a recent development the number of Canadian pharmacy graduates has increased.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: By how many?

Ms. Carole Bouchard: I don't have the exact number, because it's not only the number of seats that has increased in each of the schools; we have also had new schools of pharmacy in some jurisdictions. The University of Waterloo is an example of a new school of pharmacy having been created a couple of years ago, and we'll now see the first group of pharmacy students graduating. In that context, the report we had has indicated that there surely was a shortage in pharmacy, but with recent developments we now have some not very firm indicators that there may be a kind of shift appearing. That's why we're raising the point that this issue is important to continue examining very closely in planning health human resources, so as to know exactly what our demand is.

Ms. Katya Masnyk Duvalko: Let me add that the number of Canadian graduates in physiotherapy seems to have levelled off in recent years, so we are counting on internationally trained physiotherapists for our growth. I can't comment on why our youth are not going into these sectors, but there has always historically been a balance between the number who come in from abroad as part of our immigration process and the number who are trained locally.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That will conclude the time here.

I'd like to advise committee members that the next meeting will be held in Room 112-N, so remember to go there rather than here.

Once again, thank you to the panel for your presentation and your suggestions. Thank you.

We are adjourned.

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