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Chair

Mr. Ed Komarnicki

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1535)

[English]

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

In the first hour we will go through a number of witnesses from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, and the Department of Health. I gather each will be making a presentation.

Thank you very much for taking the time to appear before this committee. As you know, each of you will present, and then we'll have rounds of five minutes from each of the parties for questioning.

We've heard a fair bit of testimony over the last while. You may or may not have had the opportunity to be aware of the testimony. If you have any comments in that regard, feel free to make them. I'm sure someone will be asking about some of the recommendations, and so on.

Mr. LaRue.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François LaRue (Director General, Labour Market Integration, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Mr. Chair and distinguished members of this committee, on behalf of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, I would like to express my appreciation once again for this opportunity to contribute to your study on foreign credential recognition.

I am Jean-François LaRue, director general of the labour market integration directorate and with me is Mr. Jonathan Wells, director of operations.

[English]

Foreign credential recognition is a multi-dimensional issue requiring actions from a number of stakeholders and key federal departments. Over the years HRSDC has made significant progress in this area because of the active involvement of Health Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada. As you know, each department has developed a specific expertise that is fundamental to strengthening foreign credential recognition systems in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, the witnesses that have testified before the committee represent a broad range of occupations. Despite the economic slowdown, many of them have indicated that they are either

currently facing a shortage of skilled workers, or will be in the very near future due to Canada's aging society. The shortage of workers is and will continue to be felt by employers across many sectors.

[English]

As a result, our country will rely more and more on internationally trained individuals and Canadians trained abroad to fill these gaps. When I refer to these two groups of individuals, I often refer to internationally trained workers. These individuals have the skills, knowledge, and capacity to contribute to the success of businesses and the social fabric of Canada. The competition for top talent is also intensifying across countries, and those that can best meet their needs and interests will succeed in tomorrow's economy.

You will have noticed over the last few weeks that occupations are at very different stages of improving their FCR processes. Some of them are making first steps, such as conducting diagnostic and environmental scans, while others are more advanced in this work and are creating national assessment processes and developing online tools.

[Translation]

I mention this to reinforce the fact that overcoming systemic foreign trade recognition, or FCR, barriers is an ongoing, evergreen task that requires the sustained efforts of all players and cannot happen overnight. It requires the willingness and open mind of all stakeholders to consider a slightly different, or even a completely new way of doing business.

[English]

The Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications has been instrumental in fostering these ongoing partnerships with stakeholders. Over the last two years, focused work on targeted priority occupations has resulted in much progress, including building FCR capacity among regulatory bodies, facilitating national coordination, and helping individuals with pre-arrival information.

For this reason, it is important that we continue fostering these relationships and encouraging stakeholders to streamline their FCR processes. We are exploring with provincial and territorial governments ways to extend the framework beyond 2012, to maintain the current momentum and to adequately respond to future labour market needs.

Even though much progress has been made by stakeholders across many occupations, barriers still exist. Witnesses highlighted some of the areas where they think additional support from governments would make a significant difference. These messages have been consistent with those we heard in national consultations with occupations targeted under the framework. I would now like to take a few minutes to touch on some of them.

You heard about the critical importance that skilled trades play to our economy and the looming skills shortages we're facing. As you know, apprenticeship and trade certification is a provincial and territorial responsibility, with multiple approaches. This means 13 different systems, over 300 regulated trades, and a complex mix of compulsory and non-compulsory trades. In the trade occupations, the Red Seal endorsement, currently available in 52 trades, represents a standard of excellence, as it ensures mobility and the recognition of the qualifications of certified tradespersons. The Red Seal is managed by the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship, CCDA, which brings together the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to develop national standards and examinations for the skilled trades, in collaboration with industry. HRSDC is currently working with the CCDA to look at how best to apply the framework to the skilled trade occupations.

In addition, over the past two years the CCDA has been exploring an expanded range of competency-based methods for assessing individuals, beyond the current multiple-choice exam, through the multiple assessment pathways pilot project. This expanded range of assessment tools and methodologies could provide an effective way to assess a broader range of candidates, including internationally trained individuals, for whom a written assessment may create a barrier to certification unrelated to their level of competency.

Furthermore, the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, with funding from the FCR program, recently commissioned a study to better understand how the credentials and trade experience of internationally trained individuals in the Red Seal trades are assessed and recognized across the country. This study resulted in a number of recommendations that will be considered by the CCDA to improve the FCR and work experience for the skilled trades.

While many witnesses discussed the successful outcomes of bridging programs, they've also confirmed that their sustainability is very challenging. As you know, these programs bring together key stakeholders to assess skills and competencies and to deliver short, intense training to fill the gaps. Most importantly, they limit the need for internationally trained individuals to redo education and training completed abroad, which in turn speeds up their integration into the Canadian labour market.

HRSDC has already made several investments in bridging programs, the most recent being announced just last Wednesday by Minister Finley. The FCR program is funding the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants project, "Learning Assessment and Bridging Programs for Internationally Trained Accountants". Not only is this project going to create an online tool to assess foreign education and work experience, it will also create customized bridging programs to help foreign-trained accountants complete any additional courses and exams they may need to

become accredited in Canada. This will help internationally trained accountants find jobs faster in their field.

The development of mutual recognition agreements, or MRAs, is another area that witnesses highlighted as being important for government to continue to support. These agreements can help speed up the integration of internationally trained individuals, even before they leave their home country, as they prevent additional and duplicative FCR assessments upon arrival in Canada.

HRSDC supports stakeholders in this area, as per the recently announced project with the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education. This organization will hold a workshop with over 40 Canadian regulators and professional associations that will focus on the development and management of MRAs with other countries. This workshop will demonstrate the success that stakeholders have had with these agreements, identify best practices, and hopefully encourage other occupations to pursue the development of additional MRAs.

● (1540)

Witnesses have also described to you that many internationally trained individuals have difficulty paying for the tuition and other training costs associated with the FCR process. Witnesses have called upon government to find ways to support these individuals, as these costs can be prohibitively expensive for some, especially for an internationally trained individual who lacks the credit history to secure the necessary loans to cover tuition and other training costs.

I would like to take a moment to remind the committee that budget 2011 announced a complementary financial assistance pilot project. This pilot will test ways to help internationally trained individuals to cover costs associated with the FCR process, and will determine the extent to which governments can play a role in this area.

As we move forward to address these challenges, we will continue to carefully consider where to invest next. Ensuring that we have better data to support evaluation and reporting needs will be one of our focuses in the months to come. Witnesses have described their difficulties in collecting and tracking data to measure progress as these individuals go through the FCR process. This is in part due to the large number of players that are involved in the process and the uneven practices in collecting data. One good example of best practice is the work of one of the witnesses you received, the Manitoba fairness commissioner, Ms. Ximena Munoz.

[Translation]

With those considerations in mind, we are working with provincial and territorial governments to improve our ability to measure the framework's performance. This will enable us to broaden our knowledge and understanding of the challenges faced by internationally trained individuals and enhance our ability to invest in the areas that will make the biggest impact.

[English]

I have highlighted only some of the many areas where the FCR program has helped these stakeholders improve their FCR process. I have also only touched on some of the areas where continued investment from government can make a significant difference to help internationally trained individuals to overcome FCR barriers.

To conclude, and this is really important, I would like to re-emphasize that in recent years the framework has been instrumental in providing stakeholders with opportunities they may not have had otherwise. As many witnesses have clearly indicated, we do have the right approach. Given these achievements and remaining challenges, the federal government must continue to work with key stakeholders to maintain momentum. I look forward to the recommendations of the committee in this regard.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that presentation.

Who will be presenting next?

Mr. Walsh, go ahead.

Mr. Brendan Walsh (Director, Foreign Qualification Recognition, Foreign Credentials Referral Office, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Brendan Walsh. I am the director of foreign qualification recognition of the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, or FCRO, at Citizenship and Immigration Canada. I am here today on behalf of the FCRO's acting director general, Ms. Natasha Pateman, who spoke to this committee in early October.

[Translation]

I want to thank the committee for inviting federal officials back to speak further about the complexities of foreign credential recognition, or FCR, in Canada and I am pleased to answer additional questions that you may have.

In my remarks today, I will provide additional information related to some of the points and suggestions raised by some of the witnesses. As you will see, in many instances, CIC is already moving forward on suggested improvements.

[English]

As you may already know, it is the mandate of CIC to build a stronger Canada by developing policies, programs, and services that facilitate the arrival of people and their integration in a way that maximizes their contribution to this country. In line with the department's mandate, the FCRO focuses on working with individuals overseas by supporting the development of pre-arrival tools and services that provide needed information and that begin some of the licensure processes overseas. The FCRO is uniquely positioned within CIC's mandate and legislation to reach out to immigrants early via CIC's immigration system and to support their labour market integration through the department's responsibility for the settlement and integration of newcomers.

Some witnesses specifically mentioned the Canadian immigrant integration program, or CIIP, the program that the FCRO funds with

the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. You will recall that this program consists of a two-day orientation session.

I want to take a moment to clarify the reach of this CIIP program. You may recall that CIIP services are offered in the Philippines, China, India, and the United Kingdom, with satellite services available to Southeast Asia, northern Europe, and the Persian Gulf. By locating the CIIP in these service delivery points, which are Canada's highest immigration source countries, the program can potentially reach 70% of federal skilled worker applicants and 44% of provincial nominee applicants.

It is important to note that although the CIIP is a voluntary program for Canadian immigrants, it is reaching its targets. During the course of the contribution agreement 2010 through 2013, the CIIP is planning to serve a total of 13,326 immigrants. The evaluation of the CIIP will help to determine the feasibility of further program expansion after the contribution funding ends in 2013.

Mr. Chair, as noted in my remarks, which I have shared with this committee, the FCRO develops a number of information products and online tools that help internationally trained individuals understand the foreign recognition processes of Canada while they are in their country of origin and that also help other key stakeholders such as employers.

In the interest of time and to allow for more questions, I would ask the committee to please refer to my remarks for further detail about some of these FCRO information products. However, I would like to underscore that FCRO products such as *An essential workbook for newcomers*, our 24 occupation-specific fact sheets, and the *Employer's Roadmap to Hiring and Retaining Internationally Trained Workers* are meeting a real need by providing tangible, helpful information and advice. The number of downloads for all of these products is reaching now the one-million mark.

Mr. Chair, in addition to the information products that we provide, the FCRO also promotes discussion and information sharing among stakeholders who are responsible for assessing, licensing, and hiring internationally trained individuals. Launching this winter, the International Qualifications Network, or IQN, will provide a one-stop information site for FCR activities for employers, governments, immigrant-serving organizations, regulatory bodies, and academics to share new approaches and best practices.

● (1545)

[Translation]

Some of the witnesses who have appeared before this committee called for more federal leadership or new national initiatives to address FCR-related challenges. At CIC, we are always interested in hearing about new ideas and solutions from stakeholders, as we look forward to hearing the recommendations from this committee.

However, it is worth noting that, in many areas, the authority to make concrete improvements lies with provincial and territorial governments, especially if those changes concern provincially mandated professional regulatory bodies. That is why it is so important that all orders of government continue to work closely together to achieve progress through, for example, the pan-Canadian framework.

[English]

Part of CIC's specific mandate is to facilitate the integration of immigrants into Canada. The products and services provided by FCRO support CIC's mandate and are an example of how each of the three federal departments engaged in FCR activities has a unique contribution to make. There is a clear link between immigrants' ability to have their international education and experience recognized and how successful they will be in the labour market.

In the context of Minister Kenney's recent work to modernize Canada's federal skilled worker program, having the FCRO located within CIC has allowed us to work closely with other parts of the department to ensure that FCR issues and challenges are reflected and addressed through departmental policies and operations.

In closing, both CIC and the FCRO remain committed to improving the labour market integration and outcomes for internationally trained individuals. The FCRO will continue to support projects and develop tools that help internationally trained individuals begin the credential recognition process overseas so they can come to Canada and, to the extent possible, hit the ground running.

The FCRO will continue to work with federal partners at HRSDC and Health Canada, as well as provinces and territories and various stakeholders, to improve and streamline FCRO processes. When newcomers to Canada succeed in finding commensurate employment that allows them to put their skills and training to work quickly, we all succeed.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much for those insightful comments.

Is there going to be a presentation from Health Canada?

Ms. Craig Garrison, is it? Go ahead.

Ms. Margo Craig Garrison (Director, Health Human Resources Policy Division, Department of Health): Good afternoon.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak to you again. In my previous remarks I provided a general overview of Health Canada's internationally educated health professionals initiative. I would like to focus today on some of the successes that have resulted from our work and our role in foreign qualification recognition.

Health Canada has an important role to play in supporting improvements to foreign qualification recognition. Since 2005, when Health Canada started the initiative, progress has been made. We have expanded our focus from funding largely physician and nursing projects to several other professions, and from primarily assessment-focused projects to those that cross the integration pathway, from pathfinding information to entry into the health workforce.

Many of the activities and programs that address the needs of internationally educated health professionals go beyond the scope of labour and immigration ministries, and must also draw on the knowledge and expertise in health ministries. Health Canada has several avenues through which we work with our provincial and territorial counterparts on foreign qualification recognition. As a

recent example, in 2010, through the Conference of Deputy Ministers of Health, an internationally educated health professionals task force was established to address shared issues.

Investments by Health Canada align with the themes identified to the committee by other presenters. These include improving competency assessment, supporting bridge training and orientation, and professional development for faculty working with the internationally educated. I would like to provide a few examples to illustrate this alignment.

To improve the assessment and recognition of international medical graduates' foreign qualifications, Health Canada has supported the Medical Council of Canada to provide reliable, comparable information about candidates to program directors in faculties of medicine to use in their decision-making about entry into postgraduate residency programs. This is resulting in a more fair, transparent, and consistent process across jurisdictions.

To respond to a call for nationally standardized nursing bridging programs, Health Canada is supporting the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing to improve the quality and consistency of nursing bridging programs. This association is working with its provincial and territorial partners to develop a pan-Canadian framework of guiding principles and essential components for nursing bridging programs.

Helping to put in place the supports to assist internationally educated health professionals obtain the appropriate so-called soft skills is also an important focus of our work. Many of our projects support improvements to language, cultural awareness, and communication skills that are critical for interactions with patients, their families, and other health professionals. Improvements to these soft skills encourage successful integration into the workplace.

As an example of the work funded in this area, British Columbia's communication and cultural awareness project tackles language barriers by expanding access to professional communication courses, and developing and implementing a course to assist supervisors identify and address communication challenges. Funding from Health Canada has allowed the province to build program components that are self-sustaining. Working closely with stakeholders, the Government of British Columbia is addressing these needs of internationally educated health professionals and employers across the province.

The role of faculty, supervisors or preceptors, and mentors in the provision of bridging programs is also well recognized. Health Canada has worked with the University of Toronto faculty of pharmacy to develop and deliver a training program that assists mentors and preceptors gain the knowledge, skills, and confidence required to effectively supervise international pharmacy graduates during their clinical training and assessment period. Preceptor training was provided to 146 pharmacists, 78% of whom subsequently indicated a willingness to take on internationally educated pharmacy students.

These examples provide only a partial picture of the investments Health Canada has made to improve foreign qualification recognition. Over the coming years Health Canada's investments will address the gaps identified in the action plans developed with selected health professions as part of the implementation of the FQR framework. Our current work is focused on accelerating the assessment of physicians as one of the priority occupations for implementation.

• (1555)

I would like to conclude with a few general comments.

Health Canada acknowledges that the integration of internationally educated health professionals is a complex undertaking involving the mandates of numerous organizations. To this end, our work emphasizes the value of collaboration with many partners, including our federal partners, to expand the networks of organizations that are working to common purpose. Further, Health Canada collaborates with the provinces and territories to complement the significant work being undertaken in the jurisdictions.

Health Canada is committed to moving the FQR agenda forward, while recognizing the primary and key role of the jurisdictions in health, education, and training.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity to speak to you today.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that presentation.

We will go to our rounds of questioning.

We'll start with Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Thank you very much. I'm actually going to split my time with Madame Perreault.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming.

I'm going to focus on one aspect.

Mr. LaRue, you pointed out in your presentation the difficulties in collecting and tracking data, which witnesses have highlighted.

I was fortunate enough to be at a presentation this morning by the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada. Their presentation was about IMGs and Canadians being treated abroad. In that presentation, they said that the single most important element we could pay attention to was support for evidence-informed health and human resources planning, which includes continued support for the national IMG database and broader support for a health human resources data and analysis centre.

I also want to point to a report from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. It is a final project report from July 2008. There were a number of recommendations, but they talked about access to Canadian labour market information.

When you talk about collecting and tracking data, that's not in the larger context of labour market information and the kind of integrated, broad-range planning required not just for health and human services but for all occupations for when we're encouraging people from abroad.

Would you tell me what kind of labour market planning is happening right now around some of these key areas? That would include a gap analysis, looking at Canadians who could fill the jobs, looking at short-term plans for foreign recruitment, looking at timelines, and all of that kind of thing.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: Your question is very large. I mean, it speaks to—

Ms. Jean Crowder: You can send us a written response if you can't deal with it in the next 30 seconds.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I would say that through the work of the pan-Canadian framework, we've targeted 14 priority occupations, as you know. For these 14 priority occupations, we have a commitment to governance and accountability.

Clearly, one of the things we're doing is trying to identify the sorts of data commonly collected by stakeholders that would prove to be useful, common indicators for the progress being made. That's certainly one aspect.

As part of our work in terms of planning, any time we have a priority occupation, there is a process. What we do is consult, because with those national occupations, we don't necessarily have the right assessment of the certifying process. There's a process of validation that occurs with any of those occupations on the target list.

Once we've validated that we understand clearly the pathway to certification, we develop action plans. The provincial and federal governments are in the room and the regulators are in the room. The reason is very simple: We want to make sure that we don't duplicate those investments we're going to make.

Those action plans identify three specific priorities for future investments for those particular occupations. Once those action plans are in place, we examine whether they meet their commitment for the one-year timeliness service standard.

Ultimately, we also have a task group as part of the federal-provincial committee that works on this. It ensures a follow-up, because once we've done the first set of priority occupations, we're not done. We're fully aware that this is an evergreen process, so we have the structures in place in terms of tracking this.

My answer has two dimensions. One is performance management and tracking information. The second is more on your focus on planning and the process we have in place in terms of working with the priority occupations.

•(1600)

The Chair: Not exactly a 30-second response, but certainly a large question.

Go ahead. You still have one minute.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madame Perreault.

The Chair: Go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Good afternoon. Thank you for being here.

In 1989, Canada ratified the 1979 UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region. The object of the convention was to foster the recognition of foreign degrees. A new convention, similar to the 1979 one, was adopted in 1997. Canada is one of 55 signatories, like a number of countries in Europe, as well as Australia and the United States. But Canada is one of four countries that still have not ratified the convention.

I have several questions. That was just for background.

Do you know why Canada has not ratified the convention? What would be the consequences for Canada of ratifying it? What would the implications be for post-secondary institutions and the regulatory bodies of those professions? As the representative of a branch of a department that deals with the recognition of the qualifications of foreign workers, do you think that ratifying the convention would be beneficial or nothing more than symbolic?

[English]

The Chair: Obviously time is up, and there are many questions there. You might pick one that you want to answer, and then you might come back.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: This one is...

[Translation]

That question is relatively easy to answer. We are well aware of the negotiations that are going on at the moment, you understand. Of course, I do not speak for the Department of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, since the negotiations are still ongoing, it would not be appropriate for me to express an opinion that might end up interfering with them.

But it is really an excellent question. The treaty is certainly being given a lot of attention. I know that the Government of Canada, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, is working with the provinces on it and the work is continuing.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

We'll move to the next questioner. Mr. Shory.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for coming out this afternoon.

It is a very interesting topic, for me at least, because I have lived through this issue, and I can tell you that from the last few years I can see a huge change in the attitude and the progress made in this

area. That is highly appreciated by foreign-trained individuals. I like that term, instead of foreign-trained new Canadians. As a matter of fact, the fact is that there are a lot of Canadian-born children or Canadians who go overseas for a higher education or some professional education, and they have to go through the same issue that a new Canadian with foreign qualifications has to go through.

Mr. Walsh, in your presentation you talked about the pre-arrival tools, which made sense to me. The more I listened to the witnesses and the more I think about this issue, I think that will help a lot, basically pre-certification before arrival. Before anyone comes with foreign qualification to Canada, that individual should know what is the path he or she has to take, and where does that individual stand.

I guess we are in the right direction when we talk about pre-certification. If you can elaborate on that, what are the constructive ways our government can work with other countries to ensure that this pre-certification can be carried out as much as possible?

•(1605)

Mr. Brendan Walsh: Thank you.

In this matter it's a question of working particularly with the regulatory bodies in Canada. As my colleague Mr. LaRue has said, through our work on the FQR framework we are actively engaging with regulatory authorities and those who assess credentials for those target occupations to see what can be done to expedite the processes, and in particular, how much of the assessment or even some of the licensing steps can be moved to the pre-arrival phase.

We're seeing a lot of success on the information front. I think it's safe to say now that applicants who come to Canada, whether they're immigrants or internationally trained, do have access to good information about how their international training will be recognized or assessed in Canada, and what particular steps they're going to have to take.

We're seeing some challenges in moving some of the licensing steps overseas. As much as my colleagues and I would like to see many of the licensing steps happen before the applicant arrives in Canada, there are limits to how much can be done pre-arrival. It depends on the capacity of the profession and its ability to provide testing overseas at a range of possible sites around the world.

We're also seeing trends among regulatory bodies of not just relying on paper-and-pencil tests to assess, but giving applicants a chance to demonstrate their experience, a competency-based assessment. I think we're seeing a good trend, but it does make it more challenging to deliver those types of services pre-arrival.

In our discussions with the professions, we're trying to move forward on how much of the process can take place pre-arrival. In some cases professions are saying that the applicants can begin a self-assessment tool, or they may be able to start having their educational credentials taken. Maybe they can even start the initial phase of an examination. It depends on the profession, but that's where we're headed as one of our objectives.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: If I can add, HRSDC also works with many of the regulatory bodies in furthering the establishment of mutual recognition agreements as well as putting in place processes that make sense for mid-career professionals who come from overseas.

Maybe Jonathan Wells could talk rapidly about just one of our projects, like the one with accountants, and the bridging measures and some of the mutual recognition agreements we've encouraged through some occupations.

Mr. Jonathan Wells: I would certainly be happy to speak to those.

One of the items that's come up repeatedly in the national consultations is the utility of having a mutual recognition agreement between countries with respect to a single profession. I have heard this comment from a number of professions, but they're not necessarily equipped to act on this immediately. So one of the responses we're currently working on is building on the experiences we've had with such groups as the Certified General Accountants Association of Canada and the Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists.

We're looking at drawing together a group of up to 40 representatives of Canadian regulatory authorities, ones that have expressed interest in this subject, and we're intending to hold a workshop that will provide these associations and organizations with some of the additional insights and some of the how-to and what-to-look-for in consideration of advancing the idea of profession-to-profession mutual recognition agreements that can bypass many, if not all, of the steps required for licensure. This was announced in late September.

In some cases they will allow people to pass through the assessment service, such as the case of dentists, whereby individuals come to the point of writing the national exam. In other cases they can permit an individual to obtain licensure with the passage of the relevant tax exam or codes or those types of things. This is an area we have seen that is holding tremendous promise, and we're beginning to work with our partners to engage in it much more deeply.

•(1610)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move now to Ms. Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Thank you very much.

Again, thank you for your presentations.

Mr. LaRue, you talked about the Red Seal program. I know that in the audience today we also have Christopher Smillie, who's the senior advisor, government relations and public affairs, for the building and construction trades. I happen to have his testimony here as well. I'm just trying to get some sense, because there seems to be a void there. We know there's a shortage in skilled labour, especially in the construction field. One of the things he had talked about was that he wanted to see the Red Seal exam be administered overseas and on an ongoing basis, including every other week in the United States.

The other thing he had mentioned was that there needed to be more trades that should be included on the list. Basically, his words were:

We need...more trade to go through this process and if Canada decides what competencies are required where, the easier it will be to determine who else in the world has these qualifications. Canada is in competition with the rest of the world to attract investment.

Based on that, I have a couple of questions here. I'm just wondering what specific things have been done to examine skilled trades from the U.S.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I don't know that it's specifically from the U.S., but we do have the Red Seal program working with the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship. Any time that they consider an occupation to be certified as red seal, there is a process. There needs to be a sponsoring provincial government, and it must be brought forward by that sponsoring province.

A number of criteria are used to assess whether a skilled trade will be included as one of the occupations to be considered for Red Seal designation—obviously, industry support, commonality of tasks, number of PTs involved, usage....

In addition, there are a number of initiatives examining the issues related to the trades. For example, the Saskatchewan apprenticeship authority has released a study on the assessment and recognition of credential and trade experience of foreign-trained workers in red seal trades, and the CCDA has recently created a task force that will review the recommendation and certainly advise the CCDA on how best to apply the framework to skilled trades.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Just to follow up on that, you do talk about the report that came out, and it says the study resulted in a number of recommendations that will be considered by CCDA to improve the FCR and work experience for the skilled trades. I'm just wondering if you'd be able to table those recommendations.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: At the present moment we are right in the midst of implementing the Pan-Canadian framework, and this is part of the targeted occupations. The Red Seal program is not under my purview. It's difficult for me right now to tell you whether the recommendations are available publicly, but I'll be glad to forward them to the clerk of the committee if they are.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: What mandate does CCDA and HRSDC have to work with industry? Is there a mandate, or should there be a mandate?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: There is a clear mandate for the CCDA working on the Red Seal program. CCDA is an institution under the Forum of Labour Market Ministers that examines the issues related to apprenticeship.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Based on the shortage and on the demand out there, do you think that HRSDC should convene a labour ministers meeting to address this issue as well?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: Well, that's more a question for politicians and decision-makers to address. In terms of whether or not we think this is an important issue, clearly, given that we're investing a lot of resources in the Red Seal program and the CCDA, we know that for sure, as part of the framework, what there is.

If you look at page 12 of the framework, there is a paragraph that says:

Skilled trades are integral to the Framework. Advice will be sought from the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship on how best to apply the Framework to skilled trade occupations.

Recognizing the importance of this issue, as part of my opening remarks I indicated that clearly we're seeing those looming shortages as important labour market issues that will need to be tackled.

• (1615)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: How much time do I have?

The Chair: Fifteen seconds.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: That's good.

The Chair: Mr. McColeman, would you like to go ahead?

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you for coming back to the committee.

As we conclude here, I'd like your reaction and your comments to some of the common messages we've heard from various witnesses. And one of them that stands out in my mind and that just makes sense is language competency being one of the core requirements. So when we address what our recommendations might be for the skilled immigrants coming to this country for the purpose of being employed in their occupation and having their credentials recognized, how important do you think it is that one of the criteria, pre-entry, would be a certain level of competency in the language, not only English, but one of the official languages?

Mr. Brendan Walsh: Well, you're right, language proficiency and the ability to communicate is really one of the foundation pieces for successfully integrating and finding employment in the labour market. It's something that research at CIC has confirmed again and again. Along with a person's other factors, such as age, level of education, and experience, language is really one of the indicators of success.

So as part of the work to modernize Canada's federal skilled worker program, Minister Kenney has recently announced some changes to language requirements. Beginning this year, applicants looking to apply through this program are required to have their language proficiency in either official language assessed before they arrive, by an independent party, to determine whether they have enough capacity to speak in one or both official languages.

As you might be familiar, there's a points grid on which we select immigrants based on 100 points. Language now comprises 26 of those points. It's now the highest factor we look at, representing its importance. So now points for language under the points grid are being based not just on an informal discussion with the visa officer or an assessment of the person's application, but also on a third-party assessment of that person's capability.

We also know that professions might have even higher language thresholds to be met. One of the things we're working on with the ministerial instruction occupations is to determine whether professions that have additional language training can either provide some further training to applicants pre-arrival, or inform them that they will need to reach a higher language threshold if they intend to be licensed in their profession, and then provide them with supports towards that, with perhaps developing things like occupation-

specific vocabulary, for instance. These are some of the projects that our various departments have been funding.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Maybe further to that, there seems to be another consensus emerging, and it's that the CIC and HRSDC foreign credential programs, by merging the two so that there's commonality there in terms of what the requirements are, would improve the process. Can you point to the positive aspects if this were to move forward?

Mr. Brendan Walsh: Well, I'll ask my colleagues to join in on this.

In my own view, it's quite likely that this issue of FCR really requires three departments to work on it, because we all come at the issue with different perspectives and with different mandates so that we can be responsive to these challenges. For CIC, for example, I think it's critical that our department have some involvement in FCR issues, because we need to reflect FCR challenges in how we select immigrants and what sorts of supports we provide to immigrants after they arrive.

From HRSDC's perspective, I think they might say that just from a labour market systemic challenge, they're in a better position to work and support with some partners on that front to make sure that regulatory bodies, etc., are making changes. Health Canada, of course, has a particular interest in seeing that health human resource issues in the health professions are addressed through FCR issues as well.

It's a little difficult for me to say that a model whereby FCR would be housed in one department would be as effective. I think what needs to happen is we need to continue working together closely and to come at this issue from our respective mandates, and with the strength of three departments coming at this. That would be my response.

• (1620)

The Chair: Does anybody else have a comment on that?

Go ahead, Mr. LaRue.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I think this is a fairly important issue, in the sense that, as my colleague Mr. Walsh indicated, FCR is a multi-dimensional issue. The first time I appeared here I think I elaborated quite a bit about the fact that there is an education angle to this issue. There's also a labour angle and there's a health angle. And no matter what you do, currently when we look at each of our respective mandates, they are very complementary. CIC works with the individuals on the overseas component. I work with the regulatory body, making sure we have the right systems in place. Health Canada is specializing in the health profession, and when you look at the list of priority occupations, nine out of fourteen are health-related. So we each have our aspects.

Let's imagine for a moment that we were to centralize all these functions into one. The first thing I would tell you is that notwithstanding the fact that it would be in the same house, I would still need to be able to tap into those networks that CIC and Health Canada have put in place over time.

At the same time, if you were to bring such a change in the middle of implementing the pan-Canadian framework, it would be very complicated.

The Chair: Thank you.

I know we are over time, but this is an important issue.

Does Health Canada want to make a point? Go ahead.

Ms. Margo Craig Garrison: Right.

As I suggested in my opening remarks, I think the health ministries across the country bring something that the labour ministries and the immigration ministries don't bring. Health is fairly complex; I'm sure you've concluded that by this point.

We've been fostering linkages with our provincial and territorial counterparts through existing mechanisms and building on ongoing relationships. Having the established relationships—and we all have them—actually adds to the potential for success, for the success we have experienced so far and for the success that we expect to have in the future. It's a very complex array of jurisdictional requirements and regulations for each occupation, so the more we have working toward a common purpose, the more I think we're going to reach our end goals.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We'll move to Mr. Cuzner.

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

Thank you so much for the encore performance.

If I might speak a little bit more about an issue Jean talked about in the first round, the medical schools were in today and spoke a little bit about trying to develop that baseline, a data base as to where we are right now concerning needs in this country for developing medical professionals. I think there is a willingness on their part to look after this, to usher this study through, but they are saying they would need the support of the federal government with funding.

I'm sure you're familiar with their issue anyway. Could you give me your two cents' worth on that? Do you see the merit in it? Do you see the merit in the government supporting something like that? Maybe we could take it to other sectors as well, as Jean had sort of asked.

I will go to the doctors first.

Ms. Margo Craig Garrison: Thank you very much for your question.

Many people would agree that it would be a step forward to have a centralized focal point for information and data. In fact, Health Canada has supported the Canadian Institute for Health Information over a period of time to develop national supply-based databases and reporting systems for a number of health occupations, and there is some existing health occupation information already in existence for nurses and physicians.

The question is not entirely money, I think. The provincial and territorial governments clearly have an interest in the provision of health human resources. They educate, manage, and deploy health human resources across this country. So if this idea were to move forward it would require a substantial buy-in from the provinces and the territories in order to make it successful. I know you've heard that this is an interesting idea and it has been around for a while, but I

think it would require more than only an investment of capital to make it happen.

• (1625)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Obviously this is a national issue but all within the realm of provincial jurisdiction.

Would you have a similar opinion on that as well, in other areas?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I'll let Mr. Wells talk about our efforts with the medical profession in terms of developing a database to track what's happening to international medical graduates.

Mr. Jonathan Wells: Certainly the AFMC database project you're referring to is the longest-standing project of the FCRP. It's quite interesting, because where we can uncover that data, we seek to find it. In part, one of the challenges is that there's not a hidden stash of this information we can simply gain access to. The number of players an individual would encounter or interface with along the assessment process varies by profession, and it changes. If there's a national exam, there are a number of players.

In terms of an analysis of where systems are breaking down or where there are weaknesses, I agree it's critical to know the data that support that. In good measure, that's the work we're doing in terms of our analysis of the priority occupations. But the comprehensive nature of the data provided by the AFMC is more than we have for most professions. It's very useful, but it does come with some complexities in terms of acquisition, not the least of which are differences in tracking of data and clients. When does a client fall off an application? It's vital information, the best proxy information we can get. It's critical to determining where the systems need strengthening. It could be exam pass rates, the number of applications, or the ultimate number of licences. This is critical information in terms of our analysis, and we're using the most effective available information.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Another thing that came from a couple of witness groups: they indicated that one of the barriers to seeing things move along is access to funding for training. Are some groups of new Canadians not eligible, or are some groups funded and some aren't, as far as training opportunities are concerned?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: Are you referring to the suite of labour market agreements and labour market development agreements we have with the provinces? I'm not sure what you're referring to specifically.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: No. They would say if there's a particular type of training that's necessary; they talked about language skills being one of the barriers, funding assistance, maybe access to student loans and what have you.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: As I indicated in my opening remarks, in budget 2011 we recently announced an initiative to provide loans to recent immigrants and Canadians who have studied abroad. The reason is that when they come back to this country often they don't have a credit rating and it's very hard for them to access funding of that sort. We will shortly announce the details of that initiative.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cuzner, your time is up.

Ms. Leitch, please go ahead.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for coming back again. It's greatly appreciated.

I know we don't have a significant amount of time until the end of this session. We're all working under this new environment of fiscal restraint, and I think we're all acutely aware of the economic uncertainty and the instability, not necessarily in Canada but in our neighbour to the south as well as in Europe.

As we move forward, with that being top of mind, what are some of the non-monetary items we can use to address this issue in the current framework? We always seem to go back to the funding component, but I think we all know that part of this is about will and what we can do and maybe rejigging what we already have on the chessboard. Do you have some suggestions or recommendations on the things we can do that are not fiscally directed?

● (1630)

Ms. Margo Craig Garrison: I will perhaps begin, and my colleagues may be able to suggest some other options.

We have worked hard with some of our provincial and territorial counterparts to encourage regional collaboration as well as individual provincial and jurisdictional collaboration. We in fact have a western forum that deals with issues related to the internationally educated health professionals, and another one in the Atlantic. Those are showing some efficiencies in having people work together on some parts of what they would like to do.

We are fortunate at Health Canada that our internationally educated health professionals initiative has ongoing funding, 90% of which is allocated to the provinces and territories. We work with them very closely to develop projects that meet their specific needs. We have another portion of our funding that looks at pan-Canadian projects. Those are the kinds of things I've talked about, for example, with the Medical Council of Canada.

There are obviously other things that could be done. We are hoping through some of the work we are doing that we will have more information available—for example, a website people could go to. Right now I know you've heard there are varying types of websites and there are variations in the quality. We are building to that, and some of the work we have done will be able to support those kinds of innovations in the future.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: In terms of all of the work we're doing, obviously money is often at the core of the partnerships we have with many stakeholders. There are a lot of by-products that emerge from those agreements we have. For instance, when we work with a number of provincial governments—I kind of call that seed money—there is a discussion and a change in mindset that evolves. We create what I would call a critical mass of understanding on specific occupations.

Because of those discussions and proceeding with the occupations, we've built a common understanding where there used to be differential barriers. After a year or two of discussion and identifying what the problem is, some occupations have come to us and said that what was not possible a couple of years ago is now possible because of what we've done. Certainly in the medical profession the labour mobility chapter has brought some significant changes that a couple

of years ago couldn't have been considered. Now what you have is the whole medical community talking about one uniform standard across the country, which is a remarkable achievement.

There are many examples like this. I'm thinking of some professions that.... We don't force the professions out, but we have a discussion when they are requesting four years of experience plus one year of Canadian experience. Why ask for that when they are assessing whether or not that person is competent? We are working with the profession to try to establish processes that ensure that what we assess are the competencies and not the number of years they've spent in a particular field. That's a much more efficient way. What you build when you do that is good common will going in the same direction.

Jonathan, do you want to handle a few things about this?

Mr. Jonathan Wells: Sure. I can talk about a very fresh example from our consultations with the representatives from the engineering technicians and technologists. Over a three-year period roughly 14,000 newcomers arrive in the country who self-indicate that they are engineers. There's perhaps not a term that is more flexibly used in occupational jargon than the term "engineer". A very low-cost but very high-impact initiative is to establish linkages between the professional engineer associations and the certification bodies for engineer technicians and technologists that would enable individuals to be routed in a much quicker way.

We heard from individuals who had gone through the credential recognition process, and they expressed confusion over whether they should apply to this or that, or where they should go. Having connections between the regulatory bodies and increased collaboration are fundamental principles that are being put into effect by the pan-Canadian framework. These are low-cost but high-impact initiatives that assist people in finding their spot within the Canadian labour market much quicker.

● (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wells.

I will get a concluding remark from Mr. Walsh and we'll end with that.

Mr. Brendan Walsh: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I would echo my colleagues' remarks that unfortunately most of the substantive changes we'd like to see in the area of FCR are monetary-based, whether it's more money for bridge training, MRA development, or moving assessment of applicants overseas.

I do agree there is a lot to be gained from the partnership and dialogue we're trying to build among stakeholders here. I think the regulatory bodies are looking for ways to deal with these challenges. To that extent, we can bring them together to share best practices on something like the IQN network, which FCRO has recently launched, that provides a platform for all kinds of stakeholders to post best practices, new ideas, to see what's working, and create more of a dialogue so people can benefit from experiences across the country.

The Chair: Thank you very much for presenting and pulling a lot of thoughts together and giving us something to think on as we write the report.

We'll suspend for five or ten minutes.

Thank you for attending.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

• (1635) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1710)

[*Public proceedings resume*]

The Chair: Order.

Madame Perreault.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault: I just want to make sure that the motion will be tabled publicly.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay. We are in public and you're entitled to table your motion.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Okay. Do I have to read it?

[*English*]

The Chair: The motion is now before us.

Ms. Leitch, you've got a comment?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: I'd just like to ask to go back in camera, please.

The Chair: All right. We'll have a vote on—

Mrs. Carol Hughes: It hasn't been tabled.

The Chair: She just said she tabled it and we have it. It has been tabled in public.

Ms. Jean Crowder: On a point of order, is the motion on the public record at this point?

The Chair: Sure it is. Of course it is.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So she can use this motion publicly?

The Chair: She can do what she likes with it. It's her motion.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I'm just clarifying that.

The Chair: It's before us for consideration and I rule that the motion is before us in public.

We have a motion to move in camera to deal with that motion by Ms. Leitch. If there are any issues we'll have a vote on that. Perhaps we should.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Give us a roll call, please.

The Chair: Okay. Then let's have a roll call with respect to moving in camera with that motion.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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