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# Executive Summary

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**E**ach year, thousands of international engineering graduates (IEGs) immigrate to Canada. They may be seasoned engineering professionals who have been practicing in their native countries, recently engineering graduates or they may be working in jobs that would be technologist or technician positions in Canada. Regardless of which group they fall into, many of these IEGs arrive in Canada expecting to begin work as engineers and are unable to find engineering employment.

The Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE), its provincial and territorial partners, and Human Resources Development Canada have recognized the importance of addressing this critical employment issue. Together, they have embarked on a joint initiative to solve the integration problem — to better enable IEGs to gain employment in Canada and earn licences as professional engineers (P.Eng. or ing.) in their province or territory of residence.

Launched in January 2003, *From Consideration to Integration (FC2I)* is a three-phase project that aims to:

- research the Canadian immigration process, provincial and territorial engineering licensing procedures and approaches to assessing the credentials of IEGs, examine licensing processes of other professions and in other engineering jurisdictions, and gather feedback from IEGs, settlement workers and from those who employ engineers (*Phase I*);
- analyze the information gathered in Phase I, determine where the process of integration needs improvement, develop models, processes and tools to better equip IEGs, develop consistent and transparent foreign credential recognition processes for licensing

purposes, and begin building consensus among stakeholders on issues such as implementation of the selected solutions (*Phase II*); and

- implement the new processes and develop supporting information materials (*Phase III*).

Research revealed that IEGs primarily immigrate under Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (CIC's) *skilled worker* classification. The new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (in place since 2002) abandoned the former focus on a prospective immigrant's occupation in favour of an emphasis on immigrants' skills sets and their ability to contribute to the Canadian economy. There are several points of contact between immigration officials and immigrants throughout the immigration process, and there is significant information on the CIC website. Despite this, IEGs can confuse assessments conducted to assist in immigration and employment with those specific to licensing. Certainly, there is a sense that the more information IEGs have prior to immigration, the easier it is to settle in Canada.

Obtaining a clear sense of the IEG's immigration experience — from arrival to Canada through settlement to employment — would be helpful in determining where weaknesses in the system exist. Unfortunately, the information available is incomplete: CIC compiles data on immigrants who self-identify as engineers — which is problematic in and of itself given that the credentials of some IEGs don't qualify them as engineers in Canada — and provincial and territorial bodies only track IEGs who apply for licensure. Their progress through the licensing process — when or why they may leave the process — is not tracked.

Following their arrival in Canada, immigrants first attend to basic needs such as housing, then turn their attention to other matters of settlement — schooling for their children, language training, labour market information and employment. Several sources of settlement information and support exist for IEGs and their families, including:

- immigrant-serving organizations, many of which operate satellite offices at the airports in major Canadian urban centres;
- government-funded (and university) host programs that match immigrants (and immigrant students) with host families to assist with integration into Canadian culture and society;
- community networks, which are especially critical for immigrants arriving to smaller Canadian cities;
- government websites that offer valuable support information;
- not-for-profit foundations that provide support services and, in certain cases, scholarship grants to cover immigrants' education fees;
- private businesses such as law firms offer integration support and language training on a fee-for-service basis;
- numerous settlement organizations that facilitate immigrants' integration over the longer term; and
- several organizations and initiatives across the country created specifically to assist IEGs with their transition.

These are key channels of communication with newcomers.

In 2002, the federal government commissioned a report that examined long-standing problems in the immigration consulting industry. It was based on input from representatives of the legal profession, immigrant advocacy groups, academia and the immigration consulting

industry, as well as submissions from organizations and individuals in Canada and abroad. The Minister is currently determining next steps.

In terms of becoming licensed as an engineer in Canada, IEGs can access information about the licensing process on any number of websites including that of the CCPE or its members. However, even with the information on those sites, IEGs may not appreciate certain realities; for example:

- that only credential assessments conducted by the provincial and territorial engineering regulatory bodies are valid for engineering licensure;
- that while employers are unlikely to take a chance on an IEG without a P.Eng., an individual can in fact work in an engineering environment without one; and
- that earning a P.Eng. requires one year of work experience in Canada.

When an IEG applies to become licensed to work as an engineer in Canada, the overall process is *generally* the same in every province and territory — verification of education; acquisition of Canadian work experience and successful completion of a written exam.

To accommodate IEGs, some jurisdictions have undertaken innovative approaches: PEO (Ontario) permits applicants to begin the licensing process prior to immigration; APEGBC (British Columbia) has undertaken a pilot project to assist IEGs in obtaining their one year of Canadian experience; APEGGA (Alberta) is considering another category of licensure; and APEGM (Manitoba) is working with the University of Manitoba on a co-op pilot project with IEGs.

Part of the challenge in communicating licensure requirements to IEGs is the variation in requirements among provincial and territorial regulatory bodies. While the steps to licensure are generally the same, each jurisdiction has somewhat different rules. All jurisdictions have noted that their procedures are time-intensive — licensure can take anywhere from three months to four years.

Focus groups conducted with IEGs offered valuable insights into their experiences following immigration. Virtually all noted that the process of obtaining an engineering licence was extremely frustrating.<sup>1</sup> Several reported confusion regarding the number of regulatory bodies in Canada. Many felt the qualifications evaluation was time-consuming, bureaucratic and in some cases unfair. Some asked that the process be changed to permit completion of the written examination prior to immigration (which now happens in jurisdictions like Ontario.) Accumulation of a year's experience working in engineering in Canada was reported to be virtually impossible to do and was the cause of much resentment among focus group participants.

The regulatory bodies have begun to respond to these types of concerns. Professional Engineers Ontario, for example, issues Provisional Licences to applicants who have satisfied all of the licensing requirements except the minimum 12 months of acceptable engineering experience in a Canadian jurisdiction.

Settlement services providers offered some additional insight into the preconceptions of IEGs arriving to Canada. They reported a common assumption by IEGs that they would be qualified to work as engineers upon immigration.

Investigation into other Canadian professions — including the medical, nursing, dentistry, chartered accountancy, law, architecture and veterinary medicine professions — revealed certain commonalities with the engineering profession's approach to evaluating

<sup>1</sup> These IEGs immigrated prior to 2002 when the new immigration legislation came into effect.

international graduates' credentials, and certain differences. All establish technical competence through written examinations. For some, reciprocity agreements exist permitting licence mobility across the country. Some permit completion of the written exam prior to immigration.

A review of engineering licensing bodies in other countries revealed certain inconsistencies and certain commonalities with Canada's approach. For example, in the UK, 35 different professional institutions exist that govern different engineering disciplines. In the U.S., as in Canada, the professional regulation occurs at the state level.

To gain some perspective from Canadian employers, a random sampling of 21 was selected from across the country. None reported a lack of technical proficiency among IEGs. Of the factors considered in the hiring process, employers noted proficiency in English (or French) and knowledge of North American business practices as among the most important.

A number of areas for discussion in Phase II were identified.

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.