

**GETTING YOUR PROFESSIONAL LICENCE IN ONTARIO:
THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN APPLICANTS**

Executive Summary of Final Report

Prepared for

Office of the Fairness Commissioner

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC) was established in 2007 under the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006. Its mandate is to ensure “transparent, objective, impartial and fair” registration (licensing) practices in most of Ontario’s regulated health and non-health professions.¹ The OFC has multiple responsibilities including assessing the registration practices of regulated professions and providing advice to regulatory bodies, government ministries and stakeholders.

In December 2008, the OFC initiated a research study called *Getting your Professional License in Ontario: the Experiences of International and Canadian Applicants*.

The objectives of the study were to obtain:

- A comprehensive picture of domestically and internationally trained individuals, including their demographic profile, countries of origin, and their employment status;
- An understanding of the information, supports, and programs that are available to applicants, and the perceived effectiveness of these resources;
- An understanding of applicants’ experiences in the registration process; and
- An understanding of the challenges they face.

The study involved a literature review, an online quantitative survey and five focus groups. The online survey was implemented between April 27 and August 17, 2009, and was supported by an extensive communications campaign targeting people who had applied to the professions in Ontario since 2000. Participation was voluntary. The focus groups were held between July 15 and 22, 2009, in London, Ottawa and Toronto. A total of 3,784 respondents across 37 regulated professions participated in the study.

While it is not possible to draw conclusions about the population as a whole, the study provides unprecedented and valuable insight into applicants’ experiences in the licensing process in Ontario.

¹ In Canada, a regulated profession is one that sets its own standards to protect the public. It is governed by a regulatory body which has legal authority to establish requirements for entry to the profession, membership, and use of the professional designation. In addition, it determines standards of practice and competence. The authority of a regulatory body comes from a provincial statute.

Overall, this study draws the following conclusions:

- Generally, there appears to be adequate information about the licensing process available from multiple sources. However, it is not always clear to applicants how to access this information and whether it is reliable.
- Internationally trained participants experience more difficulty finding information about licensing requirements than do domestically trained.
- The existence and purpose of bridging programs are not well understood.
- Internationally educated individuals get mixed messages from different levels of government. (An immigrant professional earns points for education and work experience when he or she applies to become a permanent resident of Canada, but faces licensing challenges once here.)
- Internationally trained applicants need to be better informed, prior to arriving in Canada, about the importance of having all their required documents.
- The length, complexity and cost of licensing processes are frustrating for both Canadian trained and internationally trained individuals.
- Financial support in the form of government grants or loans to pay for education appears to be more accessible by domestically trained than by internationally trained candidates.
- Internationally trained applicants appear to be less prepared for examinations than those educated in Canada.
- The requirement of some regulatory bodies for Canadian work experience is perceived as a particularly difficult challenge by internationally trained applicants.
- Appeal processes, where they exist, are poorly understood.

The results of *Getting your Professional License in Ontario: the Experiences of International and Canadian Applicants* indicate a system in which many applicants do not clearly understand the registration process. Commonalities in their experiences provide direction in how to address these challenges:

- Most of the frustration experienced by both domestically educated and internationally educated candidates can be mitigated by better communication.
- There is a pressing need for every regulatory body to develop comprehensive information about the time and cost of every step along the path to licensure.
- The information should be easy to find and easy to understand whether an applicant is inside Canada or overseas.
- In particular, internationally trained applicants would benefit from consistent communication from federal and provincial governments and from regulatory bodies before they arrive in Canada.