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Chair

Mr. David Tilson

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•(0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting number 30. Today is Tuesday, October 27.

The orders of the day are pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the study of foreign credential recognition.

We have a number of guests this morning.

The first witness is Corinne Prince St-Amand, executive director of the Foreign Credentials Referral Office. She is with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

We have Jean-François LaRue, who is the director general of labour market integration, and Silvano Tocchi, director of the foreign credential recognition division. They are with the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development.

And finally, we have Kathryn McDade, who is the director general of the health care policy directorate with the Department of Health.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming to help us with our study.

There are three presenters. Each of you has up to 10 minutes. You don't have to take the full 10 minutes, but if you wish to, that's fine.

We will start with Corinne Prince-St-Amand.

[Translation]

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand (Executive Director, Foreign Credentials Referral Office, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am Executive Director of the Foreign Credentials Referral Office at Citizenship and Immigration Canada. I want to thank the committee for this opportunity to provide an update on CIC's role in foreign credential recognition.

[English]

I think we can all recognize that immigration has been and continues to be vital to Canada's growth and economic strength. In 2008 alone, Canada accepted a total of 103,736 federal skilled workers, and of these principal applicants, 32% identified in the top 20 regulated professions.

However, recognizing the foreign credentials of internationally trained individuals continues to be a challenge across the country. In

Canada, provinces and territories are responsible for assessing and recognizing credentials. Currently there are more than 440 regulatory bodies across the country governing more than 50 professions. There are also more than 200 accredited post-secondary institutions that assess educational credentials for academic placement, as well as five provincially mandated assessment agencies that evaluate educational credentials for the purposes of both academic placement and workforce entry.

Data indicates that approximately 48,000 internationally trained individuals have their credentials assessed by the five provincially mandated assessment agencies each year. This number, however, does not include the myriad of other players involved in credential recognition who assess credentials not only for the purposes of entry into a regulated occupation but also for the purposes of entry into a trade, for the purposes of further post-secondary study, and/or for the purposes of employment in a non-regulated occupation.

In fact, 53 provincial and territorial ministries are involved in this issue, as it spans immigration, labour market, health, and education ministries. There are literally thousands of players on this file, when you include employers, all of whom are important assessors of credentials and work experience in regulated and non-regulated occupations.

[Translation]

The Government of Canada has established a relationship of leadership and trust with provinces and territories and regulatory bodies on priorities such as labour mobility and foreign credential recognition.

Although foreign credential recognition falls within provincial/territorial jurisdiction, the Government of Canada has an ongoing responsibility for immigration and its impact on the Canadian labour market and economy. As such, the Government of Canada continues to play a central leadership role in facilitating advancements on foreign credential recognition among multiple players.

[English]

To that end, the Government of Canada established the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, which is commonly referred to as the FCRO, in May 2007 to provide internationally trained persons with the information, path-finding, and referral services they need to have their credentials assessed as quickly as possible so they can find work faster in the fields for which they have been trained. The FCRO services are offered both in Canada and overseas.

Additionally, the FCRO provides a coordinated focus at the federal level, working with HRSDC and Health Canada, to work with provinces, territories, regulatory bodies, and employers to coordinate federal-provincial-territorial efforts, share best practices across the country, and avoid overlap and duplication on an issue that is extremely complex.

[Translation]

Earlier this year, all governments recognized the importance of foreign credential recognition to the economic health of the country, as well as the important role that each level of government plays in ensuring that the skills, education and talent of those coming to the country can be quickly and rightly utilized.

My colleague Jean-François LaRue, from HRSDC will give you more details on the subject in a few minutes.

[English]

As we continue to work closely with our provincial and territorial colleagues, Health Canada, and HRSDC, the FCRO will continue to support and take a leadership role on matters related to pre-immigration and overseas initiatives. To this end, the FCRO received funding of some \$13.7 million over two years in Budget 2009 to support the development of harmonized standards and clear pathways to form credential recognition for targeted occupations beginning overseas; to strengthen the scope of the overseas platform to support and implement the first ministers' commitment; and to develop a pan-Canadian information centre, in essence a website that will showcase and promote the sharing of promising foreign credential recognition practices across the country.

Prior to the establishment of the FCRO at CIC, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada laid the foundation for consistent foreign credential processes overseas through a pilot project with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. In October 2010, the FCRO will build upon the pilot and expand funding to provide FCRO services to not only the federal skilled workers category but also to provincial nominees in China, India, and the Philippines. It will also support the creation of a fourth location in the United Kingdom, beginning no later than 2011.

The United Kingdom location will serve the British Isles, the gulf, and Scandinavia. These offices combined will cover a larger pool of immigrants and could access close to 75% of the current volume of federal skilled workers and 44% of the current volume of provincial nominees.

The FCRO is also offering important services to immigrants domestically, including the provision of information on foreign credential recognition processes in Canada, to support faster integration into the Canadian labour market. These services are offered in person to clients across Canada through 329 Service Canada centres and 245 outreach sites, as well as through a toll-free telephone line through the Service Canada call centre.

Information on foreign credential recognition is also available through the FCRO website, which includes the "Working in Canada Tool". It is an online search tool that provides individualized information on specific occupations, communities, and labour market conditions, as well as information targeted to both internationally trained individuals and employers. Between the

FCRO launch in May 2007 and September 2009, the FCRO website received over 732,00 visits, with the majority coming from overseas.

Although foreign credential recognition remains a challenge for most immigrants seeking entry into the Canadian labour market, governments are coming together to support and develop initiatives that will play a crucial role in not only supporting economic recovery from the downturn and promoting future growth of our country, but also in providing immigrants with the tools and services they need to begin the assessment and accreditation process while still in their country of origin.

● (0910)

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My colleagues from HRSDC and Health Canada will now inform you about the additional work done at the federal level on foreign credential recognition.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. It has been a good review.

We will now have Mr. LaRue make a presentation.

Good morning.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-François LaRue (Director General, Labour Market Integration, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair and distinguished members of this committee.

On behalf of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, I would like to extend my thanks to the committee for the opportunity to input into your study on foreign credential recognition.

My name is Jean-François LaRue, and I am the new Director General of Labour Market Integration, within the Skills and Employment Branch. I also have with me my colleague Silvano Tocchi, from the Skills and Employment Branch.

Today, I would like to provide the Committee with an update on the important work that HRSDC's Foreign Credential Recognition, or FCR, Program has been doing to improve the labour market outcomes of immigrants.

[English]

First, I want to emphasize HRSDC's work toward overcoming systemic barriers to immigrant labour market integration and how this work is very distinct and yet complementary to the role played by CIC, which seeks to address the individual—and I insist on the word "individual"—credential recognition challenges faced by immigrants.

From a systemic perspective, we know there are real economic costs to the Canadian economy associated with the non-recognition of foreign credentials. As was noted last Thursday in testimony, these losses are estimated to range between \$2.4 billion and \$5.9 billion annually.

Beyond the losses to productivity, the underuse of the skills and employment potential of immigrants also results in unnecessary increases to social services costs, a decreased ability of employers to find employees with the required skills, and loss of potential tax revenue.

That is why the initiatives supported by the foreign credential recognition program are not just the right thing to do for individuals; they are also sound economic policy in an area where the leadership role of the Government of Canada is key.

By tapping into the skills of immigrants, HRSDC is supporting the creation of a larger, more efficient, and more flexible labour market. By ensuring the qualifications of immigrants are given their due, we are laying the foundation for a more efficient job-matching process that responds to the needs of employers.

The FCR program is a key lever through which the skills, international experience, and global perspectives of Canada's immigrants can strengthen the labour market and position Canada to succeed in the forthcoming economic recovery.

Since 2003, the foreign credential recognition program has been supporting systemic labour market interventions to improve the labour market outcomes of immigrants by strengthening Canada's capacity to assess and recognize the credentials of immigrants.

The FCR program provides strategic financial support to organizations responsible for assessing and recognizing foreign credentials, some of which you met here last Thursday. Our support enables these organizations to develop processes and practices that are fair, consistent, transparent, and rigorous.

As of October 2009, the FCR program has provided support to 123 projects in 27 different occupations, for a total of \$71.2 million worth of investments. Through Canada's economic action plan, an additional \$50 million was allocated over this year and next to support this work. The FCR program is currently supporting 34 active projects, 19 of which are in the critically important health sector on which my colleague, Kathryn McDade, will report to you a little later.

I would like to draw your attention to four areas where we have seen considerable progress.

First, the FCR program has played an important role in facilitating the emergence of pan-Canadian partnerships. The FCR program provides financial support to a variety of stakeholders, including regulatory authorities, assessment agencies, professional associations, post-secondary educational institutions, immigrant-serving agencies, sector councils, and employers, so they have the opportunities to coordinate their efforts to develop FCR processes and tools tailored to the needs of their clients and members.

Second, we are also increasing the capacity of regulated occupations to evaluate and recognize the credentials of immigrants, with an initial emphasis on physicians, nurses, and engineers.

● (0915)

[Translation]

Engineers are the single largest occupational grouping of newcomers to the country. Our partnership with Engineers Canada,

who are leaders in developing FCR models, has helped this key demographic group to integrate into the labour market.

Since 2003, FCRP has funded a series of projects with Engineers Canada that have proceeded from environmental scans followed by concrete recommendations for effective tools and processes. The FCR program's early interventions and ongoing support have helped Engineers Canada produce their groundbreaking Database of Foreign Engineering Institutions.

This Database is centrally maintained and used by provincial engineering regulatory bodies to assess internationally-trained engineers, thereby expediting the evaluation and licensure process for international engineering graduates in Canada. This project also resulted in all engineering regulators across Canada agreeing on consistent approaches to FCR for internationally-trained engineers.

[English]

Third, the FCR program also has had engagement in the non-regulated sector, which represents between 80% and 85% of the jobs in the Canadian economy. The FCR program has supported 11 sector councils, as these crucial stakeholders provide an effective platform from which employers are able to access the tools they need to facilitate credential assessments.

Our partnership with BioTalent Canada is one such success story. BioTalent Canada is creating opportunities for immigrants in the biotechnology sector to connect with employers through internship programs that include curricula to help employers coach internationally trained professionals and introduce them to the Canadian biotechnology sector work environment. BioTalent Canada has also developed a national practical assessment and training approach for the internationally trained. This approach assesses and teaches sector-specific terminology and acronyms and language ability such as listening, comprehension, and pronunciation. The project is also increasing cooperation between governments, community agencies, industry, and, most importantly, internationally trained professionals as they are welcomed into Canada's biotechnology sector.

Fourth, we've also made progress in delivering supports to individuals prior to their arrival in Canada. As noted by Corinne, the Canadian immigration integration project has piloted the design and delivery of a continuum of services, beginning overseas and continuing after an individual's landing in Canada. This pioneering work has helped to lay the foundation for the overseas strategy of the FCRO.

Complementing the FCR program's efforts to create a systemic capacity is the "Working in Canada Tool". Managed by HRSDC, workingincanada.gc.ca helps provide immigrants with relevant, up-to-date, and credible information on credential recognition, pay rates, current job offers, and much more. The "Working in Canada Tool" aggregates information from six Government of Canada labour market databases, and produces reports customized to an immigrant's occupation and location. The tool can produce close to 40,000 unique reports, and it is used nearly 65,000 to 75,000 times a month, mostly by people living overseas.

Regarding the foreign qualification recognition framework, as you know, on January 16, 2009, the first ministers directed the labour market ministers to develop a pan-Canadian qualification recognition framework and a plan to put it into place. This process is ongoing. Over the coming weeks the forum of labour market ministers will continue to work towards a consensus framework document. I'm confident that the work the forum of labour market ministers is undertaking will make a significant contribution to reducing barriers faced by internationally trained workers and that it will lead to the improved integration of immigrants into the labour force.

The FCR program will continue to be a key piece of the Government of Canada's response to the issue of foreign credential recognition. Building on the lessons we have learned over the years, the FCR program will replicate the early successes we've had with groups like Engineers Canada and BioTalent Canada to address systemic labour market barriers on a larger scale.

• (0920)

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My colleague from Health Canada, Kathryn McDade, will round out the picture, by speaking to the Government of Canada's interventions in the critically important health sector.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LaRue.

Ms. McDade.

Ms. Kathryn McDade (Director General, Health Care Policy Directorate, Department of Health): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of Health Canada, I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to contribute to your study on foreign credential recognition. This morning I'd like to take a few minutes to provide you with a brief overview of investments that Health Canada has made to support improvements in credential recognition, specifically in the health professions.

To set the context for my remarks, I'd like to note that internationally educated health care professionals play an important role in the health workforce. To give you a few statistics from 2007, 22% of Canada's doctors, 15% of physiotherapists, and 8% of both occupational therapists and registered nurses were educated outside the country.

[Translation]

Despite their significant role, it is well documented that these professionals can face multiple challenges around integrating into the workforce. Barriers include: navigating the complex array of steps to licensure in their given profession, which may vary across the country's 13 provinces and territories; and, lack of familiarity with the Canadian health care system and its unique requirements for clinical practice in Canada.

In 2003, Canada's First Ministers made a commitment to work together to secure and maintain a stable and optimal health workforce in Canada. In 2004, first ministers agreed to a 10-year plan to strengthen health care, responding to concerns around timely access to quality care for all Canadians.

As part of the plan, federal, provincial and territorial leaders agreed to increase the supply of health professionals, in part, by accelerating and expanding the assessment and integration of internationally trained health care graduates.

[English]

In support of this 10-year plan, in the 2005 budget the Government of Canada committed \$75 million over five years to the internationally educated health professionals initiative. The goal of this initiative, which is known by the acronym IEHPI, is to address barriers and advance progress in five areas related to the integration of internationally educated health professionals, including promoting preparedness of these professionals to self-assess; improving access to credential assessment and verification through increased access to information and path-finding; initiating faculty development programs to ensure that educators have the skills to teach internationally educated health professionals; supporting successful completion of licence or exams; and increasing the availability of training orientation and other supports to facilitate integration into the workforce.

To date, investments under the IEHPI have focused on seven priority occupations, physicians, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, medical laboratory technologists and medical radiation technologists. IEHPI is currently funded at \$18 million per year. Approximately 90% of that program funding is directed to provincial and territorial governments through bilateral agreements with Health Canada.

This funding has increased the capacity of provincial and territorial governments to work with their regulators and professional associations to improve the integration process for internationally educated health professionals. Provinces and territories have developed innovative initiatives in the areas of credential assessment, bridge training, career counselling, information services, and orientation programs.

I'd like to give a few quick examples of some of the specific initiatives that provinces and territories have undertaken.

● (0925)

[Translation]

In December 2006, Ontario launched a "one-stop" information, counselling and path-finding service for internationally-educated health professionals wanting to apply for licensure to work in their field. By October 2008, the Centre had registered more than 5,200 clients. Among these clients are 92 internationally-educated doctors who were recently selected for residency positions in Ontario with the help of this service.

A competency assessment program for internationally-educated nurses was developed in Alberta and has been implemented in all the western provinces and Nova Scotia. The program assesses internationally-educated nurses' competencies and helps to prepare candidates for assessment and clinical practice in Canada.

In 2007 the assessment process was taken overseas to explore the feasibility of off-shore assessments to reduce the time required for the assessment and registration process. A total of 33 assessments were performed in four locations: England, Ireland, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

[English]

In British Columbia, international medical graduates are receiving an orientation workshop that provides information on working in the medical field in Canada. Feedback from the first 65 medical graduates was positive, and plans are under way in that province to make the orientation session mandatory for all new international medical graduates.

As a final example, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan have partnered on strategies and tools for the assessment and verification of internationally educated occupational therapists' competencies to facilitate their practice in Canada.

Those were examples of provincial-territorial investments supported by Health Canada. The remaining 10% of IEHPI program funding supports pan-Canadian projects that are undertaken by national professional bodies, academic institutions, and health care organizations. Again, to give you a couple of examples,

[Translation]

the widely-subscribed "Orientation to the Canadian Health Care System, Culture and Context" workshop, developed by the University of Toronto, provides information on the Canadian health care system to internationally-educated professionals in six cities: Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon and Ottawa, and via an on-line program.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. McDade, I'm going to have to cut you off. I see you have some time left, and already we're over. I'm sorry to cut you off. We do have your notes.

The chair notes that we're going to be in the same problem this week as we were last week, where we'll only have time for one round of questioning, which does create an unfairness to the government side. I notice there are some smiles in the room, but there is, in the

chair's opinion, an unfairness. In due course, whether it's in the business session today or at our subcommittee meeting—November 4 or November 5?—I'm going to suggest that this topic be revisited. We have time for one round of seven minutes each.

Mr. Karygiannis, and then Ms. Mendes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Good morning, folks, and thanks for coming.

Have any of you tried to navigate this website you've set up?

● (0930)

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: The "Working in Canada" website?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: The foreign credentials website.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: Yes, I have.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You have. Let me tell you my experience. I'm a professional. I am a graduate of engineering in Toronto, and I tried navigating it as if I am somebody from overseas. When I arrive at the website, in my area, it was suggested that I go to CICS, which is a local provider for people settling in Canada. They absolutely could not assist me with engineering skills or who I contact and everything else. I don't know what site you're navigating, but the one I tried to navigate certainly did not get me the same results you're describing.

The other thing I have for you is, when we ask people who are coming in—doctors, engineers, pharmacists—to join those organizations...these organizations are self-controlled within the province, correct?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: Correct.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Now, wouldn't you also want to encourage more people to become members of these organizations as well as vote for, let's say, PEO? Wouldn't the Government of Canada be interested that foreign people who are coming in also get to vote for who's on the board?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I can't speak to the internal functioning of these organizations. What I'm trying to do is have in place processes so that credentials of foreign or recent immigrants are recognized, and then they can participate and be accredited with those organizations.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You give them money, don't you?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I do give money to have processes put in place so that these bodies work together toward common objectives and processes and develop tools that they need to make appropriate assessments.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. LaRue, wouldn't you have a carrot and stick approach, where you not only give them money but you also encourage them to have members vote? Don't you think that's prudent?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I'm sorry, I'm not sure what you're getting at.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: What I'm getting at, sir, is that only 15% of PEO members in Ontario, the last time around, went to vote. I find that number horrible.

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: Yes, it's pretty low. I would agree.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So don't you think you should also have a carrot and stick approach, that, yes, we're going to give you money to train these people, but I also want them to be a part of the governance of the body? Wouldn't you have something in there, a caveat, that says you have to do this?

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand: Mr. Karygiannis, the federal role is to fund organizations, including national associations of regulatory bodies, to build assessment tools to ensure that their processes for obtaining licensure are as fair and transparent as possible for foreign-trained, as well as for Canadian-trained, individuals. Once an individual in a licensed occupation becomes a practising member of that occupation, as you well know, they obtain a licence and they then have to pay licensing fees to maintain that licence. With that right comes the right to vote within the occupation, but in an area of foreign credential recognition that is, as we've said in our opening statement, the purview of the provinces and territories, I don't think the federal government has the right to insist that either domestically trained or foreign-trained licensed individuals in any occupation must vote in one way or the other.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You should encourage them to have self-governance and to have people participate in that self-governance. Nowhere in the contracts that you've signed with them is there encouragement for people to participate in voting. Enough said.

You're spending \$71.2 million in doing all this. How much money was used to advertise in the ethnic press?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I would have to get back to you on that specific question, because I don't have that figure.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Is there any advertisement that's done from the \$71.2 million?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I would have to check with my communication services.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Sir, you spent \$71.2 million and you don't know where it's going?

Mr. Silvano Tocchi (Director, Foreign Credential Recognition Division, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development): We do know where the money is going. That's—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Okay. If you do know, how much is going for advertising?

The Chair: Mr. Karygiannis, let Mr. Tocchi speak.

Mr. Silvano Tocchi: That money was disbursed through contribution agreements to third parties. Some third parties may have provided notices of some of the work they're doing. These third parties would have been professional regulators or other labour market bodies with whom we work. They may have made information available through ethnic media.

• (0935)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Tocchi, what I'm hearing is that you're spending \$71.2 million and you don't know where it's going. That's what I'm hearing.

Mr. Silvano Tocchi: I don't think we would characterize it that way.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: If you can't tell me how much money was used to advertise—

The Chair: Mr. Karygiannis, I don't think he said that.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Chair, I'm sure he can answer to his own remarks.

Mr. Tocchi, I am hearing from you, sir, that \$71.2 million is used and you don't know where it's going, if you can't tell me how much of that was for advertising in mainstream media and ethnic media.

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand: Mr. Karygiannis, on the issue of advertising, I can tell you that the foreign credentials recognition referral office in 2008 undertook a \$1 million advertising campaign that was primarily focused on the ethnic media but was also carried in national dailies, print only. I can also tell you that my office currently—in the next few weeks, in fact—will be coming out with yet another advertising campaign, again focused primarily on the ethnic media.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: How much?

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand: It will be \$600,000. That will run from November through to the end of March. In order to capitalize on the Olympics, we will add an additional \$300,000 in the January to March period to add advertising in transit as well as at airports.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Is there a linkage from our websites in the different posts abroad to your foreign credentials websites?

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand: Yes, there is.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I listened to your presentations on the issue of foreign credential recognition. This is a concern for all committee members.

Another thing also concerns me. Immigrants who managed to get their credentials recognized still have difficulty entering the labour market. In some cases, these are even people who have lived here for much of their lives, or who were born here and who still find it hard to integrate because of their name, among other things.

The *Journal de Montréal*, in particular, conducted a survey that was highly revealing on this point. The same CV was sent out. One bore the name of Mohamed Mohamoud, for example, and the other that of Martin Tremblay. What a surprise, Martin Tremblay received a lot more invitations to an interview than the person with the foreign-sounding name.

That's why the Bloc Québécois has come up with a proposal to introduce an anonymous CV in businesses under federal jurisdiction. That's a principle that has previously been applied in various places in Europe and which is applied by certain major businesses. All the personal information is put on page 1 of the CV, and it is removed when the CV arrives at the business. Recruiters have access only to the information on the person's qualifications. This invites all kinds of discrimination, for both immigrants and women, youths, older workers and so on.

Has this approach been evaluated in the departments? Do you think it could help immigrants at least get over the first hurdle and get invited to an interview, so they can have a chance to show their qualifications in person?

[English]

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand: Thank you, Mr. St-Cyr, for the question.

I think you've heard in our statements this morning that we all recognize that even with all the assistance that our provincial and territorial colleagues, as well as the federal government, are putting into this issue, there still remain challenges.

The suggestion you've put forth around anonymous CVs, ensuring that no bias would be given because of a person's country of origin or their name, is an interesting model. In fact, I believe Ms. Elizabeth McIsaac, who was here in front of you last Thursday, did share with you that in fact the Royal Bank of Canada has attempted to incorporate that kind of anonymity into its hiring processes, so that the individual's curriculum vitae does become assessed to the point at which a hiring decision is going to be made. Only at that point in the process are the individual's name, country of origin, and credentials, perhaps, brought into the equation. And I think the Royal Bank of Canada has had some success in that effort.

I know that neither HRSDC—I don't think Health Canada, Kathryn—nor Citizenship and Immigration have actually looked at that in terms of a federal program. You can imagine that the federal role is fairly limited, and the example you use is an excellent one for employers to employ. In fact, as we think of how we can collectively ensure that immigrants are integrated into the Canadian labour market as quickly as possible, we need to look not only to governments, but we need to look to employers and what role they can play in ensuring that happens.

So I think the Royal Bank, in putting in place that kind of a system, has something that perhaps a community organization or a group of employers across the country could employ as part of their regular hiring practices. And it's being looked at by the organization Ms. McIsaac represents, the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, which is also affiliated with the Maytree Foundation.

• (0940)

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I'd like to clarify one point because I had the chance to ask Ms. McIsaac some questions at the last meeting, and I went to talk to her afterwards.

With regard to the Royal Bank, if I correctly understood, the idea is simply to standardize the qualifications issue. Instead of saying where candidates have earned their bachelor's degree in finance,

they'll simply indicate a standardized equivalence. In that way, there will be no lack of objectivity in saying that the University of Abidjan, for example, isn't really a good university.

However, RBC wasn't yet ready to adopt the completely anonymous CV solution, which would prevent recruiters from guessing the origins of the person by reading his or her name. We of the Bloc Québécois believe that this measure would have a second benefit, this time in terms of positive discrimination programs. When we conducted our consultations, a lot of people told us that, when they had obtained their positions as a result of a positive discrimination policy, they heard a lot of nasty comments insinuating that so and so had obtained the position simply because he was black and that another person did so because she was a woman, and so on.

However, by first sorting on the basis of qualifications and then a selection interview based on a form of positive discrimination, at least everybody in the business is aware that those who have gotten to that stage all had the qualifications to do the job.

[English]

The Chair: You have less than a minute.

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Do you have anything to add?

[English]

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand: I would like to further comment on that issue, Mr. St-Cyr. As I said, in learning what the Royal Bank of Canada has done, I think this is an opportunity for all employers across Canada to consider this kind of an approach to ensure that they truly do have an open-door policy and are looking at applicants and CVs that come across their desk in an open and transparent way. I would like to tell you that over the coming 24 months, the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, along with the Alliance of Sector Councils, will be holding 40 sessions in communities across this country to talk to employers about a product that the FCRO—

The Chair: We've got to wind up, I'm sorry.

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand: —and the alliance have developed. In those sessions with employers—you have a copy of the employer road map in front of you—we certainly could signal this as a possibility and see if there's interest from the employer community.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): I can pick up where you left off.

I read through your book. It talks about mentorship and bridging programs. However, the employer has little incentive, in terms of financial incentives, through HRSDC or your office to do the mentorship program or the bridging or internship programs.

So I have questions about three areas. I will ask them all.

One, how do you reduce the red tape for the employers so they can access the programs? And if there are funds available, what kinds of funds are available? Are you looking at developing more incentive programs so that even small businesses can access them, not just the big banks, like the Royal Bank, which have HR staff? So that's the employer side.

And then the second part is about the trainees. The trainees are often using up their savings while being trained and get desperate and go and do their other jobs, like delivering pizza, for example. Once they get trapped doing that for a year or two, they can't get back out. So having the income support, child care support, and transportation support they really need in the first year or two they are in Canada is critically important. Where is that at this point? Who is looking at that? In Quebec, for example, they have one year of French training with income support. I'm not talking about free ESL programs, which I know we have, whether voucher programs or whatever. What I am talking about is how you provide the income support so they don't have to worry about putting food on the table and using up their savings.

The third area is for Health Canada. I see that the \$15 million per year over five years to deal with the barriers runs out next year, in 2010. Is that funding going to be renewed? And is that amount useful in actually helping to increase the number of internships in hospitals, because we can give them all the information we want, we can have programs, we can have workshops, advertising, and everything we can possibly give them, including any website, and all of that, but if there is no internship and they can't get their practicum in the hospitals—even if they totally qualify—because there are just not enough, it won't help them?

So where are we at in regard to opening up more internship programs in hospitals? I ask because I don't think the \$15 million each year actually provides that kind of incentive. So what incentive is there so that hospitals or companies will actually bring in the interns and the apprentices so that these new Canadians can get their first job and get the Canadian experience? If not, then it's not going to work.

Now, the last piece—because this is a fairly complex issue—is the provincial-federal responsibility, the forum, and the framework agreement. Once that framework agreement comes into place, is the target to have a process that's similar in different provinces, that's transparent and has similar timeframes? I ask because one province could take six months, whereas another could take five years, or something like that. So maybe you can describe the framework and the kind of desired outcome you're looking at when you've finished the consultation.

• (0945)

The Chair: Okay, we have three minutes to answer those three questions.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Well, it's very complex.

The Chair: It is indeed. I don't know what to say, but we have a time problem.

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand: Very quickly, Mr. Chair, I will address the first question, and then pass the rest to my colleagues.

On the employer issue, Madam Chow, you've raised an issue that is broader than foreign credential recognition. We're getting into the additional supports that are absolutely needed to ensure successful immigrant labour market integration in an holistic way.

Over the past several years, the federal government has been working very closely with a number of organizations across the country who have put in place some very innovative programming. You may know about Career Bridge, which is one that comes to mind. At Citizenship and Immigration, my colleagues in the integration branch have been testing some bridging programming through contribution agreements. It's still early days, but you're absolutely right that these types of bridging, mentorship, and internship programs are absolutely needed. I know I can't get into it right now, but even at the federal level, both HRSDC and Citizenship and Immigration have piloted an immigrant internship pilot. It's now in its second year running. It's very successful. Many of those interns have actually found full-time employment in the federal government after their internships. I'd be happy to provide you with more details on that if we have time.

Kathryn, over to you for the health question.

• (0950)

Ms. Kathryn McDade: Sure.

Thank you, Ms. Chow.

You asked a couple of very specific questions. First, on the issue of the internationally educated health professionals initiative and the funding, you're right that the first five-year funding cycle is about to expire at the end of the current fiscal year. The full amount of the funding will be renewed, and I've started conversations with provincial and territorial governments about how they want to use that funding, looking at what we've learned over the first five years of the initiative and what they see as the gaps in some of the programming they're investing in. Then we have a period of several months to figure out a go-forward strategy. So the short answer is yes, it is being renewed.

On your question about the number of internships or residencies in hospitals, I can give you more numbers if you're interested in them. The numbers are actually quite encouraging in terms of increases in the number of seats. Between 2003-04 and 2008-09, at the undergraduate level there was an increase of 30% in the number of seats across the country. At the post-grad level or the residency level, which I think is your primary interest, there was an increase of 32%. So that has been a dramatic increase. It's not supported through the internationally educated health professionals initiative; the main support is the Canada health transfer, as you know, which supports health care delivery in the provinces and territories.

With respect to immigrant medical graduates, you asked specifically about getting access to residency seats for international medical graduates. Those numbers are also quite encouraging. In 2003 there were 75 seats in residencies for international medical graduates. In this current year of 2009, there will be 404. So in a pretty short period of time there's been quite a dramatic increase in the seats available.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McDade. I'm sorry that I keep cutting you off every time you speak.

Mr. Young.

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Thank you.

Monsieur LaRue, I'm impressed with your support for individuals prior to their arrival in Canada, and I'd like to ask you about your actual role.

You say that with your "Working in Canada Tool" you provide immigrants with relevant information on credentials. That includes pay rates, credentials, job offers, and those sorts of things. And you aggregate information from six labour market databases that exist in the federal government. I was very, very pleased to see that you can produce 40,000 reports and that this database is accessed about 780,000 times a year.

So you are not like an employment agency that finds people jobs. Is that correct?

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: That's exactly right. In fact, the "Working in Canada Tool" is not designed to place immigrants in jobs, but to enable immigrants to secure employment by equipping them with reliable and up-to-date information.

Obviously, there are challenges in regard to the information to which we have access. You have to understand that most of the databases that were developed on labour market information were done in the sixties and seventies. So these survey materials were designed for a very different economic reality, one where there was an over-supply of workers and not necessarily the shortages that we know of these days. Although we're in a recession, certainly the looming demographic challenges we're going to face are going to be problematic.

So work has to be done not only on the instruments used to diffuse information and to provide the right information, including credential information, to immigrants coming to the country, but also on the data and the labour market information being tailored.

Mr. Terence Young: I see you've had some successes.

I will mention in passing that just yesterday I was in a cab here in Ottawa and was chatting with the driver, who's from Iraq and is a mechanical engineer and is driving a cab. Now I'm not saying that driving a cab is not an important job; we're lucky that we have people who get us around safely, but ideally he would be working as a mechanical engineer. He came to Canada eight years ago.

But I notice that in health care you've had some successes. I'd like to ask you about them as well. In your internationally educated health professionals database, you've registered more than 55,200 clients, and 92 internationally educated doctors were recently selected for residency positions in Ontario with the help of that service. One of them was from my riding of Oakville. He was a

doctor from Pakistan, studying for the credentials exams, which are very difficult—and should be—and yet he was delivering pizzas at the same time, which made life a little bit difficult for him.

Perhaps you could tell us a little bit more about the work the Foreign Credential Referral Office does to connect foreign-trained professionals with the appropriate credential agencies, perhaps with an example and in plain language.

• (0955)

Mr. Jean-François LaRue: I think I'll let Corinne and Kathryn respond to this one because this is really their area of responsibility.

Ms. Corinne Prince St-Amand: Thank you, Mr. Young. I'll begin.

The Foreign Credential Referral Office, as well as the pilot project funded by HRCC that the FCRO will begin funding later next year, allows, in three countries currently—China, India, and the Philippines—for individuals who have been given approval for immigration to the country.... When they receive their letter from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, they are also given information on the ability to take in a free, personal, face-to-face session that is up to two days of information and training. They go into these offices, in China, India, and the Philippines currently, and are told about what it will be like in Canada and what they will need to do in order to work in their occupation.

A foreign-trained nurse in the Philippines, walking into an Association of Canadian Community Colleges office in Manila, would be given general information on settling in Canada and would be given specific information on the nursing profession. In fact, the "Working in Canada" tool that Jean-François spoke about earlier is one of the key tools used in those offices overseas. That nurse would be working with one of the employees of that office to figure out whether they are a licensed practical nurse, a registered nurse, or a psychiatric nurse, and would be asked where they want to settle in Canada. The office would then connect them to the appropriate regulatory body while overseas. In fact, our office has developed a very detailed workbook they can use to do their search while they're still at home in Manila, but also bring that with them.

I did bring copies with me today for the committee, but we didn't have enough in both languages. I would be happy to forward that to the chair if you'd like to see that product as well.

Mr. Terence Young: I'll pass to Mrs. Grewal, if that's alright.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Last week we had some witnesses from the Alberta International Medical Graduates Association who talked about some of the challenges that are being faced by foreign physicians. Please can you tell us what Health Canada is doing to allow more Canadians to benefit from their medical expertise?

Ms. Kathryn McDade: Thanks very much for the question.

I was going to talk a little bit about an initiative that addresses exactly the challenge you've raised. International medical graduates' entry into the medical profession, as you know, is one of the most complex licensing processes in Canada and varies across jurisdictions.

What we've done with the Medical Council of Canada and provincial-territorial governments and several of the regulatory associations is to develop a common assessment process for international medical graduates who come to Canada looking to enter into residencies. Rather than having these assessment processes...I was going to say done ten different ways across the country; it's actually more than ten different ways because it varies by medical school. Even within a jurisdiction you can have four, five, or six schools running a different assessment process with different requirements. We have only this spring agreed on a common national assessment process. It will be piloted this fall in three assessment centres. Then, based on the pilot, we would hope to roll it out nationally.

The second piece of work, which hasn't started yet but we're working on it with the Medical Council, is for internationally trained doctors who come to Canada practise-ready. These are doctors who are not early in their career, not looking to complete a residency. They've already completed their residency training. They've practised in their home country. We're looking to develop a common national assessment process for those professionals, but we haven't started that work yet.

•(1000)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our time has come to an end.

I want to thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for coming and offering your comments. You've been very helpful. Thank you very much.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Chair, I have a point of order.

I know we've said that we would take the next hour and look at recommendations. This area is fairly complex, and you're absolutely right that the government side really only had seven minutes in total. Is there a desire on the government side to want to delve into this more and therefore change the agenda somewhat, so we could do another hour with some more discussion in order that we can answer more of the questions? Does that make life totally chaotic and it's not worth going down that route?

I thought I would raise that because you raised the question that they had seven minutes. Do people feel they need more discussion with the staff here, or not? As a courtesy, I thought that question should be asked.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Olivia Chow: If not, then we can just go in camera.

The Chair: Does anyone have any other questions on the government side?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Maybe not.

The Chair: You've been very helpful, Ms. Chow, as usual. Thank you very much.

We will suspend the meeting for a few minutes to continue in camera.

Only those who are government members can stay, along with their staff.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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