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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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• (1530)

[English]

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

We have presenters from the University of Manitoba, the Alberta International Medical Graduates Association, and Mount Royal University. The presentations are to be between five and ten minutes, and then there will be rounds of questioning of five minutes. We ask you to respect that time if you can and not read overly quickly, because it's a bit difficult for the interpreters.

We'll start with the University of Manitoba and Professor Jonathan Beddoes. Go ahead.

Professor Jonathan Beddoes (Dean, Faculty of Engineering, University of Manitoba): Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to present to you this afternoon.

About ten years ago Manitoba embarked on a strategy to increase immigration to Manitoba from the then current 3,000 to 10,000 immigrants annually by 2007, with a deliberate focus on professionals. To assist this endeavour, Manitoba was the first province to introduce the provincial nominee program of Citizenship and Immigration Canada to target and fast-track immigrants who hold qualifications in high demand. The 2007 target of 10,000 new immigrants was achieved with about 70% through the provincial nominee program, and in 2010 nearly 16,000 immigrants came to Manitoba.

As part of this endeavour Manitoba Labour and Immigration alerted professions to the new immigration strategy and encouraged the development of licensing pathways for new Canadians. The engineering profession was singled out as being punitive to internationally educated applicants. Consequently, the University of Manitoba and the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba began to consider ways to encourage applications from internationally educated engineers.

Provincial engineering regulators have always provided a pathway for internationally educated engineers to become registered as professional engineers in Canada through the completion of confirmatory technical exams assigned by the provincial regulator. This pathway often requires three to five years and has a high attrition rate, due to the fact that it tends to be completed in isolation, with little or no support from or contact with other engineers. Given

the problems of this process, some internationally educated engineers chose to repeat the entire four-year engineering program at a Canadian university at considerable cost, or leave the profession altogether

Many engineering immigrants to Canada face several challenges. First, many are not familiar with the concept of a regulated profession and the legal requirement for registration to practise the profession, since in many countries the university degree in engineering confers both the right to title and practise. Second, once they understand what the licensing and registration process entails, they often find it punitive and may not have the financial wherewithal to spend three to five years getting their qualifications recognized. Third, without professional recognition, finding an engineering job becomes extremely difficult, but because Canadian engineering experience is required for licensure there's a chicken-and-egg paradox. Fourth, language and communication abilities are frequently insufficient.

The internationally educated engineers qualification program at the University of Manitoba is designed to address these challenges. The objective is to provide an alternative process of equal validity and rigour to the confirmatory exams, but with a higher completion rate in a one- to two-year timeframe. In addition to confirming academic qualifications, additional objectives are to incorporate a labour market component that provides critical assistance in finding that first engineering job, and provide language development and cultural orientation for participants.

The IEEQ program at the University of Manitoba is operated in close collaboration with the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba, the provincial regulator. To enter into the program the engineering background of participants is first assessed by the provincial regulator to identify the engineering disciplines in which confirmatory exams are required. But instead of undertaking these exams, participants take corresponding senior-level undergraduate courses at the University of Manitoba. Successful completion of the normally four to ten courses required is used to confirm their technical background.

In addition to these course requirements, the program contains four additional important elements. First, a co-op work experience term in a local engineering industry gives Canadian engineering experience and helps build a professional network. Second is orientation to the culture of Canada and the culture of professional engineering in Canada. Third is professional networking opportunities within the university and the engineering community. Fourth is development of English language and communication skills. All components of the program are critical to participants gaining professional recognition and success in the Canadian engineering workplace.

The IEEQ program was introduced on a pilot scale in 2003, with up to 12 participants annually and funding from the Province of Manitoba. The program became permanent in 2007. This permanency has allowed enrolment to climb to 35 to 40 participants each year. Concurrently, the University of Manitoba approved an associated post-baccalaureate diploma that provides graduates with an academic credential, in addition to the professional credential.

IEEQ program participants have arrived from 30 countries, the top five being the Philippines, Ukraine, India, China, and Pakistan. Participants are generally between 30 and 45 years old and usually have spouses and children. About 25% are women.

- (1535)

All participants have a previous bachelor-level engineering degree from their country of origin, with three to twenty years of engineering experience prior to arrival in Canada, but rarely do they have any Canadian engineering experience. There are currently 45 participants enrolled in the program. All 86 graduates to date have registered with the provincial regulator as engineers in training. About 90% of the graduates have developed engineering careers, most often facilitated by the co-op work experience component of the program. Through a one- to two-year investment in the program, graduates move from low-paying jobs to engineering positions, resulting in a huge impact on the well-being of the participant and their family. Furthermore, the tax advantage to Manitoba and Canada is significant, with the government investment in funding the program paid back by participants in three or four years as they move from a low to a higher level of income and taxation.

Many immigrant agencies serve and offer support to internationally educated engineers, most often in the form of language and communication development, cultural training, professional job shadowing, or volunteer opportunities. Rarely, though, do these initiatives meet the licensing requirements as does the IEEQ program at the University of Manitoba.

The success of this program at the University of Manitoba has spawned several similar programs elsewhere. Ryerson University in Toronto began a bridging program a few years ago. In 2010 the University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina, and the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Saskatchewan began collaborating to provide a similarly structured program that includes cultural orientation and co-op work experience. In Manitoba beginning in 2008, the agrology profession also established the internationally educated agrologists program, a partnership between the University of Manitoba and the Manitoba

Institute of Agrologists, which was modelled after the IEEQ program.

In 2009 there were 155 applications to the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba from internationally educated engineers. There were nearly 2,000 such applications to Professional Engineers Ontario. Nationally 36% of applicants for professional engineering licensure in 2009 were immigrant engineers. For these immigrant engineers to realize their full potential and fully contribute their skills to the well-being of the Canadian industry and society there must be an expeditious, efficient, and effective process so they can become professional engineers in Canada. However, the program at the University of Manitoba accepts about 30 new participants each year, only a fraction of the 155 applicants. Likewise, the capacity at Ryerson is only a small fraction of the nearly 2,000 applicants.

It is clear that the success of the Internationally Educated Engineers Qualification Program at the University of Manitoba provides real benefits to the individual, the engineering profession, the province of Manitoba, and Canada. It more than halves the time for internationally educated engineers to enter the Canadian engineering profession. Accordingly, governments at all levels should endeavour to make resources available to allow this and analogous programs to expand to meet the existing and growing demand.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the opportunity to present this program to the committee this afternoon.

The Chair: Thank you for that presentation.

Go ahead, Dr. Idahosa.

Dr. Peter Idahosa (President, Alberta International Medical Graduates Association): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Honourable members of the committee, it's a special privilege to be here to give this presentation, because sitting before you is a true product of today's topic. I'm a physician currently working in the Foothills Hospital in Calgary, Alberta, the Peter Lougheed Centre, as well as the Rockyview General Hospital under a special licence, a "supervised licence", despite the fact that I was trained as a family physician and have between 14 and 16 years of experience as a family physician in South Africa.

The Alberta International Medical Graduates Association that I represent is a manifestation of what exactly is going on today. We consist of doctors trained or educated in countries other than Canada. It includes individuals and organizations interested in the various challenges facing international medical graduates in Alberta. The most challenging obstacle is having our members' foreign qualifications recognized by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta. It's a similar situation across Canada.

It is well publicized that within Canada there is a huge shortage of family physicians. Approximately five million Canadians do not have access to family physicians, which is very sad. International medical graduates account for only approximately 25% of physicians in Canada. Despite the growing physician shortages, IMGs continue to be an underutilized resource by the strained Canadian medical system.

Addressing this perennial dilemma has been an uphill battle. The sole reason is due to the provincial regulatory bureaucracy constantly devising various means, in a selective and biased manner, to limit recognition of the foreign qualifications of several immigrants who have settled in Canada.

The general misperception and misinformation in the public is that these IMGs have inferior knowledge and skills compared to graduates of Canadian medical schools. However, a direct comparison study done by Andrew Moran compared 24 IMGs with 21 Canadian medical graduates in a family practice residency program in 2006 and 2008 at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver. It showed that IMGs and Canadian graduates had similar results in evaluation reports. The results of these in-hospital training evaluation reports indicated that IMGs are seen by their teachers as competent physicians. Consequently, in clinical practice there are no valid statistics at the moment to show that IMGs are not proficient in patient care.

The Canadian government's pan-Canadian framework for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications shows that within one year an individual will know whether their qualifications will be recognized, be informed of the additional requirements necessary for registration, or be directed toward related occupations that are commensurate with their skills and experience.

For IMGs, the assessment and recognition process can take many years—sometimes from 10 to 15 years. There may be cases where it is not appropriate or practical to come to a licensing decision within one year. However, exceptions should exist, such as where an IMG, as a newcomer, requires an extended practice-based or workplace-based component to their registration process to continue. The foreign qualification recognition process may seem fair, transparent, and timely, but it is inconsistent across Canada, and marred by bureaucratic bottlenecks.

My first recommendation is to have a simplified system of assessment. It should be realized that cases involving well-known qualifications should be treated in a simpler way. If the recognition authority reaches the conclusion that recognition cannot be granted in accordance with the applicant's request, alternative or partial recognition should be considered to facilitate integration of IMGs into the Canadian medical system. Recognition bodies should take an active role in specifying the steps needed to be taken by IMGs through clear, coherent, objective, and unambiguous pathways, to enable them to get their qualifications recognized.

My second recommendation is standardization. The ruling medical authorities, as well as the provincial bodies, should consider forming a partnership with the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada, national information centres, and other assessment agencies. These centres should publicize standardized information on the processes, procedures, and criteria of the

assessments used for foreign qualifications for specific professions, especially foreign-trained physicians. This information should automatically be given to all, as well as any persons making preliminary inquiries about the assessment of their foreign qualifications. This currently does not exist.

• (1540)

Third is timelines. The untimely process in the evaluation of qualifications causes a delay in IMGs entering the medical system. In addition, this slow process causes IMGs to have further distance from their medical skills. A specified timeline should be given to applicants and adhered to by all regulatory bodies. Applications should be processed as promptly as possible, and the processing time should not exceed three months.

Fourth is educational credits. Each academic year of study, as recognized by the official designated authority in the country of origin, should be granted as at least one academic year of recognition within Canada. That doesn't exist now.

Fifth is the availability of recognized funding for clinical transition programs. The current limited opportunities for foreign-trained doctors to obtain clinical experience through recognized externship, hands-on hospital experience, and continuing medical education programs for IMGs to complete any theoretical or clinical skills deficits have to be addressed. These CME programs will help IMGs become familiar with the Canadian medical system and gain educational credits, while maintaining their certification. This could be achieved through more funding, either as grants or loans directly to IMGs. Most of these IMGs are either permanent residents or citizens at the moment.

Seven, a one-stop shop for foreign qualification recognition is highly advocated. It would be helpful to deal with one regulatory body, and for applicants to understand the full menu of options from the onset. The application procedures should be expedited. There should be a single enhanced written test, and one practical clinical examination instead of the current myriad of multiple tests that are so varied and confusing. At the end of the day, they do not guarantee a licence or recognition of qualifications.

Increasing the residency training positions, or having well-defined practice assessment programs to avoid backlog, with the aid of clarity of direction from this one-stop centre would be most helpful.

Finally, a pre-qualified pool system, whereby applicants are pre-screened and pre-qualified by the regulatory authority before immigrating to Canada, would be an added advantage. We recommend advancing the timing of foreign qualification recognition in the immigration process.

With this and the many other recommendations I've handed in, I want to thank you for your time for listening. I look forward to a very fruitful deliberation today.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Idahosa.

We will move to Ms. Nordstrom. Go ahead with your presentation, please.

Dr. Pam Nordstrom (Director, School of Nursing, Mount Royal University): I believe you have copies of my presentation.

The Chair: All right. Go ahead.

Dr. Pam Nordstrom: Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to tell you what we've observed regarding assessments of internationally educated nurses.

I'm here as director of the School of Nursing at Mount Royal University in Calgary. One of my responsibilities is to work with internationally educated nurses. I do want to clarify, though, that I'm not here representing the Alberta nursing regulators.

Over the past six years we've taken some good directions based on the recommendations that were described in a document called "Navigating to Become a Nurse in Canada". However, we're clearly experiencing a nursing shortage, and our successful initiatives are being taxed by the number of people accessing our services.

Although our initiatives have been very successful in where we've come from in the last six years, we are unable to track and to speak to outcomes.

I'm going to provide you with my recommendations first and then proceed to explain why I've identified these points and how they link to the funnel that's on top of that slide.

We need to support data-sharing to improve understanding of IEN recruitment and retention patterns; we need policies to support stakeholder collaboration to improve flow through the funnel, which I'm about to explain; we need sustainable recruitment plans of international nurses; we need to build databanks of assessment tools and incorporate intelligent technologies; and we need to measure outcomes along the funnel.

Mount Royal has had considerable experience in pioneering initiatives for internationally educated nurses over the past decade. I won't take time to describe each of our studies, but I've presented the ones we've received funding for under the slide "IEN initiatives at MRU". Our learnings from these initiatives are the basis for my comments and recommendations.

What have we learned?

We've chosen to use a funnel to describe the recruitment and retention flow, at least from our perspective. The reason we want to use a funnel was that it showed that a much larger number of IENs start the process than actually end up working. However, the shape of the funnel isn't perfect, in that it doesn't show proportions, if we used the analogy "leaks", of where the leaks might be in our funnel.

The different stages in the funnel are essentially sequential. IENs, who either refer themselves or are brought through the recruitment

process through a formal agency recruitment, contact the professional regulator, and if the professional regulator is unable to determine, by paper documentation, that they have the competencies to enter practice in Canada as a nurse, they'll refer them to Mount Royal, where we do an assessment of their skills and competencies. I'll speak to that in just a moment.

A report on their assessment is referred to the regulator, who then determines if they need a bridging program. And once they've completed the bridging program they move on to write the national exam and then move into the workplace.

At each phase of that funnel, IENs may choose to continue or they may choose to step out and come back later. And certainly the push and pull factors in the context they live in are at play in terms of immigration or family needs, but we haven't identified those in the funnel specifically.

Our experience over the past five years certainly indicates that the countries of origin impact the number of people who are coming through that funnel. Currently, 75% of all internationally educated nurses who apply to our regulator, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, are referred to us for further assessment. Just over half of those who are asked to contact us actually do. And once they've contacted us, just over half of those proceed.

Approximately 200 IENs come through each year, and we've assessed over 1,200 IENs in the past five years. Of those who are required to go through the assessment process, 70% are required to do remediation. That may sound high, but remember, the IENs who are good to go, so to speak, who have met the requirements, don't come to our assessment centre.

• (1550)

We've also learned that our assessment strategies must be comprehensive to reflect the complex nature of our practice. So we have a series of tests. Certainly language and communication are a challenge, and the regulator requires that all English language requirements be done prior to their assessments. Partnerships with regulators, government, and employers are essential for this process to work.

The purpose of an IEN assessment is twofold: to assess IEN competencies that aren't evident in their paper documentation to the regulator, and to provide IENs an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity for practice as a Canadian nurse. We use a constellation of tools and it takes one to four days depending on the nature of the assessments required. We've benefited greatly from our provincial government grants that fund centres in Edmonton and Calgary. The average cost, based on our studies, is about \$1,000 per assessment. IENs need anywhere from one to four assessments, so it's an average of \$4,500 per IEN. But the candidate does not have to bear those costs. It's important to know that we report to the regulator what our assessments are and the regulator makes a decision on what bridging is needed.

We have a program called "Bridge to Canadian nursing". Once the assessments have been done and the IEN is needed or requires some bridging, she can apply to the program. We have eight courses they can take, but they take only what they need, and they bear the cost of this tuition. We've noticed that the average course-taking has gone up over the past couple of years, but that also reflects the countries of origin from which recruitment's been occurring. Of IENs who engage in this part of the process, 95% complete their studies.

We are seeing many IENs, but because of the limited information that flows through the funnel, we can't speak definitively about the yield to the workforce or outcomes. We know there are leaks and losses within that funnel. We don't know the scope and magnitude of those losses, because of the limitations on information-sharing across the system of stakeholders, so we're unable to measure our flow-through in concrete outcomes and costs. We know IENs sometimes get lost in that funnel, and we don't know the reasons for this, although we have many anecdotal pieces of information.

In summary, I go back to the recommendations I presented at the beginning. Assessment and bridging courses are critical tools for access to the RN profession. But we need the ability to track so we can use a unique identifier that started with IENs at the beginning of the funnel and followed them all the way through. This would help us to get accurate information and a strong sense of outcomes. It would help us to understand why the IENs are leaving the system.

We need coordinated, regular engagement by all stakeholders and at all levels of the government to coordinate policy development that makes sense to those who are implementing it and actually improves the situation for IENs. We need sustainable recruitment plans so that stakeholders and resources are aligned and sufficiently nimble to be able to manage the expansion and compressions of recruitment.

The processes we've developed for assessment, at least in the western provinces and in collaboration with Nova Scotia, are serving IENs and regulators well, at least better than they were when the "Navigating to Become a Nurse in Canada" document was written in 2005. But we need to invest in databases of assessment tools and use intelligent technologies that make these tools accessible to IENs and the assessors while still maintaining security.

• (1555)

The Chair: Could I get you to wrap up as quickly as you can, perhaps with a summary?

Dr. Pam Nordstrom: Certainly.

And we need to support measurements of outcomes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to make this presentation.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll open it up to rounds of questioning. Perhaps if you've not gotten everything into your spoken portion, you can deal with it then.

We'll start with Ms. Hughes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): I have a couple of questions.

This will be for anybody who wants to jump in, but this is specifically for you, Mr. Idahosa.

When I'm looking at this, it says, "In 2007, IMGs represented about 23% of the total physician workforce, a decrease of 33% from the late 1970s." There's been a decrease, and I'm wondering if you have any idea what has contributed to the decrease.

Dr. Peter Idahosa: Thank you, Ms. Hughes.

I think the reason the decrease has been like that is because right across the border, in the U.S.... When I discussed it with a number of colleagues, most of the provincial regulatory bodies impose all these barriers and difficulty. Why do you want to sit in a place? You come to Canada. This is a home. You've got this feeling, and it's a nice place.

But do you sit, for five, ten years, trying to get a licence as a physician. You were at home working as a physician, and you come to Canada and you're driving a taxi cab or you're working at Walmart. You could go across to the U.S. and write the U.S. MLE exam, and in under a year, two years, you'd become a certified physician working in a hospital—a defined pathway.

Because of the discouragement, a lot of people have moved out. Some of them have lost dreams, fallen by the wayside and decided to do something else. I know some physicians who have given up because of what's going in. It has been very frustrating.

That is the reason the trend is falling. A lot of people are losing hope.

Thank you.

• (1600)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: To add to that, when they go across to the United States are they recognized in any state?

Dr. Peter Idahosa: The U.S. has a standard process, one pathway; they call it the ECFMG. You put in your certificate, they assess it, then you write the exam. It's a three-stage exam. It's one pathway. Truly, that is ECFMG.

After you finish the exam, you now decide which state you have to go to. It's a clearly defined, very easy, straightforward simple process. It's not what we have here, that you go from one province to the other and it's a different ball game.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: You did touch base on the shortage in Canada of physicians, especially in the rural areas, and I think that's extremely important.

I come from northern Ontario, and we've got Elliot Lake and a lot of the remote areas that need physicians. I understand we're here for the foreign credential recognition program, but at the same time, within Canada itself, I'm wondering if you could elaborate on the difficulties of being able to foster our own doctors as well, especially given the fact that we have such a high population of first nations, where there are young people who want to go to school and because of funding caps and programs it is just not working for them to be able to go to school.

Dr. Peter Idahosa: The real problem is that most of the members are eager, are wanting to go to the rural areas to work. But what happens when you pick up.... It's typically unlike what happens with nursing, where you have at least a website after you put in your credentials. Just talking with respect to the college of physicians in Alberta, when you put in your credentials, and they just give you "ineligible" or "eligible". Being ineligible, the door is slammed on you. Nobody tells you, "Okay, Peter, you have to do one, two, three steps and we'll give you a licence." You have to go through a bridging program. You now have to figure it out yourself.

As a newcomer to Canada, it's extremely difficult. Sometimes what they do, they're going to have to go to the rural areas, which I did also. I called some of the rural hospitals and asked if they could sponsor me, and talk to the college. I asked them to contact the hospitals I worked at in South Africa, and let them assess me, if they can't talk to me, because it's always online and you can't ever reach anybody. They don't bother to send you if they like....

Some of them contacted me, and the first thing they said is that it's extremely difficult. There is a brick wall. The college has set to make it extremely difficult for foreign-trained doctors to come in, especially if you are here in Canada. I'm not saying we have kind of a different pathway, because they go over, which they do, to get doctors from southern countries, and recruits. But we've got a huge pool of doctors already on the ground in Canada. Most of us are Canadian citizens, but we can't access the pathway because our credentials are not recognized by the college, and they don't give you the reason why.

They tell you you're ineligible. So you now have to figure out what you need to do. If you're lucky enough, you become a clinical associate or a clinical assistant in a hospital, and you work as a physician, but you are not recognized as a doctor.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to Ms. Leitch.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you very much, all of you, for your presentations.

I want to say just one thing from a standpoint of correcting the record. I am a member of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons. Just so that we are clear, in this country there are provincially based colleges, which provide the regulatory regime for people to become physicians, to practise, and to receive a licence.

That is different from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, in which the examinations take place. There are regulatory bodies by province, just like there are in the United States. You have to take a licence state by state. You do write a national exam, the USMLE, just like we do here in Canada. The process is the same state by state as it is here province by province. Just so we're clear on the process there.

I do have a question, though, for all three members of the panel.

You may be able to answer specifics now, or you may want to submit something to us. Obviously there are concerns about shortages in these areas, and we'd like to ask you first what you believe those shortages are, and what the specific numbers of those shortages are. Also, explain how and through what foreign credentialing programs we could address these shortages.

Second, I would also like to ask you what you think those specific financial challenges are for your profession. I would ask you to be specific as to what that might be. We've heard different reasons for financial challenges from different organizations.

Third, what are your specific recommendations for addressing the shortages, and addressing the financial needs based on foreign credentialing?

As I said, I would like all three of you to answer, and if you are not able to give us a fulsome answer based on the time, I'm respectful of that. Maybe you could submit something to us.

•(1605)

Prof. Jonathan Beddoes: Maybe I'll start.

You've asked a number of very good questions, none of which have simple answers, unfortunately.

Let me try to touch on each of them individually, and remember I'm speaking from the Manitoba perspective, and from the perspective of the engineering profession.

It's relatively clear—at least to me—that there is a shortage of engineering skill in Manitoba. Senior business people and owners of companies have told me directly that they would expand in Winnipeg if they could get engineers. One of the unique things about Winnipeg, of course, is that it's not really on anyone's top ten list of places to live, despite the fact that it's a great place to live. So it's very difficult to recruit people from elsewhere in the country to come to Winnipeg.

There is a shortage of engineers in Manitoba, and that's why the province adopted the provincial nominee program, and targeted foreign-trained engineers to come to Manitoba to help with this shortage.

As for the specific financial challenges some people face when they're recent immigrants, oftentimes their financial wherewithal is very limited. Prior to going to Manitoba, I had extensive experience here in Ottawa at Carleton University, and I was continuously appalled at the number of foreign-trained engineers with very good credentials who, without access to an internationally educated engineers qualification program as we have in Manitoba, would end up taking the entire four-year undergraduate program over again. During that time, they're full-time students, they're not working, they've got a spouse, and they've got children. It's incredibly difficult.

When I speak to these students and ask them why they are doing that, the typical response I get is that they don't want to give up on engineering; either they do this or they're a taxi driver. They don't want to be taxi drivers. But to put them through four years of engineering education where an awful lot of what they're learning is exactly the same as what they have already learned elsewhere overseas—and it is just too difficult for us to recognize it—is incredibly frustrating to me, and I'm sure it's incredibly frustrating to the individuals as well.

It's because of that previous experience here in Ontario that I am convinced that programs like the internationally educated engineers qualification program that we have at the University of Manitoba, which we operate in close collaboration with the provincial regulator for engineering, is such a good idea. It allows the students to get through the program. We aim for one year to 18 months, depending on the individual's background, and that includes a six-month co-op placement with a local employer in an engineering position, for which they are paid by that employer. Frequently they're hired on for a full-time basis by that same person. That reduces the financial challenge quite considerably.

The Chair: Thank you. I guess your five minutes are up.

The others haven't had an opportunity to indicate their thoughts, but it was a series of questions, so if you don't get an opportunity later in the questioning to respond to those questions, you might submit those responses to the committee, if you wish.

We'll now proceed to the next round, starting with Mr. Patry.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Idahosa, which language did you study medicine in?

[English]

Dr. Peter Idahosa: I started my studies in English. My basic primary as well as post-primary school and university was in English.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry: Sometimes, people coming from foreign countries to live here run into difficulties and get discouraged. Should people have to take exams?

A little while ago, you compared the best foreign doctors in 2007 and 2008. The results were the same outside Canada. You also said that your analysis showed the training to be similar.

People who come to Canada like you could take exams in order to become a resident in a hospital. They could have a mentor, a guide, a doctor assigned to them. That could replace the three, four or five years they have to do that push some of them out of the profession. Could you see that happening in Canada?

• (1610)

[English]

Dr. Peter Idahosa: There is no doubt that it's very important that when you're coming into a new environment, especially in Canada, you understand how the system works. But the only issue is that those platforms are not open unless you are trained in the work. If I'm coming in, how do I get into a system in a hospital? It's extremely difficult. You need a licence from the regulatory body. And you are specifically told, it is for "observership". Observership is not hands-on training. You're just going there to watch and see what's going on. It doesn't make you a good doctor. The regulatory bodies are very reluctant to give you a licence to actually participate, so it becomes very difficult.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry: Personally, I have a problem with opening our doors to a quota and not to everyone. I have a hard time living with that. We let people come from overseas so that they can establish themselves here. I agree that selection should be done before people are let in. Otherwise, they have a hard time working in their field. You mentioned engineering and said how frustrating it is. I understand that. I have a hard time accepting it. I don't know why we would go looking for people outside the country if we are going to treat them like that. That is one of my comments.

Mr. Jonathan—I am not even going to try to pronounce your last name for fear of massacring it—you mentioned language problems just now. You also talked about a co-op program the goal of which is to provide work for people who come here. Can you explain to me how that program works?

[English]

Prof. Jonathan Beddoes: I agree with your comment that we let people in based on the training they've had elsewhere, and then when they get here we don't allow them to undertake the occupation for which they've been trained. That is very frustrating. I think one recommendation, which was alluded to earlier, is that Canadian immigration authorities overseas be well aware of the requirements to become registered as a professional in whatever occupation you are in once you get to Canada.

How does our language and training component work? As I said, we have a mandatory co-op program, which is part of the IEEQ program at the university. We work in very close collaboration with local industry to place each student with a local industry that's associated with the training they've had. That's a paid assignment for that person. So financially it's very good for them, but it's also primarily important from the "getting experience" point of view.

With regard to the language and cultural part, almost all the immigrant students who come to us in this program have some English-language abilities, some more than others, but their language abilities specifically with respect to engineering technology may be weaker. So we have worked with each individual student and the various applied-language experts at the university to try to raise their language skills up to the level required for entry into the profession.

We also have a mandatory course as part of the program, which is called "Practicing Professional Engineering in Canada", so that they understand the regulatory framework within which engineering works in Canada, which is oftentimes very different from what they might be used to in their country of origin.

So we focus not only on the technical skills, which are clearly important, but on all of the other skills you need to be successful in the workforce.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Patry, your time is gone.

We'll move now to Mr. Shory.

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

And thank you, witnesses, for coming this afternoon. I have to admire your passion and I can also feel your frustration in this process.

I won't waste too much time speaking of other things and I will come to the question directly.

Mr. Idahosa, I'll start with you because you also have lived through this problem. I want you to quickly go through what you had to go through and how long it took. And when we talk about the medical profession specifically... I'm from Calgary, and in Alberta there is a shortage of almost 2,500 doctors, whereas we have almost 1,100 foreign-qualified doctors. And when we talk about foreign qualifications, we are not only talking about the individuals who came from overseas. Canadians also go out of the country to get their education.

So coming back to your profession—and talking about taxi drivers—there are some people who say that the best place to have a

heart attack might be in the back seat of a taxi because the chances are a doctor is driving the taxi. It sounds funny, but it is true that the professionals have to go through all this.

You are also very actively involved in the organization, I know that. I also want you to tell us if any improvement has been made from the earlier days when we talked about coordination between different provincial bodies. Does the pan-Canadian framework help, and what more can be done? And considering the shortage of doctors, is there any appetite or is there any capacity to speed it up? What exactly should we be doing when we talk about shortening the processing time? And would this pre-certification, which you also touched on, help the professionals when they come to Canada?

• (1615)

Dr. Peter Idahosa: Thank you, Mr. Devinder Shory.

Just briefly, my life is a two-page book. It's very easy, it's not a long one. I graduated in 1996 in Nigeria. I wrote exams and I passed the exams and moved to South Africa because I wanted to be a very good doctor.

During that process I applied to immigrate to Canada. And luckily in 2007 my immigration came through, and I moved here. But prior to that I already took the Canadian evaluation exams, the QE1 and then the QE2.

But right off the bat most people told me that Canada is a dead end for a physician; it's extremely difficult to get licensed. But it's a country I've always loved, I've looked for, and it's something I've dreamed about and I want to settle. I look at obstacles as stepping stones. You don't need to shut the door, no matter what people say. So I said I'd put in my head and I would come in. But I wasn't told that by immigration; it was a personal decision and I am ready to face the consequences, and that's what is happening.

So back to the other question with regard to the pan-Canadian framework, we were extremely happy when we saw that the Canadian government decided to address it. It's very welcome.

Our members are a bit disillusioned, because I think it's the Canadian government, the political leaders, who have to make the decisions. We're a little disillusioned with the college, because we've lost faith in them. I come in... Give me a licence and let me address the physician shortage. I want to contribute. This is my home. My kids will be born here. Where am I going to go? I can't go to the U.S. This is Canada. I love being in this country, but you're shutting the doors on us. You don't want to give us a pathway. Show us a pathway so we can go through. So the pan-Canadian framework is good.

Let it be an all-encompassing body that will bring together the college as well as the people whose lives are affected—that is us, the IMGs—and discuss a pathway. You cannot sit in the college in Edmonton and make a decision about people's lives without sitting with them, and that's what's happening.

We want the government to play an active role, because they are more neutral. And I believe, for this gathering today, they are not happy about what's going on. But the college has not deemed it fit to call the association and ask if they could sit and let's pool on that. We are close to 2,500 unlicensed physicians in Alberta, and that is a disaster. And 80% of us are family physicians.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Idahosa.

We will now move to Mr. Cuzner, for five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thanks very much, and I thank the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Nordstrom, I really appreciate the funnel optic in the diagram you use.

Maybe I'll get comments just a little bit later from the other two witnesses. If you guys have a similar experience in terms of when people are leaving the process, I'll get you to comment on that.

Ms. Nordstrom, you said that it would be nice to get some support so that you could further track those who exit the program. That's a fairly severe drop. More than half contact the MRU for information, and then half of them decide to be assessed. That's pretty significant. I think you're recognizing that you just don't have the capacity to monitor that. Are you trying to monitor it now? It's probably anecdotal information you're getting now. How are you doing it now, and what kinds of responses are you getting?

Dr. Pam Nordstrom: Thank you for the question. I'll approach that in two different ways.

The challenge right now is that we don't have a unique identifier to know if you've been recruited by an employer and if you've contacted the regulator. Those pieces of information aren't necessarily shared. The regulator would send them to us, but that piece isn't shared. We know who comes to see us, but we don't know how many don't come to see us. We have a hunch from the regulator. They're keeping some track. An employer doesn't necessarily hire them and tag them, so to speak, as internationally educated, because as employees, they're all employees of their institutions. It's not that there isn't interest. It is that we haven't developed mechanisms or been willing to share because of privacy of information about different people. Each of us interprets our obligations for protecting privacy, and it's just not being shared.

One of our current research activities is some retrospective work on what we have. We are contacting each of those IENs who have been to us for assessment or for the bridging program. We are asking them to speak to what their integration into the workplace has been like. Have they pursued it? Our numbers are based on what we know. I think it would be much richer data if we could pool together the data from the recruiters, the regulators, us, and employers so that we could understand it a little bit better.

What do I know about the applicants who might not come to us? Part of it is that they are recruited internationally. To come to Canada they need immigration papers, and if they're unable to produce those, we lose them early on. They need to understand that nursing work in Canada is a little bit different from nursing work in other countries,

so we provide the website to give them an idea of RN practice in Canada and perhaps other options they might pursue as well.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: To the gentlemen, are your experiences the same, in that you see the number of applicants sort of dwindle as they go through the process? Do you guys track that?

Prof. Jonathan Beddoes: We don't track how many engineers are coming in and how many are successfully completing the process. The associations of professional engineers in each of the provinces will be tracking that, I am sure. I think it is very worthwhile to ask where we are losing the people along the way.

I think the other thing to ask is almost a corollary of that. When is it that people join the process? We have an awful lot of students in our program who have been in Canada for four or five years, but it's only after four or five years of working at some relatively menial jobs that they've actually built up the financial wherewithal to stop working for eight months to come back to university, even for eight months, on a full-time basis. For most people, not getting a paycheque for eight months is a pretty daunting sort of thing to try to plan for. So it takes a while for many of them to actually show up and undertake the program.

• (1625)

Dr. Peter Idahosa: Our situation is a little bit different, because the numbers that are not being licensed are increasing. What we have come to realize is that the number of foreign-trained doctors going through the residency program, the training program, has decreased. At the end of the day, in 2009 in Alberta we had 68 positions and as of last year it dropped to 40. An average of 2,500 people are competing for 40 positions. It cannot be calculated in a mathematical kind of way. The equation doesn't add up. It is actually becoming a very bad situation at the moment because of the numbers that are not being licensed.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

We've got a few moments left for the final round.

Mr. Daniel, go ahead.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you.

To each of the professions here, I'm going to ask what may seem like a dumb question, but please help me understand this. Is there any country that somebody can come to Canada from, say England or Australia, where there are no language barriers and the process and the culture, and go straight into their profession?

Prof. Jonathan Beddoes: Yes. In engineering there is. Canada is a signatory to what is referred to as the Washington Accord, along with a number of other countries, the United States, the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and so on. Engineers who are trained in accredited universities in those countries can come to Canada and practise professional engineering in Canada by applying to the provincial association and being accepted. Likewise, Canadians can go to all of those countries and practise professional engineering with very minor obstacles involved.

The Washington Accord is a very strictly regulated aspect of the profession. It's monitored very closely to make sure that engineers who are in that system meet a minimum standard. It works very well.

Unfortunately, if you look at the countries from which we draw most of our immigrants, most of them are not Washington Accord countries.

Dr. Peter Idahosa: Adding further to what Jonathan has said, it is the same thing in medicine. There are particular countries you can come from, but it's not very easy.

Mr. Joe Daniel: From the U.K. or—

Dr. Peter Idahosa: From the U.K.... My problem was, I graduated from Nigeria and I trained in South Africa, so it knocked me off. If you're from the U.K. and you graduated from medical schools from South Africa or Australia, it's easier. You won't have as many problems to get your certificate recognized.

Mr. Joe Daniel: So it's easier, but you still have to go through a process—

Dr. Peter Idahosa: You still have to, yes.

Mr. Joe Daniel: —to get re-registered here, etc.?

Dr. Peter Idahosa: Yes.

Dr. Pam Nordstrom: In nursing, all applicants have to write the registered national exam. Some will go through more quickly. Australia, the U.K., the United States might not have to come for assessment of competency, but they all have to write the national exam.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Okay. So following up with that, in your opinion how far can the credentialing process proceed before individuals arrive in Canada?

Prof. Jonathan Beddoes: That's a very good question. I'm not sure that it could actually proceed very far. I think that at least what we owe potential immigrants to Canada is a clear explanation of what they will face when they get here to become a professional in their occupation.

I have frequently been really disheartened when I speak to recent immigrant engineers who really want to practise and their conclusion is "I'm better off to go back to where I came from, because I just can't build a career in Canada without doing the whole engineering program again, which costs a lot of money". They can't do it. To see first-rate immigrants like that give up on Canada and go back home, I just think, oh man, we're really doing something wrong here.

That's why I think this qualification program that we've introduced in Manitoba and that has now been cloned at several other universities really needs to expand, because these are the people

we're really going after. Once they're here, we've invested that much in them. Let's get them to build a strong career here in Canada.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Just from the engineering point of view, we're talking about registered engineers?

Prof. Jonathan Beddoes: Registered professional engineers, yes.

The Chair: Our time is almost up. A short response from Ms. Nordstrom.

Dr. Pam Nordstrom: We had an opportunity to take two trips offshore to try to create our assessment centres in a variety of countries, the U.K., Qatar, U.A.E., and India, and the challenge was you needed to be assessed against Canadian standards and in a Canadian context. It's very hard to create that offshore and to do your assessments offshore.

We gave it a couple of rounds. We were always questioning whether or not we were creating the same kind of atmosphere in which to do our assessments.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up. We appreciate your presentation.

We will suspend to allow our next panel to come to the table.

• (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: We will recommence our hearing. We have with us Joan Atlin from the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, and Mr. Tam from SUCCESS.

Mr. Tam, you testified earlier today, I understand, before the immigration committee, so this is the second round for you.

We will start with your presentations and then we will have five-minute rounds of questions.

Ms. Atlin, are you going to start first? Go ahead.

Ms. Joan Atlin (Director of Programs, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council): I'm sorry, we had a bit of a late invitation, so I wasn't able to provide the presentation in advance for translation. We will send it on.

The Chair: If you present it to the clerk, we'll get it translated and circulated to the members of the committee.

Ms. Joan Atlin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members. My name is Joan Atlin and I'm the director of programs for the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, or TRIEC.

TRIEC is a multi-stakeholder council that brings together employers, community organizations, colleges, universities, occupational regulatory bodies, and all three orders of government to seek practical solutions to connect skilled immigrants with appropriate employment.

At TRIEC our understanding of foreign credential recognition is cast broadly. In an effort to maximize our reach and impact, we have focused on those highly skilled immigrants who are seeking employment in non-regulated professions, which actually represents the majority of immigrants to Canada. They are people like sales managers, financial analysts, software developers, project managers, HR professionals, etc. Whether and how their credentials, experience, and qualifications are recognized is up to the employer. So our work with regard to foreign credential recognition has been focused largely on reaching out to employers to build their capacity to recognize immigrants' skills, experience, and qualifications.

For many employers, concerns about hiring skilled immigrants include not understanding their experience, not being familiar with their credentials or previous employers, and concerns about communication skills. Often the requirement for Canadian experience, which we hear so much about, is in fact a kind of euphemism for not knowing how to interpret the immigrant's qualifications.

This lack of familiarity, and the perceived risk that goes along with it, leads to widespread non-recognition of qualifications by employers in non-regulated professions. This has been our focus since TRIEC was established in 2003. We think it's important to recognize that some programs, initiatives, and practices have met with success and that future directions should build on this success. So the remainder of my comments will focus on the opportunities we think the federal government should consider in order to facilitate immigrant attachment to the workforce and opportunities delivered by third-party organizations.

The first is internships, or work-experience programs. They have been successful employment interventions because they directly connect employers and skilled immigrants. Internships can provide immigrants with their first job in Canada as well as professional references, both of which reassure risk-averse employers. On average, about 80% of participants find full-time work in their field upon completion of a work-experience program—a highly successful outcome, both for the individual and for the economy.

However, the demand for internships from immigrants far exceeds the number of participating employers and positions. There are also employers and communities across the country that would welcome an internship program but lack the capacity to establish one. There is a need for a national internship program that could leverage the participation of employers across the country.

The federal government has the opportunity to set an example as an employer by taking the lead in offering targeted internships for skilled immigrants. In 2010, the federal internship for newcomers program was established. The program was initially piloted by CIC and HRSDC and has now expanded to a number of other departments. According to the government's 2010 annual report on foreign credential recognition, there were 65 internships offered through the program in 2010.

There's considerable scope to expand this program across the federal government. The Ontario Public Service has a similar internship program that has placed nearly 600 newcomers in internships between 2006 and 2011 in Ontario alone.

The second intervention I want to talk about is mentoring programs. They have been successful because they connect skilled immigrants with a mentor who is an established colleague in their occupation. The mentor shares professional networks and helps navigate the job search. The mentee, a skilled immigrant job-seeker, gains a greater understanding of the occupational context and expectations in Canada.

In 2004, TRIEC launched our mentoring partnership. To date, more than 6,000 immigrants in the greater Toronto area have been matched through this program and 70% of them are employed in their field or a related one within six months after the end of their mentoring relationship. While many smaller-scale mentoring programs are currently offered across the country, they often have difficulty recruiting mentors and they lack the marketing resources they need to build a profile for their programs.

CIC is currently supporting ALLIES, which is a national project of the Maytree and McConnell foundations, to share this mentoring model nationally. ALLIES is building on the experience of TRIEC to support other immigrant employment councils across the country. Together, we have provided advice and supported the start-up of similar mentoring initiatives in Halifax, Montreal, Calgary, and Edmonton. There's a strong role for the federal government to play as an employer-partner in these local mentoring initiatives.

● (1640)

TRIEC is currently working with the Foreign Credentials Referral Office, the FCRO, to launch a mentoring pilot in the Ontario region of CIC. Pilots will also be launched with our sister employment councils in Calgary and Ottawa. This pilot should pave the way to national involvement of the federal public service in mentoring programs for skilled immigrants. However, beyond the role of supporting the dissemination of the model and participating as an employer, there is a need for a funded national mentoring program to ensure the ongoing delivery of this successful intervention. Creating a national mentoring program would allow for enhanced program quality and coordination, increased employer participation, and reliable and sustained funding for these programs.

Third, I will talk about bridging programs, which you heard quite a bit about with the previous panels. They were initially piloted in regulated professions. They bring together key stakeholders—employers, occupational regulatory bodies, and educational institutions—to assess immigrant skills and competencies, deliver training to fill gaps, and provide mentoring and workplace or required clinical experience. The objective of these programs is to fill gaps that may exist in knowledge or skills while avoiding duplication in the immigrants' education and training so that they can be bridged quickly to licensure and/or employment in their fields. To date, there are many successful examples of bridging programs in various sectors, both regulated and non-regulated sectors. Most bridging programs have been funded by provincial ministries and while the outcomes of the bridging programs have been very promising, they are only accessible to a limited number of participants and are difficult to sustain. The FCRO is currently developing a website called the International Qualifications Network as a vehicle to disseminate best practices on bridging programs and other initiatives. Beyond this promising initiative, there may be an opportunity for the federal government to invest in a nationally-coordinated bridge-training strategy as well as to create a loan program for participants to cover their living costs. You heard about that from the previous panel as well.

The fourth element I want to talk about is employer engagement, which is key to immigrant employment success. While there has been a significant investment in the development of labour market programs for immigrants, there has not yet been a parallel investment in programs targeted directly at employers. Ultimately, it's employers who either recognize or reject the credentials of skilled immigrants. We and our immigrant employment council partners across the country have seen a strong and growing demand from employers for support in recruiting, assessing, integrating, and promoting skilled immigrants, and we need a national strategy to respond to this demand. Of the three key elements of employer engagement needing support, the first is awareness.

There is still a need to increase employer awareness of the value of immigrant skills, and of how including this talent pool can make Canada more productive and competitive in the global marketplace. Despite an uncertain economic outlook, the evidence is unequivocal that immigrant skills will play a key role in the Canadian labour force in the upcoming years. With support from CIC and HRSDC's FCR program, TRIEC has been successful in running awareness campaigns to engage employers, and an employer awards program to recognize innovative and leading employer practices.

Second, employers need tools and resources to support organizational change. There's a wide array of assessment tools for language, for credentials, for competencies, and HR practices that employers need to learn about and be able to implement. Hireimmigrants.ca, a website originally developed by TRIEC and now managed by the national ALLIES project, is a key national resource for employers. It houses a wealth of resources for employers, including best practices and case studies from around the country. There is an opportunity for the federal government to fully endorse hireimmigrants.ca as the go-to place for employers and to support extensive marketing for this resource.

• (1645)

The Chair: Are you about to conclude? You're reaching the end of your time.

Ms. Joan Atlin: Yes. I have one more.

The last element is that employers need to be able to connect efficiently with a range of services and programs that prepare skilled immigrant candidates for the Canadian labour market. Employers are often overwhelmed by the numerous service providers approaching them and the vast array of program information available. Often the effect is employer disengagement rather than engagement. The back end of employment services systems needs to be better coordinated so that the front-end experience for employers is as seamless as possible. TRIEC is currently working with the employment services arm of the government of the city of Toronto to pilot new strategies to coordinate outreach to employers by TRIEC, the city, and various employment service networks. While these gateways for employers must be built locally, there's an opportunity for the federal government to encourage and support their development across the country so that services available to employers to access candidates are better coordinated.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that presentation.

We'll now turn to Mr. Tam.

Mr. Thomas Tam (Chief Executive Officer, SUCCESS): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members of the standing committee, my name is Thomas Tam. I'm the CEO of SUCCESS, which is a multicultural organization serving new Canadians in British Columbia. We serve over 180,000 people a year through our offices in greater Vancouver, northern B.C., and three overseas offices in China, Korea, and Taiwan.

Today my focus will be on the foreign credentials recognition process. As an immigrant-serving agency, we have been working with internationally educated skilled workers, or IEPs, since 2001. Of course, we have a lot of partners. We partner with employers, sector councils, regulatory bodies, and government departments. Details of our involvement and services are attached for your reference.

Today I will focus on our recommendations to overcome the systematic challenges faced by internationally trained professionals. They face four major challenges, but recently we identified an additional fifth one.

The first four challenges are lack of Canadian work experience, lack of Canadian cultural exposure, lack of language proficiency, and lack of a Canadian network. The recent fifth challenge we have identified is the financial barriers. I think in the previous session, there was also some discussion on the financial barriers facing foreign-trained professionals.

In terms of recommendations, we recommend a six-point strategy. There are six areas that we would like the committee, as well as the federal government, to consider. We suggest a specialized foreign credential recognition case management service. At this time, most new immigrants can only get employment services at a provincial level in a very piecemeal manner. It's short term and when the funding contract is finished, there's no continuity of service for the internationally educated professionals. As you know, the whole process is very lengthy, costly, and sometimes insulting, so a lot of immigrants end up just getting survival-type jobs. They may not be able to afford the long battle without a very supportive case management system.

Second, we recommend a new and separate language and communication proficiency to replace cultural competency training. Language and workplace culture are always very big hurdles for foreign-trained professionals entering the different professions. This is what we call a soft skill. We have a lot of experience working with sector councils and employers, and this proved to be a very effective way to speed up the whole foreign credentials recognition process.

Third, we recommend an effective bridging mechanism between the internationally educated professionals and the regulatory bodies. This bridging program would be different from what we just discussed; it's not a technical bridging program. We find that many internationally trained professionals group together, but they don't have very good communication with the regulatory bodies. We tried a couple of projects. One was working with foreign-trained nurses in B.C., in partnership with the nurses' union of the province, to develop some support groups among the nurses. Then the nurses grouped together to support each other, and we also organized activities between the support groups, the nurses' union, and some regulatory bodies. People can sustain the struggle with the support of their peers on the same journey toward the foreign credentials recognition process. We would like to see more support for these support groups so that they can sustain the whole journey.

• (1650)

Fourth, we recommend extensive work placement services for IEPs. I think Joan also mentioned that. Mentoring and placement opportunities are very important. In B.C. we've been working closely with both the local organizations as well as some sector councils. We work with ICTC, the Information Communication and Technology Council, to run some pilot projects in Vancouver to help to recruit foreign-trained professionals to get into some placement and mentoring services.

The fifth one is the service support to employers. In the last ten years we never overlooked the importance of employers accepting and understanding the challenges and the benefits of hiring foreign-trained professionals. So the support to employers is very important. We have a website providing the tools for the HR departments of the business owners in terms of hiring and retaining immigrant workers.

We also provide training for employers in understanding the challenges of internationally trained professionals.

Finally, we would like this document to support regionalization initiatives. What I mean here is to connect the immigrants to areas of more opportunities, especially in some smaller communities that are industry-based, like our project now at Fort St. John, which is the oil- and gas-based small town in northern B.C. We need more resources and support to encourage internationally trained professionals to go there and to help resolve the skill and labour shortage over there. We've been working very well with the community, with the energy companies, and also with people in Vancouver encouraging immigrants to relocate to the smaller communities.

Honourable members of the standing committee, I respectfully submit my report for your deliberation.

Thank you.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Tam. I appreciate that presentation.

Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): I want to thank Ms. Atlin and Mr. Tam for coming and for providing so succinctly some concrete recommendations for the committee's consideration.

I think most of us here can tell stories in our own ridings about people who have come to Canada specifically because of their professional designation or work experience in their country of origin, and yet can't work in their field.

You may not have these numbers, but do you have any sense among clients you deal with how many actually find work in their field, and within what timeframe?

Mr. Thomas Tam: There are two kinds of experiences. One is a generic service, say for someone with a support group with all those workshops and seminars. It's difficult to track the results.

On the other hand, we also have very specific programs of a pilot nature. For example, three years ago we worked with Spectra Energy, a very big energy company in Fort St. John, and we recruited twelve Chinese engineers, all of whom were new immigrants in Vancouver. We worked with the company to develop a six-month training program, half in Vancouver and half in Fort St. John, including the placement. After that program, 100% of this group of twelve people were hired by the company. Of course, they may not be licensed engineers, but they were all hired entering into the junior engineering profession.

So for some specific programs of a very confined scope, we can track the success of the result. For another example I just mentioned, the work with ICTC, we also got close to a 100% success rate.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Ms. Atlin, this seems to be coming up fairly consistently. Witnesses are often saying that they can't give us accurate numbers simply because there's no way of tracking people, but it sounds like anecdotally people feel there's a significant number of people not working in their profession.

Ms. Atlin, do you have any sense of numbers?

Ms. Joan Atlin: Actually, I did bring some numbers with me. I have a StatsCan report that 80% of working-age skilled immigrants found work during their first year in Canada; however, only 42% found work in their intended occupation.

Ms. Jean Crowder: So less than half.

Ms. Joan Atlin: It's less than half.

Ms. Jean Crowder: It's a significant loss when we're talking about productivity in Canada. We're talking about all those kinds of things. With the previous presenters, we heard—

Mr. Thomas Tam: It's what we call survival jobs.

Ms. Joan Atlin: There are certainly stats. There was a study by RBC a couple of years ago. I can't remember the number off the top of my head, but it's in the billions, the money lost to the Canadian economy through the under-recognition of—

Ms. Jean Crowder: Sorry, who did that study?

Ms. Joan Atlin: RBC.

Ms. Jean Crowder: RBC.

The matter of Canadian work experience is coming up consistently. A number of witnesses have raised this, and you certainly raised it. You've talked about the internship and the mentoring role that the federal government could play. Are there other things the federal government could do to create Canadian work experience in people's designated fields?

Mr. Thomas Tam: In B.C. through the payment transfer, most of the employment funding comes from federal transfers to the province. But when the province develops its own employment services, it's according to their own policy and direction. For the foreign credential recognition, sometimes this does not match. So HRSDC may have to develop a program geared to the success of the foreign credential recognition process, including mentoring or internship and placement programs.

• (1700)

Ms. Joan Atlin: I would echo the same. In our experience, it's internships and mentoring, the programs that get people into the

workplace. It gets people past that initial risk aversion of employers and the initial concerns of employers that people aren't going to be able to meet their needs. It gets them into the workplace, either in a paid or unpaid internship capacity or through a mentoring relationship that often gets people over the hurdle.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move to the second round. Mr. Butt.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to both of you for being here.

During the Thanksgiving week, members had time in their constituencies. I had a town hall meeting in my riding in Mississauga on foreign credentials. I had many people come in and talk about their experiences. One of the interesting things that came up, and it was probably the funniest part of the evening, was a line of mine. I said that we have the e-harmonies of the world, that it's easier to get a couple together over a website than it is to get an employer and employee matched through a website system. A foreign-credentialed individual who may need some upgrades to qualify for work in Canada and an employer who is looking for people with at least 75% or 80% of the necessary skills can have a lot of trouble hooking up.

Could you share a little more about that? It sounds like both of your organizations have done a little of that kind of thing, whether you want to call it e-harmony for employment or whatever. It sounds like you've had some success doing that. From the federal government's perspective, is there any role we can play through CIC or HRSDC to support foreign credential recognition beyond what we're already doing? It sounds like you're having a lot of success on the ground in getting this done. If we can make it more national in scope, it could help a lot more people across the country. Would you share some of your experiences on that?

Mr. Thomas Tam: First of all, I would like to express my appreciation for the pan-Canadian FCR framework. This was a very good start a couple of years ago, and we see a lot of progress in terms of the increased motivation from the sector councils, with more efforts being paid by the regulatory bodies. We are aware of those changes from other stakeholders.

In terms of HRSDC's role, we are now working with HRSDC Ottawa on a proposed loan program for a foreign credential recognition process. I think this is a unique role. The federal government can work with organizations to enhance our capacity to provide financial support to those people who want to go through all those processes, which are sometimes very costly. This is one thing.

The other thing is to develop some more long-term and very targeted programs. Again, in each of the provinces sometimes the programs are very piecemeal and sometimes it's not 100% targeting foreign credential recognition. So I would like to see HRSDC develop more long-term and systematic services or supports to us in terms of mentorship, case management, and also internship.

That's what I lay out here today.

Mr. Brad Butt: Ms. Atlin.

Ms. Joan Atlin: To the point you made, I think the employer engagement points I spoke to—the idea that we need to be investing in the same way that we invest in a suite of services for immigrants, to help them settle and help them get employed, the kinds of services that Thomas's organization delivers.... We need to support a suite of services for employers that goes from awareness with employers—I don't know if any of you remember, those of you from Ontario, but there was an advertisement campaign that TRIEC ran a couple of years ago, where you would see a skilled immigrant going into a workplace and what the reaction was—through to employer engagement programs. Most employment services have employment counsellors, and they have job developers who are going out knocking on the doors of employers. But part of what we're trying to do is create a much more coherent system, because employers get their doors knocked on by hundreds of people, and it sometimes has the opposite impact that we want. And I think there is a role for the federal government to look at an employer engagement strategy.

We've had some very successful experiences with job matching, but not through websites. People get lost on Monster.ca and all of the other hundreds of websites that are out there. But in the IT field, for instance, we did a project last year where we worked with a number of IT employers in the GTA, and AMEX was one of them. You would think that AMEX, with the capacity that they have, could find the people they need, but they can't. They have IT shortages. We were able to work with their front-line hiring managers to create screening and recruitment events very specific to their needs. We were working with all of the employment services in Toronto to bring the right candidates to them and make those matches directly.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you for that e-matching suggestion there, Mr. Butt.

We will go to Ms. Boutin-Sweet.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): I am sorry I am late, Mr. Chair. I am afraid that we were stuck in an elevator in the Promenade building for half an hour.

I would also like to share my question time with my colleague.

Although I was late, I heard you talk a little about mentoring, and it intrigued me. Could you tell me a bit more about it? Previously, I

was part of a mentoring program, but it is certainly not the same kind of mentoring.

Who is responsible for the mentoring? Who is eligible for it? Are those eligible people paid, and, if so, for how long? What are the specific benefits of the mentoring for those who take part?

[*English*]

Ms. Joan Atlin: The mentoring program that TRIEC runs is a structured program for skilled immigrants who haven't yet had significant work experience in their field in Canada. The mentees are recruited by employment services organizations funded by Ontario's employment services program.

The unique thing about the mentoring partnership is that there were a number of small mentoring programs around Toronto that a number of different organizations were running. We brought all of those programs together so that we could go to large employers and recruit qualified mentors directly in the workplace from among their workforces.

For instance, TD, in financial services, have recruited over 800 mentors for us over the last five years—Deloitte, RBC, AMEX, CGI...—across those services, so we've now, as I said, matched over 6,000 skilled immigrants. It's a mentoring relationship that provides 24 hours of professional mentoring over a four-month period. It's not a work experience program, and yet even with that intervention, our outcome statistics show that it's leading to a 70% success rate of people getting employed directly in their field, or related field, within six months of completing that mentoring relationship.

A large part of the need for this is that people lose their professional networks when they come to Canada. We all know that a large part of a successful job search is knowing who to talk to, having those networks, and knowing where the opportunities are. A big part of the success of those mentoring relationships is helping people to rebuild a professional network here.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: If I understand correctly, it's mostly about networking, correct?

[English]

Ms. Joan Atlin: It's networking. It's having a professional in their field look at their résumé, coaching them through interviews, helping them know the right websites to look for in a particular field, where the right places are, which companies in their field are growing, who are the right people to talk to, and getting exposed to the Canadian workplace. Often the mentors do mentoring in their workplace, so people get a chance to be exposed to the environment.

Mr. Thomas Tam: We had a similar experience in B.C. Recently we also targeted some major employers. We worked with the City of Vancouver, which is a big employer. They identify staff from four different departments—the finance department, the engineering department, and two other departments—to provide mentors for new immigrants. Sometimes we focus on certain professions, and recently we have been looking for the cooperation of major employers. We also challenge the provincial and federal government departments to provide mentors for new immigrants, because both governments are huge employers. Again, we would like to have more employer participation in providing mentoring and placement opportunities.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

Mr. Claude Patry: Madam, a little earlier, you said that employers were not getting involved. Why?

Then you said that you were having more and more difficulty recruiting mentors. Why?

[English]

Ms. Joan Atlin: I said mentoring is difficult to get, but our model has actually been very successful in getting mentors because we pooled all of those small mentoring programs in Toronto, and TRIEC, as an organization, is quite well leveraged with large employers. In our case as well, the City of Toronto, for instance, is one of our employer partners in the mentoring partnership program and they've provided hundreds of mentors to the program in all different departments, in the same way that the City of Vancouver has.

Part of the benefit of scaling up a program like this is that it gives you the leverage to go to large employers, to really structure the program to make it easy for them to participate and provide the orientation for their mentors, provide the structure and support they need to be effective mentors. Through that, we've been able to recruit thousands of mentors in the GTA.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry. Your time is up.

We'll move to Mr. Daniel.

Mr. Joe Daniel: I think you've hit the nail on the head with regard to the mentoring program helping to get people into the workplace. Clearly, it's a situation where people need to get some work experience to get into the workplace.

One of the things I've been working on is assisting people to do volunteer work for some of the charitable organizations. Usually I don't hear from them because they've been there a month or two and

they've then been recruited because their skills are known and they've got some experience.

Have you actually worked with any of the charities or charitable organizations to be able to place people with them to get some experience?

Mr. Thomas Tam: Definitely. Volunteer development is part of our core services of SUCCESS. Very often people have to get a survival job for their own living, so many immigrants may not be able to afford to spend too many hours as volunteers. But it is always the case that for the first couple of months they start to do some volunteer work, but very soon they have to get into some sort of survival job. The merit of the mentoring program is that they can use flexible hours and different formats to connect and to build up their social capital.

Mr. Joe Daniel: I was thinking that just by getting some work experience with some of the charitable organizations, they can now say they've got some Canadian experience. That then helps them step into another position that may be....

Do you have any comments?

Ms. Joan Atlin: There are a number of volunteer placement programs. As Mr. Tam said, there are challenges with that, in terms of whether people can get enough work experience that way. A paid internship is obviously more effective if you're trying to support a family. But there are a number of programs to help people get volunteer experience, references, and Canadian employers on their résumés.

Mr. Joe Daniel: As time goes on, do you see that the types of immigrants coming in are changing, from the profession point of view? I know that back in the eighties and nineties a lot of engineering folks were coming in. There are probably fewer medical people coming in, given the fact that it's so difficult to break into the medical profession. What are you finding, in terms of trends or anything else like that, as far as who is coming in?

Mr. Thomas Tam: I am also involved on the immigration side. We see now that more and more people are coming in through the provincial nomination program. If they come through the PNP, that means they already have employers. Each province identifies their own job requirements or labour market needs. So in the long run it's not a national trend of occupations or professions among the newcomers; it's province by province. If you look at the figures, the number of PNPs is getting higher and higher. In reverse, the federal number will be less and less.

Ms. Joan Atlin: In Ontario we have a provincial nominee program, but the number is very small—it's in the hundreds. In Ontario most immigrants are not coming through a provincial nominee program. Nationally, something around 17% of all immigrants are actually the principal applicants selected under the point system. Then there are all of the other immigrant classes and the dependants of those people.

• (1715)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Are there any specific obstacles that you feel you need to overcome to improve the process of matching these immigrants with potential jobs, and so on?

Ms. Joan Atlin: We're really focusing on the employer engagement side of the equation. TRIEC's work is primarily employer-facing. There's a wealth of organizations in Toronto that are immigrant-serving organizations. We're focused primarily on employers, and we're really working now with players like the City of Toronto, their employment services, and the various networks of employment services, to better coordinate the way we approach employers and the suite of services that we have to offer employers. Any support, in terms of a national strategy and a coherent strategy around programs to help us do that work with employers, who are ultimately the ones who are making the hiring decisions, is welcome.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

Your comments on the provincial nominee program are interesting. The uptake is fairly good in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. It's interesting that Ontario has not quite taken up that program yet.

It's good to hear from you, Mr. Tam, that it certainly directs a lot of people to where the jobs are.

Mr. Cuzner.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thanks very much for being here today.

Those are two pretty impressive numbers: that those who receive mentoring have a 70% success rate in landing applied work, and the 80% success ratio for those who are able to engage in internship programs.

You say you're working heavily with the City of Toronto. There's an internship program available as well with the Province of Ontario. So who are offering those internship supports right now financially?

Ms. Joan Atlin: In Toronto, there's an organization called Career Edge, which was actually established to create youth internships and internships for people with disabilities. When TRIEC started work, we partnered with them to create an internship stream for skilled immigrants, and together we've done outreach to corporate partners. It's been most successful in the public service and in the financial services. There's a lot of scope to expand that program.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: That's something to build on when you're seeing an 80% success ratio.

So that would mean there's a number of clients you deal with that aren't getting access right now. Give me, for example, how many clients you deal with don't have access to internship.

Ms. Joan Atlin: It's the vast majority. We don't serve clients directly, but I would say of all the immigrants approaching services in the city of Toronto like we're doing through the mentoring

partnership, just in terms of mentoring about 1,200 mentoring matches a year, if you think about the number of immigrants coming to the GTA, it's a tiny drop in the bucket.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: What are the sectors you're really being frustrated by? Are there a couple of general job descriptions that are being frustrated by not being recognized? Are there some more than others, or are there one or two that stand out that aren't getting the recognition?

Ms. Joan Atlin: As we heard from the previous panel, the greatest challenges are in the regulated professions, absolutely, because of the licensure issues and the access to assessments, to bridging training, and in the health professions in particular to the clinical residencies that are required as part of the licensure process.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: And you're seeing the same?

Mr. Thomas Tam: Those health-related professions are the most difficult part for foreign-trained professionals. We see that the majority of employment opportunities are in the non-regulatory professional jobs. In that area, the most important factor is the employer's acceptance or readiness. That's why I totally agree with Joan that in dealing with the majority of the opportunities, employers are in a very important role in working with the service provider to accept and provide opportunities for the internationally trained professionals.

• (1720)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I'm fine, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. McColeman.

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

Thank you for being here.

Ms. Atlin, I'd like to ask you just to expand a bit more on what you were talking about earlier. You were relating an example of the IT success that you had. What other professions...? Specifically, I've got a direct interest in trades and construction. Do you get much uptake from that industry?

Ms. Joan Atlin: TRIEC actually doesn't work in the trades. We've been working particularly in the white collar skilled professions. As regulated professions, the trades have some similar issues to the other professions we were talking about, engineering and health care, in the sense that there is a licensure path you have to go through and you have to be licensed in order to work in your profession.

Mr. Phil McColeman: My experience over 25 years in that industry was that you're absolutely correct. To be a plumber, you have to do an apprenticeship and there's licensure involved at the end of that and so on to be a licensed trade. But there are a lot of semi-skilled tradespeople required. In fact, in my own community two weeks ago, I met with a business owner who wanted to hire 20 new employees in the area of restoration and historic restoration work that his company does, and he cannot find those workers.

If it's not your organization who would direct people, where would new immigrants who were semi-skilled from their own backgrounds in construction and trades go?

Mr. Thomas Tam: For the trades, we've been working with different trade associations and the Industry Training Authority in B. C. For three years in a row, from 2004 to 2007, we worked with the roofing and sheet metal apprenticeship program helping new immigrants to get into the roofing industry. I can quote you a lot of success stories, but the problem is there's no sustainable funding. So when we've done a group of people and they get employment, then the funding stops and we have to find another amount of money to help another group of people.

In my presentation there's ten years of work SUCCESS has been doing. We can quote you the exact numbers of people who are the partners and what the result is, but every time it's very short-term funding support and we have to stop somewhere and then find another funding source to help another group of people. That's the challenge the service provider is facing.

Mr. Phil McColeman: You've actually segued into my next question. What are your funding sources for your organizations?

Ms. Joan Atlin: TRIEC is funded in part by CIC. In the mentoring partnership, all the employment services and the services to the mentees are funded by the Employment Ontario program, which is the Ontario government's employment services program delivered through community-based agencies.

The TRIEC work we do recruiting corporate partners to recruit mentors for the program is funded by CIC and by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

Mr. Phil McColeman: It is a combination of federal and provincial funding.

Ms. Joan Atlin: Yes.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Is there anything from the City of Toronto?

Ms. Joan Atlin: No, there really isn't funding available from the City of Toronto for this kind of program, but the City of Toronto has been a very active participant in, for instance, the mentoring partnership and the career bridge program by engaging as an employer by providing mentors.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Mr. Tam, what about in your case?

Mr. Thomas Tam: Of course the provincial and federal governments are our major funding sources. In the Fort St. John case we also received funding from the energy companies. We also charge the participants tuition fees. It's a combination of different sources of funding.

Mr. Phil McColeman: I appreciate your bringing up the example of the ultimate benefactors of your work, which are the employers

who bring on individuals who will no doubt enhance their companies, their business, and all that goes along with that. It seems reasonable to me that there would be some kind of mechanism so that you could have something coming back from the industry you're helping.

• (1725)

Ms. Joan Atlin: I should add that in the mentoring partnership, the initial seed funding to start the program came from TD and that we currently also have sponsorship from Manulife Financial, which is supporting the program. We are looking at models that would increase employer sponsorship of the program.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

We'll go to Ms. Crowder.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I wanted to clarify two points, and then I'll share my time with Ms. Boutin-Sweet.

Mr. Tam, as we know, the federal government has signed agreements with many of the provinces, labour market development agreements, whereby they've turned over employment services and training and other aspects to the provinces. To clarify, is it your understanding that these LMDA agreements do not have any targets for foreign credential recognition?

Mr. Thomas Tam: No. They have, but again, when we go to the provincial level, say for example in B.C., there's a business transformation of employment services. In B.C. we have over 70 employment centres. You send people to generic employment services that are for all people who need employment. There's no targeted or very specific foreign credential recognition program targeting foreign-trained professionals.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Yes, that was my question. There is no specific target.

Second, you mentioned sector councils a number of times. Sector councils in my experience have been very important in terms of providing labour market information. Are you aware that there are some proposed cuts to the sector councils?

Mr. Thomas Tam: Yes.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I wanted to clear that up.

Ms. Boutin-Sweet, you wanted to ask a question.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Thank you.

I represent the riding of Hochelaga in Montreal. In Quebec, that is.

Some voters have told me that employers have asked them for Quebec experience before hiring them. I was wondering if the people you know are experiencing the same kind of thing in your organizations and your provinces.

[English]

Ms. Joan Atlin: Yes, this idea of Canadian experience, of employers requiring Canadian experience, is very common. As I said in my presentation, it's kind of a proxy or a euphemism. If you look at what people really mean by Canadian experience, it's usually a combination of issues that make employers afraid to take a risk on a skilled newcomer. They may not know the educational institution the person came from or the employers that are named on the résumé. There may be concerns about language or communication skills. Canadian experience is a very common barrier and one that all of these kinds of programs really help to get past, because it exposes the employer to the real person, as opposed to concerns about the résumé.

Mr. Thomas Tam: I totally agree. I think very often this exposes the social aspect for the employers, their comfort level, and also the risk factor. If the employer were given support and the chance to understand where they came from and their credentials and their knowledge, I think it would clear a lot of hurdles.

Ms. Joan Atlin: A lot of the work we've done at TRIEC is developing resources. We have some training videos that follow a skilled immigrant through the recruitment process and the integration process with an employer. We have a set of workshops for

employers looking at managing cross-cultural teams, how to get past bias in the hiring process.

You've probably seen studies that have come out recently. There were several from UBC, where simply a non-anglo or non-franco name on a résumé... if you just change the name and leave everything else on the résumé the same, it has a huge impact on whether employers will call that person back for an interview. So that level of bias still exists in our employer communities.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: I can attest to that. It happened to me in Ontario, with my French name. I understand perfectly what you are saying.

If I understand correctly, it commonly prevents people from getting a job. But what you are doing, with the mentoring among other things, is improving the situation. Is that correct?

● (1730)

[English]

The Chair: Give a short answer if you could.

Ms. Joan Atlin: The short answer is yes, we like to think the work we're doing is making a difference. Some of the stats we have demonstrate it.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation and some of the excellent points and recommendations you've made.

With that, we'll adjourn.

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