

International Credential Recognition Act (ICRA) Briefing - July 10TH, 2025

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1. How the Act has Impacted Newcomers in the Certification Process

Positive Shifts

- **Creating a shared provincial standard** for credential recognition across regulators. There is now greater consistency in how barriers are defined, and regulators are required to report credentialing timelines, outcomes, and improvement plans to the Superintendent. While these reports are not public, the Act introduced a new framework for government oversight and accountability that did not previously exist.
- **International agreements** from that support faster recognition of foreign credentials have benefited some newcomers. These agreements predate the Act but are now being looked at more deliberately in the context of ICRA's focus on efficiency and fairness. For example, Engineers Canada recognizes degrees from accredited institutions in countries like the US, Australia, and the UK through the Washington Accord. CPA Canada has similar arrangements with accounting bodies in India, the UK, and Australia, allowing qualified accountants to pursue certification in Canada without duplicating training. The Act has helped shine a light on these types of models, encouraging regulators to build on or replicate them where possible.
- Highlighted **the need for more transparent and consistent assessment frameworks** that work across both foreign and domestic contexts. Regulators have noted that credentials from Commonwealth countries, particularly in established fields like biology, are often easier to assess, given longstanding familiarity with their academic structures. By comparison, some newer BC-based programs, such as interdisciplinary degrees in environmental or health sciences, don't always align as clearly with existing regulatory standards.
- The International Credential Recognition Act has introduced a **consistent oversight framework** that accounts for different starting points across regulators. While some required only minor adjustments due to existing alignment, others are undertaking more substantial reforms. This variation is expected, and the Act is designed to monitor both compliance and continuous improvement, ensuring that all regulators are held to the same standards, regardless of their initial level of readiness.

Ongoing Gaps

- Internationally trained applicants continue to face **disproportionately long wait times**, inconsistent communication, and unclear appeals processes. While domestic applicants may encounter some delays, newcomers face added challenges such as unfamiliar systems, overseas documentation, or language barriers that uniquely affect their timelines.
- Some credentialing **standards remain outdated**. For instance, requirements like recent English language test results or Canadian work experience, which are now recognized as barriers and included in regulators' annual reporting under ICRA, persist in some regulatory practices. These standards often fail to reflect currently labour market realities or education models.

- The Act does not currently mandate that regulators **review or modernize credentialing criteria**. However, it does require them to report on timelines, barriers, and actions taken to improve recognition processes.
- While the Act sets important expectations, **implementation depends on collaboration** with provincial regulators, many of whom operate independently. Progress varies by jurisdiction, and federal influence remains limited without regulatory buy-in.
- Despite shortages in sectors like healthcare and skilled trades, newcomers continue to face significant delays in credential recognition in these fields, with **too few expedited or occupation-specific pathways** in place to address sector shortages.

Unknowns

- The potential impact of federal Bill C-5 on labour mobility remains unclear. It is not yet known how this will interact with ICRA or how provincial regulators will respond to federal direction in this area. The bill proposes measures such as:
 - Automatic national credential recognition;
 - A federal recognition framework;
 - Comparable standards across provinces.

2. Barriers Still Faced by Newcomers Despite the Act

Systemic and Operational Barriers:

- Some **institutions require applicants to request transcripts in person** at their former school or mandate that transcripts be sent directly from the issuing institution to the regulator. This creates significant challenges for applicants from conflict-affected regions where institutions are closed, unreachable, or unsafe to contact. Some regulators have introduced alternatives such as sworn affidavits, third-party verified credentials, or challenge exams, but these are not standardized. ICRA encourages publication of such alternatives but does not mandate their creation.
- Some regulators, especially smaller bodies, continue to rely on **volunteer committees** with limited or no formal training in credential evaluation. These volunteers assess both domestic and international applicants, but complex international cases are more prone to inconsistency or delay. There are no minimum training requirements for these evaluators under ICRA at this time.
- **Credentialing assessments fees**, typically \$300-\$400 through agencies like World Education Services or International Credential Evaluation Services, can be a barrier to newcomers, especially those without access to income supports or who are required to complete more than one assessment. There are currently no consistent fee waivers or equity measures in place, and some applicants delay or abandon the process because of the cost.

- While ICRA does not mandate an **appeals process**, it requires regulators to clearly disclose whether an appeal or review mechanism exists, and to outline alternate methods of follow-up where applicable. Strengthening these provisions could improve transparency and applicant trust.

3. Barriers Labour Market Program Staff Face in Supporting Newcomers

Challenges for Front-Line Staff:

- Labour market staff report **limited communication from regulators** about ICRA-related changes, and shifting requirements make it difficult to guide clients effectively.
- Program staff struggle to guide clients when decisions from regulators seem **arbitrary or inconsistent**, especially when assessors are untrained volunteers.
- Many employers, both public and private, **default to well-known certifications** (e.g. P.Eng.) even when not essential, increasing pressure on newcomers and making it harder for staff to promote alternative, valid credentials.
- There is no **centralized resource or liaison function** to track changes in regulatory practices or provide clarity across professions.

4. Client Testimony

A [Career Paths](#) program client will attend to share her personal experience with the credential recognition process. She will speak to:

- Where and how she encountered barriers in the system
- The duration and outcome of her certification journey
- What supports were and weren't available, and where program staff were limited
- The emotional and financial impact of the process

5. Recommendations for Potential Policy and System Reform

- a. Mandate **regular reviews of credentialing criteria** to reflect evolving education systems and labour market needs, including eliminating outdated requirements like Canadian experience or recent re-testing.
- b. Implement **minimum training standards** for credential assessors, particularly those reviewing international qualifications.
- c. Introduce **alternative documentation pathways** under ICRA for applicants from conflict zones or those unable to access institutional records. This may include:



- Third-party verified digital credentials;
 - Sworn affidavits;
 - Portfolio or competency-based assessments;
 - Blockchain credentialing models for tamper-proof verification.
- d. Explore **equity-based fee structures** and financial supports to reduce the cost burden on internationally trained professionals, especially those required to undergo multiple assessments
- e. Work with sector to create a **coordinated employer education campaign** to improve awareness about licensing tiers, reduce credential inflation in job postings, and encourage recognition of diverse, qualified applicants
- f. Strengthen ICRA through **clearer accountability mechanisms**, sector-specific targets, and defined timelines for implementation.
- g. Create monitoring systems to assess possible patterns of barriers and/or delays related to specific professions and/or counties of origin.

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