

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Parisa Mahboubi
To: Canada's Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Date: February 9, 2017
Re: **MATCHING IMMIGRANTS' SKILLS WITH EMPLOYERS' NEEDS**

Due to the retirement of the baby boom generation, Canada will likely face skills shortages in some professional occupations and technical disciplines, such as [engineering](#). These skill shortages may be addressed either through training more engineers at Canadian universities and colleges or by facilitating the immigration of skilled engineers or technicians in this field from other parts of the world.

Under Express Entry programs, such as the Federal Skilled Worker Program, applicants with higher levels of education receive higher points regardless of their occupation. Higher levels of education are also associated with higher skills, which are essential for economic growth. Education is also considered the key determinant to an immigrant's success.

However, a higher level of education may not be really necessary for addressing skill shortages in some highly technical fields.

From the point of view of some employers, not all positions require a graduate degree. In fact, this is the case for many engineering positions for which applicants are often overqualified. This educational mismatch can lead to an under-utilization of skills.

Immigrant engineers are usually over qualified for entry level jobs such as technicians and analysts. They have high levels of education due to the design of points system that assigns more weights to higher university degrees. When it comes to job search, they either are reluctant to apply for entry level positions since they have relatively high expectations or they are not preferred by the employers since they are over qualified and may have higher salary expectations compared to recent graduates.

Furthermore, immigrants with high levels of educational attainment in regulated occupations are unable to work at intermediate and senior positions without being licenced. As with medicine and law, engineers are required to earn a licence from a provincial and territorial regulatory body in order to practice professional engineering in Canada. To be granted with a licence, at least four years of work experience are required in an engineering discipline including a minimum one year of Canadian experience under the supervision of a professional engineer.

Hence immigrants from regulated occupations such as engineering, regardless of their educational degree, are required to start their career path from entry-level positions which are not easily accessible for higher degree holders. This lack of foreign credentials and experience recognition increases the long-standing barriers to labour mobility in Canada.

In order to more effectively fulfill Canada's future workplace needs in regulated occupations, strategies should be considered to address immigrants' challenges in regulatory professions. In the immigrant selection process, candidates who obtained their university degree in Canada to practice in a regulated occupation should be prioritized. Furthermore, the points-based system should differentiate the importance of higher educational attainments by type of occupations. Lastly, it would be important to involve the provincial and territorial regulatory and professional bodies in the immigration process and work towards expanding or developing mutual recognition agreements, such as the [Washington Accord](#) or the [Quebec-France Agreement](#), to address the issues related to foreign credential and work experience non-recognition among immigrants.

Parisa Mahboubi is a Senior Policy Analyst at the C.D. Howe Institute.