

**Foreign Trained Professionals:
Federal Government Reform to Accelerate Recognition of
Foreign Credentials Will Bring Much Value to Business,
Especially after Economic Recovery;
Main Value—Increased Supply of Employees and New Ideas;
Main Barriers—Poor Language Skills and Cultural Adaptation**

**BDO Dunwoody Weekly CEO/Business Leader Poll
By COMPAS in *Canadian Business*
For Publication December 7, 2009**



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1.0 Overview

In the wake of Hon. Jason Kenney's announcement of the Government of Canada's commitment to accelerating the recognition of foreign professional certifications, CEOs and business leaders on the COMPAS business panel were asked about the value of this government-led reform as well as perceptions of the main assets and liabilities of foreign trained professionals.

Panelists see the Conservative government-led reform as highly valuable and expect its value to jump further after the economy recovers from the Recession. Some panelists nonetheless express concern about non-equivalence of credentials in the case of some professions.

The principal benefits to business of foreign trained professionals are an increase in the supply of skilled personnel along with an increase in the number of employees with new ideas and diverse experiences.

Panelists see the main challenges as foreign trained professionals with inadequate skills in either of Canada's Official Languages along with inadequate understanding or acceptance of Canadian social practices, for example, how men relate to women.

These are the key findings from this past week's Internet survey of CEOs and business leaders on the COMPAS panel. The weekly business survey is undertaken for *Canadian Business* magazine under sponsorship of BDO Dunwoody LLP.

2.0 Details

Table 2a displays evidence of the panel's perceptions of a high value for the government-led reform, especially after recovery from the Recession. Table 2b displays panelists' opinions of the benefits of foreign trained employees while table 2c displays their opinions of the challenges.



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Table 2a: (Q1) The federal government just announced a program to cut in half the amount of time needed for foreign-trained newcomers to Canada to find out if their certification is valid here. This would apply to such occupations as architects, registered nurses, accountants, technologists, and pharmacists. On a 7 point scale where 7 means very valuable and 1, the opposite, how valuable will this reform be for businesses that employ professionals in each of these categories...

	Mean	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
In the present economic climate	5.1	19	24	26	18	9	3	1	1
When we recover from the Recession and there is a tight supply of people with professional skills	5.8	35	37	14	8	4	2	1	0

Table 2b: (Q2) On a 7 point scale where 7 means very valuable and 1, the opposite, please rate each of the following potential benefits of having foreign trained people with certified skills for Canadian companies to choose from.

	Mean	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
A larger supply of potential employees	5.7	26	39	23	8	3	2	0	0
Having access to employees with varied experiences and new ideas	5.5	24	32	24	11	5	4	0	0
Skills that may be more advanced than in Canada	5.1	22	27	18	17	9	5	3	0
Having access to employees who understand better than many Canada's multicultural communities	4.8	14	22	28	18	7	9	3	0



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Table 2c: (Q3) On a 7 point scale where 7 means a significant challenge and 1, the opposite, please rate of the following potential challenges of having skilled, foreign trained people employed in a firm in Canada.

	Mean	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	DNK
Inadequate knowledge of either English or French, as the case may be, when the newcomer's mother tongue is neither of these	5.8	36	37	11	7	5	3	1	0
Inadequate understanding or acceptance of Canadian social practices, for example, how men relate to women	5.5	28	29	22	10	8	4	0	0
Skills that may be behind the skills of people with Canadian training	4.9	15	23	20	23	8	7	2	3
Prejudicial attitudes against them by fellow employees	4.3	8	16	24	19	16	13	3	1

The following verbatims provide a nuanced sense of panel opinion:

There is no question, that there is a desperate need for some profession more than others in certain fields where that particular trade or trades will die and we must do something about it now.

It is important that any immigrant can fit in to Canadian society and has a feeling of Canadian heritage and values.

Foreign trained professionals are often not adequately trained for Canadian practice. For example foreign trained doctors don't just have language barriers, but the scope of their practice (i.e. tropical medicine) is not directly applicable here. The better answer is to train more Canadians - rather than stealing from other places that need doctors, and other professionals too.



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Corporations should begin educating Canadian employees on diversity and acceptance of foreign trained professionals in order to minimize any potential social challenges.

We have a real shortage of trained professionals, most notably in healthcare that may be compromising the quality of care being given, increased wait times, burn out of professional staff. Some predict that our medical schools etc. cannot catch up to this shortfall until 2015 or later. Qualified professionals should be carefully screened, but fast tracked as much as possible to address these shortages.

Consideration should be given to placing them for a specified period of time in underserved regions of the country.

We need to open up to recognize more certifiable skills. Canada needs all the knowledge and skills we can get!

Finally, we might be able to bring talented people from abroad and utilize them in their own expertise rather than educated general laborer!

It is a shame that professionals are forced to work in menial jobs for years because the government made promises they did not live up to. This is a disservice both to them and to us.

The issue of qualification of foreign trained professionals is being misrepresented in the media and is poorly understood among politicians. The role of self-regulating professional associations such as architects, engineers and medical professionals is to protect the public from inadequately trained and experienced professionals. The credentials presented by many foreign trained applicants are often from educational institutions whose own credentials are either below Canadian standards or are not known with sufficient confidence to accept them as equivalent to Canadian standards. There is a tendency among the public, media and politicians to assume foreign educational and training credentials are equivalent, when often there is no rational



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basis for such an assumption. The real question is how much risk is the public willing to take in the name of qualifying foreign trained professionals when the state of knowledge of their qualifications is less than what the current Canadian standards would require?

I hate to say it but maybe we should consider going the way of the U.S., we are Canadian first. e.g. not French Canadian but Canadian Frenchman. We should also require a full comprehension of the English and/or French language. We do not need people that want to come here and do not want to learn the language.

There are two questions - how long to give a decision regarding acceptance of foreign qualifications and the actual acceptance of those qualifications. This is looking like a politically correct movement which will not have a good result. I have interviewed and hired foreign trained engineers and on balance I have an issue with their training and general competency. The engineering associations have a process which though onerous seems to ensure the foreign entrants to the profession have a high level of knowledge and are acceptable to practice in Canada. Any watering down of this process in the name of better accessibility (generally driven by political correctness) will result in lower standards and compromising our safety and economic outcomes.

Glad to see the government moving this initiative forward.

As long as communication skills and issues are fully addressed, change can only help. In medicine especially, misunderstood accents or dialects could cost lives.

It should not just be about increasing the employee base. It should be because it is the right thing to do!

The process should include an English proficiency test.



We will need more skilled employees in the coming years as the "baby boom" generation starts to work less or retire completely.

Many of the 'Professions' are particularly 'Protectionist' and don't serve Canada well. In many parts of the world education and practice are more advanced than here. The downside, as always, is the issue of grasp and use of the English French language.

Immigrants bring many things with them, not only their own skills and training but a willingness to get ahead in life through dedication to their careers. They also inject their children with ambition and the objectives of bettering themselves for the future, which means getting an education and seeking good positions. Canada is stronger as a result of its immigration policy and has an open society that is more respectful of each other than many other countries.

3.0 Methodology

The COMPAS web-survey of CEOs and leaders of small, medium, and large corporations was conducted December 1 - 3, 2009. Respondents constitute an essentially hand-picked panel with a higher numerical representation of small and medium-sized firms.

Because of the small population of CEOs and business leaders from which the sample was drawn, the study can be considered more accurate than comparably sized general public studies. In studies of the general public, surveys of n=119 are deemed accurate to within approximate 9.0 percentage points 19 times out of 20. The principal and investigator on this study is Conrad Winn, Ph.D.

