

# Workshop Report

## WORKSHOP

11. An international comparison of the recognition of foreign credentials. Examples of good practice in Canada, Great Britain and Germany

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### Main Outcomes of the Workshop:

The issue of recognition of professional (and academic) credentials from abroad can be seen and recognized only in an international context. This is necessary because of the respective national education systems and because the individual experience of all migrants is characterized by a movement from one system into another. The recognition of foreign credentials represents a key factor for successful integration.

In the workshop, structural conditions that contribute to integration or lead to exclusion were elicited. In the talks, the processes of recognition in Canada, the UK and Germany were presented. Challenges for regulators, political and legal frameworks, attitudes and mindsets (both in the community and of the main stakeholders), and the various requirements for candidates, as well as the need for professional advice – these and other factors were discussed and provided a context for learning about good practice and helping improve the quality of the respective systems.

The international comparison and exchange in the workshop came from three different perspectives: from the perspective of the clients and advice-seekers themselves (Germany), from the perspective of a regulatory and advisory authority (UK) and from the perspective of an independent body for monitoring the implementation of certification procedures (Canada).

### Findings and results:

#### 1. Advice seekers / Applicants

A central and common aspect to all contributions was the need to reflect on the whole process of recognition of foreign credentials from the perspective of the clients, in order to reach a "good practice". All political decisions and regulations have a direct effect on these people.

Special hurdles and challenges were presented by the IQ Network of the German federal state of Bavaria, whose representatives looked back on a long-standing practice of professional counseling. Key aspects include the high complexity of the legal framework, the different methods of practice of responsible agencies, access to adjustment training programmes (provided that such services are even offered), the reimbursement of costs for the procedure itself and other requirements (e.g. translations), and difficulties when applying from abroad. The systematic usage of expert counseling enables the identification of barriers and opportunities for improvement in the system.

(see also the slide presentation: "IQ Bayern Guidance to recognition" by Ines Weihing and Martin Walter)

## 2. Integration of professional and trade associations

Producing and assuring quality standards is not possible without the technical and methodological knowledge of the trade associations. Issues of safety and quality are especially important to regulated professions. For the regulatory and supervisory "Professional Standards Authority" in London, UK, the complexity of the tasks is clear. There, 35 regulated professions in the social and health sectors, or their appropriate professional organizations, are united under one roof.

It is not always possible to match individual career profiles with single, clearly identified profession descriptions. While the training systems of the Commonwealth countries are often very similar, this is less true in comparison to most EU countries.

The development of common and comparable standards between the systems, but also between related professions, is therefore a major challenge. The structural connection between expert knowledge about professions on one side and politics on the other can facilitate access of migrants to the new labour market, without softening the existing quality standards.

(see also slide presentation "International applications" by Douglas Bilton) and website <http://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/>

## 3. Independent Agents / Monitoring

A structurally entrenched, independent body can unite the various interests of the actors involved. The "Office of the Fairness Commissioner" assesses the practice of recognition of foreign credentials in Ontario/Canada based on the four principles of transparency, objectivity, neutrality and fairness.

The regulators (trade associations, responsible agencies) are expected to review their practice of recognition procedures and to implement possible improvements according to the proposals made by the Fairness Commissioner. The legal basis for this is the "Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act" of 2006.

The establishment of this act was preceded by a long process of political and academic debate. A first impetus took place in the late 1980s as the "The Task Force on Access to Professions and Trades in Ontario" noted discrimination factors in accessing most professions and structural solutions were called for to reduce systematic barriers in accessing professions.

In April 2007 the "Office of the Fairness Commissioner" began its work, with headquarters in Toronto.

The diverse responsibilities of the office can be found on the website <http://www.fairnesscommissioner.ca/>. An overview of the work done so far and the other tasks to be completed were given by Hon. Jean Augustine in her presentation:

→ You can find the text of her speech within the workshop documentation

### Aspects of the discussion and conclusions:

- Strive for more "mutual agreements" (bilateral agreements to automatic recognition of credentials)
- Provide legal certainty
- Embeddedness in societal developments (integration, inclusion)
- Establish specialist advise services
- Build reliable structures of counseling on application procedures to adapt credentials
- The actors should be able to interact with each other on an equal footing. For this purpose, the applicant / consultant requires special support by independent bodies.

- In strategic positions and organisations, such as in politics or trade associations, equal representation should be provided. Moreover, diversity can be improved by constituting networks together with appropriate partners.