



Ontario Association of Architects

## Final Report of the Internationally-trained Professionals Task Group – January 20, 2005

### Objective:

- To report on OAA initiatives to date regarding the integration of internationally-trained professionals into the architectural profession.
- To outline the issues, and challenges – both real and perceived, that may inhibit internationally-trained professionals trained as architects from accessing employment in the profession and from completing OAA licensing requirements.
- To recommend programs and other initiatives that the OAA should consider to assist ITPs in integrating into the architectural profession.

### Background:

In February, 2004, OAA Council at its strategic planning session, identified the review of the OAA membership model and the related intern architect and internationally-trained professionals initiatives as high priorities for 2004. At that time, OAA Council identified a number of issues related to internationally-trained professionals for further review and discussion, including:

- Identify challenges and barriers to employment and licensing by internationally-trained professionals, including challenges that are unique to the architectural profession
- Suggest ways that the OAA can help internationally-trained professionals
- Review the relevance of Intern Architect Program to ITPs including the Architectural Registration Examination (ARE), experience requirements and OAA Admission Course
- Identify issues and concerns related to other organizations including the Canadian Architectural Certification Board (CACB), employers and organizations that provide support to new immigrants
- Review and comment on information available to ITPs prior to immigrating to Canada
- Review of OAA Practice Bulletins on hiring practices and job search guidelines for ITPs
- Identify other areas of concern and make suggestions for improvements.

In March, 2004, OAA Council appointed the Internationally-trained Professionals Task Group (ITP) to undertake a comprehensive investigation of issues related to Internationally-trained Professionals as input to the Membership Model Task Group and identify ways that the OAA can assist in the integration of Internationally-trained professionals into the architectural profession. The ITP Task Group reports to, and coordinates its findings with, the Membership Model Task Group as part of a broad review of the OAA's membership model.

The Task Group members include:

Jeff Perry, OAA Councilor, Chair, ITP Task Group  
Ted Shepherd, OAA Councilor  
Cornel Ionescu, OAA  
Vandna Gupta, Intern Architect  
Zeid Haddad, Intern Architect  
Vladimir Popovic, Intern Architect.

### **Other OAA ITP Initiatives**

In the last few years, the integration of internationally-trained professionals and other skilled workers into the Canadian workforce has become a high priority for all levels of government. OAA Council has demonstrated its commitment to this important issue through participation in a number of activities initiated by the Province of Ontario and in partnership with other organizations. Those activities have included the following:

### **Ontario Regulators for Access (ORA)**

The Ontario Regulators for Access is comprised of twelve of Ontario's self-regulating professional bodies including the OAA. ORA has received funding from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to promote systemic change across a number of occupations. As part of this project ORA has developed:

- a Regulator's Guide, including 'best practices' from various regulators, including the OAA.
- Business Case
- Two forums on access issues
- A Web site for Regulators
- Guiding Principles.

ORA has applied to the Province for additional funding to continue and expand its activities.

### **Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Report Card**

The Ontario Provincial Government has announced the creation of a Report Card on Access to Professions and Trades to be completed annually by each regulator that will outline current initiatives and identify remaining challenges faced by regulators in ensuring that procedures governing entry-to-practice in Ontario for ITPs are fair, transparent and accessible.

The OAA and ORA have responded to an MTCU survey of information that will assist the Minister in finalizing the report card. In addition, OAA President Lesley Watson and Executive Director Brian Watkins met with Minister Mary Ann Chambers of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities on April 21, 2004 to provide an overview of OAA initiatives and remaining challenges faced by the profession in integrating ITPs.

### **Policy Roundtable Mobilizing Professions and Trades (PROMPT)**

PROMPT is an umbrella group representing 20 immigrant associations including professionals, trades people, ethno-racial planning councils and community initiatives. PROMPT has received Federal and Provincial funding to investigate and develop strategies with respect to ITPs, including a research study and report issued on September 29, 2004. ORA met with PROMPT prior to the release of their report and expressed concerns with the content of the report, its accuracy and tone. ORA has further expressed these concerns in a letter to Minister Chambers of MTCU. At the same time, representatives of ORA and the OAA have met with representatives from PROMPT in an effort to identify potential areas for collaboration.

### **Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)**

TRIEC is a Council under the Toronto City Summit Alliance – a coalition of civic leaders from the private, labour, voluntary and public sectors in the Toronto Region. TRIEC's mission is to create a vibrant and sustainable bridge linking immigrant skills with labour needs in the city region. OAA Registrar Hillel Roebuck has been appointed to represent the OAA on the

Occupation and Licensing Bridge Working Group and the OAA has also been asked to participate in the Mentoring Working Group.

#### **Review of Regulators' Appeals Processes**

On September 29, 2004, Minister Chambers announced the appointment of former justice George Thomson (Advisor) to review the regulatory bodies' appeals processes and develop a set of common principles upon which to base a standard independent appeals mechanism. The Advisor will be consulting with regulatory bodies, organizations representing immigrants, affected ministries and experts from Ontario and abroad.

#### **Job Search Facilitators Workshop**

In October, 2004 a Job Search Facilitators Workshop, funded by the provincial government, was held in Toronto to bring together agencies from around Ontario who provide job search training and placements for internationally-trained individuals, including professionals. The OAA participated in a presentation with other professional bodies on their licensing processes and staffed a booth over the two days of the workshop to provide information to, and network with, those agencies.

#### **Internationally-trained Professionals Task Group**

The following issues, challenges and final recommendations are the result of the OAA's ITP Task Group's work over the last several months including:

- Input from ITP Task Group members based upon their own experiences
- Anecdotal evidence provided by ITPs who are currently Intern Architects or OAA members and individuals who are not associated with the OAA but who are interested in pursuing a career in architecture and/or being licensed by the Ontario Association of Architects
- Statistical data identified through the OAA database, Federal and Provincial government sources, schools of architecture and community colleges offering architectural science and technology programs. At the present time, approximately 16% of licensed architects in Ontario are internationally-trained.
- Designated area on the OAA Web site that provides licensing information, job search advice and practical information about the architectural profession in Ontario.
- Development of six Practice Bulletins that provide advice to ITPs on job search strategies and tools appropriate to the architectural profession and information about the architectural profession in Ontario, as well as regulatory information for both ITPs and employers.
- Meeting with representatives from PROMPT (Policy Roundtable on Mobilizing Professions and Trades), an umbrella organization that represents and advocates on behalf of ITPs
- Research on mentoring programs available from other professions and settlement agencies that support ITPs and development of a set of guiding principles for the development of an OAA mentoring program specifically for ITPs
- Ongoing research to identify settlement agencies that work with ITPs and the kinds of services that they provide
- An online survey of ITPs that generated 160 responses
- Employers Focus Group including architects from a range of small, medium and large size practices, specialty practices and government, 50% of whom are internationally-trained and all of whom have experience working with, and hiring, ITPs.

The information presented in this report is based upon the experiences and perceptions of the ITP Task Group members and others including the OAA members who participated in the Employers Focus Group and individual ITPs who responded to the OAA's ITP survey. The information has not been factually verified.

### **ITP Survey Results**

An online survey developed by the ITP Task Group was posted for two weeks on the OAA Web site, and available to OAA members, Intern Architects and the public. Members and intern architects were notified of the survey through the OAA's e-bulletin and in addition, 25 individual ITPs not associated with the OAA and 24 settlement organizations were also notified and encouraged to respond.

160 individual ITPs responded to the survey. 79% of the respondents are employed, 65% are employed in the architectural profession. Many of those who are employed are working in marginal, low paying positions such as retail clerks, hospitality services, security guards and maintenance work. Approximately 40% of respondents are either licensed in Ontario or another jurisdiction in Canada or the USA, or are intern architects or students. The remaining 60% were qualified architects in their home country or reported no professional status. 75% of individuals intend to complete the requirements for licensure.

The majority of respondents were able to obtain general information about Canada while in their home countries. Of those who did not obtain information, a small number of individuals either did not seek out information or it was not available to them. About two thirds of respondents obtained information about the architectural profession in advance. Many respondents felt that the information available from the Canadian government was misleading or not available especially information related to:

- cost of living,
- general labour market information
- information about the architectural profession specifically, including the roles and responsibilities of architects in Canada that may differ from other parts of the world
- the documents that should be brought from the home country
- market demand for architects, salaries, types of positions available
- job search information – need for resume, portfolio
- length of time and process to obtain licence and employment
- how the Federal Government's 'point' system for immigrants works. That system is perceived as a poor indicator of employability
- support and assistance in getting settled on immediate arrival, finding accommodation, healthcare, etc.
- the type information and support services that are available.

ITPs felt that information could be improved by:

- providing a more realistic picture of the process and challenges of settling and finding employment in Canada rather than the 'romantic' view portrayed by staff at the Canadian embassies and consulates
- providing information directly from associations and employers
- online chat rooms to connect with other new immigrants to share information

- being able to start the process of certification, licensing and initiating job search from their home countries
- information on the licensing process that is specifically tailored to ITPs
- information about the CACB certification process, and how documents and schools are assessed
- information about the kinds of skills employers require and training opportunities available for ITPs
- a comprehensive directory of architectural practices and salary information.

### **Employers Focus Group**

The employers who participated in the focus group all indicated a desire to work with the OAA to identify issues, challenges and solutions that can ensure fair and equal access for ITPs in the architectural profession. All participants have worked with and hired ITPs and reported mixed experiences. Many individuals are well qualified and bring the necessary soft skills – attitude, work ethics, work habits, initiatives and flexibility, to integrate well. Other individuals may have more difficulty integrating due to a lack of the necessary soft skills, language and communication difficulties, and lack of technical, knowledge, CAD and other practice-related skills.

### **Issues**

While ITPs, employers, regulators and settlement agencies reported a number of factors that they believe to be challenges for ITPs, there appear to be some key issues that are the primary causes of ITP disenfranchisement in general. Those are:

- A disconnect between the federal government's promotion of Canada, its active encouragement of highly skilled and qualified immigrants on the basis of a 'point system' and a perceived shortage of qualified professionals that is not based on real market demand for all professions, the ability for the market to absorb highly qualified immigrants and a lack of, or inaccurate, information regarding the difficulties in settling in Canada and accessing one's chosen profession; and,
- Lack of a single information resource for ITPs that is easily accessible and can direct them to the appropriate organization for all information, support services and training available related to their chosen professions.
- Lack of a comprehensive program designed specifically to assess skills and qualifications and prepare individual ITPs for employment and licensing in the architectural profession and that can give employers confidence in the credibility of those qualifications.
- Cultural issues and differences in the training, roles and responsibilities of architects from different countries that may result in unrealistic expectations and misperceptions regarding the architectural profession in Canada, as well as the reasons that many ITPs experience difficulties in accessing and integrating into the profession here.
- While the OAA's statutory role includes licensing and regulation of the profession, the priority of ITPs is to find employment that enables them to use their architectural training and qualifications and to support themselves and their families over obtaining a licence, although the majority surveyed intend to pursue a licence.

### **Challenges:**

The sources that provided input to the Task Group were generally consistent in identifying key challenges to the integration of ITPs into the profession. The challenges identified include the following:

- Lack of Canadian experience due to:
  - Limited English language skills and occupation specific language and communication skills
  - Lack of knowledge of Canadian construction processes, codes and regulatory requirements, roles and responsibilities of architects in Canada, preparation of construction documents and general review of construction
  - Lack of CAD skills
  - Limitations in assessing foreign training, skills and qualifications by Canadian Architectural Certification Board (CACB), OAA and employers
  - Lack of market demand due to:
    - Lack of work placement/coop opportunities
    - Volatile economic cycles
    - A large number of small practices with limited ability to support and train staff
    - Competition with Canadian-trained graduates for the limited number of entry level positions available
  - Foreign qualifications difficult to assess and may not be recognized
- Lack of job search support and advice due to:
  - Lack of networking skills and opportunities
  - Difficulty accessing 'hidden' and unadvertised employment opportunities
  - Lack of job search skills training and tools such as resumes, portfolios and interview skills
  - Lack of a mentor/advisor
- Challenges in completing the OAA licensing requirements due to:
  - High cost of CACB certification (\$1070 (including GST) for ITPs versus \$107 (including GST) for Canadian trained applicants) and that is perceived as a systemic barrier
  - Difficulty obtaining documents from home country where individuals are refugees, the educational institution no longer exists, and applicant is responsible for having transcripts and other original documents translated
  - Difficulty understanding the licensing process
  - Lack of support from the OAA
  - Licensing process is onerous and too costly
  - Cost of upgrading skills
  - Length of time to upgrade skills

### **Cultural Challenges**

Many ITPs who responded to the OAA's ITP survey suggested that discriminatory practices and closed attitudes of Ontario architects are key factors preventing ITPs from obtaining employment. Other ITPs, including those on the ITP Task Group, refuted those suggestions. At the same time, employers who participated in the Employers Focus group suggested that the key to an individual achieving success is his/her attitude – willingness to learn, curiosity, ability to take initiative, the flexibility to undertake a range of tasks and the ability to work as part of a team.

Further, the ITP Task Group's meeting with representatives of PROMPT indicated a limited, and perhaps naïve, understanding on the part of ITPs of the architectural profession in Ontario i.e. the large number of small practices, impact of economic cycles on market demand, ITPs need to compete with Canadian-trained graduates for the same jobs, and limited opportunities to undertake international projects, role of architects in Canada and the way that the profession and architectural design are regulated in Canada.

All of these factors when viewed together suggest that cultural differences and limited knowledge of the architectural profession in Canada may be contributing to the difficulties that ITPs experience in finding employment.

### **Recommendations:**

The following are the recommendations proposed by the ITP Task Group for programs and other initiatives to assist internationally-trained professionals.

#### **1.0 Market Demand**

- 1.1 Continue to monitor market demand and make information available online
- 1.2 Identify opportunities for ITPs to relocate outside of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) where market demand may be greater.

#### **2.0 Advocacy**

- 2.1 Advocate and support the development of the OAA a central "Architectural" portal through the OAA Web site that could advocate and promote direct, integrated and coordinated linkages to existing federal, provincial entry programs to prospective immigrants from their home countries. A central portal could minimize misinformation, provide direct OAA access to newcomers and eliminate the "disconnect" that ITPs experience in accessing the architectural profession in Canada and Ontario. That information could include:
  - Current market demand, types of positions
  - Current salary ranges
  - Licensing information.
  - Continue to work with Ontario Regulators for Access (ORA) to share information, best practices and develop common initiatives where appropriate.
  - Negotiate reciprocity agreements with other countries (long term goal).

#### **3.0 Certification:**

- 3.1 Expand the mandate of CACB to assess architectural educational programs that are not professional degree programs
- 3.2 Reduce the cost of CACB certification for ITPs and bring the cost in line with CACB fees paid by Canadian graduates.
- 3.3 Permit an alternative assessment equivalent for individuals who are not able to obtain academic documents from their home country or educational institution.

#### **4.0 Bridging Program**

Develop a career bridging program that should include the following components:

##### **4.1 Assessment:**

- Competency-based assessment process to assess skills and competencies of individual ITPs and identify gaps.

##### **4.2 Training:**

Language training, including general language assessment and occupation specific language training and communication skills

Canadian building construction processes, codes, role of architects in Canada, preparation of construction documents, general review of construction

Job search skills training – resumes, portfolio, interviews, networking opportunities

Soft skills development – understanding the culture and developing critical thinking and team building skills

CAD and other computer skills

#### **4.3 Mentoring:**

Develop a program to link ITPs with architect mentors that includes guidelines for ITPs and mentors, code of conduct, OAA support, online, individual and group mentoring opportunities

#### **4.4 Licensing Support:**

Provide study materials and resources, exam preparation training

Consider a provisional licence for ITPs

#### **4.5 Employment:**

Job placement service

Financial subsidies to assist with salary costs during the placement or probationary period, training costs, employment costs (e.g. workers compensation)

#### **5.0 Communications:**

5.1 Develop an information package for ITPs on the qualities and skills that employers seek in ITP applicants

5.2 Simplify language of licensing requirements for ITPs

5.3 Publish success stories of ITPs who have succeeded in integrating into the profession

5.4 Educate employers on the advantages of hiring ITPs and on support programs and advisory services available to employers and ITPs.