

GETTING ON THE PATH TO LICENSURE

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 2022 CACB Conference theme is “Architecture Continuum: Collaborate, Educate, Integrate”, with the goal of exploring “... the career trajectory of the architect from early discovery to formal education, internship, examination, licensure, and lifelong learning through practice and continuing education.”

This paper will examine the landscape of pre-licensure for individuals educated and/or licensed in International countries other than the US and members of the Canberra Accord. Our research indicates that the issue of getting on the path to licensure is a stumbling block for many individuals who come to Canada with the goal of becoming architects. Individuals who are able to meet all of BEFA’s requirements form a minority of applicants (69 out of 296 International applicants in 2021 = 23%)¹. The remaining 77% are faced with navigating a challenging landscape of options such as Syllabus, CACB Certification, or going back to school - all of which entail significant time and financial investments in order to become an architect. It is not surprising then that many choose to work as technologists or switch careers altogether.

This loss of potential architects concerns us because as a country of immigrants, Canada and our profession rely on the influx of migrants for growth and sustainability. Therefore, it is essential to focus research on how to support, further educate, and integrate this vital group of individuals.

Canada is faced with a steadily declining birth rate averaging .735% since 2018². Immigrants comprise 75% of our population growth and almost 100% of our labour force growth³ - making us heavily reliant on this influx of educated individuals for filling jobs and growing the economy. Architecture is no exception. According to the OAA’s 2022 Demographics survey, 73% of respondents are immigrants.⁴ While we have not found surveys for other regulators’ percentage of immigrant membership, reasonable extrapolation can be made by looking at Canada’s most populous and immigrant-rich provinces : Ontario, Quebec, BC and Alberta⁵. CALA’s 2019 National Demographic Summary put the total number of licensed architects in Canada at just over 10,000⁶. This number included 3769 architects in the OAA, 3437 in the OAQ, 1593 in AIBC, and 684 in AAA for a total of 9483 (or 95% of the total number of architects) in provinces known to attract the highest percentage of immigrants.

These statistics effectively illustrate the reality that the sustainability of the architectural profession in Canada mandates we provide the clarity and support necessary to ensure that as many immigrants with architectural qualifications as possible achieve licensure.

¹ 2022 CACB report to ROAC

² <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/CAN/canada/birth-rate>

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2021/12/canada-welcomes-the-most-immigrants-in-a-single-year-in-its-history.html>

⁴ OAA Demographics Survey 2022

⁵ <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/canadian-provinces-territories-by-immigrant-population.html>

⁶ CALA 2019 National Demographic Summary

2. BACKGROUND

The last CACB Conference was held in Saint-Sauveur, Quebec in the fall of 2014. It was attended by a nexus of interns who had met earlier that year at the RAIC Conference in Winnipeg, and begun to engage and discuss issues encountered as they worked through the IAP Program. It was at the closing event of this conference that they decided to found Canada's first advocacy organization for interns.

After winning the 2015 RAIC Foundation prize, this group went on to found RAIC Emerging Practitioners (RAIC EP) and made great progress over the ensuing 5 years in providing a voice for interns, syllabus students, and others on the path to licensure. As the RAIC EP we accomplished a great number of initiatives - carrying out vital research, disseminating information, organizing nationally broadcast webinars in support of ExAC prep, creating ConEd Sessions, and holding design competitions.

Following RAIC's discontinuation of the EP committee in fall of 2020, key members of RAIC EP working together with former CASA executives decided to carry on the work of advocacy and support for licensure by founding BAC-DAC (Becoming Architects Canada-Devenir Architecte Canada).

BAC-DAC is an independent national non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to supporting those who are working towards becoming architects in Canada. BAC-DAC was launched in June of 2021 and its establishment was supported by key organizations across the field of architecture in Canada, including **ROAC**(The Regulatory Organizations of Architecture in Canada), **BAIDA** (Black Architects & Interior Designers Association), **CASA** (Canadian Alliance of Students Association), **Canadian Architect, Collectif**, **RAIC** Edmonton Network, **TSA** (Toronto Society of Architects), **CAFÈs** (Canadian Architecture Forums on Education).

For foreign licensed architects/architectural graduates, one of the biggest obstacles that has been voiced to us⁷ is a lack of understanding of how to GET on the path to licensure in Canada (ie. not understanding what the options are and who to talk to to get more information). Therefore, we struck a "Getting on the path to licensure" committee aimed at supporting foreign licensed and/or educated architects and helping them better understand the process of licensure in Canada. Tasked with conducting research on and providing support for this issue, this committee was among the first to be struck and has been active in engaging with the issue.

This paper represents a snapshot in time of our on-going research into the myriad social, economical, cultural, and professional issues faced by those who would become architects in Canada. The objective is to identify and better understand the obstacles faced by foreign educated/licensed architects, their specific needs, the current resources available, and the additional sources of support needed to support and empower the numerous qualified "Becoming Architects" who journey to our mosaic .

⁷ BAC-DAC Launch Event Findings : <https://www.bac-dac.ca/>

3. RESEARCH :

3.1. Challenges faced by foreign educated/licensed architects

As previously mentioned, “Getting on the Path to Licensure” was one of the first BAC-DAC committees to begin work. This committee held a Webinar in November of 2021 targeting foreign educated/licensed professionals. The Webinar was attended by a CACB representative, and included brief presentations by BAC-DAC and CACB followed by breakout discussions. This event and our Launch Event both targeted feedback from attendees as to issues they were facing and initiatives they were interested in our organization offering. Some of the main themes which emerged are categorized and summarized as follows :

3.1.1. Bureaucracies

The disconnect between Federal and Provincial/Territorial governments, as well as between governments and regulators/associations means that few individuals come to Canada with clarity as to the hierarchy of the profession, where they will land within it, and the legislation governing use of the title “Architect” with its attendant penalties. The limited presence of the profession within the process of immigration means that many individuals find themselves unsure as to which path to pursue to licensure, how long this journey may take, and what the attendant costs are. This leads many potential architects to question the feasibility and value of licensure.

Unfortunately, much of the professional information supplied by governments during the process of immigration is vague at best, and irrelevant at worst. The situation is worse if you come to Canada on a work permit, because then the Federal Government has no purview or obligation to offer any support. Additional bureaucratic obstacles include :

3.1.1.1. Provincial/Regulator Level Concerns:

- i. Currently do not allow permanent residents to be on council (i.e. the OAA), so there is a barrier for immigrants to get on council and have a voice,
- ii. There is a lack of guidance and mentorship. Many regulators don’t have lists of available mentors even for those in the IAP Program; when there is such a list, it is often outdated,
- iii. Without connections, it is difficult to decipher the options and make informed decisions, so there is a great deal of confusion,
- iv. There are no foreign trained architect reps on regulator councils.

3.1.1.2. Academic Certification/Accreditation Concerns:

- i. Difficult to get university calendar (some people can be denied just for this, which doesn't really describe much in terms of their education and training)
- ii. Need to match which course falls into which category that CACB is asking for, so that takes time and can be difficult to verify
- iii. All or nothing situation with BEFA experience requirement - nothing less than 7 years is acceptable

3.1.2. Cultural Obstacles

These begin with language - mastery of a language requires understanding of the culture, current issues, prevailing values, and social mores. Being a visible minority, styles of dressing, social interactions, speaking with an accent, understanding a joke in time to laugh all impact an individual's self-esteem and confidence, which in turn affect their agency in terms of self-advocacy, asking questions, making sure they understand the answers, not being too timid to ask follow up questions, not giving up, etc.

3.1.3. Professional Barriers

3.1.3.1. Certification Concerns:

- a. Lack of understanding of the process, how to get started and what the options are for path to licensure (and lack of support to navigate path)
- b. Unclear about NAFTA and other Mutual Agreements if you were educated even partially in another country
- c. BEFA program requirements and structure unclear
- d. Lack of support groups or access to others who have been down these paths to help each other out
- e. Unclear what is path for technologist to become licensed

3.1.3.2. Cost Concerns:

- a. Unclear about CACB costs and/or are concerned about costs associated with BEFA vs other paths
- b. \$1800 just for CACB to look at foreign architect equivalence
- c. Having to work for little or no salary
- d. Time consuming and expensive process

3.1.3.3. Systemic Bias Concerns:

- a. Firms have bias - often ask for Canadian Experience so if you don't have this you have little chance of getting an interview. As a result, many are forced to "volunteer" or work for a nominal wage in order to gain experience.
- b. Age or being "overqualified" by having worked on larger projects in country of origin
- c. Lack of understanding of the BEFA program amongst architects so firms are more comfortable hiring people from the IAP program vs BEFA
- d. Resume approach in Canada different than some other countries, especially for architecture, so applicants may be setting things up in a way that is detrimental to finding a job
- e. Some employers take advantage of newcomers unsure of their worth and value within the profession by having them work as "volunteers" in order to gain a foothold within the Canadian job market.

3.1.4. Need for Advocacy

Accommodating to a new country is accompanied by a real sense of fatigue, despondency, and inadequacy, and the combination of the above issues plus lack of networking and mentorship opportunities often leads to isolation. Not having contact with others who are now navigating or have already navigated this daunting task leads to a loss of perspective as well as issues of uncertainty and insecurity.

As we know, Becoming an architect in Canada is a challenge for those educated and trained here. Given the additional obstacles faced by would-be architects from other countries, advocacy and networking are vital to their success.

3.2. CASE STUDIES

As part of our research, we are taking a closer look at some of the individuals who have participated in our organization and look to us for support and leadership. Not surprisingly, the majority of foreign educated/licensed professionals we have encountered originate from the middle east. Social and political upheavals, wars, and economic hardship drive this brain drain.

3.2.1. Sogol Rabeie, Iran:

Background

My name is Sogol Rabeie. I came to Canada 2.5 years ago on an open-work-permit, just before COVID started. I was not aware that I had to be an registered intern architect to work in my field. I had to go through the process of CACB to get my degree accredited.

My path to Licensure

I didn't know anyone in Canada, so I started making connections on LinkedIn. No one was mentioning CACB, either they didn't know about it or it was too expensive to even mention it. Many people suggested a program called IPLAN by JVS Toronto, but I couldn't register since I was on a open-work-permit. I even asked everyone about CACB and OAA, but they all preferred to work as a technologist and didn't bother with getting licensed.

Regardless, I decided to apply to CACB. It took more than 6 months to get my CACB certification because of COVID. Plus, it costs too much, especially for a newcomer. After I got my CACB certificate, I registered for OAA as an intern.

Finding a job

Once I was an OAA Intern Architect, I got more job interviews and call backs. After a year of being in Toronto, being alone and isolated due to COVID, I finally found a job as an intern architect. But the problem was that I was working for free. It was really challenging for me as a

newcomer not to have a job for a year and even when I got one I wasn't getting paid. Nevertheless I was thankful to start my journey. It goes without saying that every employer was looking for Canadian experience, and the volunteer work I did helped a lot with that. I took a lot of online courses for skills that I already had to obtain the certifications for my resume. The problem was that they needed the experience that I had in my home country, but they didn't accept the certificates I already had. After 6 months of volunteer work I was finally able to find a real paying job.

IAP Program

I was lucky because I was working in a smaller company and was able to collect hours in the categories that other people struggle with. My first supervisor helped me with finding my first mentor, but I had a hard time reaching her. So I tried getting help from OAA to find a new mentor, but the problem was that the list that they gave me was outdated and it didn't help me much. Therefore my second supervisor helped me find my second mentor, which was a big help.

Advocacy

I got a lot of help from the Iranian community in my path. They have online forums, and they help you with the process, but the problem is that it's not diverse. I'm sure every community has some kind of support system but I think that we need a source for everyone. A source that is legit and you can trust 100%.

3.2.2. Hasan Elghayesh, Egypt :

Background

My name is Hassan Elghayesh. I am a registered intern architect with the OAA. I will talk about my prior experience in my home country and my experience so far as a Foreign Licensed Architect maneuvering my way to licensure.

My home country is Egypt. I did my Bachelor's Degree in Cairo. A bachelor degree in Architecture is 5 years after which you are automatically registered as an Architect. I worked briefly as a technical office Architect. I then shifted my career to teaching, I taught undergraduate architecture courses for two years. I received my Master's degree from University of Liechtenstein in 2017. It was a great experience but I came out of it more interested in practicing than teaching. I returned to Egypt to work as a project architect for 2 years.

I applied to come to Canada as a federal skilled worker. It is a point-based system in which many factors are taken into consideration (Profession, Age, Level of Education ... etc.) Once your points are calculated you are added to the pool of people hoping to immigrate to Canada. The Canadian government then chooses the candidates with the highest points in the pool. Once I was chosen, I started doing proper research on the profession in Canada. In the first few weeks, it was very confusing trying to find information. It was hard to believe that the process of becoming an architect is so long. As I mentioned before, In Egypt once you are done with your studies you can start practicing right away. This is the same as in Liechtenstein/Switzerland where I studied. I was so confused at this point that I was looking for

Architect jobs and applying for them not knowing that there is a long process of licensure in Canada. Only 4 months before coming to Canada I came to realize that I have to get certification and apply for intern architect jobs. I came to know about this from my own research on online forums of people applying to come to Canada. These forums held more valuable information than the Canada immigration website. The forums were categorized in a way that was easy to navigate. I navigated to the architecture sub-forum and the path to licensure was described there by people who had arrived in Canada and had started the process.

My path to Licensure

There were a number of options for FLA. In My case, I did not have a lot of experience so I was left with only one option; to apply for certification from the CACB, register with a provincial Association and fulfill the hours, and take the ExAC. The first challenge was securing the money to apply for certification. When applying to come to Canada, you have to hold about 12,000 dollars in your bank account to prove you are able to support yourself for your first few months in Canada. So with this 12,000 dollars held up, securing 3,000 dollars more was very hard for someone who makes a wage in Egypt. Another challenge was getting my documents from my undergraduate University in Egypt. Record keeping is not the best, so I basically had to go every day and try to work something out with the administration of the university to have the papers sent. I ended up bringing the document with me to Canada and taking it to the CACB office in Ottawa, this set me back quite a bit and I was looking at a 6 months wait for certification. In retrospect, I think the problem was the lack of information on the Canada immigration website where the resources to help us find jobs do not include information specifically for architects. I thought there would be synergy between immigration Canada and CACB. Immigration Canada sent emails all the time about how to get a driver's license, how to deal with the weather, how to find lodging. Yet they did not communicate with me on what I need to do to become an architect in Canada.

Finding a job

The situation was complicated. I had arrived in Canada, was waiting for my certification and could not practice architecture. I had to find employment in any way. I started working in a coffee shop and also secured a job as a bank teller. As a newcomer, I was also connected to an employment agency for newcomers 'OCISO'. I went to meet them and they told me they had a new program called the 'Foreign Credential Recognition Program' that would help me as an architect. The program was to assign a mentor from the profession to each newcomer. On our first group meeting I realized it was also for accountants and lawyers. They were able to secure a mentor for each person except me - it was hard to find an architect interested in mentoring a newcomer. During that same time, I met with a number of Egyptians. Some were architects in Egypt and shifted careers in Canada; their advice was to not pursue architecture and to get a PMP and be a project manager. They said it was not worth it to spend much time and effort on certification and licensing. Many times, I doubted my ability to continue with the process of certification. It took effort and determination to stay focused on becoming an architect.

After 6 months I got my certification. was able to register with the OAA and use the OAA website to look for jobs. I was not lucky on my first round of applications in Ottawa and Toronto. On my second round of applications, I started applying to Offices all over Ontario. It was not ideal but I thought it would be less competitive and would be a good way to get a foot in then move to Ottawa or Toronto. It took a month before I was called for my first Interview. I was hired as an intern architect in North Bay. I did not ask for a good salary, I felt very insecure

about my abilities because my architecture experience did not seem to be relevant, and this insecurity affected my judgment. I know now I could have asked for more. I consider myself very lucky to have found a job. I was also lucky to have a mentor, an acquaintance who has been practicing in Canada since the early 2000s. We met one time before starting the job and we remained in contact by phone through COVID.

IAP Program

My experience in the architecture firm has been positive. I still aspire to move to a bigger office but for now I feel settled. My experience from Egypt has proven very helpful when it comes to Schematic Design and Design Development. There are no resources for FLA in our office but everybody is extremely helpful in sharing their expertise. I owe a lot to the technologists in the firm who instruct me in detailing, estimating and tendering. Detailing is one of the things I struggled with the most in Canada.

Challenges

My main concern is not getting a lot of one-on-one time with the Principal Architect. We are a small office and it is hard to sit down for a proper review of my designs. I think I am well on my way to licensing and should be done in 2 more years. I think a lot about my experience in Egypt and how it was dismissed. I wonder whether at one point FLA will be able to claim a certain amount of hours from their work in their home countries through a process that is reasonable and fair. Architects who do not qualify for BEFA have to start all over. I fall into that category and I am taking the longest route to licensure. What I realized is ... I have to be extremely determined to do it.

3.2.3. Ehsan Jahani, Iran :

Background

I migrated to Canada on the federal skilled workers program. I left Iran as a PhD student, with my master's degree from Oxford Brookes University in the UK. I held an architectural license back home, with more than 8 years of international experience. But all that didn't help much.

My path to Licensure

I had researched the path to licensure before arriving in Canada using the OAA website for 2 months by myself with no one to help me. After that I decided to go with the IAP program. Getting the CACB certification was the first and the easiest step for me, the challenges started after that. I had my CACB certification before arriving in Canada. But still no job, no mentor, no supervisor,... Even when I managed to find a job there were no proper working hours. I also faced challenges with OAA regulations and policies in regards to the time in IAP, and we all faced challenges for COVID.

Finding a job

I couldn't find a job in the architectural field for the first year, and none of the employment agencies referred to by Immigration Canada would help me, because I had no Canadian experience. So I decided to take the IPLAN program, but even after that I had to work for free for 8 months to open some doors in the market for myself and gain some Canadian experience.

Finding a mentor wasn't easy either. I managed to find a mentor at a workshop held by the OAA.

My experience at the workplace was not great. I felt like a slave, I had to work for free. On top of that I had to commute from Aurora to downtown Toronto out of the pocket as a newcomer.

IAP Program

Even though the projects were large, I was only able to log a handful of hours in each CERB category.

I had to jump from firm to another firm over and over to find the needed IAP hours for completing the program. One of the firms was an engineering firm, and the hours were not accepted by OAA.

Challenges

I met a lot of great people along the way, but I think too many policies and regulations made this profession like traveling to Mars. I wish I would have chosen to be an astronaut in Canada, I am sure that would be easier. My perspective is that the architectural profession is not well paid in Canada and all these policies make me think that it's not worth it. And all the resources for FLA are limited to the IAP Program. The amount of time and effort required for me to complete this journey has been a huge challenge, and an experience I hope I never have to repeat.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Who can help?

There are public and private, formal and informal entities which can coordinate efforts in order to provide the much-needed support include :

4.1.1. GOVERNMENTS

- a. Reach out to individuals as they go through the process of coming to Canada
 - i. Connect with the Federal government about reaching out to foreign educated/ trained architects
 - ii. Create videos about living/working in Canada (Federal Gov't has open-source website with general helpful videos for new immigrants) - these could also be live sessions
- b. Coordinate efforts between Federal and Provincial governments as well as Regulators in order to provide early outreach to back to foreign educated/licensed architects who are new to the country

4.1.2. PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- a. CACB
 - i. Help applicants network by connecting people with others from their university/country in order to provide them with guidance in completing their application
 - ii. Clarify what to do if you're missing a course (or just missing a couple of hours) - how do you complete these hours?
 - iii. Have a page for foreign educated/licensed individuals which lists the local/national organizations available for support along with a brief summary of what they offer
 - iv. Allow applicants to utilize experience garnered both outside of Canada as well as inside Canada towards credit hours
 - v. A positive measure implemented by CACB is that they have helped to streamline the application process by referring to existing records of applicants in situations where a new applicant shares the same educational background (same year/university)
- b. Regulators (ROAC)
 - i. Provide support to applicants in finding jobs
 - ii. Develop strategy to prevent firms don't take advantage of newcomers desperate for Canadian experience by having them work for free
 - iii. Liaise with CACB to provide contact and, potentially, mentorship as applicants go through the process of certification
 - iv. BC has a program to help guide professionals coming to Canada called the Broadly Experienced Applicant (BEA)

Program administered by AIBC⁸. ROAC currently has three committees : CACB, IRC (International Relations Committee), and CExAC. Having BEA offered on a national level through CACB would be a substantive measure of support.

- v. Include a page on regulator websites for foreign educated/licensed individuals which lists the local/national organizations available for support, along with a brief summary of what they offer. The TSA has one which could be emulated⁹.

4.1.3. ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

- ii. Connect and coordinate with each other so that they are able to provide references to other organizations for additional support, training, networking, etc.
- iii. Assemble a list of frequently asked questions to clarify with CACB and disseminate this information
- iv. Hold events with members of the profession in attendance in order to provide opportunities for discussion and networking
- v. Have chat rooms or forums on their website for connecting, networking, sharing experiences and tips
- vi. Have a website page for educated/licensed individuals on which to disseminate relevant information
- vii. Address issues with getting hired
 - i. Explain what BEFA is and what the alternatives entail
 - ii. Help with Resumes/Portfolios via Workshops, a Tips Document, etc.

5. BAC-DAC initiatives

We recognize that as a national advocacy organization dedicated to promoting and supporting licensure, we will need to play a key role in promoting and incorporating our recommendations.

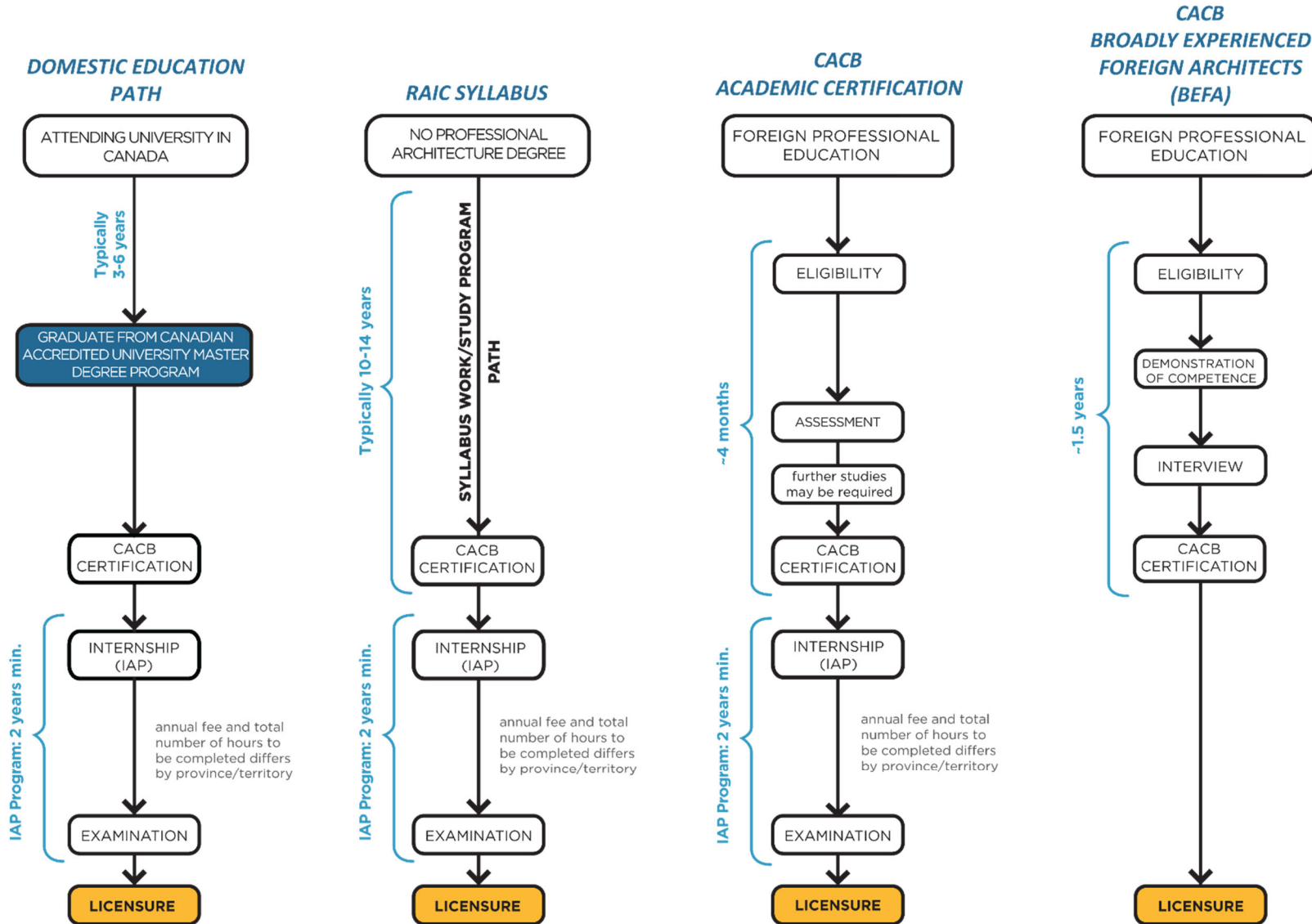
5.1. Current initiatives include:

- 5.1.1. Continuing the research which this paper is based on and presenting it as a Webinar with a workshop component
- 5.1.2. Virtual Resume Support/Networking Event Wednesday July 20, 2022
- 5.1.3. In-Person Architectural Networking Event in Ottawa, Sat, Aug 11, 2022
- 5.1.4. We are developing a “Paths to Licensure” diagram, with input from the CACB, RAIC and ROAC. This diagram is a visual summary of the alternative paths to licensure in Canada. We anticipate completing the review process and finalizing it for dissemination by the end of this summer.

⁸ <https://aibc.ca/registration/become-an-architect-aibc/alternative-qualifications/#:~:text=Administered%20by%20the%20AIBC%2C%20the,British%20Columbia%20under%20a%20Mutual>

⁹ <https://torontosocietyofarchitects.ca/resources-for-internationally-trained-architectural-professionals/>

PATHS TO ARCHITECTURAL LICENSURE IN CANADA



5.2. Upcoming initiatives:

- 5.2.1. Establish a presence on the Canada Immigration Website
- 5.2.2. Create a page on our website for International educated/licensed architects
- 5.2.3. Compile a listing of support/advocacy organizations by province
- 5.2.4. Present Webinars on topics such as the Building Envelope which will be useful to those with experience in different climates
- 5.2.5. Create a diagram to summarize the options for coming to Canada to pursue a future in Architecture (Study permit, open/closed work permit, Express Entry, Provincial Nomination, etc.)

6. CONCLUSION

The theme of an Architecture Continuum which requires collaboration, education, and integration applies as much - if not more - to the career of individuals who come to Canada with degrees and licenses from international countries. They come to us as older individuals, often with families to support, and are faced with competing with Canadian born and educated colleagues for a foothold in the profession. Their aspiration for a fresh start and a better life comes at great cost and encounters numerous and varied obstacles.

We are a nation which recognizes and acts on the need for the influx of immigrants in order to maintain population and economic growth. Our profession is faced with the reality that in order to sustain and grow, we need to institute broader and more effective measures to ensure the success of newcomers. We need to collaborate on further educating those who come to our shores to practice architecture - and we cannot restrict our efforts solely to those who already hold an architectural license. Rather, we need to institute a systematic network to attract, inform, and support Internationally trained and licensed individuals to become architects.