

Charting New Pathways for Fairness and Equity

By Bruce Millar and Maria Tretiakova

The End of the Beginning:

After 4 years and 9 months the Pathways Project has come to an end, at least as a Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration funded operation. Pathways was a very ambitious project attempting to completely change the way Internationally Educated Professionals (IEPs), who wanted to obtain licensure with the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors (AOLS) were assessed.

The existing system relied on the assessment of Candidates through a course-based system requiring Candidates to provide documentation of the courses and their content from their own countries. An attempt was then made by the AOLS assessor to determine if the course content was consistent with similar courses offered in Canada. This process was acknowledged to be impersonal and somewhat ineffective. Course-based comparisons are very problematic as even in Ontario, it is difficult to find congruity across university courses and programs. This is because the courses, even those with similar names, can and do differ substantially in content and emphasis. As a result, many (perhaps the majority) of Candidates were required to take a significant number of courses at either Ryerson University or York University to ensure that essential requirements were covered. Once Candidates received their assessment letter from the Academic and Experience Requirements Committee (AERC) they were left on their own to complete the requirements and contact between the Candidates and the AOLS was minimal.

New tools, processes and methodologies were created and applied to the licensure process in order to establish positive relationships between the AOLS and Candidates. These relationships allowed Candidates to feel supported as they navigated the challenging process of certification while adjusting and familiarizing themselves with the Canadian social and working environment. These relationships also allowed the AOLS to keep track of Candidates' progress which permitted intervention as required. Furthermore, the AOLS was able to forecast when Candidates would become eligible for Articling which would bring them a step closer to their swearing in ceremony.

The Project introduced the concept and practice of a "Competency Based Assessment" (CBA) which was implemented in a multi-step process. The first step was to identify all of the competencies required to successfully function as an OLS. The identified competencies were thoroughly reviewed and classified into three categories:

- Enduring knowledge or those competencies that an individual would absolutely have to have mastered in order to function as an OLS.
- Need to know or those competencies that an individual would need to know in order to function within their workplace. An

example would be that an OLS working in the Timmins area would need to have a solid understanding of the Mining Act and the elements of working in the mining sector.

- Nice to know or those competencies that would benefit a person within their work, such as the use of new equipment and systems.

The second phase of this part of the project included listing all of the competencies and the identification of reference and resource materials to assist Candidates in understanding the individual areas.

A completely new assessment process meant to support CBA was developed. This process allowed Candidates to receive as much recognition of their previous learning and experience as possible while ensuring the rigour and standards of the OLS Profession in Ontario. The new assessment process provided Candidates with options and supports that were previously non-existent.

The initial change within the process begins with the intake process that among other features and applications, identified Candidates with Language issues, and offered assistance and support to organize their documentation into a Portfolio format. Pre-assessment meeting(s) between Candidates and the assessor allow for a direct assessment of the Candidate's command of the various competencies and competency groupings and provide an opportunity to identify areas where further study and or experience is required.

With these changes in assessment, new competency based reporting forms were developed for use by the AERC. Previously, assessments listed only required courses which meant that Candidates were taking full courses, when in reality they may only be missing a handful of the competencies covered by a particular course. The option and means now exist which allow Candidates to participate in partial courses and focus on those knowledge areas identified by the competency based assessment.

Another key process that has been implemented is the Learning Plan developed in collaboration with the Candidate, Assessor, and AOLS Case Manager and designed to develop a path or map to achieve what is required for the Candidate to undertake to complete his/her academic requirements.

The Pathways Project's approach incorporated Adult Learner Friendly Institutions (ALFI) principles which denote that adults learn and adjust differently to mastering competencies than do young students taking the traditional path through the educational system.

Most adults and virtually all IEPs have families and survival jobs and taking courses imposes extra stress on them. In addition to the cost of enrolment, there is the cost of time off work,

transportation, and supply costs. Virtually all post-secondary organizations require a learner to be in a particular geographic location, at a specific time for the opportunity to have a “professor” lecture. Oh and, by the way, if there aren’t enough students to cover the costs, the course isn’t offered.

Pathways started the movement to reduce the negative impact of courses by addressing four key factors: Place Bound; Time Bound; Role Bound and Efficiency Bound. Municipal Planning, Professional Communications, Introduction to Canadian Common Law as well as Survey Law 1 and 2 are now offered in Blended/Hybrid configurations. These courses are offered in a blended format with some Learners in a class and others on-line thus easing the impact on Candidates.

Pathways attempted to infect the AOLS membership and head office with a beneficial virus that stressed the absolute need for moving learning, knowledge, and development into a top priority. As a Social Enterprise whose mission is to: Protect the Public, Support Membership and Advance the Profession, becoming a Learning Organization is critical. Pathways advocated for the use of competency systems, not only for IEPs but for Professional development and recruitment.

Of note is the wonderful initiative by the AERC with respect to the Articling Process. Essential Areas of Knowledge are yet another way of describing “competencies”. The migration of Learning Plans into this process is unique, effective and commendable.

The future is now in the hands of the membership. There will

be resources required to continue to implement and refine the tools, methodologies and processes that were introduced during the Project’s 3 phases. There will need to be a resolve on the part of champions, to continue to modernize and rethink the importance of learning support and relationship building for members and aspiring members. It will require resource decisions and process decisions to ensure that the hard work of the Pathways Team does not stall. The Team has worked hard to get this change started. Like all aspects of change, things tend not to happen as quickly as the Team would have liked, but the change has started.

The AOLS has an opportunity here. This is only the end of the beginning. Public support has gotten the AOLS over the costly hump of initiating change and now success will be measured in an improvement in the number of IEPs achieving licensure with the AOLS and in the reduction of the time it takes for an IEP to join the profession. 

Bruce Millar has been the Project manager for the Pathways to Fairness and Equity Project for the past five years. He has been involved in Adult Learning and Recognizing Prior Learning (RPL) for more than 30 years. As President of Kente Bay Holdings, he served as CEO of seven companies, including serving as the founding President of First Nations Technical Institute. Bruce can be reached at brucemillar@sympatico.ca
Maria Tretiakova joined the Pathways Project team in March 2013 as a Project Coordinator. She is a recent Queen’s University graduate who has previously worked at the Canadian Defence Academy with the Department of National Defence.