

Building a Pan-Canadian Consensus on Quality Assurance for Degree Programs

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In recent years, the degree-granting landscape in Canada has become more complex than it was twenty years ago. Four of the ten Canadian provinces have opened their doors to external degree providers, public and private. Three provinces have enabled their colleges to offer undergraduate degree programs and “hybrid” institutions offering both diplomas and degrees have developed. The public universities have become more entrepreneurial, among other things offering “Executive MBAs” whose academic standing and transferability are uncertain and sending their programs across provincial boundaries through various forms of distance delivery. In far greater numbers, external universities are also projecting their programs into Canada by electronic and correspondence means. In short, it is becoming increasingly difficult to determine at a glance the legitimacy, credibility or transferability of many new academic credentials.

It used to be simpler—all degrees in Canada were offered by public universities, and the universities’ public standing and similarity of mission and governance structure were taken to be sufficient gauges of quality. However, the emergence of new degree programs, some of them offered by single-program providers, and of new private degree-granting institutions, some of them for-profit in nature, has raised questions about their character and quality. Though the public universities generally operate with implicit rather than explicit academic standards and do not uniformly follow ideal quality assurance practices, they see themselves as the guardians of academic quality and they are widely seen in society as such. Thus, the challenge of establishing the academic credibility of the new institutions and programs is essentially that of engaging the public universities in a dialogue about academic standards and quality assurance procedures that would satisfy them that the new programs and institutions are of adequate quality.

This paper describes an important inter-provincial governmental initiative to address the quality assurance of degree programs in Canada, beginning with the standards that governments themselves should adopt in making decisions to approve new degree programs or new degree granting institutions. This paper describes the origins, course and initial consequences of the interprovincial initiative on quality assurance for degree granting.

The Canadian Context

As in most federations, the primary responsibility for education in Canada rests with regional governments, in this case, ten provinces and three territories. There is no federal or national department of education. The phrase “pan-Canadian” is used to indicate that nation-wide forms of cooperation are those agreed upon or created by the provinces and

territories. Though the Council of Education Ministers, Canada (CMEC) occasionally establishes a consensus on some key issues, such as the transferability of credits and the mutual recognition of credentials, its authority is essentially moral. None of its decisions are binding on the provinces or territories, and they pay varying degrees of heed to the words they approve in pan-Canadian meetings. And nothing the Council does has any binding force on Canadian universities or other degree-granting institutions. Thus, pan-Canadian cooperation in higher education amounts to shifting coalitions of the willing, first among the provinces, and second among degree-granting institutions.

Higher education in Canada began with religiously-affiliated colleges in the eastern regions of the country. Public universities came later. In some cases the religious colleges became public institutions; in other cases, the public universities were created de novo. The greatest changes in this regard occurred in the wake of the Second World War, notably in the 1960s, when the participation rate soared, older universities grew greatly in enrolment, and new public ones were established. Changing needs and participation rates in the 1960s also led to the establishment of college systems across the country. Their character differs markedly, but they all offer terminal career preparation programs at the diploma level and most offer university-transfer programs as well.

From the 1960s to the 1990s a binary approach to higher education flourished, with universities offering degrees and colleges offering diplomas. To stabilize the new institutions, governments discouraged creation of new private universities and regulated or denied approval for programs offered by out-of-jurisdiction degree-granting institutions.

A More Complex Degree-Granting Landscape

The growing complexity in the degree-granting landscape in Canada derives from a medley of changes.

To begin with the public universities, they have become increasingly entrepreneurial, expanding activities across jurisdictional boundaries in Canada and elsewhere; they have introduced entire degrees by distance education means; they are offering increasing numbers of degree programs in partnership with foreign institutions or in partnership with colleges; they have turned forms of customized or contracted learning into “Executive MBAs” and other applied degree credentials; “deregulated” fees have led to some programs being run on a cost recovery basis, though some of the deregulated tuition fees may exceed what it would cost a private organization to offer the same program. Today, in recognition of the diminishing role of operating grants and the growing role of tuition fees in their revenues, most universities describe themselves as “publicly supported” rather than as public institutions.

Similarly, the public colleges have also become degree granting in several parts of Canada. In 1989, British Columbia began the process by expanding the mandate of some its colleges, those with already existing junior college functions as well as career programs, to include degree programs. The new, hybrid institutions became known as

“university colleges.” They were offered the usual array of baccalaureate programs as well as some described as “applied degrees” because they were oriented to particular career program requirements. In 1995, Alberta permitted its colleges and technical institutes also to offer “applied degrees,” though not more general undergraduate degrees. In 2001, Ontario approved legislation enabling its 24 public colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in applied areas of study, not as an automatic entitlement but on the basis of applications for particular programs that undergo a quality assessment and are approved by the Minister. Thus, an array of so-called hybrid colleges has emerged, though with different characteristics in each province.

For a variety of reasons, having to do largely with the fact that public university systems were greatly expanded in the 1960s and governments wanted to dampen down ambitions for yet more public universities or the conversion of yet more private universities into public ones, they placed a *de facto* embargo on the establishment of secular private universities to permit the new public systems to consolidate. But this could not and did not last.

In 1989, Alberta became the first province to permit new private, secular degree-granting organizations to operate. This was to be done on the basis of ministerial consent in each case, rather than via legislation for each institution. Applicants were required to subject their organizations and programs to review by an arms-length agency, the Private Colleges Accreditation Board. (In 2004, the Board was folded into a new agency, the Campus Alberta Quality Council.)

Ontario followed in 2000 with the *Post-Secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act* that enabled any organization now empowered by an Ontario statute to offer degree programs or to use the word “university” to apply for ministerial consent to do so, following a review by a new arms-length agency, the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board. The applicants consist of all private and out-of-jurisdiction institutions, all of the public colleges wanting to offer baccalaureate degrees in applied fields of study, and a new public university whose degree-conferring authority has not yet been proclaimed. As a matter of ministerial policy, another category of private applicant consists of religious colleges with Ontario statutes wishing to change their mandates to include secular degrees—e.g., in education. , 2000. In order to get government support for a change to their legislation, they are required to go through two five-year cycles of review by the Board.

In 2002, British Columbia also passed legislation, its *Degree Authorization Act*, opening up its postsecondary education market to private providers. As in Alberta and Ontario, all applications are reviewed by an arms-length agency, the Degree Quality Assessment Board. Subsequently, the province of New Brunswick also began to permit private institutions to offer degrees in its jurisdiction, though on the basis of government review rather than on the basis of an arms-length quality assurance agency.

Thus, a variety of new private and out-of-jurisdiction degree providers have begun operating in Canada. They include *de novo* and existing, for-profit and not-for-profit, traditional *in situ* and distance learning institutions.

Apart from the new degree providers, the landscape of degree granting has been further complicated by the fact that the three new government-based quality assurance agencies in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario must operate transparently and fairly, which means that they have to publish standards, procedures, post applications, and make public reports on outcomes of their processes. The agencies have full-time secretariats that beaver away on articulating standards and procedures. Their web sites are routinely trolled by thousands of people a month—in the case of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board in Ontario, it oscillates between 30,000 and 50,000 hits a month—by people both within our own institutions and around the world wanting to see what applications are under consideration, what standards and procedures are being used to assess them, and what the outcome are. It seems fair to conclude that the existence of the agencies and their transparency in dealing with new degree program providers has heightened interest in the standards being met and the procedures used in the public universities.

Pan-Canadian Initiatives

It was in this broad context that the three provinces with quality assurance agencies (British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario) held a meeting of agency board members and ministry officials in February 2004 to discuss the fit between their standards and procedures, to share best practice, and identify issues arising from the activities of the new agencies. The meeting was well attended by officials from other provinces. It was instantly evident that quality assurance was of general concern. A working group was struck at the meeting to make suggestions on how to proceed at a pan-Canadian level.

The working group, turn, recommended that the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), through its advisory council of deputy ministers, should establish a fully representative pan-Canadian committee to draft, after consultation with stakeholders:

- (a) a degree qualifications framework describing the general learning outcome competencies expected of degree holders at each level, with a view to articulating threshold degree standards and enabling credentials to be mapped against one another;
- (b) standards for quality assurance reviews of sufficient rigour to generate the confidence of all stakeholders that the standards in the degree qualifications framework and any other standards for programs are met in practice; and
- (c) a pan-Canadian approach to the external validation of the quality of programs based on (a) and (b).

In August 2004 the deputy ministers accepted this recommendation.

The Pan-Canadian Committee on Quality Assurance for Degree Programs first met in September 2004. At that meeting, it made two important decisions:

- To focus on the issues as they relate to *government decisions* (at some point most governments approve new degree-granting institutions and degree programs for funding other purposes) rather than as guidelines for institutional behaviour; and
- To focus on the drafting of a *degree qualifications framework and quality assurance standards and procedures, leaving the question of external validation at the pan-Canadian level for the future.*

The Pan-Canadian Committee also developed consultation documents so that discussions within each jurisdiction would begin with common texts. (**Appendix I.**) The proposed pan-Canadian degree level standards adopted for the exercise are those of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board in Ontario. The degree categories and their descriptions are based on Ontario practice and do not describe all degree structures across Canada. In British Columbia, for example, there are two-year associate degrees and in Alberta there are three-year applied degrees; those are not taken into account in the Ontario documents. The point, however, is not to impose a single degree structure on the country but rather to find a way to describe the degrees that are offered in accord with common descriptors, so that their salient features can be identified and to some extent mapped against one another.

The Ontario Board's degree-level standards themselves were initially borrowed, with permission, from the Quality Assurance Agency of the United Kingdom. The Board needed to begin acting quickly after its establishment, and those standards were the most useful at that point. Over time they have been modified by changes inspired by the qualifications frameworks in other countries—e.g., Australia, New Zealand and Ireland—and adapted to circumstances in Ontario, notably the need to assess programs in applied fields of study. This is why the distinction between supposedly theoretical and applied studies is addressed by the descriptions and to some extent in the degree level standards.

The original schedule envisaged a consultation process that would be completed by the end of 2004, leading to a report and recommendations to the deputy ministers in the spring. Not surprisingly, the consultations of institutions and other stakeholders undertaken by the provincial ministries took more time than that, with the result that the deadline for receiving feedback from institutions and stakeholders was deferred to March 31, 2005. (**Appendix II.**) The new target is to have a report and recommendation ready for consideration by the deputy ministers and the Council of Ministers of Education in September 2005.

Process Comments

As this first phase of the project has taken longer than anticipated, I am not able to report on the results I was intending to present at this point. Instead, perhaps I can comment on the process and the general topography of responses from stakeholders. I will make just two points about process.

First, there are challenges arising from the requirement to consult stakeholders through ten separate ministries. Consultation through multiple bureaucracies opens the potential

for fragmented, incomplete and inconsistent communications, and we have seen some of that. The Committee tried to offset the possibility that some ministries would consult certain stakeholders—e.g., students' or faculty associations—that others did not by agreeing on the range of stakeholders to be consulted. Within weeks it turned out that the agreement was being interpreted differently by the provinces, leading to concerns that the process in some cases was excluding stakeholders who were being consulted elsewhere. As a result, some provinces adjusted their consultations to ensure that no feels excluded from the process. The point I want to stress is not the details but rather the sheer challenge of herding ten provincial bureaucracies all in the same direction.

The second challenge has been changing personnel. Two of the three deputy ministers who were behind the project at the outset have taken on other responsibilities. Some assistant deputy ministers, directors and senior policy analysts have changed along the way. The leading administrators for CMEC have taken new jobs elsewhere, including the official assigned to this project. To try to keep everyone involved on the same page, the Committee has held teleconference meetings. Those will no doubt multiply now that the feedback period is at an end and the drafting of the final report and recommendations must be tackled.

Stakeholder Responses

As I have not seen all of the stakeholder responses, I am not in a position to provide a comprehensive picture of the responses to the consultation. I have seen enough however, to comment generally on what appear to be the major arguments being offered.

The comments tend to reflect the context from which they came—whether, for example, from a province where there are no new universities, no degree-granting colleges, no private or out-of-jurisdiction operators, or from a province where those are lively issues; whether they come from a smaller university in which people want to believe their standards are equivalent to those in elite institutions or whether they come from people in elite institutions wanting to be sure their standards are not confused with what they see as the minimal standards elsewhere; whether they come from private or for-profit operators or from public institutions; whether they come from a community college offering a few degree programs or from universities; or whether they come from a province where there are quality assurance agencies already in place, either run by the universities themselves or set up by governments, or from a province without anything but institution- or profession-driven quality assurance.

The discussion of the issues in Canada has reflected a growing though by no means uniform awareness of the current discussion of the degree Qualification Frameworks for Europe. At a time when the quality of education is seen as a competitive advantage globally, many countries are establishing Qualifications Frameworks and government-based quality assurance agencies, and the European Union has announced that it wants to have the highest academic standards in the world in the next decade, some Canadian educators, like those elsewhere, are asking whether there are implications for Canada.

The responses from the public universities, both pro and con, reflect a concern about the implications of governments expressing an interest in quality assurance. By contrast, those from private institutions, colleges, and some other stakeholders, welcome any initiative that might contribute to shared degree level standards and quality assurance procedures because they have something to gain from them, specifically greater recognition by the public, employers and other postsecondary institutions. Let me give some of the flavor of the dialogue.

The only negative comments came from the public universities. The most common points are as follows:

- Governments lack the expertise to address issues of academic quality. Their “need of documents like the Degree Level Qualification Framework to advise them in their decision-making provides a clear indication that governments are entering into a domain of values and judgement for which they are not qualified.” Thus, as one respondent put it, “It is the exercise itself, rather than any of the draft documents, that therefore raises objections.”
- All universities share common standards. Thus, among the “disturbing and erroneous presuppositions” found by one respondent is “that an appropriate and effective harmony of standards and expectations does not already exist across the various educational jurisdictions of this country.” “The Framework merely offers, “in a highly reductive fashion, what ought to be obvious to anyone who has spent even a few years in higher education; indeed, so strong and widely-known is the prevailing North American consensus on degree requirements and aims that one wonders why it has been thought necessary to write it down at all.” From the point of view that all universities share the same standards, there is a danger that publishing minimal standards will cause people to think that they are the actual standards when universities implicitly share higher than minimal standards.
- All universities do not share common standards. From the point of the institutions with the highest admissions standards and aspiring to elite status, indeed, the development of shared standards implies standards written to accommodate less demanding institutions. This entails two dangers. One is the potential confusion in the public mind or in the minds of institutions elsewhere in the world that the published standards are theirs as well. Another is the danger that someone, like governments, may conclude that since all degrees share the same minimal standards admission standards for graduate studies and transfer students should reflect that reality.

At the more positive end of the spectrum of stakeholder responses are these:

From public universities:

- We are already articulating standards and have quality assurance procedures consistent with those outlined in the consultation document. In other words, we see the value of the exercise and share a desire to realize it in our sphere.
- We recognize that governments are interested in accountability and must be seen to holding universities accountable for the quality of their work; therefore, having degree level standards and agreed quality assurance procedures amounts to a way

for both universities and governments to demonstrate they are both acting accountably with respect to program quality.

- It would be useful for such standards to be applied to interlopers in degree granting, such as colleges, private institutions or out-of-province institutions.

From public colleges, private institutions:

- It would be useful for such standards to be applied to all degree-granting institutions because we want the graduates of our programs to receive appropriate credit when they wish to continue their studies or to transfer from one institution to another.
- Shared standards and quality assurance procedures will foster student confidence, both at home and abroad, in the quality of all degree credentials offered in Canada.
- They will also reassure employers and other postsecondary institutions of the worth of our degree credentials.
- Because we are a small institution with a specific focus and draw students from across Canada, and because our students practice in various parts of Canada and require licensure where they wish to practice, our students would benefit from having Canada-wide standards and quality assurance procedures.

Concluding Remarks

It is still too early to say what conclusions the Pan-Canadian Committee will be able to draw from its consultation, but I suspect that there will be enough positive feedback to suggest that the issue should be pursued further. What that further effort might entail is unclear.

One thing we will need to be clear about is the purpose of any Qualifications Framework. I can imagine three uses.

- One is *descriptive*. Here are the degree credentials offered in our jurisdiction and their salient features using descriptors widely used around the world. One can use other descriptors than the ones the Pan-Canadian committee proposed or approach the matter differently, but one advantage of the degree level standards is that they help identify for potential students not only the nature but the relationship of degree credentials to one another.
- Another is *system coordination*. Here are the credentials described in those terms, and how they map against one another. That mapping can provide a context for credential recognition and credit transfer.
- The third is *quality assurance*. Here are the degree level standards against which programs are assessed, and when they meet those standards they are deemed minimally acceptable. To be sure, these need to be supplemented by program specific standards and usually are, whether in the written form and/or peer review.

Here we may learn from the European experience. As I understand it, the Qualifications Framework soon to be approved by the Ministers of Education will be a primarily descriptive document. Standards suitable for quality assurance or system coordination will then be developed by national or sub-national qualifications frameworks. Thus, there will be an onion-skin dimension to the standards—the first layer will describe European

credentials in accord with common descriptors and degree levels, the next layers will serve the other purposes.

In a federal regime like that in Canada, where the provinces have responsibility for education, we may want or need to adopt a similar approach. The initial challenge will be finding a way to establish a pan-Canadian consensus on the description of the degree credentials we offer—the equivalent of what is happening in Europe at the moment.

However, conditions are different from those in Europe. Where the harmonization of standards in Europe is driven in good part by political commitments relating to the development of the European Union, there is no equivalent political commitment to harmonization in Canada. Unlike much though not all of Europe, where there is a history of state direction of higher education, there is no similar experience in Canada, where the universities have considerable autonomy. Unlike Europe, or at least much of it, we have private degree-granting institutions, both not-for-profit and for-profit, and hybrid colleges offering both diplomas and degrees that must be taken into account in matters of quality assurance.

Within a few months we will know whether there is sufficient will and commitment in Canada to develop a shared Qualifications Framework for degrees for primarily descriptive purposes. Should we ever move beyond that level, it will several papers like this to describe the complications!

Appendix I

ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF NEW DEGREE PROGRAMS AND NEW DEGREE-GRANTING INSTITUTIONS

Consultation Document

At its meeting of August 2004 the Advisory Committee of Deputy Ministers of Education (ACDME) established a committee to draft standards and procedures to assist provincial governments in assessing the acceptability of new degree programs and new degree-granting institutions. This document is intended to solicit opinion and advice on these matters.

The committee established by ACDME was asked to consult stakeholders and to draft:

- (d) a degree qualifications framework describing the general learning outcome competencies expected of degree holders at each level, with a view to articulating threshold degree standards and enabling credentials to be mapped against one another;
- (e) standards for quality assurance reviews of sufficient rigour to generate the confidence of all stakeholders that the standards in the degree qualifications framework and any other standards for programs are met in practice.¹

Governments share the desire of students, parents, employers and postsecondary institutions to be able to understand and assess the level and quality of new degrees and of new degree-granting institutions. In the context of a dynamic and ever more varied degree-granting environment in Canada, determining the level and the quality of new degree credentials is of concern to provincial and territorial governments that must make decisions relating to them. Two key issues prompted this concern.

1. In the context of a growing international trade in educational services in which quality assurance standards and procedures are a major marketing theme, Canada may be disadvantaged in attracting foreign students and exporting programs abroad. Our universities and other degree-granting institutions must compete in a global context in which other countries not only assess programs against published standards at home but also assess them when offered at foreign sites.

- Although some provinces have arm's length quality assurance agencies and some professions and regulated fields have national accrediting bodies, there is no pan-Canadian consensus on a degree qualifications framework and standards for assessing the quality of degree programs and institutions that offer them. This is rare among advanced countries.
- Increasing international trade in educational services has included the expansion of "degree mills" into Canada and other countries, underlining the need for clear standards and appropriate quality assurance both at home and abroad. Accreditation protocols in the home jurisdiction are increasingly being used by other jurisdictions as the simplest means to distinguish between legitimate and unscrupulous degree program providers. As Canada moves increasingly toward the export of its programs, it may be expected to identify the standards and procedures used for quality assurance.

¹ The ACDME also asked the committee to consider "a pan-Canadian approach to the external validation of the quality of programs based on (a) and (b)." However, the committee has concluded that that is a separate task requiring a separate discussion and consultation. The current consultation focuses on standards for government decisions.

- Internationally, the trend in quality assurance is toward assessing academic quality in terms of program learning outcomes, published standards, and transparent assessment procedures and outcomes. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was established in 1991 to collect and disseminate information on current and developing theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education. INQAAHE currently has membership from agencies representing sixty-five countries, fifty-eight of which have formal quality assessment requirements at the institutional and/or program levels.
- In 2003, the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published guidelines on quality provision in cross-border higher education that acknowledge the “need for new international initiatives to enhance quality provision in cross-border higher education at a global level by further strengthening quality assurance, accreditation and recognition of qualifications schemes at both national and international levels.”

2. In response to rising demand for degree programming, degree-granting has become more complex in Canada, increasing the need for the establishment of quality assurance procedures and standards. Graduates of such programs require the acceptance of their degrees by employers, licensing and professional bodies, and other post-secondary institutions as a pre-requisite to further studies.

- In recent years new degree-granting institutions have emerged, and new degree programs and degree nomenclatures have multiplied. There are new public universities, new private universities and degree-granting institutions, public colleges offering both diplomas and degrees, non-resident institutions, and distance delivery universities operating in various parts of Canada—or in all of it.
- Four provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Ontario) have permitted private degree-granting institutions, including for-profit institutions, to develop or operate. Three provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario) have enabled their colleges to offer degree or applied degree programs. Degree-completion partnerships have multiplied between colleges and Canadian and American universities.
- It is easy to anticipate that still more institutions and programs will emerge as Canadian society grows and changes. The question of how the new degree credentials fit into the context of existing credentials is a natural matter of concern to students, postsecondary institutions, employers, and governments. As mobile Canadians expect their learning achievements to be recognized by postsecondary institutions and employers across Canada and in other countries, the impact of the changing postsecondary scene will sooner or later affect all provinces and territories.

Following are two draft documents --Degree Level Qualifications Framework, and Procedures and Standards for a) Program Quality Assessment, and b) Institutional Assessment. In addition to assisting governments in making decisions about new programs and institutions, such standards should also seek to address the needs of:

- students in making informed choices and mapping out lifelong learning pathways;
- post-secondary institutions in determining how new credentials fit with their standards for credential recognition, credit transfer, and admission to further study;
- students, parents, employers, post-secondary institutions, governments and others in comparing standards across jurisdictional boundaries;

- students, parents, employers, post-secondary institutions, governments and others in determining and describing the level and quality of degree credentials;
- employers in determining the competency levels of graduates.

Your suggestions for improvement in the clarity and appropriateness of the framework and standards are appreciated.

Part 1: Degree Level Qualifications Framework

Degree qualifications frameworks are either in place or are being developed in many countries. They focus on the learning outcome competencies of graduates at each degree level that are transferable to work, further study, or other activities. Those general competencies are not subject-dependent. They are meant to be found in any graduate at a given degree level. The point is not to impose a common content on programs but to articulate the general competencies expected of anyone graduating with a degree at the same level. Program quality assessment may include other matters, such as the adequacy of the content and learning outcomes for any specific program. Those are not intended to be captured in nor to substitute for the Degree Level Qualifications Framework standards.

The attached example of a Degree Level Qualifications Framework is based on similar statements developed in some provinces and in other jurisdictions. It is not intended to suggest a degree structure for all provinces but to suggest a way of describing each degree level in ways that facilitate both quality assurance and comparability. If your province has a different degree structure, that means that a column would be needed in the chart for any other degree levels, with descriptors appropriate to its location on the grid of credentials.

Part 1A *describes* degrees in terms of their purpose, length, etc. Here is where other degree levels would need to be described in terms of their purpose and nature.

Part 1B *sets out the degree level standards* in terms of the competency levels found under each “descriptor” (the category of competency down the left-hand side). The addition of other degree levels will require the descriptors to be completed. Like its counterparts in other jurisdictions, Part B includes two important characteristics:

- Degree levels are separated from one another by their proximity to the frontier of the discipline or field—that is, to the creation of new knowledge, the capacity to criticize and modify fundamental assumptions and methodologies, the capacity to work autonomously. Each degree level is a line drawn across the continuum from learning established bodies of knowledge and methodologies to developing new knowledge or innovative professional behaviour.
- Degree levels are also described in general learning outcome skills transferable to other settings—employment, further study, professional or occupational behaviour.

Questions:

- **Does Part 1A describe adequately the degrees offered in your province? If not, what changes would be needed to do so?**
- **Do the competency levels identified in Part 1B adequately capture degree-level standards that should be applied to new degree programs? If not, what changes would be needed to do so?**
- **How might the standards in Part 1B be improved for assessing the quality and level of new degree programs?**

Part 1A. Degree Level Qualifications Framework

DESCRIPTIONS OF DEGREE CATEGORIES

The following descriptions are intended to capture the most general aspects of the respective degree levels. It is to be understood, however, that each of these degrees and degree levels applies to an extremely broad spectrum of disciplines and program types.

Some general and honours/specialist baccalaureate degrees are in fields that are very practically oriented (e.g., archaeology, chemistry, geology, microbiology, zoology), while some applied programs are in disciplines that are heavily knowledge and research based (e.g., applied psychology, applied mathematics, applied linguistics, agricultural and applied economics). The applied/non-applied distinction at this level is designed to capture the essential features of the differences between these two types of programs while respecting the fact that, whether a program is intended to prepare an individual either for immediate practice/employment in a field of practice or for further study in a discipline, each must meet a substantial and common set of outcomes that have historically been and continue to be critical to and shared by both types of programs within a degree-level educational environment.

At the master’s and doctorate levels, the differences in program content and outcomes between the “traditional” degrees and those which have a designed applied focus are much subtler. This is usually evidenced by close ties with industry or professional organizations (such as external advisory committees, research ties, formal partnerships, and sponsorships), by the integration into the program of some practical elements (such as management, marketing, or law, information science), and by offering these in a manner that develops and reinforces communication and team skills through working in real or simulated occupational or professional environments. Separate skill and knowledge outcomes for professional and research degrees at the graduate level therefore, where the “applied” distinction is essentially lost, have not been retained. These degree levels are intended to provide increasingly higher levels of knowledge and skills in a discipline and the ability to apply these in any and all relevant occupational, professional and academic environments.

DESCRIPTION	BACCALAUREATE DEGREE: GENERAL	BACCALAUREATE DEGREE: HONOURS/SPECIALIST	BACCALAUREATE DEGREE: PROFESSIONAL AREA OF STUDY	BACCALAUREATE DEGREE: APPLIED AREA OF STUDY	MASTER'S DEGREE	RESEARCH	DOCTORAL DEGREE	RESEARCH
<p>Overall Program Design and Outcome Emphasis</p>	<p><i>General Baccalaureate degree programs are normally designed to require some conceptual sophistication, and specialized knowledge in at least one discipline or field.</i></p> <p>Such programs typically require less intensive disciplinary specialization than an honours or specialist program and less preparation for employment in a field of practice than a program in an applied area of study.</p>	<p>Baccalaureate degree programs in this category are normally designed to require more conceptual sophistication, specialized knowledge, and intellectual autonomy than a general degree program, and a deeper and broader disciplinary knowledge than a baccalaureate degree in an applied area of study.</p> <p>Students in honours or specialist programs learn by doing, with a focus on deepening their mastery of the knowledge and methods of the discipline. Such programs normally require students to prepare, under supervision, a terminal research paper, thesis, project, exhibition, or other research-based or performance-based exercises that demonstrate methodological competence and capacity for independent intellectual/creative work.</p>	<p>Baccalaureate degree programs in this category are normally designed to require a level of conceptual sophistication, specialized knowledge, and intellectual autonomy similar to that in an honours or specialist degree program but with the disciplinary content oriented to a professional field of practice.</p> <p>Students in professional programs learn by doing, with a focus on preparing for entry into a professional field of practice. Such programs incorporate a blend of theory and practice, and normally include a terminal project or other practice-based exercises intended to develop and demonstrate the student’s readiness for employment in the professional field of practice.</p> <p>Professions are often practiced within a regulatory framework, and programs may require accreditation by a regulatory body or professional association.</p>	<p>Baccalaureate degree programs in this category are normally designed to require a level of conceptual sophistication, specialized knowledge, and intellectual autonomy similar to that in an honours or specialist degree program but with the disciplinary content oriented to an occupational field of practice.</p> <p><i>Students in applied programs learn by doing, with a focus on preparing for entry into an occupational field of practice. Such programs incorporate a blend of theory and practice, and normally include a terminal project or other practice-based exercises intended to develop and demonstrate the student’s readiness for employment in the occupational field of practice.</i></p>	<p>Professional</p> <p>A professional master’s degree program builds on knowledge and competencies acquired during related undergraduate study, and requires more specialized knowledge and intellectual autonomy than a baccalaureate degree program. Much of the study undertaken at the master’s level will have been at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline.</p> <p>Students will have shown originality in the application of knowledge, and they will understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They will be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and they will show originality in tackling and solving problems.</p> <p>Profession-oriented master’s programs normally draw on students holding baccalaureate degrees or first professional degrees from varied academic backgrounds and provide them with a selection of courses and exercises intended to prepare them for a particular profession or field of practice or, if they are already involved</p>	<p>Research</p> <p>A master’s degree program builds on knowledge and competencies acquired during related undergraduate study, and requires more specialized knowledge and intellectual autonomy than a baccalaureate degree program. Much of the study undertaken at the master’s level will have been at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline.</p> <p>Students will have shown originality in the application of knowledge, and they will understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They will be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and they will show originality in tackling and solving problems.</p> <p>Research-oriented master’s programs are typically offered to graduates of related undergraduate or professional programs in the field or to students who have taken bridging studies to equip them for graduate study in the field; the focus is on developing the research, analytical, methodological, interpretive and expository skills necessary for doctoral studies or for leadership in society. Typically, programs</p>	<p>Professional</p> <p>A doctoral program builds on the knowledge and competencies in a field or discipline acquired during prior study, usually at the graduate level. Study at the doctoral level is at the forefront of an academic or professional discipline.</p> <p> Holders of the doctoral degree must have demonstrated a high degree of intellectual autonomy, an ability to conceptualize, design and implement projects for the generation of significant new knowledge and/or understanding, and their ability to create and interpret knowledge that extends the forefront of a discipline, usually through original research or creative activity.</p> <p>Practice-oriented doctoral programs are of a more applied nature, relate to a professional or creative activity and, where there is an internship or exhibition requirement, may also require a dissertation. Doctoral programs with an orientation to practice typically involve more course work than doctoral programs with a more</p>	<p>Research</p> <p>A doctoral program builds on the knowledge and competencies in a field or discipline acquired during prior study, usually at the graduate level. Study at the doctoral level is at the forefront of an academic or professional discipline.</p> <p> Holders of the doctoral degree must have demonstrated a high degree of intellectual autonomy, an ability to conceptualize, design and implement projects for the generation of significant new knowledge and/or understanding, and their ability to create and interpret knowledge that extends the forefront of a discipline, usually through original research or creative activity.</p> <p>Research-oriented doctoral programs focus on the development of the conceptual and methodological knowledge and skills required to do original research and to make an original contribution to knowledge in the form of a dissertation. In some fields an internship or exhibition component may be required, but without diluting the significance of the dissertation as the primary</p>

					in the profession or field, to extend their knowledge base and skills as professionals/practitioners. Examples: MSW (Social Work), MHA (Health Administration), MPS (Public Administration), MHRM (Human Resource Management), M. Eng. (Engineering)	are thesis-based and require the student to develop and demonstrate advanced research skills under supervision. Some programs are course-based and require students to demonstrate the necessary research, analytical, interpretative, methodological and expository skills in course exercises. Examples: M.A. programs in the humanities and social sciences; M.Sc. programs, MAsc. (Engineering)	theoretical or disciplinary focus. Such programs lead to the award of a degree designation reflecting the field or discipline. Examples: Ed.D. (Education), Mus. Doc. (Music), Psy.D. (Psychology)	demonstration of mastery. Such programs lead to the award of the Ph.D. Examples: Ph.D. (Psychology), Ph.D. (Education), Ph.D. (Music)
Preparation for Employment and Further Study	In addition to personal and intellectual growth, the programs may prepare students for some second-entry professional degree programs, employment in a variety of fields, or advanced entry into an honours or specialist program of study in the field. Normally these programs do not prepare students for direct entry into graduate study.	In addition to personal and intellectual growth, honours and specialist programs are primarily designed to prepare students for entry into graduate study in the field, second-entry professional degree programs, or employment in a variety of fields.	In addition to personal and intellectual growth, the programs are primarily designed to prepare students for employment in the field of practice, second-entry professional degree programs, or, depending on the content of the program and the field, entry into either graduate study or bridging studies for an appropriate graduate program.	In addition to personal and intellectual growth, the programs are primarily designed to prepare students for employment in the field of practice, second-entry professional degree programs, or, depending on the content of the program and the field, entry into either graduate study or bridging studies for an appropriate graduate program.	Graduates will have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgment, personal responsibility and initiative, in complex and unpredictable professional environments.	Graduates will have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgment, personal responsibility and initiative, in complex and unpredictable professional environments.	Holders of doctorates will have the qualities needed for employment requiring the ability to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, and innovation in tackling and solving problems.	
Length of Program	They are typically six to eight semesters in duration (normally 90 to 120 credits, or the equivalent).	They are typically eight semesters in duration (normally 120 credits, or the equivalent).	Classroom instruction is typically eight semesters or more in duration (normally 120 credits, or the equivalent) and may be supplemented by required professional experience (e.g., supervised practica or internships).	Classroom instruction is typically eight semesters in duration (normally 120 credits, or the equivalent) and may be supplemented by required workplace experience (e.g., two to four supervised co-operative work terms).	A master's program is typically three to five semesters in duration (normally 45-60 credits, or the equivalent).	A master's program is typically three to five semesters in duration (normally 45-60 credits, or the equivalent).	A doctoral program is typically three to five years in length, depending on the field and the speed at which individuals progress through requirements. It may involve course work of varying lengths aimed at cultivating further conceptual depth or breadth.	

Part 1B. Degree Level
Qualifications Framework

DEGREE LEVEL STANDARDS

The focus of these degree level standards is on the expectations of graduates of each credential. The standards stipulate the demonstrable transferable learning skills and level of mastery of a body of specialized knowledge in eight dimensions:
1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge Inside the Field; 2. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge Outside the Field; 3. Conceptual and Methodological Awareness; 4. Level of Analytical Skill; 5. Level of Application of Knowledge; 6. Professional Capacity/Autonomy; 7. Level of Communications Skills; and, 8. Awareness of Limits of Knowledge.

The shades of distinction between degrees are determined by the capacity of the graduate at each level to act competently, creatively and independently, and by their proximity to the forefront of a discipline and/or profession. Among other things, the degree level standards: (a) guide applicant decisions on the degree standard for their proposals; (b) provide clear learning outcome standards to instructional and program designers; (c) mitigate any inconsistencies in peer judgement; and, (d) foster an environment propitious for credit transfer and credential recognition.

	BACCALAUREATE DEGREE: GENERAL	BACCALAUREATE DEGREE: HONOURS/SPECIALIST	BACCALAUREATE DEGREE: PROFESSIONAL AREA OF STUDY	BACCALAUREATE DEGREE: APPLIED AREA OF STUDY	MASTER'S DEGREE	DOCTORAL DEGREE
EXPECTATIONS	<i>This degree is awarded to students who have demonstrated:</i>	<i>This degree is awarded to students who have demonstrated:</i>	<i>This degree is awarded to students who have demonstrated:</i>	<i>This degree is awarded to students who have demonstrated:</i>	<i>This degree extends the skills associated with the Baccalaureate degree and is awarded to students who have demonstrated:</i>	<i>This degree extends the skills associated with the Master's degree and is awarded to students who have demonstrated:</i>

1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge in the Field	<p>a. a general knowledge and understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the principal assumptions, methodologies and applications of the discipline; the main fields within the discipline; and the discipline's relationship with other disciplines; <p>b. an ability to evaluate and interpret new material relevant to the discipline's well-established framework of knowledge;</p> <p>c. some detailed knowledge in specialized areas;</p>	<p>a. a specialized knowledge and critical understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the principal assumptions, methodologies and applications of the discipline and the field of practice and of the way in which these have developed; the main fields within the discipline; and the discipline's relationship and interaction with other disciplines; <p>primarily but not only as these relate to mastery of the discipline,</p> <p>at least some of which is informed by developments at the forefront of the discipline;</p> <p>b. an ability to interpret, critically evaluate, and apply, new material relevant to the discipline;</p>	<p>a. a specialized knowledge and critical understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the principal assumptions, methodologies and applications of the discipline and the field of practice and of the way in which these have developed; the main fields within the discipline; and the discipline's relationship and interaction with other disciplines; <p>primarily but not only as these relate to mastery of the field of professional practice,</p> <p>at least some of which is informed by developments in or needs of the field of practice and/or trends in the discipline;</p> <p>b. an ability to interpret and to critically evaluate and apply new material relevant to the field of professional practice;</p>	<p>a. a specialized knowledge and critical understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the principal assumptions, methodologies and applications of the discipline and the field of practice and of the way in which these have developed; the main fields within the discipline; and the discipline's relationship and interaction with other disciplines; <p>primarily but not only as these relate to mastery of the field of occupational practice,</p> <p>at least some of which is informed by developments in or needs of the field of practice and/or trends in the discipline;</p> <p>b. an ability to interpret and to critically evaluate and apply new material relevant to the field of occupational practice;</p>	<p>a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice;</p>	<p>a thorough understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of their academic discipline or area of professional practice;</p>
2. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge Outside the Field	<p>a more than introductory knowledge of the distinctive assumptions and modes of analysis of a discipline outside their main field of study and of the society and culture in which they live and work;</p>	<p>a more than introductory knowledge of the distinctive assumptions and modes of analysis of a discipline outside their main field of study and of the society and culture in which they live and work;</p>	<p>a more than introductory knowledge of the distinctive assumptions and modes of analysis of a discipline outside their main field of study and of the society and culture in which they live and work;</p>	<p>a more than introductory knowledge of the distinctive assumptions and modes of analysis of a discipline outside their main field of study and of the society and culture in which they live and work;</p>	<p>sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge outside the field and/or discipline when necessary for research projects or solutions to professional problems;</p>	<p>sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge outside the field and/or discipline when necessary for research projects or solutions to professional problems;</p>
3. Conceptual and Methodological Awareness	<p>a knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in their subject(s) that enables the student to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems using well-established ideas and techniques in the field of study, and devise and sustain arguments and/or to solve problems using these methods; 	<p>a conceptual understanding that enables the student to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline; and describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research or equivalent advanced scholarship in the discipline and how these are relevant to the evolution of the discipline; 	<p><i>a conceptual understanding that enables the student to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve practice-related problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline or field of practice; and describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research or equivalent advanced scholarship in the discipline and/or profession and how these are relevant to the field of professional practice; 	<p>a conceptual understanding that enables the student to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve practice-related problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline or field of practice; and describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research or equivalent advanced scholarship in the discipline and/or profession and how these are relevant to the field of occupational practice; 	<p>a. originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and inquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;</p> <p>b. competence in a range of standard and specialized research or equivalent tools and techniques of enquiry;</p> <p>c. conceptual understanding that enables the student (i) to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline, and (ii) to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses and/or interpretations;</p>	<p>a. the ability to conceptualize, design, and implement projects for the generation of new knowledge, applications, or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;</p> <p>b. a significant range of skills, techniques, tools, practices and/or materials which are associated with the field of learning;</p> <p>c. the ability to develop new skills, techniques, tools, practices, and/or materials;</p> <p>d. a detailed conceptual and practical understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic inquiry;</p>
4. Level of Analytical Skill	<p>an ability to review, present, and interpret quantitative and qualitative data (as appropriate to the area of study), to develop lines of argument, and to make sound judgements in accordance with the major theories, concepts and methods of the subject(s) of study;</p>	<p>an ability to review, present, and critically evaluate qualitative and quantitative data (as appropriate to the area of study), and to apply underlying concepts, principles, and techniques of analysis, both within and outside the context in which they were first studied and implemented;</p>	<p>an ability to review, present, and critically evaluate qualitative and quantitative data (as appropriate to the area of study), and to apply underlying concepts, principles, and techniques of analysis, both within and outside the context in which they were first studied and practiced, particularly within a professional field of practice;</p>	<p>an ability to review, present, and critically evaluate qualitative and quantitative data (as appropriate to the area of study), and to apply underlying concepts, principles, and techniques of analysis, both within and outside the context in which they were first studied and practiced, particularly within a occupational field of practice;</p>	<p>a. a comprehensive understanding and creative application of concepts, principles and techniques in their own research, advanced scholarship or field of practice;</p> <p>b. the ability to deal with complex issues and make judgements based on established principles and techniques;</p>	<p>a. the ability to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data and sometimes requiring new methods or hypotheses;</p> <p>b. the ability to create and interpret new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication;</p>

5. Level of Application of Knowledge	<p>the ability to</p> <p>a. use a basic range of established techniques to analyse information and to evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis;</p> <p>b. make limited use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g., refereed research articles and/or original materials) appropriate to their discipline;</p>	<p>the ability to</p> <p>a. use a range of established techniques and bodies of knowledge to initiate and undertake critical analysis of arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (which may be incomplete);</p> <p>b. apply the methods and techniques of the discipline to extend their disciplinary competence;</p> <p>c. make judgements;</p> <p>d. frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution – or to identify a range of solutions – to a problem or research question;</p> <p>e. initiate and carry out discipline related projects; and</p> <p>f. make critical use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g., refereed research articles and/or original materials) appropriate to their discipline;</p>	<p>the ability to</p> <p>a. use a range of established techniques and bodies of knowledge to initiate and undertake critical analysis of arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (which may be incomplete);</p> <p>b. apply the methods and techniques of the discipline and practice-related experience to extend their professional competence;</p> <p>c. make judgements;</p> <p>d. frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution – or to identify a range of solutions – to a problem in a professional context;</p> <p>e. initiate and carry out professional projects; and</p> <p>f. make critical use of scholarly and professional reviews and primary sources (e.g., refereed research articles and/or original materials) appropriate to their discipline and field of practice;</p>	<p>the ability to</p> <p>a. use a range of established techniques and bodies of knowledge to initiate and undertake critical analysis of arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (which may be incomplete);</p> <p>b. apply the methods and techniques of the discipline and practice-related experience to extend their occupational competence;</p> <p>c. make judgements;</p> <p>d. frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution – or to identify a range of solutions – to a problem in an occupational context;</p> <p>e. initiate and carry out occupational projects; and</p> <p>f. make critical use of scholarly and professional reviews and primary sources (e.g., refereed research articles and/or original materials) appropriate to their discipline and field of practice;</p>	<p>self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level;</p>	<p>the capacity to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, to contribute to the development of academic or professional skills, techniques, tools, practices, ideas, approaches, and/or materials;</p>
6. Professional Capacity/Autonomy	<p>a. qualities and transferable skills necessary to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making in defined areas of accountability; • acting effectively with peers and under guidance of qualified practitioners; and <p>b. the ability to identify and address their own learning needs in changing circumstances, and to select an appropriate program of further study;</p>	<p>a. qualities and transferable skills necessary for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employment requiring the exercise of initiative, responsibility and accountability in both personal and group contexts; • developing leadership and management skills; • decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; <p>b. the ability to manage their own learning in changing circumstances, both within and outside the discipline, and to select an appropriate program of further study;</p>	<p>a. qualities and transferable skills necessary for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employment requiring the exercise of initiative, responsibility and accountability in both personal and group contexts; • developing leadership and management skills; • decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; <p>b. the ability to manage their own learning in changing circumstances, both within and outside the discipline and profession, and to select an appropriate program of further study;</p>	<p>a. qualities and transferable skills necessary for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employment requiring the exercise of initiative, responsibility and accountability in both personal and group contexts; • developing leadership and management skills; • decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts; <p>b. the ability to manage their own learning in changing circumstances, both within and outside the discipline and occupation, and to select an appropriate program of further study;</p>	<p>a. the ability to self-evaluate and take responsibility to continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level;</p> <p>b. the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility and accountability, decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations, and the independent learning required for continuing professional development;</p>	<p>a. the independence to remain academically and professionally engaged and current, including the ability to evaluate the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts;</p> <p>b. the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments;</p>
7. Level of Communication Skills	<p>the ability to communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, orally and in writing, to non-specialist audiences using structured and coherent arguments;</p>	<p>the ability to communicate information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably, orally and in writing, to specialist and non-specialist audiences, using structured and coherent arguments, and where appropriate informed by key concepts and techniques of the discipline;</p>	<p>the ability to communicate information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably, orally and in writing, to employers, team members, clients, consumers, and others, using structured and coherent arguments, and where appropriate informed by key concepts and techniques of the discipline and/or field of practice;</p>	<p>the ability to communicate information, arguments, and analyses accurately and reliably, orally and in writing, to employers, team members, clients, consumers, and others, using structured and coherent arguments, and where appropriate informed by key concepts and techniques of the discipline and/or field of practice;</p>	<p>the ability to communicate issues and conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences;</p>	<p>the ability to communicate complex and/or ambiguous ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences;</p>
8. Awareness of Limits of Knowledge	<p>an appreciation of the limits of their own knowledge, and how this might influence their analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.</p>	<p>an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge, and how this might influence analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.</p>	<p>an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge, and how this might influence analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.</p>	<p>an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge, and how this might influence analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.</p>	<p>an appreciation of the complexity of knowledge and understanding and of the potential contributions made by diverse interpretations, methods, and disciplines.</p>	<p>an full appreciation of the complexity of knowledge and understanding and of the potential contributions made by diverse interpretations, methods, and disciplines.</p>

Part 2: Procedures and Standards for Quality Assessment Reviews

There are well-established Canadian principles and practices with respect to assessing the quality of academic programs, as exemplified in the statement of principles published recently by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC)² and collaborative activities among universities in various regions of the country.

The challenge for the committee, however, is that of determining the possibility of establishing quality assessment standards (baseline indicators) and procedures that would (a) ensure that new degree programs meet the appropriate degree-level standard, (b) satisfy postsecondary institutions that the degree-level standard is or will be met in practice, and (c) ensure that the program and/or institution continues to assess its own performance in accord with recognized quality assurance standards and procedures.

Part 2A below describes the standards and procedures normally applied in **program quality assessments**.

Part 2B describes the standards and procedures normally applied in **institutional assessments** of degree-granting organizations.

²E.g., the AUCC's "*Principles of Institutional Quality Assurance in Canadian Higher Education*" (February 2004).

Part 2A: Procedures and Standards for Degree Program Quality Assessment

The committee would like to elicit your views on the following draft Procedures and Standards for Degree Program Quality Assessment that are intended to guide assessment of the level and quality of proposed new degree programs.

These standards and procedures sometimes overlap with those for institutional assessments (the subject of Part 2B), or may apply equally well in either category. The committee is aware of this and is more concerned about substantive issues rather than about categorization at this stage.

Questions:

- **Are the proposed Standards and Procedures adequate to assess the quality and level of new degree programs? How might they be improved?**
- **Are the proposed Standards and Procedures adequate to assess the acceptability of a new institution's policies for on-going program quality assurance? How might they be improved?**

Draft Procedures and Standards for Program Quality Assessment

Procedures

1. The evaluation process is transparent and equitable.
2. The process is conducted for each major at the baccalaureate degree level and at the graduate level for each field or specialization within an area of study, with all specializations within a discipline normally being able to be assessed during the same assessment process.
3. Each program is subject to review by an independent expert panel that is comprised of a majority of senior academics with experience in the degree granting or university sector and in program evaluations.
4. The process includes written report(s), discussion with proponents of the institution (including academic staff, students and responsible officials), a site visit, a written report by the expert panel, and an institutional response to the report.
5. The process includes the evaluation of student work toward the end of the program with a view to determining whether stated degree level and program learning outcome standards are being met.

Standards

6. The process includes evaluation against published standards which include at least the following commonly used elements:
 - 6.1 Degree-Level - The degree-level of the program is in accord with the Degree-Qualifications Framework adopted by the jurisdiction.

- 6.2 Admissions, Promotion, Graduation - The applicant has admissions, promotion, and graduation requirements for the proposed program consistent with the postsecondary character of degree-granting organizations; ensures appropriate forms of assessment of prior learning for admission to programs; and can demonstrate that the criteria and processes used to determine whether an individual can enroll in a program are set at a level that provides a reasonable expectation that the student can successfully complete the program.
- 6.3 Program Content - The content of the program, in both subject matter and learning outcome standards, meets the degree-level standard in the Degree Qualifications Framework identified in 6.1 above. In addition, the program offers an education of sufficient breadth and rigour to be comparable to similar programs offered by other degree-granting institutions that meet recognized standards in the host province or territory and in other jurisdictions.
- 6.4 Program Delivery - The delivery methods will achieve the proposed learning outcomes at the degree-level standard. This is normally measured by looking at whether the delivery methods are appropriate to the course content and the proposed learning outcomes; the effectiveness of the expertise and resources that support the program; the processes for students feedback; the presence of an “academic community” among and between students and staff.
- 6.5 Capacity to Deliver - The applicant has the legal characteristics, governance structure, and administrative capacity necessary to organize and manage a competent institution of higher learning and the capacity to deliver the quality of education necessary for students to attain the stated and necessary learning outcomes. This is normally measured by looking at whether the applicant has: sufficient resources, academic and otherwise, to deliver degree-level postsecondary education; and satisfactory policies pertaining to faculty that address issues such as: academic/professional credentials; the regular review of faculty performance; the means of ensuring that faculty knowledge of the field is current; teaching, supervision and student counselling loads; academic and instructional professional development of faculty; student and faculty access to appropriate learning and information resources (such as library, databases, computing, classroom equipment and laboratory facilities); student access to an appropriate range of academic support services.
- 6.6 Credential Recognition - The program’s learning outcomes and standards are sufficiently clear and at a level that will facilitate appropriate recognition of the credential by other postsecondary institutions and employers. Where appropriate, the program, courses or curricular elements in it are designed to facilitate credit transfer or credential recognition by other postsecondary institutions and by employers, both within the host province or territory and other jurisdictions as appropriate.
- 6.7 Regulation and Accreditation - Learning outcomes and standards in courses and other requirements for graduation in programs leading to professions that are subject to government regulations are designed to prepare students to meet the requirements of the relevant regulatory or professional body.
- 6.8 Program Evaluation - The institution has a formal approved policy and procedure requiring the periodic review of programs to occur on a cyclical basis, normally not exceeding seven years. The policy and procedure includes assessment of the program against the degree-level standard in the Degree Qualifications Framework referred to in 6.1 and any program- or institution-specific standards for the program, and assessment of individual student work in the terminal stage of the program to determine whether the standards are being achieved by students. The program review procedure includes, at a minimum:

- (i) A self-study undertaken by faculty members and administrators of the program based on evidence relating to program performance against the criteria stated above, including strengths and weaknesses, desired improvements, and future directions;
- (ii) An assessment conducted by a panel consisting of experts external to the institution that normally includes a site visit;
- (iii) A report of the expert panel assessing program quality and recommending any changes needed to strengthen that quality;
- (iv) An institutional response to the recommendations in the report.

Part 2B: Procedures and Standards for Institutional Assessment

In making decisions about new institutions or about institutions wanting to offer new degree programs, institutional reviews of various depths may be necessary. The nature of such reviews may depend, for example, on whether the proponent is a private institution whose financial stability will require detailed examination or a public institution whose financial stability may be taken for granted. The following standards and procedures relate to a full institutional review, though only parts may be applied in various cases. The intent of institutional reviews is to determine the capacity of organizations to mount and sustain good quality degree programs.

The committee would like to elicit your views on the following draft Procedures and Standards for Institutional Assessment. As indicated in Part 2A, the program quality and institutional assessment procedures and standards may overlap or apply equally well to the other category. The committee is aware of this and is more concerned about substantive issues rather than about categorization at this stage.

Questions:

- **Are the proposed Standards and Procedures for Institutional Assessment adequate to assess the quality and capacity of new degree-granting institutions? How might they be improved?**
- **Are the proposed Standards and Procedures for Institutional Assessment adequate to assess the acceptability of a new institution's policies for on-going quality review?**

Draft Procedures and Standards for Institutional Assessment:

Procedures

1. The institutional review process is transparent.
2. The review of a new institution includes an independent, expert panel composed of senior administrators and/or experts competent to provide an informed opinion on the quality of the unit or operation.
3. Where appropriate (as with private institutions), the review includes an evaluation of the financial capacity of the institution to deliver its proposed programs and to sustain them appropriately.
4. The review includes written material, discussion with proponents of the institution (including academic staff, students and responsible officials), a site visit that normally includes an inspection of facilities where they exist, a written report by the expert panel, and an institutional response to the report.

Standards

5. The review includes evaluation against recognized and published procedures and standards, including the following matters:

- 5.1 Mission Statement and Academic Goals - The institution has approved a mission statement and academic goals that identify the academic character and aspirations of the organization, including the extent to which the applicant is committed to the dissemination of knowledge through teaching and, where applicable, the creation of knowledge and service to the community or related professions.
- 5.2 Administrative Capacity - The institution has the legal characteristics, governance structure and administrative capacity necessary to organize and manage a competent institution of higher learning within the jurisdiction (including policies with respect to strategic planning within the institution), and where the development of the curriculum, academic policies, and standards includes appropriate participation by qualified academic staff and appropriate forms of consultation with students.
- 5.3 Faculty and Staff - The institution has policies with respect to the number and quality of the academic faculty and instructional staff and policies with respect to appointment, evaluation (including student evaluations), employment conditions including workload, promotion, termination, professional development, and policies/practices with respect to research and/or scholarship. In addition, the institution has policies regarding appropriate human resource development and management.
- 5.4 Information Services/Systems – The institution has available for students and faculty appropriate information services and learning resources to support the academic programs. The review normally considers how priorities are established with respect to their acquisition and the institution’s commitment to maintaining and supplementing them as needed. In addition, the applicant has systems in place to gather and analyze data for planning and decision-making purposes.
- 5.5 Physical Plant – The institution has a physical plant and facilities including laboratories, classrooms, technology, specialized equipment, etc. appropriate to support degree programming in the program or programs it offers (or proposes to offer) or demonstrates the availability of adequate learning resources and learning support for students where alternate means of delivery are employed.
- 5.6 Ethical Conduct - The institution values and upholds integrity and ethical conduct, as demonstrated by the policies and practices by which it proposes to conduct its business and, if applicable, by its past performance within and/or outside of the jurisdiction.
- 5.7 Academic Freedom and Integrity - The institution maintains an atmosphere in which academic freedom and intellectual independence exist: an atmosphere that promotes a full and balanced treatment of the commonly-held academic body of knowledge, theories, and opinions with respect to the various individual subjects and general discipline areas which comprise the program of study. Academic activity is supported by policies, procedures and practices that encourage academic honesty and integrity and address the ownership of the intellectual products of employees and students, formal ethical research

standards and the management of research funds, and academic honesty and procedures for their enforcement based on the principles of natural justice.

- 5.8 Financial Stability** - The institution demonstrates financial stability and the financial resources to provide a stable learning environment and to ensure that students can complete the program; has a long-term business plan; has procedures for the regular audit of the institution's financial methods, performance, and stability by an arm's-length professional accountant; and has methods to protect student financial investment in the case of the cessation of activity.
- 5.9 Student Protection** - The institution values and upholds integrity and ethical conduct in its relations with students through the availability of full, accurate and truthful material regarding its mission and goals; history; governance and academic structure; program and subject descriptions, faculty and administrators credentials; entrance requirements including credit transfer and prior learning assessment policies; clear and informative student enrollment agreements verifying student awareness of relevant policies; support services; payment requirements and refund policies; financial assistance; transcript protection.
- 5.10 Dispute Resolution** - The institution has policies for dealing with disputes between the organization and its students, and between faculty and students where complaints, grievances, and/or disputes of students, faculty, staff and administration are dealt with in accordance with the principles of natural justice (i.e., fair and expeditious resolution of disputes with reasonable deadlines; full disclosure; the right to be heard in response to charges or complaints; a process for and an officer charged with reviewing disputes and examining the evidence; and provision for a final internal review by a body of persons not involved in the dispute).
- 5.11 Periodic Review** - The institution has a policy requiring periodic assessments of the quality of all units and/or operations, normally for periods not exceeding seven years. Such assessments normally include the advice of external experts.

Appendix II

Committee on Quality Assurance of Degree Programs in Canada Progress Report to ACDME February, 2005

This report is intended to provide an update on the progress of the Committee on Quality Assurance of Degree Programs in Canada toward the following recommendations approved by the ACDME at their meeting of August 2004:

1. That members of ACDME endorse in principle the establishment of a pan-Canadian approach to quality assurance for degree programs that would include the development of:
 - a. a degree qualifications framework,
 - b. standards for accreditation/quality assurance reviews, and
 - c. a pan-Canadian approach to the external validation of the quality of programs based on (a) and (b).
2. That members of ACDME establish a committee consisting of an appointed representative from all interested provinces/territories.
3. That the committee draft a recommended pan-Canadian approach to quality assurance of degree programs after consultation with degree-granting institutions and other appropriate stakeholders, and to provide recommendations to ACDME no later than March 30, 2005.

Progress to Date

As the lead province, Alberta called the first meeting of the Committee on Quality Assurance of Degree Programs in Canada for September 23 and 24, 2004 in Edmonton. At the conclusion of that meeting, members had agreed to prepare a common consultation document to be used by each jurisdiction in consulting with its stakeholders. The resulting consultation document included a sample degree qualifications framework and institutional and program assessment procedures and standards. Further, the document emphasized that the draft standards and procedures being proposed were intended to be used in relation to government decisions with respect to new degree programs and new degree-granting institutions.

Members felt that through sharing common baseline or threshold standards, governments across Canadian jurisdictions could ensure the new degree programs and new degree-granting institutions to be assessed are consistent in quality. It should be noted that the Committee also determined that it would be premature to include at this time consideration of “a pan-Canadian approach to the external validation of the quality of programs” based on the standards and degree qualifications framework.

In late November, each jurisdiction began its consultation with locally identified key stakeholders. Typically they consulted all degree-granting institutions and quality assurance agencies, where they exist, in their jurisdictions. In many jurisdictions, faculty

association and student groups were also included. The consultation was to end by December 17, 2004 but it soon became evident that this was unrealistic. In addition to the local consultations, three members of the committee held separate meetings on November 25, 2004 in Ottawa with representatives of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) and with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC).

The responses received by early January 2005 indicate that there is support for the development of a pan-Canadian approach to quality assurance of degree programs. Of note in the responses reviewed to date is the broad support the initiative has received among the different stakeholder groups of universities, colleges, faculty associations and student representatives. There is, however, some emerging convergence of opinion on areas of the degree qualifications framework and assessment standards and procedures that need to be addressed in greater depth. These areas include the following:

- Baccalaureate Degrees: General, Applied and Professional Categories:
Given the range of definitions and nomenclature of baccalaureate degrees among jurisdictions, there were many responses that sought clearer definitions of the different categories of baccalaureate degree described in the degree qualifications framework. Many comments were directed at the distinction between applied/occupational and professional degrees, and the relationship of the general baccalaureate to applied/occupational baccalaureates was questioned. A difficulty raised by many respondents was the fact that applied degrees in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario are quite different in structure and intent. The comments raised concerns of program length, inclusion of work terms, and perceptions of one category being more advanced than another.
- Definitions and Clarifications:
There was agreement among stakeholders that quality assessment procedures should be transparent, but questions were raised as to the level of transparency required. Issues were raised with respect to appropriate definitions of academic freedom, criteria around identifying expert reviewers, and consideration of faith-based institutions. Furthermore, the issue of the level of faculty participation in governance drew comments from traditional universities, public colleges and faculty associations, indicating a tension between a desire for strong levels of faculty representation, and existing governance structures of some colleges and other new types of institutions.
- Application of the Proposed Approach:
Stakeholder comments indicated some confusion over whether the proposed approach would be applied to both public institutions and private institutions, and whether the draft standards refer to quality assessment of new programs prior to their approval, or their ongoing quality assessment once implemented. In terms of the procedures for program quality assessment being conducted for each major at the baccalaureate level and for each specialization at the graduate level, more than one respondent mentioned the necessity of clarifying the terms “major” and “specialization”. Ambiguity concerning how the proposed approach would be implemented, and what would need to be done in order to bring it to fruition is also evidenced in comments received to date.

Next Steps

At the Committee's January teleconference meeting, it was determined that more time was needed to ensure a meaningful result in the consultation process, as many stakeholders indicated the need for more time for careful consideration of the documents. Therefore, the Committee decided to extend the consultation to the end of March, 2005. It is anticipated that further consultation will deepen the Committee's understanding of stakeholder attitudes to the issues that already have been identified, indicate other areas of concern, and give an indication of the level of support a revised degree qualifications framework and assessment standards and procedures might gain among stakeholders.

Once all the responses have been tabulated, the Committee will reconvene. It expects to provide a report for the fall meeting of ACDME.