



International Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (ISG) alignment

External review report

Organisation	Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB)
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Postsecondary Education Quality Assurance Board (PEQAB) requested an external evaluation of its operation by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) to assess the extent of its compliance with the International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education, 2022 (ISG). The request was for a review against the Baseline Standards (Module 1). PEQAB submitted a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) on 30 December 2024; the Review Panel found that that document did not address all the standards and requested supplementary information, which was supplied on 22 February 2025.

A Review Panel, appointed by INQAAHE in line with its procedures manual, reviewed the SER and supporting evidence provided in a series of appendices, using this to draw up the programme for the site visit and identify lines of enquiry to explore in meetings during the visit.

The site visit included a series of eleven meetings, four with PEQAB (Secretariat or Board); two with groups of expert reviewers; and five with a range of external representatives, including from government, from institutions and from other agencies involved in quality assurance. The Review Panel found all meetings to be constructive and informative dialogues which added significantly to the information in the SER.

The overall conclusions of the Review and Recognition of PEQAB against the ISG Baseline Standards was:

	Standard	Judgement
1	Legitimacy of the External Quality Assurance Provider	Substantially compliant
2	The EQAP's framework for external review of quality of TEPs	Substantially compliant
3	The EQAP's Review of TE Providers: Evaluation, Decision Making and Appeals	Fully compliant
4	Internationalization and External Relations	Fully compliant
5	Integrity, Disclosure and Transparency	Fully compliant
6	Stakeholder role and engagement	Fully compliant

Commendations, recommendations and suggestions for further improvement are included under each standard and summarised at the end of the report [page 41].

The principal areas for commendation found by the Review Panel included: the strength of PEQAB's operational foundation; the clarity of its quality assurance processes and the ways it seeks to ensure that its expert reviewers and applicant tertiary providers understand

those processes; the ways PEQAB involves sector representative bodies in its work and in the development of quality assurance together with the resulting trust there is in PEQAB and its operational practices; and the agency's active engagement in the wider international quality assurance community.

Key areas where the Panel identified recommendations for action or suggestions for improvement included: working to refine and improve some aspects of process, especially with regard to expedited reviews and the way other modalities are addressed; the frequency of external reviews; the production of systemic and thematic reviews; ensuring that material in French is equally available and there is no disadvantage to French speaking providers; and extending the involvement of students as principal stakeholders.

There were two strengths which the review the Panel also noted across the site visit that do not emerge naturally from the ISG but which it wished to mention. These strengths were:

- The deep respect and value for the CEO, and his leadership, across all stakeholders, the cohesive and effective nature of the team that forms the Secretariat and the professionalism of the Board;
- The ways PEQAB uses the design and application of the standards used to assess providers at organisational and program level to help deliver policy and shape educational provision (most notably through indigenous and cultural awareness in breadth provision).

A final section considered matters not covered elsewhere. This includes the SER and the agency's reflective capacity. Some matters noted by the Panel are not fully within PEQAB's control with this section additionally discussing succession planning, the nature and extent of PEQAB's independence and ways in which this could be enhanced.

INTRODUCTION

About the review process

The Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) in Canada requested the external evaluation of its performance in compliance with the International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (ISGs) by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). PEQAB carried out the self-assessment process and submitted the Self-Evaluation Report and a list of supporting documentation to INQAAHE in December 2024.

The external evaluation of PEQAB was undertaken following the ISGs issued by INQAAHE in 2022 (Annex 3. International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education). The review was carried out by an independent review panel of international experts in the areas of evaluation and quality assurance in higher education (Annex 1. External review panel and visit programme).

The site visit was held from 11-13 March 2024. The agenda included different interviews with PEQAB stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, senior management, staff, higher education institution representatives, peer reviewers and representatives of national and international organizations (Annex 1. External review panel and visit programme).

About Canada's Higher Education System

The information about higher education and quality assurance in Canada is summarised from PEQAB's Self-Evaluation Review.

Across Canada there are 96 public and private universities providing degrees at International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 6 and higher together with over 100 public colleges that primarily offer diplomas at ISCED level 5. Altogether, approximately 230 higher education institutions are spread over nine provinces and three territories. In addition, there is a comparatively large private career/vocational college sector, with one province (Ontario) alone hosting over 500 institutes that provide short-cycle certificates or diplomas at ISCED level 5.

Responsibility for higher education lies with Canada's provinces and territories which are responsible for organising, funding and directing postsecondary education. Each has its own system and structure for higher credential provision and quality assurance. All provincial governments have accountability agreements with the publicly assisted universities and colleges. The exact nature of the accountability agreements varies in the jurisdictions, but the institutions provide significant amounts of information to the government including enrolment rate, retention rate, graduation rate, etc. as requirements for funding eligibility.

Following this pattern, quality assurance matters firmly rest within provinces and each manages the process slightly differently. Nevertheless, at the pan-Canadian political level, through the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, the jurisdictional governments come together to discuss policy matters of mutual importance. The coordination of Canadian

participation in the Lisbon Accord and the UNESCO Global Convention are examples of such activities. In 2007, this group published the Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada that outlines procedures and standards that provide general guidelines on assessing the quality of new degree programs and new degree-granting institutions; these were endorsed by each provincial and territorial minister responsible for higher education. This work also included the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework (CDQF) which provides guidelines for degree-level standards/ expectations for Bachelors, Masters and PhD degree programmes across the country. While the CDQF is not formally operationalized, it provides a reference point for each province/territory in conducting and examining its own system, with provinces responsible for ensuring the higher education institution programming adheres to the CDQF (at least in practice even if not fully articulated in principle).

The provincial quality assurance agencies are independent in their legislature, policies, system design, and quality assurance models. However, Canada's External Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAAs) also seek to cooperate, recognising that there are many common issues, and participate in informal monthly meetings. This frequent, and voluntary, collaboration has supported the development of many complementary, if not similar, policies and procedures across the nation. Hosted by PEQAB, this collaboration among EQAAs creates a common understanding of language, policies and procedures rather than standardization. In addition, some the agencies have chosen to seek recognition against INQAAHE standards and guidelines, with two having undergone and received recognition through the earlier Guidelines of Good Practice, and one (other than PEQAB) currently seeking it through the new ISG process.

The SER explains that quality assurance agencies of Canada have a variety of relationships with their governments, but those responsible for degree level programming are typically arms-length, autonomous or quasi-autonomous agencies. As such, the majority of these agencies have governing boards or councils made up of diverse stakeholders such as students, public tertiary institutions, industry/business representatives, and a mix of other representatives who represent the public-at-large.

The majority of Canada's EQAAs conduct reviews both at institutional level and program level (new and existing degree programs). The regular cycle of reviews takes place between 5-7 years. Additional quality assessment measures for private and out of province providers exist to ensure financial and organizational structural stability.

About the system in Ontario

In Ontario, degree providers fall into one of three categories: publicly assisted organisations with an act of the Ontario legislature (Ontario universities), private organisations with an act of the Ontario legislature and consent holders. Consent holders can be private organisations (based in or outside the province), public organisations (in or outside the province) and Ontario Colleges offering degrees.

There are four organisations/agencies in Ontario that quality assure degree programs with the government being responsible for the oversight of private career colleges:

1. The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance provides quality assurance for members of the universities' Council of Ontario University;
2. The Ontario Colleges Quality Assurance Service provides quality assurance for Ontario Colleges, focusing on their non-degree credentials;
3. There are nine Indigenous Institutes which, based on legislation in 2017, are able to offer degrees. Indigenous Institutes quality assurance (and equivalent of consent) is through the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council with the Indigenous Quality Assurance Board the related quality assurance agency;
4. PEQAB.

In Ontario there are 22 principal publicly-assisted universities, each having an act of the Ontario legislature which permit it to offer degrees. These acts generally place these universities outside of PEQAB's mandate. In addition, there are two new publicly-assisted universities, Université de l'Ontario Français, whose legislation requires that its degree programs be quality assured by PEQAB, and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, where any degree programs, other than those for the training of medical doctors, would be quality-assured by PEQAB. Both of these arrangements are transitional strategies with a provision, which will eventually trigger independence from PEQAB, built into the legislation.

Over the years, 17 institutions (predominantly religious) have obtained private acts of the legislature giving them limited degree-granting authority (primarily to award religiously-oriented degrees). Although these have accreditors in various forms, there is no provincial quality assurance body/processes which apply to these institutions or their religious programs.

Ontario's Post-secondary Education Choice & Excellence Act, 2000 (PSECE) sets the parameters for how degree authority is obtained by institutions other than those having individual acts of the Ontario legislature. Under PSECE, the Minister for Colleges and Universities refers applications to PEQAB for review and recommendation, with the Minister making the final decision on whether or not to grant consent.

Ontario has its own jurisdictional qualifications framework, the Ontario Qualifications Framework (OQF). It reflects the CDQF, with the OQF setting out detailed credential-level expectations for all levels of post-secondary education, intended to "set the standard for each credential that can be used to assess the quality of particular programs at that credential level, and [...] facilitate international recognition of credentials, credit transfer and graduate mobility" (quotation from PEQAB's Self-evaluation Report). All Ontario institutions are expected to comply with the OQF and the standards and guidelines of quality assurance agencies are guided by it.

About the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB)

PEQAB's mandate under the PSECE Act is tertiary (postsecondary) degrees and, under this legislation, it provides quality assurance for all kinds of consent holders. PEQAB is responsible for the quality assurance of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programs offered

by Ontario colleges, private institutions, public institutions that are based in other jurisdictions that offer degree programs in Ontario, and public universities in Ontario which are offering programs outside of their legislation.

All tertiary organizations require either an act of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario or the consent of the Minister to offer a degree or to use the term “university” with all applications for consent referred to PEQAB (or another quality assurance agency recommended by PEQAB). Consent is required in order for an institution to operate, or maintain, a university, grant a degree, provide a program or part of a program in Ontario leading to a degree or otherwise advertise, offer or provide a diploma, certificate, document or other material that indicates or implies the granting or conferring of a degree.

As set out in PEQAB’s Self-evaluation Report (SER), PEQAB is empowered to:

- Review all applications referred by the Minister for consent under the Act
- Establish the criteria and procedures to determine the quality of postsecondary programs
- Undertake reviews of program quality and organization capacity
- Create subject matter expert review panels, organization review panels and advisory committees
- Undertake research as appropriate
- Provide recommendations to the Minister on applications
- Address any other matter referred to the Board by the Minister.

Since 2001, pursuant to the consent of Ontario’s Ministry for Colleges and Universities, PEQAB has responsibility for the external quality assurance of 24 Colleges in Ontario which offer Honours Bachelor degrees (21 Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology and three Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning. This group of colleges are collectively referred to as “Ontario Colleges.” Since 2023 Ontario Colleges have been permitted consent, through PEQAB recommendation, to offer three-year Bachelor’s degrees (as well as the established four-year degrees) and, as of 2024, to offer Master’s degrees. Approximately 80% of PEQAB’s quality assurance activity is with Ontario Colleges.

The procedures operated by PEQAB are published on its website in a series of sector/purpose-specific Manuals, including for different types of degree applications and for out of province organisations. Reviews are conducted by an expert panel, supported by a member of the secretariat; the resulting report and documentation is considered by the Board which will make a recommendation to the Minister. This may be for consent, consent with specific conditions, consent with recognized commitments or the denial of consent. Consent with conditions and/or recognized commitments are the most common.

ASSESSMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH INQAAHE INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

1. Legitimacy of the External Quality Assurance Provider

☐ Not compliant
 ☐ Partially compliant
 ☒ Substantially compliant
 ☐ Fully compliant

1.1 MISSION, GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATION

THE EQAP IS A RECOGNIZED, CREDIBLE ORGANIZATION, TRUSTED BY KEY STAKEHOLDERS: THE GOVERNMENT, TERTIARY EDUCATION PROVIDERS (TEPs) AND THE PUBLIC AT LARGE. ITS GOVERNANCE, STRUCTURE, AND OPERATIONS ENABLE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT OPERATIONS IN LINE WITH ITS MISSION.

EVIDENCE

The SER states that PEQAB was established under the Post-Secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000. The Act regulates degree granting in Ontario. PEQAB operates independently under the Act, in an advisory role, making recommendations to the Minister; it is the Minister that makes decisions on whether or not to grant Consent for an institution to operate or a program to be delivered. PEQAB's processes cover both academic rigor at program level and institutional soundness. The SER indicated that the agency engages with various stakeholders -- including higher education institutions, policymakers, and the public -- through committees, consultation, and research; this was confirmed in meetings during the site visit.

According to the SER, the organizational structure of PEQAB comprises the Board and the Secretariat. Some Board members have experience in the university and college sectors and others have experience in private sectors. According to the SER: "The Secretariat comprises a small team of ministry employees dedicated to supporting the Chair and the Board in fulfilling their duties". In the SER, PEQAB declares that their arms-length relationship with the Ministry "permits full independence to set standards, guidelines and procedures", as well as operate an independent decision-making process by the Board in making recommendations to the Minister.

The nature of PEQAB's independence allows it to set standards and evaluate proposals autonomously. Additionally, it supports transparency and enables public confidence through the publication of material, including applications, on its website and consults openly with representative bodies from the sectors it serves.

The SER also stated that PEQAB's vision is "a stronger Ontario through high-quality postsecondary student learning outcomes". Currently, PEQAB does not have an explicit mission statement, however, it was explained in a meeting that it considers its mission to be set out in its mandate, the Panel noted that this mandate is included in agency's annual reports. Under Ontario's Agencies & Appointments Directive, PEQAB operates under Terms

of Reference with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. Agencies must undergo a review of their mandates at least every six years; that next such for PEQAB is scheduled for 2024/2025 fiscal year.

PEQAB sets quality standards, reviews applications to offer degree programs and employs expert reviewers to assess institutional capacity against those standards; it also conducts research. Guided by principles of fairness and transparency, detailed in the Ministerial Statement on quality assurance of degree education in Canada (2007), PEQAB ensures that programs align with recognized provincial and national qualification frameworks.

The SER outlined the composition of the Board, members are appointed by the Minister, with the position of Chair appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council (this is vacant and has been for some time). The activities of the Board are guided by a published Code of Conduct, a Conflict of Interest Policy and an oath taken under the Public Service of Ontario Act. Decisions of the Board follow a structured review process, guided by ethical standards, with PEQAB outlining, in the SER, how integrity and ethical behaviour are core to its functioning. Confidentiality is maintained through compliance with Ontario's public service regulations and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

PEQAB reviews include the opportunity for public views to be submitted on applications, evaluation by expert reviewers leading to a report which, together with the institutional response, are assessed by the Board before making recommendations to the Minister. The SER outlines the range of review processes, which, alongside standard institutional and program reviews, includes Expedited Reviews, Bundled Reviews and Collaboration with Accreditation Agencies.

According to the SER "The operations of PEQAB are regularly examined in the annual report vis a vis annual and perennial goals, as well as a satisfaction survey distributed to applicant institutions and reviewers. Annual goals are set by the Board, typically during the Annual retreat held in November each year." Annual reports are published on PEQAB's website. The most recent, that for 2024, record both perennial and annual goals, sets out performance measures, records activity, and summarises engagement and external participation; as well as listing expert reviewers and giving details of the memberships of Board committees.

The SER describes the main objectives of the Board, which are given as: "1. Providing the Minister of Colleges and Universities with timely, well-researched recommendations based on expert reviews of matters referred to the Board, including consent and renewal of consent. 2. Continuously improving standards, benchmarks, and processes to effectively assess the quality of postsecondary programs. 3. Researching best practices in quality assurance recognized in other jurisdictions. 4. Contributing to best practices through original research on quality assurance issues in postsecondary education, focusing on learning outcomes and the impact of PEQAB's practices in Ontario. 5. Supporting applicant institutions in meeting Board standards and demonstrating program quality and graduate qualifications to other institutions and employers".

ANALYSIS

The Panel confirmed that PEQAB operates within a well-defined legal framework, is recognised by government and by tertiary education providers, has a clear set of objectives detailed in the SER, and an organizational structure that effectively supports external review processes. It acts with independence, transparency and objectivity and its engagement with sector stakeholders contributes to its credibility. The Panel confirmed, through meetings, that PEQAB is seen to uphold high-quality postsecondary education standards in Ontario.

PEQAB's structured review processes, adherence to conflict of interest policies, and compliance with public service regulations ensure impartiality and accountability in decision-making. The public availability of its quality assessment standards in its manuals, details of its Board members and the posting of applications for public comment reinforce its stated commitment to transparency. Consultation and engagement with the TEPs with which it works encourage trust. Sector stakeholders are engaged through regular meetings and contacts; the Board appointments in practice embrace a range of stakeholders, including the indigenous community. It was evident to the Panel that PEQAB is respected and trusted by Ontario's government and by TEPs.

However, the Panel noted that PEQAB does not have a formal, published mission statement, and considered that this would enhance clarity in communicating its purpose and guiding principles.

1.2 RESOURCES

THE EQAP HAS ADEQUATE RESOURCES – PHYSICAL, FINANCIAL AND HUMAN – TO CARRY OUT ITS MISSION.

EVIDENCE

The SER explains that "The PEQAB Secretariat consists of a CEO and up to six staff members, primarily holding PhDs. One Senior Policy Advisor position requires bilingual proficiency, assessed during the hiring process. The Head of Research, International, and Special Projects specializes in both qualitative and quantitative higher education research". The SER also details the process to train new staff members, which includes mentorship and support through joint work with a senior policy advisor, site visits, panel orientations, and regular meetings.

The SER states that "External Expert Review Panel (EERP) members must possess qualifications and personal qualities that instil confidence in the Board, the Minister, the public, accrediting bodies, relevant regulatory bodies, and other degree-granting institutions". PEQAB has five types of reviews for which experts are appointed: Organization Reviews, Breadth Reviews, System Coordination Reviews, Program Reviews and Policy Reviews. The SER describes the specific requirements for the external reviewers in each case.

According to the SER, PEQAB's budget, office location, and supporting technologies are provided by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. PEQAB has developed a

comprehensive management information system ‘PEQAB Application Management System’ (PAMS), which tracks applications and acts as the reviewer database.

ANALYSIS

In the view of the Panel, PEQAB demonstrated a strong operational foundation with a highly qualified staff, many holding PhDs, and a commitment to professional development through mentorship, training, and participation in international quality assurance fora.

The agency effectively upholds rigorous quality standards by engaging an appropriate pool of external experts and maintaining structured review processes. Additionally, PEQAB benefits from stable financial support provided by the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, which covers essential operational costs, including office space, salaries, and technological infrastructure. The creation by PEQAB of a specialized tool, in the PAMS database, further enhances efficiency in managing applications and reviews.

However, a potential area for enhancement lies in PEQAB’s role in budgetary decision-making. While the agency receives full financial backing from the Ministry, a more proactive role in shaping its budget could enhance its strategic autonomy. Increased involvement in financial planning would allow PEQAB to better align resources with evolving priorities, ensuring continued excellence in quality assurance and policy implementation. The impact of the pace of societal, economic, environmental and technological change on higher education in the view of the Panel will make this more important in the future than it has been to date.

1.3 INTERNAL QA AND ACCOUNTABILITY

THE EQAP HAS IN PLACE POLICIES AND MECHANISMS FOR ITS INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE THAT DEMONSTRATE A CONTINUING EFFORT TO MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND INTEGRITY OF ITS ACTIVITIES.

EVIDENCE

In the SER the agency states that PEQAB is invested in maintaining currency and relevance in its quality assurance practices. Its Internal Quality Assurance Policy, last updated in 2017, includes mechanisms for feedback, monitoring, and a procedure for reporting survey findings and stakeholder feedback (see PEQAB’s [Internal Quality Assurance Policy](#)). Externally, PEQAB outlines in the SER that it gathers stakeholder input through surveys, consultations, and public comments, collaborating with national and international organizations to maintain transparency and uphold “high standards of quality assurance in Ontario’s postsecondary education system”. In both its SER and in meetings, PEQAB emphasized its nimbleness in adapting to evolving educational needs based on stakeholder feedback, societal trends, and government directives. Changes to standards and benchmarks follow a structured process involving documentation, consultation, stakeholder communication and Board approval

Internal reviews, which are conducted at least every seven years and precede external review, focus on accountability, resources, legislative mandate, relationships with TEPs, processes and requirements in reviews and collaboration.

The SER highlights that PEQAB participates in an external evaluation at least every seven years. Reviews in 2011 and 2017 resulted in improvements such as increased transparency, enhanced quality assurance, and greater stakeholder engagement. The 2017 review was designed to assess PEQAB's "adherence to internationally recognised standards as represented by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" and to apply for registration on the European Quality Assurance Register. Although not successful, resulted in changes, those reported in the SER include the implementation of a complaints process, expedited reviews, and streamlined standards and benchmarks.

PEQAB aim to maintain high-quality assurance is reflected in its ongoing stakeholder engagement, especially, as reported in the SER and confirmed in meetings, through two sector bodies, the College Degree Granting Operating Group (CDOG) and the Private and Out of Province Degree Granting Operating Group (POPDOG). The SER also reports on the continuous refinement of standards, regular evaluations bi-annual manual updates, and governance improvements.

Regarding diverse modalities the SER states that "Based on the research, interviews, consultations and stakeholder feedback, it was determined that the existing benchmarks with some modifications which were then reflected in revised Manuals, could appropriately address quality matters for all modes of delivery".

ANALYSIS

The Panel found that PEQAB demonstrated a strong commitment to quality assurance through both internal and external evaluations, and to continuous improvement. The agency has undergone two external reviews, in 2011 and 2017, which have led to enhancements in its processes.

However, the SER does not fully capture PEQAB's impact and strengths. A more comprehensive discussion of the agency's contributions, particularly regarding its role in improving institutional quality and public perception, would have strengthened the report. The SER, in general, listed activities and engagements by PEQAB but did not discuss the benefits and impact of that extensive work or reflect on what was learned and how that then changed practices.

There is also room for improvement in the frequency of external evaluations. Conducting these reviews every five years, rather than at longer intervals, in the view of the Panel would provide more timely feedback and further enhance quality assurance. As indicated above, given the pace of wider change, this is likely to be of more importance and value in the future. The Panel also considered that external reviews should always be planned to feed into the periodic review of PEQAB's mandate by the Ministry in a timely way.

While PEQAB ensures rigorous standards for traditional education programs, there are no explicit expectations outlined for hybrid or distance education programs. The agency states in the SER that it “determined that the existing benchmarks with some modifications could appropriately address quality matters for all modes of delivery”. However, the Panel considered that, given the increasing prevalence of online learning and other modalities, establishing clear guidelines, specifying the relevant modifications or articulating clearly to TEPs and expert reviewers how existing standards should be interpreted or applied to them, would strengthen PEQAB’s oversight and ensure that evolving educational models maintain the same high-quality standards.

Commendations

- The Review Panel commends the strong operational foundation demonstrated by PEQAB with a highly qualified staff, many of whom hold PhDs, and a commitment to professional development through mentorship, training, and participation in international quality assurance fora.
- The Panel commends the creation of the specialized PAMS database enhances efficiency in managing applications and reviews.

Recommendations

- The Panel recommends that the frequency of external evaluations should always be scheduled to feed into the review of PEQAB’s mandate and could beneficially be increased to every five years, rather than the current longer intervals, to provide more timely feedback to support continual enhancement and further enhance PEQAB’s quality assurance processes.
- The Panel recommends that PEQAB goes beyond noting that, with modifications, existing benchmarks could meet the needs of diverse modalities to specify what the relevant modifications are and articulating clearly, for both TEPs and expert reviewers, how existing standards should be interpreted or applied for differing modes of delivery.

Suggestions for further improvement

- The Panel is of the view that PEQAB should seek to ensure that the SER, or equivalent, for its next external review provides a more detailed discussion of PEQAB’s contributions, particularly regarding its role in improving institutional quality and public perception, to present a clearer picture of the agency’s impact.

In addition to the matters noted above, the panel commends the benefit to PEQAB of the stable financial support from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, which covers essential operational costs and infrastructure. However, while PEQAB receives full financial backing from the Ministry, it would benefit from a more proactive role in shaping its budget. This would enhance its strategic autonomy and better enable the alignment of resources

with evolving priorities. The Panel would encourage the Ministry to consider this when next revising PEQAB's mandate and status. This is discussed further in section seven [page 39].

2. The EQAP's Framework for External Reviews of the Quality of TEPs

☐ Not compliant
 ☐ Partially compliant
 ☒ Substantially compliant
 ☐ Fully compliant

2.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EQAP AND TERTIARY EDUCATION PROVIDERS (TEPs)

THE EQAP RECOGNIZES TEPs AS HAVING PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR QUALITY AND RELEVANCE AND PROVIDING SUPPORT IN PROMOTING TRUST AND CREDIBILITY.

EVIDENCE

In the SER, the agency states that PEQAB ensures TEPs assume primary responsibility for quality through internal evaluation processes. Institutions must outline their governance structures, conduct self-assessments, and involve external experts in program reviews. PEQAB's role is to verify that these processes are in place and effective. The SER emphasizes that "it is the TEPs that are principally responsible for quality and that the PEQAB role is to verify."

In the SER, PEQAB describes how it considers the following core values in its evaluations: equitable access; accountability (by ensuring legal status and considering reporting and decision-making structures); academic freedom (by considering intellectual independence); institutional autonomy; and social responsibility (by requiring breadth, or what is termed non-core programming, and, since 2023 knowledge of Indigeneity through at least one course on indigenous culture).

According to the SER, PEQAB implements several measures to support efficiency and effectiveness in its processes. This includes recognizing prior reviews, offering expedited renewals for established programs, bundling related applications, and coordinating with other accreditation agencies. These efforts aim to reduce costs and minimize administrative burdens.

Finally, the SER highlights that PEQAB offers guidance through manuals and well-defined processes for both program and organizational reviews. During meetings with representatives from higher education institutions, participants confirmed that they receive comprehensive support – including resources, guidance documents, and direct contact within the Secretariat.

ANALYSIS

PEQAB's standards, benchmarks and processes uphold and ensure essential values in higher education, including equitable access, accountability, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and social responsibility. The agency provides institutions with clear and structured guidance through regularly updated manuals and comprehensive support materials. The support provided by the Secretariat was complimented by sector representatives met by the Review Panel during the site visit; the system of assigning a

named officer to each TEP was noted as a strength of the approach. Both the SER and the site visit underscored how the continuous dialogue with policy advisors plays a critical role in supporting adherence to quality standards and promoting ongoing improvement. Additionally, the availability of an expedited review process and working with other bodies to conduct joint reviews demonstrate PEQAB's commitment to efficiency by reducing administrative burdens and aligning review timelines while maintaining rigorous quality standards. These approaches contribute to a transparent and effective quality assurance framework that ensures institutions understand, and are able to meet, the required standards.

However, during the site visit, concerns were raised by some representatives from the sector about the experience of the expedited review process being more complicated than the standard procedure. If expedited reviews are perceived as more burdensome, they may not achieve their intended purpose of streamlining applications and reducing delays. To address this, the Review Panel considered that PEQAB could conduct a further evaluation of the process, gathering direct feedback from institutions to identify and resolve any inefficiencies or issues. In the view of the Panel, ensuring that expedited reviews genuinely reduce complexity while maintaining rigorous oversight would enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of this option.

2.2 THE EQAP'S STANDARDS FOR EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW

THE STANDARDS VALUE DIVERSITY OF PROVISIONS AND PROMOTE TRUST, RELEVANCE, ENHANCED QUALITY OF TE PROVISIONS, AND THUS PROMOTE A QUALITY CULTURE.

EVIDENCE

In the SER, the agency claims that PEQAB recognizes the diversity of tertiary education providers by establishing tailored standards, flexible faculty qualifications, and inclusive review processes. It supports institutions' unique missions, provides documentation in both English and French, and ensures that curricula reflect diverse perspectives. PEQAB states, in its SER, that it "reviews degree programs from a wide range of institutions, including Ontario Colleges, private institutions, and public institutions from other jurisdictions," and that it "has developed specific handbooks and submission guidelines for different types of institutions". PEQAB states that it also provides documentation in both English and French, a point confirmed during meetings with Secretariat members and representatives from higher education institutions, and evidenced in the [French version](#) of the website.

According to the SER, PEQAB revises its benchmarks regularly, and consults stakeholders on proposals prior to finalisation. Additionally, internal assessments and external evaluations are conducted. The SER further states that PEQAB's Standards explicitly define key areas of a TEP's activity. Institutional reviews focus on governance, ethics, financial stability, and student protection, while degree program evaluations assess compliance with academic, delivery, and accreditation standards. These standards include clear benchmarks to guide requirements across different provider types.

When conditions are attached to Consent, there is a procedure for formal follow-up, described in the SER as generally comprising a report-back to PEQAB within specified timelines.

The SER emphasizes that PEQAB provides clear guidelines through manuals and appendices. Manuals outline expectations and list commonly submitted documentation, while appendices offer templates and additional clarity. The availability and usefulness of the documentation was confirmed during meetings with representatives from higher education institutions. PEQAB's standards, as described in the SER, include Academic Freedom and Integrity as part of the required institutional policy.

The SER explains how "PEQAB actively engages with stakeholders to gather feedback and improve its processes. This engagement helps ensure that the Standards remain relevant and supportive of diverse institutional missions".

ANALYSIS

The providers that PEQAB serves as an agency embrace a wide range of colleges and other institutions with varied missions, and it was evident to the Panel that it demonstrated a strong commitment to recognizing and supporting the diversity of these tertiary education providers. During the visit, representatives from providers specifically praised the positive impact of PEQAB accreditation on the perception of the quality of the education they provide, noting particularly the enhanced understanding by the university sector through the involvement of university faculty as reviewers. PEQAB's approach to external reviews involves sector stakeholders ensuring that their perspective contributes to the assessment process. Additionally, PEQAB has established a formal follow-up procedure for those external reviews which have conditions attached to consent, reinforcing accountability and continuous improvement.

The clear guidelines and structured review processes maintained by PEQAB enable institutions to align with published standards, at institutional and program level, while preserving their particular educational objectives. In the view of the Panel, with these strengths, PEQAB effectively balances flexibility and accountability, fostering institutional development, promoting trust (in its own work and in the programs it reviews) and ensuring the quality of provision across diverse higher education providers.

2.3 THE EQAP'S EXTERNAL REVIEW PROCESS

THE EXTERNAL REVIEW FRAMEWORK HAS A CLEAR SET OF PROCEDURES FOR EACH TYPE OF REVIEW.

EVIDENCE

All PEQAB's manuals are available online. There are manuals for both three- and four-year degrees for Ontario colleges, applied master's degrees, out-of-province organizations and expedited reviews; appendices provide detailed guidelines. Representatives from higher education institutions confirmed the clarity and usefulness of PEQAB's manuals. These

documents outline quality standards, benchmarks, and the documentation required for applications.

The SER outlines the selection process for members of external expert review panels. Reviewers must demonstrate both relevant professional expertise and key personal attributes aligned with the program or institution under evaluation. According to the SER, “Following recruitment, program reviewers are provided with the publicly available manuals for the relevant review type” and are “invited to an orientation with a PEQAB Senior Policy Advisor.” The value of this orientation process was confirmed by the expert reviewers during the site visit.

There are clear policies on conflicts of interest and the SER outlines possible conflicts of interest as well as the mechanisms to avoid conflicts in practice.

According to the SER, PEQAB aims to maintain consistency across reviews and in the resulting recommendations by ensuring appropriate reviewer qualifications and training, in the oversight provided by the Secretariat, and applying standardized procedures.

Also, according to the SER, the typical processing time, from the government’s referral to the issuance of the Board’s recommendation to the Minister, is approximately six months. Once the Secretariat reviews the panel report, it is shared with the institution, which then has 20 days to respond. Responses may correct factual errors, seek to clarify the rationale, or raise specific concerns. Extensions may be granted to the 20 day response period.

ANALYSIS

PEQAB’s external review framework outlines specific procedures tailored to each type of review. It demonstrates a strong commitment to transparency and accessibility by ensuring that detailed information about its external review process, standards, and reviewer qualifications is readily available online. The clear structure of its review process, including defined requisites for different types of reviewers, helps maintain objectivity and credibility. During the site visit, higher education institutions confirmed that the standard review timeline of six months is consistently met, reinforcing PEQAB’s efficiency in processing applications. The structured briefing and guidance provided to external reviewers, along with conflict of interest policies and the involvement of a senior policy advisor in each review, further enhance the integrity and fairness of evaluations.

However, there is potentially room for improvement in ensuring greater consistency in the nature of recommendations. During the visit, representatives from similar institutions reported discrepancies in the recommendations they received on specific topics. The Panel acknowledged that, as full reports are not published, these views are based on perceptions, however, this suggests that, while PEQAB has clear evaluation criteria, there may be variations in how these criteria are interpreted or applied across different cases in developing the resulting recommendations. Strengthening alignment among reviewers, refining internal consistency mechanisms and publishing more regular analyses of review outcomes would enhance the reliability and fairness of the review process.

2.4 REGULAR SYSTEMIC REVIEWS

THE EQAP CONDUCTS REGULAR SYSTEMIC/THEMATIC REVIEWS TO INFORM ITS STAKEHOLDERS AND PUBLIC AT LARGE ON SYSTEMIC ISSUES/DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS.

EVIDENCE

PEQAB's website includes a section dedicated to [research and publications](#). This section features four topics: micro-credentials, the academic pathways of Ontario college graduates in graduate school, external expert review panel reports, and student participation in quality assurance processes.

During the meeting with Canadian and international partners, several QA agencies acknowledged PEQAB's leadership in assuring the quality of micro-credential programs.

PEQAB also contributes actively to both the Canadian and global higher education quality assurance community through its engagement in conferences. The 2023 Annual Report on the PEQAB website highlights the participation of the Head of Research, International and Special Projects in 17 quality assurance presentations and conferences.

ANALYSIS

The panel found that PEQAB demonstrated a strong commitment to research and dissemination by producing important publications led by the Secretariat and the Head of Research, International, and Special Projects. These publications contribute to the broader academic and policy discussions on quality assurance, student participation, and academic trajectories. The accessibility of these studies through various channels, such as publications, presentations, and annual reports, ensures that stakeholders at local, national, and international levels can benefit from the insights generated.

However, given the extensive dataset of reviews that PEQAB has accumulated, there is an opportunity to provide more systematic and regular system-wide reports on overall outcomes. While PEQAB does share insights through various means, a more structured approach to synthesizing and presenting trends, findings, and policy implications would be beneficial to the broader higher education community. Regularly publishing focused and thematic, as well as comprehensive periodic, analyses of review outcomes could further contribute to continuous improvement within the sector. Consideration of the format of outcomes, including more creative, shorter and user-oriented formats, would also add to understanding and to impact.

Commendations

- The Review Panel commends PEQAB for how it seeks to ensure transparency, objectivity, and efficiency in its external review process by publishing clear information in its manuals, in the briefing of reviewers, and in delivering timely outcomes.

- The Panel commends how PEQAB supports institutional diversity by offering clear guidance and structured reviews that respect each institution's mission.
- The Panel commends the ways in which PEQAB contributes to local and international quality assurance conversations through the production and dissemination of research publications that inform policy and practice.

Recommendations

- The Panel recommends that PEQAB review and, if necessary, adjust the effectiveness of the expedited review process to ensure it meets its intended goals.
- The Panel recommends that PEQAB enhance consistency in the nature of recommendations across similar institutions/programs and extends its work to ensure that TEPs understand the reasons for any differences as part of briefing and training processes.
- The Panel recommends that PEQAB establishes a timetable to regularly and frequently publish systematic analyses of review outcomes that identify trends, thereby supporting continuous improvement in Ontario's higher education system.

Suggestion for further improvement

- The Panel suggests that PEQAB draws on the extensive knowledge base it possesses to produce a series of frequent, short, informative outputs in a range of formats to support the TEPs with which it works to understand, for example, the collective strengths and shared challenges revealed in review reports.

3. The EQAP's Review of TE Providers: Evaluation, Decision Making and Appeals

☐ Not compliant
 ☐ Partially compliant
 ☐ Substantially compliant
 ☒ Fully compliant

3.1 EVALUATION

THE EVALUATION CONDUCTED BY AN EXTERNAL PANEL IS BASED ON A CLEARLY ARTICULATED AND PUBLICLY AVAILABLE CRITERIA AND METHODOLOGY.

EVIDENCE

The SER outlines the requirements and processes that providers are required to undertake and indicates that these are clearly articulated in its [manuals and guidelines](#). PEQAB review panels apply these publicly available standards, and the procedures, as detailed in its manuals and guidelines which are published on its website. Changes and updates to manuals are discussed, in advance, with stakeholders through groups that meet regularly, such as CDOG and POPDOG. More broadly, developments are discussed with other Quality Assurance Agencies from Ontario and Canada.

PEQAB explained, in the SER and in meetings, that it uses various processes and instruments to ensure consistent application of standards and criteria, including the process of briefing review panels and the ways in which senior policy officers support the process throughout.

Similarly, PEQAB explains in the SER, and the Review Panel heard in meetings, that it uses various processes and instruments to ensure continuous improvement and sound understanding of the standards and criteria, such as:

- Twice yearly updates of the standards (January and September), via desk research on current trends along with consultation and feedback from stakeholders, which are approved by the Board.
- The publication of updated, along with the recent versions of manuals, which ensures that processes can be continually improved but that applicants have continuing access to the manual and process relevant to their application.

In the SER PEQAB indicates that it ensures that all documentation is available, and processes can be conducted in French, in support of linguistic diversity in Ontario. French language manuals, guidelines and relevant documents are available on PEQAB's website, as was attested by the Review Panel, but not every document on the English website was available in the French version of the site. PEQAB leadership stated, in a meeting, that this is due to having only one staff member fluent in French who carries out this work in addition to other duties.

PEQAB outlines in the SER "that it ensures that evaluation criteria and methodology are consistently applied across all cases through a structured and transparent process that includes regular practices for Panel member identification and orientations and site visit

activities”. This was confirmed in meetings with Program Reviews Assessors during the site visit.

The SER states that “Panel members for Program Reviews are identified on a rolling basis as the niche programs offered by the institutions makes it important to include subject matter Experts able to comment on the specific curriculum”. Further than this, PEQAB stresses in its SER that experts must possess qualifications and personal qualities that instil confidence by the Minister, the sector, the public and other quality assurance and accrediting bodies. The Review Panel met a range of both new and experienced reviewers reflecting a range of field-specific expertise during its interviews.

PEQAB’s panels are led by a Chair, who has typically conducted a PEQAB Review previously. The panel is provided with the application, the relevant Manual, the specific Panel Guideline and an orientation package, and then has a one-hour orientation with the PEQAB Secretariat. Review experts met by the Review Panel confirmed the adequacy of the material, the orientation and the support provided.

The SER records that “application documentation considered during the Board deliberations is provided to the Minister and cc’d to the institution and the panel members ensuring transparency of information included for consideration. A formal letter of Recommendation is also sent to the Minister. This ensures transparency: reviewers know what, in the end, the Board made of their advice/panel reports; and the applicant institution knows exactly what the Board is recommending to the Minister”. In the meetings with Program Reviews Assessors this was confirmed.

ANALYSIS

During the site visit, the Review Panel learned that all parties involved in a procedure appreciated the clarity of the materials provided and the support from PEQAB’s Senior Policy Advisors during briefing and throughout the review process. For reviewers this was especially the emphasis placed on consistency when drafting assessment reports. The Review Panel heard from both institutions and reviewers that the support by Senior Policy Advisors is appreciated and highly valued.

The fact that appeals (referred to at PEQAB as reconsideration) rarely occur, was taken by the PEQAB Leadership team as indication of consistent application of the standards, stated during a meeting with said team. Although the option of withdrawal was emphasized as a significant contributory factor.

The Review Panel concluded that PEQAB’s efforts to assure consistency are comprehensive and effective, and that this is a result of the guidance and support provided to all parties involved, alongside the published manuals, clear standards and benchmarks. The interviews demonstrated that PEQAB has a sound understanding of potential risks of inconsistency arising from peer reviews and designs its processes, and its approach to support, to mitigate these risks accordingly. The Panel wishes to commend PEQAB for the robust and effective system to ensure consistency.

3.2 DECISION-MAKING

THE EQAB HAS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES IN PLACE THAT ENSURE FAIR AND INDEPENDENT DECISION-MAKING ON THE REVIEW CASES.

EVIDENCE

PEQAB's outlines in the SER how its decision-making processes are designed to be impartial, rigorous, and transparent; further, they incorporate both internal and external evaluations.

When doing an initial review, there is an assessment of PEQAB's "Standard 9 - Internal Quality Assurance and Development", regarding the nature of the applicant's approach in the program under review, and on Program Renewal there is an assessment of both the nature and the application of internal quality assurance and the development in the program under review. In this way, the provider's internal review processes are very much taken into consideration.

PEQAB appoints external experts to review the institution's application, evaluate it against standards and benchmarks, conduct site visits (which are predominantly conducted virtually), and prepare a detailed report using the Panel Guideline Template. The template is designed to provide a space for the Reviewers to indicate the extent to which the standards and benchmarks are met and provide comments on their decision.

The SER states that PEQAB ensures that all decisions are grounded in the published standards and procedures, which are clearly articulated in the manuals and guidelines. At its monthly meetings the Board utilizes a 'Decision Tree' in formulating its Recommendations to the Minister. That Decision Tree incorporates the principal decision to recommend consent or denial and details the basis of decisions as to conditions of consent and the recognition of commitments.

A commitment to transparency is reflected in the [public posting of applications](#), their status, Recommendations and Ministerial decision on the PEQAB website. By making decisions public, PEQAB promotes transparency and accountability in the quality assurance process. Additionally, it also publishes not only the comprehensive manuals that explain the entire Review process, but the guidelines external expert reviewers use in reviewing the application, and the [Decision Tree](#) which supports the Boards recommendations.

ANALYSIS

In line with the evidence presented under 3.2, verified on-site and on-line, and from interviews with Board members, Rectors or senior management representatives from higher education institutions with accreditation experience, Quality Assurance Managers or equivalent with responsibility for the quality assurance portfolio from institutions of higher education it was evident to the Review Panel that the processes in place to assure consistency and impartiality are effective.

In the view of the Review Panel, at PEQAB, the implementation of its quality assurance procedures is very professional.

3.3 APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

THE EQAP DEPLOYS CLEAR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS.

EVIDENCE

The SER explained that, because PEQAB offers Recommendations to the Minister rather than makes final decisions on review outcomes, PEQAB has a ‘Reconsideration’ process rather than an Appeals process. Institutions facing a proposed denial of consent can request reconsideration of the recommendation before it is sent to the Minister. After each Board meeting, the Secretariat provides the applicant institutions and the relevant External Expert Review Panel with the PEQAB Final Report, which includes the Board’s Recommendation concerning the consent duration, conditions, or denial, the conclusions of the External Expert Review Panel, and the institution’s Response. Applicants can request reconsiderations of any part of the report or even request a full withdrawal from submission. PEQAB process to handle appeals (reconsiderations) is, therefore, clearly outlined and established.

Regarding complaints, the SER states that: “PEQAB is committed to addressing concerns and complaints regarding institutions offering programs under ministerial consent, the programs themselves, or the Board’s operations. The processes for handling these matters is presented on the [website](#) and states: “Complaints about PEQAB Operations: Complaints regarding the Board’s operations should be directed to James Brown, CEO of PEQAB, at James.Brown@ontario.ca. If the subsequent resolution does not meet the complainant’s expectations, they may forward their complaint to the Assistant Deputy Minister overseeing the PEQAB Secretariat. Additionally, complainants may choose to contact the Ontario Ombudsman for further recourse”

During the site visit, the Review Panel learned that the Reconsideration process, accessible on its website, and outlined in the SER “is designed to promote fairness by providing institutions with a clear, structured opportunity to contest a denial of consent recommendation before it is finalized. By allowing applicants to submit a written notice of reconsideration that specifies the parts of the recommendation in question and the rationale for the request, the process ensures that institutions can present their perspectives and relevant information to the Board”.

In the SER, PEQAB outlined the necessary steps “Applicants have up to ten business days to submit a written request for reconsideration, specifying which parts of the Recommendation they wish to contest and their justification. Following this, institutions will have an additional 20 days to finalize their submissions, but any changes made after the original Panel Report will not be considered. If no response from the institution is received in the allotted time, the recommendation will be forwarded to the Minister. A neutral third-party panel will re-evaluate the recommendations upon the institution’s request. This Reconsideration Panel, composed of independent experts, will review all relevant documents from the initial evaluation without the inclusion of new materials. Based on their assessment, the panel can either affirm or modify the original Recommendation. The findings will be documented in a report and presented to both the applicant and the Board,

which may then revise its recommendation to the Minister”. However, during a meeting with PEQAB leadership about how many institutions have requested this, the answer was none to date, they have all opted for withdrawal instead.

In meetings with Assessors from the System Coordination and Organization Review Committee and with Program Reviews Assessors, the close working relationship with PEQAB was consistently expressed and how any matters that could become an issue, were tended to appropriately (i.e. that effectively matters were addressed without the need to be escalated into complaints).

ANALYSIS

The Review Panel concluded that PEQAB has a well-designed and robust procedure that is a suitable equivalent of an appeals procedure for institutions that want to request a ‘reconsideration’ of a decision, although to date no institution has requested such a procedure as they have opted for a withdrawal of their submission. The Panel was confident that the clarity of the process, its robustness and the use of a neutral panel provides for fair implementation should a case arise.

The same held true for complaints, although there is a process, in practice complaints are non-existent as stakeholders explained that their close working relationship with their assigned PEQAB senior policy officer helped to resolve any issues that may surface during different stages of a process. During meetings many representatives from the sector, in a range of roles, also stressed how PEQAB staff, including the CEO, were readily contactable, available and open to discussion.

Commendations

- The Review Panel commends PEQAB for its robust and effective systems that ensure consistency in the application of its standards.
- The Panel commends the extent to which PEQAB is involved with its stakeholders and how, together, they discuss changes to the standards via representative groups that meet regularly, including CDOG and POPDOG, assuring changes are quickly adopted.
- The Panel commends PEQAB for its working practices and the way it has built relationships which mean that it is seen to act independently with its decision-making process regarded by its stakeholder as very trustworthy and fair.

Recommendation

- The Panel recommends that PEQAB ensures that its complaints procedure is more prominent on its website and that information about the availability of the complaints process is included in each of its manuals.

Suggestion for further improvement

- The Panel suggests that PEQAB should ensure additional support for the placement of manuals and information on its website in French, as only one staff member supports this, alongside other professional commitments, and given that there is a lag in some French translations being placed on the website and the French website does not contain the full range of material as that in English.

4. Internationalization and External Relations

☐ Not compliant
 ☐ Partially compliant
 ☐ Substantially compliant
 ☒ Fully compliant

4.1 INTERNATIONALIZATION

THE EQAP HAS A ROBUST INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY THAT LEADS TO ENHANCED EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY IN ITS OPERATIONS.

EVIDENCE

In the SER, PEQAB states that it has a perennial goal to engage with the quality assurance community of practice both to “continuously monitor best practices from national and international quality assurance bodies... [and] participate in provincial, national and international discussions, meetings and conferences related to quality assurance”. The ways in which PEQAB satisfies this goal, it states, is reported in each of its Annual Reports (which are published on its website).

The SER presents the text that PEQAB uses to promote its engagement provincially, nationally and internationally in its procedural manuals. The information includes an example of how it drew on international quality assurance practice in its own approaches to illustrate its leading role: looking back over 20 years to 2002, PEQAB states that it introduced Canada’s first qualifications framework based on that developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK. This work formed the basis of the subsequent Ontario Qualifications Framework and informed the creation of the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework, approved by the Council of Ministers of Education, and published in 2007.

PEQAB also indicates, in its manuals and in the SER, that it is active in engaging with INQAAHE’s work, is a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group (CIQG) and publishes on “contemporary topics in quality assurance at national and international conferences”. In general, both the SER and the agency’s annual reports list participation at events etc. but do not provide evidence on the nature of any good practices exchanged, specify what has been learned or how capacity has been built. However, the Review Panel heard in meetings extensive examples of how PEQAB’s external and international engagement is valued and is seen to benefit quality assurance in Canada, in the province and across sector stakeholders.

The focus of PEQAB’s work as an EQAP is Ontario, including out of Province providers delivering, or seeking to deliver, in Ontario. It does not operate internationally as a quality assurance or accreditation agency or provide consultancy services outside Ontario.

In 2023, one of PEQAB’s senior policy advisor roles was formalised as the Head of Research and Special Projects. Both the SER and Annual Reports list the substantial output of research papers and conference or event contributions. However, only four research publications appear on PEQAB’s website with one, from 2018, touching on international practice.

However, the SER lists recent examples of collaborative projects and research, including work on learning outcomes and academic credit, on North America as part of a study on global trends and a conference presentation on cross-agency capacity building. One example, that of the EQAA in Croatia, is listed as a staff exchange, this took place in 2017.

In meetings the Review Panel heard details, from agency staff and from its stakeholders, about the range of PEQAB's international work and the value placed on it within and beyond Canada.

ANALYSIS

Typically, the Annual Reports record factual information on participation internationally, for instance list meetings and events attended, but do not reflect on the impact of the engagement nor indicate how such participation has led to any enhanced efficiency or effectiveness. Thus, there is no information on what has been learned from participation or what any outcomes have been; there is no indication of how this has benefited PEQAB or its stakeholders and how any results are disseminated for providers in Ontario; and there is no indication of why particular topics have been the basis for research or why particular international events were selected. Beyond the example of the development of a qualifications framework, which is significant, if historic, there is little by way of examples of ways in which internationalization has enhanced efficiency and/or effectiveness of PEQAB's operations – or has had an impact on, or benefited, the tertiary education sector in Ontario. An example of a staff exchange in 2017 is given but no details of what was learned from this. [Also see commentary on the SER under ISG1 in connection with how impact is detailed].

However, there is no doubt that PEQAB is open to, and engages with, international developments, despite the limited information in the SER and supporting documents concerning how international partnerships and activity lead to continuous improvements and ensure the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of PEQAB's quality assurance practices.

In meetings the Review Panel were able to explore the extent to which international engagement impacts on the work of the agency, what it gains from that engagement and how it benefits the sector it works with in Ontario. Meetings with national and international partners and with sector representatives illustrated the extent to which PEQAB's international engagement is valued and it was clear to the Review Panel that PEQAB plays a leading role in Ontario, and across Canada, in informing EQAPs and sector bodies about trends in the field. The Review Panel also heard how PEQAB is able to draw on these connections to support work on contemporary changes and challenges (such as the quality assurance of micro-credentials).

The SER states that PEQAB has mechanisms for analysing trends but says nothing about what those trends are – or, again, what it has learned and how that analysis supported the sector or impacted on quality assurance. To date there has only been one such published study, on reviews conducted 2011-2016, although a second is planned for 2025. The Review Panel considered that PEQAB could make far more extensive use of the knowledge base it

possesses in review reports to analyse trends and to explore specific issues and that more frequent, shorter and more targeted publications and other outputs would benefit the sectors it serves and quality assurance partners across the province and nation more generally [this matter is also discussed under ISG2 above].

4.2 EXTERNAL RELATIONS

THE EQAP EFFECTIVELY PROMOTES ITS COLLABORATIONS WITH KEY PLAYERS IN NATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS.

EVIDENCE

In the SER PEQAB discusses ISG 4.2.1 ('the EQAP appropriately coordinates and communicates with other national, regional international government and non-government organizations in the oversight of its provisions') in terms of cross-border provision, however, ISG 4.2.2 ('the EQAP's external relations, partnerships and collaborations promote its mission and successful implementation of its strategies') is interpreted in relation to external relations more broadly.

Under the discussion of 4.2.1, the SER indicates that PEQAB's cross-border activity covers: out of province institutions working in Ontario, consent for Ontario providers to offer provision outside Ontario and recognising the reports and recommendations of other reputable agencies. In this context, PEQAB states that it "meets expectations regardless of the source jurisdiction" and thus "that the reputation of Ontario's higher education sector is protected at home and abroad".

The SER under this standard provides detail on PEQAB's approach to the Recognition of Prior Review (RPR) whereby PEQAB will recognise, or take into account, a portion of a review by another credible agency. It indicates that it will work with other jurisdictional agencies to perform joint reviews.

PEQAB indicates that specific consent is needed for a provider to operate outside Ontario (i.e. consent is for 'home' delivery only and not transferable). PEQAB also confirms that it does not provide quality assurance beyond Ontario unless there is an affiliation with an Ontario degree. PEQAB records that, as an outcome of working on the SER and considering the ISG, it has developed a more formal policy, published in November 2024, on cross-border activities to "support consistent understanding and application".

In terms of 4.2.2, the SER reiterates information about the agency's active involvement with INQAAHE and CIQG and, nationally, with Canadian quality assurance agencies, joint and collaborative projects.

ANALYSIS

The SER provides information about a number of activities that involve other agencies but does not provide much detail of what these activities are or discuss the significance of this

activity for PEQAB's work. Thus, it indicates that it supports EQAPs elsewhere in establishing whether Ontario organisations meet PEQAB's expectations and requirements, but gives no indication about how often this occurs (or indeed if it has) or how it relates to the promotion of collaborations or other aspects of the standard. Similarly, there is no information here about the extent to which RPR is drawn upon, or any reflection on its effectiveness or efficiency, be it for providers or for PEQAB. There is no information on how frequently consent is sought to offer programmes, or to operate, outside Ontario. Thus, from the SER it is hard to establish the extent and nature of cross-border activity. However, information on the RPR is contained within PEQAB's manuals and make it clear what applicant institutions need to do, and the submission requirements.

Given that PEQAB focuses under part of this standard on cross-border activity, the Panel acknowledged the fact that undertaking the SER and preparing for the ISG recognition process has led to positive change in the development, approval and publication of a statement on Degree Programs of PEQAB-referred consent-holders at sites outside Ontario.

Under the discussion of 4.2.2 PEQAB asserts that active participation facilitates the exchange of good practices and being able to stay abreast of the latest developments. However, there is limited illustrative detail in the SER to show what this has meant in practice, for instance, an example given asserts the contribution to capacity building and continuous improvement of quality assurance processes, but does not say in what ways. However, in meetings throughout the site visit, the Review Panel heard from a wide range of different constituencies how much value is placed on the benefits of the ways in which PEQAB engages with the wider national and international quality assurance community. The Panel were impressed by what it heard and was of the view that PEQAB should seek to find ways to promote the benefits of its external engagement more widely (including when developing documents such as a SER for external review, given that the SER for this review significantly underplayed PEQAB's strengths and achievements, as highlighted under ISG1).

Although the section makes reference to PEQAB remaining aligned with international benchmarks, it does not identify which ones. There are a variety of accepted practices internationally and a range of potential benchmarks. This can be illustrated through PEQAB's last external review, which it elected to be against European standards, and showed, in specific areas and in the overall outcome of non-compliance, different benchmarks, norms and expectations with regard to matters such as the publication of reports, independence and the involvement of students. Nevertheless, it is clear from documentation and from meetings, that PEQAB reflects on external feedback and takes action in response as far as it is able in the context within which it operates. The Review Panel was of the view that the legislation under which PEQAB operates limits its ability to innovate and to take a role at the forefront of quality assurance internationally. Given the pace of change and the growing need for quality assurance to be responsive and flexible to meet shifts in technology, in society and the economy, as well as adapt to environmental imperatives, such limitations are likely to be a growing hindrance.

In closing this section of the SER, PEQAB states that its approach to external relations ensures "that it remains a leader in quality assurance in higher education" but, again, does not articulate how and in what ways, or in what locations, it is a leader. Meetings during the

site visit revealed and emphasised the extent to which PEQAB is seen as a leader within Ontario and Canada, predominantly through the ways in which it feeds its international engagement back into discussion with sector stakeholders. However, its mandate and the legislation under which it operates mitigates against the agency leading the development of quality assurance in a wider context or being at its forefront in rethinking approaches and possibilities. The Review Panel heard, and would confirm, that PEQAB is what it describes as ‘nimble’ in finding effective ways to respond to needs while not stepping beyond its mandate and specific context.

The level of activity at INQAAHE and within Canada supports PEQAB’s stated “goal to contribute to the international conversation on higher education quality assurance” and it became clear in meetings that this has impacted on its own practices, had enhanced efficiency and effectiveness and had benefited provision and providers in Ontario. The Panel agreed with the statement in the SER that PEQAB continues to connect to the broader quality assurance community and commends its active engagement.

Commendations

- The Panel commends the active engagement of PEQAB with INQAAHE and its contributions to quality assurance internationally.
- The Panel commends the ways in which PEQAB draws on its active participation in debates about quality assurance internationally, to feedback to organisations and groups within Ontario as well as to other quality assurance agencies across Canada.

In addition to the matters noted above, the Review Panel would encourage the Ministry to consider whether the legislation and mandate under which PEQAB operates will limit its ability to respond effectively to the pace of change and the growing need for quality assurance to be responsive and flexible to meet shifts in technology, in society and the economy, as well as adapt to environmental imperatives. This is discussed further in section seven [page 39].

5. Integrity, Disclosure and Transparency

☐ Not compliant
 ☐ Partially compliant
 ☐ Substantially compliant
 ☒ Fully compliant

5.1 INTEGRITY

THE EQAP OPERATES WITH INTEGRITY AND PROFESSIONALISM AND ADHERES TO ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS.

EVIDENCE

PEQAB states in the SER that it exemplifies integrity and professionalism in its operations, adhering strictly to ethical and professional standards.

Transparency and openness are core values, as reflected in PEQAB's [Values statement](#) which is included in every agenda package and as prominently displayed on the landing page of its website. It has also established public, comprehensive policies and procedures that underpin its operations, along with a set of Policies for Conflict of Interest, for both panel members and Board members to provide a framework for disclosing any personal, financial, or professional interests that could potentially influence the decisions or actions; these policies promote ethical behaviour among Board and panel members. The policies assist in managing risks associated with potential conflicts, thereby preventing situations that could lead to consequences or damage to the reputation of PEQAB. The commitment to ensuring that conflicts of interest are identified and acted upon appropriately (for instance by withdrawing from a discussion at the Board) was confirmed in meetings during the site visit.

ANALYSIS

For the Review Panel, PEQAB's commitment to integrity was evident in its clear policies and procedures designed to ensure transparency and accountability across all its functions. This was reinforced in interviews with PEQAB Board members, Assessors from System Coordination and Organization Review Committee, and Accreditation Agencies involved in joint review activities.

5.2 DISCLOSURE

THE EQAP ENSURES DISCLOSURE AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ITS ACTIVITY IN LINE WITH THE CULTURE WITHIN WHICH OPERATES.

EVIDENCE

The SER states that PEQAB is transparent in disclosing its evaluation standards, processes, and discloses the Recommendation the Board made to the Minister following the Ministers

decision on an application, posting the outcome of decisions on its website. This was verified by the Review Panel.

PEQAB does not, however, publish the full panel reports online and explains in the SER that “Across Canada, full transparency of QA proceedings by the QA agency is not yet normalized”. In terms of review findings, PEQAB explains in the SER that it encourages each institution to disseminate review findings but there is no requirement for these to be publicly posted.

During meetings with PEQAB it became evident it considers its local and regional cultures, by way of its land acknowledgement but also from working with stakeholders to consider including courses on indigenous people.

ANALYSIS

For the Review Panel, the interview sessions, particularly those with PEQAB’s leadership team and accreditation agencies involved in joint review activities, clarified how PEQAB discloses the decisions the Board reaches and the rationale for them and the limitations on disclosure. PEQAB acknowledged that more extensive publication is required in other jurisdictions and quality assurance cultures.

It was clear to the Panel how PEQAB works with its stakeholders to ensure alignment with its regional culture, i.e., via the recognition of indigenous people and reaching consensus on including courses on indigeneity in new proposals. However, the legislation and context within which it works means that PEQAB does not publish the reports it generates from its reviews.

During the interview session it became clear to the Review Panel how, within the limits of its legislative mandate, PEQAB publishes considerable detail of its work and activity, especially in its Annual Reports. These offer insight into the agency’s operations and provide an overview of its activity. Annual reports are published on PEQAB’s website (which contains a full set from 2001/2002 onward).

5.3 TRANSPARENCY

THE EQAP HAS ROBUST SYSTEMS IN PLACE TO ENSURE TRANSPARENT AND TRUSTWORTHY OPERATIONS.

EVIDENCE

PEQAB’s Application Management System (PAMS), which is designed to handle a wide range of data related to its review activities, is described in the SER and was demonstrated to the Review Panel during the site visit. This system captures data for each application including status, timelines, external panel members and their expertise, and Recommendations including Commitments and Conditions of Consent.

PEQAB is transparent in disclosing its evaluation standards, processes, outcomes, decision-making, and appeals (reconsiderations) and, it was demonstrated, the data is easily pulled

from the system to track application status as well as to provide summative information for use in the Annual and other Reports. In addition, the Panel was informed, a current/updated report on Applications Under Review is pulled from PAMS and provided to Board members at each Board meeting as part of the regular Agenda Package.

According to PEQAB's Terms of Reference, all information submitted to or created by PEQAB, including confidential information, may become publicly available through requests under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

ANALYSIS

PAMS, as demonstrated on-site during the site visit, was very informative to the Review Panel. The system provides the required information to administrative staff and is capable of handling data related to all the types of PEQAB reviews and modalities, including Expedited Reviews. This flexibility ensures that PEQAB can effectively manage and evaluate a diverse range of educational programs.

The system is continually being developed and extended and is actively managed. It is used for effective routine administration, monitoring and reporting. The Review Panel also heard how the system is being developed to support the interrogation of review outcomes to support research and trends analysis.

Commendations

- The Panel commends PEQAB for the creation and continuing development of a robust and comprehensive information management system that fully supports its processes.
- The Panel commends PEQAB for its commitment to fully embracing its local and regional indigenous cultures by including practices that recognize this in the way it conducts business at the Secretariat.

Recommendation

- In line with international best practice, the Panel recommends that PEQAB identifies ways to disclose reports on outcomes of its QA process.

6. Stakeholder role and engagement

☐ Not compliant
 ☐ Partially compliant
 ☐ Substantially compliant
 ☒ Fully compliant

6.1 STAKEHOLDER ROLE

THE EQAP IS CLEAR IN THE EXPECTATIONS OF EACH STAKEHOLDER GROUP.

EVIDENCE

In the SER PEQAB lists its internal and external stakeholders. It identifies its Board and staff members as its internal stakeholders with applicant institutions, sector representative groups, expert reviewers, government and regulatory bodies as external stakeholders, alongside the broader quality assurance and higher education community and wider public. The SER does not make mention of students as stakeholders. While regulatory bodies and the public in general are listed, employers are absent, be in their role as employers of graduates or in informing and shaping the nature of industry's needs in the curriculum at program level as part of external quality assurance.

ANALYSIS

While PEQAB lists a series of internal and external stakeholders and, very briefly, states the roles and its expectations of each as well as the intended impact, it provides limited analysis or evidence in support. The outlines of expectations are not comprehensive and, thus, it is not clear in the SER if expectations are shared with and by the different stakeholder groups. There is no indication of the level of impact on PEQAB from each stakeholder group, indeed the information presented is mainly about the PEQAB's impact on, rather than that from, most of the stakeholder groups listed. No indication of stakeholder views is provided, either on the relationship or on the intended impact of the relationship.

The information presented focuses primarily on process and its operation from the perspective of PEQAB. For instance, the role of applicant institutions is to "submit comprehensive applications and engage transparently with the PEQAB Review processes", the expectation is to "adhere to PEQAB's Standards and guidelines" and the impact is on PEQAB's recommendations on applications. This is a particular interpretation of the meaning of ISG 6.1 which does not emphasise the level of impact from each stakeholder group, nor embrace matters such as communication and interaction, about mutual learning and effective two-way engagement as part of PEQAB's expectations. However, consultation is indicated as an expectation for one stakeholder group. Despite the particular interpretation of the standard, the Review Panel considered that PEQAB's expectations of its stakeholder groups are more expansive in practice and extend beyond more transactional elements.

6.2 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

THE EQAP ENSURES MEANINGFUL AND IMPACTFUL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN ITS FUNCTIONS.

EVIDENCE

In the SER, PEQAB stresses the importance of stakeholder engagement in enabling it to fulfil its terms of reference and outlines the methods it uses to communicate with stakeholders. These include annual surveys and its involvement with two in-province sector groups, CDOG and POPDOG. During the site visit the Panel heard from members of CDOG and POPDOG alongside a wide range of other stakeholders about the active nature of PEQAB's involvement with them and the value they placed on participation in groups and discussions.

More widely the SER indicates that PEQAB coordinates a monthly meeting with quality assurance agencies in Canada and that members of staff are involved in provincial and national activity and involved in INQAHE and CIQG as international networks.

The SER provides brief information on non-discriminatory policies with links to conflict of interest policies for Board members and external reviewers [discussed earlier in this report].

ANALYSIS

The information in the SER refers to requiring stakeholder engagement to enable PEQAB to fulfil its functions. The Review Panel commends PEQAB's active engagement with its stakeholders, and the ways in which it supports and involves both the College and Out of Province constituencies in its work. The Panel heard in meetings (also noted in the SER) that the consultation with CDOG and POPDOG is mutually beneficial and helps to ensure that revisions to standards or manuals are informed by the reality of practice in TEPs.

It was similarly evident from meetings that PEQAB's coordination of monthly meetings of Canadian quality assurance agencies is valued.

The SER provided some information on PEQAB's approach to non-discriminatory practices and the Review Panel considered that it would have been beneficial to provide more information and a reflective commentary (for instance on how it ensures the Board, the secretariat and reviewers act in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code, the importance of considerations of indigeneity and the commitment to Land Acknowledgement).

PEQAB does not have a board in the form of a governing body that specifies representation of defined stakeholder groups. It does reach out to sector bodies to ensure engagement by them in its functions; however, there is no formal, assured engagement or involvement in its functions from a governance perspective.

PEQAB does not identify employers/industry representatives as its stakeholders. While employers are involved at program level within institutions, given the concern with system coordination, the consideration of demand and economic need, ways systematically to

involve industry views and engage industry as stakeholders in its own work could be of benefit.

PEQAB does not identify students and the student interest in its discussion of stakeholders. Given the ways students are integral to approaches to both internal and external quality assurance in many quality assurance systems internationally, continuing consideration of how to involve students as primary stakeholders in PEQAB's processes would be beneficial and would build on the work PEQAB has done to encourage student involvement in TEPs' internal quality assurance.

Commendation

- The Panel commends PEQAB's active engagement of sector groups as stakeholders in its work as well as its wider active involvement in discussions amongst quality assurance bodies in Ontario and across Canada.

Recommendation

- In line with international best practice, the Panel recommends that PEQAB identifies ways to extend the systematic involvement of students as core stakeholders in its work and activity and outlines its expectations of students as stakeholders.

Suggestions for further improvement

- The Panel would encourage PEQAB to identify ways to extend the systematic involvement of industry and employers in its work and activity, both for the added benefit of this perspective in general and to support system coordination.
- The Panel suggests PEQAB includes students and the student interest overtly in its work and approach, listing students as stakeholders and, in systematically considering how that stakeholder interest is represented and promoted, how students are enabled to become partners to the assurance of the quality of their education and their learning.

7. Additional Commentary

In addition to the assessment by the panel of PEQAB against INQAAHE's ISG there were three areas that the Review Panel wished to note; these are detailed below.

Succession planning

The review team found PEQAB's foundational elements—its structure, policies, and guidelines—to be robust and well-established. This strong framework has enabled PEQAB to rise into a position of leadership within its sector.

A key factor in PEQAB's success has been its proactive engagement with stakeholders and its collaborative spirit in working alongside other agencies. This effective partnership approach is significantly underpinned by the leadership, the professional development and increasing maturity of the individuals within PEQAB.

Looking ahead, while PEQAB's essential work continues, it is crucial to proactively strengthen its organizational resilience. This is particularly important considering both evolving external landscapes and, even more so, given the inevitable internal transitions that organizations face. To best prepare for these future needs, PEQAB and its Board should develop a comprehensive succession plan that adheres to all relevant Ministry regulations. Once in place, this plan will provide PEQAB with a clear and reliable roadmap for navigating necessary changes in the years to come.

The SER and reflective capacity

While PEQAB's Self-Evaluative Review (SER) followed the ISG structure and included supporting documentation of its activities, processes, and structures, it presented a largely descriptive account lacking in analytical depth. This limited the Review Panel's ability to understand how gathered information shaped institutional decisions and, crucially, the impact of PEQAB's described activities. The team also noted the initial SER was incomplete – a deficiency identified by the Review Panel despite internal consideration, including sign off by the Board – suggesting a potential gap in ownership, engagement with the external review and effective internal quality processes.

However, on-site discussions painted a contrasting picture. The review team observed a significant capacity for reflection and analytical thinking among PEQAB's policy officers and leadership in their decision-making. This insightful approach demonstrably contributes to PEQAB's success in its mandate and stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, the site visit highlighted the substantial impact of PEQAB's work within Ontario and the high value placed on its external engagement.

To enhance future self-evaluations, a more analytical approach would empower PEQAB to better identify areas for improvement and further refine its operations, while also providing a stronger foundation for external review teams. In this regard, it is crucial to emphasize that a Quality Assurance Agency's self-evaluation should reflect, embody and support its quality culture and operational standards, at a minimum meeting, if not exceeding, the expectations it holds for the providers and programs it reviews.

Independence

The opening section of PEQAB's SER outlines Quality Assurance in Canada and its Provinces and states "the quality assurance agencies of Canada have a variety of relationships with their governments, but those responsible for degree level programming are typically arms-length, autonomous or quasi-autonomous agencies. As such, the majority of these agencies have governing boards or councils made up diverse stakeholders such as students, public tertiary institutions, industry/business representatives, and a mix of other representatives who represent the public-at-large" (PEQAB SER p.5)

PEQAB, under the PSECE Act has a Board composed of a chair, appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council; and a vice-chair and not more than nine other members appointed by the Minister. The Act does not indicate any detail of the make up of the members of the Board or identify the stakeholder interests that should be represented. The Board reviews the reports and supporting information arising from evaluations conducted by expert reviewers with the support of members of the Secretariat and makes recommendations to the Minister regarding the granting of consent. It is not a governing board or council and there is no governing body as such. The CEO of the Secretariat reports to an Assistant Deputy Minister in the Ministry for Colleges and Universities and not to the Board.

When the opportunity arises, the Review Panel would strongly encourage the Ministry to strengthen the independence of PEQAB through the establishment of a Governing Board with the CEO and Secretariat responsible and reporting to it. Further, the Panel would encourage the nature of the stakeholder interests that make up that governing body to be specified, to include the kind of diverse range indicated in the SER (students, tertiary institutions, industry/business representatives) alongside independent members appointed to represent the general, public interest and that of the indigenous community

The Review Panel would encourage the Ministry to consider whether the legislation and mandate under which PEQAB operates will limit its ability to respond effectively to the pace of change and the growing need for quality assurance to be responsive and flexible to meet shifts in technology, in society and the economy, as well as adapt to environmental imperatives.

Further, while PEQAB benefits from stable financial support from the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, which covers essential operational costs and infrastructure, it would benefit from a more proactive role in shaping its budget. This would enhance its strategic autonomy and better enable the alignment of resources with evolving priorities. The Panel would encourage the Ministry to consider this when next revising PEQAB's mandate and status.

Conclusion

Overall judgment of the Review Panel

The Panel considers that PEQAB is in overall compliance with INQAAHE's International Standards and Guidelines.

Outcome for each standard

	Standard	Judgement
1	Legitimacy of the External Quality Assurance Provider	Substantially compliant
2	The EQAP's framework for external review of quality of TEPs	Substantially compliant
3	The EQAP's Review of TE Providers: Evaluation, Decision Making and Appeals	Fully compliant
4	Internationalization and External Relations	Fully compliant
5	Integrity, Disclosure and Transparency	Fully compliant
6	Stakeholder role and engagement	Fully compliant

Summary of commendations

1. The Review Panel commends the strong operational foundation demonstrated by PEQAB with a highly qualified staff, many of whom hold PhDs, and a commitment to professional development through mentorship, training, and participation in international quality assurance fora.
2. The Panel commends the creation of the specialized PAMS database enhances efficiency in managing applications and reviews.
3. The Review Panel commends PEQAB for how it seeks to ensure transparency, objectivity, and efficiency in its external review process by publishing clear information in its manuals, in the briefing of reviewers, and in delivering timely outcomes.
4. The Panel commends how PEQAB supports institutional diversity by offering clear guidance and structured reviews that respect each institution's mission.
5. The Panel commends the ways in which PEQAB contributes to local and international quality assurance conversations through the production and dissemination of research publications that inform policy and practice.
6. The Review Panel commends PEQAB for its robust and effective systems that ensure consistency in the application of its standards.

7. The Panel commends the extent to which PEQAB is involved with its stakeholders and how, together, they discuss changes to the standards via representative groups that meet regularly, including CDOG and POPDOG, assuring changes are quickly adopted.
8. The Panel commends PEQAB for its working practices and the way it has built relationships which mean that it is seen to act independently with its decision-making process regarded by its stakeholder as very trustworthy and fair.
9. The Panel commends the active engagement of PEQAB with INQAHE and its contributions to quality assurance internationally.
10. The Panel commends the ways in which PEQAB draws on its active participation in debates about quality assurance internationally, to feedback to organisations and groups within Ontario as well as to other quality assurance agencies across Canada.
11. The Panel commends PEQAB for the creation and continuing development of a robust and comprehensive information management system that fully supports its processes.
12. The Panel commends PEQAB for its commitment to fully embracing its local and regional indigenous cultures by including practices that recognize this in the way it conducts business at the Secretariat.
13. The Panel commends PEQAB's active engagement of sector groups as stakeholders in its work as well as its wider active involvement in discussions amongst quality assurance bodies in Ontario and across Canada.

Overview of judgements and recommendations

1. The Panel recommends that the frequency of external evaluations should always be scheduled to feed into the review of PEQAB's mandate and could beneficially be increased to every five years, rather than the current longer intervals, to provide more timely feedback to support continual enhancement and further enhance PEQAB's quality assurance processes.
2. The Panel recommends that PEQAB goes beyond noting that, with modifications, existing benchmarks could meet the needs of diverse modalities to specify what the relevant modifications are and articulating clearly, for both TEPs and expert reviewers, how existing standards should be interpreted or applied for differing modes of delivery.
3. The Panel recommends that PEQAB review and, if necessary, adjust the effectiveness of the expedited review process to ensure it meets its intended goals.
4. The Panel recommends that PEQAB enhance consistency in the nature of recommendations across similar institutions/programs and extends its work to ensure that TEPs understand the reasons for any differences.
5. The Panel recommends that PEQAB establishes a timetable to regularly and frequently publish systematic analyses of review outcomes that identify trends and challenges, thereby supporting continuous improvement in Ontario's higher education system.

6. The Panel recommends that PEQAB ensures that its complaints procedure is more prominent on its website and that information about the availability of the complaints process is included in each of its manuals.
7. In line with international best practice, the Panel recommends that PEQAB identifies ways to disclose reports on outcomes of its QA process.
8. In line with international best practice, the Panel recommends that PEQAB identifies ways to extend the systematic involvement of students as core stakeholders in its work and activity and outlines its expectations of students as stakeholders.

Suggestions for further improvement

1. The Panel is of the view that PEQAB should seek to ensure that the SER, or equivalent, for its next external review provides a more detailed discussion of PEQAB's contributions, particularly regarding its role in improving institutional quality and public perception, to present a clearer picture of the agency's impact.
2. The Panel suggests that PEQAB draws on the extensive knowledge base it possesses to produce a series of frequent, short, informative outputs in a range of formats to support the TEPs with which it works to understand, for example, the collective strengths and shared challenges revealed in review reports.
3. The Panel suggests that PEQAB should ensure additional support for the placement of manuals and information on its website in French, as only one staff member supports this alongside other professional commitments, and given that there is a lag in some French translations being placed on the website and the French website does not contain the full range of material as that in English.
4. The Panel would encourage PEQAB to identify ways to extend the systematic involvement of industry and employers in its work and activity, both for the added benefit of this perspective in general and to support system coordination.
5. The Panel suggests PEQAB includes students and the student interest overtly in its work and approach, listing students as stakeholders and, in systematically considering how that stakeholder interest is represented and promoted, how students are enabled to become partners to the assurance of the quality of their education and their learning.

ANNEX 1: EXTERNAL REVIEW PANEL AND VISIT PROGRAMME

Panel composition

Role	Name	Position/Institution	World region
Chair	Helmuth Trefftz	Professor of Computer Science, Universidad EAFIT, former Director Colombia National Accreditation Council and of INQAAHE Board	Latin America and Caribbean
Expert	Carlos A. González-Campos	Dean of Planning, Institutional Effectiveness and Accreditation, CETYS University, Mexico	North America
Secretary	Rowena Pelik	International Higher Education Consultant, UK, former Director at the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, UK	Western Europe
Observer	Fabrice Hénard	INQAAHE CEO	
Coordinator	Concepción Herruzo	INQAAHE project coordinator	

Site visit program

Day 1. 11/03/2025

Time	Activity	Attendees
08:30	Arrival	
08:30-09:30	Preparatory Meeting	
09:30-10:30	PEQAB Leadership team	Staff from PEQAB Secretariat
10:30-10:45	Break	
10:45-11:25	Accreditation Agencies involved in joint review activities	Engineering Teacher Education Interior Design
11:25-11:30		
11:30-12:30	Canadian and International Partners	Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

		Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC)/Council of Ministers of Education, Canada INQAAHE
12:30-13:30	Lunch	
13:30-14:00	Panel Internal Meeting	
14:00-15:55	Board members	Vice Chair and other member of the Board
15:55-14:00		
16:00-17:00	Rectors or senior management representatives from HE institutions with accreditation experience	Presidents/Vice Presidents of Ontario Colleges and Private, Out of Province, and Other Institutions
17:00-17:45	Panel Internal Meeting	

Day 2. 12/03/2025

Time	Activity	Attendees
8:30	Arrival	
8:30-09:30	Preparatory Meeting	
9:30-10:30	Professional Staff related to EQA system for Higher Education	Staff from PEQAB Secretariat
10:30-10:45	Break	
10:45-12:10	Quality Assurance Managers or equivalent with responsibility for the quality assurance portfolio from institutions of higher education	Managers/Directors of Quality in College Degree and Private, Out of Province, and Other Institutions
12:10-12:15		
12:15-13:00	Government representatives	Assistant Deputy Minister and Director
13:00-13:30	Panel Internal Meeting	
13:30-14:30	Lunch	
	Administrative Staff	
14:30-15:25	Online Platform for Data Management inclusive of QA Processes and Reviews and Automated QA	Staff from PEQAB Secretariat

15:25-15:30		
15:30-16:30	Assessors from System Coordination and Organization Review Committee	Expert reviewers
16:30-17:50	Panel Internal Meeting	

Day 3. 13/03/2025

Time	Activity	Attendees
9:00	Arrival	
9:00-10:00	Preparatory Meeting	
10:00-11:00	Program Reviews Assessors	Expert reviewers
11:00-11:15	Break	
11:15-11:45	Call back session	Executive Director and staff
11:45-12:45	Panel Internal Meeting	
12:45-13:15	Oral Exit Report	Board, Executive Director and staff
13:15-14:00	Lunch	
14:00	Departure	

ANNEX 2: GLOSSARY

CDOG	College Degree Granting Operating Group
CDQF	Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
EQAP or EQAA	External quality assurance provider (or agency)
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISG	International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education
OQF	Ontario Qualifications Framework
PAMS	PEQAB's Application Management System
PSECE	Post-secondary Education Choice & Excellence Act, 2000
PEQAB	Postsecondary Education Quality Assurance Board
POPDOG	Private Out of Province Degree Providers Operating Group
QA	Quality assurance
RPR	Recognition of Prior Review
SER	Self-evaluation Review
TEPs	Tertiary Education Providers
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ANNEX 3: INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Module 1: Baseline standards

STANDARDS		GUIDELINES
1. LEGITIMACY OF THE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROVIDER (EQAP)	1.1 Mission, Governance & Organization: The EQAP is a recognized, credible organization, trusted by key stakeholders: the government, TE providers (TEPs) and public at large. Its governance, structure and operations enable effective and efficient operations in line with its mission.	1.1.1 The EQAP has an established legal basis and is recognized by key stakeholders: government, TE providers and the public at large. The EQAP is guided by principles of good practice in formulating its policies and practices (e.g. independence, objectivity, autonomy).
		1.1.2 The EQAP has a clearly articulated mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly state that the external quality assurance of tertiary education is a key function of the organization, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable performance indicators. The interest of students and society are at the forefront of its aspirations.
		1.1.3 The EQAP has a well-articulated governance model consistent with its mission and objectives and adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders at pertinent levels of governance and management.
		1.1.4 The composition of its decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure trust, independence and impartiality in decision-making. A clear policy and adequate mechanisms preventing conflict of interests are in operation and apply to its staff, its decision-making body, and external reviewers.
		1.1.5 The EQAP's organizational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently.
		1.1.6 The EQAP's activities are premised on a robust strategic planning. Adequate mechanisms are in place to assess its progress, impact and plans for future developments.

	<p>1.2 Resources: the EQAP has adequate resources – physical, financial and human – to carry out its mission.</p>	<p>1.2.1 The EQAP is equipped with a well-trained, appropriately qualified staff to enable external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. The staff has the needed skills to carry out the functions associated with external QA. The EQAP provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.</p>
		<p>1.2.2 The EQAP has established, maintains and enhances a robust pool of qualified external reviewers supported by necessary recruitment, on-boarding, training and professionalization opportunities.</p>
		<p>1.2.3 The EQAP has adequate physical, virtual and financial resources to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives. Its funding approach instils trust and sustainability in operations. It is equipped with the necessary technological resources to carry out efficiently its processes including a database of external reviewers, a respective platform for managing its evaluation procedures, etc.</p>
	<p>1.3 Internal QA and Accountability: The EQAP has in place policies and mechanisms for its internal quality assurance that demonstrate a continuing effort to maintain and improve the quality and integrity of its activities.</p>	<p>1.3.1 The EQAP has a clear policy for its own internal and external quality assurance linked to organizational planning, funding and performance. Outcomes are evinced through robust accountability measures available to the TE community and the society it serves.</p>
		<p>1.3.2 The EQAP has robust internal quality assurance mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of tertiary education, the effectiveness of its operations, and to maintain its relevance and contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.</p>
		<p>1.3.3 The EQAP periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects on the system(s) it operates within and its over-riding values. The review is premised</p>

		on reliable data collection and analysis to inform decision-making and trigger improvements.
		1.3.4 The EQAP's plan for internal and external evaluation of its policies and practices identifies and integrates its practices in reviewing diverse modalities of delivery (e.g. distance education provision, hybrid) and UNESCO ISCED levels 4-8, as applicable. For example, while assessing postgraduate programs, necessary dimensions, such as research capacity should form the core of evaluation, focused on links between research and learning through an integrated approach to external QA review.
		1.3.5 The EQAP is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not to exceed five years. Evidence of any required action(s) is (are) implemented and disclosed.
		1.3.6 Strong evidence exists of a well-established and robust quality culture, which drives enhancement, relevance of and trust in the EQAP. The evidence is present throughout all the functions of the EQAP, as per its mandate.
2. THE EQAP'S FRAMEWORK FOR EXTERNAL REVIEW OF QUALITY OF TEPs	2.1 The relationship between the EQAP and Tertiary Education Providers (TEPs): The EQAP recognizes TEPs as having primary responsibility for quality and relevance and providing support in promoting trust and credibility.	2.1.1 The EQAP recognizes that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the tertiary education providers themselves and respects the specific feature of each TEP.
		2.1.2 The EQAP ensures that the core values of tertiary education - equitable access, accountability, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and social responsibility - are respected and promoted.
		2.1.3 The EQAP promotes development, appropriate implementation, and continuous enhancement of the TE IQA system in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the providers.
		2.1.4 The EQAP is mindful of the level of workload and related costs that its procedures will place on

		TEPs and strives to make the procedures as time and cost effective as possible.
		2.1.5 The EQAP provides tertiary education providers with clear guidance on the requirements for self-assessment and external review processes.
	2.2 The EQAP's standards for external quality review: The standards value diversity of provisions and promote trust, relevance, enhanced quality of TE provisions, and thus promote a quality culture.	2.2.1 The EQAP recognizes and values the diversity of providers and translates this institutional aspect into standards that take into account the TEP's identity and mission.
		2.2.2 The standards adopted by the EQAP have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system.
		2.2.3 The standards explicitly address the areas of a TEP's activity that fall within the EQAP's scope, (e.g., governance and management, program design and approval, teaching and learning processes, student admission, progression and certification, research, and community engagement) and on the availability of necessary resources (e.g., finances, staff and learning resources).
		2.2.4 The standards take into account and provide for an effective internal follow-up on the outcomes of the external reviews.
		2.2.5 The EQAP has a clear policy that specifies how standards are to be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.
		2.2.6 The EQAP standards adequately address and promote academic integrity.

	<p>2.3 The EQAP's external review process: the external review framework has a clear set of procedures for each type of review.</p>	<p>2.3.1 The EQAP carries out an external review process that is driven by a publicly available and reliable methodology ensuring independence, trust, relevance to the existing context and credibility of its procedures. Where applicable, the EQAP should demonstrate its capacity to conduct reviews in both virtual and in-person modes supported by purpose-built methodology. This distinction should be clear to avoid any issues of misconduct.</p>
		<p>2.3.2 The EQAP has published documents clearly articulating expectations from TEPs in the form of quality standards and procedures for each step/phase of the external review.</p>
		<p>2.3.3 The external review process is carried out by a panel(s) of experts consistent with the characteristics of the provider/provision under review. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners. Experts represent a balance of diversity, equity, and inclusion as appropriate for the mission of the EQAP.</p>
		<p>2.3.4 The EQAP has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and relevant materials such as guidelines/handbooks and manuals for evaluation.</p>
		<p>2.3.5 External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest and ensure that any judgment(s) resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria.</p>
		<p>2.3.6 The EQAP's system has mechanisms in place that ensure each TEP or program is evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees differ.</p>
		<p>2.3.7 The EQAP carries out the external review within a reasonable time-frame to ensure that information is current and updated.</p>

		2.3.8 The EQAP ensures the tertiary education providers have an opportunity to correct any factual error that may appear in the external review report.
		2.3.9 The EQAP provides clear guidance to the providers in the application of each step within the external review procedure, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate.
	2.4 Regular Systemic Reviews: the EQAP conducts regular systemic/thematic reviews to inform its stakeholders and public at large on systemic issues/developments. and trends.	2.4.1 Where applicable, the EQAP conducts regular systemic/thematic reviews within the domain it operates in and makes reports on trends and impacts publicly available for broader use by stakeholders.
		2.4.2 The EQAP prepares, and periodically disseminates, integrated, system-wide reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes, impacts on the TE system and its performance, and of any other relevant activities.
3. THE EQAP'S REVIEW OF TE PROVIDERS: EVALUATION, DECISION MAKING AND APPEALS	3.1 Evaluation: The evaluation conducted by external panel is based on a clearly articulated and publicly available criteria and methodology.	3.1.1 The evaluation criteria are clearly articulated and supported by a robust methodology.
		3.1.2 The evaluation criteria and methodology are consistently applied across all cases.
		3.1.3 The EQAP provides full and clear disclosure of its policies, procedures, criteria and methodology for evaluation and judgements of TE performance, made publicly available prior to its application.
	3.2 Decision-making: The EQAP has policies and procedures in place that ensure fair and independent decision-making on the review cases.	3.2.1 EQAP decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the provider's internal review process and the external review panel while considering any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to the provider.
		3.2.2 EQAP decisions are based on published standards and procedures and can be justified only with reference to those standards and procedures.

		3.2.3 The EQAP decision-making process is impartial, rigorous, and transparent. The approach to decision-making and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up by TEPs are consistent throughout all procedures.
		3.2.4 The EQAP makes its decisions and/or review reports public. The content and extent of reporting accords with the cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.
		3.2.5 The EQAP has mechanisms to facilitate a fair public understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.
	3.3 Appeals and Complaints: The EQAP deploys clear policies and procedures for appeals and complaints.	3.3.1 The EQAP has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operations.
		3.3.2 The EQAP has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.
		3.3.3 Appeals are conducted by an independent panel/commission not responsible for the original decision and has no conflicts of interest. Appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAP.
4. INTERNATIONALIZATION AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS	4.1 Internationalization: The EQAP has a robust internationalization strategy that leads to enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in its operations.	4.1.1 The EQAP abides by an <i>internationalization principle</i> in its functions and operations as applicable and which accord with its mission.
		4.1.2 The EQAP is open to international developments in quality assurance and tertiary education at large and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field, thus enhancing relevance.
		4.1.3 The EQAP collaborates with other QA bodies internationally where possible in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, review of decisions, joint projects, and/or staff exchanges.
	4.2 External relations: the EQAP effectively promotes its collaborations with key	4.2.1 The EQAP appropriately coordinates and communicates with other national, regional international government and non-government organizations in the oversight of its provisions.

	players in national, regional, international contexts.	4.2.2 The EQAP's external relations, partnerships and collaborations promote its mission and successful implementation of its strategies.
5. INTEGRITY, DISCLOSURE AND TRANSPARENCY	5.1 Integrity: The EQAP operates with integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.	5.1.1 The EQAP has a clear policy and procedures in place to underpin integrity in its functions and manifests it openly and transparently. Integrity is integral to the culture of the organization and is consistently respected in all the modes of delivery of services (face-to-face; distance; hybrid; cross-border).
		5.2.1 The EQAP's policies and procedures on external evaluation of tertiary education providers and provisions underpin adequate disclosure of its reviews and related outcomes/decisions made, based on consideration of the local and regional cultures, while ensuring alignment with international best practice.
	5.2 Disclosure: The EQAP ensures disclosure at different levels of its activity in line with the culture within which operates.	5.2.2 The EQAP makes public its policies and decisions and disseminates reports on outcomes of its QA processes. The EQAP publicly discloses decisions about the EQAP resulting from any external review of its own performance.
		5.3.1 The EQAP's policies and procedures on the external evaluation of tertiary education providers and provisions underpin the transparency principle in dealing with reviews and decision-making.
	5.3 Transparency: The EQAP has robust systems in place to ensure transparent and trustworthy operations.	5.3.2 The EQAP has a robust information management system, which supports transparent, efficient, data driven and reliable decision-making. The EQAP has a process for data collection and reporting about its review/accreditation activity for all types of modalities and reviews (e.g., online/distance education provisions, cross-border education, short programs) which are consistent and comply with national/governmental requirements.
		6.1.1 The EQAP clearly defines its internal and external stakeholders along with comprehensive
	6.1 Stakeholder role: The EQAP is clear in the	

6. STAKEHOLDER ROLE AND ENGAGEMENT	expectations of each stakeholder group.	statements of expectations and level of impact from each stakeholder group.
	6.2 Stakeholder engagement: The EQAP ensures meaningful and impactful stakeholder engagement in its functions.	6.2.1 The EQAP's policies ensure pro-active stakeholder engagement in matters related to standards, procedures, reviews, and decision-making. The EQAP, where applicable, should demonstrate an inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement, e.g., in its procedures in terms of ensuring gender and geographical balance, and other non-discriminatory policies.
		6.2.2 To ensure meaningful engagement, the EQAP has targeted induction, training and professionalization measures, which are consistently applied and regularly enhanced as needed.