

Quality Assessment Panel Report Guidelines

Review of Capacity to Deliver Online Degree Programming

Applicable to all Applicants – Public Organizations, Private Organizations, Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology

SAMPLE

Preface

In Ontario, organizations that wish to offer degree programs or part of a program leading to a degree (that do not have legislative authority to do so) must request the consent of the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The Minister refers the organization to the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB, the Board) for its recommendation on the quality of the program/proposed activities and the organization's ability to deliver the program/proposed activities. If the Minister is satisfied that the organization can deliver a quality programming, s/he grants a time-limited consent that requires the program and the organization to be reviewed on a regular basis (typically every 5-7 years).

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL INSERTED HERE: i.e., Organization A has applied for a review of its capacity to deploy online technologies in the delivery of its degree programs.

GUIDELINES FOR YOUR REVIEW

THIS SECTION OUTLINES THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE QUALITY ASSESSMENT PANEL (QAP)

We have enclosed the organization's proposal for your review. Your assignment, discussed in detail below, is to assess the submission against the Board's requirements for distance education for a Bachelor's Honours Degree in an applied area of study.

We will provide a short orientation session for you over the phone a week or so after you receive the package. Following that session, we will start the process by introducing you (by email) to your contacts at the organization. Please note that in the Background and the Additional Information Related to Your Review Section (p.13ff) of these *Guidelines* you will find information, that we will also cover in the orientation, about degree granting in Ontario, and the review and assessment of applications for Ministerial consent. In addition, the section contains tips about the review which you might find helpful.

Your primary obligation is to provide the Board with your best judgement on the quality of **Organization A's** proposal and the organization's overall capacity to use online technologies and methods in the delivery of its degree program.

The Board's definitions of delivery methods are as follows:

Traditional Delivery: Classroom based teaching with assignments and activities that students pursue independently of each other.

Web Facilitated Delivery: Web resources and technologies are used to facilitate what is essentially a face to face course. May use web pages and course management systems (CMS) to post syllabi, readings and assignments.

Blended/Hybrid Delivery: Course blends online/e-learning and face to face delivery. Substantial parts of the content are delivered online and discussions, team projects and activities are used for learning. The number of face to face sessions is decreased as the volume of online activity increases.

Online Delivery: A course where all or almost all of the content is web-based with no or a very small number of face to face meetings. Delivery methods included in the "online" category include multimedia, video conferencing, social networking, web-based learning management system (LMS), and/or learning objects.

To this end, the Panel is asked to assess the organization against the standards and benchmarks set by PEQAB (enclosed) and, when it deems it appropriate, to identify and address any other quality-related issues arising from the proposal.

We have provided you with materials related to online learning, including policy documents and information contained within a program proposal, and should we receive any additional information, either from the Organization or interested stakeholders, we will forward it to you. Please direct any requests for additional information directly to the Organization. Should you receive additional information, please submit it with your report for our files.

Assessment against Standards and Benchmarks

The Board has four standards relevant to the review of an institution's capacity to use online technology in the delivery of its degree programs¹:

1. Program Delivery
2. Capacity to Deliver
3. Academic Freedom and Integrity
4. Student Protection

Definitions of Assessment Categories

When assessing the proposal against the Board's benchmarks, you're asked to indicate whether the organization **meets or exceeds the Board's benchmark** (this aspect of the proposal meets or exceeds the threshold set by the Board in the benchmark) or **does not meet the Board's benchmark** (this aspect of the proposal does not meet the threshold set by the Board in the benchmark).

In the case that the benchmark is not met, the Board requires your guidance about whether the revisions required to meet the threshold set by the Board in the benchmark are **major** (required revisions to meet the Board's benchmark are substantial, would take significant time and/or resources to rectify, and/or should be re-assessed before being implemented) or **minor** (required revisions to meet the benchmark are relatively minor, the institution has the capacity to implement them, and they do not require reassessment prior to implementation).

For each benchmark, please indicate whether the organization

- Meets or exceeds the benchmark (check "Y"); or
- Does not meet the benchmark (check "N").

Where an aspect of the proposal does not meet the benchmark, characterize whether a) you consider the revisions required to meet the Board's threshold to be major or minor (based on the definitions provided above), b) the nature of the revision(s) that will be required to meet the threshold, and c) the reasons for your judgements.

Note any commitments made by the organization during the review that were critical to your judgements.

Completed Report:

Please return the final report to the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board in electronic format and send a signed version of the report to:

Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board
c/o Secretariat staff name

¹ For samples of Quality Assessment Panel Report Guidelines used to review a new program, please see:
<http://www.peqab.ca/Publications/QAGuidProgRevPublicHonsWebFeb.pdf> (Public)
<http://www.peqab.ca/Publications/QAGuideProgRevPrivBachWebFeb.pdf> (Private)
<http://www.peqab.ca/Publications/GuidelinesCAAT2010newprogram.pdf> (Ontario Colleges)

900 Bay Street
23rd Floor, Mowat Block
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Alternatively, the Chair may submit the final report electronically and copy all members of the QAP on the email. This submission will be considered affirmation from the panel that they are aware of and approve the content of the final report.

Electronic submissions should be forwarded to: **X@ontario.ca**.

SAMPLE

Quality Assessment Panel Guidelines

1. PROGRAM DELIVERY STANDARD

Standard:

The delivery methods support achievement of the expected and actual learning outcomes.

Benchmarks:	Meets or exceeds the benchmark (Y/N)?²	If no: comment on a) whether the required revisions are major or minor ³ ; b) the nature of the revisions required; c) the reasons for your judgements; and d) any commitments or important clarifications the organization made during the review that were critical to your judgements. If yes: detail any commitments or important clarifications the organization made during the review that were critical to your judgements.
1. The institution conducts sustained, evidence-based and participatory inquiry to determine whether courses and the programs (whether delivered using traditional, web facilitated, blended, hybrid, or online methods) are achieving the intended learning outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
2. The results of such inquiry are used to guide curriculum design and delivery, pedagogy, and educational processes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
3. Assessment of the delivery methods includes consideration of: a) their quality and effectiveness; b) standardized and regular feedback from students; c) provisions for pre-registration and ongoing academic advising; d) policies concerning interventions for poor student progress; and e) availability and suitability of technical and other supports.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	

² Indicate whether the College

- Meets or exceeds the benchmark (check “Y” for “yes”); or
- Does not meet the benchmark (check “N” for “no”).

³ **Major:** Required revisions to meet the threshold are substantial, would take significant time and/or resources to rectify, and/or should be re-assessed before being implemented.

Minor: Required revisions to meet the threshold are relatively minor, the institution has the capacity to implement them, and they do not require reassessment prior to implementation.

4. Delivery methods are appropriate to course content and design.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
5. The institution has the expertise and resources to support the proposed delivery methods and to ensure their effectiveness.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
6. The delivery methods contribute to and enhance the creation of academic community among students and between students and faculty. For online learning elements, this includes that a) the program/course design and the course syllabus make appropriate provisions for instructor-student and student-student interaction; and b) the technologies used to achieve interactions among faculty and students (e.g., email, telephone office hours, phone conferences, voicemail, fax, chat rooms, web-based discussions, computer conferences and threaded discussions) are adequate.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
7. Where a program is offered both in the classroom and online, there is a clear and integral relationship between those responsible for electronically offered course(s)/programs and the classroom-based academic structure.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
8. The responsibility for program quality remains with the institution. Accordingly, consortial agreements for programs delivered online: a) reflect that the institution shares responsibility for all aspects of program delivery, including but not limited to: i) ongoing oversight of the curriculum and program design decisions; ii) financial, human and physical resources; iii) resource upgrading; iv) setting the qualifications and training required of faculty and staff; v) ensuring data integrity; and vi) students' privacy; b) include clearly defined performance expectations concerning all aspects of program delivery, including but not limited to those matters identified in (a); c) specify the conditions for the termination of the contract between parties; d) include provisions to ensure quality control of all aspects of program delivery; and e) ensure the financial arrangements among the parties to the consortial and other agreements provide for adequate participation and management by the institution.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	

<p>9. Policies pertaining to blended, hybrid, and online learning modes of delivery ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) student and faculty preparation and orientation to existing and new technologies; b) adequate resources and processes to acquaint faculty, students, and course designers with new software or systems as they are adopted; c) regular opportunities for ongoing professional and course development for faculty and others responsible for program development; d) reliable, sufficient, and scalable course- management systems to meet current and projected needs, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) a robust and secure technical infrastructure, providing maximum reliability for students and faculty; and ii) emergency backup provisions; e) accessible technical assistance for students and faculty for all hardware, software, an delivery systems specified by the organization as required for the program; f) 24 hrs per day, 7 days per week access to secure online databanks for web-delivered courses; g) well-maintained, current and appropriate hardware, software, and other technological resources and media; and h) risk assessment and planning that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) a disaster recovery plan to ensure consistency of operational capacity; ii) back-up and storage technology protocols; and iii) a requirement for historical logs and physical documentation of exceptions, breaches, capacity usage, upgrades, workarounds, bolt-ons etc. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
<p>10. Appropriate safeguards assure the authentication of student identity and the integrity of student work for online courses/programs. Policies and procedures assure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the security of students' confidentiality and privacy when conducting assessments and evaluations, and in the dissemination of results; b) the secure destruction of personal data when it is no longer needed; c) the verification of student identity for coursework and examinations, and for the control of examinations, including but not limited to security; time limits; the selection of proctors/invigilators; and the requirements for, and weighting of, evaluations conducted face to face. 	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	

1. The Organization:
 - Meets or exceeds the Board’s standard
 - Does not meet the Board’s standard
2. Identify, for this standard:
 - a. Strengths
 - b. Major weaknesses
 - c. Minor weaknesses
3. Was the information provided in the submission combined with any additional information sought from the organization sufficient, reliable, and valid for the purposes of this review?
 - Yes
 - No (if no, please comment)

2. CAPACITY TO DELIVER STANDARD

Standard:

The applicant has the capacity to deliver the quality of education necessary for students to attain the stated and necessary learning outcomes.

Benchmarks:	Meets or exceeds the benchmark (Y/N)?⁴	If no: comment on <i>a) whether the required revisions are major or minor⁵;</i> <i>b) the nature of the revisions required;</i> <i>c) the reasons for your judgements; and</i> <i>d) any commitments or important clarifications the organization made during the review that were critical to your judgements.</i> If yes: detail any commitments or important clarifications the organization made during the review that were critical to your judgements.
1. The institution makes a commitment in its budgets and policies to provide and maintain the necessary learning, physical,	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	

⁴ Indicate whether the College

- Meets or exceeds the benchmark (check “Y” for “yes”); or
- Does not meet the benchmark (check “N” for “no”).

⁵ **Major:** Required revisions to meet the threshold are substantial, would take significant time and/or resources to rectify, and/or should be re-assessed before being implemented.

Minor: Required revisions to meet the threshold are relatively minor, the institution has the capacity to implement them, and they do not require reassessment prior to implementation.

technological, human, and other resources for the program, and to supplement them as necessary.		
2. Learning resources are available online to students in online courses/programs. If not all appropriate resources are routinely available online, the institution has made appropriate and adequate arrangements to provide them to online students.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
3. Policies pertaining to faculty support the professional development of faculty including the promotion of curricular and instructional innovation, as well as technological skills, where appropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	

1. The Organization:
 - Meets or exceeds the Board’s standard
 - Does not meet the Board’s standard
2. Identify, for this standard:
 - a. Strengths
 - b. Major weaknesses
 - c. Minor weaknesses
3. Was the information provided in the submission combined with any additional information sought from the organization sufficient, reliable, and valid for the purposes of this review?
 - Yes
 - No (if no, please comment)

3. ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND INTEGRITY STANDARD

Standard:

The applicant maintains an atmosphere in which academic freedom exists and in which students and academic staff are expected to display a high degree of intellectual independence. Academic activity is supported by policies, procedures, and practices that encourage academic honesty and integrity.

Benchmarks:	Meets or exceeds the benchmark (Y/N)?⁶	If no: comment on a) whether the required revisions are major or minor ⁷ ; b) the nature of the revisions required; c) the reasons for your judgements; and
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⁶ Indicate whether the College

- Meets or exceeds the benchmark (check “Y” for “yes”); or
- Does not meet the benchmark (check “N” for “no”).

		<i>d) any commitments or important clarifications the organization made during the review that were critical to your judgements. If yes: detail any commitments or important clarifications the organization made during the review that were critical to your judgements.</i>
1. There are appropriate policies and procedures concerning compliance with copyright law.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
2. Where courses/programs are delivered using online delivery, the institution has appropriate policies and procedures to address copyright and intellectual property issues (e.g., digital rights management and the use of object learning repositories).	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	

1. The Organization:
 - Meets or exceeds the Board’s standard
 - Does not meet the Board’s standard
2. Identify, for this standard:
 - a. Strengths
 - b. Major weaknesses
 - c. Minor weaknesses
3. Was the information provided in the submission combined with any additional information sought from the organization sufficient, reliable, and valid for the purposes of this review?
 - Yes
 - No (if no, please comment)

⁷ **Major:** Required revisions to meet the threshold are substantial, would take significant time and/or resources to rectify, and/or should be re-assessed before being implemented.

Minor: Required revisions to meet the threshold are relatively minor, the institution has the capacity to implement them, and they do not require reassessment prior to implementation.

4. STUDENT PROTECTION STANDARD

Standard:

The applicant values and upholds integrity and ethical conduct in its relations with students.

Benchmarks:	Meets or exceeds the benchmark (Y/N)?⁸	If no: comment on a) whether the required revisions are major or minor ⁹ ; b) the nature of the revisions required; c) the reasons for your judgements; and d) any commitments or important clarifications the organization made during the review that were critical to your judgements. If yes: detail any commitments or important clarifications the organization made during the review that were critical to your judgements.
1. For courses and/or programs that incorporate blended, hybrid, or online delivery ¹⁰ , potential students are fully informed about: a) the technological requirements of participation and the technical competence required of them; b) the nature of learning and the personal discipline required in anytime/anywhere environment; c) any additional costs, beyond tuition and ancillary fees, associated with e-learning aspects of course/program delivery; and d) the kind of support and protection available to them.	<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	

1. The Organization:
 Meets or exceeds the Board’s standard

⁸ Indicate whether the College

- Meets or exceeds the benchmark (check “**Y**” for “yes”); or
- Does not meet the benchmark (check “**N**” for “no”).

⁹ **Major:** Required revisions to meet the threshold are substantial, would take significant time and/or resources to rectify, and/or should be re-assessed before being implemented.

Minor: Required revisions to meet the threshold are relatively minor, the institution has the capacity to implement them, and they do not require reassessment prior to implementation.

¹⁰ **Traditional Delivery:** Classroom based teaching with assignments and activities that students pursue independently of each other.

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Online Delivery: A course where all or almost all of the content is web-based with no or a very small number of face-to-face meetings. Delivery methods included in the “online” category include multimedia, video conferencing, social networking, web-based learning management systems (LMS) and/or learning objects.

Does not meet the Board's standard

2. Identify, for this standard:

- a. Strengths
- b. Major weaknesses
- c. Minor weaknesses

3. Was the information provided in the submission combined with any additional information sought from the organization sufficient, reliable, and valid for the purposes of this review?

- Yes
- No (if no, please comment)

SAMPLE

Background

Degree Granting in Ontario

Applications for Ministerial Consent

In Ontario, most universities have an act of the Ontario Legislature, which permits them to offer any degrees. Under the terms of the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000* (the Act), the consent of the Ontario Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities is required for anyone without legislative authority seeking in Ontario, either "directly or indirectly," to

- grant a degree;
- provide a program or part of a program of postsecondary study leading to a degree to be conferred by a person inside or outside of Ontario;
- advertise a program or part of a program of postsecondary study offered in Ontario leading to a degree conferred by a person in or outside Ontario;
- sell, offer for sale or provide by agreement for a fee, reward or other remuneration, a diploma, certificate, document or other material that indicates or implies the granting or conferring of a degree;
- operate or maintain a university;
- use or be known by a name of a university or any derivation or abbreviation of a name of a university;
- hold oneself out to be a university;
- make use of the term university or any derivation or abbreviation of the word in advertising relating to an educational institution in Ontario; and
- make substantial changes to programs offered pursuant to a consent.

Anyone wishing to engage in these activities must apply to the Minister, who refers the application to the Board. Organizations in this category include colleges of applied arts and technology; most private institutions; Ontario public institutions with limited degree granting authority; and public institutions from outside Ontario.

Role of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board Secretariat

PEQAB Secretariat staff:

- support the Board in fulfilling its mandate;
- communicate on the role of the Board and its operations to prospective applicants, stakeholders and others; and
- manage all applications for consent.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELATED TO YOUR REVIEW

Role of the Assessor(s)

The primary obligation of the assessor(s) is to provide their best judgement on the quality of the proposed program/proposal. To this end, the assessor(s) are asked to:

- assess the proposal against the standards and benchmarks set by PEQAB;
- to consider any special instructions indicated by PEQAB; and
- when members of the panel deem it appropriate, to identify and address any other quality-related issues arising from the proposal.

Under the coordination of the panel chair, the panel develops a report which should provide the best collective judgement of the panel with respect to the quality of the proposed program, the reasons for its judgements, and be of sufficient detail to enable the Board to determine the extent to which its criteria are satisfied. The key issues are whether the proposed program meets the standards set by the Board, and whether panel members think the program is of sufficient quality to be recommended to the Board and eventually to the students of Ontario. More specifically, the report must include at least the following:

- an assessment of the application against each of the Board's standards and benchmarks;

- an assessment of the application in terms of any additional matters raised by the Board;
- an assessment of the sufficiency, reliability and validity of the evidence provided by the organization;
- an assessment of evidence found during any site visit, resulting from the panel's research, or submitted to the panel by other parties; and
- a recommendation, with reasons, on whether the proposed program meets the Board's criteria and is of sufficient academic quality to be offered to the people of Ontario.

Role of the Panel Chair

In addition to the responsibilities noted above, the Chair is responsible for the following:

- planning and assigning the activities to the panel;
- liaising with the organization regarding timing and setting the agenda for the site visit;
- organizing the panel's work; and
- coordinating and preparing the final report using these *Guidelines*.

Quality Assessor Procedures

- peruse the submission and guidelines included in this document;
- panels often work through the *Guidelines* as they do a desk audit, making preliminary judgements on the strengths and weaknesses of the program and noting items that require follow-up at the site visit. Reviewing the submission and conducting a desk audit prior to the site visit typically aids in the drafting of the report;
- set questions for discussion/clarification to be raised when meeting with other member of the panel;
- set tentative questions for the site visit;
- identify who needs to respond to the panel's questions at the visit; and
- determine what is needed in the way of additional information.

Additional Information provided by the Institution

The Board provides QAPs with the organization's complete submission for review as well as any supplementary information the Board has received from the organization. The Board asks the panel to direct any requests for additional information from the organization through the panel chair. Additional information pertaining to the application received by the panel should be forwarded to the Secretariat together with the panel's report.

The Site Visit

In most cases, panels are expected to undertake a one-day site visit where they can test the validity of claims made in the application. Where several locations are proposed, the chair decides which one(s) to include in the visit. Ultimately, the chair will determine, in consultation with the PEQAB secretariat, if a site visit is needed. The chair will establish the site visit strategy and develop an appropriate schedule in consultation with the organization.

Duties of the Institution's Liaison

The institutional contact person ensures that the visit is arranged so that the agenda can be realized, including scheduling meetings and rooms for the panel. Panel members will make their own travel arrangements (transportation, hotel room), but may consult the institution for recommendations.

During the visit, the team will wish to interview senior administrators, faculty, students and alumni (in the case of renewal applications) to gain a cross-sectional view and a variety of perspectives on key issues. Depending on the type of review, they may also wish to meet with support or collaborating staff and examine facilities and other resources. The panel's expectations need to be made clear prior to the site visit. The chair might begin each interview session by identifying the objectives of the interview and by posing open-ended questions and questions that evoke analysis and dialogue. Panel members are encouraged to take careful notes of each interview session as they will be invaluable when writing the report. The panel is encouraged to keep interviews to a manageable number. Too many interviews may

limit the panel's ability to explore an issue comprehensively. The panel might decide to include a session at the end of the site visit to conclude and reach consensus about the content of the report.

Writing the Report

Under the coordination of the panel chair, the panel will prepare a report for the Board. The report should provide the best collective judgement of the panel with respect to the quality of the proposed program, the reasons for its judgements, and include sufficient detail in narrative form to enable the Board to determine the extent to which its criteria are satisfied and provide the Board with the information it needs to make an informed decision. Deficiencies should be documented particularly carefully. The key issues are whether the proposed program meets the standards set by the Board, and whether the panel members think the program is of sufficient quality to be recommended to the Board and eventually to the students of Ontario.

The materials provided in these *Guidelines* are intended to be an aid to the panel and the Board. They should not be seen as limiting the scope of the assessment or the panel's full report to the Board.

Diverging Opinions

The members of a QAP may not always agree on all matters. The Board is interested in knowing about areas of substantive disagreement, the nature of the disagreement, and the reasons for the disagreement. The Board does not want to receive minority reports. It requires a single report, which should include divergent opinions fully and fairly.

Institution's Commitments

During the review, the institution may make commitments that alter what the panel's judgement would be for the submission alone. It is important to document such commitments in the report and their role in your judgements. The panel's final assessment should be based on all information provided by the institution, including additional materials and commitments made during the review. The institution will have to confirm that they made the commitment and their intention to honour it. The Board will then be in the position of determining whether the commitments are reasonable and whether the institution is capable of honouring (hence the importance of your advice in this regard).

Ownership of Reports

The QAP's report and all related attachments are the property of the Minister. The panel will hold its deliberations and preliminary report in confidence. Following the Minister's decision on the application and in accordance with the Board's terms of reference, the Board may post on its website all official report(s) of the quality assessment panel and the organization's responses to them, or make these reports otherwise available to the public subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

Following the Submission of the Report

Institution's Response to Reports

To ensure a transparent and fair assessment process, the Board will provide the institution with the opportunity to respond to the panel's report. In some cases, the Board may ask the panel to respond to the institution's remarks.

Next Steps

In formulating its recommendation, the Board will consider:

- the institution's submission;
- the findings of the QAP;
- the institution's response to the panel report;
- any additional materials provided by the institution to the Board; and
- any commitments made by the institution during the review process.

The Board communicates its recommendation to the Minister. The Minister considers the Board's recommendation and any public policy matters, and makes a decision about consent. If consent is granted, it is normally for a five-year period, after which the program(s) must be reviewed again.

SAMPLE