

## Handbook for Ontario Colleges

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Applying for Ministerial Consent under  
the *Post-secondary Education Choice and  
Excellence Act, 2000*

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## Applying for Ministerial Consent under the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000*

This *Handbook* is a guide for Ontario Colleges, established under the *Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act, 1990*, and named in *Regulation 771*, seeking a new or renewed consent of the Minister pursuant to the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000* to offer bachelor degree programs in applied areas of study. It outlines the mandate of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB), and its criteria and procedures for review of applications for consent to offer or advertise all or part of degree programs in Ontario or to use the term “university” in Ontario.

For instructions on what to include in a submission to the Board, consult the Board’s *Submission Guidelines*.

The preparation of this *Handbook* has benefited from the advice of stakeholders and the work of other accrediting and quality assurance bodies, including:

- the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS), Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), and Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA)
- the Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS)
- the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC)
- the British Columbia Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB)
- the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC)
- the Saskatchewan Higher Education Quality Assessment Board (SHEQAB)
- the accreditation criteria and procedures used by these regional accrediting bodies in the United States:
  - Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
  - New England Association of Schools and Colleges
  - North Central Association Higher Learning Commission
  - Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
  - Western Association of Schools and Colleges
  - Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

We are also grateful to the many stakeholders and other interested parties who contributed their comments during the preparation of this *Handbook*.

Applicants should note that the Board may revise its documents from time to time, and the onus is on the applicant to ensure that it is using either of the then current versions of the Board’s policies and criteria.

Inquiries about the Board's criteria or procedures should be directed to:

Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board Secretariat  
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23rd Floor, Mowat Block  
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2  
Telephone: 416-212-1230  
Fax: 416-212-6620  
E-mail: [peqab@ontario.ca](mailto:peqab@ontario.ca)  
Web: <http://www.peqab.ca>

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## Applications for the Minister's Consent

Under the terms of the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000*, the consent of the Ontario Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development is required for anyone 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
- advertise a program or part of a program of postsecondary study offered in Ontario leading to a degree conferred
- 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.

The Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development may refer applications for consent to PEQAB or to another accrediting or quality assurance body (as prescribed in regulation), reject an application without referral to PEQAB (or other body) according to prescribed circumstances and policy criteria, consider a prior quality assurance review as satisfying the requirement that the application be referred, and deem approval by such a body as satisfying the requirement that the Minister receive a recommendation.

This guide addresses only the Board's criteria and processes for the review and recommendation of applications referred to it by the Minister. Inquiries about the application and consent process, the Act and its regulations, the activities subject to the Act, and the Minister's requirements should be directed to the Universities Unit of the Postsecondary Education Division, Postsecondary Accountability Branch, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development.

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1 Quality Assessment in Context

Prior to 1983, there was no Ontario legislation preventing any organization from offering degree programs, granting degrees, or calling itself a university. Traditionally, degree granting authority was based in a royal charter or provincial statute.

From 1984 to 2001, the *Degree Granting Act*<sup>1</sup> set conditions under which degrees were granted and degree programs offered in Ontario. Under the *Degree Granting Act*, an Ontario-based institution required an act of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to grant degrees, offer programs leading to a degree, call itself a university, or advertise using the word “university.” The *Degree Granting Act* also provided that an out-of-province institution required consent from the Minister to undertake similar activities in Ontario.

The *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000* (the Act) permits the granting of degrees or operation of a university either by an act of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario or with the consent of the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development. The Act also sets out the responsibilities of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB), which makes recommendations to the Minister on applications for ministerial consent under section 7(3) (a) of the Act.

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## 1.2 Provincial, National and International Collaboration

PEQAB is a leader within Canada in setting the standards for the quality assurance of degree programs and institutions. PEQAB introduced the first qualifications framework in Canada in 2002. Qualifications frameworks are descriptions of the generic knowledge and skills each credential or qualification (e.g., certificate, diploma, bachelor degree) is intended to achieve. They serve a number of purposes, including acting as a standard for quality assurance. The Board requires that samples of student work in the terminal phase of every program are assessed to ensure that the knowledge and skills identified in the framework are being achieved.

Many countries, including those of the European Union, Australia, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, South Africa, Singapore, and Russia have, or are developing, such frameworks. The PEQAB framework is based on the best features of international frameworks, with modifications to suit the Ontario context.

After its release, the PEQAB degree framework was adopted, with minor modifications, for the review of undergraduate and graduate programs offered by Ontario public universities.

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<sup>1</sup> Degree Granting Act, 1983, c.36, as rep. by *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000*, c. 36

Subsequently, the PEQAB Secretariat led a ministry-wide initiative to develop a framework of all postsecondary qualifications offered in Ontario. The Ontario Qualifications Framework is the only framework in Canada that includes all postsecondary education credentials, from certificates to doctoral degrees.

In April 2007, the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) endorsed the *Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada*. The *Statement* contains

- a Degree Qualifications Framework that describes the knowledge and skills expected of graduates holding degrees at the bachelor, master’s and doctoral levels
- standards and procedures for reviewing decisions to establish new degree granting organizations
- standards and procedures for reviewing proposals for new degree programs.

The framework and standards in this *Statement* have their origins in the PEQAB degree framework and standards.

PEQAB is also a key participant in international quality assurance, especially through its participation in the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)—an international network of approximately 200 organizations active in the theory and practice of quality assurance in higher education – and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group (CIQG) – a forum for postsecondary institutions, accrediting and quality assurance organizations, higher education associations, governments, businesses, foundations, and individuals to address issues and challenges for quality assurance in an international setting.

PEQAB has played a leadership role in quality assurance in Ontario, in Canada, and internationally. Although the Board’s roots are local, its work is consistent with the trend toward the harmonization of postsecondary educational standards manifest in other jurisdictions.

**By ensuring its standards reflect recognized practice, PEQAB**

- facilitates comparative quality assessment
- facilitates lifelong learning by documenting the standards students have met and the outcomes they have achieved
- facilitates labour mobility
- facilitates credit transfer and recognition
- fosters accountability by requiring institutions to articulate standards and outcomes
- ensures graduates possess knowledge and skills necessary for employment and further study
- ensures that students and society are served by programs of assured quality.



## 2. The Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board

Established in 2000, and continued under the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000* (the Act), the Board is composed of a chair appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, a vice-chair and up to nine other members appointed by the Minister. The Board makes recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development concerning applications for ministerial consent under the terms of the Act and other matters pursuant to the Act referred to it by the Minister.

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### 2.1 Responsibilities and Legislative Requirements

Under sections 5 and 7 of the Act, the Board is responsible for

- reviewing all applications referred under the Act for ministerial consent
- creating expert review panels and committees
- undertaking research to assist in the Board's work
- providing recommendations to the Minister
- addressing any other matter referred to it by the Minister.

In making its recommendations to the Minister, the Board establishes the criteria and processes for the review of applications. Pursuant to the Act, PEQAB criteria are required to be in accordance with educational standards recognized in Ontario and other jurisdictions, and to comply with policy directions given by the Minister.

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### 2.2 Vision and Values

**A stronger Ontario through high quality postsecondary student learning outcomes.**

To achieve its vision to inspire excellence in education through leadership in quality assurance and enhancement, the Board embraces as values, being

- accountable
- transparent
- impartial
- collegial
- dedicated to quality and continuous improvement
- grounded in research, evidence, and best practice.

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## 2.3 Board Meetings

Colleges wishing to forward information or materials to the Board must do so through the Secretariat, the Chief Executive Officer of which serves as secretary to the Board. Board meetings are held *in camera* and Board members respect the confidential nature of documents, information, and records, and restrict the use of this information to their work as Board members.

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## 2.4 Secretariat

The Board is supported by a Secretariat. Among other responsibilities, the Secretariat undertakes research, drafts the Board's criteria, policies, and procedures, and coordinates the Board's relations with Ministry officials and regulatory bodies. Each application for ministerial consent is managed by a member of the Secretariat who assists the college and expert assessors in understanding the Board's criteria and procedures to facilitate the comprehensive review of applications.

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## 2.5 The PEQAB Website

The Board is committed to transparency and maintains the following on its website:

- a list of current Board members, their terms of office, and brief biographies
- the Board's mandate, meeting procedures, and policies
- PEQAB publications (*Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines*, annual reports)
- an overview of the consent process
- contact information for the PEQAB Secretariat
- information about relevant legislation, regulation, and pertinent contextual information (e.g., the *Minister's Guidelines and Directives for Applying for a Ministerial Consent*)
- links to national and international quality assurance bodies
- information about applications, including portions of the application, the Board's recommendation, and the Minister's decision.

# 3. Procedure for Review and Recommendation

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## 3.1 Application Fee

As per the Minister's requirements, separate application and assessment fees shall be payable for each program or part of a program for which the Minister's consent is requested, including applications to renew existing consents. For example, a request for consent to offer degree programs leading to a Bachelor of Business (Automotive Management), a Bachelor of Journalism, and a Bachelor of Technology (Landscape Architecture) constitutes three applications and requires three application fees (and three separate assessment fees, as outlined below). The application fee is \$5,000 per application.

## 3.2 Assessment Fees and Charges

Colleges are responsible for paying the costs of assessment carried out by the Board, and will be invoiced for the estimated cost of each assessment. A deposit in the estimated amount must be received prior to the commencement of assessment activities. The Ministry will invoice the college for the balance of any unpaid costs or refund any balance owing to the college. The Minister's decision will be announced to the college when all accounts are settled.

The charge for assessments varies with each application depending on the number of reviewers, the length and complexity of the review, any associated travel, accommodation, meeting or communication costs, and whether the college's response to the panel report requires further assessment. Assessment costs normally range between \$7,000 and \$11,000 for a full program quality review.

## 3.3 The Board's Procedures

This chapter of the *Handbook* includes a flowchart that outlines the process for reviewing an application to offer a degree program. Chapters 4 and 5 describe the processes and standards for program quality reviews. The process for requests for other forms of ministerial consent (e.g., to offer a bridging program from a diploma to a degree program) varies according to the complexity of the application.

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### 3.4 Disclosure

Colleges must disclose to the Board any and all information that the Board may require to carry out its evaluation and make informed recommendations to the Minister.

According to the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000* it is an offence to knowingly furnish false information in any application, statement, or other documentation. If a college is discovered to have knowingly provided false information to the Minister or the Board, the Board will recommend that the Minister deny the application for consent.

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### 3.5 Review Process

The Board receives the application, posts it on its web site, gives a deadline for public comment, and strikes an expert panel for the assessment, as appropriate. The college is then informed of the composition of the expert panel(s) and is advised of any site visit. A suggested agenda template for the PEQAB site visit can be found in **Appendix 8.1**.

The expert panel undertakes the review in accord with the Board's detailed procedures (as per the *Guidelines for Assessors*) and typically files its report within 15 days after the site visit. Colleges will normally submit to the Board their formal response to the panel report within 20 business days (4 weeks) of receiving it. College representatives may notify their PEQAB of the need for an extension on any reasonable basis, including but not limited to, the unavailability of relevant staff to consult on the response, the complexity of the response, or the number of items requiring response.

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### 3.6 Ownership of Expert Reports

All reports prepared by the Board's reviewers are the property of the Minister. The Board may include panel reports and college comments in its recommendation to the Minister.

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### 3.7 Opportunity for College Comment

The college will have an opportunity to provide further information if the application is found to be incomplete, to comment on the report from any panel, and to respond to any comment from a third party in accordance with section 3.8 below.

Although colleges are urged to prepare and promptly submit their formal response to the panel report, colleges have a maximum of three months to submit a response to the Board. If there is no response from the college, the application and report(s) will be considered by the Board at the first scheduled meeting following the deadline.

The college may request an extension of the deadline in writing. In the request to the Board, the college should state clearly the reason(s) for the delay and the date by which it expects

to provide a response. The Board’s decision on whether to grant a delay will be based on the extent to which the reason for the anticipated delay is outside of the direct control of the college.

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### 3.8 Opportunity for Public Comment on Applications

At the time an application is submitted, the Board will post it on its website and indicate a deadline for comment on the application from interested parties. Those seeking further information about the application should address the college.

Comments bearing on the assessment of the application against the Board’s criteria will be handled as follows:

Type of Comment	PEQAB Procedure
comments bearing on the assessment of the application against the Board's criteria	transmit to the expert reviewers and applicant for consideration
comments bearing on the Board's criteria or operations	transmit to the Board for consideration

Comments bearing on the assessment of the application against the Board’s criteria should be submitted to the Secretariat and may be emailed to [peqab@ontario.ca](mailto:peqab@ontario.ca).

Unless requested to do so by the Minister, the Board does not consider matters related to public policy. Comments bearing on matters of public policy should be directed to the Universities Unit of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, and will be referred there if first received by the Board.

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### 3.9 Withdrawal of an Application

In the event that a college wishes to withdraw an application during the process, the college must send written notice to the Minister, with a copy to the Board.

The Board will post all applications on its website, as indicated above, and report on the status of each application including the status of “withdrawn.” All materials and reports received in relation to an application may be subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

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## 3.10 Integrity of the Process

### ***College's Obligations***

To protect the integrity and confidentiality of the application and review process, colleges should not attempt to discuss their applications with Board members. In response to a college's attempt to lobby Board members, the Board may cease its review of the application and notify the Minister accordingly.

In general, the assessor reports are to be treated by the applicant college as confidential to the applicant college. This requirement of confidentiality should not be interpreted so as to limit the college's internal consultations, either as regards the draft stage at which the college's response is sought, nor at the final stage, at which the college is implementing or revising the degree program in response to a new or renewed consent. Specifically it is PEQAB's expectation that assessor reports are to be shared with all faculty, staff and administrators involved in the program within the college, so that the most informed response, at the draft stage, and the fullest implementation of conditions and commitments, at the final stage, can be delivered by the college.

### ***Board Members' Commitments***

Members are committed to the principles and practices of quality assurance in postsecondary education and adhere to PEQAB's values. Board members make decisions on the merits of each application referred to them, and consider the information provided in good faith and to the best of their abilities, not being concerned with the prospect of disapproval from any person, institution, or community. In addition, all members of PEQAB commit to the following.

#### **Confidentiality**

- Discussion in PEQAB meetings or committees is kept in confidence.
- Members do not discuss individual submissions outside the Board's deliberations.
- Members employed by a postsecondary institution do not represent their home institution.
- Members do not report to their home institution on confidential information of any type about another institution, nor do they report on decisions regarding their home institution unless those matters are in the public domain.
- Members respect the confidential nature of documents, information, and records received as Board members, and restrict the use of this information to their work as Board members.
- Members adhere to the intent and requirements of Ontario's *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1990*, which applies to all information, material, and records relating to, or obtained, created, maintained, submitted, or collected during the course of a review.

#### **Communication**

- Members do not make public statements on any issues that are currently under consideration by PEQAB or the Minister.

- Members refrain from communicating with the media regarding the deliberations or recommendations of PEQAB unless designated to do so by the chair.

### **Avoidance of Personal Gain**

- Members do not take improper advantage of information obtained through their official duties as PEQAB members.
- Members do not engage in conduct that exploits their positions as members.
- Subject to the Conflict of Interest Guidelines for Board Members, members do not accept money, awards, or gifts from persons who may be, or have been, affected by a PEQAB decision.

### **Impartiality**

- Members are sensitive to issues of gender, race, language, culture, and religion that may affect the conduct of a review or decision.
- Members deal with groups and persons, with staff and with each other in a manner that reflects open and honest communication, respect, fair play, and ethical conduct.
- Members approach every application and every issue arising with an open mind, and avoid doing or saying anything to cause any person to think otherwise.
- Members are independent in decision-making.

### **Collegiality**

- Members promote positive relationships among PEQAB members.
- Members demonstrate respect for the views and opinions of colleagues.
- Members share their knowledge and expertise with other members as requested and as appropriate.

### **Commitment**

- Members are available on a timely basis to attend meetings and are adequately prepared for the duties expected of them.

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## Overview of Consent Process

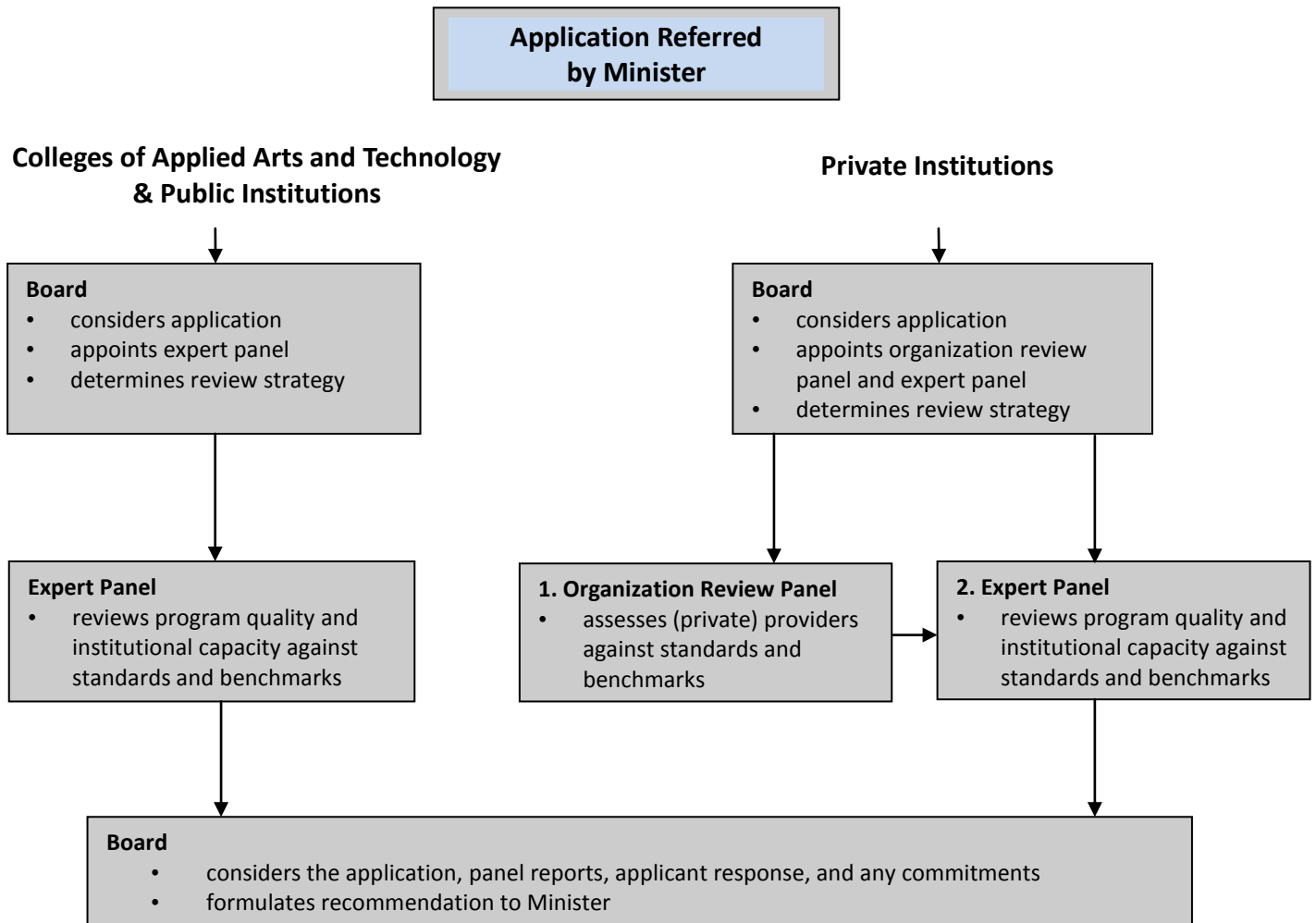
P  
E  
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1. Ministry
  - determines whether the application falls under the Act
2. Minister
  - decides, for each application that falls under the Act, whether and how to refer it to PEQAB
3. Secretariat
  - reviews the application
  - identifies potential review experts
  - posts the application on the PEQAB website
4. PEQAB
  - reviews the application
  - determines review strategy
  - appoints panel
5. Expert Panel
  - reviews the submission against PEQAB standards and benchmarks
  - submits a written report to PEQAB
6. Secretariat
  - provides the report to the applicant for response
  - receives the applicant's response to the report
7. PEQAB
  - reviews the application, the panel report, the applicant's response and commitments made by the applicant during the review process, and any additional information required to formulate a recommendation
  - submits a recommendation to the Minister
8. Ministry
  - ensures all fees have been paid in full
9. Minister
  - considers PEQAB's recommendation and any public policy or financial issues that may flow from the granting of a consent
  - communicates the decision about consent to the applicant

Following the Minister's communication of the decision to the applicant, the Board's recommendation and the Minister's decision are posted on the PEQAB website.



## Overview of PEQAB Review Process



# 4. Process for Degree Program Quality Review

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## 4.1 Degree Program

For the purposes of this *Handbook*, a degree program in an applied area of study is a prescribed set of courses/studies and work-integrated learning oriented to a field of practice that culminates in mastery of the bodies of knowledge and skills appropriate to the honours baccalaureate degree standard in the field of study, and mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary to be an effective practitioner upon graduation, and to remain professionally current thereafter.

The curriculum of an Ontario college degree program in an applied area of study, like those offered by most institutions in North America, is shaped by these characteristics:

- a technical or professional education based on the fundamental principles in each field
- application of theory to practice, of learning by doing, and of converting personal experience into knowledge and skills through laboratory, applied research, and work experience
- cultivation of the analytical skills to evaluate new information and the ability to apply new knowledge to the field
- a balance of professional study and general education/breadth courses to enhance students' understanding of the environment in which they will function as professionals and as educated citizens and to enhance their understanding by exposure to disciplines outside their main field of study.

To the extent that vocational outcomes are not jeopardized, college degrees are expected to be designed to qualify graduates for consideration for further study. Whether graduates will qualify for programs of further study will depend on whether there is a graduate or professional program with sufficient affinity to the college program.<sup>2</sup> College programs may be in areas where there is no corresponding graduate or professional program, or it may be necessary for graduates to complete a bridging program prior to being eligible for consideration for further study.

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<sup>2</sup> Controlling for an appropriate level of performance in the degree by the graduate to be competitive and any other factor not related to the program.

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## 4.2 Expert Panels

The quality of each proposed degree program, or any part thereof, will normally be assessed by a panel of expert reviewers. The nature and complexity of the application will determine the number and nature of credentials, skills, and backgrounds of reviewers. The Board will select all expert reviewers.

The college may nominate up to three qualified persons of whom the Board may choose one or more to serve on the expert panel. The Board has sole discretion, however, to select all expert reviewers for the application, without regard to the college's nominees.

When a college applies for consent to offer multiple programs, the Board will name a panel or panels of a size and nature appropriate to the application. Among the factors the Board will consider are whether the programs are new or being currently offered by the college, and the degree of affinity among the proposed programs.

### Criteria for Expert Reviewers

Expert reviewers will possess qualifications and personal qualities that engender the confidence of the Board, the Minister, the public, accrediting bodies, relevant regulatory bodies, and degree granting institutions. Specifically, expert assessors should demonstrate the following:

- be committed to the principles and practices of quality assurance in postsecondary education
- be recognized by their peers for having a broad outlook, an open mind (an ability to function objectively and effectively), and sound judgement
- be free of any conflict of interest, in accordance with the Board's policy on conflict of interest for assessors
- have demonstrated skills in oral and written communication, preferably including experience writing formal reports to deadlines
- hold an advanced academic credential related to the subject area under review (normally at the terminal level in the field)
- possess required or desired professional credentials and/or related work experience of substantial depth and range
- have relevant academic experience such as administration, teaching, curriculum design, and/or quality assessment experience (e.g., as appraisers for accrediting bodies or as reviewers of degree programs)
- have a record of active scholarship, normally having achieved advanced professional status in their institution.

In addition to the qualities of panel members, panel chairs will normally be experienced in the administration of higher education, and be experienced committee members who can function objectively and effectively as chair of an assessment committee.

The Board will strive to name panels that reflect an appropriate mix of academic/professional credentials and experience related to the field.

In establishing its roster of expert reviewers, the Board may seek nominations of qualified individuals from the public and a wide variety of constituencies, including but not limited to the following:

- Ontario Council on Graduate Studies
- Ontario universities and colleges
- professional, accrediting, and regulatory bodies within and outside of Ontario postsecondary educational institutions outside Ontario.

Suggestions for, and self-nominations by, qualified individuals are welcome.

### **Expert Panel Report**

The primary obligation of the panel will be to provide its best judgement on the quality of the proposed program. In cases where the college is seeking consent to offer part of a degree program, the panel will provide its best judgement on the quality of the part program in the context of the whole program.

To this end, the panel will assess applications against the standards and benchmarks stated in Chapter 5. To assist in deliberations, the panel may request from colleges any information in addition to that contained in the application.

Under the coordination of the panel chair, the members of the panel will develop a report that includes at least the following information:

- an assessment of the application against each of the Board's standards and benchmarks stipulated in Chapter 5
- assessment of the sufficiency, reliability, and validity of the evidence provided by the college
- an assessment of evidence found during any site visit
- a recommendation, with reasons, on whether the proposed program meets the Board's standards and is of sufficient academic quality to be offered to the people of Ontario.

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## **4.3 Board's Recommendation**

The Board's process for reviewing applications for ministerial consent is most likely to result in either a recommendation to the Minister to grant consent (the Board may, in some circumstances, recommend certain conditions be attached to the consent) or, when an applicant failed to meet the Board's standards, a recommendation to the Minister to deny consent.

## 5. Degree Program Quality Review Standards

All colleges seeking ministerial consent to offer a degree program or any part thereof must undergo a program quality assessment to determine whether the proposed program meets the Board's standards and benchmarks. In cases where the college seeks ministerial consent to offer a part of a degree program, the Board will assess the proposal in the context of the entire degree program.

The Board will assess the quality of degree programs proposed by Ontario colleges in accordance with the following Board standards and ministerial requirements. The following program quality standards will apply to programs taught by various means, including courses or programs that are designed specifically to serve students at a distance.

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### 5.1 Program Structure

The Board expects that degree programs offered by Ontario colleges comprise, at a minimum

- eight semesters, or the equivalent, of on-campus studies
- 14 weeks of separate, paid, full-time equivalent work (420 hours) prior to graduation, related to the professional field of study.<sup>3</sup>

All components of the program must be submitted to the Board for review and recommendation to the Minister. If a college wishes the Board to consider the appropriateness of an alternative minimum program structure, it should explain any deviation from the Board's normal expectations.

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### 5.2 Standards and Benchmarks

The Board will assess the quality of proposed degree programs in accordance with the following Board standards.

1. Degree Level
2. Admission, Promotion and Graduation
3. Program Content
4. Program Delivery
5. Capacity to Deliver
6. Credential Recognition
7. Regulation and Accreditation
8. Nomenclature

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<sup>3</sup> When a paid work term is not feasible, the Board may consider proposals for a full-time unpaid work term of comparable length to meet this requirement.

- 9. Program Evaluation
- 10. Academic Freedom and Integrity
- 11. Student Protection
- 12. Economic Need
- 13. Non-Duplication

## 1. DEGREE LEVEL STANDARD

The Board's four degree standards and the knowledge and skills expectations under each of these comprise the Ontario standard for degree programs (see the [Ontario Qualifications Framework](#)). These degree standards identify the knowledge and skills expected of graduates of bachelor, master's and doctoral degree programs in Ontario.

The degree descriptions and the knowledge and skills identified in the standard are intended to capture the most generic aspects of the respective degree levels. Each of the degree levels, however, applies to an extremely broad spectrum of disciplines and program types.

For example, some general and honours/specialist bachelor degrees are in fields that are practice oriented while others are more theoretical and research-based. Whether a program is intended to prepare an individual for immediate practice/employment in a field of practice, for further study in a discipline, or both, it must meet a substantial and common set of outcomes that have historically been, and continue to be, critical to and shared by both types of programs within a degree level educational environment.

The college program must meet the Board's Baccalaureate/Bachelor Honours Degree Standard.

### ***Baccalaureate/Bachelor Degree: Honours***

#### ***Depth and Breadth of Knowledge***

- a. A developed knowledge and critical understanding of the key concepts, methodologies, current advances, theoretical approaches, and assumptions in a discipline overall, as well as in a specialized area of a discipline*
- b. A developed understanding of many of the major fields in a discipline, including, where appropriate, from an interdisciplinary perspective, and how the fields may intersect with fields in related disciplines*
- c. A developed ability to*
  - i. gather, review, evaluate, and interpret information*
  - ii. compare the merits of alternate hypotheses or creative options, relevant to one or more of the major fields in a discipline*
- d. A developed, detailed knowledge of and experience in research in an area of the discipline*
- e. Developed critical thinking and analytical skills inside and outside the discipline*
- f. The ability to apply learning from one or more areas outside the discipline*

### **Conceptual & Methodological Awareness/Research and Scholarship**

*An understanding of methods of enquiry or creative activity, or both, in their primary area of study that enables the student to*

- a. evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems using well established ideas and techniques*
- b. devise and sustain arguments or solve problems using these methods*
- c. describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research or equivalent advanced scholarship*

### **Communication Skills**

*The ability to communicate information, arguments and analysis accurately and reliably, orally and in writing, to specialist and non-specialist audiences using structured and coherent arguments, and, where appropriate, informed by key concepts and techniques of the discipline*

### **Application of Knowledge**

- a. The ability to review, present, and critically evaluate quantitative and qualitative information to*
  - i. develop lines of argument*
  - ii. make sound judgements in accordance with the major theories, concepts, and methods of the subject(s) of study*
  - iii. apply underlying concepts, principles, and techniques of analysis, both within and outside the discipline*
  - iv. where appropriate, use this knowledge in the creative process*
- b. The ability to use a basic range of established techniques to*
  - i. initiate and undertake critical evaluation of arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and information*
  - ii. propose solutions*
  - iii. frame appropriate questions for the purpose of solving a problem*
  - iv. solve a problem or create a new work*
- c. The ability to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources*

### **Professional Capacity/Autonomy**

- a. The qualities and transferable skills necessary for further study, employment, community involvement, and other activities requiring*
  - i. the exercise of initiative, personal responsibility, and accountability in both personal and group contexts*
  - ii. working reflectively with others*
  - iii. decision-making in complex contexts*
- b. The ability to manage their own learning in changing circumstances, both within and outside the discipline, and to select an appropriate program of further study*
- c. Behaviour consistent with academic integrity and social responsibility*

### **Awareness of Limits of Knowledge**

*An understanding of the limits to their own knowledge and ability, and an appreciation of*

*the uncertainty, ambiguity, and limits to knowledge and how this might influence analysis and interpretations*

The program must also be in an applied area of study and meet the following **Benchmarks**:

1. The program meets or exceeds the degree level standard and the applicant demonstrates how the program meets the standard.
2. Assessment of individual student work in the terminal stage of the program that reflects exemplary, average, and minimally acceptable performance demonstrates that the degree level standard has been achieved.

A degree in an **applied area of study** requires the same level of conceptual sophistication, specialized knowledge, and intellectual autonomy as that of other 4-year honours degrees in Ontario but with the disciplinary content oriented to an occupational field of practice.

Students in applied programs learn by doing, with a focus on preparing for entry into an occupational field of practice. Applied programs incorporate a blend of theory and practice, and normally include a terminal project or other practice-based exercises intended to develop and demonstrate the student's readiness for employment in the occupational field of practice.

In addition to personal and intellectual growth, the programs are primarily designed to prepare students for employment in the field of practice and second-entry professional degree programs or, depending on the content of the program and the field, entry into either graduate study or bridging studies for an appropriate graduate program.

Classroom instruction is typically eight semesters in duration (normally 120 credits, or the equivalent) and may be supplemented by required work experience (e.g., two to four supervised co-operative work terms).

## 2. ADMISSION, PROMOTION AND GRADUATION STANDARD

*Admission, promotion, and graduation requirements are consistent with the postsecondary character of degree granting organizations.*

### **Benchmarks:**

1. Admission requirements are appropriate to the learning outcome goals of the program and the degree level standard.



2. Admission to a bachelor program normally requires at a minimum an Ontario Secondary School Diploma or equivalent,<sup>4</sup> six university or university/college courses at the Grade 12 level, a minimum average of 65%, and any additional requirements.
3. Mature students<sup>5</sup> have demonstrated academic abilities equivalent to those of Ontario high school graduates, verified by successful completion of courses at the postsecondary level or an entrance examination.
4. Where any type of advanced standing into the program is proposed, policies and procedures pertaining to bridging requirements, advanced standing, credit, and credential recognition
  - a) have as a principal criterion that the credits accepted for admission to a degree program are in proportion to the affinity with and/or applicability to the specialist content of the program and other curricular requirements
  - b) are fair (award credit where credit is due), reasonable (do not award credit where none is due), and consistent
  - c) identify the bases on which such decisions are made, including
    - i) the minimum acceptable grade or achievement level
    - ii) the requirements for comparability of program content of earlier studies with that of the proposed program
    - iii) the procedures for determining the credit to be awarded
    - iv) the procedures that students will follow when requesting credit and appealing transfer of credit decisions
    - v) the limit on the number of credits that will be awarded for prior degree<sup>6</sup> level study toward the degree program
  - d) require in all cases a gap analysis of the program content and outcomes of the studies for which transfer credit is being awarded
  - e) ensure that the degree level standard and all program learning outcome standards of the degree program are met
  - f) identify any requirements for bridging studies that facilitate entry into the proposed program.

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<sup>4</sup> For credentials earned in Quebec, applicants should have a Secondary V diploma and at least one year (minimum 12 academic courses) in a CEGEP academic diploma program, with subjects at stated levels relevant to the degree program.

<sup>5</sup> Mature students are applicants who have not achieved the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) or its equivalent and who are at least 19 years of age on or before the commencement of the program in which they intend to enroll.

<sup>6</sup> Credits recognized for advanced standing must be earned at a postsecondary institution which is

- a) a Canadian public university
- b) an organization authorized to offer the degree program on the basis of an Ontario ministerial consent
- c) an organization that has the legal authority to grant degrees, is accredited by a recognized accrediting body where relevant, applies quality assurance policies to programs consistent with the program evaluation policy requirements of the Board, and is a member of a recognized association of degree granting institutions
- d) another institution acceptable to the Board.

5. For a degree completion arrangement a detailed gap analysis demonstrates the academic integrity of the degree program and that the degree level standard and degree program learning outcomes are met.
6. Colleges proposing to award credit for learning that takes place outside formal postsecondary educational institutions
  - a) have policies and procedures pertaining to prior learning assessment, which must include at a minimum
    - i) key principles informing the prior learning assessment
    - ii) methodology used for portfolio assessment, and examination challenge for credit
    - iii) policies on credit limits, appeals, and confidentiality
    - iv) assessment documents, guidelines, brochures for potential students.
  - b) demonstrate that
    - i) credit will be awarded only for learning and not for experience
    - ii) credit will be awarded only for degree level learning
    - iii) the determination of competence levels and credit awards will be made by academic experts in the appropriate subject matter.
7. The institution
  - a) does not offer any credits for “life experience”, unless that experience is assessed for its appropriate learning value to the specific degree program
  - b) does not waive comprehensive examinations, academic reports, research projects, and/or theses, if these are standard requirements of the program
  - c) does not award advanced standing for more than 50% of the total number of the credits of the program based on prior learning assessment<sup>7</sup>
  - d) requires that at least 50% of the individuals enrolled in a program at any given time are actively taking required elements of that program.
8. Administrative procedures for assessing advanced standing include the following elements.
  - a) Credit awards and their transcript entries are monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
  - b) Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, are fully disclosed and publicly accessible.
  - c) All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and provision should be made for their continued professional development.

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<sup>7</sup> In the context of this benchmark, prior learning assessment only refers to the assessment of learning gained outside a traditional classroom (through work experience, volunteering, outside study, etc.) and excludes (and therefore allows) transfer credits and transfer agreements which may amount to more than 50% advanced standing.

- d) Advanced standing decisions are regularly monitored, reviewed, and evaluated to ensure their ongoing validity for the degree program.
9. Promotion and graduation requirements are consistent with the learning outcome goals of the program and include
- a) policies governing academic remediation, sanctions, and suspension for students who do not meet minimum achievement requirements
  - b) a grading system that is easily understandable, meaningful, and convertible to students, other postsecondary institutions, and potential employers, whether expressed as letter grades, percentages, or grade points
  - c) regardless of the grading scheme, grades for acceptable performance correspond to student work that demonstrates the degree level standard has been achieved
  - d) minimum overall average acceptable achievement for progression (across all degree requirements, including the breadth and discipline-related requirements) not lower than the level typically designated by C- or 60–62%
  - e) minimum overall average acceptable achievement in discipline-related requirements for progression in the program not lower than the level typically designated by C- or 60–62%
  - f) a level of overall achievement expected in the core discipline(s) of study higher than the overall average.

### 3. PROGRAM CONTENT STANDARD

*The program offers an education of sufficient rigour, breadth, and depth to achieve the knowledge and skills identified in the degree level standard.*

#### **Benchmarks:**

1. The program ensures an appropriate balance of theory and practice.
2. The Program Advisory Committee
  - a) includes experts in the field external to the organization and, for degrees in applied and professional areas of study, employers and representatives from industry and professional associations
  - b) confirms the currency of the curriculum and, as appropriate, its relevance to the field(s) of practice
  - c) endorses the program as represented in the application.
3. Learning outcomes in the subjects/courses enable graduates to meet or exceed the requirements
  - a) for graduates from similar programs in Ontario and other jurisdictions
  - b) of the field(s) of study and/or practice
  - c) of any relevant professional or accrediting body.

4. All courses provide exposure to increasingly complex theory at the degree level and, in applied or professional courses and where otherwise appropriate, the application of that theory to practice and the demands of practice in the field(s).
5. Time allotments assigned to the program as a whole and to its components are appropriate to the stated learning outcomes.
6. All bachelor programs have a breadth requirement that includes coherent and substantive non-core<sup>8</sup> offerings. This requirement informs the design of non-core courses and provides the basis of at least some of the assessment of student outcomes. The curriculum (core and non-core) contributes to the achievement of
  - a) critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, written and oral communication skills
  - b) knowledge of society and culture, and skills relevant to civic engagement.
7. The non-core curriculum provides
  - a) knowledge in at least two of the following:
    - i) humanities
    - ii) sciences
    - iii) social sciences
    - iv) global cultures
    - v) mathematics
  - b) more than introductory knowledge of the distinctive assumptions and modes of analysis of a discipline outside the core fields of study.
8. The curriculum reflects current knowledge in the core field(s).
9. The curriculum reflects current knowledge in the fields represented in the non-core/breadth offerings.
10. In undergraduate programs, the balance of core and non-core/breadth studies is normally achieved as follows:
  - a) 20% of the program hours are in courses in the non-core curriculum<sup>9</sup>
  - b) at least one non-core course is a free elective.

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<sup>8</sup> Non-core courses are those that contribute to knowledge in fields unrelated to the main field(s) of study. Core courses are those that contribute to the development of knowledge in the main field(s) of study. The main field(s) of study is the field(s) identified in the degree nomenclature. Core courses can be in the main field(s) of study, or in related fields. For example, psychology, history and statistics are different fields of study. Because the field of psychology uses scientific method as one of its methodological approaches, statistics would be a core course in a psychology degree program. Statistics is not related to scholarship in history, however, and would not be a core course in a history degree program.

<sup>9</sup> An applicant may demonstrate through alternative approaches that the degree program meets the breadth/non-core requirements typical of such programs as offered at other postsecondary institutions. For example, undergraduate programs associated with accrediting bodies or other industry/professional regulatory bodies may depart from this norm, especially if meeting the 20% non-core benchmark would drive the total program to an extraordinary number of credit hours.

11. The type and frequency of student assessments demonstrate the achievement of the stated learning outcomes and provide appropriate information to students about their achievement levels.
12. Any work-integrated learning experience
  - a) is appropriate to the field of the program
  - b) has articulated, appropriate learning outcomes
  - c) is supervised by both a college representative with appropriate academic credentials and an employer/staff member who collaborate to evaluate the student performance
  - d) amounts to no less than 14 weeks of full-time equivalent work (420 hours), either in one block, or in multiple cumulative blocks appropriate to achieving the learning outcomes.
13. Where applicable, the curriculum reflects appropriate levels of Ontario and Canadian content.

#### 4. PROGRAM DELIVERY STANDARD

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

##### **Benchmarks:**

1. The institution conducts sustained, evidence-based and participatory inquiry to determine whether courses and the program (whether delivered using traditional, web facilitated, blended, hybrid, or online methods) are achieving the intended learning outcomes.
2. The results of such inquiry are used to guide curriculum design and delivery, pedagogy, and educational processes.
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
  - e) availability and suitability of technical and other supports.
4. Delivery methods are appropriate to course content and design.
5. The institution has the expertise and resources (including appropriate technological resources) to support the proposed delivery methods and to ensure their effectiveness.
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 ensuring that

- a) the program/course design and the course syllabus make appropriate provisions for instructor-student and student-student interaction
  - 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, threaded discussions) are adequate.
7. The technology used to deliver courses, both pedagogically and administratively, is adequate to facilitate program delivery.
  8. Faculty involved in course delivery are adequately trained for the delivery mode.
  9. There are adequate resources and processes to acquaint faculty, students, and course designers with new software or systems as they are adopted for the delivery mode of the program.
  10. Academic support services are appropriate to the delivery mode of the program.
  11. An institution offering distance courses/programs ensures that there is a sufficient number of faculty qualified to develop, design, and teach the courses/programs.<sup>10</sup>
  12. Appropriate safeguards assure the authentication of student identity and the integrity of student work for online courses/programs. Policies and procedures assure the verification of student identity for coursework and examinations, and for the control of examinations, including but not limited to security, time limits, and the selection of proctors/invigilators.

## 5. CAPACITY TO DELIVER STANDARD

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

### **Benchmarks:**

1. The program is appropriate to the college's mission, goals, and strengths.
2. The college provides for reasonable student and faculty access to learning and information resources (e.g., library, databases, computing, classroom equipment, laboratory facilities) sufficient in scope, quality, currency, and kind to support the program.
3. The college makes a commitment in its budgets and policies to provide and maintain the necessary learning, physical, technological, human, and other resources for the program, and to supplement them as necessary.

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<sup>10</sup> NB: this benchmark is only relevant for a program offered exclusively online.

4. Students have access to an appropriate range of academic support services (e.g., academic counselling, tutoring, career counselling, placement services).
5. Policies pertaining to faculty
  - a) define the academic/professional credentials required of present and future faculty teaching all courses in the program
  - b) require the college to have on file evidence, supplied directly to the college from the granting agency, of the highest academic credentials and any required professional credentials claimed by faculty members
  - c) fairly and consistently verify the equivalency of international credentials to those similarly named credentials offered by Canadian institutions
  - d) require the regular review of faculty performance, including student evaluation of teaching and/or supervision
  - e) identify the means of ensuring that faculty knowledge of the field is current
  - f) support the professional development of faculty including the promotion of curricular and instructional innovation, as well as technological skills, where appropriate
  - g) specify faculty teaching and supervision loads and availability to students.
6. There are sufficient numbers of academic and other staff to develop and deliver the program and to meet the demands of the projected student enrolment.<sup>11</sup>
7. All faculty<sup>12, 13</sup> teaching in the professional or main field of study and, where appropriate, acting as thesis supervisors and/or members of examining committees
  - a) have, where relevant, professional credentials and related work experience
  - b) hold an academic credential at least one degree higher than that offered by the program in the field or in a closely related field/discipline
  - c) engage in a level of scholarship, research, or creative activity sufficient to ensure their currency in the field.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The required minimum faculty and staff members will depend upon the method of delivery, enrolments, and the complexity and variety of specializations.

<sup>12</sup> To satisfy the following benchmarks, and in compliance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the applicant has obtained the written consent of individual faculty members to submit their CVs to the Board.

<sup>13</sup> Exceptions to any benchmarks pertaining to faculty must be

- a) based on the absence of a related program credential in a university or other extraordinary circumstances
- b) justified in writing with specific reference to the Board's Capacity to Deliver standard and approved by the President or, on explicit delegation, the applicant's senior academic officer. The signed document must be kept for review at the time of any request for renewed consent.

<sup>14</sup> In assessing faculty members' currency and engagement with scholarship, research, or creative activity, the following may be considered, provided that these contributions are in a form (in a phrase adapted from Boyer) "subject to critical review and allowing use/exchange by other members of the scholarly community." In all cases, such contributions may take digital form. In general, the Board seeks evidence that faculty are intellectually engaged with developments in their fields, including but not limited to

- publishing and/or reviewing professional publications in their fields
- participation and/or presentations at provincial, national, and international conferences, competitions, or exhibitions in their fields
- engagement with the scholarship of pedagogy in their fields

8. At least 50% of the students' experience in the professional or main field of study is in courses taught by a faculty member holding the terminal academic credential in the field or in a closely related field/discipline.<sup>15, 16</sup>
9. All faculty<sup>17, 18</sup> teaching non-core courses
  - a) have, where relevant, professional credentials and related work experience
  - b) hold an academic credential at least one degree higher than that offered by the program in the field or in a closely related field/discipline
  - c) engage in a level of scholarship, research, or creative activity sufficient to ensure their currency in the field.<sup>19</sup>
10. At least 50% of the students' experience in the non-core areas is in courses taught by a faculty member holding the terminal academic credential in the field or in a closely related field/discipline.<sup>20,21</sup>

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- participation in regulatory and accrediting association workshops, degree audits, or related work in their fields
  - engagement in basic and/or applied research, labour market research, and/or related industry needs assessments
  - application of conceptual knowledge to current practice in their fields, such as reports to industry or consulting work
  - creative contributions to their fields through exhibitions or related forms
  - development of case studies in their fields.

<sup>15</sup> Generally and in the context of a practicable schedule of teaching assignments, the percentage can be achieved if 50% of all faculty teaching core courses in the program hold the terminal academic credential in the field or in a closely related field/discipline or if 50% of all core courses or all hours in core courses in the program are taught by faculty with a terminal academic credential in the field or in a closely related field/discipline.

<sup>16</sup> The doctorate is normally the terminal academic credential in all fields or disciplines with the exception of certain fields where a master's degree in the field/discipline is more typical. The Board expects that the faculty will hold the terminal academic credential

- a) in the same field/discipline area as the proposed program area
- b) in a field/discipline that can be shown to be closely related in content
- c) with a graduate level specialty in the same field/discipline.

<sup>17</sup> To satisfy the following benchmarks, and in compliance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the applicant has obtained the written consent of individual faculty members to submit their CVs to the Board.

<sup>18</sup> Exceptions to any benchmarks pertaining to faculty must be

- a) based on the absence of a related program credential in a university or other extraordinary circumstances
- b) justified in writing with specific reference to the Board's Capacity to Deliver standard and approved by the President or, on explicit delegation, the applicant's senior academic officer. The signed document must be kept for review at the time of any request for renewed consent.

<sup>19</sup> In assessing faculty members' currency and engagement with scholarship, research, or creative activity, the following may be considered, provided that these contributions are in a form (in a phrase adapted from Boyer) "subject to critical review and allowing use/exchange by other members of the scholarly community." In all cases, such contributions may take digital form. In general, the Board seeks evidence that faculty are intellectually engaged with developments in their fields, including but not limited to

- publishing and/or reviewing professional publications in their fields
- participation and/or presentations at provincial, national, and international conferences, competitions, or exhibitions in their fields
- engagement with the scholarship of pedagogy in their fields
- participation in regulatory and accrediting association workshops, degree audits, or related work in their fields
- engagement in basic and/or applied research, labour market research, and/or related industry needs assessments
- application of conceptual knowledge to current practice in their fields, such as reports to industry or consulting work
- creative contributions to their fields through exhibitions or related forms
- development of case studies in their fields.

<sup>20</sup> Generally and in the context of a practicable schedule of teaching assignments, the percentage can be achieved if 50% of all faculty teaching non-core courses in the program hold the terminal academic credential in the field or in a closely related field/discipline or if



## 6. CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION STANDARD

*While meeting particular needs, the program is designed to maximize the graduates' potential for employment and promotion in their field and for further study.*

### **Benchmark:**

1. Documented consultations with employers, relevant occupational groups, professional associations, and other postsecondary education organizations indicate the credential will be (for new programs) or is (for existing programs) recognized for purposes of employment and further study.

## 7. REGULATION AND ACCREDITATION STANDARD

*Programs leading to occupations that are subject to government regulations are designed to prepare students to meet the requirements of the relevant regulatory and/or accrediting body.*

### **Benchmark:**

1. Documented consultations with the relevant regulatory and accrediting body(ies) indicate the credential will be recognized for purposes of employment and further study.

## 8. NOMENCLATURE STANDARD

*The program nomenclature reflects the postsecondary education achieved, facilitates public understanding of the qualification, and assists students, employers, and other postsecondary institutions to recognize the level, nature, and discipline of study.*

### **Benchmarks:**

1. The degree title conveys accurate information about the
  - a) degree level<sup>22</sup>
  - b) nature of the degree<sup>23</sup>

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50% of all non-core courses or all hours in non-core courses in the program are taught by faculty with a terminal academic credential in the field or in a closely related field/discipline.

<sup>21</sup> The doctorate is normally the terminal academic credential in all fields or disciplines with the exception of certain fields where a master's degree in the field/discipline is more typical. The Board expects that the faculty will hold the terminal academic credential

- a) in the same field/discipline area as the proposed program area
- b) in a field/discipline that can be shown to be closely related in content
- c) with a graduate level specialty in the same field/discipline.

<sup>22</sup> Pursuant to the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000* (the Act) Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology may apply for the Minister's consent to offer bachelor degrees in applied areas of study. Consequently, bachelor level and not master's or doctoral level nomenclatures are available for designating these degrees.

- c) discipline and/or subject of study.

## 9. PROGRAM EVALUATION STANDARD

*The quality of the proposed program is assured by procedures for periodic evaluation that meet the requirements outlined below.*<sup>24</sup>

### **Benchmarks:**

1. The college has a formal, institutionally approved policy and procedure for the periodic review of programs that embody the following characteristics:
  - a) program reviews at regular intervals, normally not exceeding five to seven years. The first such evaluation should occur before a request for renewal of ministerial consent.
  - b) criteria for program reviews that include
    - i) assessment of the continuing consistency of the program with the college's mission, educational goals, and long-range plan
    - ii) assessment of the learning outcome achievements of students/graduates by comparison with
      - i. the program's stated learning outcome goals and standards
      - ii. the degree level standard
      - iii. the opinions of employers and students/graduates
      - iv. the standards of any related regulatory, accrediting or professional association
  - c) where appropriate, assessment of
    - i) graduate employment rates
    - ii) graduate satisfaction level
    - iii) employer satisfaction level
    - iv) student satisfaction level
    - v) graduation rate
    - vi) the default rate on the Ontario Student Assistance Program or other student loan plan
    - vii) student retention rates

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<sup>23</sup> There is a variety of ways to connote with nomenclature whether a degree is applied/professional or research-oriented. With the exception of Bachelor of Applied Science, which connotes research-oriented degrees, research-oriented degrees are normally of the form: *Bachelor of Faculty (Subject)*, for example, Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) or Bachelor of Science (Chemistry). The typical approaches to nomenclature for bachelor degrees in applied areas, available for designating college degrees, are

a) *Bachelor of Faculty (Subject)*, for example, Bachelor of Technology (Information Technology)

b) (With the exception of *Applied Science*) *Bachelor of Applied Faculty (Subject)*, for example, Bachelor of Applied Arts (Justice Studies)

c) *Bachelor of Subject*, for example, Bachelor of Interior Design.

<sup>24</sup> The following benchmarks are based on the criteria employed by Ontario public universities and Redeemer University College.

- d) assessment of the continuing relevance of the program to the field of practice it serves, including evidence of revisions made to adapt to changes in the field of practice
- e) assessment of the continuing appropriateness of the method of delivery and curriculum for the program's educational goals and standards
- f) assessment of the continuing appropriateness of admission requirements (i.e., achievement level, subject preparation) for the program's educational goals and standards
- g) assessment of the continuing appropriateness of the program's structure, method of delivery and curriculum for its educational goals and standards
- h) assessment of the continuing adequacy of the methods used for evaluating student progress and achievement
- i) assessment of the efficient and effective utilization and adequacy of existing human, physical, technological, and financial resources
- j) indicators of faculty performance, including the quality of teaching and supervision and demonstrable currency in the field of specialization
- k) assessment of individual student work in the terminal stage of the program that reflects exemplary, average, and minimally acceptable performance and demonstrates that the degree level standard has been achieved.

2. The program review procedure includes

- a) A self-study  
A study undertaken, with student input, by faculty members and administrators of the program based on evidence relating to program performance against the criteria stated above, including strengths and weaknesses, desired improvements, and future directions.
- b) A Program Evaluation Committee  
A committee struck by the senior administration to evaluate the program based on
  - i) the self-study
  - ii) a site visit during which members of the committee normally meet with faculty members, students, graduates, employers, and administrators to gather information. A majority of the members must be senior academic peers (both scholars and administrators) with relevant expertise from both outside the college and internal to the college but outside the program, and free of any conflict of interest.<sup>25</sup>
- c) The report of the Program Evaluation Committee  
The overarching purpose of the Program Evaluation Committee report is to assess program quality and recommend any changes needed to strengthen that quality. The report must be addressed to the senior administration and shared with the academic

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<sup>25</sup> A conflict of interest policy similar to that of the Board should be implemented in selecting members of a Program Evaluation Committee.

council, governing board, faculty members, and students in the program, together with a plan of action responding to the recommendations in the report.

3. The implementation of the policy and procedures for the periodic review of programs
  - a) is aligned with the Board's requirements for such evaluations
  - b) achieves its intended aim of continuous improvement of the program(s).

## 10. ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND INTEGRITY STANDARD

*The college 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:**

1. The college has a policy on academic freedom that recognizes and protects the rights of individuals in their pursuit of knowledge without fear of reprisals by the college or by third parties, and the right of individuals to communicate acquired knowledge and the results of research freely.
2. The college has appropriate policies pertaining to academic honesty and procedures for their enforcement.
3. The college provides an appropriate plan for informing students and faculty about and ensuring their understanding of the policies and procedures concerning academic honesty.
4. The college has an appropriate policy on the ownership of the intellectual products of employees and students.
5. The college upholds formal ethical research standards. Where the college conducts research in Ontario that involves the management of research funds, the use of animals in research or human research participants, the policies of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and/or the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada will govern the research.
6. There are appropriate policies and procedures concerning compliance with copyright law.
7. Where courses/programs are delivered online, the college has appropriate policies and procedures to address copyright and intellectual property issues (e.g., digital rights management and the use of object learning repositories).

## 11. STUDENT PROTECTION STANDARD

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

### **Benchmarks:**

1. Public reports, materials, and advertising are produced in a thorough, accurate, and truthful manner.
2. Recruitment policies follow ethical business practices.
3. Key information about the college's organization, policies, and programs is published in its academic year calendar and is otherwise readily available to students and the public, specifically including
  - a) the college's mission and goals statement
  - b) a history of the college and its governance and academic structure
  - c) a general description of each degree program (e.g., purpose, outcomes, length)
  - d) the academic credentials of faculty and senior administrators
  - e) individual descriptions of all subjects in programs and their credit value.
4. The college has policies and procedures that protect student and consumer interests in the following areas:
  - a) the resolution of students' academic appeals, complaints, grievances, and/or other disputes
  - b) security of academic student records
  - c) payment schedule of fees and charges
  - d) student dismissal
  - e) withdrawals and refunds.
5. Prior to registration, students are provided with, and confirm in writing their awareness of, policies (and procedures) pertaining to:
  - a) admissions
  - b) credit transfer arrangements for incoming students
  - c) credit transfer arrangements with and recognition by other institutions
  - d) entrance examinations
  - e) prior learning assessment
  - f) grading
  - g) the ability of international students admitted to the program to meet program requirements for degree completion
  - h) method of course delivery
  - i) academic honesty
  - j) intellectual property rights

- k) student dismissal
  - l) dispute resolution
  - m) student support and services
  - n) tuition
  - o) scholarships and other financial assistance
  - p) payment of fees and charges
  - q) withdrawals and refunds
  - r) institutional closure
  - s) where appropriate, supervision, preparation, and examination of theses/dissertations.
6. For courses and/or programs that incorporate blended, hybrid, or online delivery, 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 an anytime/anywhere environment
  - c) any additional costs, beyond tuition and ancillary fees, associated with e-learning aspects of course/program delivery
  - d) the kind of support and protection available to them.

## 12. ECONOMIC NEED STANDARD

*The program is designed so that graduates will fulfill an identified economic need.*

### **Benchmark:**

The college provides evidence of the present and anticipated economic need for the program and how the program closes a skills gap in the labour force including, for example,

- an analysis of economic forecasts, job advertisements, surveys of employers, and evidence of student demand
- the need for degree level graduates of a bachelor degree program in an applied area of study (e.g., from professional associations, regulatory, and/or licensing bodies)
- evidence of employer commitments to offer placements to students for the required work experience component of the program, to hire graduates, or to provide financial support for the program and/or its students.

### 13. NON-DUPLICATION OF PROGRAMS STANDARD

*The program does not duplicate programs normally offered by Ontario universities or contribute to unwarranted raising of credentials among similar programs in the college system.*

#### **Benchmarks:**

1. The college provides evidence that the program surpasses the standards of related diploma programs.
2. The college submits a comparison of the proposed program with potentially related university programs.
3. The college provides evidence that the proposed program meets a need not adequately addressed by other programs in colleges and universities.

## 6. Honorary Bachelor Degree in Applied Studies

Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology may submit applications for consent to award an Honorary Bachelor of Applied Studies.

To receive consent to award an Honorary Bachelor of Applied Studies, a college must hold a Ministerial Consent under the *Post-Secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000* and agree to the following requirements:

1. The only honorary applied degree that may be granted is an Honorary Bachelor of Applied Studies.
2. The college may not award more than one honorary applied degree per academic year for each Ministerial Consent for a degree program in force at the time the honorary degree is awarded.
3. The college may not charge any fees or payment from the (proposed) recipient of an honorary applied degree award.
4. Unless an honorary degree is being awarded posthumously, the recipient of an honorary applied degree award must be in attendance at the convocation or other college public event at which the honorary degree is awarded.
5. The recipient of an Honorary Bachelor of Applied Studies award must meet one or more of the following criteria:
  - has made a significant contribution to society
  - has achieved noted accomplishments in a particular field of study or applied education
  - has enhanced or promoted the college's image and reputation in Ontario or elsewhere.
6. If the college offers a joint baccalaureate degree in an applied area of study with one or more other colleges, each college offering the joint program may award one honorary applied degree per academic year provided the consent for the joint program remains in effect.

Should a college be granted consent to award the Honorary Bachelor of Applied Studies, subsequent applications are not required unless the Minister determines that some criteria be amended or new criteria added. Once a college has been granted consent to offer the Honorary Bachelor of Applied Studies, the college retains permission to award this honorary applied degree so long as the college maintains at least one applied degree consent in effect.

There will be no fees to Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology for reviewing applications for Ministerial Consent to award the Honorary Bachelor of Applied Studies.



## 7. Recognition of Prior Assessments

The Board acknowledges the potentially unique circumstances facing colleges that have, within the past two years, completed a thorough program or institutional evaluation with another quality assurance body. Colleges in these circumstances may ask the Board to recognize the findings of a recent assessment in the formulation of its recommendations to the Minister.

The onus is on the college to request that the Board recognize all or part of any relevant, prior review. In its request, the college must submit the following information:

- a) a complete consent application in accord with the Board's [Submission Guidelines](#)
- b) documentation of the requirements (criteria, standards and procedures) of the assessment that occurred within the two years prior to the submission to the Board
- c) an analysis of the overlap in requirements of the Board and the previous assessment
- d) the complete reports resulting from the previous assessment
- e) written permission for the Board or its agents to consult the assessors or any professional, accrediting, or regulatory body named in the submitted documentation.

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### 7.1 Recognition of Prior Assessments

The Board has sole discretion to recognize the findings of another assessment. The Board must be satisfied that the prior review examined the program against standards and benchmarks similar to those established by the Board. The Board will also consider:

- how recently the review occurred
- the credibility of the reviewing body
- the criteria, standards, and procedures used in the assessment
- the qualifications, standing, and objectivity of the external reviewers involved
- evidence that the quality of the program will be maintained in Ontario.

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### 7.2 The Recognition Process

The Board expects colleges wishing to have prior assessments considered to adduce all relevant evidence. The Board will review and assess the nature and adequacy of any recent prior reviews or assessments in the light of the criteria and procedures outlined in this *Handbook*.

If the Board finds that the prior assessment meets all of its standards and procedural requirements, the Board will normally recognize the outcome of that prior assessment as satisfying its requirements.

If the Board finds that the prior assessment meets only some of its standards and procedural requirements, the Board will normally recognize the relevant portions and ask its assessors to address the remaining matters.

If the Board finds that it would not be appropriate to recognize and use any of the findings of a prior assessment, the Board's review will proceed through its normal process.

# 8. Appendices

## 8.1 PEQAB Site Visit: Suggested Agenda Template

**NAME OF APPLICANT**

**NAME OF PROGRAM - NEW PROGRAM/RENEWAL**

**Site Visit: DATE & LOCATION**

**Quality Assessment Panel Chair:**

**Quality Assessment Panel Subject-matter Expert:**

**PEQAB Representative:**

<b>Time<sup>26</sup></b>	<b>Topics/Areas of Focus/Session</b>	<b>Participants</b>
8:00 – 8:30am	<b>Welcome and Coffee</b>	
8:30 – 9:00	<b>Overview of the Agenda, College and School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior college administration</li> <li>• Program coordinator and/or chair</li> <li>• Dean of the relevant faculty</li> <li>• Program Development and Quality Assurance</li> </ul>
9:00 – 10:30	<b>Academic Program Overview/ Overview of Program Development, Content, Outcomes, and Delivery</b> including e.g., detailed discussion of curriculum, course outlines, work integrated learning experiences and bridge pathways (if applicable), college’s research capacity and academic pathways for degree graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program coordinator and/or chair, i.e. person(s) responsible for the oversight of the program</li> <li>• Dean(s)</li> </ul> Maybe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research Services</li> <li>• Program Development and Quality Assurance</li> </ul>
10:30 – 10:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Break</b></li> </ul>	

<sup>26</sup> All times and durations are approximate.

10:45 – 11:30	<b>Meeting with current and past Students<sup>27</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to meet with current students and graduates (for program renewals)</li> <li>• current students and graduates from related programs (for new programs)</li> </ul>
11:30 – 12:15	<b>Program Currency and Relevance to the Field(s) of Practice</b>	Representatives of the Program Advisory Committee <sup>28</sup>
12:15 – 1:00	<b>Working Lunch (panel only)</b>	
1:00 – 1:45	<b>Tour of Campus Facilities</b>	This tour may include a visit to the library, computing facilities, student support services and some classrooms and labs.
1:45 – 2:45	<b>Program Content and Delivery and Capacity to Deliver</b>	Meeting with Faculty
2:30 – 2:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Break</b></li> </ul>	
3:00 – 3:45	<b>Institutional Support for Program and Program Policies</b> Including capacity to deliver supports to students and potential questions about the institution’s policies as they pertain to the program	Participants may include representatives from ‘enabling areas’/ ‘support areas’ such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Services &amp; College Resources/ Student Affairs</li> <li>• Co-op Education and Career Services</li> <li>• Enrolment Services</li> <li>• Financial Aid and Student Awards</li> <li>• Marketing</li> </ul>
3:45-4:15	<b>Academic Policy Review</b> Topics such as program quality assurance, academic freedom, student protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program coordinator and/or chair</li> <li>• Dean of the relevant faculty</li> <li>• Program Development and Quality Assurance</li> </ul>
4:15 – 4:45	<b>Panel Caucus (panel only)</b>	
4:45 – 5:00	<b>Concluding Meeting/ Exit Interview</b>	The same participants as in the 9am session

<sup>27</sup> Some panels have had good experiences with moving either the meeting with students or the meeting with representatives of the Program Advisory Committee to the working lunch. These options should be discussed with the panel chair.

<sup>28</sup> This meeting may, in some cases, be better situated later during the day to accommodate working professionals.

## HOW TO USE THE TEMPLATE

**Please note:** Recently PEQAB Secretariat staff have observed some inconsistencies in the development of site visit agendas including but not limited to

- timing (length and order)
- topics of discussion (in relation to PEQAB standards), and
- attendees in the various discussions throughout the day.

This template, meant as a guide, is an attempt at fostering consistency amongst site visits and ensure site visits are using the time allocated as best as possible. It remains the role of the panel Chair to set the agenda in close collaboration with the applicant and to lead the site visit. The template is based on the experience of assessors and PEQAB staff and is intended to reflect what worked well during past site visits.

### Suggestions

- **Content of sessions:** It is suggested to keep to the topics/areas of focus.
- **Timing (length and order):** While it is suggested to keep the approximate order and time allotments, the length of various sessions may vary from review to review as each review can raise different difficult issues. The order, apart from the opening and closing sessions, can vary and is often dictated by local needs.
  - Some topics/sessions lend themselves well to being moved, e.g., switching the meeting with the PAC with the one with students, or changing the timeslot of the tour of the facilities.
  - Some topics/sessions are more strategically placed and should not be moved if possible, e.g., the review of institutional support for the program and program policies should remain later in the day to allow the panel to follow-up with senior management on any questions that may have been raised during the meetings with faculty or students.
- **Samples of student work:** The review of samples of student work is only required for renewals. It is strongly suggested that the applicant distribute samples of student work to the assessor(s) prior to the site visit to allow for a desk review in advance of the site visit. Where that is not possible, a minimum of 60-90 minutes will have to be found somewhere in the agenda for the subject-matter expert(s) to conduct this crucial task.
- **Participant:** Participants noted are suggestions only. It is, however, important that, in addition to the assessment team, only faculty are present during the faculty session and that student sessions are attended by students only. Moreover, it is suggested that the applicant's administrators be excluded from the meeting with members of the Program Advisory Committee.

### Other best practices

#### **Applicant**

- Presentations by the applicant should be kept at a minimum to allow for maximum amount of time for dialogue and Q&As.
- Some discretionary elements (shaded in grey) are identified, e.g.,
  - the policy review is only required if such review has not occurred at the college for some time (review guidelines will identify this). Generally policy questions can be addressed as part of the *Institutional Support for Program and Program Policies* session.
- The concluding meeting should be kept short. The panel will give a high level summary of findings and, in addition to strengths, make the applicant aware of any major and minor weakness that will be raised in the report as per 'no surprises-policy'. The panel will usually also review its request for any additional material to be submitted. PEQAB staff will address the timelines for the remainder of the review process.

### **Panel**

- Where possible, the Panel Chair and subject-matter expert(s) are encouraged to submit requests for additional information in advance of the site visit day. It is understood that the panel may see the need to require additional material during and after the site visit.
- It is also suggested that the panel tries to find time to meet face-to-face (e.g., for a working dinner the night before the site visit or for breakfast on the day of the site visit). This may help the panel to focus on key issues to discuss with the institution's leadership and program staff and to narrow concerns and emphases.
- The panel may want to consider holding an informal team meeting after the *Exit Interview* to discuss the next steps, including timelines and the approach to and distribution of responsibilities in writing the report. This meeting could become part of the official agenda if desired.
- For programs that require an assessment of breadth curriculum (usually conducted via desk review), it is suggested that the panel solicit from the breadth reviewer comments or concerns and bring these forward during the suitable sessions at the site visit.

### **PEQAB Secretariat Staff**

PEQAB Secretariat staff are 'guides from the side' responsible for

- introducing the assessment panel and applicant
- acting as support to panel and applicant on questions related to PEQAB standards and benchmarks
- keeping track of additional material to be sent to the panel after the site visit
- outlining the timelines and further steps in the program review
- time keeping reminders (where necessary).