

Building a Pan-Canadian Consensus on Quality Assurance

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Growing Complexity

- In 1960s and 1970s a binary system prevailed in Canada
 - colleges offered diploma/certificate programs oriented to the workplace;
 - universities offered degree programs.
- Later, a more complex reality:
 - Changes in public education:
 - Universities have become entrepreneurial, some offering programs for a profit—e.g., Executive MBAs, distance education—across provincial and in some cases international boundaries.
 - Some public colleges have become “hybrid” organizations, offering both diploma and degree programs.
 - Cross border activity:
 - Limited number of external universities permitted in Ontario since 1983
 - Evidence of external university activity found in most provinces
 - Emergence of new private sector:
 - Major change has been development of share-based corporations offering degree programs .

The Canadian Context

- Education is a provincial matter
 - Ten provinces
 - Limited coordination of government policy at national level is through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)
 - Provinces have responded differently to changing conditions
- British Columbia introduced “university colleges” in 1989, opened doors to private degree granting in 2002
- Alberta opened doors to private degree granting in 1989, permitted colleges to offer applied degrees in 1995
- Ontario opened doors to new private degree granting and permitted colleges to offer applied degrees in 2001

Quality Assurance Agencies

- In BC, the Degree Quality Assessment Board:
 - Assesses both public and private degree programs but approved an exemption policy for the public universities
- In Alberta, the first QA agency (1989) dealt only with private institutions; its successor, the Alberta Quality Council (est. 2004):
 - Assesses all degree public and private degree programs
- In Ontario, the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (2001):
 - Assesses degree programs offered by all institutions not authorized to offer a degree by an Ontario statute of their own
 - All 24 public colleges; a new public university during a probationary period; all external and private universities
 - Public universities in Ontario share their own QA processes for graduate and undergraduate programs

Coordinating Standards/ Procedures

- Meeting of representatives of three government-based QA agencies, Feb. 2004
- Led to working group to consider common degree level standards and QA procedures
- Also led to recommendation that the coordination ought to include all ten provinces
- That idea was endorsed by the Pan-Canadian council of Deputy Ministers of Education in August 2004
- Pan-Canadian Committee on Quality Assurance for Degree Programs struck, met in September 2004, with a view to preparing a report and recommendations to the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) in early 2005

Pan-Canadian Committee

- Consists of a representative from each of the ten provinces
- Mandate:
 - To propose a degree qualifications framework describing the general learning outcome competencies expected of degree holders at each level, with a view to articulating threshold degree standards and enabling credentials to be mapped against one another
 - To propose standards for QA reviews of sufficient rigour to generate the confidence of all stakeholders that the standards in the degree qualifications framework and any other standards for programs are met in practice.
 - (To propose a pan-Canadian approach to the external validation of the quality of programs—this was deferred until the first two points have been addressed).

Process

- Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) rules require consultations of their stakeholders to be done by their ministries
 - The Pan-Canadian committee could directly consult only with national organizations, such as Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
- To mitigate potential confusion, the Pan-Canadian committee developed a consultation document to be used by all
- Consultations took longer than originally planned and are only being completed on March 31

Responses

- Public universities have been wary
 - General concerns about a government-originated discussion of QA
 - Some see the development of a QF as a way to demonstrate their accountability and reduce potential for government intrusion
 - Some have developed or are developing similar standards statements and QA procedures
- All other stakeholders—student groups, public colleges, private degree providers—have been uniformly positive
 - Want to meet shared standards to facilitate student transfer, credential recognition, and the credibility of the credentials they offer

Next Steps

The Pan-Canadian Task

Next Steps

- The Pan-Canadian Committee will now:
 - Consider the feedback from the consultations
 - Develop a report and recommendation for CMEC on whether and how to proceed with the initiative
 - Should be done by about September

