

EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT BOARD

2016-17 Self-Study

PEQAB

THE POST SECONDARY EDUCATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT BOARD

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1

Introduction

To ensure the rigor and transparency of its criteria and processes, and in preparation for an external review of the agency, the Secretariat undertook, on behalf of the Board, a Self-Study on its quality assurance practices and operations since 2011. This is a report of that review. The report is structured so as to facilitate an analysis of the Board's operations against the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*.

Maureen Morton

James Brown



PEQAB, Chair

PEQAB, CEO

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Development of this Self-Study

It is best practice for quality assurance agencies to undergo an external review at regular intervals (typically between five and seven years). Consistent with this expectation, the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board's (PEQAB's) *Internal Quality Assurance Policy* requires an external evaluation at least every seven years. Since the last external evaluation took place in 2011, the Board instructed the Secretariat in September 2016 to begin a Self-Study in preparation for its second external review. The external review of PEQAB is expected to be complete in 2017. The Terms of Reference for both the Self-Study and external review are provided in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

In the 2011 Self-Study, PEQAB was reviewed against its legislative mandate as identified in the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000* (PSECE). The 2011 Self-Study and corresponding external review of PEQAB were based on the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies' (INQAAHE) *Guidelines of Good Practice*. This 2017 Self-Study is based on the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). The ESG and INQAAHE standards are substantially the same, but the ESG provide more structured benchmarks, guidance for the interpretation of benchmarks and detailed descriptions.¹ Moreover – and unlike INQAAHE's *Guidelines* – the ESG are the principal assessment tool used by numerous quality assurance bodies for purposes of external review and membership recognition in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Finally, PEQAB's 2011 external review panel also noted a weakness with using INQAAHE's *Guidelines* – a weakness mitigated by using the ESG.²

This document is the result of the 2016-2017 PEQAB Self-Study. Over the course of six months, the PEQAB Secretariat examined current practices and protocols to determine how well the goals and purpose of the agency's work are being satisfied and to identify areas for improvement. The results of the evaluation are presented for consideration by the PEQAB Board, our stakeholders and community members, and for assessment by an External Evaluation Panel.

In this document readers will find three main Parts. The first Part is introductory and its Sections 1-7 detail PEQAB's role and activities as a narrative which is drawn upon in later Sections. In this first Part, Section 2 discusses matters pertaining to the design of the Self-Study and external evaluation and how to read this document. In Section 3, readers will find information on the role of PEQAB in the broader Ontario higher education landscape, and Section 4 provides detail on PEQAB's development, structure and governance. Section 5 delves more deeply into PEQAB's model of quality assurance, and Section 6

¹ The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) manages a register of quality assurance agencies that have demonstrated substantial compliance with the ESG. EQAR has published a *Use and Interpretation of the ESG for the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies* document that provides the principal interpretations of the ESG and outlines what the agencies' self-evaluation reports and external review reports should demonstrate in order to achieve compliance with the ESG.

² According to the 2011 reviewers: "The Panel also wishes to acknowledge that the INQAAHE *Guidelines*, although ostensibly flexible enough to be relevant to most higher education quality assurance agencies, are probably more easily applied to institutional than programmatic agencies and are better fitted for an agency that takes ultimate actions rather than making recommendations" (*External Review of PEQAB*, 2011, p. 11).

provides the details of the processes. Finally, Section 7 provides information on our internal quality assurance processes and demonstrates how continuous improvement is embedded in our activities.

Part 2 of this Self-Study is a direct response to the ESG and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR's) interpretation of those standards. In Section 8, readers will find evidence of PEQAB's compliance with the External Quality Assurance Standards (how PEQAB quality assures institutions and programs), and Section 9 addresses Quality Assurance Agencies Standards (examining PEQAB itself).

Part 3, comprising Sections 10 and 11, considers the changes PEQAB has made since the 2011 evaluation and recommendations, and identifies current challenges and areas for future development.

Particularly throughout Parts 2 and 3, readers will find references back to other sections for context and detail. This is an effort by the Secretariat to minimize duplication while ensuring readers are provided with adequate information. Similarly, please note that many background documents referenced throughout this Self-Study are included as Appendices. Exceptions – which are only included in the digital version – include the sample Board agenda package as these agenda packages often run to a thousand pages. Other long documents, such as PEQAB's *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* for applicant institutions, are included only as web references and internet links, with relevant sections of these quoted directly in the text of this document.

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Quality Assurance of degree programs in Ontario

3.1 Degree Providers in Ontario

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

There are 22 publicly funded universities in Ontario. Each institution has an act of the Ontario legislature. Most of these institutions are authorized by their acts to confer any and all degrees.³ Almost all federated colleges of public universities also have acts of the legislature which provide degree-granting authority.

As additional context, seventeen institutions (predominantly religious) have obtained private acts of the legislature giving them limited degree-granting authority. All private acts that provide degree granting authority to organizations provide only restricted degree authority, primarily to award non-secular degrees.

In addition, there are 24 Ontario Colleges (21 Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) and 3 Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning (ITALs)) which offer Honours Bachelor degrees pursuant to the consent of Ontario’s Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD).⁴ In the interests of simplicity, Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology and Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning will be collectively referred to throughout this document as either “CAATs” or “Ontario Colleges”. Approximately 80% of PEQAB’s activities are in regard to CAATs—and they will feature prominently in this Self-Study.

3.2 QA for Degrees Offered in Ontario

There are two organizations in Ontario that quality assure degree programs: the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance and the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB).

THE ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES COUNCIL ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

³ OCAD U is permitted to award two undergraduate and three graduate degrees and Algoma University (Ontario’s newest university created in 2008) has restricted degree granting authority.

⁴ In September 2016, the Government of Ontario changed the name of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD).

The Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (called the Quality Council), established in 2010, coordinates the quality assurance activities those publicly assisted Ontario universities with their own legislated authority to offer degree programs. Specifically, under the aegis of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU), the Quality Council is the provincial body responsible for assuring the quality of all programs offered by universities with acts which lead to degrees and graduate diplomas, including new undergraduate and graduate programs. The Council also oversees the regular audit of each university's quality assurance processes.

The Quality Council has the authority to make the final decision on whether, following the COU mandated appraisal of any proposed new undergraduate or graduate program, such programs may commence. In addition, the Quality Council reviews the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP) for Ontario universities as well as each institution's compliance with its own IQAP for the cyclical review of existing programs. The requirements for the IQAP are set out in the Quality Council's *Quality Assurance Framework* (<http://oucqa.ca/resources-publications/quality-assurance-framework/>).

THE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT BOARD

PEQAB is responsible for quality assessing degree level programming (Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral programs) offered by Ontario colleges, private institutions, public institutions that are based in other jurisdictions that offer degree programming in Ontario, and public universities in Ontario which are offering programs outside of their legislation.

Pursuant to the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000*, the Minister of MAESD refers applications to PEQAB for review and recommendation. The current legislation gives the Minister the option of referring applications to a quality assurance body other than PEQAB, but the Minister has not done so to date. The Board's criteria and processes for reviewing applications are detailed throughout this report.

To briefly summarize the process, PEQAB reviews applications against clearly defined criteria and makes recommendation to the Minister on the quality of the degree program and, in some cases, the organization's capacity to deliver it. In the decision on consent, the Minister considers the Board's recommendation and any public policy or financial matter flowing from the granting of a consent. Should the Minister decide to grant consent, consent holders must meet regulatory requirements and additional terms and conditions of consent imposed by the Minister. The terms and conditions of consent include a provision that that the program may not change during the period of consent (except to maintain currency) and that the organization must provide extended access to transcripts and some additional requirements that vary depending on whether the consent holder is an Ontario College, another public organization or a private institution.

There are no current provisions for private institutions with acts of the Ontario legislature to undergo quality assurance (e.g. Holy Redeemer College, Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St. Paul's United College).

4

History, mandate, profile and activities of PEQAB

4.1 History and Mandate of the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board

OVERVIEW OF THE *POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION CHOICE AND EXCELLENCE ACT, 2000*

Legislation

Degree granting in Ontario is regulated by the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000*, (PSECE or the Act), proclaimed in 2001. PSECE is the core component of Ontario's degree quality framework. The Act sets the parameters for how degree authority is obtained in the province (by an act of the legislature or Minister's consent), the student protection conditions attached to organizations that offer degrees pursuant to consent (e.g. financial security and access to transcripts), the requirements for quality assurance of degree programs (all applications for consent must be referred to PEQAB or another quality assurance agency for review and recommendation) and the mechanisms to address organizations that contravene the Act (fines and imprisonment).

Prior to PSECE, the *Degree Granting Act* (DGA) was in force in Ontario. Under the DGA, private and public out-of-province organizations sought Ministerial consent to offer degree programs.⁵ In determining whether to grant consent under the DGA, the criteria considered by the Minister included one quality measure (whether the organization was accredited in its home jurisdiction) and several factors related to societal need, including

- whether a publicly assisted university was offering, during the period for which the consent was requested, the same course of study and degree, in a manner and form consistent with the articulated and confirmed needs of the specific client group
- whether the proposed degree program was similar to one leading to the awarding of a certificate or diploma by a college of applied arts and technology in Ontario
- identifiable need for graduates in a specific field that were met by the program
- employment surveys
- letters of support
- duration of the need.

While the DGA was in effect there were routine consultations with the Council of Ontario Universities to solicit comments on an application for consent, particularly to determine whether member institutions were planning to offer the same program of study as the applicant.⁶

Key Features of the PSECE Act

Key features of the original PSECE Act include

⁵ Private in-province institutions could not seek consent.

⁶ In cases where there might be duplication, a consent might still be granted if the applicant served a different group of students (e.g., part-time, mature) or the program had other features that distinguished it from the program offered by the university.

- all organizations require either an act of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario or the consent of the Minister to offer a degree or to use the term “university”
- the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) and Institutes of Advanced Learning and Technology (ITALs) may apply for consent to offer baccalaureate degrees in applied areas of study⁷
- all organizations not empowered by an act of the Ontario legislature to offer degrees are able to seek consent
- the Minister must refer all applications for consent to PEQAB or another quality assurance agency
- the Minister may not grant or deny consent until he or she has received a recommendation from PEQAB or another agency
- the Minister is required to be satisfied that private applicants have adequate student protection measures in place, specifically access to transcripts and security before giving consent
- enforcement mechanisms were strengthened by establishing an inspection process and the powers of the inspector, and increasing the level of fines significantly
- PEQAB, created in 2000 and prior to the Act, was continued and made responsible for the review of applications for consent.

Pursuant to the Act, an application for consent is required to

- grant a degree
- provide a program or part of a program in Ontario leading to a degree
- advertise a program or part of a program of post-secondary study offered in Ontario leading to a degree to be conferred in or outside Ontario
- sell, offer for sale or provide by agreement for a fee, reward or other remuneration, a diploma, certificate, document or other material that indicates or implies the granting or conferring of a degree
- operate or maintain a university
- use or be known by a name of a university or any derivation or abbreviation of a name of a university
- make use of the word university or any derivation or abbreviation of the word university in any advertising relating to an educational institution in Ontario.

Because the Minister’s terms and conditions of consent do not permit a consent holder to change a program (unless it is to maintain the currency of the curriculum) an application for Ministerial consent or an amendment of consent is required when consent holders wish to change the program in any way (e.g. eliminate or add an admissions requirement, change degree nomenclature, alter assessment strategies).

In June 2010, the Act was amended and regulatory changes came into effect in January 2012.

Amendments to the Act included

- rejecting an application without referral to PEQAB (or other body) according to prescribed circumstances and policy criteria
- considering a prior quality assurance review as satisfying the requirement that the application be referred, and deeming approval by such a body as satisfying the requirement that the Minister receive a recommendation.

⁷ CAATs could not offer degrees prior to 2001.

The Minister's *Guidelines and Directives for Applying for Ministerial Consent* (Appendix 3) elaborate on the procedures to be followed in applying for the Minister's consent, the standard terms and conditions of a ministerial consent and contains an attestation form.

PEQAB's Mandate

Under sections 5 and 7 of the Act, PEQAB is empowered to

- review all applications referred by the Minister for consent under the Act
- establish the criteria and procedures to determine the quality of postsecondary programs
- undertake reviews of program quality and organization capacity
- create subject matter expert review panels, organization review panels and advisory committees
- undertake research as appropriate
- provide recommendations to the Minister on applications
- address any other matter referred to the Board by the Minister.

In fulfillment of its mandate, the Board determines the criteria and procedures for its reviews, strikes expert and advisory panels and undertakes related research. The Board's criteria and procedures are contained in its various *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines*, www.peqab.ca/Handbooks.html.

4.2 The Organizational Structure of PEQAB

PEQAB 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. Board members have a mix of backgrounds and expertise. Some members have experience in the university and college sectors and others are experienced in private sectors. As of January 1, 2017 the Board has eight members, including the Chair.

MEMBERS

Maureen Morton (Chair 25-Apr-2011 to 31-May-2019; Vice-Chair 01-Jul-2001 to 24-Apr-2011) obtained her LLB from the University of Toronto in 1989. She is a business law lawyer specializing in technology law since her call to the Ontario Bar in 1991. She practiced with Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP until 1994 when she joined Lerner LLP, where she practised until her appointment by Autodata Solutions Company in February, 2000, as vice-president, legal affairs, followed by her appointment as senior vice-president, legal affairs, in 2008. Ms. Morton has been president of MJM Law Professional Corp. since 2012. She has sat on the board of directors for several not-for-profit organizations, and is currently chair of the board of directors for the TechAlliance of Southwestern Ontario.

Rob Devitt (25-Nov-2013 to 04-Dec-2019) has a bachelor's degree from Queen's University and a master's degree from the University of Ottawa, and is a Certified Health Executive. Mr. Devitt recently retired as president and chief executive officer of the Toronto East General Hospital (TEGH), a teaching hospital serving communities in southeast Toronto. He has been appointed to assist a number of other hospitals in Ontario, including serving as a supervisor and peer reviewer. In 2009, Mr. Devitt was appointed to serve as interim CEO of eHealth Ontario to turn around the struggling organization. Prior to joining TEGH, he was the president and CEO of the Peterborough Regional Health Centre, where he led the integration and merger of two separate hospitals, and was also successful in securing government approval for the development of a new replacement hospital in Peterborough. Mr. Devitt is active as a preceptor for master's

students in administration. He is currently a senior fellow with the Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation at the University of Toronto.

Richard Barham (01-Jul-2007 to 30-Jun-2019), retired, has a BA and MA from the University of Otago (NZ) and PhD from the University of Alberta. He has held academic appointments at the University of Otago, the University of Alberta, and the University of Guelph, where he was a former department chair and, subsequently, dean of the College of Family and Consumer Studies. He has served two terms as an auditor of the undergraduate program reviews conducted by the Council of Ontario Universities, and was a member of the COU Quality Assurance Transition/Implementation Task Force from May, 2008, to October, 2009. Dr. Barham was awarded an honorary fellowship from the University of Guelph in 2011.

Robert Gordon (23-Nov-2009 to 22-Nov-2018) has spent more than 45 years in public education, including seven as president of Dawson College in Montreal and 25 as president of Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning in Toronto. He holds an honours BA in history, a master's degree in modern British history, a master's degree in educational administration, a master's degree in public administration, a doctorate in educational administration, and several honorary doctorates. Dr. Gordon has a long history of service to numerous boards and committees, including chair of the Ontario Technology Fund, president of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, president of League for Innovation in the Community College, member of the Premier's Council of Ontario, chair of the Committee of Presidents of Ontario, president and chair of the board of Canada Basketball, president and chair of the board of the Corporation of Bishop University, leader-in-residence of the Council for Emerging Leaders of the Conference Board of Canada, chair of the board of Waste Diversion Ontario, graduate faculty member of the University of Toronto and Central Michigan University, member of Ontario Heritage Trust, member of the Private Sector Advisory Board of the Network of Centres of Excellence Canada, and member of the Expert Panel on STEM skills at the Council of Canadian Academies. Dr. Gordon is also a recipient of the Order of Ontario and an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Dianne Kieren (04-June-2010 to 03-June-2019) is professor emeritus, University of Alberta, where she served as the chair of the Department of Family Studies and the associate vice-president (academic). She received her PhD and MSc degrees from the University of Minnesota. She was the chair of the Alberta Private Colleges Accreditation Board and also served two terms on the Campus Alberta Quality Council. She has sat on the board of directors for several postsecondary institutions, a hospital board, the Vanier Institute of the Family, a provincial regional social services board, many not-for-profit associations, the Good Samaritan Society and Good Samaritan Canada boards, and the Alberta Persons with Developmental Disabilities Regional Board.

Alexandre Laurin (18-Sept-2012 to 16-Sept-2017) worked for the Parliamentary Information and Research Service, where he provided reports, analysis, and policy advice to members of the House of Commons and the Senate, and to parliamentary committees on a non-partisan and confidential basis. Mr. Laurin has authored numerous research studies published by the C.D. Howe Institute and other organizations, and he frequently contributes to public policy debates through seminars, conferences, and media appearances. He holds an MA in economics (1998) from Queen's University and a BSc in economics (1997) from Université du Québec à Montréal.

Catherine Chandler-Crichlow (23-Aug-2016 to 23-Aug-2019) is the President & Chief Human Capital Officer of 3C Workforce Solutions. With close to 30 years of experience in human capital research and development, she has worked on a range of initiatives that span private, public and voluntary institutions in Canada, Central Europe, Latin America, South-East Asia and the Caribbean. Dr. Chandler-Crichlow was the inaugural Executive Director of the Centre of Excellence in Financial Services Education, and has worked as an Associate Vice President – Education and Training at TD Bank Financial Group. Dr. Chandler-Crichlow held senior advisory roles with a number of international agencies such as the Toronto International Leadership Centre for Financial Sector Supervision, a financial sector development initiative funded by the Government of Canada, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). She has also completed capacity building assignments with organizations such as the World Bank, the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Securities and Exchange Commission of Malaysia. In the education sector, she held the position of Director – Corporate Programs, Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto.

Patricia Lang (23-Aug-2016 to 23-Aug-2019) holds a Bachelor of Nursing from the University of New Brunswick and a Masters of Arts from Central Michigan University. She received an honorary doctorate from the University of New Brunswick and was appointed an Honorary Captain for the Royal Canadian Navy (2009-2015). After 40 years as a community college educator at five colleges in Quebec and Ontario, she retired as the President of Confederation College in 2011. She has extensive public board experience, most recently on the Cancer Care Ontario Board and the ORNGE Board. She has received numerous awards including the Influential Woman of the Year Award for Northwestern Ontario, a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and a Distinguished Service Award from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. Patricia is also a member of the Order of Canada.

The PEQAB Secretariat is currently supporting MAESD and the Public Appointments Secretariat in recruiting a new (student) Board member. The PEQAB Secretariat is also working to promote a Board member to the currently vacant position of Vice-Chair.

Board Vision Statement and Values

The Board held a workshop in February 2016 to identify a new Vision Statement. The following was adopted as the new PEQAB vision: *A stronger Ontario through high quality postsecondary student learning outcomes.*

Values

The Board's values were revised by the Board at its 2014 Retreat as follows:

Accountable

Impartial

Collegial

Transparent

Dedicated to Quality & Continuous Improvement

Grounded in Research Evidence & Best Practice

BOARD MEETINGS

At the discretion of the Board, meetings usually take place bi-monthly and last between two and four hours. The following items are likely to be discussed at a typical Board meeting

- the appointment of expert panel candidates
- the review of quality assessment reports
- organization reviews
- other matters referred by Minister
- board criteria, policies and procedures
- referrals and communications from the Minister and
- other correspondence.

The PEQAB Secretariat prepares an electronic meeting binder for each meeting, which is shared with Board members at least seven days prior the meeting. While each meeting generally covers all items listed above, the core of each meeting is the appointment of expert panel candidates and the review of quality assessment reports. All agenda items that require a discussion by the Board contain draft motions as starting points for discussion. In preparing Board items, the Secretariat reviews applications and assessment reports and writes detailed materials for the Board's consideration. At the Board meeting Secretariat staff presents all items and provides additional background, as needed. The average length of an agenda is approximately 800 pages. For an example of a full Board agenda package, please see Appendix 4.

The Secretariat's Chief Executive and staff respect the confidentiality of Board discussions which are conducted *in camera*. Accordingly, Board minutes and records are treated as confidential. However, the Board is subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (1990)* and the Secretariat will respond to any requests made under the act, as per Ministry procedure.

Electronic Votes

Since 2014, the PEQAB Secretariat has increasingly used electronic votes for standard items that do not require substantive deliberation such as the approval of the roster of expert panel candidates for program reviews/renewals.

THE SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat consists of a small group of ministry employees whose main purpose is to support the Chair and the Board in carrying out the Board's duties. Its activities, which are described in more detail on page 19, include

- drafting the Board's policies, procedures and criteria
- managing of applications for consent
- consulting with stakeholders and other quality assurance bodies on standards and quality assessment procedures
- advising applicants and potential applicants about the Board's requirements
- identifying a roster of experts for selection by the Board as program quality assessors or as organization reviewers
- contacting, recruiting, and orienting the particular reviewers chosen
- attending all site visits to provide support in interpreting PEQAB's criteria and processes
- liaising with government officials, professional associations and regulatory bodies
- researching best practices and keeping the Board abreast of developments in quality assurance

- attending, presenting, and in one case, collaborating with other quality assurance agencies to convene, conferences relevant to quality assurance

Each application referred by the Minister is managed by a Senior Policy Advisor of the Secretariat who assists the applicant and expert assessors in understanding the Board's criteria and procedures to facilitate a comprehensive review.

Currently, the members of the Secretariat are

- James Brown, PhD, Chief Executive Officer
- Janna Lüttmann, MPPA, Senior Policy Advisor
- Joel Buenting, PhD, Senior Policy Advisor
- Mary Catharine Lennon, PhD, Senior Policy Advisor
- Jason Yeung, Research Policy Analyst
- Rosaria Cioffi, CSC, Operations Coordinator

Additionally, the Secretariat maintains the PEQAB website on behalf of the Board. PEQAB's website (www.peqab.ca) includes

- a list of current Board members, their terms of office and brief biographies
- the Board's mandate, meeting procedures and policies
- PEQAB publications (*Handbooks, Submission Guidelines and Annual Reports*)
- an overview of the consent process
- information about relevant legislation, regulation and pertinent contextual information
- 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
- contact information for the PEQAB Secretariat
- a statement on the value of Ontario college degrees and
- information on making requests for information related to applications for ministerial consent through *The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (1990)*.

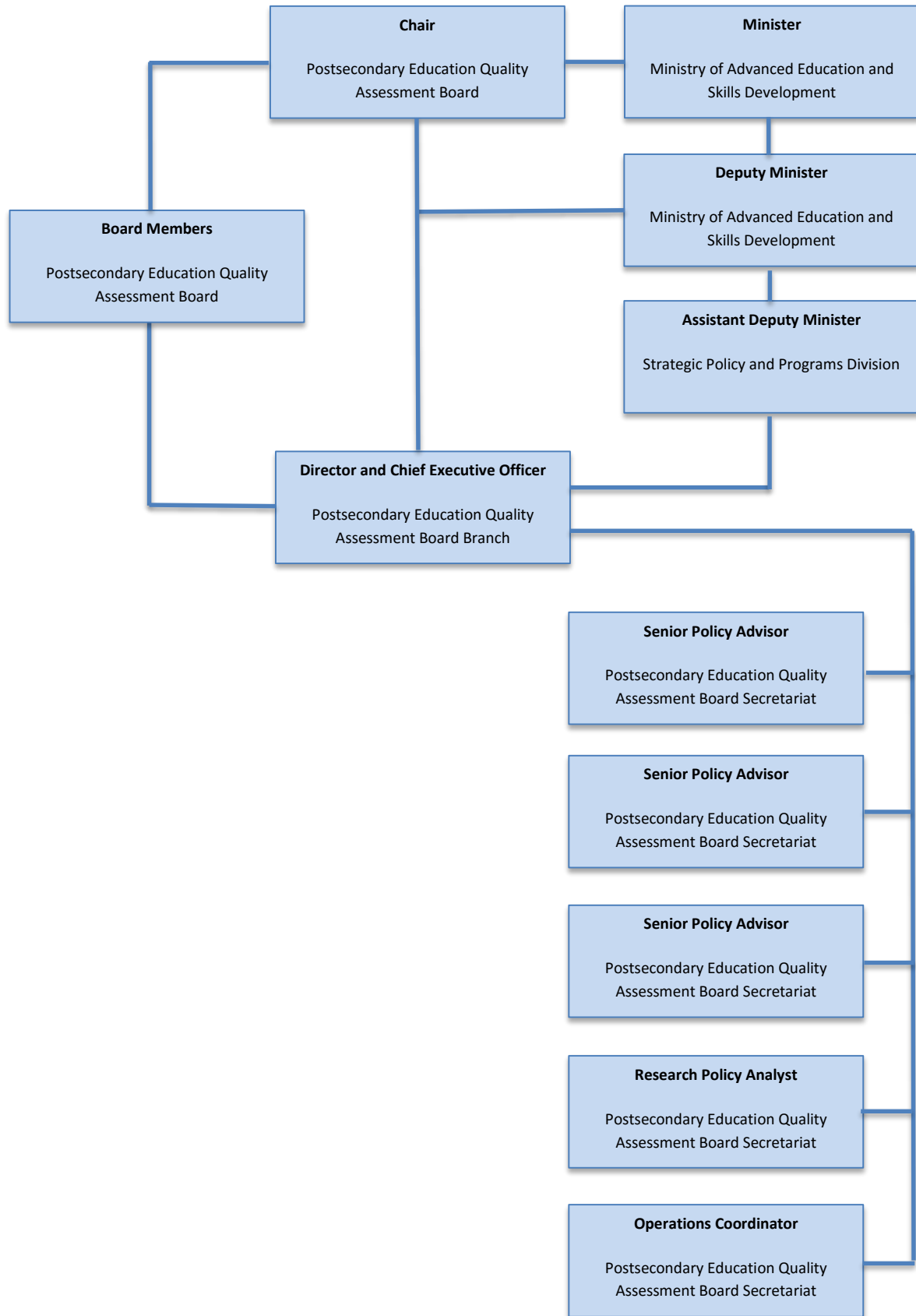
GOVERNANCE

Memorandum of Understanding

Government of Ontario's *Agency Establishment & Accountability Directive* requires all agencies to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the responsible Minister and the agency that reflects the accountability framework "in order to ensure a full understanding of the relationship between the Minister and the agency". The MoU and Ontario's *Agency Establishment & Accountability Directive* are provided as Appendix 5 and Appendix 6.

The MoU and Directive identify the accountability framework between the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development and the Chair of PEQAB on behalf of the Board. In addition, they clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Minister, the Chair and the Deputy Minister and set out the expectations for the operational, administrative, financial, staffing and reporting arrangements between the Board and the Ministry. The chart on the following page identifies the administrative structure of the Board and Secretariat in relationship to the ministry.

Table 1. PEQAB's Reporting Relationships



ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Minister

In general and in practice, the Minister is accountable to the Legislature for the Board's fulfilment of its mandate, its compliance with government policies, and for reporting to the Legislature on the Board's affairs.

The Minister

- recommends to Management Board of Cabinet (MBC) the establishment and elimination of the Board and any change to the Board's mandate that needs corresponding change to its constituting instrument
- reports and responds to the Legislative Assembly on the affairs of the Board
- reports and responds to Cabinet on the Board's performance and compliance with the government's operational policies and Board policy directions
- when appropriate or necessary, takes action or directs/recommends that corrective action be taken in respect of the Board's mandate or operations
- informs the Board's Chair of the government's priorities and broad policy directions for the Board
- consults, as appropriate, with the Chair and others, on significant new directions and/or when the government is considering regulatory or legislative changes for the Board
- recommends to MBC the provincial funding to be given to the Board and
- directs that a periodic review of the Board be conducted and makes subsequent recommendations to MBC.

Deputy Minister

In general and in practice, the Deputy Minister is accountable to the Minister for monitoring the Board on behalf of the Minister while respecting the authority of the Board and, where warranted, for identifying the need for corrective action and recommending to the Minister ways of resolving issues. The Deputy Minister is also accountable for advising the Minister on the establishment, elimination, consolidation, acquisition and operation of the Board and advising the Minister on meeting assigned ministerial responsibilities with respect to an agency.

The Deputy Minister

- establishes a framework for reviewing and assessing Board reports
- advises the Minister on Board documents submitted to the Minister for review and/or approval
- advises the Minister on meeting assigned ministerial responsibilities with respect to the Board
- undertakes reviews as directed by the Minister
- co-operates with any periodic review directed by the Minister or MBC
- monitors the Board on behalf of the Minister while respecting its authority, and where warranted, identifies needs for corrective action and recommends to the Minister ways of resolving issues
- consults the Chair, as needed, on matters of mutual importance, including any services provided by the ministry, MBC directives and ministry policies
- meets with the Chair as needed or directed
- seeks feedback from the Chair on the performance of the Director and
- provides administrative, financial and other support to the Board as specified in the MoU/Directive with the Board.

PEQAB Chair

The Chair is accountable to the Minister for the performance of the Board in fulfilling its mandate and for carrying out the roles and responsibilities assigned to the Chair by Management Board Directives, the constituting instrument and the MoU. The Chair

- keeps the Minister informed of issues or events that may concern the Minister in the exercise of the Minister's responsibilities; provides leadership to the Board in fulfilling its mandate
- serves as spokesperson for the Board
- ensures development of performance measures for the Board and monitors its performance
- recommends financial needs for inclusion in annual requests for Board funding
- co-operates with any periodic review directed by the Minister or MBC
- directs that corrective action be taken if needed
- makes decisions on Board governance consistent with the MoU for the Board and
- provides Board advice and recommendations to the Minister, as well as the Board's Annual Report.

Chief Executive Officer

The core responsibility of the Chief Executive is to support the Chair and the Board in carrying out the Board's duties. The Chief Executive supports the Chair and agency by

- managing the day-to-day operations of the Agency in accordance with the mandate of the Agency, MBC and Ministry of Finance directives, accepted business and financial practices and the MoU with the Minister
- advising the Chair on the requirements of and compliance with the *Agency Establishment and Accountability Directive* as well as other MBC and Ministry of Finance directives and policies
- translating the goals, objectives and strategic directions of the Agency into operational plans and activities
- ensuring that the Agency has the oversight capacity and an effective oversight framework in place for monitoring its management and operations
- keeping the Agency informed, through the Chair, on the implementation of policy and operations of the Agency
- carrying out in-year monitoring of the Agency's performance and reporting on results to the Chair
- keeping the Chair advised on issues or events that may concern the Chair in the exercise of his or her responsibilities
- making sure that a process is in place for responding to and resolving complaints from applicants under the Act and the public with respect to matters that are the responsibility of the Agency
- supporting the Chair in fulfilling his/her responsibility for records management in accordance with Section 11.5 of the MoU
- consulting with the Ministry, as needed, on matters of mutual recognition, including Ministry policies/services provided to the Agency, and MBC and Ministry of Finance directives and policies
- supporting the Chair in cooperating with a periodic review directed by the Minister or MBC;
- preparing reports as directed by the Chair for the review and approval of the Chair and
- as directed by the Chair, addressing any other matter referred to the Agency by the Minister

Secretariat Staff

Secretariat staff are accountable to the Chief Executive Officer. Including the CEO/Director, the Secretariat comprises a total of six ministry staff who draft the Board's criteria and processes and manage applications for consent. The Secretariat's ongoing activities in support of the Board include

- monitoring the degree environment for
 - domestic and international developments in curriculum, technology, and other relevant program or institutional characteristics (e.g. requirements for inclusion of liberal arts/general education requirements in undergraduate degrees) and
 - experience in other jurisdictions that may be relevant to improving the board's criteria (e.g. degree mill activity in the United States and other jurisdictions)
- participating in inter-jurisdictional quality assurance activities (e.g. attendance at, and presentations to, quality assurance related conferences, participating or assisting in the establishment of regional networks to share best practices)
- developing and maintaining relationships with other quality assurance agencies in Ontario and other jurisdictions
- drafting criteria and processes
- monitoring quality assurance agency's criteria and processes to ensure PEQAB criteria and processes reflect best practice (e.g. in the level and nature of training that assessors should receive; Secretariat involvement in expert panel site visits to applicant organizations)
- undertaking necessary research
- drafting and maintaining PEQAB *Handbooks*, *Submission Guidelines* and *Panel Guidelines*
- management of applications, which includes
 - identifying potential assessors for the review of the application
 - recommending a quality assurance strategy for the application
 - contracting with and instructing the assessment panel
 - clarifying standards and procedures as appropriate
 - attending quality/organization site visits
 - reviewing the panel report and ensuring it conforms to expectations
 - securing the applicant's response to the panel report
 - preparing materials for the Board's consideration
 - preparing Board communications to the Minister and
 - notifying the applicant that a recommendation has been made.

5

Higher education quality assurance activities and approaches of PEQAB

As discussed in Section 4.1 (pp. 11-12), PEQAB is responsible for reviewing applications referred to it by the Minister to

- offer a degree program or part of a program
- use the term university or operate as a university or university college
- advertise degree programs in Ontario and
- amend the conditions of an existing consent.

The Board reviews applications for Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degree programs in Ontario. The majority of applications referred to the Board are for Honours Baccalaureate degree programs offered by Ontario Colleges. The Board also reviews any other matter referred to by the Minister.

As detailed in Section 3.1 (p. 8), applicants include all organizations that wish to offer degree programs (or parts of programs) and/or operate as a university (or university college) in Ontario that do not have statutory authority to do so. These applicants include

- private organizations (e.g. Niagara University; Adler School of Professional Studies)
- public out-of-province organizations (e.g. Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia; Cornell University, New York State)
- public in-province organizations (e.g. Algoma University) and
- Ontario Colleges (e.g. Humber College, Seneca College).

The three primary review types are as follows:

1. Review of proposed programs for consent
2. Assessment of existing programs for consent renewal
3. Review of organization soundness (private institutions only)

In addition, the Board is considering moving further toward audits of programs. The review types are described in more detail below (Section 5, p. 21).

Review of Proposed Programs

All proposed programs referred to PEQAB by the Minister are assessed against all PEQAB's standards and benchmarks by an External Expert Panel. The review of an initial application for consent involves an evaluation of the program proposal.

In its program proposal, every institution is required to submit information on a full range of matters (curriculum, faculty credentials, admissions practices, learning and physical resources, etc.) and an external expert panel is recruited to provide its best collective judgement with respect to the quality of the program and organization, the reasons for its judgements, and sufficient detail to enable the Board to determine the extent to which its criteria are satisfied. The key issues are whether

- the program meets the standards set by the Board

- the panel thinks the program is of sufficient quality to be recommended to the Board and eventually to the students of Ontario and
- the institution has the capacity to assure program quality on an ongoing basis.

The review process is described in detail in the Board's *Handbooks* (<http://PEQAB.ca/Handbooks.html>).

Assessment of Existing Programs

At the time of consent renewal (typically five to seven years after the initial consent was granted) the Board and External Expert Panel evaluate the *actual delivery* of the program and the organization's implementation of policies and procedures to support program delivery. The Panel reviews the organization's general policies and conduct an audit against relevant standards and benchmarks.

A particular focus of the assessment of an existing program is the Panel's

- audit of the institution's policies and procedures to ensure its ongoing quality and the implementation thereof. Most importantly, the panel will review the institution's program self-study (see *Submission Guidelines for Renewal of Consent*, <http://PEQAB.ca/Handbooks.html>), and
- review of samples of student work for evidence that the expected learning outcomes related to the degree-level standard have been achieved. The objective of this requirement is to assess whether the institution has appropriately assessed the level of student performance and that student performance meets the degree-level standard.⁸

As is the case for new programs, the Panel is again asked to provide to the Board its best judgment with respect to the quality of the program, the reasons for its judgments and to do so in sufficient detail to enable the Board to determine the extent to which its criteria are satisfied. Sample *Panel Guidelines* for new programs and program renewals are attached as Appendix 7 and Appendix 8.

Review of Organization Soundness (private institutions only)

For reviews of applications submitted by private institutions, the Board also appoints an Organization Review Panel to review the submission against the Board's criteria for organizations. During the organization review, the Organization Review Panel assesses the applicant's organization character, financial stability and student protection policies and practices against the Board's standards.

Organization reviews are described in detail in the *Handbooks for Private Organizations* (<http://PEQAB.ca/Handbooks.html>) and *Panel Guidelines* (sample attached in Appendix 9).

Audits of Programs

PEQAB is currently developing criteria and processes for advancing Ontario Colleges which have demonstrated that they are "mature" in offering such degrees toward an institutional quality Audit-Only approach.

Qualifying Criteria for College Degree Audit-Only Status

⁸ Prior to the site visit, the panel is typically provided with samples of student work sorted into what the institution considers exemplary, average, and minimally acceptable performance categories to allow for the selection of samples from among these three categories.

Colleges would apply through the Ministry to PEQAB for assessment for Audit-Only status as an institution. It is proposed that in order to qualify for an institutional Audit-Only Process, Ontario Colleges will first demonstrate that they have an effective internal Quality Management System (QMS) for degrees—as determined by the PEQAB Board, based on a Board-appointed special panel. Other qualifying criteria for Audit-Only status will likely include that Ontario Colleges require a minimum number of degree programs that have already received consent renewal. Best practice is for a quality assurance agency to re-review the QMS itself on a regular basis (5-7 years). PEQAB intends to reflect this best practice. For more details, see Section 11, pp. 74-75.

Institutional Audit-Only Process for Programs

Those Colleges having received Ministry approval for Audit-Only status through a successful application would have available to them an expedited PEQAB Audit-Only review process for all continuing degree programs (i.e. degree program previously reviewed by PEQAB and new degree programs).

New degree programs from Colleges with Audit-Only status would undergo an *expedited review process* which would likely include only a desk review of the proposed course outlines, a self-study of the institution's readiness to offer the proposed program, and an assessment of the self-study by an expert or panel of experts in the field.

The focus of the audit for *continuing degree programs* would be the review of its internal QMS through an audit of the institution's self-study documents and results of learning outcomes assessments.

6

PEQAB's quality assurance processes and methodologies

6.1 Overview of Consent Process

The core of the PEQAB review process extends from the referral of an application by the Minister to the communication of the Board's recommendation on the application to the Minister. Additionally, PEQAB's website will post both PEQAB's recommendation and the Minister's decision after it is made. The larger *consent process*, however, involves three additional steps

1. *Pre-referral*: occurs prior to the referral of an application to PEQAB
2. *Post-recommendation Decision*: after the Board has made its recommendation, the Minister makes her decision about whether to grant consent, and if so, what conditions to attach to the consent
3. *Post-consent*: Once a consent is granted, consent holders are subject to certain terms and conditions which may require further contact with the ministry during the life of the consent.

Before summarizing the PEQAB process, these additional contextual steps in the consent process are briefly summarized.

1. Applicant

- The applicant institution prepares a submission according to the Board's *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* and submits the application to the Minister. The PEQAB Secretariat is available to – and normally does – provide advice and support at this stage.

Pre-referral

2. Ministry Staff

- Are responsible for administering and interpreting the Act, and for setting the application process
- Determine whether the application falls under the Act, is complete, and includes
 - the required fee (\$5000)
 - the applicant's acknowledgement of an agreement to the parameters of consent, and permission to verify any aspect of the application and
 - a submission according to the PEQAB *Guidelines*.
- If the activities are subject to the Act and the Minister decides to refer the application to PEQAB, staff also prepare a letter of referral to the Board for the Minister's signature.

3. Minister

- The Minister may reject an application on policy grounds identified in regulation, refer an application to another body or refer an application to the PEQAB for review and recommendation.

Post-recommendation Decision

4. Ministry Staff

- Ensure all fees have been paid in full
- Identify any financial or policy considerations for the Minister's consideration
- Prepare a recommendation for the Minister's consideration that summarizes the proposed activities, whether there are any public policy or financial matters that may flow from the granting of a consent, and if consent is to be granted, what terms and conditions should apply to the consent.

5. Minister

- Considers PEQAB's recommendation and any public policy or financial issues that may flow from the granting of a consent⁹
- Communicates a decision about the consent to the applicant.

Post-consent

6. Ministry Staff

- Monitor consent holders for compliance

6.2 Overview of PEQAB Review Process

The length of time required from referral to recommendation varies from a few weeks to eighteen months. Factors that influence the timing to complete the PEQAB process include the quality and completeness of the applicant's submission and the nature and complexity of the proposed activities. When an application has been referred to PEQAB by the Minister, the application proceeds through a series of steps

Post-referral

1. Secretariat

- Reviews the application and confirms its completeness
- Identifies issues for the Board's consideration and identifies potential expert reviewers for the assessment panel
- Posts the application on the PEQAB website and provides a ten-week period for the public to provide comments on the application
- Receives any stakeholder comment and forwards to assessors and applicant for response

2. PEQAB

- Considers the application and any matters requiring additional scrutiny
- Determines the assessment strategy
- Appoints and instructs the External Expert Panel for the organization review (for private applicants) and the External Expert Panel for the program review (for CAAT, other public and private applicants)

⁹ In all but twelve cases, the Minister has made the decision regarding consent that was recommended by the Board.

3. External Expert Panel

- Reviews the submission against PEQAB criteria and any other instructions from the Board
- Submits written report to PEQAB Secretariat

4. Secretariat

- Reviews the report for conformity with *Report Guidelines* and instructions from the Board
- Forwards the External Expert Panel Report (“Panel Report”) to the applicant for response

5. Applicant

- Responds to the issues raised in the Panel Report and submits responses to the Secretariat

6. Secretariat

- Receives the applicant’s response and seeks clarification when required
- Prepares proposed Board motions, including an overview plus the full Panel Report/s, applicant response/s and all other relevant information for the Board to make a decision

7. PEQAB

- Considers the application, Panel Report(s), the response(s) of the applicant to the Panel Report/s, stakeholder comment, commitments made by the applicant, and any additional information
- Requests more information if needed or refers response of applicant back to the External Expert Panel for additional comment
- Formulates its recommendation to the Minister which may include recommendations to the Minister for conditions to a consent

8. Secretariat

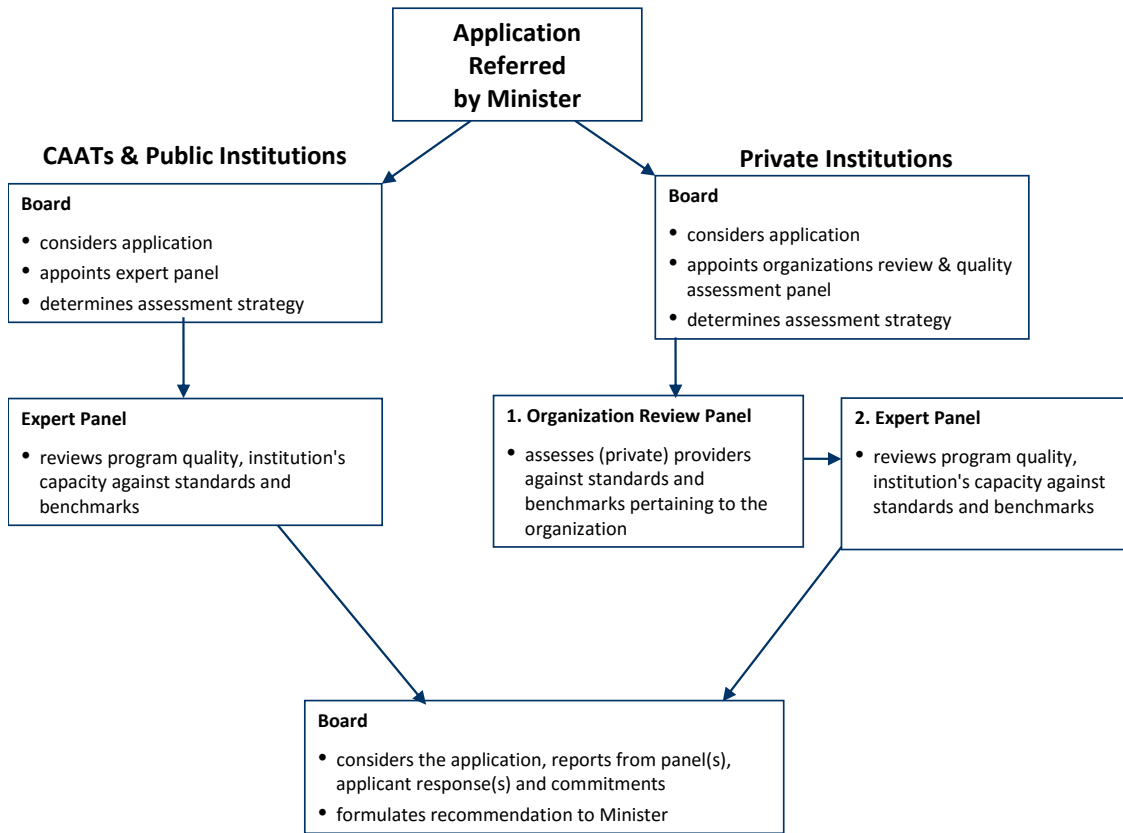
- Forwards the recommendation and a Background Report to the Minister on behalf of the Chair

Post-consent

7. Secretariat

- Following the Minister’s communication of the decision to the applicant, posts the Board’s recommendation and the Minister’s decision to the PEQAB website

Table 2. PEQAB’s review process



Opportunity for Public Comment on Applications

At the time an application is referred to PEQAB, the Board will post the application on its website and indicate a deadline (ten weeks for applications and four weeks for nomenclature change requests) for comments from the public/interested parties. Comments bearing on the assessment of the application against the Board’s criteria are handled as follows

Table 3. PEQAB’s review process

Type of Comment	PEQAB Procedure
comments bearing on the assessment of the application against the Board’s criteria	transmit to the quality assessors and applicant for consideration
comments bearing on the Board’s criteria or operations	transmit to the Board for consideration

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 are forwarded by the Secretariat for consideration by the Universities Unit in the Ministry’s Postsecondary Education Division.

6.3 PEQAB Criteria

PEQAB is empowered by the Act to establish the procedures and criteria that it will apply in reviewing applications referred to it. The criteria established by the Board must

- be in accordance with educational standards recognized in Ontario and other jurisdictions and
- comply with such policy directions as may be given by the Minister.

PEQAB's HANDBOOKS AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

PEQAB has published criteria for the review of organizations, programs, and the use of the terms “university” and “university college”. Its criteria are published in its *Handbooks* for Public Organizations, Private Organizations, and Ontario Colleges to guide applicants through the submission and consent process. The *Handbooks* outline the mandate of PEQAB and its procedures for review of applications for consent to offer or advertise degree programs in Ontario, and use of the terms “university” and “university college”. For instructions on what to include in a submission to the Board, applicants consult the Board’s relevant *Submission Guidelines* (for Public Organizations: New Programs and Renewal of Consent, for Private Organizations: New Programs and Renewal of Consent, and for Ontario Colleges: New Programs and Renewal of Consent).

The Board’s *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* are updated annually with new “editions” published on August 1st of each year, along with a corresponding *Record of Changes*.

Organization Review Criteria (private applicants only)

Private applicants undergo two PEQAB reviews: Organization and Program. These normally occur in sequence, but may, at the request of the applicant, proceed concurrently. The overarching goal of the Organization Review is to assess the applicant’s organizational soundness (i.e. the “organization character and student protection policies and practices”). PEQAB has eight standards against which it assesses the organization

1. *Mission Statement and Academic Goals*
2. *Administrative Capacity*
3. *Ethical Conduct*
4. *Student Protection*
5. *Academic Freedom and Integrity*
6. *Financial Stability*
7. *Dispute Resolution*
8. *Organization Evaluation*

The review is undertaken by a group of Board-approved senior and experienced assessors, which the Board has denominated as an Organization Review Committee. Standards and benchmarks assess a range of institutional matters, including

- governance structure of the organization
- administrative capacity
- financial stability
- long-term business plan demonstrating required resources to deliver and sustain programs
- coordination of academic and business plans
- relation of programs to the mission of the institution

- policy environment, including those related to faculty, students, grading, dispute resolution, academic freedom and integrity, ongoing internal quality assurance, and curriculum development
- resources to provide degree programs and
- support services.

For each standard, the Board identifies benchmarks that represent the threshold the applicant must meet to achieve the standard, and/or the evidence required to support a demonstration that the applicant meets or exceeds the standard.

Program Review Criteria (all applicants)

All applicants (CAATs, other public and private) undergo program reviews. The overarching goals of program reviews are to assess the academic rigour of the program, its degree level and the applicant's capacity to deliver the program. PEQAB currently has eleven standards against which it assesses programs:¹⁰

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*
9. *Program Evaluation*
10. *Academic Freedom and Integrity*
11. *Student Protection*

As discussed these assessments are undertaken by a panel of academic peers as the External Expert Panel and includes a site visit. Standards and benchmarks address a range of program matters, including

- degree standards included in the Ontario Qualifications Framework (<http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/programs/oqf/>)
- curriculum design, level, and content for each program offered leading to the respective degrees
- program delivery
- requirements for admission, promotion and graduation
- resources to provide degree program
- academic capacity
- assessment of student work and
- faculty qualifications.

¹⁰ Until November 2016, PEQAB had two additional standards (*Economic Need and Non-Duplication*). In response to a long-standing request from the Board, Minister Matthews submitted a letter to the PEQAB Chair in the Fall of 2016 requesting that the Board remove these standards. The letter indicates that the Ministry reviews applications for Economic Need and Non-Duplication on policy grounds prior to referring an application to PEQAB and following a PEQAB review. Accordingly, an additional PEQAB assessment is unnecessary. These standards will be removed from the agency's 2017 edition of the *Handbook* and were removed from the Board's *Assessor Guidelines*.

For each program standard, the Board specifies benchmarks that identify the threshold the applicant must meet to achieve the standard and/or the evidence required to demonstrate that the applicant meets or exceeds the standard.

6.4 Applications to Date

As of the end of PEQAB's last fiscal year, April 2016, a total of 564 applications had been submitted to PEQAB since inception in 2001. The table below breaks these applications down by applicant type and the stage in the review process.

Table 4. Applications to PEQAB

Type of Institution	# of Institutions	# of completed applications	# of withdrawn applications	# of applications under review	# of total applications received
Private	33	56	11	4	71
Public In-Province	9	86 ¹¹	3	1	90
Public Out-of-Province	13	42	4	0	46
CAAT	21	341	10	6	357
Total	76	525	28	11	564

All completed applications and applications under review are available on the PEQAB website. There are currently 150 active consents in Ontario.¹²

6.5 PEQAB External Experts

The Board seeks advice from experts on applications for consent. For each application, the Board considers candidates for the External Expert Review Panel as well as the assessment strategy. On behalf of the Board, the Secretariat develops and provides each External Expert Panel with *Panel Guidelines* including relevant standards and benchmarks to guide their review and the writing of their Panel Report. See Appendix 7 for a sample copy of the *Panel Guidelines*.

¹¹ The public in-province applications include 75 from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, which were reviewed prior to the university receiving its full degree granting authority in legislation.

¹² CAATs: 108; Private: 18; Public In-Province: 3; Public Out-of-Province: 21.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Some dimensions of program and organization reviews require specialized expertise beyond the subject-matter experts consulted for each review. Accordingly, the Board has two standing committees.

Organization Review Committee

The Board's Organization Review Committee assesses the organization soundness and capacity of private applicants. The Board strikes an Organization External Expert Panel from among the members of the Organization Review Committee to review each application from a private organization.

Organization reviewers are selected by the Board to reflect the several dimensions of student protection and organization quality, including but not limited to financial analysis, admission processes, registrarial functions, learning resources and educational management. Organization reviewers may include persons with

- accounting certification and experience in corporate financial management
- experience in admissions/registrarial responsibilities, including admissions policies and academic records management in a degree-granting institution
- experience in managing learning resources
- senior management experience in a degree-granting institution and
- experience with professional, accrediting and regulatory bodies for higher education within and outside of Ontario.

Depending on the nature and complexity of the application for a private organization, the Organization Panel will normally have between one and three members.

Breadth/Liberal Arts Committee

The Board's undergraduate *Degree Level* and *Program Content* standards require that graduates achieve a certain depth and breadth of knowledge outside of their main field of study. This is normally achieved through studying a liberal arts curriculum within the institution.

The Board has appointed a small standing committee of individuals with expertise in liberal arts and a record of scholarship that reflected an interest and understanding of the purpose and outcomes of a liberal arts curriculum.

SUBJECT-MATTER EXPERTS

A unique External Expert Panel consisting of subject-matter experts is appointed to each program review. Depending on the nature and complexity of the application, the Panel will normally have between two and three members, with one member appointed as panel chair.

The applicant may nominate up to three qualified persons from whom the Board may choose one or more to serve on the Panel. The Board has sole discretion, however, to select all quality assessors for the application without regard to the applicant's nominees.

Criteria for Expert Assessors

Expert Panel members 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. They must

- 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 and sound judgment
- be free of any conflict of interest, in accordance with the Board’s policy on conflict of interest for assessors and applicants and
- have demonstrated skills in oral and written communication, preferably including experience writing formal reports to deadlines.

The Board will seek to select highly qualified Panel members who possess

- an advanced academic credential related to the subject area under review (normally at the terminal level in the field)¹³
- required or desired professional credentials and/or related work experience of substantial depth and range
- 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) and
- a record of active scholarship, normally having achieved the rank of associate or full professor.

At its July 2011 meeting, the Board considered the criteria for the selection of external experts with the aim of being more inclusive of faculty members who are either experts in teaching and learning in their disciplines or who have a high degree of understanding of college-level degrees in their disciplines (for CAAT applications). A motion was carried that the Board may consider, on a case-by-case basis, such academics as candidates for External Expert Review Panels for the review of applications for undergraduate programs.

Expert Panel members of graduate program proposals will have experience in graduate teaching and, as appropriate, in graduate thesis supervision or in the supervision of clinical or applied studies at the graduate level. In addition to the qualities of Panel members, Panel Chairs will normally be experienced in the administration of higher education, and will be experienced committee members who can function objectively and effectively as a chair of an assessment committee.

Panel chairs for graduate program proposals will normally also be experienced in the administration of graduate programs (e.g. as chair of a department with graduate programs, graduate program coordinator, chair of a graduate committee, member of a faculty graduate or research council or committee).

The Board strives to name panels that reflect an appropriate mix of academic/professional credentials and experience related to the field. In establishing its roster of external expert reviewers, the Board seeks qualified individuals from a wide variety of constituencies, including but not limited to the following

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

¹³ The doctorate is normally the terminal academic credential in all fields or disciplines with the exception of studio disciplines where a master degree in the field/discipline is more typical. The Board expects that the assessors will hold the terminal academic credential: (a) in the same field/discipline area as the proposed program area or (b) in a field/discipline that can be shown to be closely related in content.

- postsecondary educational institutions outside Ontario, including the United States and Europe.

EXTERNAL EXPERT PANEL REPORTS

The primary obligation of a Panel appointed by the Board is to perform a review and provide its best judgement as to the quality of a proposed program or the organizational soundness of an applicant institution. To this end, the Panel is asked to assess applications against the standards and benchmarks set by PEQAB and, when members of the Panel deem it appropriate, to identify and address any other quality related issues arising from the proposal.

Under the coordination of the Panel chair, members of the Expert Panels will develop a Panel Report that includes at least the following information

- a description of the review procedure, the Panel’s overall recommendation, any recommended conditions of consent and any identified good practices
- an assessment of the application against each of the Board’s standards and benchmarks
- an assessment of the sufficiency, reliability and validity of the evidence provided by the applicant
- if applicable, an assessment of evidence found during any site visit; and
- 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. (A sample of a complete Panel Report is included in Appendix 10).

To ensure a transparent and fair review process, once the Panel submits its Report, the Board provides the applicant institution with the opportunity to respond to the Panel’s Report. In some cases, the Board may ask the Panel to respond to the organization’s remarks.

In formulating its recommendation, the Board will consider

- the organization’s submission
- the findings of the Panel
- the organization’s response to the Panel Report
- any additional materials provided by the applicant to the Board and
- any commitments made by the organization during the review process

The Board will communicate its recommendation to the Minister (and identify any proposed conditions of consent). The Minister considers the Board’s recommendation and any public policy matters, and makes a decision about consent.

Panel Reports are currently accessible to the public through *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (1990) requests. Additionally, the Board is currently exploring options concerning the publication of detailed program and institutional reviews to its website to ensure fuller transparency. For more information on transparency, see Section 9 Standard 3.4 on p. 62.

ASSESSMENT COSTS

Applicants are responsible for paying the costs of the assessments carried out by the External Expert Panels. The applicant must provide a deposit in the amount of the estimated assessment costs. The charge for an assessment varies with each application, depending on the number of reviewers, the length and complexity of the review, and associated travel, accommodation and meeting or communication costs, and whether the applicant’s response to the Panel Report requires further

assessment. In general, the assessment costs for the program quality assessment range from \$9,000 and \$12,000, and the costs for an organization review, which is required for all private institutions, will not normally exceed \$7,500.

Ordinarily the Panel members receive an honorarium for 3 days at \$800 CAD per day. The Panel chair receives the same daily honorarium as Panel members but is paid for an additional day for coordinating the assessor team and for writing the Panel Report. In addition, Panel members and chairs will have their reasonable out-of-pocket expenses reimbursed. All contracts are nominally with the Ministry, but they are the responsibility of, negotiated and managed by, the Secretariat; and they are signed by the CEO.

7

PEQAB's internal quality assurance

PEQAB and the Secretariat are invested in maintaining currency and relevance in quality assurance practices. As such, the Board has an *Internal Quality Assurance Policy*. This policy describes the Board's commitment to quality assurance and outlines the general framework for maintaining and improving the Board's activities, processes and procedures. The major elements of the policy are provided below; the policy itself is available at PEQAB's website (<http://peqab.ca/InternalQA.html>) and provided in Appendix 11.

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

The Board is committed to an internal quality assurance system, consisting of the following main elements

- The ***Board Member Code of Conduct*** which establishes the rules of conduct that govern the professional and ethical responsibilities of Board members in carrying out the responsibilities of the Board.
- The ***PEQAB Assessor Code of Conduct*** which establishes rules of conduct that govern the professional and ethical responsibilities of organization reviewers, quality assessor's and any other expert assessors appointed by the Board.
- ***Conflict of Interest Policies*** in place for Board members and all external experts who participate in the Board's quality assurance processes.
- An ***internal feedback mechanism*** to collect and track feedback from the Board and its Secretariat.
- An ***internal reflection mechanism*** to respond to internal recommendations for improvement.
- ***Procedure for reporting*** survey findings and stakeholder feedback, and for following up the results with necessary actions.
- ***Ongoing monitoring*** of the degree and quality assurance environment to ensure its criteria are in accordance with educational standards recognized in Ontario and other jurisdictions.
- Establishing in its Annual Report both ***annual goals*** unique to that reporting year and ***perennial goals*** repeated year-to-year, including performance benchmarks.
- ***Participation in Canadian and international quality assurance, conferences, and activities.***
- ***External feedback mechanism*** to collect and track feedback from stakeholders for future development, including
 - meetings/interviews with the different stakeholders carried out on an ad-hoc basis;
 - external expert and applicant surveys after the completion of assessments;
 - annual surveys administered and analyzed by an independent party; and
- A ***comprehensive internal review*** of its activities, based on internationally recognized best practice, conducted at least every seven years addressing at least the following
 - The Board's
 - accountability, transparency, resources, and legislative mandate;
 - relationship with postsecondary institutions;
 - requirements for institutional/program performance, and institutional self-evaluation and reporting;
 - review of institutions; and

- collaboration with other quality assurance agencies.
- An **external review** of the quality of the Board’s operation and its compliance with international best practice at least every five to seven years.

Engagement with the Quality Assurance Community

PEQAB remains a standing and active member of numerous domestic and international quality assurance networks and organizations. Membership and participation allows the Secretariat to monitor the the degree and quality assurance environment on an ongoing basis and to continually review its criteria to identify potential changes. PEQAB membership includes

- *Canadian Quality Assurance Bodies*
PEQAB’s Chief Executive Officer chairs a regular monthly teleconference with the leadership of other quality assurance agencies, including the executive leads of the Council of Ontario Universities Quality Assurance agency, the Quality Council, the Ontario Colleges Quality Assurance Services, British Columbia’s Degree Quality Assessment Board, Campus Alberta Quality Council, the Saskatchewan Higher Education Quality Assessment Board and the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.
- *International Network for Quality Assessment Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)*
Internationally, PEQAB has been closely involved with the work of INQAAHE. PEQAB became a member of INQAAHE in 2003, and its Secretariat Director served on the Board of INQAAHE Directors in from 2004-2006. In 2009, the PEQAB Chair was elected to the Board of Directors of INQAAHE where he held the position as treasurer. In 2007, PEQAB and the Province of Ontario jointly hosted the biennial conference of the INQAAHE in Toronto. Members of the Secretariat travel regularly to attend annual INQAAHE meetings.
- *Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)*
PEQAB maintains ties with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation’s International Quality Group and regularly attends their annual conference in Washington D.C. CHEA is an association of 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities that recognizes 60 institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations. CHEA conferences and seminars cover issues of central relevance to PEQAB, ranging from emerging international developments, changes in international quality assurance practices, to degree mills, accreditation mills and private, for profit degree organizations. In March 2016, PEQAB become a signatory to CHEA’s International Quality Group’s *Memorandum of Affiliation (MoA)*. The purpose of becoming a signatory was to promote partnerships with international quality assurance bodies, by encouraging the use of the seven quality assurance principles. These principles and the signed MoA are posted to PEQAB’s website (<http://www.peqab.ca/Archive/PEQAB%20MOA%20Completed.pdf>).
- *European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)*
PEQAB is currently in discussion with the EQAR. EQAR manages a register of quality assurance agencies that have demonstrated substantial compliance with the *European Standards and Guidelines*.

Conference Participation

PEQAB staff remain active in provincial, national and international quality assurance forums. Conference participation provides Secretariat staff with the opportunity to discuss strategic and operational issues related to degree granting and quality assurance, to exchange ideas about emerging trends in quality assurance, establish new networks and relationships with key individuals in higher education quality assurance and share Ontario’s challenges and successes.

Numerous changes to PEQAB’s standards and benchmarks, as well as various operational processes and procedures, have resulted from PEQAB’s engagement with the broader quality assurance community. These changes are documented on an annual basis in the Board’s *Record of Changes*, available at PEQAB’s website.

Stakeholder Engagement and Collaborative Activities

To ensure a complete record of communication, the Secretariat tracks engagement and collaborative activities with stakeholders and reports these at each Board meeting. A complete list the 2016 Stakeholder Engagement and Collaborative activities are provided in Tables 5 and 6 below.

Table 5. Summary of 2016 Stakeholder Engagement Activities

Deputy Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 26 – CEO and Chair met with Deputy Minister to discuss expediting PEQAB membership appointments and reappointments
Applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 11 – Secretariat staff attended site visit at Dalhousie University (MBA - Financial Services) January 12 – CEO and staff teleconferenced with VP regarding extension for response to assessment report for Durham College for Bachelor of Healthcare Technology Management January 15 – Secretariat staff attended site visit at Conestoga College (Bachelor of Engineering - Building Systems Engineering) January 18 – Secretariat staff attended site visit at George Brown College (Bachelor of Commerce – Culinary management) February 9 – CEO participated in teleconference with Queens VP Academic on nomenclature and renewal of Queens/Cornell degree February 17 – CEO and Secretariat staff met with VP, Dean and Quality Manager at Ontario College of Art and Design University to discuss renewal of Bachelor degree. March 4 – Secretariat staff attended site visit at Seneca College (Honours Bachelor of Commerce - Marketing) March 10 – CEO and Secretariat staff teleconference with Conestoga VP Academic and Quality Manager on Conestoga degree renewals April 15 – Secretariat staff attended site visit at Seneca College (Honours Bachelor of Healthcare Management) April 19 – Secretariat staff attended site visit at Sacred Heart of Peterborough (Honours Bachelor of Arts in Catholic Studies) April 26- Secretariat staff went to the Royal Conservatory of Music in preparation of the organization review for the Bachelor of Music Performance. April 27 – Secretariat staff attended site visit at Sacred Heart of Peterborough (Honours Bachelor of Arts in Catholic Studies) May 12 – CEO and Secretariat Staff met with Dr. Richard McCutcheon (Academic Dean, Algoma University) May 24 - Secretariat staff travelled to Mohawk College to consult in preparation for the program review for the College’s Honours Bachelor of Digital Health June 13 – Secretariat staff attended site visit at Algoma University (Honours Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science) July 12 – Secretariat staff attended site visit at Seneca College (Honours Bachelor Therapeutic Recreation) September 30 - Secretariat staff attended site visit at Algoma University (Bachelor of Geography – Honours) October 7 - Secretariat staff attended site visit at the Royal Conservatory of Music

	<p>(Organization Review)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 19 - Secretariat staff attended site visit at Humber College (Honours Bachelor of Design) • October 25 - Secretariat staff attended site visit at Algonquin College (Honours Bachelor of Public Safety) • October 27 - Secretariat staff attended site visit at Mohawk College (Honours Bachelor of Digital Health) • October 31 - Secretariat staff attended site visit at Seneca College (Honours Bachelor of Commerce – Technology Management) • November 3-4 - CEO & Secretariat staff attended site visit at Sheridan College (Honours Bachelor of Interior Design) • November 11 - Secretariat staff attended site visit at Conestoga College (Honours Bachelor of Public Relations) • November 12/13 - CEO and Secretariat staff to attend site visit at Adler School of Professional Studies (Master of Psychology)
Ministry staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 20 – Secretariat Staff participated in Premier’s Summit on Talent and Skills in the new economy • February 1 – Secretariat Staff presented on PEQAB’s process for managing emails as PDFs at the Records & Information Management meeting • February 11 & 12 – Secretariat Staff attended Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association Conference • April 7 –CEO participated with Ministry staff in discussion of engineering programs in the Ontario postsecondary sector • April 21 – CEO and Secretariat attended a Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development All-Staff Meeting at Ryerson University • January 12 -- CEO & Secretariat staff met with colleagues from the ministry’s Postsecondary Education Division, Accountability Branch, Universities Unit (UU) to discuss current and prospective consent applications • February 26 -- CEO & Secretariat staff met with UU, as above • April 22 -- CEO & Secretariat staff met with UU, as above • June 29 – CEO & Secretariat staff met with UU, as above • July 22 -- CEO & Secretariat staff met with UU, as above • September 23 – CEO & Secretariat staff met with UU, as above • October 13 – CEO & Secretariat staff met with UU, as above • October 28 – CEO & Secretariat staff met with UU, as above • November 25 – CEO & Secretariat staff met with UU, as above • May 17 - CEO and Secretariat attended a ministry presentation on the preliminary Ontario results of CMEC’s Learning Outcomes Survey • May 17 – CEO attended and provided information for Minister’s staff briefing on PEQAB and the PSECE Act
Ontario Higher Education Institution (HEI) associations ¹⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • April 18 – CEO attended (via teleconference) regular meeting of CCVPA and provided PEQAB updates • April 19 – CEO attended Champions of Public Education Dinner at Metro Convention Centre (for the Deputy Minister’s Office) • June 13 – CEO and Secretariat attended (via teleconference) and provided updates to regular Spring meeting of CDOG • June 17 – CEO and Secretariat attended retirement of CEO of OUC Quality Council • May 1 – CEO participated in teleconference among our out of province and private

¹⁴ For example, the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), Council of Ontario Universities (COU), Colleges Ontario (CO), College Degree Operating Group (CDOG), Coordinating Committee of Vice Presidents Academic (CCVPA)

	<p>degree consent holders and applicants as an organization meeting to establish a new consultancy group with PEQAB to be called Private and Out of Province Degree Operating Group (POPDOG)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 6 – CEO and Secretariat participated and provided PEQAB updates to initial meeting (teleconference) of POPDOG • October 3 - CEO attended (via teleconference) regular meeting of Committee of College Vice-Presidents Academic (CCVPA) and provided PEQAB updates • October 19 - CEO and Secretariat staff attended and provided updates to the regular fall meeting of College Degree Operating Group (CDOG)
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February 26 – Secretariat staff met with representatives of the Royal Conservatory of Music regarding the application to offer a Bachelor of Music Performance • November 25 - CEO and Secretariat staff to attend a meeting with a prospective applicant for a new Aviation College with staff of the Universities Unit

Table 6. Summary of 2016 Collaborative Activities

Descriptions of meetings with and visits to and from other EQAAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February 25 – CEO chaired monthly teleconference of Canadian Quality Assurance Agencies. Membership includes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) ○ Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) ○ Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA) ○ Ontario College Quality Assurance Services (OCQAS) ○ Saskatchewan Higher Education Quality Assurance Board (SHEQAB) ○ Campus Alberta Quality Control (CAQC) ○ Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB) • March 24-- CEO chaired monthly teleconference of Canadian Quality Assurance Agencies • April 15 – CEO met with Melinda Waters, Director, National Secretariat (Australia) for quality assurance at TAFE (Technical and Further Education) Australia • April 28 -- CEO chaired monthly teleconference of Canadian Quality Assurance Agencies • May 13 – CEO and Secretariat staff attended CDOG meeting via teleconference. • May 26 -- CEO chaired monthly teleconference of Canadian Quality Assurance Agencies. (Membership: see above) • June 23—Secretariat staff chaired monthly teleconference of Canadian Quality Assurance Agencies. (Membership: see above) • August 25 – CEO chaired monthly teleconference of Canadian Quality Assurance Agencies. (Membership: see above) • September 27 - CEO chaired and Secretariat staff participated in monthly teleconference of Canadian Quality Assurance Agencies. (Membership: see above) • October 27 - CEO chaired and Secretariat staff participated in monthly teleconference of Canadian Quality Assurance Agencies. (Membership: see above)
Participation in projects, meetings, conferences and workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 12 – CEO met with Ministry staff to discuss inclusion of Private Career Colleges in Ontario Qualifications Framework and PEQAB practices as adaptable to Private Career College Superintendent • January 12 – Secretariat participated in joint meeting with Ministry colleagues to discuss applications and other matters of interest • January 22 – CEO met with SMG Consulting to plan Board Vision Retreat • January 27 (ongoing) – Secretariat participated in research project in collaboration with Tracey McCutcheon (Seneca College) on Student participation in QA processes • January 27 & 28 – CEO participated in Council of Higher Education Accreditors (CHEA)

	<p>International Quality Group (CIQG) Conference in Washington DC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February 1 – CEO and Secretariat staff presented at Ministry’s Records and Information Management Bi-monthly meeting, re: PEQAB record-keeping protocols • February 5 – CEO participated in Ontario Council on Articulation & Transfer ONCAT Learning Outcomes as a Steering Committee member (1 day workshop) • February 9-11 – Secretariat attended the 11th annual Ontario Education Research Symposium • February 11 – CEO and Secretariat staff participated in Ontario Confederation of Faculty Association conference • February 18 – CEO and Chair attended Ethics Executive Orientation Workshop • February 26 – Secretariat participated in joint meeting with Ministry colleagues to discuss applications and other matters of interest • February 29 – CEO and Secretariat staff teleconference with HEQCO on pilot program with Ontario universities and colleges on assessment of learning outcomes • March 9 – CEO participated in OECD webinar on <i>Teaching Excellence through Professional Learning and Policy Reform - Lessons from around the World</i> • March 23 & 24 – CEO and Secretariat staff participate in HECQO Conference, <i>Transitions: Learning Across Borders, Sectors & Silos</i> • March 30 – CEO and Secretariat staff participate in College Degree Operating Group (CDOG) meeting • April 5 – Secretariat presented and CEO participated in OISE research symposium <i>College – University Pathways Principles and Framework Consultation</i> • April 7 – CEO participated in Deloitte Board Strategy Session • April 11 – CEO and Secretariat met with member of college Pathways Working Group. • April 12 – CEO attended discussion of postsecondary education and global development at the Aga Khan Centre • April 13-14 – Secretariat participated in Aga Khan conference <i>Smart Global Development</i> • April 14 – CEO attended meeting of ONCAT’s Learning Outcomes Steering Committee. • April 15 (ongoing) – Secretariat participated in conference planning committee meeting for November 2017 conference on learning outcomes, jointly hosted by PEQAB, OCQAS, and OUCQA amongst others • April 25-26 – Secretariat presented and CEO participated in ONCAT conference <i>Student pathways in higher education</i> • April 27 (ongoing) – Secretariat participated in research project in collaboration with Tracey McCutcheon (Seneca College) on Student participation in QA processes • April 29 – CEO presented and Secretariat participated in OISE/TCU/HEQCO symposium <i>The Changing Professoriate at Ontario Colleges and Universities</i> • May 2--4 – Secretariat staff attended the international conference of ASIIN¹⁵ in Berlin. • May 5 – Secretariat met with CMEC to discuss learning outcomes assessment activities • May 11 – Secretariat had teleconference with Andrew Boggs, Policy Lead at the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) on revised QA framework • May 12 (ongoing) – Secretariat participated in teleconference planning the development of a research project/book in collaboration with Fanshawe College, Brock University, OISE and ONCAT researchers on the topic of learning outcomes • May 29- June 2 – Secretariat presented at the <i>Canadian Society for Studies in Higher</i>
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¹⁵ ASIIN stands for *Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften, der Informatik, der Naturwissenschaften und der Mathematik* (i.e. Accreditation Agency for Programs of Study in Engineering, Computer Science, Natural Sciences and Mathematics).

	<p><i>Education</i> annual conference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 6 – CEO and Secretariat participated in TCU speakers series: <i>How colleges contribute to innovation</i> • June 9 – CEO and Secretariat participated in Prix REALM award ceremony: PEQAB Secretariat nominated and among finalist for Customer Service Award • June 14 (ongoing) – Secretariat participated in teleconference with Japanese and Australian researchers regarding forthcoming book chapter on learning outcomes and quality assurance/accountability • June 21-24 – CEO and Secretariat participated in <i>Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education</i> annual conference at Western University • June 27-28 – CEO participated in Institute of Public Administration of Canada annual conference in Toronto • July 13 – CEO participated in July meeting of the ONCAT Learning Outcomes Steering Committee • August 30 - Secretariat submitted staff member a book chapter on learning outcomes and quality assurance/accountability with Japanese and Australian colleagues • August–September - Secretariat staff participated in supporting the Ministry’s selection of Vendors of Record for contract research • August 30–September 2 - Secretariat staff member presented research at the European Society for Studies in Higher Education conference in Birmingham, UK • August–October - Secretariat staff participated on planning committee for <i>Learning Outcomes: Evolution of Assessment</i> hosted by PEQAB, OCQAS, and OUCQA • August–Ongoing - Secretariat staff participating in research on student participation in QA processes in collaboration with Seneca College • August–Ongoing - Secretariat staff member participating in a research project/book in collaboration with Fanshawe College, Brock University, and ONCAT researchers on the topic of learning outcomes • September 5-7 - Secretariat staff member presented research at the Higher Education Reform conference in Dublin, Ireland • September 23 - CEO attended kick-off event for Northeastern University graduate programs, Toronto. • September 29 - CEO attended “Understanding the Complexities of Research Ethics” Toronto. • September 30 - CEO attended Records & Information Management: Community of Practice meeting as records & information “champion” for Strategic Policy & Projects Division (SPPD) of Ministry • October 1-3 - Secretariat staff member participated in experts meeting on the topic of international assessments of learning outcomes at the OECD, Paris • October 17-18 - CEO and Secretariat attended <i>Learning Outcomes: Evolution of Assessment</i> hosted by PEQAB, OCQAS, and OUCQA • October 24 - CEO attended all day meeting with Aboriginal Institutes Consortium (AIC) and Ministry staff re: quality assuring potential degree and other programs for AIC • October 28 - CEO attended Centennial College 50th Anniversary • November 2-3 - Secretariat staff member attended the conference <i>Quality Assurance in the European Context</i> (Brussels) • November 13 - CEO to attend as member of the Steering Committee on Learning Outcomes for Ontario Network for Articulation & Transfer (ONCAT) • November 18 - Secretariat staff to attend the MAESD/OISE/HEQCO symposium in Toronto • November 20-21 - CEO and Secretariat to attend the Colleges Ontario annual
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	conference, Higher Education Summit, in Toronto
Membership in networks/organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of the International Network for Quality Assessment Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) • Member of Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA): International Quality Group (CIQG)

External Feedback

PEQAB’s values of congeniality and transparency guide relations with stakeholders. The two most relevant vehicles for external feedback and consultations with stakeholder are

- bi-annual meetings with
 - the College Degree Granting Operating Group (CDOG) and
 - the Private and Out of Province Degree in Ontario Group (POPDOG) and
- client satisfaction surveys administered to each applicant institution over the course of its application and those administered to all External Expert Review Panels

College Degree Granting Operating Group and the Private & Out of Province Degree Operating Group
CDOG represents all Ontario Colleges currently offering degree level programming and as quality assured by PEQAB. CDOG meets bi-annually to discuss operational and policy issues related to degree granting in Ontario. Until the spring of 2016, there was no comparable group among private and out-of-province degree providers in Ontario. With support from the PEQAB Secretariat, POPDOG was established in 2016 and held its inaugural meeting on June 1st. PEQAB’s Secretariat regularly attends CDOG and POPDOG meetings for purposes of consultation and information sharing. In addition to formal meetings, Secretariat staff consults with both groups on an ongoing basis concerning proposed changes to its review criteria and processes.

Client Satisfaction Surveys

PEQAB systematically collects feedback from applicant institutions and External Expert Panels. During the course of an application, the Secretariat sends, via email link, invitations to applicants to participate in PEQAB’s survey on three separate occasions (the “beginning”, “middle” and “end” points of an application). PEQAB administers an additional assessor survey on an ongoing basis. Assessor surveys measure the satisfaction levels of national and international academics who serve as expert reviewers for degree programs. The survey includes both open and Likert-scale questions.

The purpose of gathering feedback is twofold. The first is to collect information for the continuous improvement of PEQAB’s benchmarks and processes. The second is to monitor the quality of the PEQAB reviews to maintain high levels of client satisfaction. Results from PEQAB’s surveys provide a reference point for publically stated performance benchmarks for the Secretariat. These performance measures can be found on p. 7 of PEQAB’s 2015/16 *Annual Report* (Appendix 12). Survey results can be found on pp. 31-35 of the *Annual Report*. PEQAB’s goal going forward is to maintain the currently (very high) levels of satisfaction reported there.

Publications

PEQAB has published *Annual Reports* to its website since 2001. *Annual Reports* detail the quality assurance activities of PEQAB, including detailed information concerning applications referred to the Board, Board recommendations and applications currently under review. Since 2014/15, *Annual Reports* also contain in-year accomplishments, ongoing performance measures, Board accomplishments and the results of the Board’s client satisfaction surveys. Since 2015/16, *Annual Reports* also present two sets of Board goals (annual goals unique to each reporting year and perennial goals which are identical each

reporting year). For the Board's 2016/17 goals, please see pp. 6-7 of the attached *2015/16 Annual Report*.

PEQAB provides annual updates to its *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* by August 1st of each year. *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* are posted to the Board's website (www.peqab.ca/Handbooks.html). Each reporting year, the current and previous year's editions of the materials are clearly indicated and available on the website for applicants' reference. A corresponding *Record of Change*, which provides an annual summary of improvements based on feedback from External Expert Panels, applicants, assessors and the broader quality assurance networks and organizations PEQAB is a member of, is also posted on the website.

Annual Board Retreat

Board Retreats are held annually and provide the Board and Secretariat with the opportunity for focussed reflection and discussion related to organization issues and future planning. Retreats also provide Board and Secretariat with the opportunity to review domestic, national and international trends in quality assurance practices and their related applicability to PEQAB's standards and benchmarks.

Other Quality Assurance Procedures

Feedback from the Board to the Secretariat is typically recorded in the meeting minutes and corresponding action items, and then identified internally for follow-up at the next Board meeting.

Internal feedback and reflection from both staff and Board members occurs organically. The Secretariat is a small team with a highly collegial and open work environment. Many *ad hoc* meetings allow for immediate discussions of issues. This free exchange of ideas and experiences fosters internal quality management and consistency of operational review practices. During weekly meetings, the Secretariat discusses an internal work plan, all applications under review and any other relevant issues.

In order to safeguard the assessment process PEQAB uses an informal backup system. While every application is assigned to one Senior Policy Advisor, information about each application is accessible by the entire Secretariat. This information includes emails related to each application, application materials and institutional/assessor contact information. In addition, details about each application are discussed at weekly internal meetings and monthly meeting with colleagues in the Universities Unit. In general, all Secretariat staff maintain an up-to-date awareness of different applications and could take over any application as circumstances arise.

8

Compliance with the European standards and guidelines (Part 2 of the ESG)

2.1 CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard

External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1 of the ESG.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

Section 2.1 of the ESG requires that external quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance (which is described in Part 1 of the ESG). As such, this section is presented by stating the ESG 2015 *Standards for Internal Quality Assurance* (Section 1) are bolded and information demonstrating PEQAB's achievement is directly below each.

This ESG standard generally pertains to institutional issues. Note that PEQAB is only responsible for quality assuring whole institutions in the organization reviews of private institution applicants. Ontario College and public out of province applications referred to PEQAB are seeking to provide a bachelors/honours bachelor degree program in an already established recognized institution. The Colleges, for example, are established under the *Ministry of Colleges and Universities Act, 1990* (www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90m19). Therefore, most referrals to PEQAB focus only on the ability of the program to meet the Board's Standards and Benchmarks (see for example, the *2016 Handbook for Ontario Colleges*), rather than focusing on institutional level issues. Hence, responses in this section will refer to institution wide policies and activities where possible, but in general refer to the implementation of institutional policies in a particular degree program under review.

ESG 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

PEQAB's *Program Evaluation Standard* (i.e. Standard 9 in the *Handbooks*) ensures that "the quality of the program is assured by procedures for periodic evaluation that meet [specified] requirements". Benchmarks include a formal institutionally approved policy for program review that considers a number of indicators and is reviewed through a self-study which includes student and faculty feedback. Both the data and the self-study are evaluated by a Program Evaluation Committee. The Program Evaluation Committee is required to include "senior academic peers (both scholars and administrators) with relevant expertise from both outside the institution and internal to the institution but outside the program, and free of any conflict of interest." Furthermore, each program is required to have a Program Advisory Committee (see for example, *Program Content Standard*, Benchmark 2) that is made up of experts in the field, external to the institution.

As part of any submission, applicants must provide relevant policies for the reviewers to consider. After a successful policy review, PEQAB may choose to exempt certain standards and/or benchmarks specifically related to policies from subsequent program reviews. Therefore, subsequent application reviews include an assessment of whether institutional policies are appropriately implemented in each program under review. Ontario Colleges are asked to update their policies on file with PEQAB annually. If there are significant changes to policies, identified either by PEQAB or by the institution themselves, PEQAB will re-review the policies.

Where all applicants must comply with the *Program Evaluation Standard*, private institutions wishing to offer degrees are also subject to an organization review for every application. The organization review includes standards relating most specifically to ESG Standards for quality assurance policies. For example, *Organization Review Standard 2: Administrative Capacity* ensures “The applicant has the legal characteristics, governance structure and administrative capacity necessary to organize and manage a competent institution of higher learning”. Similarly, the *Organization Evaluation Standard* requires “The quality of the operational and administrative aspects of the organization is assured by procedures for periodic evaluation that meet the [specified] requirements”, which include internal and external input and evaluation. Once PEQAB is satisfied with the organization capacity the institutional program review commences to review the Program itself, including the *Program Evaluation Standard*.

ESG 1.2 Design and approval of programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

In Ontario, the equivalent of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area is the Ontario Qualifications Framework (OQF) (attached as Appendix 13). The OQF competencies and learning outcomes are recognised across the province and the country as acceptable standards, and are in line with the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework (see Appendix 14). While the OQF does not directly correspond to the European Qualification Framework, the framework strongly supports programs that adhere to the four missions of higher education as established by the Council of Europe¹⁶.

PEQAB’s *Degree Level Standard* requires that the OQF degree level standards be met and that samples of student work are provided as evidence of achievement. PEQAB’s *Program Content Standard* requires that “the program offers an education of sufficient rigour, breadth, and depth to achieve the knowledge and skills identified in the degree level standard”. Benchmarks in this standard require information on how programs are developed and revised. For example, each program is required to have a Program Advisory Committee that is made up of experts in the field, external to the institution that approve of curriculum content and must endorse the program. Learning outcomes for core and breadth courses must be clearly established; there must be appropriate distribution of core and non-core components of

¹⁶ Coherent higher education and research policies should ... address the multiple concomitant purposes of higher education, which include:

- preparation for sustainable employment
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies
- personal development
- the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

the curriculum, and in reasonable allotments. Work-integrated learning experiences are also assessed in this standard.

ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

There are a number of PEQAB standards that address this issue. Considering the implementation of student-centred learning and teaching, the *Capacity to Deliver Standard* inquires about appropriateness of delivery methods, and requires policies on the support of professional development to promote curricular and instructional innovation, including a benchmark that states “Development of curriculum, academic policies, and standards includes appropriate participation by qualified academic staff and appropriate consultation with students”. The *Program Delivery Standard* Benchmark 6 also considers how the delivery methods “contribute to and enhance academic community among students and between students and faculty members”.

Furthermore, PEQAB’s *Academic Freedom and Integrity Standard* ensures that “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. This standard ensures students are aware of their role in the educational process.

Regarding assessment, PEQAB’s *Program Delivery Standard* requires that “the delivery methods support achievement of the expected and actual learning outcomes” Benchmark 3 requires that delivery methods are assessed by standardised and regular feedback from students. PEQAB’s *Program Content Standard* Benchmark 11, also relates to supporting student centred learning and assessment by investigating if “the ‘type and frequency of student assessment demonstrate the achievement of the stated learning outcomes and provide appropriate information to students about their achievement levels”.

ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

PEQAB’s *Admission, Progression and Graduation Standard* directly relates to this ESG standard. The Standard that “Admission, promotion and graduation requirements are consistent with the character of degree granting organizations” includes 11 benchmarks regarding student admission (including for mature students), advanced standing requiring detailed information on credit transfer, prior learning assessments and advanced standing policies. The promotion and graduation benchmarks also require information on grading policies and evidence of student achievement of learning outcomes in the programs.

A number of PEQAB standards address elements of recognition and progression, including the *Nomenclature Standard* which states “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. PEQAB’s *Credential Recognition Standard* deals explicitly with the programs ability to maximize the graduates’ potential for employment and promotion in their field and further study, by requiring consultations with

employers, relevant occupational groups, professional associations and other postsecondary education organizations. Similarly, PEQAB's *Regulation and Accreditation Standard* requires that institutions present documentation on interactions with relevant regulatory and accrediting agencies.

ESG 1.5 Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

PEQAB's *Capacity to Deliver Standard* also includes a number of benchmarks that pertain to faculty members. For example, benchmarks under this standard require policies on the expectations for faculty credentials, evidence of support for professional development, and information on teaching and supervision loads. Others ensure the faculty members have suitable credentials and expertise, and require "at least 50% of the student's 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" and a similar provision requires the same of faculty in the non-core curriculum. Another benchmark requires institutions to verify the equivalency of international credentials of faculty in a fair and consistent manner, while yet another relates to reasonable student and faculty access to learning and information resources, which includes consideration of library, computing, laboratory equipment, etc.

Similarly, the *Program Delivery Standard* includes benchmarks that relate to resources, such as Benchmark 9 which states that "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."

ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

Under the *Capacity to Deliver Standard* Benchmark 2 states "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". The *Program Delivery Standard* also includes benchmarks that relate to resources, including Benchmark 9 which states "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."

ESG 1.7 Information management

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

As PEQAB does not examine institutional level activities in Ontario College or public institutions, the PEQAB Standards reflect the use of program-related data and information. As part of the *Program Evaluation Standard* all college programs must collect and analyze data on a number of key areas, including the assessment of student learning outcomes, student graduation, employment and satisfaction rates, assessment of program structure and delivery, employer satisfaction amongst others. Benchmark 2 of the Standard requires that an internal evaluation of that data be conducted and that a Program Evaluation Committee (PEC) evaluate the program data, the self-study, and provide a plan of action.

In the private institution Organization Review, institutions are required to demonstrate “the administrative capacity to effectively manage an institution of higher learning as demonstrated by coordinated business and academic plans detailing the commitment to the academic quality of program content and delivery” (*Administrative Capacity Standard*). Similarly, the Organization Evaluation Standard notes that there are policies in place that “assess the continuing accuracy and completeness of the institution’s public reports, materials, and advertising and the key information about the organization and determining that it is readily available to potential and current students”.

ESG 1.8 Public information

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

All institutions must comply with the *Student Protection Standard* which requires “public reports, materials and advertising are produced in a thorough, accurate, and truthful manner” and that key information about the organization, policies and programs are published in the academic year calendar and is otherwise readily available to students and the public. Furthermore, the *Submission Guidelines* require that certain policies are made public (see Section 16), including policies on Admission, Promotion and Graduation; Student Protection; and the majority of policies on Academic Freedom and Integrity.

ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

PEQAB’s *Program Evaluation Standard* ensures that “the quality of the program is assured by procedures for periodic evaluation that meet [specified] requirements”. Benchmark 1 requires a formal institutionally approved policy for program review that satisfies a number of indicators including that a self-study should occur 5 to 7 years, criteria for program review (including assessment of learning outcomes, graduation rate, appropriateness of delivery, etc., Benchmark 2 requires that a Program Evaluation Committee (PEC) evaluate the program and the self-study. The PEC is required to include “senior academic peers (both scholars and administrators) with relevant expertise from both outside the institution and internal to the institution but outside the program, and free of any conflict of interest.” The benchmark also requires that the report of the PEC is shared with the academic community: “The report must be addressed to the senior administration and shared with the academic council, governing board, faculty members, and students in the program, together with a plan of action responding the recommendations in the report.”

ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance

Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis

As discussed earlier, with the exception of private Institutions, PEQAB reviews focus only on the ability of a *program* to meet the Board’s standards and benchmarks, hence, PEQAB does not have a policy requiring an institutional external quality assurance review for Ontario Colleges or public Institutions.

Private institutions wishing to offer degrees are subject to a complete organization review which includes *Organization Evaluation Standard* requires “The quality of the operational and administrative aspects of the organization is assured by procedures for periodic evaluation”. Given that Ministerial

consent to offer the program is generally granted for a 5-7 year period, and the institution is required to undergo PEQAB's external review in order to renew consent for a program, the external review component satisfies ESG standards 1.10.

2.2 DESIGNING METHODOLOGIES FIT FOR PURPOSE

Standard

External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

At the highest level, PEQAB's purpose is defined in its enabling legislation. Under the *Post-secondary Choice and Excellence Act, 2000*, (PSECE) PEQAB's purpose is to provide Ontario's Minister of Advance Education and Skills Development (MAESD) with advice as to the quality of degree programs offered in Ontario by institutions which are not enabled to do so by Ontario legislation. As discussed here in Section 3.1 (p. 8), three types of institutions submit applications to PEQAB: public universities based outside of Ontario, private institutions (whether based in Ontario or not) and Ontario Colleges offering honours baccalaureate degrees. The Ministry's goal for Ontarians is captured in the key terms in the title of the legislation: one goal is to offer Ontarians a wide range of "choice" of postsecondary programs by including private and out of province institutions among the range of offerings, while also assuring the quality "excellence" of those programs.

At another level, and as it has evolved, PEQAB's purposes have been resolved along three main lines: providing the Ministry with advice as to the prospective quality of proposed (new) degree programs, providing the Ministry with advice as to the quality of existing programs (at renewal), and providing the Ministry with advice as to the adequacy of (private) institutions to offer degree programs (organization reviews).¹⁷ PEQAB has responded to these different purposes with different kinds of *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines*: for new programs, for renewal of programs and for organization review. Each is designed to be fit for that particular purpose and the differences are numerous: for instance, only in the *Handbooks* on renewal is the Degree Level standard demonstrated through the assessor's re-marking of samples of work produced by students in the final stages of the program, and only in the *Submission Guidelines* for private institutions is there a template for a business plan.

Within this broad set of purposes, PSECE allows (and requires) PEQAB to establish its own review methods and quality assurance processes. PEQAB's review methods and quality assurance processes have been guided, at the next level, by establishing its own Vision, Mission and Values. PEQAB's Vision ("A stronger Ontario through high quality student learning outcomes") was reassessed and revised at a Board Retreat in 2016 and PEQAB's Values ("Accountable, Impartial, Collegial, Transparent, Dedicated to Quality and Continuous Improvement, Grounded in Research Evidence and Best Practice") were reassessed and revised at a Board Retreat in 2014. PEQAB's quality assurance methods and processes are detailed in Section 5 (pp. 21-23).

Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.

¹⁷ Private institutions present a broader array of challenges. Since their finances are not under-written by Ontario—as are those of Ontario Colleges, nor are they underwritten by another jurisdiction—as are those of public out-of-province institutions, the economic viability of private institutions is an additional consideration along the lines of student protection.

One of PEQAB's core values is "continuous improvement." And in fact, PEQAB's *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* reflect its process of continuous improvement. Changes are so numerous over the course of each annual cycle, that the Secretariat now issues revised *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* on August 1st of every year. In fairness to institutions which may have applications under development, two sets of all *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* are always posted to the website, and applicants chose to apply under the current or previous year's guidelines. Changes are captured and highlighted in a *Record of Change* document, which is also published to PEQAB's website.

Regarding involvement of stake-holders: all changes are made with prior consultation with two stakeholder bodies—one of long-standing: the College Degree Operating Group (CDOG) and one which PEQAB recently helped to create, the Private and Out of Province Degree Operating Group (POPDOG). Both groups meet twice a year and PEQAB consultation is prominent on the agenda of both groups. In regard to proposed changes affecting the Colleges, the PEQAB Secretariat, since late 2013, has discussed these in advance with CDOG—at two meetings prior to implementation. The first meeting deals with the general concept and the second meeting deals with the specific language of the change. Occasionally, CDOG, which is officially within the College structure a sub-committee of the Committee of College Vice-Presidents (Academic) CCVPA, has asked that the Secretariat also discuss the proposed change with CCVPA. In all cases, this additional consultation has occurred, and PEQAB is also now a regular contributor to CCVPA meetings.

As a specific example, in the fall 2013, PEQAB's then new CEO, met with CDOG, and discussed eight opportunities for PEQAB improvement desired by the group. In June of 2014, the CEO was invited by CDOG to speak at a plenary session of the CDOG Annual Conference, and he was able to report on having addressed all eight—see Appendix 15.

The way PEQAB develops and updates its processes and criteria is as follows. Candidate criteria for updating are identified through a variety of sources; these include

- questions of interpretation or application of specific benchmarks raised with the PEQAB Secretariat by institutional representatives working through the PEQAB application processes and materials
- concerns raised by CDOG or POPDOG
- issues and opportunities raised at conferences—Secretariat staff regularly attend both CHEA and INQAAHE as well as a wide variety of conferences related to learning and learning outcomes—including an annual Symposium on Learning Outcomes which PEQAB co-sponsors with other Ontario quality assurance agencies
- client Satisfaction Surveys—PEQAB surveys applicants three times over the process of each application, and External Expert Panels at the conclusion of an application
- Secretariat research—all Senior Policy Advisors read relevant research studies and keep abreast of developments in quality assurance in other jurisdictions; the job responsibilities of one Senior Policy Advisor with a PhD related to quality assurance are principally in the area of maintaining currency for herself, the Secretariat and the Board
- regular (third Thursday of each month) monthly teleconference with other Canadian quality assurance agencies—PEQAB "hosts" that teleconference and
- regular informal discussions with a wide variety of contacts in postsecondary institutions.

These "candidates" are prioritized in discussion at a weekly Secretariat meeting, at which progress on various applications is reviewed and the Secretariat's internal Work Plan is updated (for a sample Work Plan, see Appendix 16). Inclusion in the Work Plan of work on revising a particular Standard, benchmark

or process signals it as a priority—and it is further prioritized and tracked as to timelines on the Work Plan itself.

At this point—the point that draft language has been developed for a potential change—the Secretariat begins informal consultation with the sector. Consultation always involves CDOG (and recently POPDOG), and potential changes are identified as agenda items the Secretariat presents at both groups' Spring and Fall meetings. The CEO also discusses the prospective change with the Chair of the Board, both informally on email and more formally as a part of their regular meetings. Depending on the nature and implications of the change, the CEO might also initiate discussions with the Ministry—starting with the Assistant Deputy Minister for Strategic Policy and Programs, at their regular meetings.

Next steps would be the initial discussion at CDOG and POPDOG, with a range of results. There can be complete stakeholder buy-in—in which case the issue's second appearance at CDOG/POPDOG would be after the Board has approved the change. More often, discussion with stakeholders results in changes to the concept, and if these are substantial, the revised idea comes back to a second CDOG/POPDOG meeting, prior to Board consideration.

At the point that the Secretariat has developed a viable change, the proposal is submitted to the Board as a formal item, including relevant background and contextual information. If the change is approved, affected stakeholders are informed by email. The change is then incorporated into the Board's *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines*, and the new "edition" of these is published on PEQAB's website on August 1st of each year. In early August, stakeholders are reminded via email that the new *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* are now up on the website.

In the case of joint programs, the quality assurance agency should use the European Approach to the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

PEQAB has quality assured the joint programs of two institutions in two different countries previously. In one case, an Ontario institution (Queen's University) offers a joint MBA with an American institution (Cornell University)—in which instance PEQAB accepted the report of the quality assurance agency in the United States in regard to the aspects of the program delivered by that institution, did a gap analysis and applied only the (few) PEQAB standards and benchmarks not already covered by the American accreditor. A joint application from the University of Mannheim (Germany) and the University of Waterloo in Ontario for a Master of Arts (Intercultural German Studies) was treated similarly—in effect, the quality assurance of the German agency was accepted by PEQAB and the Ministry.

For future such applications, PEQAB could easily commit to adopt the *European Approach to the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes*. Detailed analysis of that approach reveals approximately forty main features—PEQAB's process is already identical to thirty-three of them. Five other features are substantially similar and could be made identical with small operational additions/revisions which PEQAB could easily make. (For instance, PEQAB's recommended terms of consent are typically five to seven years, but it would be a trivial matter to consistently recommend instead a six year period prior to re-review, as per the *European Approach*.) PEQAB would face only two challenges in fully mirroring the *European Approach*. Only the international partner universities fall under PEQAB's auspices, the Ontario universities are quality assured by another agency, the Council of Ontario Universities own quality assurance agency, the Quality Council (See Section 3.2, p. 8). If the Universities chose *not* to engage in a joint submission, PEQAB could not enforce the provision for a "self-evaluation report jointly submitted by the cooperating institutions." Appeal would be the other issue. PEQAB's process does not currently have provisions for appeal. Because PEQAB is an advisory agency only, any effective appeal would have

to be to the Minister's decision, and currently MAESD does not have a formalized appeal process, applicable to consents to offer postsecondary credentials in Ontario. That said, PEQAB's process does fully embrace the provisions for applicant institutions to "comment on the draft version of the report and request correction of factual errors" and PEQAB does fully "consider the comments by the higher education institutions" prior to making a recommendation to the Minister.

2.3 IMPLEMENTING PROCESSES

Standard

External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include

- a self-assessment or equivalent;
- an external assessment normally including a site visit;
- a report resulting from the external assessment;
- a consistent follow-up.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

Processes: Pre-Defined, Reliable and Published

The review and management of consent procedures are pre-defined, standardized across degree granting institutions and follow prescribed quality assurance processes. As described in Section 6.3 (p. 28), PEQAB publishes to its website *Handbooks* which describe the Board's standards for organization reviews and new program/renewals. PEQAB also publishes to its website *Submission Guidelines* to assist institutions in developing degree level programming. Changes or modifications to the Board's standards and benchmarks are published separately in a *Record of Changes*. The result is that applicants have full and ready access to information describing precisely how their programming will be assessed. Since *Submission Guidelines* also describe the broader processes involved in ministerial consent, applicants are also provided with detailed information on what to expect during the application process.

In addition, Senior Policy Advisors are available to applicants (or potential applicants) to provide any guidance or clarification on any aspect of the Board's operations at any point prior to submission, during the course of a review, or after a Board recommendation.

Self-Assessment

For applications to renew consent to offer degree programs, the Board requires that applicants satisfy the Board's *Program Evaluation Standard*. As detailed in the Board's *Handbooks*, this standard specifies that the quality of the proposed program is assured by procedures for periodic evaluation including a "self-study undertaken, with student input, by faculty members and administrators of the program based on evidence relating to program performance ... including strengths and weaknesses, desired improvements, and future directions."

External Review, Response to External Review and site visit

In addition to a self-study, every application for consent to offer or renew a degree program, and every organization review, includes an institutional site visit attended by the External Expert Panel appointed by the Board to review the program and the Senior Policy Advisor within the Secretariat assigned to the application. For consistency in site visit procedures for new programs and renewals, the Secretariat provides both Panels and the applicant with a site visit template agenda. The use of the template is

intended to normalize site visits and establish consistency across the sector. A copy of the template is attached as Appendix 17.

External Expert Panels assess degree programs (and organizations) against the Board's standards and benchmarks for quality (as described in materials provided to the Panel by the Secretariat) and provides its best judgement, in the form of written Panel Report, on whether the program (or organization) meets relevant standards and benchmarks.

Applicants are provided with a copy of the Panel Report and are invited to provide to the Board (via the Secretariat) a written response to the Report and any other matter they wish to communicate to the Board about meeting its standards and benchmarks. In formulating its recommendations to the Minister, the Board considers the applicant's submission, the Panel Report, any additional materials provided by the applicant, the commitments the applicant makes in their submission and during the review, the applicant's response to the Panel Report, and the Board's assessment of each of these in relation to its standards and benchmarks.

Under normal circumstances, External Expert Panels produce and submit their Reports to the Secretariat within 15 business days of the site visit. The Senior Policy Advisor assigned to the file then forwards the report to the applicant, who has 20 business days to provide the Board, via the Secretariat, with a response.

Senior Policy Advisors assigned to institutions follow highly consistent processes when managing applications for Ministerial consent. As described in Section 4.2 (p. 20), these steps include

- notifying applicants of a referral from the Minister
- identifying potential assessors for the review of the application
- recommending a quality assurance strategy for the application
- contracting with and instructing the assessment panel
- clarifying standards and procedures as appropriate
- attending quality/organization site visits
- reviewing the panel report and ensuring it conforms to expectations
- securing the applicant's response to the panel report
- preparing materials for the Board's consideration
- preparing Board communications to the Minister and
- notifying the applicant that a recommendation has been made.

Once PEQAB makes a recommendation to the Minister the file is transferred to the Universities Unit in the Ministry through a formal Recommendation Letter and Background Report. The institution is then informed that a recommendation has been made but not the results of the recommendation. The file is considered closed once the Secretariat receives a copy of the Minister's consent letter from the Universities Unit and reports the decision, along with PEQAB's recommendation, on its website.

2.4 PEER-REVIEW EXPERTS

Standard

External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

Section 6 (pp. 30-32) describes how the Board seeks advice from External Expert Panels on applications for consent. Included below is additional information the criteria and process the Secretariat uses for selecting and recruiting external experts for reviews.

Selecting External Experts

When selecting candidates for External Expert Panels, the Senior Policy Advisor assigned to the application first consults the application to see if any nominees are listed by the applicant. If the applicant has included nominees, the Senior Policy Advisor includes their biographies and curriculum vitae in the roster of potential candidate reviewers (if they indeed have the appropriate qualifications). In addition to the inclusion of any applicant nominees, Senior Policy Advisors conduct extensive internet searches to find comparable programs (typically in Canada and the U.S.) from which to draw potential candidates.

If a program has more than one focus of study (such as Niagara College's Bachelor of Business Administration - International Commerce and Global Development or Algonquin College's Bachelor of Early Learning and Community Development), Senior Policy Advisors will find candidates for both (all) fields and ensure that both (all) fields are represented on the External Expert Panel.

Changes to the External Expert Election Process

In 2016, there were two changes related to the selection of External Experts

1. For every application from Ontario Colleges, college level faculty will be considered as External Expert Panel candidates. A new checkbox requesting the search of qualified college faculty ("*Candidate pool included search for college level faculty?*") has been added to the process for selecting external experts.
2. There may be occasional issues of perceived or actual conflicts of interests (i.e. external expert candidates applied but did not get a job in the program they would have to review, they are employed by an institution with a competing program, etc.). The Secretariat now shares the list of external expert candidates with applicants for their input. While PEQAB does not allow applicants to choose who they would like to review their program, the Board does allow them to make the case to "veto" potential reviewers. As long as applicants can provide sufficient justification, the Secretariat will either remove such external expert candidates (with a note to file) or put them at the bottom of the candidate list.

Approving External Expert Candidates

- At Board meetings the Secretariat proposes a review strategy as well as External Expert Panel candidates that are then discussed and approved (sometimes with changes).
- The Secretariat proposes approximately a dozen panel candidates ranked in order of preference based on relevant qualifications and experience. If suitable individuals were identified as nominees by the applicant, those nominees will be listed on the top of the candidate list and will be identified as such for the Board.
- The Secretariat also indicates which candidates could serve as panel Chairs (they must have senior administrative experience). Ideally, Chairs will have participated as panel members for previous quality assurance reviews.
- The Board considers both candidate biographies and curriculum vitae and may change the order of candidates or remove any it does not deem appropriately qualified.
- Provisos typically accompany review strategies. The most common provisos are that

- panel members not be from the same institution
- only one panel member be from an Ontario College
- only one panel member be an applicant nominee and
- both/all fields of study are covered by the external expert panel.

Recruiting External Experts

Once the Board has approved a review strategy and panel candidates, Senior Policy Advisors begin recruiting External Expert Panel members, beginning with the candidates listed first and then moving down the list until an available member/Chair is found. Senior Policy Advisors generally use standardized language and process and ensure that assessors do not have a conflict of interest as defined in the Board's *Conflict of Interest Policy for Board Members, Assessors, and Applicants* (See Appendix 18).

After assessors have been recruited and after they have received their review material, a Senior Policy Advisor organizes an orientation session to review details of the application and PEQAB's process and criteria. External Expert Panels are then introduced to the applicant and can begin organizing the review and review schedule.

Student members

External Expert Panels do not normally have students as members. Instead, input from recent graduates and current students is solicited through interviews and roundtable discussions during site visits. The Secretariat is currently undertaking a formal research project to determine how we can more fully incorporate students in both internal and external quality assurance activities. For more information see Section 11 (p. 77).

2.5 CRITERIA FOR OUTCOMES

Standard

Any outcomes or judgments made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

Review against Published Criteria

All program and organization reviews are based on clear criteria published in PEQAB's *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* and posted to its website (<http://PEQAB.ca/Handbooks.html>). The Board assesses the quality of proposed degree programs in accordance with standards published in its *Handbooks*.

Consistent Application of Criteria

External Expert Panels undertake reviews in accordance with the Board's detailed procedures. Panel members are oriented by Senior Policy Advisors on assessing applications using PEQAB's standards and benchmarks. Under the coordination of the panel Chair, each panel is required to assess an application using a *Panel Report Guideline* specific to the application in question and to develop a Panel Report providing the Panel's judgment on the quality of the program or organization under review. External Expert Panels are also asked to provide rationales for their judgements. Panel reports must be of sufficient detail to enable the Board to determine the extent to which its criteria are satisfied. Sample *Guidelines for Assessors* are provided in Appendix 8.

Secretariat staff members are tasked with ensuring the consistent application of criteria and the conformance and appropriate specificity of each Panel Report. The key issues are whether the program meets the standards set by the Board, and whether Panel members think the program is of sufficient quality to be recommended to the Board and eventually to the students of Ontario. More specifically, each report must include at least the following

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

Each standard has several benchmarks against which the institution's performance will be assessed. For each benchmark, External Expert Panels are required to indicate whether the institution

- ✓ Meets or exceeds the benchmark
- ✓ Does not meet the benchmark

In addition, Panels are asked to indicate

- a) the reasons for their judgments
- b) any commitments or important clarifications the institution made during the review that were critical to their judgments
- c) any revisions needed
- d) whether revisions are minor or major. (Minor revisions can be implemented without significant time or resources, and the institution would appear to have the capacity to implement them. Major revisions are those required to meet the threshold, would take significant time and/or resources to rectify, and/or should be addressed).

Considerations in Formulating its Recommendations

In formulating recommendations on new program or program renewals, the Board considers

- the applicant's submission
- the findings of the External Expert Panel appointed by the Board to assess the program against the Board's relevant standards and benchmarks and
- the applicant's response to the panel report and any commitments made by the applicant over the course of the review.

New Programs

When consent is recommended for a new program, the standard period of consent recommended for honours bachelor programs (i.e. four-year programs) is seven years while the standard period of consent recommended for graduate programs is five years. These consent periods are intended to allow the institutions enough time to launch and program and have at least one graduating cohort before they need to undertake the self-study and then submit their consent renewal application.

Program Renewals

In 2010, a new renewal process and renewal *Submission Guidelines* were introduced with an emphasis on the applicant's self-study and the review of samples of student work. When reviewing renewal applications, External Experts Panels now report on whether the implementation of the policy and procedures for the organization's periodic review of programs are a) aligned with the Board's requirements for such evaluations; and b) achieve its intended aim of continuous improvement of the program(s). External Expert Panels also remark random samples of minimal, average and exemplary work from students in the terminal years of the program.

This new renewal strategy provides the Board with the ability to distinguish those consent holders that have shown the ability to assure their own quality from those that require shorter term consents, monitoring, and more regular reviews. As a result, in addition to recommendations to "not renew consent" or "not renew consent at this time", three different types of recommendations for renewal of consent have emerged since the new renewal guidelines and procedures have been in place

- Renew consent for 5 years
- Renew consent for 7 years
- Renew consent for an unlimited period provided that the program is subject to a less onerous review (i.e. an "audit") by the Board on an extended cycle

To ensure consistency in its recommendations, the Board approved, at its May 2014 meeting, the following *Principles for Recommending Varying Consents* at the time of consent renewal:

Five-year consents are to be recommended

- when conditions or outstanding issues are identified, particularly if they are related to the Board's Degree Level, Program Content and/or Capacity to Deliver standards, but when the Board finds that the institution has the capacity to meet these conditions and/or address these issues, and/or
- when, despite the absence of any shortcomings in meeting the Board's standards,
 - an institution does not have a proven track record of honouring commitments and/or of ensuring its internal quality assurance, and/or
 - when a program has undergone significant changes, either during the tenure of its consent or during the renewal review process.

Seven-year consents are to be recommended

- when there are some program strengths and no or only minor weaknesses, typically not related to the Board's Degree Level, Program Content and/or Capacity to Deliver standards, are identified and/or
- when a program has many strengths but some shortcomings in meeting the Board's Program Evaluation standard and/or
- when a program only needs to meet requirements for relevant regulatory bodies (e.g. accreditation criteria) and
- when, generally, no conditions are attached.

Unlimited consents with a subsequent "lighter touch" audit process developed and approved by the Board are to be recommended for programs

- with many strengths, no major weaknesses, and no minor weakness related to the Board’s Degree Level, Program Content, Capacity to Deliver and/or Program Evaluation standards, and that are offered by institutions that
 - have demonstrated mature policies and practices for quality assessment and improvement,
 - have a record of honouring commitments and
 - have at least undergone one successful renewal.

2.6 REPORTING

Standard

Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

PEQAB is making progress towards greater transparency of Panel Reports on its reviews. Currently, the Reports produced by External Expert Panels are made available for comment to applicants, prior to Board consideration. Applicants are invited to respond fully to all aspects of the Panel Reports, and these responses – and the Panel Reports themselves – are brought to the Board at the same time. The Board’s recommendation to the Minister is informed by the submission itself, the Panel Report and the institution’s responses to the Panel Report. The Board then makes a formal recommendation to the Minister as to whether to grant/renew consent to offer the degree program. After the Minister’s decision, both PEQAB’s recommendation and the Minister’s decision are posted and remain publicly available on the PEQAB website.

External Expert Panel Reports *per se* are not made public, excepting only that there is a note to the public on the PEQAB website at <http://www.PEQAB.ca/CurrentConsent.html> : “Please note that the completed Panel Reports may be publicly requested under the Government of Ontario’s Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act.”

PEQAB is currently reconsidering transparency generally. Because the Board considers the Panel Report as an input—and only one such input—into its recommendations to the Minister, the focus of consideration has been on the degree of transparency of what has been called its “Background Report” to the Minister. Along with every formal recommendation to the Minister—which is posted on the website—the Board has sent an accompanying Background Report, which provides a great deal of detail from the Panel Report and the applicant’s response. Until 2013, these Background Reports were marked “Confidential to the Minister,” but subsequently they have been written to be shared also—at the discretion of the Ministry—with the applicant institution.

One proposal, currently under consideration by the Board is to redesignate the “Background Reports” as “PEQAB Final Reports” and to post these on the Board’s website, along with the Minister’s decision. A PEQAB concern is that, while it would more fully express PEQAB’s value of being “transparent,” going further and publishing External Expert Panel Reports themselves may also inadvertently undermine PEQAB’s value of “quality and continuous improvement.” If Panel Reports were to be made fully public, assessors may then begin to write their Reports—particularly when discussing weaknesses and opportunities for improvement—in a more cautious/circumspect way. Applicant institutions, when responding to Panel Reports—particularly to weaknesses—may respond more defensively and be less

willing to acknowledge weaknesses and implement improvements, if they knew that to do so would become, in effect, a public admission of weaknesses in their programs.

PEQAB has had many examples of how productive of positive outcomes its current process can be when the initial “dialogue” between PEQAB assessors and applicant institutions through the Expert External Report and the applicant’s response is not a public one. Recently, one Ontario College volunteered to completely revamp its degree proposal while gratefully acknowledging the advice of the initial Panel Report—a Report which identified many weaknesses in the initial proposal. This would have been a much more difficult position for an institution to take, if senior administrators there had had to anticipate that the initial critique of the program would become a public document.

PEQAB is also considering an alternative method of publishing the full report of the External Expert Panel Reports and thereby making them accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals—see Section 11, “Transparency of PEQAB Final Reports” p. 75.

2.7 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Standard

Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

PEQAB’s recommendations to the Minister do not currently have provisions for appeal. Because PEQAB is an advisory agency only, any effective appeal would have to be to the Minister’s decision, and currently MAESD does not have a formalized appeal process, specific to PEQAB’s role in consents to offer postsecondary credentials in Ontario.¹⁸ That said, PEQAB’s process does fully embrace the provisions for applicant institutions to “comment on the draft version of the report and request correction of factual errors” and the PEQAB Board does fully “consider the comments by the higher education institutions” prior to making a recommendation to the Minister.

With regard to complaints, PEQAB has been collecting feedback systematically since its inception and surveys both the higher education institutions that have taken part in the assessments and the external expert panel team members. As discussed in Section 7 (p. 42), during the course of an application for ministerial consent, the Secretariat sends, via email link, invitations to applicants to participate in PEQAB’s survey on three separate occasions (the “beginning”, “middle” and “end” points of an application). PEQAB administers an additional assessor survey on an ongoing basis. Assessor surveys measure the satisfaction levels of national and international academics who serve as expert reviewers for degree programs. The survey forms include both open and Likert-scale questions.

The response to PEQAB’s on-going surveys has been generally very positive—as reflected in the last *Annual Report*; see especially pp. 31-36. It’s also true that the responses sometimes do amount to “complaints” and these go the PEQAB’s CEO for response. Complaints also come to the CEO through his email address and through the peqab@ontario.ca email account. PEQAB recognizes that this should and

¹⁸ Regulations under PSECE at <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/020279#BK30> do detail an appeals process regarding a Ministerial decision to “amend, suspend, revoke, or re-instate a consent” through a Tribunal, but these procedures do not appear to apply to a Ministerial decision (in accordance with PEQAB’s recommendation or not) to, for instance, deny a consent.

could easily be more formalized and intends to add a short section to the next edition of the *Handbooks* and *Guidelines*, more clearly defining and communicating PEQAB's complaints process.

9

Compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance Agencies (Part Three of the ESG)

3.1 ACTIVITIES, POLICY AND PROCESSES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Standard

Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities as defined in Part 2 of the ESG on a regular basis. They should have clear and explicit goals and objectives that are part of their publicly available mission statement. These should translate into the daily work of the agency. Agencies should ensure the involvement of stakeholders in their governance and work.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

This Self-Study marks the second of PEQAB's full external quality assurance initiatives, the first having concluded with a Report in 2011 (see Appendix 19). The Board's *Internal Policy on Quality Assurance* (Section 7, pp. 35-36) commits PEQAB to external evaluations at least every seven years, and PEQAB intends to update that policy to say "every five years" in compliance with both ESG norms and PEQAB's actual past practice.

PEQAB has clear and explicit goals, posted on its public website in the form of its Vision and Values on its homepage at www.PEQAB.ca and in more detail in its Mandate at <http://www.PEQAB.ca/Mandate.html> or in Section 4.1 (p. 12) of this document.

The Secretariat believes that PEQAB's Vision, Values and Mandate do translate into the daily work of the agency and perhaps the best encapsulation of this is in the agendas of the regular Board meetings; see Appendix 20 for sample Board agenda.

Our most fundamental stakeholder is the resident of Ontario seeking, engaged in, or interested in postsecondary education here and that involvement is facilitated through such means as the posting of all submissions, the ten week formal opportunity for public comment on them, the posting of PEQAB's recommendations and Ministerial decisions, the existence of and our response to the general PEQAB inquiry email at PEQAB@ontario.ca. Our most proximate stakeholders are the institutions seeking to offer such degrees, and PEQAB's regular and extensive participation in the meetings of CDOG and POPDOG exemplify this involvement. Finally our full listing of one year of stakeholder engagement activities is detailed in Section 7 (pp. 36-41) of this document.

3.2 OFFICIAL STATUS

Standard

Agencies should have an established legal basis and should be formally recognized as quality assurance agencies by competent public authorities.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

The Post-secondary Choice and Excellence Act, 2000 identifies PEQAB as a quality assurance agency operating in Ontario, Canada, in 2001. This Act of the Ontario legislature very clearly establishes PEQAB's legal basis by a competent public authority and provides a solid foundation for PEQAB operations and PEQAB's assessment of higher education institutions that want to offer degree programs or parts thereof in Ontario but do not have the legislative authority to do so. Section 4.1 (p. 10) described in detail PEQAB's role under the Act which is also elaborated on the PEQAB website at www.PEQAB.ca/Legislation.html, and the full Act and its relevant regulations are linked from there.

While the act states that the "Minister shall refer applications for a consent or renewal of a consent to the Post-secondary Education Quality Assessment Board or another accrediting or quality assurance body or authority", to this date all consent or consent renewal applications have been referred to PEQAB rather than another quality assurance agency. In addition, the Minister has, with very few exceptions, fully accepted all recommendations made by PEQAB when formulating his or her consents. These PEQAB recommendations often included detailed recommended conditions of consent that were also adopted in by the Minister in their entirety in the majority of consent decisions. Both facts provide further confirmation not only of PEQAB's formal but of its actual recognition by the Ontario legislature as a quality assurance agency.

3.3 INDEPENDENCE

Standard

Agencies should be independent and act autonomously. They should have full responsibility for their operations and the outcomes of those operations without third party influence.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

PEQAB's independence can be measured operationally, organizationally and in terms of its decision-making processes.

Operational Independence

As identified by the legislative powers of the agency, PEQAB's independence allows it to

- establish expert panels to review applications
- establish advisory committees to assist the Board in providing recommendations and advice to the Minister
- undertake such research as it determines necessary to carry out its duties
- establish procedures for carrying out its duties and
- establish and exclusively define provincial standards and benchmarks for quality assurance, with the constraint that any such standards and benchmarks are in accordance with those recognized in Ontario and other jurisdictions.

PEQAB does have full responsibility for its operations and outcomes and the widest latitude in setting the standards, benchmarks and processes by which it pursues quality assurance.

Organization Independence

Once appointed through the Ontario Public Appointments Secretariat, Board Members function entirely independently of the Ministry. PEQAB Secretariat staff remain Ministry staff and as such their independence may be a more open question. The PEQAB Secretariat is identified for internal Ministry purposes as the PEQAB Branch, formally organized within the Strategic Planning and Policy Division

(SPPD) of the Ministry (MAESD). The Secretariat has a defined office area within a Ministry building (Mowat Tower, Queen's Park Complex). Additionally, the Secretariat's senior administrative official is both the Chief Executive Officer of PEQAB and the Director of the PEQAB Branch. As such, the CEO is accountable to the Board and its Chair, and as Director to the Minister through an Assistance Deputy Minister. While the Secretariat, both through its proximity and its context in organization structure, may appear to be open to influence by the Ministry, the execution of the Board's powers, its decisions and the independence of External Expert Panels remain fully arm's length features of the review and recommendation process. In fact and in practice, the Ministry has shown no inclination to influence the Board either directly or indirectly through its Secretariat. In truth, the value of PEQAB to the Minister/Ministry is to ensure that decisions about the quality of the postsecondary education are not, and are not seen to be, politically influenced, and the Ministry has not shown any inclination to undermine that value. Even if some subsequent Minister did have such an inclination, the Secretariat would provide very poor leverage with which to exercise influence over Board decisions.

PEQAB's Processes

PEQAB is an arms-length, independent and autonomous government agency. The Board's decision-making and recommendations, both formally and in practice, are based solely on the quality of the review under consideration as articulated by independent panels of experts against pre-established standards and guidelines. Specifically, the Board's recommendation is based on

- the applicant's submission
- the findings of the expert panel appointed by the Board to assess referrals
- the applicant's response to the panel report
- the Board's assessment of the information and
- any commitments made by the applicant during the review

As to third party influence on Board members, such as from stakeholders: members of the Board are bound by to the Board's *Conflict of Interest Policy* (see Appendix 18). In accordance and as a standing agenda item for Board meetings, members declare potential conflicts of interest. When potential conflicts are identified, members abstain from voting and physically remove themselves from the meeting until a motion has been passed concerning the relevant item.

3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Standard

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyze the general findings of their external quality assurance activities.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

PEQAB regularly publishes reports that describe and analyze the general findings of its external quality assurance activities. The most relevant and annually recurring reports are PEQAB's *Annual Reports* and "Annual" and "Perennial Goal" sections within that *Report*, along with the agency's updated *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines*. In addition, PEQAB has, in a few instances, analyzed specific findings of its external quality assurance activities (e.g. when PEQAB analysed the findings from its 2010-2013 college degree program renewal reviews). In addition, PEQAB recently expanded its data collection for all applications referred to PEQAB.

The following provides some detail about these examples of compliance with this standard.

Annual Reports and Annual and Perennial Goals

As described in Section 7 (pp. 41-42), PEQAB has published an *Annual Report* for each fiscal year since its creation in 2001. Between 2001 and 2014 the general findings of the Board's external quality assurance activities were reported. Beginning in 2015-16, the Board's external quality assurance activities have been supplemented with the articulation of annual and perennial goals. Articulating the Board's goals provides a basis to continually monitor and improve practical aspects of quality assurance and serves as a reference point for accountability and progress in subsequent *Annual Reports*. Annual reporting since 2015/16 has also included in-year accomplishments and results of PEQAB's Client Satisfaction Surveys.

Annual Updates to *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines*

As described in Section 7 (p. 42), the Board's *Handbooks* and *Submission Guidelines* are updated annually, along with a corresponding *Record of Change*, which provides an annual summary of improvements based on feedback from the External Expert Panels and applicants as well as ongoing internal reflections and research.

Analysis of Findings from 2010-2013 College Degree Program Renewals

In 2010, the Board introduced new *Submission Guidelines* for Ontario Colleges seeking the renewal of consent. These guidelines were established to assist the Board in its assessment of

- whether the program meets the Board's standards and benchmarks
- whether consent holders have honoured commitments made, if any, during the initial review
- whether the samples of student work reflect the anticipated outcomes of the program
- the degree to which the college assures its own internal quality and
- enrich the Board's recommendations to the Minister (e.g. by recommending longer consents for applicants who meet the Board's expectations at renewal, or greater oversight of those applicants who do not).

As a result of the analysis of the findings from these renewal reviews the Board adopted the following new *Principles for Varying Lengths of Consent Renewals*

Five-year consents are to be recommended

- when conditions or outstanding issues are identified, particularly if they are related to the Board's Degree Level, Program Content and/or Capacity to Deliver standards, but when the Board finds that the institution has the capacity to meet these conditions and/or address these issues, and/or
- when, despite the absence of any shortcomings in meeting the Board's standards,
 - an institution does not have a proven track record of honouring commitments and/or of ensuring its internal quality assurance, and/or
 - when a program has undergone significant changes, either during the tenure of its consent or during the renewal review process.

Seven-year consents are to be recommended

- when there are some program strengths and no or only minor weaknesses, typically not related to the Board's Degree Level, Program Content and/or Capacity to Deliver standards, are identified and/or
- when a program has many strengths but some shortcomings in meeting the Board's Program Evaluation standard and/or
- when a program only needs to meet requirements for relevant regulatory bodies (e.g. accreditation criteria) and

- when, generally, no conditions are attached.

Unlimited consents with a “lighter touch” audit process to be developed and approved by the Board are to be recommended for programs

- with many strengths, no major weaknesses, and no minor weakness related to the Board’s Degree Level, Program Content, Capacity to Deliver and/or Program Evaluation standards, and
- that are offered by institutions that
 - have demonstrated mature policies and practices for quality assessment and improvement
 - have a record of honouring commitments and
 - have at least undergone one successful renewal.

New Expanded Data Collection

PEQAB initiated an expanded data collection exercise for all applications referred to it from January 2016. This process identifies any minor or major weaknesses an application may have during the review process. The commitments made and/or the weaknesses addressed by the institutions are also identified. Lastly, the Board recommendation made and any conditions of consent are listed for each application. The findings from this data collection will help institutions address these weaknesses in their current and future applications. The data will also help PEQAB identify areas of consistent challenge that institutions may have so that these issues can be avoided in future submissions (see Appendix 21).

3.5 RESOURCES

Standard

Agencies should have adequate and appropriate resources, both human and financial, to carry out their work.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

The PEQAB Branch has six Full Time Equivalent positions (FTEs) assigned. Currently all six are filled with full time employees. In our current Other Direct Operating Expenses (ODOE) budget approximately \$650,600 for salary and benefits has been approved by the Management Board of Cabinet, for fiscal year 2016-17.

In addition to this FTE count and included in this budget allocation, the Branch is allowed to hire summer students under the Summer Student Employment Office program, in which we have participated in the past two years.

The use of temporary placement agencies is allowed through the vendor of record list that is supplied by the Ministry of Government Services. When the need arises for specialized areas of expertise or specific work projects, temporary agencies are utilized. These costs are also absorbed in the salary allocations.

The Branch has a total ODOE of \$710,000 for this fiscal year. Resources for the Board’s travel expenses and per diems, staff travel, training, conference fees, office equipment and publications are covered in this ODOE total.

All expenses associated with reviews are managed through a separate cost centre within PEQAB's budget and these are fully reimbursed by the institutions.

Historically, PEQAB has underspent its budget for many years and is in no way constrained by its current financial arrangements with the Province.

3.6 INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Standard

Agencies should have in place processes for internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of their activities.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

PEQAB's internal quality assurance system is detailed in Section 7 (pp. 35-42).

The Board instituted and follows an *Internal Quality Assurance Policy* (IQAP) which outlines the Board's commitment to quality and the general framework for work on assuring and improving the quality of the Board's activities, processes and procedures. The main features of PEQAB's IQAP are

- a Board Member Code of Conduct which establishes rules of conduct that govern the professional and ethical responsibilities of Board members,
- a PEQAB Assessor Code of Conduct which establishes rules of conduct that govern the professional and ethical responsibilities of organization reviewers, quality assessor's and any other expert assessors appointed by the Board,
- Conflict of Interest Policies for Board members and all external experts who participate in the Board's quality assurance processes,
- internal feedback and reflection mechanisms to collect and track feedback from the Board and its Secretariat and to respond to internal recommendations for improvement,
- a procedure for reporting survey findings and stakeholder feedback, and for following up the results with necessary actions,
- the ongoing monitoring of the degree and quality assurance environment to ensure its criteria are in accordance with educational standards recognized in Ontario and other jurisdictions,
- annual goals unique to each reporting year and perennial goals repeated year-to-year, including performance benchmarks,
- participation in Canadian and international quality assurance, conferences, and activities,
- external feedback mechanism to collect and track feedback from stakeholders for future development and further improvement of PEQAB standards and processes,
- a comprehensive internal review of PEQAB activities and criteria combined with an external review of the quality of the Board's operation and its compliance with international best practice at least every five to seven years.

3.7 CYCLICAL EXTERNAL REVIEW OF AGENCIES

Standard

Agencies should undergo an external review at least once every five years in order to demonstrate their compliance with the ESG.

PEQAB COMPLIANCE

PEQAB's internal quality assurance policy spells out the following commitments

- A comprehensive internal review of its activities, based on internationally recognized best practice, conducted at least every seven years addressing at least the Board's accountability; transparency; resources; legislative mandate; relationship with postsecondary institutions; requirements for institutional/program performance and institutional self-evaluation and reporting; review of institutions; and collaboration with other quality assurance agencies.
- An external review of the quality of the Board's operation and its compliance with international best practice at least every seven years.

In January 2009, PEQAB initiated an internal review of all aspects of its first seven years of operation followed by an external review. PEQAB was the first Canadian quality assurance agency in post-secondary education to undertake such a review. The internal review included

- audits of completed applications with a view to assessing the consistency and efficiency of the application of the Board's criteria and procedures;
- a comparative analysis of all of the Board's criteria and processes with those of other agencies in Canada and other jurisdictions with a view to ensuring its
 - criteria reflect recognized standards; and
 - procedures are streamlined to ensure efficiency while meeting its mandate to assure the quality of degree programs and institutions;
- consultation of stakeholders on all aspects Board and Secretariat operations and criteria.

In 2011, an external panel representing provincial, national and international expertise evaluated the extent to which the Board fulfills its legislative mandate and follows best practices as assessed against the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) *Guidelines for Good Practice*. The external review was conducted over a four-month period from December, 2010, to March, 2011. The review was completed in March 2011 and the following documents were published on the PEQAB website (<http://PEQAB.ca/PEQABquality.html>).

- Self-Study Report
- Report on Self-Study Recommendations
- External Review Report

Acknowledging that it is internationally regarded as good practice to undertake an external review of activities every five years, PEQAB has begun its internal and external review process in September of 2016 just over five years after the completion of the first external review. The 2016 Terms of Reference for the PEQAB Self-Study and the external review of PEQAB can both be found in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. PEQAB will continue undertake a Self-Study of its operations to evaluate the extent to which the Board complies with the ESG and fulfills its legislative mandate and follows best practices. The Board also intends to submit itself to an external review against the ESG every five years and will update its Internal Quality Assurance Policy accordingly.

10

Recommendations and main findings from the previous review and PEQAB’s resulting follow-up

To ensure the rigor and transparency of its criteria and processes PEQAB undertook an internal review of all aspects of its operations during its first seven years. This Self-Study examined the transparency, efficiency and the consistency of the Board’s procedures, and currency of its criteria. In 2011, the external review report presented the following recommendations and main findings:

Recommendations and Main Findings	How PEQAB has addressed this
Governance	
<p>1 The Panel suggests that the vision statement might be improved were it not to link “inspiring excellence” solely through exercising “leadership.” That is, in Ontario the future of effective higher education quality assurance might demand as much effective partnering and collaboration as it does leading. But in drawing up its own hallmarks of excellence, the Board has defined a culture of respectful regulation that bodes well for its contributions to the Ministry and to higher education in Ontario.</p> <p>2 The panel understands that a legislative goal of PSECE was to create an agency at “arm’s length” from the political aspects of consent. At various points in the governance of the agency, that distance could be abridged either by the people who sit in Ministry or the people who sit on the Board. But it appears that the intent has been honored in practice. However, it may well become important that constituents have a clearer sense of who is responsible for what and when in the multi-stage consent approval process. Specifically, it would be particularly useful for PEQAB to inform the institution, if not the public at large, when PEQAB has completed its portion of the process and the recommendation it is making.</p>	<p>The Board and Secretariat participated in a facilitated workshop in February 2016 to develop a new statement of PEQAB’s Vision. The following was adopted: <i>A stronger Ontario through high quality postsecondary student learning outcomes.</i></p> <p>In many of its PEQAB’s public documents (i.e. <i>Handbooks, Submission Guidelines</i>, and website) responsibilities in the multi-stage consent approval process are clearly identified. As internal operational policy, applicants are informed by Secretariat staff as soon as a referral by the Minister has been made, once a panel of reviewers has been assigned to review an application and when the Board has made a recommendation. Once the Board has made a recommendation, applicants are also provided with contact details for Ministry staff in the Universities Unit who manage the post-consent process.</p>
Resources	
<p>3 The Ministry controls the space allocated to PEQAB and, quite honestly, PEQAB is almost invisible to someone who might walk the 23rd floor of the Mowat Block where it is currently housed. It does not have full control over any sizable meeting space although all of its Board meetings and the conferences with institutions for the Organization Review Panel process are held in very adequate conference space on the 23rd floor. PEQAB does not appear to have much say in some basic resource decisions, especially those related to officing. Moreover, protection of privacy of its documents as well as deliberations is very inadequate for an agency intended to be arms-length. The credibility of an agency among stakeholders hinges in part on an identifiable and professional setting for the agency.</p> <p>4 The Panel’s concerns about physical space are less than its concern about the ability of the Secretariat to support PEQAB over time.</p>	<p>The Ministry and PEQAB agreed that the agency should be located in an identifiable and professional setting appropriate for an arms-length agency. Since renovations on the 23rd floor of Mowat Block, PEQAB has a clearly identifiable and distinct office space.</p> <p>PEQAB’s current process of records retention follows the Government of Ontario’s <i>Records and Information Management</i> directive and the PEQAB Secretariat is active in and fully compliant with Records & Information Management Initiative (RIM). It also has its own Record Series, as approved by the Ontario Archivist and its digital records reside on servers with appropriate rights and protections.</p> <p>a. In consultation with the Ministry, PEQAB addressed this recommendation by ensuring that the Secretariat leadership (Chief Executive) position is attractive to the people with the unique skills required to perform the</p>

- a. The first issue is the nature of the leadership of the Secretariat. This agency provides a very critical interface between the interests of higher education public policy makers and the long-standing cultures of colleges and universities. To date the Ministry has been wise in choosing leaders for the Secretariat who understand and bridge these two related but very different worlds. And PEQAB's success to date is in large part because those leaders have provided sensitive, visionary leadership. But in titling and pay, the Ministry is possibly and quite inadvertently making that leadership position unattractive to the very people it will need to attract in the future.
- b. The rest of the current staff, while marked by remarkable energy, commitment, and productivity lacks any significant experience in higher education. Either a different strategy of hiring or more generous support for professional development will be necessary to ensure the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of the Secretariat. In any long-term plan perhaps both will be required.

duties. In particular, the position of manager of PEQAB was changed to CEO/Director of PEQAB and the job description was changed to the current one to correctly reflect the role of the CEO and to attract appropriately qualified candidates to the position.

- b. In consultation with the Ministry, PEQAB addressed this recommendation by implementing a revised hiring strategy. Currently, two of the three Senior Analyst positions within the Secretariat are staffed with individuals who hold PhDs; the third position is staffed by an individual with an MPPA and extensive (and global) experience in higher education quality assurance.

Quality Assurance

5 The Panel notes that several of the people it interviewed did not know much about the 2009 Self-Study and its recommendations. An effective internal quality assurance program always includes effective strategies to communicate to stakeholders what the agency is learning about its work and how it is translating that learning into policies, procedures, and practices. Perhaps the PEQAB Annual Report, already an excellent document, can be used for these purposes, but as the Panel suggests below, PEQAB should consider ways to be more proactive in its communication strategies.

PEQAB actively and regularly interacts with the College Degree Granting and Operating Group (CDOG), the Private and Out of Province Degree Operating Group (POPDOG), and other stakeholders, including the Ministry and other quality assurance agencies' across Canada on issues of mutual interest.

This Self-Study and External Review will be shared with each of these stakeholders.

Public Information

6 Although the website lacks the kind of search possibilities that someone working on a research project might desire, it is a rich resource to institutions new to the PEQAB process, institutions wishing to compare ministerial response to similar kinds of programs, and to any who simply want to know more about the kinds of quality issues addressed in the process.

PEQAB's website has been updated and modified over time to provide more information to potential applicants, current consent holders and the public. The website now contains a search function for all current and past applications. In addition, it includes detailed information on the consent process, past/current consents and applications under review. The Board's website also contains a detailed Frequently Asked Questions section and links to many of PEQAB's documents, including Annual Reports.

7 Transparency suffers when the listing of applications raises more questions than it answers. For example, there are currently several applications for which the time for third party comment is long past, and within the application documents one can find evidence that the Minister's decision is past due. The Panel learned that in almost all of those situations, PEQAB has actually done its review and forwarded its recommendation. But the full documentation of a process is only posted at its conclusion. For these lengthy unfinished processes, the website simply fails to inform anyone very adequately of

In the Secretariat's experience, stakeholders with questions concerning a specific (past or current) consent contact the office directly, either through a call or email.

As the panel noted, there are some applications for which PEQAB has long concluded its review and forwarded its recommendation but the Minister's final decision is still outstanding. While the website does not inform about the state of such applications they are *de facto* still under review. PEQAB either answers directly or routinely forwards any inquires about such apparently long-standing applications to Ministry staff who will be in the position to comment on the status.

the state of affairs.

8 The Panel suggests that PEQAB may wish to be more proactive in how it interacts with the publics it serves. Although it appears that someone from the agency often participates in programs sponsored by other organizations, PEQAB does not appear to set up its own conferences or training sessions. The Panel suggests that PEQAB might want to study the cost-benefit ratio of supporting more programming. Moreover, the Panel heard several stories about institutional and student confusion over the meaning of ministerial consent, particularly about the comparability of degrees among institutions in Ontario. PEQAB has relied on institutions to explain this; perhaps it should strengthen its FAQ's on the website to be more useful to consumers (students, parents, and employers) in understanding the unique issues of comparability.

After receipt of the 2011 external review report, PEQAB updated the FAQ's on its website to improve useful of the section to consumers (students, parents, and employers). In addition, PEQAB added to its website a separate section addressing the comparability of degrees among institutions in Ontario.

Secretariat staff invest considerable amount of time orienting panel members, and guiding applicants and potential applicants through the review process. Rather than offering workshops or training for larger groups of stakeholders, PEQAB will typically meet with individual stakeholders to discussion concerns, questions or other matters that may be very specific to a particular institution, delegation or group of assessors. In addition, PEQAB chairs monthly teleconference with the leadership of other Ontario quality assurance agencies, and has been a co-sponsor and member of the planning committee for the last two Ontario conferences on Learning Outcomes (held in 2014 and 2016).

Relationships with Institutions

9 It seems likely that PEQAB, the Ministry, and, perhaps, the Legislature will need to review the efficacy of policy and existing required processes to assure that they do not calcify into unnecessary bureaucratic approaches for PEQAB's quality review. Most institutions claimed that their independence in self-governance was recognized and honored, but some suggested that without some modifications, the processes appropriate for 2002 would become unduly duplicative and restrictive to institutions of 2012.

PEQAB has implemented several operational and policy-based strategies to reduce the administrative burden for applicants applying for consent. For example, institutional policies are initially reviewed but not re-reviewed upon renewal unless there have been significant change. Breadth programming is also reviewed on a cyclical basis, and not upon every renewal. The Board also has an approved "unlimited consent" policy for applicants whose programs have numerous strengths and no minor or major weaknesses. Institutions with unlimited consent would undergo a light-touch audit only. In addition, PEQAB is currently developing criteria and processes toward an institutional quality audit-only approach.

10 More institutional involvement is especially important at this time because the basis of the quality standards for PEQAB is the existing understanding of academic standards in Ontario. Effective continuous quality improvement includes periodic comprehensive review of the appropriateness of quality standards (PEQAB's Criteria), and such review and subsequent revision should include input from institutions and programs.

Proposed modifications to PEQAB's standards, benchmarks and processes are routinely discussed with stakeholders for purposes of consultation and feedback. The two most relevant groups are CDOG and POPDOG. PEQAB's experience is that this approach is not only welcomed among stakeholders but also one that has strengthened sector wide relations and this is reflected in the Survey feedback from stakeholders.

Requirements for Institutional/Program Performance

11 PEQAB established a set of organization standards and benchmarks that appear to have been well received by institutions, although in meeting them institutions submit very significant amounts of paper. And resubmission every five years will become unnecessarily burdensome.

PEQAB has addressed the "resubmission every 5 years issue" in three ways:

- Recommending renewal periods of seven years for renewals with no major weaknesses (2014)
- Recommending "Light Touch Audit" only for renewals with no major weaknesses from institutions with strong track records (2015)
- Developing Institutional Audits Only for Colleges mature in degree-offering (In process 206-17)

12 Private institutions believe that their consent decisions are held up by a post-PEQAB MTCU review of documents also related to institutional integrity and stability.

N.A to PEQAB.

13 There is some concern from institutions that existing standards are over-weighted toward the academic culture

PEQAB's benchmark requires that "at least 50% of the students' experience in the professional or main field of

of research universities, particularly in defining requirements for faculty credentials.

study is in courses taught by a faculty member holding the terminal academic credential in the field or in a closely related field/discipline". PEQAB has added a footnote to help clarify how this percentage can be calculated: "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."

PEQAB has further defined "faculty scholarship" at the college level for assessment purposes. Faculty scholarship now broadly includes

- 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.

Institutional Self-Evaluation and Reporting

14 PEQAB's current processes consist less of self-study than completing documentation of compliance with criteria and benchmarks. Perhaps the new application for renewal of consent will follow the more traditional patterns of self-study, but institutions still report that the process is unduly bureaucratic in its approach. To date PEQAB's expectations of institutional preparation and assessors' completion of reports smack much more of compliance than judgments based on institutional self-reflection.

Many of PEQAB's standards and benchmarks are compliance driven (i.e. they assess how well an institution or program meets defined standards). However, PEQAB's standards for the renewal of programs (and the organization re-evaluation of private applicants at any degree program renewal) now rely primarily upon self-studies produced by applicants in accordance with PEQAB standards and the review of samples of students work. These self-studies encourage the development of a culture of quality assurance within an institution and institutional growth and learning. The Self-Study Report is a central aspect of each of the more recent initiatives: the Light Touch Program Audit and the Institutional Audit-Only processes.

15 PEQAB has yet to formalize a way to tap the potential for shared learning among institutions. Workshops for several institutions, for example, might be beneficial. Using effective leaders from institutions to “share the story” of success and growth through PEQAB’s processes might also be beneficial for all who engage in those processes.

16 PEQAB apparently does not have a very robust system of on-going communication. For example, in the electronic documents on the website changes are not black lined or highlighted in any other manner that would call attention to an important change. This publication of information seems to rely too much on the initiative of PEQAB’s stakeholders to go to the website and then determine if there are any changes germane to their status or interests.

Evaluation of Institution and/or Program

17 The Assessors themselves seemed rather disconnected when it comes to evaluation of their work. That is, they accepted an invitation and they did the review and filed a report but they received no feedback on their efforts. Unless they went to the PEQAB website to discover MTCU action, they did not know the ultimate result of their work. This is changing, the Expert Panel was told. But the fact is that PEQAB has not made much of the opportunity to strengthen its Assessors individually or collectively. PEQAB has been using Assessors long enough that it has a competent and experienced pool that can contribute to the on-going development of Assessors; right now that pool is a largely untapped resource to the agency.

18 One part of the evaluation process not well understood by Assessors and institutions is the integration into it of invited external third party comment. While the Secretariat seems clear on how this is accomplished, participants in the process are somewhat confused. Without much effort, PEQAB can rectify this situation.

Independence of Decisions

19 The leaders of the Board and Secretariat have labored to maintain the clear line of demarcation between the broader public policy concerns of MTCU and the specific responsibilities of PEQAB. Structurally there are several vulnerable points to this separation. For example, the Board Chair meets directly with the Minister, and the Manager/CE of the Secretariat has dual accountability that includes reporting to MTCU. The Panel believes that there

CDOG represents all Ontario Colleges currently offering degree level programming quality assured by PEQAB. For many years, the Secretariat has had a standing participation at CDOG meetings. In addition, under the leadership the Secretariat, the POPDOG was established in 2016. POPDOG is a group analogous to CDOG comprising private and out-of-province degree providers in Ontario. As with CDOG, the Secretariat has regularly participated in POPDOG meetings. Participation in both meetings is consultative and has resulted in (formal and informal) institutional sharing of best practices in areas related to PEQAB’s standards and managing the application consent process. PEQAB’s co-sponsorship of the Learning Outcomes Symposia in 2014 and 2016 featured extensive participation by the Colleges which PEQAB quality-assures and has also served the sharing of learning among them.

PEQAB annually updates and then publishes a *Record of Change*. The *Record of Change* clearly identifies any modifications to the Board’s standards and benchmarks. Additionally, applicants are made aware of changes (and potential changes) through ongoing consultation through CDOG and POPDOG.

As an operational policy, Senior Policy Advisors within the Secretariat now inform panels of the Minister’s decision once the Minister’s letter of consent has been delivered to the institution. In addition, PEQAB has several standing committees made up of seasoned assessors with whom PEQAB works frequently. In assembling review panels, the PEQAB Secretariat also strives to reappoint assessors previously involved in PEQAB reviews. These experienced assessors then often fulfill the role of the panel chair and mentor assessors new to the PEQAB process. However, as PEQAB receives degree applications for very diverse fields of study, often including niche and emerging areas, the Board is required to constantly broaden its pool of assessors, and often cannot rely on what the external panel calls the “experienced pool”. Surveys of assessors, as reported in the Annual Report, reveal a very high level of satisfaction with PEQAB.

PEQAB has implemented operational and administrative procedures for managing public comments related to applications. Comments bearing on the assessment of the application against the Board’s criteria are transmitted to the quality assessors and applicant for consideration and this is now clearly described on the present PEQAB website under Public Comment.

a. Ministry processes in the regard have changed. PEQAB now routinely recommends conditions on applications for ministerial consent. These conditions are monitored by the Universities Unit in the Postsecondary Education Division. In cases where conditions are implemented, applicant institutions are required to submit evidence that the conditions have been satisfied. If the conditions relate to program quality, the applicants “Report on

might be a couple of significant challenges to this state of affairs.

- a. But PEQAB is confronting several situations in which it wants to make its recommendation conditional or in which it would make a stronger positive recommendation if it knew that promised implementation steps could be monitored. MTCU has no formal way to implement follow-up in either situation. Sometimes recommendations that are less than wholeheartedly positive, just sit with no action. Current policy and practice fail to provide ways for either PEQAB or the Minister to implement a useful program of follow up. If the Minister prefers recommendations that are either up or down, MTCU may wish to modify the PEQAB processes to allow for some follow-up at that level in the process, or in the granting of consent the Minister might choose to include follow up reporting to PEQAB.
- b. The Panel heard that several requests for consent had entered a “black hole.” That is, although the institution has no official information regarding PEQAB’s action on the request, it has concluded that a recommendation is being processed somewhere in MTCU. Unfortunately, the extended nature of some decisions is causing some observers of the process and several of the participants in it to question the independence of PEQAB.

Conditions of Consent” or “Progress Report” is submitted to PEQAB for evaluation.

- b. As operational policy, Senior Policy Advisors notify applicants when (i) an application has been referred to the Board; and (ii) when the Board has made a recommendation. When the Board has made a recommendation, applicants are provided with the contact details of the Manager in the Universities Unit who manage the post-PEQAB review process. (See also response under 7).

Appeals

20 PEQAB might propose that it be allowed to share a negative recommendation so an institution would have the opportunity to withdraw the request or revise its materials for another Board review.

PEQAB cannot disclose the Board’s recommendations to applicants until after the Minister has communicated his/her final decision on consent. However, the Universities Unit now provides applicants with the opportunity to withdraw their submission, if facing a negative recommendation.

Collaboration

21 Within the Canadian scene, the head of the Secretariat is a member of the Canadian Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) quality assurance subcommittee and communicates monthly with leaders of other Canadian provincial quality assurance agencies (Canadian Quality Assurance Network). It is of concern to the Panel that this important task—provincial and national—appears not to be formalized in legislation and/or ministerial directive in Ontario. Moreover, the funds to underwrite it, particularly those related to travel, are either lacking or out of the agency’s direct control. It is important that the contributions of this young agency in these vital endeavors be understood and supported in the future. This calls for clearer delegation of responsibility underwritten with funding, but in the meantime it calls for doing nothing that undercuts the current credibility of the agency in the eyes of the academy and the public policy makers in Ontario and across Canada.

CMEC is no longer an active national forum. However, the Canadian Quality Assurance Network subcommittee formed while CMEC was active still functions informally on a volunteer basis and the PEQAB Director chairs monthly teleconferences with the executive leads of other Canadian provincial quality assurance agencies.

Transnational/Cross-Border Higher Education

22 Lack of control over its travel budget has greatly limited the agency’s capacity to be present at important and useful international meetings and conferences.

PEQAB has a generous travel budget but requires Ministry approval for any travel. The panel is referring to a few outlier examples that lie far in the past. In the past few years the PEQAB CEO and Secretariat staff have had no problems with receiving approval to travel if relevant to PEQAB’s work, as a result, has participated in numerous international

23 Deference to some other external quality assurance body—even Canadian—probably should not be unexamined, but lacking any agreed-upon hallmarks of practice in quality assurance it is difficult to determine a protocol on how to include in the PEQAB process the actions of other quality assurance bodies. Nonetheless, this is one area where PEQAB and MTCU should work together to find a common-sense solution.

meetings, conferences and workshops.

In principle and in practice, PEQAB accepts and works with institutions based in other jurisdictions on the recognition of their quality assured degrees for students in Ontario. In such cases, PEQAB typically performs a gap analysis identifying any differences in quality assurance standards between its own standards and those the applicant was assessed against. PEQAB then reviews (the organization or the proposed program) only against those elements not previously reviewed by the other QA agency. This process ensures that, in areas of overlap, no duplication occurs. It also warrants that, in areas where Ontario’s standards are not addressed, an assessment occurs.

Formal recognition of quality assurance processes interjurisdictionally remains an outstanding issue and one that PEQAB has actively worked and continues to work to address.

11

Current challenges and areas for future development

PEQAB Time Lines and Light Touch Assessments

PEQAB's principal challenge, as perceived by its stakeholder institutions—particularly those already offering many degrees, the Ministry—particularly the Deputy Minister, and to some extent by PEQAB itself is that PEQAB's current full review processes, in at least in some cases, absorb amounts of time, energy and other resources which are disproportionate to any real risk of sub-standard degrees otherwise being offered in Ontario.

In response, recently PEQAB has given close attention to its time-lines, and it has been able to point out, in its *Annual Reports* and elsewhere, that if applicant institutions

- prepare full and well organized submissions
- are able to agree to site visit timing and
- do not require more than 20 days to respond to Assessor Reports

(i.e. are not “outliers”), then PEQAB can deliver quality assurance, from Ministry referral to recommendation to the Minister, on average in seven months. See Appendix 12, PEQAB *Annual Report* 2015-16. However, three things remain true about the above. First, the seven months leaves out of the account the time taken on the “front” end in preparing the submission, having an initial policy review completed at the Ministry and getting the referral to PEQAB, as well as time taken on the “back” end in the final policy review and getting letters of intent and consent from the Minister. The total time expended, from the point of view of the applicant institution, is much greater. Secondly, the greatest hurdle in better time efficiency during the PEQAB process *per se* is in arranging the site visit, and it is largely not further addressable. All parties want the site visits when students are available and this precludes large chunks of time and thereby extends the (full) review process. So, for instance, any referral received after March of any year is very unlikely to see a site visit prior to the following October. Similarly the month of December is largely lost to site visiting. So, thirdly, and as a result, there are numerous official “outliers” in the PEQAB calculation above.

It is also true that particularly for Ontario Colleges, which are required by legislation only to offer “applied” degrees and which are otherwise required to demonstrate that their credentials are attuned to the labour market, the time lag between identifying a labour market need and the ability to actually offer a degree to meet the need is always “years”—by which time the need may well have changed and the opportunity have been lost.

PEQAB's last attempt to address this, in 2015, has not proven particularly practicable. PEQAB does have a “Light Touch” Audit process which both reduces the amount of material that the institution has to provide and eliminates the need for the site visit. However, its application is limited, as the process applies—as do all of PEQAB's current processes—only at the level of the particular degree program. See <http://www.peqab.ca/Publications/Handbooks%20Guidelines/SubmissionGuidelinesCAATsAudit2016.pdf>

As a fuller response to the challenge, PEQAB currently has before its Board a proposal for an **Institution Audit-Only Process for College Degrees**. The first of the main features of this process is an initial qualifying standard: Five degree programs, having been recommended by PEQAB for renewal of consent, followed by a thorough review of the College's internal Quality Management System (QMS) for degrees. Once the College has "passed" this standard, it would only be required to submit, directly to PEQAB its self-study and some related deliverables for all on the degrees it offers, for renewal of consent. For a detailed outline of this initiative see Appendix 22, *PEQAB Institutional Quality Audit-Only Process for College Degrees*. The essence of this initiative is to identify Colleges which are experienced and "mature" in offering degrees to acknowledge with a simplified and more efficient process the relative lack of risk to the quality of those degrees.

Transparency of PEQAB External Expert Panel Reports

As discussed earlier, PEQAB does not publish External Expert Panel Reports; however, PEQAB does publish on its website its (brief) formal recommendation to the Minister and any recommended conditions of consent, after the Minister has made a decision. Recently (September 2016) the PEQAB website has also noted that "completed [External Expert] Panel Reports may be publicly requested under the Government of Ontario's *Freedom of Information and Privacy Protection Act*," (FIPPA).

In addition, PEQAB does produce to accompany its (public) formal recommendation to the Minister, a Final Report—formerly called a "Background Report" with a very full summary of the assessors' findings and the applicant institution's responses, including major and minor weaknesses—as well as strengths of the program. Prior to 2013, this Background Report was conceived as strictly confidential to the Minister. However, with the advent in 2014 of a round of re-submissions by the Ministry to PEQAB of some degree programs not ready for consent renewal, PEQAB and the Ministry agreed that all PEQAB Background Reports should be written with both the Ministry and the applicant institution in mind as potential "audiences." This change meant that the opportunities for improvement and details of conditions could be clearly documented and communicated for the applicant institution to take into account in its re-submission to PEQAB. To date, the Ministry has sometimes made Final Reports available to applicants, but not consistently. PEQAB has taken the position that its Final Reports are addressed to the Minister, and at the option of the Ministry, these can be shared with the applicant (or more widely), but PEQAB has not itself published these fuller Reports, only its brief formal recommendation to the Minister, on its website.

There are two other considerations to the current availability of PEQAB' External Expert Panel Reports. First, PEQAB's contracts with external experts contain clauses which, in effect, "warn" them that Panel Reports may be publicly accessible through FIPPA. Secondly, PEQAB has established with its principal regular applicants, the Ontario Colleges and others, an understanding that when External Expert Panel Reports are returned to the applicant institution for response, prior to Board consideration, PEQAB's expectation is that these will be shared within the institution as widely as possible, so as to support a fully informed response to PEQAB. This internal sharing is expected to include all faculty concerned with the program, and applicant institutions are not to make the argument, as a means of denying relevant faculty access, that PEQAB or the Ministry requires these Reports to be "confidential."

Another alternative which PEQAB considered at its January 31, 2017 Board meeting (most recent, as of this writing) is to establish a PEQAB policy which says that institutions, as a best practice, should post External Expert Panel Reports on their own websites. This would create some impetus in the direction of greater transparency, and it could be discussed as a first step with CDOG at its next meeting.

Implementation could take the form of a revision to all *PEQAB Handbooks* to take effect August 1, 2017. The introductory section in each Handbook which currently says

“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.”

could be expanded with a sentence along the lines of the following:

“As a best practice, on gaining consent, institutions are encouraged to post external expert panel reports and their responses in full in an appropriate section of their websites.”

The PEQAB Secretariat will discuss options for greater transparency of External Expert Panel reports at its next meeting with CDOG in March 2017.

ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

PEQAB’s principal approach to assessing whether students have achieved the learning outcomes dictated by the Ontario Qualifications Framework (OQF) remains the process outlined as a benchmark to the Degree Level Standard in our *Handbooks*. In summary, we ask the assessor to re-evaluate the work of students submitted in the terminal stages (third and fourth year) of the degree program under review, and in preparation for that we ask the applicant institution to make provide a selection of that work, organized in three “piles”: minimally acceptable, average, and exemplary work from the program. In 2015, and reflected in the 2015-16 *Submission Guidelines*, PEQAB formalized the procedures for assembling that work, see Appendix A in

<http://www.peqab.ca/Publications/Handbooks%20Guidelines/SubmissionGuidelinesPublicRenew2016.pdf>

PEQAB has also been interested in the prospect of incorporating large scale standardized tests of student learning outcomes and has done some work with a number of such tests, including CLA+, ETS HEIghthen, particularly as indications of the critical thinking, problem-solving and communication competencies, detailed in the OQF. One context in which such standardized tests are actively under consideration is in PEQAB’s proposal for an Institutional Quality Audit-Only Process: College Degrees (see Appendix 22) referenced above, where “Standardized tests of critical thinking, problem-solving and communications skills of students graduating from the program” are offered as alternatives and CLA+ and ETS HEIghthen are cited as examples.

ABORIGINAL INSTITUTES

Since the 1980s, some of Canada’s First Nations have been offering various kinds of post-secondary training to their communities. There are nine such Institutes in Ontario. Most of this training has been (and is) at the sub –degree level, and since PEQAB’s mandate is quality assurance of postsecondary degrees, PEQAB has not been involved. Also, typically the Aboriginal Institute programs proceed in partnership with Ontario colleges or universities, so their quality assurance has been handled under the auspices of either the Ontario Colleges Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS) or the Council of Ontario Universities (COU’s Quality Council).

In 2015 one such institute, Six Nations, applied to offer a degree, a Bachelor of Arts in Ogwehoweh Languages (Mohawk or Cayuga) and was referred to PEQAB for quality assurance. Six Nations underwent an Organization Review and subsequently a Program Review for this degree, received a

positive recommendation from PEQAB and ultimately consent to offer this degree from the Minister. Subsequently the Ministry has agreed to consider the Institutes' request that they be more formally incorporated into Ontario's postsecondary system, and it commissioned a report by consultant KTA to provide advice on a stand-alone policy for the Aboriginal Institutes.

PEQAB has been discussed by the Ministry and the Institutes as the means of quality assuring the credentials which may be offered by the Aboriginal Institutes. The Institutes' first ambition would have been to quality assure themselves; however, there now seems a general recognition on all sides that they are not ready to do that unassisted at this point. Also, Six Nations and PEQAB did work well together on the Ogwehoweh Languages degree. PEQAB has participated in two large meetings between Ministry officials, including the Minister, the Deputy and the Assistant Deputy Minister on one side and senior representatives of each of the Institutes on the other. Insofar as the credentials involved are degrees, PEQAB is well positioned to provide quality assurance through the standards and processes that it already has in place; however, a small proportion of the Aboriginal Institutes offerings are likely to be degrees. If as now seems strongly possible, the Ministry is going to ask PEQAB to develop standards and processes to quality assure the Aboriginal Institutes sub-degree credentials, then another area for PEQAB's future development will open up.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES

While Ontario students are the focus of PEQAB's work, it has been recognized that current PEQAB standards and procedures do not go far in promoting student engagement in quality assurance activities. Recognizing the importance of student participation, in 2016 two Senior Policy Advisors within the PEQAB Secretariat have initiated and are formally engaged a research project in partnership with faculty at Seneca College to explore how Canadian institutions and quality assurance agencies can support the involvement of students in program and institutional quality assurance activities. The research reviews literature and promising practices from around the world and surveys publicly funded higher education institutions across Canada in order to identify current policy and practice supporting student engagement. The research seeks to identify activity trends and policy models that support student engagement in Canadian postsecondary institutions and determine how PEQAB can support and encourage best practice in both internal and external quality assurance activities. Findings of this research are being disseminated through conference presentations, (i.e. INQAHE and the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education), and a possible publication. The report findings will be used to inform changes to quality assurance policies at Seneca College and PEQAB.