

Program Standards 101

Updated as of December 2025

What is a Program Standard?

- Program standards are ministry developed and apply to all similar programs of instruction offered by publicly funded colleges across the province.
- Program standards promote consistency in education/training outcomes across all public colleges, principally Ontario Colleges (and in some cases, career colleges, school boards and Indigenous Institutes).
 - Program standards provide the basis for curriculum development and influence the kinds of learning activities that program faculty design for students and how students are evaluated.
 - Students will have a clear indication of what they are expected to learn and demonstrate.
 - Program standards promote accountability for program quality.

Background

Program standards development initiated in 1993 with the following objectives:

1. More consistency to college programming across the province;
 2. Broader focus to college programs – including the essential employability skills and general education requirements to ensure graduates have skills to be flexible and to continue to learn and adapt;
 3. Public accountability for quality and relevance of college programs.
- There are 302 program standards (English and French) for 151 college programs that exist across several credential levels.
 - Program standards in English and French are reviewed/developed concurrently.*

*When no program is offered in French, only the English program standard is reviewed/developed and its translation in French will be available.

Program Standards

Do not....

- mandate curriculum

Do....

- offer minimum standards and guidelines for programs of instruction

Curriculum development..

- is the responsibility of each college in alignment with a program standard
- can exceed vocational standards and essential employability skills standards

Program Standards – Who Does What?

Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Branch (PEQAB)

What does PEQAB do?

- Responsibility for the development, review, approval and release of system-wide standards for programs of instruction at Ontario Colleges.

Postsecondary Education Programs Branch (PEPB) – Colleges Unit

What does the Colleges Unit do?

- Oversees the implementation of program standards, including the implementation timing, implementation reporting, and program standard appeals.

Ontario Colleges

What do colleges do?

- Ensure programs and program delivery are consistent with provincial standards and that essential skills and knowledge are relevant and appropriate to needs of students, graduates and employers.

Program Standards: 3 Components

1. Vocational Learning Outcomes – specific to program and consists of:

- Learning Outcome Statements – describes vocationally relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes
- Elements of Performance – defines and clarifies learning outcomes

2. Essential Employability Skills:

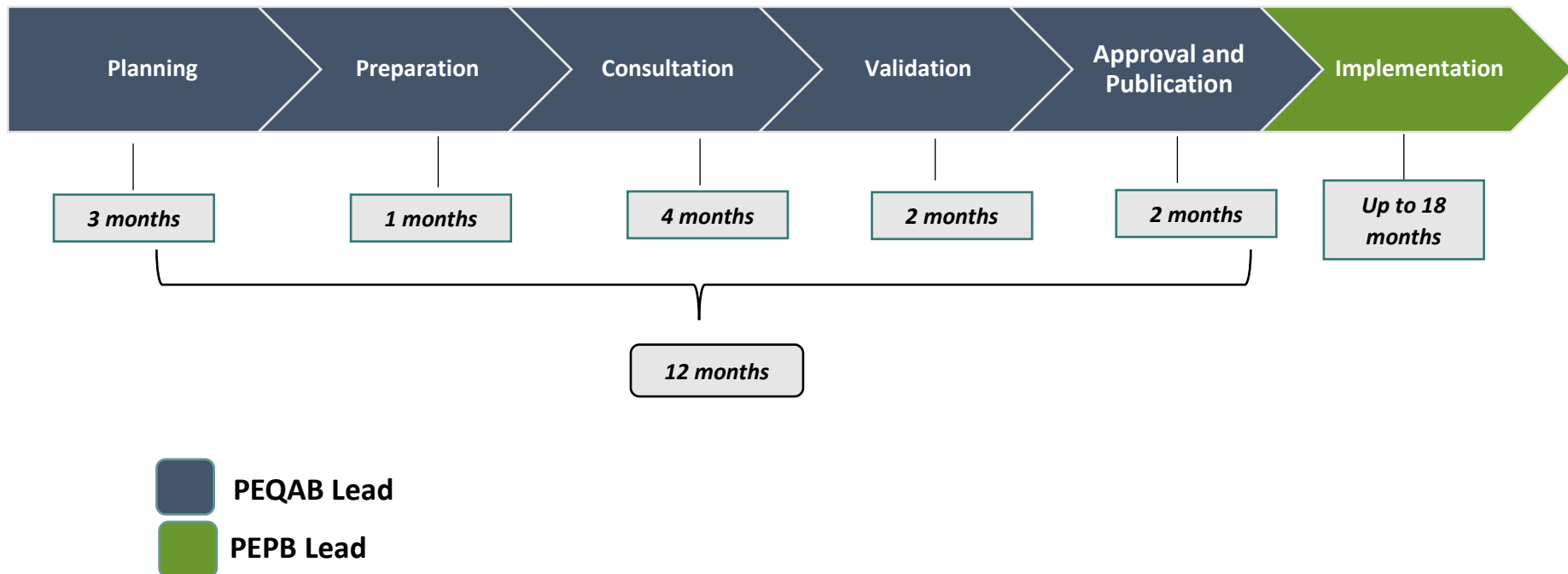
- common for all programs and necessary for personal and career success of graduates

3. General Education Requirements:

- learning outside vocational area that benefits personal growth, citizenship and working life

Note: During the yearly review/development of program standards, only the vocational learning outcomes which are specific to a program code are reviewed and/or developed. Essential Employability Skills and General Education Requirements are not reviewed as the standards which were developed in 2005 applies to all programs of instruction.

Program Standards Process



Overview of Program Standard Development Process – Planning

- The Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Branch identifies program standard clusters to be reviewed or developed as per requests received and consultation with the Colleges Unit, other Ministry's, and Colleges through their Vice-Presidents Academic. Other criteria includes:
 - Age of program standard
 - Regulatory changes in the field
 - Related standards being updated (e.g., national standards, professional/regulatory, Skilled Trades Ontario, etc.)
- Recruit and hire Project Officers.

Overview of Program Standard Development Process – Preparation

Some items PEQAB reviews:

- Approved Program Sequence (APS) table
- Student enrolment
- Contact with Colleges
- List of stakeholder groups

Overview of Program Standard Development Process – Consultation

Facilitated by Project Officers hired by the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Branch

1. Zoom – small groups (typically up to 16 people); 1.5 hour online sessions

- mix of College (program coordinators, faculty, chairs, deans, curriculum developers), industry (Program Advisory Committee members, employers, industry/professional associations), and other stakeholders connected to the program (graduates, regulatory bodies, and Ministry's with an oversight on the program).
- discuss trends and issues in sector and provide input regarding the skills, knowledge and attitude required of graduates for developing/revising Vocational Learning Outcomes.
- builds on previous feedback to scope the learning outcomes.
- any program titling changes.

2. Broad-Based Consultation (BBC) Electronic survey

- input on draft Preamble, Vocational Learning Outcomes, Elements of the Performance and glossary prepared from the Zoom and subsequent one on one consultations.
- any program titling changes.

3. Final review of draft with Ministry's having an oversight on the program and/or any regulatory bodies if necessary

Overview of Program Standard Development Process – Validation

The Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS) through the Credential Validation Service (CVS) is responsible for:

- Informal review/formal validation of vocational learning outcomes at appropriate credential level; and
- Titling protocols (alignment with existing nomenclature, consistency, field of study, truth in advertising).

The Vice-Presidents Academic (VPAs) provide:

- Input on validity and appropriateness of the process and any implications of new/revised standard on College delivery.

Overview of Program Standard Development Process – Approvals and Publication

- The Project Officer prepares summary and recommendation report for Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Branch (PEQAB) approval:
 - summarizes the consultations and validations
 - presents the revised or new program standard, including any recommendations on program title
 - Highlights any points the ministry should be aware of
- New/revised program standard approved by PEQAB.
- New/revised program standard released to colleges by PEQAB for implementation.

Program Standard Implementation

- The Colleges Unit is responsible for overseeing the implementation of program standards. Each College listed in the release letter as offering an applicable program is required to submit an attestation letter signed by the College president.
- The attestation letter confirms the date by which the revised or newly developed program standard will be fully implemented.
 - This includes the college's adherence to new/revised vocational learning outcomes.
- To allow College's time to make the necessary changes to their curriculum, a minimum of one year is typically provided for implementation.