Exploring Options for Institutional Accreditation in Canadian Post-Secondary Education

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FOREWORD

In the fall of 1995, I registered for first year arts at Okanagan University College in Kelowna. My ambitions had not yet solidified and I was without any real direction. A course in political ideologies caught my interest. That professor set me on the path that would lead me to complete my bachelor's degree at OUC in politics, philosophy, and economics.

In the fall of 1997, the campaign for OUC to become a full university was in full swing. I was confused by the campaign's motives, as I did not understand what was missing from OUC to make it anything less than a university. I was debating philosophy with my peers in the quadrangle, spending long hours in the library with Supreme Court decisions, participating in martial arts clubs and other social activities – this was everything I had expected a university to be. I found nothing to be lacking, save the odd periodical collection in the library. My impressions of the quality of my undergraduate experience were reinforced when I arrived at graduate school at the University of Victoria in 2002. I found myself well prepared for the heavy workload of the Masters in Public Administration program.

In 2003, I participated in an academic exchange that involved summer studies at Sciences-Po Lille in France. My classes on the policies of the European Union were held in a building with no air conditioning, a limited library, and no place to purchase a cold drink or a coffee. Although my French school had none of the qualities that I had come to associate with an institution of advanced study, I learned more about the politics and policies of the European Union in that month than I had dreamed possible.

In undertaking this project, I have learned that what constitutes "quality" in post-secondary education is difficult to define. My own experiences, of which I have given a brief account in this preamble, would support this conclusion. I have come to understand an institution of higher education as not consisting of bricks, books, equipment, or facilities. Rather, the institution of higher education is a dynamic living thing.

This project seeks to provide advice toward a system for assuring and publicly verifying the quality of Canadian post-secondary institutions. However, I am aware that it falls miles short of providing a definition of institutional quality. Defining quality in an institution is as challenging an endeavour as defining quality in an individual human being. Throughout my research, I was reminded of Socrates' statement in Plato's *Apology* that "it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day…for the unexamined life is not worth living for men."

In extending this principle to institutions of higher education, fostering a culture of self-examination within institutions is one of this reports' conclusions. Perhaps through coaxing our institutions toward the examined life, the true nature of their virtues may become more apparent to us all.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Michael Skolnik (2005) describes the traditional paradigm of degree granting in Canada as one where: "the authority to deliver degree programs was stringently restricted by provincial legislatures to a limited number of provincially chartered and provincially funded universities." In four provinces, this monopolistic era has ended. In Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and New Brunswick the degree-granting market has opened to new institutional suppliers. These provinces have also established mechanisms to ensure the quality of the new providers' programming. The emerging category of atypical degree-granting institutions includes public colleges, polytechnic institutes, and private post-secondary institutions.

New providers are generally not able to become members of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). However, in Canada, "which does not have a national system of institutional accreditation … membership in the Association coupled with the appropriate provincial legislation is generally accepted in lieu of institutional accreditation." (AUCC, 2005a) Applying this convention can result in new providers being deemed as non-accredited, calling into question the recognition and portability of their degrees and credentials, despite having successfully undergone provincially established quality assurance reviews.

Some graduates of new providers' degree programs are already facing the repercussions of these credential recognition issues. In one example, a graduate of a Bachelor's program at a BC college was informed by four Ontario universities that he would "not be considered for entry to post-baccalaureate teacher education programs because his undergraduate degree was from a non-AUCC institution." (BCCAT, 2006) The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) is engaging in efforts to increase the level of awareness of emerging credential recognition issues in Canada. A recently published BCCAT report suggests that a viable long-run solution "may be the development of regional and/or national accrediting agencies." (BCCAT, 2006)

This project takes this suggestion as its starting point, and sets out on an exploration to discover models of institutional accreditation that may provide for inter-provincial recognition of credentials, through ensuring and validating the quality of Canadian post-secondary institutions themselves. Its overarching goal is to recommend as to whether Canadian jurisdictions should consider a new quality assurance regime, and to provide potential new models to consider in that context.

The following report begins with a detailed account of the traditional Canadian degree-granting paradigm. Then it explains how this paradigm is shifting under pressures such as massification, competition, and globalization, toward a more highly differentiated set of institutional typologies that quality assessment mechanisms are struggling, and in some cases refusing, to incorporate.

This report identifies the source of credential recognition problems as the "patchwork" nature of Canada's various and uncoordinated quality assurance mechanisms. To a lay person, such as a prospective student, plain explanations of which institutions are recognized for what and by whom are difficult to find. For educational professionals, these explanations are difficult to provide. In short, Canada lacks a consistent and comprehensive approach to quality assurance that:

- includes a majority of institutional types offering programs at the degree level;
- enjoys the trust and support of post-secondary education stakeholders and the public; and,
- leads to an easily understood and recognizable statement of quality that students, parents and institutions can utilize in making comparative decisions of quality.

Three methods of exploration form the basis of this report: the first a comparison of alternative approaches, the second an assessment of current methods, and the third an appraisal of current attitudes and perspectives among stakeholders. The initial comparison launches from a discussion of Van Vught and Westerheijden's (1994) general model of quality assessment, which identifies common procedural and organizational elements among different models. These common elements then form the basis for a comparison of three modes of quality assurance: assessment, audit, and accreditation. Key international examples of each of these modes are presented and their comparative strengths and weaknesses are discussed. This review suggests that a combination of models can provide the optimal mix of evaluation of both programs and institutions. In addition, this review allows for the identification of key pre-conditions for an effective quality assurance model.

- Support or "ownership" by faculty and academic administrators, achieved through their involvement or management of the process;
- Appropriate situation of the organization between government and institutional interests;
- Balancing the interests of improvement and accountability; and,
- Transparency regarding the process and its outcomes.

A second branch of investigation seeks a working knowledge of current systems and approaches to quality assurance in Canada, including AUCC membership, internal program review managed by institutions, and newly established provincial quality assessment boards. This appraisal of Canadian mechanisms focuses upon their organizational and procedural elements, with an aim to providing insight into responses received in the stakeholder survey.

A third approach gathered stakeholder attitudes and perspectives toward current trends and possible models for accreditation through a survey. The survey primarily targeted stakeholders in British Columbia, whose positions require their knowledge of quality assurance methods in Canada and issues arising with regard to credential recognition. A secondary and smaller target population consisted of the same group of stakeholders from education systems in other provinces. Thirty-seven responses to the survey were received, providing the following key findings.

- A strong majority of respondents (71%) disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that current methods for ensuring quality in Canadian universities are sufficient.
- Only 8% of participants disagree with the premise that there is a growing problem of credential recognition among Canadian institutions, while a majority of respondents (54%) strongly agree with this premise.
- a strong majority (86%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the premise that there are too many different approaches to be clearly communicated and well understood by the public.
- A strong majority (76%) felt that consideration of moving toward an accreditation-style model of quality assurance is warranted of such a program is justified.
- When asked whether any existing organizations in Canada have the ability to provide such a system, responses were split evenly between "no" and "yes" answers, each receiving 47% of the 34 responses.

Although the survey's respondents represent a small sample skewed toward British Columbian interests, it provides significant support for the consideration of new quality assurance models. Its results provide some guidance towards which organizational and procedural elements might be included in a potential accreditation mechanism.

The assessment of Canadian mechanisms revealed myriad uncoordinated approaches and mechanisms. The Canadian quality assurance system is rich in methods of program assessment. However, one aspect that Canadian systems lack in most cases is the meta-evaluation of these program assessment methods at the institutional level. Such meta-analysis is characteristic of the audit model.

A desirable aspect of the accreditation model is its certification function. Membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) has provided this function in bestowing a status of recognized quality to its members. However, as this status is exclusive to certain institutional typologies, AUCC membership in its present form no longer provides an adequate accreditation function in the overall context of Canadian post-secondary education.

Through reflection on the information gathered through this study's exploratory methods, the study determines a combination of program assessment and institutional audit to be the best model for a Canadian system of quality assurance. Based on this model, illustrated below, speculative options for the implementation and management of quality assessment processes are developed

| Regular Quality Assessment of Programs | **+** | Cyclical Audit of Assessment Mechanisms for Effectiveness | **=** | Bestowing of Institutional Accreditation / Recognized Status |
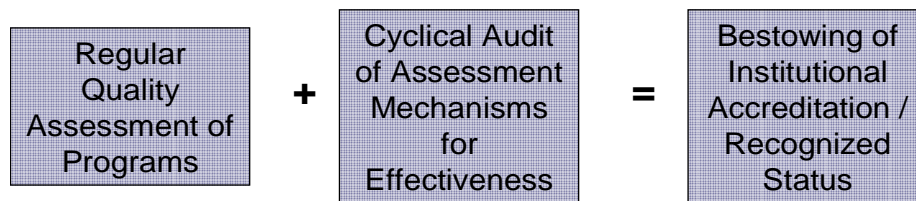
Four options are presented in the *Options and Recommendations* section. The first includes the expansion in the membership criteria of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada to be inclusive of new providers. The second builds on current pan-Canadian efforts in quality assurance in degree granting. A third option creates a regional model through combining the provincial assessment boards of Alberta and British Columbia. Finally, a fourth model speculates on the establishment of a new Canada-wide non-profit organization consisting of institutional members, which would have the responsibility for managing a combined process of assessment and audit models.

These four models are then subject to an evaluative comparison against the following criteria;

- Inclusiveness and comprehensiveness
- Institutional engagement and ownership
- Understandable statement of recognition
- Government involvement
- Building upon existing organizational capacity
- Feasibility

In the recommended option, provincial assessment boards in Alberta and British Columbia are combined into one quality assessment board responsible for the region. The regional agency has one set of processes and criteria for the assessment and approval of new degree programs and new institutions in both provinces, as well as a process for institutional audit that is voluntary for all degree-granting institutions. The Western Provinces model is recommended because it is feasible and can be implemented swiftly. However, as a regional model, the recommended option falls short of providing a system that is nationally comprehensive and inclusive. A successful regional model may eventually expand to include other provinces.

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INTRODUCTION

About eighty-five institutions in the Western world established by 1520 still exist in recognizable forms with similar functions and unbroken histories, including the Catholic Church, the parliaments of the Isle of Man, Iceland and Great Britain, several Swiss cantons, and seventy universities. Kings that rule, feudal lords with vassals, and guilds with monopolies are gone. These seventy universities, however, are still in the same locations with some of the same buildings, with professors and students doing much the same things, and with governance carried on in much the same way.

- Clark Kerr, 1982

The above statement is often quoted as a testament to the durability and tradition of the university as an institution of civilized society. Be they universities or colleges, Canadian post-secondary institutions all share in this rich tradition. However, tradition can cause resistance to change. Subject to increasingly broad and massified demand, increased competition, and globalization, Canadian post-secondary education is poised between countervailing forces of tradition and transformation. Evidence of tension is beginning to show, particularly in the area of credential recognition.

Michael Skolnik (2005) described the traditional paradigm of degree granting in Canada as one where: "the authority to deliver degree programs was stringently restricted by provincial legislatures to a limited number of provincially chartered and provincially funded universities." In four provinces, this monopolistic era has ended. In Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and New Brunswick the degree-granting market has been opened up to new institutional suppliers. These provinces have also established mechanisms to ensure the quality of the new providers' programming. The emerging category of atypical degree-granting institutions includes public colleges, polytechnic institutes, and private post-secondary institutions.

New providers are generally not members of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). Moreover, AUCC's eligibility criteria for membership (Appendix A) are so construed as to make membership unattainable for many of these new, atypical degree-granters. The AUCC is a not an accrediting agency but "an organization in which institutions seek membership to benefit from its public policy, communications, research and advocacy roles." (BCCAT, 2006) However, in Canada, "which does not have a national system of institutional accreditation … membership in the Association coupled with the appropriate provincial legislation is generally accepted in lieu of institutional accreditation." (AUCC, 2005a) Applying this convention can result in new providers being deemed as non-accredited, calling into question the recognition and portability of their degrees and credentials, despite having successfully undergone provincially established quality assurance reviews.

On January 22, 2004, the Queen's University Senate formalized this convention in approving its *Policy on Determining Canadian Universities' Status for Basis of Admission*. The policy reads as follows:

> *To satisfy the basis of admission requirement to any degree program at Queen's University, academic credentials obtained from a Canadian institution must be from an institution that is a member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.*(Queen's University Senate, 2004)

This policy formalized a long-standing practice in which Queen's is not alone (Marshall, 2005, pg.7). In research undertaken in 2004, by Dr. David Marshall, President of Mount Royal College, seven major Canadian universities reported using a similar policy in their graduate admissions processes. (pg. 6) These revelations sparked widespread realization that degree programs emerging from new types of institutions may not be perceived as comparable to those offered by traditional universities.

This issue is critical for Canada's institutions, which need to distinguish quickly and accurately among programs that do and do not adequately prepare students for further study. Gatekeepers of the academy must ration out the limited number of advanced educational opportunities available to the most qualified, able, and committed students. The use of screens and filters in the admissions process, such Queen's use of the AUCC criterion, or reliance on an institution's accreditation status can assist with this challenge.

At the same time, concerns of quality and recognition are of parallel importance to prospective students and their parents. Many students are often uninformed and operating with the naivety of youth, an ever more complex educational labyrinth increases the risk that they will face obstacles as they navigate through post-secondary education, resulting in unnecessary costs and frustrations. Some graduates of new providers' degree programs are already facing the repercussions of these credential recognition issues. In one example, a graduate of a Bachelor's program at a BC college was informed by four Ontario universities that he would "not be considered for entry to post-baccalaureate teacher education programs because his undergraduate degree was from a non-AUCC institution." (BCCAT, 2006)

As an increasing number of students graduate from new providers' degree programs, credential recognition issues are likely to affect a greater number of these students. For this reason, credential recognition issues are of particular concern in British Columbia, a province where various new degree providers operate. In fact, data retrieved from the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education's Central Data Warehouse indicate that in 2004, over 500 students graduated with baccalaureates from the three public institutions of Kwantlen University College, the British Columbia Institute of Technology, and Capilano College (Central Data Warehouse, 2005). Not one of these institutions is a member of AUCC.

Credential recognition issues in Canada have implications for student and professional mobility both inside and outside our national borders. To facilitate cross-border education, international organizations have sought to develop common guidelines for the assurance of quality in higher education (UNESCO, 2005). The quality of institutions and their credentials, and methods for ascertaining and verifying this quality, need to be understood both domestically and internationally. The recognition of this need has led some to question whether it is time to consider implementing a system of institutional accreditation in the Canadian context.

The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) is engaging in efforts to increase the level of awareness of emerging credential recognition issues in Canada. With the aim of elucidating the nature and source of these issues from the British Columbian perspective, BCCAT released a report entitled *Recognition of Degrees from Non-AUCC Member Institutions: A Review of Issues*. While this report focuses on identifying the problem, it also suggests that a viable long-run solution "may be the development of regional and/or national accrediting agencies."(BCCAT, 2006)

This project takes this suggestion as its starting point, and posits that while many effective quality assurance methods exist in Canadian post-secondary education, there may be too many different approaches to be plainly and clearly understood by the public. This study sets out to develop options for a system of institutional accreditation may provide a means for addressing this issue, with an aim to increasing the global recognition of Canada's post-secondary credentials, through ensuring and validating the quality of Canadian post-secondary institutions themselves. In addition, the research seeks to ascertain whether attitudes among those in Canadian post-secondary are receptive to the prospect of institutional accreditation, and whether implementation of such a system is warranted at this point.

Through offering insight into different approaches to quality assurance, as well as the opinions and attitudes of those who provide leadership in post-secondary education in British Columbia and Canada, this project's overarching goal is to recommend as to whether Canadian jurisdictions should consider a new quality assurance regime, and to provide potential new models to consider in that context. The strategic focus of this goal is to outline a system that has the potential to address emerging credential recognition issues in Canada, and provide a solid foundation for the continuing global recognition of the quality of Canadian institutions of post-secondary educations, their credentials, and their graduates.

Report Structure

The following report consists of eight main sections. The first provides background information substantiating the report's approach, including a brief review of the traditional degree-granting paradigm in Canada and institutional and degree typologies emerging to challenge this paradigm. The background also provides an outline of various forces and trends transforming post-secondary education in Canada and throughout the world.

A second section outlines the assumptions, concepts, and methods undertaken in producing this report. This section pays particular attention to the survey portion of the methodology, which aims to gather information regarding stakeholder perspectives toward current and potential approaches to quality assurance in Canadian post-secondary education. In soliciting the opinions of stakeholders in British Columbia and across Canada, the survey looks at the respondents':

- attitudes towards current trends in Canadian post-secondary education;
- awareness of various quality assurance organizations and methods;
- desired set of characteristics for an organization performing quality assurance in the context of Canadian post-secondary education;
- ideal procedural elements for a Canadian quality assurance process; and,
- opinions as to whether a new system of institutional accreditation should be implemented.

Another method for gaining information to illuminate this study is a review of literature providing insight into various models of quality assurance. This third section of the report includes a description of a general model of post-secondary quality assurance systems and examples from different international jurisdictions where variations on this model are evident. In a fourth section, this review turns to quality assessment mechanisms currently in place in Canadian post-secondary education.

A fifth section reports the findings of the survey process. A sixth section presents a discussion distilling these findings and analyzing them in the context of information gleaned from the reviews of quality assurance in post-secondary education in general, and in Canada specifically. This discussion section provides in depth examination of the study's findings, with a view to providing a solid foundation for advising possible next steps.

The report's seventh section outlines these recommendations and speculates a number of optional models for possible quality assurance regimes in Canada, weighing the benefits and disadvantages of each. Finally, the report concludes with a synopsis of the study, and recommends short term and long-term goals on the path towards a national system of institutional quality assurance.

BACKGROUND

Two facets of background information provide the foundation for this study. The first relates to the historical archetype of Canadian degree-granting education and recent developments challenging this paradigm. The second identifies forces, values, and trends currently shaping post-secondary education in Canada as well as globally.

1. Post-secondary Education in Canada: A Shifting Paradigm

Degree Granting in Canada – The Archetype

The basic framework of Canada's federal system is set out in the *Constitution Act, 1867*. The *Act* divides legislative jurisdiction between federal and provincial authorities; the authority to make laws in relation to education is in the domain of the provinces. There are 10 provinces and three territories in Canada's vast dominion, each with a unique social climate and economic base. Despite this diversity in context, there has been a tradition of what Marshall (2004) has referred to as a "tacitly accepted framework of Canadian degree-granting post-secondary education," regardless of the nation's many educational jurisdictions. (pg. 5)

This framework consisted of a common approach among provinces to restrict degree-granting authority to publicly funded universities established through statute or charter. For the most part, this has been achieved through provincial legislation that restricts the use of the word *university* and the ability to grant degrees. Skolnik (2005) describes paradigmatic Canadian institutions as predominantly comprehensive, "in the sense of offering graduate and professional programs as well as undergraduate programs." In particular cases, other specialized institutions also offered degrees. For instance, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design was established in 1887 and is the "oldest degree granting professional college of its kind in Canada." (Christie, 1997 pg. 225) However, it was an anomaly for a Canadian institution classified as a college to be degree granting.

This "tacitly accepted framework" did not generally include community colleges in the degree-granting enterprise. University education in Canada pre-dates Confederation. The college, on the other hand, did not fully arrive on the scene until the 1960s. At that time, anticipated growth in demand for post-secondary education led to the creation of new universities, as well as the expansion of previously established universities. However, universities could not, or chose not to, respond to the growing need for trained technicians and trades people generated by the industrial growth of that period (Dennison, 2003).

Although education is in provincial jurisdiction, the federal government can influence educational developments through cost-sharing arrangements with provinces, conditional grants, and provision of student financial assistance. According to Dennison (2003), the availability of financial resources from the federal government enabled the provinces to construct "an alternate system of post-secondary institutions, other than universities, to educate and train a workforce with the skills necessary to fill the industrial needs of the nation."(pg. 3) This emerging system consisted of colleges, technical institutes, and in Quebec, Colleges d'Enseignement General et Professionel (CEGEPs).

The history of Canadian post-secondary education encompasses the development of its universities and alternative institutions, and their relationships with governments, society, and each other. For ease of comparison, this report will employ a simple binary classification of universities and colleges: the university as the traditional locus of degree-granting in academic

and professional study; and the college as typically restricted to offering diplomas designed to prepare students for specific vocations, and in some cases, the first two years of university study.

One key difference between colleges and universities in all provinces is the colleges' policy of open access to adults, even those who have not completed a high school diploma (Dennison, 2003, pg. 4). Universities, on the other hand, generally ration admissions to students who demonstrate a required level of performance in prerequisite studies, and this depends on the number of spaces available and the qualifications of the pool of applicants. This difference affects perceptions of status: universities are often seen as more exclusive and prestigious than colleges.

Another key difference between the university and college sectors lies in governance structures and degrees of autonomy from provincial governments. Universities in Canada generally enjoy a large degree of autonomy from government. They self-regulate under a bi-cameral governance system consisting of a corporate board and an academic senate composed primarily of faculty and academic administrators. Moreover, there is a division of responsibility between the two authorities: the board has responsibility for administration, and the senate for academic affairs (Jones, 2004, pg.38). Dennison and Gallagher see "sound reasons" for this type of governance structure in that universities are intended to "exercise full freedom to challenge societal values" (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pg. 153).

On the other hand, "the public character of the college in the service of society compels a different approach to government and control." (Dennison and Gallagher, 1986, pg. 154) Although colleges benefit from the educational guidance of advisory councils in some cases, they remain principally accountable to external boards appointed by provincial governments, whose sole preoccupation, according to Dennison and Gallagher (1986) "should be to ensure that the college operates in conformity with the board members' perception of the public interest." (pg. 154) Again, it is arguable that colleges' lack of autonomy from government affects public perceptions of their status. Seen as "extensions of government," colleges' status as "real" post-secondary institutions is less concrete than that of the more autonomous universities (Dennison, 2003, pg. 4). Colleges and universities are distinct in many other ways, including vast differences in their respective costs to governments and students. Universities generally have research mandate, while colleges focus more on community service. In addition, it can be argued that university faculty enjoy a higher degree of academic freedom than do instructors in the college setting. However, the university faculty's workload generally includes both teaching and research, while college instructors are able to focus exclusively on teaching.

Finally, while the university and college sectors have many differences, this does not mean that they operate in exclusive domains. Cooperation between colleges and universities is ingrained in British Columbia's "extensive transfer system, which allows students to receive credit towards a baccalaureate degree for appropriate first- and second-year courses taken at a college, university college, or institute." (BCCAT, 2006) Alberta also has a similar, well-established transfer system.

Besides public universities and colleges, private post-secondary institutions have also been a part of the Canadian post-secondary system, though not in great numbers. Although private post-secondary institutions are often characterized as a new development in Canada, private faith-based educational institutions and seminaries have long existed in most provinces. In some cases, these institutions are not limited to religious subjects in the degrees for which they have authority to provide. For instance, British Columbia's Trinity Western University is a faith-based private

university that has, under provincial legislation, the ability to grant academic degrees. Moreover, private career colleges are numerous in most provinces, and provide training to a considerable number of Canadian and international students. These institutions, and the regulations and quality assurance mechanisms that govern them, are not part of the scope of this study. However, an institutional accreditation mechanism exists in BC - the Private Career Training Institutions Agency (and its predecessor the Private Post-Secondary Education Commission) - and provides quality assurance and customer protection in the private career-training sector.

A Changing Landscape

The binary institutional framework dominated the landscape of Canadian post-secondary education until the 1990s. However, Marshall (2004) identifies four "cracks" in this foundation that were beginning to show during that period. The first is the granting of a university charter for specialized institutions, such as BC's Royal Roads University. This was paralleled by a second development: establishing five university-colleges in British Columbia, baccalaureate degree-granting institutions often referred to as *hybrids*. These institutions were originally established under the province's *College and Institute Act*, and could offer and grant degrees in partnership with one of the province's major universities. Eventually, the university colleges evolved to grant degrees in their own right, although the institutions continued to lack key university characteristics, such as a research mandate, tenured faculty, graduate degrees, and an academic senate.

Opening the degree-granting market to private institutions in some provinces represents a third challenge to the Canadian paradigm. Some individuals in Canadian post-secondary education may view the enabling of private-for-profit institutions to grant degrees in Canada particularly problematic. Until recently, very few for-profit institutions were present in Canadian degree granting. A very small number of private-for-profit institutions based outside of Canada have been granting degrees in Alberta and BC since as far back as 1977, and yet, according to Marshall. "the existence of these degrees in Canada has put a large crack in the compact of the Canadian degree credibility." (Marshall, 2004, pg. 85)

It is perhaps peculiar in Canada that the quality of private post-secondary institutions is not pre-supposed, but rather, perceived with skepticism. Unlike America, where the most prestigious institutions are predominantly private, Canadians seem to value the public nature of their post-secondary institutions, and attribute to this public and non-profit nature the institutions' perceived quality and accountability.

In describing private institutions as a crack in the foundation, Marshall refers to non-resident institutions granting degrees under charters obtained outside of Canada. Such arrangements were enabled under previous regulatory frameworks, such as BC's now-repealed *Private Post-Secondary Education Act*. Institutions taking advantage of these frameworks sought to address particular niches in educational markets, such as graduate programs for school teachers (Clift, 1999). These institutions, such as the University of Phoenix, which has been operating in BC since 1998, or Washington State's City University operating in BC since 1977, are grandfathered to continue offering degree programs under the *Private Post-Secondary Education Act's* provision until April 2007. At that time, these institutions must have received the Minister's consent under the new *Degree Authorization Act* in order to continue offering degrees in BC.

Under new legislation, the influx of private institutions into Canadian degree granting markets is not limited to non-resident institutions. Regulations in Alberta, BC, Ontario, and New Brunswick now allow private institutions to grant degrees in those provinces. Under these provisions, established private career colleges, such as BC's Sprott-Shaw Community College, may apply to offer degree programming. Alternatively, entirely new private institutions can be established in Canada with degree-granting capabilities, such as Lansbridge University in New Brunswick and British Columbia. Finally, non-resident institutions may establish satellite campuses in Canada that have achieved provincial authorization to grant degrees in their own right.

Marshall's fourth crack is the new ability granted to colleges in Alberta, BC, and Ontario to grant applied baccalaureate degrees. Marshall (2004) asserts that these degrees are only for programs that lead to "unique applied workplace credentials, and not intended to be in competition or a substitute for a traditional baccalaureate degree." (Marshall, 2004, pg.86) However, as BCCAT (2006) observes, "the distinctions between traditional baccalaureate degrees, terminal applied degrees, and applied baccalaureate degrees offered in various provinces are not always clear." A further confusion arises with regard to the terminus of the applied degree path. Some applied degrees are not intended to prepare students for graduate academic study, but rather, focus on developing employment skills. However, graduates of applied baccalaureates might seek further education in professional programs. This may reflect a gap in the expectations of where the applied degree path may lead between a program's designers and its students.

Dunlop (2004) identifies further issues relating to establishing a "parity of esteem" between applied degrees offered by colleges and traditional university degrees. He observes that:

> *…many university personnel are quite dismissive of vocational schools being empowered to offer degrees. It may not be that much of an issue in British Columbia and Alberta, with their long history of university transfer schemes, but it is a big deal in Ontario where the two sectors have operated to a large degree in splendid isolation from each other.* (pg.3)

Many of Marshall's cracks have taken place in British Columbia, and as a result, this province may be viewed as particularly unconventional by Canadian post-secondary norms. However, Alberta has also pushed the envelope in allowing colleges to provide not only applied baccalaureates but also baccalaureates in traditional and academic fields. To a certain extent, all of the developments that lead away from the traditional degree-granting paradigm in Canada are inherently confusing to those holding on to the traditional, binary conceptual model. The recognition of colleges' traditional baccalaureates in Alberta, and applied baccalaureates in Alberta and British Columbia will likely be assisted by the collaboration and mutual understanding of institutional practices instilled through provincial transfer systems. However, recognition of these degrees outside their respective provinces may prove problematic.

Table 1 below summarizes the current institutional and degree-level credential typologies by province. One does not see a tacitly understood framework, but rather a high degree of differentiation. The cumulative effect of the cracks identified by Marshall is the end of the traditional bifurcated homogeneity of the Canadian degree-granting paradigm. The Canadian system already embraces, however uneasily, new types of institutions, degree-level credentials, and quality assurance mechanisms. Before discussing these quality assurance mechanisms, we must understand the forces and circumstances that have brought about this end.

Table 1: Institutional and Degree-Level Credential Typologies by Province

	Doctoral	Masters	Applied Masters	Bachelor	Bachelor Degree - Applied in Nature	Associate Degree
Alberta	U, (P)	U, P	N	U, I, C, P	C, I, P	N
British Columbia	U, (P)	U, P	UC, I, P	U, UC, I, P	UC, C, I, P	UC, C, I, P
Manitoba	U	U, UC	N	U, UC, P	N	N
New Brunswick	U	U, P	N	U, P	N	N
Newfoundland	U	U	N	U	N	N
Northwest Territory	N	N	N	N	C	N
Nova Scotia	U	U, C, I	N	U, C, I	N	N
Nunavut	N	N	N	N	N	N
Ontario	U, (P)	U, P,	U	U	C, I, P	N
Prince Edward Island	N	N	N	U	N	N
Quebec	U	U	N	U	N	N
Saskatchewan	U	U	N	U, I	C	N
Yukon	N	N	N	N	N	N

U = Public University or Grande École   UC = Public University College
P = Private/Non-resident Institution   I = Public Institute, polytechnic or
C = Public College/CEGEP   N = No Institutions Offering this Credential

(P) =   denotes that while the ability exists for private institutions to offer this credential, none offer this level of credential at the present time.

Notes:

Information provided in this table is taken from the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials searchable database, available at: http://www.cicic.ca/en/post-sec.aspx?sortcode=2.16.22&s=1

Faith-based institutions offering degrees limited to those in religious or divinity subjects are not included in this table.

Colleges who are enabled to grant degrees through federation/affiliation with a university are not included in this table.

The Royal Military College of Canada is not included in this table.

2.   Forces that Drive Change, Circumstances that Constrain Policy

David Marshall has posited that because new degrees in Canada require the approval of their respective provincial governments, forces behind the increased differentiation in the supply of Canadian degrees are primarily political, based on "a combination of fact and myth" and the varying successes of lobbying efforts (Marshall, 2006, pg 6). Groups in business and industry, parents and students, labour groups, faculty, and post-secondary institutions all can influence post-secondary education decisions.

Despite the different motivations of various interests, convergence of these motivations and interests remains possible. For instance, parents and students may seek increased access to post-secondary education, labour groups may seek broader access to more qualified workers, institutions may seek the increased prestige of offering degrees, and businesses may seek the opportunity to engage in for-profit education delivery. All benefit to some extent from the increased differentiation in Canadian post-secondary education. Several interrelated forces and values are at play inside and outside Canada that influence the perceptions and attitudes that shape policy. Several major factors are contributing to, and in some cases resulting from, the paradigm shift in Canadian degree-level education.

Massification.   This describes a worldwide increase in the demand for higher education, and the resulting expansion of post-secondary education systems. The "global demand for higher education is projected to grow from 97 million students in 2000 to 263 million in 2025." (Ruby, 2005, pg. 234) This increased demand, however, is not simply for more traditional education credentials. Dirk Van Damme (2002) postulates that through massification, traditional degrees and diplomas "will be supplemented by specialized programmes, vocational and competency-oriented training and modular courses adapted to a new lifelong learning demand". (pg. 23) And, increased demand for education can be explained by its increasing value in knowledge based economies:

> *…knowledge and skills that students gain from attending colleges and universities have become much more valuable, both to the individual and to society, thereby increasing the importance of obtaining a higher education degree and of participating in an educational programme that leads to tangible gains in student learning.* (Dill, 2000, pg.204)

The new global economy raises the importance of education to an unprecedented level, and as education increases in importance and value, so too do demands for quality assurance and credential recognition.

Credential Creep. As demand for post-secondary education increases and broadens, so does the demand for its credentials. At the same time, post-secondary institutions offer a variety of credential typologies that require different modes, subjects, and durations of study. Whereas the diploma-level training used to be sufficient preparation for entry to practice into numerous professions, today it is more and more the norm that occupational and professional groups require completion of a university degree (Marshall, 2006, pg. 6). Such credentialism among occupational and professional associations may further fuel the demand for more advanced credentials, as students, parents and employers increasingly see these as associated with professional advancement and economic success.

Prestige Seeking. As higher education systems worldwide move from elite to mass provision, there may not be enough status to go around. Post-secondary education, according to Marginson (2006) exists in a *positional market*; that is, some institutions offer educational products to students that "offer better social status and lifetime opportunities than others." (pg. 3) New providers' degree- granting aspirations may reflect a measure of prestige seeking. Despite the learning advantages of a small institution focused on teaching, "faced by choice between a prestigious university with known indifference to undergraduate teaching, and a lesser institution offering better classroom support, nearly everyone opts for prestige." (Marginson, 2006, pg. 5) In this sense, an institution offering only one degree program may benefit from the elevated status that a more university-like repertoire accords.

Increasing Mobility. Developments in technology facilitate and accelerate the movement of people, information, and capital. In post-secondary education, students, graduates, and faculty are increasingly mobile. Furthermore, to study at a foreign university, students do not need to travel, but can stay at home and take programs from a foreign university through online delivery. In this global marketplace, the portability of a post-secondary credential becomes paramount. Whether a credential is obtained at the local university, through online delivery, or achieved while studying abroad, it must be considered as holding recognizable value and meaning to be useful to whomever has earned it.

Internationalization. Altbach (2004) defines internationalization as including "specific policies and programmes undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions… to cope with or exploit globalization."(pg. 6) One example is the intense efforts of some Canadian institutions in recruiting international students. Further examples include cross-border delivery of academic programs through collaborative agreements, joint-degrees, and the establishment of offshore satellite campuses. In a recent, controversial, example of an international initiative, Simon Fraser University has contracted with an Australian for-profit business to set up a joint preparatory college on its Vancouver campus. The company will not only recruit international students for the college, but will deliver a first-year curriculum designed to prepare up to 2000 international students for transfer into a variety of Simon Fraser programs (Birchard, 2006).

Degree/Diploma Mills. A confounding factor for credential recognition in the global marketplace is the worldwide existence of degree mills. Ezzel (2005) offers the following definition of a diploma mill:

> *…an organization that awards degrees without requiring students to meet educational standards for such degrees, it either receives fees from its so called students on the basis of fraudulent misrepresentation, or it makes it possible for the recipients of its degrees to perpetrate a fraud on the public.*(pg. 55)

The existence of degree mills calls into question the quality and legitimacy of many of the world's lesser-known post-secondary opportunities, as well as the effectiveness of mechanisms established to ensure that quality and legitimacy. Even strong policy frameworks, such as the Canadian "accreditation by legislation" approach, do not always prevent questionable institutions from arising. Vancouver University Worldwide has "offered online learning and 'aggregate degrees' for years, but it has no authority from any government to call itself a university or award degrees in Canada." (Charbonneau, 2005, pg. 14) There is an understandable fear that Marshall's cracks might allow more questionable degree providers to slip through Canada's regulatory guardians.

Increased Competition among Institutions. Not all institutions will be equally successful in their response to massification, since they must compete for qualified applicants and student enrolments, resources, qualified staff and faculty, and status. The increasing number of institutions offering degrees can only intensify competition on all fronts. In the positional market described by Marginson, traditional universities have the competitive advantages of subsidization, size, and status. However, new providers may be less constrained by tradition and structure, and more able to respond quickly to pockets of immediate and specific demand. Moreover, in the global market place: "all universities are now judged in terms of two active frames of reference: the national, and the global. The more an individual university aspires to the top end of competition, the more significant global referencing becomes."(Marginson, 2006, pg. 27) In this context, the spirit of collaboration and collegiality that credential recognition and quality assurance mechanisms depend upon is challenging to sustain.

Calls for Increased Public Accountability. As the provision of higher education becomes more expensive, governments and the public seek assurances that the public investment is worthwhile. Ewell (1994) observes that calls for increased public accountability of higher education result from the conflux of two "frontier values" of the academy with two "bleak realities". The values are continued and unfettered expansion of the academy and its independence. The two bleak realities, fiscal and political, are characterized respectively by "decreasing state appropriations to higher education," and, "new government initiatives with respect to allocation and accountability". (Ewell, 1994) Ketcheson (2001) notes that "advances in information technology

have revolutionized the way colleges and universities collect, analyze, and report information about their activities." This development may result in heightened expectations that data can be made available to substantiate institutional claims to quality and value for money.

Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom. According to the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations, "Universities should be free to pursue inquiry while retaining the right to determine goals and programs within the context of their missions, as well as determining the means by which those goals and programs will be realized." (OCUFA, 2006) The values of institutional autonomy and academic freedom are the cornerstones of the university and require that institutions pursue their "self-actualizing goals as an enterprise, free of the 'unhealthy' influences of external market and political forces." (Ewell, 1994) The independence of intellectual pursuits from political intervention is not only an academic value, but also a democratic one. However, these values can be confounding to government exercises aimed at ensuring a standard of quality or measure of accountability spanning numerous institutions, who claim such interventions to be an affront to their autonomy, and hence, fundamentally flawed.

Decreasing Public Funding. Van Damme (2002) asserts that "expansion and massification will not be matched by a proportional rise in public expenditure, leading to an increase in private and commercial provision". Increasing demand for access to post-secondary education, coupled with perceived inadequacy of public funding to meet its growing costs, suggests that "without unconventional solutions, the system would become unsustainable." (Culos, 2005, pg. 33) Moreover, as Clift (1999) describes: "if governments continue to provide insufficient funding to public institutions to meet their mandate, it is likely that public institutions will, in the absence of government prohibition, effectively create a non-public system operating within the public one."

Privatization. Of the new degree providers, perhaps the most unconventional in Canada are private institutions. While non-profit private institutions have some history in Canadian post-secondary education, for-profit enterprises are particularly controversial. These institutions are "run like any other for-profit enterprise, seeking to maximize revenues in the market for knowledge products and services,"(Schwartzman, 2003) and this calls into question their commitment to upholding academic standards in the face of declining profits. A discussion paper prepared by the Working Group on Quality Assurance in Degree Programming in Canada (2004) notes:

> *…the introduction of for-profit private degree institutions and the development of for-profit (or de-regulated fee) activities in public universities raise concerns about the potential dilution of academic standards, either for reasons of the financial bottom line or to serve client needs so specifically that normal academic requirements are set aside.*

In profit-seeking, private institutions may choose to avoid some of the more costly trappings of the traditional university. For instance, Ruby (2005) asks the following question: "If private suppliers eschew a mission of research in order to contain costs, does this decoupling of the creation of knowledge from its dissemination lower the quality of education?" (pg. 234) This question also has implications for Canada's degree-granting public colleges, and will be covered later in this report's discussion section.

Globalization. Some aspects of globalization – massification, internationalization, and competition – have been covered. Attitudes toward each range from welcoming to resistant, as do attitudes to globalization itself. As an effect of globalization, the opening of Canadian degree-granting to new providers may be similarly subject to varying, and sometimes negative, attitudes.

As noted by Altbach (2004):

> *Some have argued that globalization, the Internet and the scientific community will level the playing field in the new age of knowledge interdependence. Others claim that globalisation means both worldwide inequity and the McDonaldisation of the university. It is argued that all the contemporary pressures on higher education, from the pressures of massification to the growth of the private sector, are the results of globalisation.* (pg.3)

Shwartzman (2003) identifies "two opposite, but complementary effects of this globalization trend: one to deregulate, and the other to establish equal, internationally compatible rules and standards for the regulation of national higher education systems." (pg. 8) Massification provides the rationale for deregulation efforts like opening degree-granting to new-providers. However, the expansion of systems, "by increasing costs and extending the numbers and types of people interested in higher education, draws attention to issues of quality. At the same time, it removes the prime traditional mechanisms for achieving it, namely exclusiveness." (Brennan, 2000, pg.20)

The tendency for expansion to result in negative consequences such as credential recognition issues and proliferation of degree mills leads to a demand for new quality assurance mechanisms. However, varying degrees of institutional autonomy among higher education jurisdictions challenge the development and implementation of a common approach or standard. Finally, circumstances such as increased competition among institutions and strained public resources create real and perceived limitations in the way institutions, governments, and quality assurance agencies conduct their business and communicate with each other.

Developing and implementing a functional quality assurance approach is no simple task in a post-secondary education environment that can be characterized as "bounded, complex, hierarchical, fragmented, contested, product-making, subject-forming, continually transforming world-wide arrangement; with its specific rules, discourses and exchanges." (Marginson, 2006, pg. 2) Moreover, Canada's multi-jurisdictional educational arrangement compounds this challenge. The present study asks the question: is it possible to envision a coordinated, comprehensive, and effective national approach to quality assurance in Canadian post-secondary education? The following section outlines approaches taken in this project in attempting to answer this question.

APPROACH AND METHODS

This project aims to explore options for new methods of quality assurance in Canada. This section of the report explains the assumptions, concepts, and strategies employed towards achieving this aim. This section begins by providing a definition of the problem under investigation.

1.   Problem Definition

The introduction to this paper outlines emerging credential issues that are receiving increasing attention among post-secondary educators and policy makers in Canada. Discussions on these issues often focus upon Queen's and other universities use of AUCC membership as a threshold criterion for the basis of admission pertaining to applicants from other Canadian institutions. Some view such policies and practices as the source of credential recognition problems. Skolnik (2005), for instance, asserts that:

> *The problem is not the absence of accreditation in Canada, it is the apparent refusal of at least some AUCC Institutions to recognize the accreditation processes that already exist….it would appear the their position on the matter is based entirely on political rather than technical considerations, that is, the desire to maintain their monopoly on degree-granting. As such, the appropriate response to their position is political rather than technical.* (pg. 6)

This project takes an alternate position, and sees the Queen's policy as symptomatic of a more fundamental problem underlying credential recognition issues. This problem is that *while the quality assurance methods currently in place in Canadian post-secondary education may be effective and valid, there are too many different approaches to be well understood by the public or recognized in global markets.*

This problem is both technical and political. It is technical in the sense that the numerous quality assurance approaches in Canada have evolved in different contexts and for various original purposes. Different types of organizations with different sources of authority manage them, and they apply different models of quality assurance in their work. For these technical reasons, it is difficult to comprehend how the various approaches map against one another, and how they might be combined into one comprehensive approach.

The problem is political in that any effort by governments to establish a nationally comprehensive quality assurance system would have a questionable basis of constitutional authority. Provincial governments have authority over educational matters only within their respective provinces, and the federal government has no authority in this legislative domain. While a collaborative, inter-provincial agreement toward a common quality assurance approach has some promise on the jurisdictional front, it is arguable that the strongly held value of institutional autonomy throughout Canadian universities may result in their reluctance to participate in such a government initiative. Finally, any collaborative efforts towards a comprehensive quality assurance approach across Canadian institutions will face pockets of resistance arising from ideological aversions to new degree-granting providers and from strong traditional values.

The following schematic provides a conceptual model of the shifting paradigm in Canadian degree granting and its parallel array of compartmentalized quality assessment models. This confusing array is identified as the source of current and future credential recognition issues. The following sub-section describes the methods and strategies taken in exploring options for a solution to this problem.

Figure 1: Problem Definition

The Traditional Paradigm Post-secondary Institutions in Canada has shifted…

Public Universities
- *Degree Granting*
- *Academic / Professional Programs*
- *Research Mandate*
- *Autonomous*
- *Exclusive*
- *Prestigious*
- *Expensive*

Public Colleges
- *Diplomas & Certificates*
- *Trades & Vocational Programs*
- *Teaching Focus*
- *Open Admissions Policy*
- *More connected to government*
- *Less Expensive*

Traditional Quality Assurance Mechanisms

AUCC Membership
Institutional Program Review

Professional Accreditation
Legislative Restrictions

Student Outcomes Surveys
Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission

…under various pressures and forces…

- **Massification**
- **Calls for Increased Accountability**
- **Increasing Competition**
- **Internationalization**
- **Privatization**
- **Decreases in Public Funding**
- **Credential Creep**
- **Prestige Seeking**

- **Globalization**
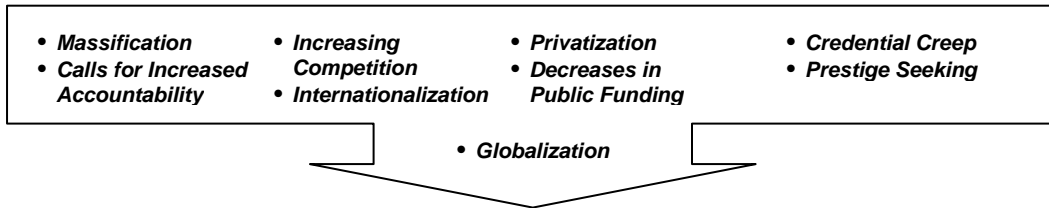
…resulting in new institutional degree providers in some provinces…

NFLD, Nova Scotia, PEI, Quebec

Manitoba, Saskatchewan

Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick

| **Public Universities** | **Public Institutes/ University Colleges** | **Public Colleges** | **Private Institutions** | **Non-Resident Institutions** |
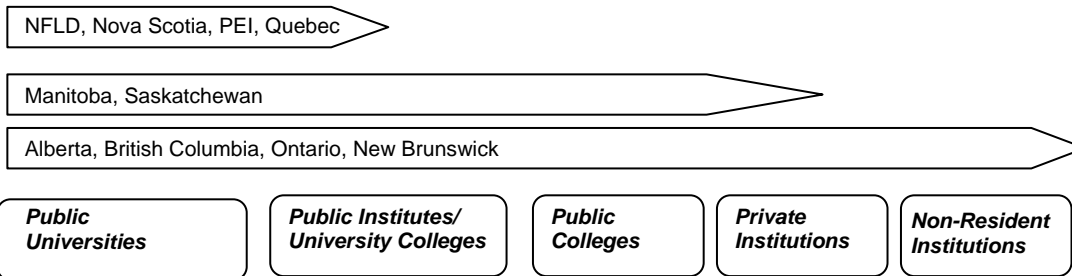
…and a confusing, compartmentalized, and incoherent array of quality assurance mechanisms...

AUCC Membership, Institutional Program Review

Legislative Restrictions

MacLean's Magazine Rankings

Provincial Quality Assessment Boards (New programs and organizations only)

Student Outcomes and Engagement Surveys

US Regional Accreditation

Professional Accreditation for some programs

Systems of Transfer and Articulation (AB and BC)
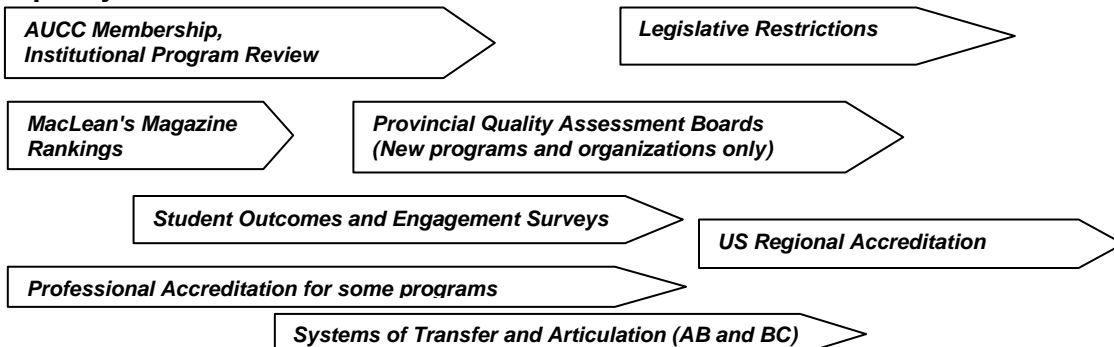
…ultimately leading to credential issues that confound student mobility and undermine perceptions of quality across the system.

2. Conceptual Framework

This project aims to provide recommendations for an accreditation system, under the assumption that such a system might provide a solution to the problem outlined above. Where credential recognition issues arise, they manifest themselves in refusal to consider graduates of entire institutions, not of individual programs. For this reason, the accreditation solutions being explored focus upon assessment at the institutional level. On the other hand, quality assurance systems emerging at the provincial level focus their assessments on programs, mostly because they functionally result in new degree program approval. Occasionally, assessment at the organizational level may be included where a new institution is proposing the degree program, but this is not always the case.

A further rationale for the focus on institutional, rather than program assessment, is that a desirable characteristic of any new accreditation mechanism is that it be plainly understandable to the Canadian public. This is facilitated by validation at the institutional level, not only because there are far fewer institutions than programs, but also because there is far less variation their nomenclature and aspect.

As reflected in its title, this report focuses on developing potential options for institutional accreditation. The word "accreditation" is used to describe the potential model, however, this should not be taken as literal. As described in the next section of this report, accreditation as a model of quality assurance has distinctive characteristics of which many who work in educational domains may be aware. However, in colloquial use, the word "accredited" is often taken to be synonymous with "recognized". The layperson, then, is not aware of the accreditation model's key features, they are only aware of the recognition that successfully undergoing this process may accord. Therefore, it is common that the word accreditation is applied to quality assurance processes that result in widespread recognition of institutions or programs, regardless of whether these processes display the distinctive characteristics of the accreditation model.

The approach taken in this project is founded on the view that Canada lacks a consistent and comprehensive approach to quality assurance that meets the following criteria:

- It is inclusive, in that it includes a majority of institutional types offering programs at the degree level;
- It enjoys broad support, in that is has the trust of post-secondary education stakeholders and the public; and,
- It leads to an easily understood and recognizable statement of quality that students, parents and institutions can utilize in making comparative decisions of quality.

These criteria are consistent with the colloquial conception of accreditation. Therefore, while the present study explores options for institutional "accreditation," these options are not constrained to the characteristics of the accreditation model of quality assurance, but oriented towards the criteria listed above.

A quality assurance mechanism must meet the above criteria to establish the desired connection between institutional quality assurance and credential recognition. However, these criteria are neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure the mechanism's ability to achieve its primary quality assurance purposes, whether those purposes be to encourage continuous improvement, to establish whether institutions have met minimum standards of quality, or to ensure that an institution's internal quality assessment mechanisms are functioning properly. Any discrete mechanism may excel in meeting its quality assurance objectives, but if the system is not

understood by the public, nor supported by the academy, it will not function as a mechanism for facilitating credential recognition.

The schematic diagram below provides a conceptual model illustrating the current, problematic state as compared with optimal future states wherein an accreditation system meeting the criteria outlined above can provide external validation of institutional quality, and provide a sound basis for the inter-provincial and international recognition of Canadian credentials. Inherent in this conceptual framework is the three pronged methodological approach to exploring options for institutional accreditation that will be explained further in the next sub-section.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Canadian Post Secondary Current State

- Not commonly understood by the public

| New Providers Offering Degrees in some Provinces | → | Various Uncoordinated Quality Assurance Mechanisms | → | Emerging Credential Recognition Issues |

- Different mechanisms for different institutions
- Different provincial approaches

Project Methods and Objectives

Step 1
Review International QA Models

General Characteristics
- Managing Agent
- Self-evaluation
- Peer Review
- Reporting

Models and Examples
- Assessment (NL)
- Audit (UK)

Step 2
Review Canadian QA Mechanisms

Traditional
- AUCC Membership
- Accreditation of Professional Programs
- Institutional Program Review

Emerging
- Provincial QA Boards
- US Accreditation

Step 3
Survey Stakeholder Attitudes and Opinions
- Attitudes and Awareness
- Organizational Elements
- Procedural Elements
- Assessment of Organizational Capacity
- Appetite for New Model

Step 4
Develop Options and Recommendations
- Models based on AUCC membership
- Models based on Provincial Assessment Boards
- New Models

Optimal State (Short Term)

| Assurance of Institutional Quality | → | Comprehensive Multi-Provincial Quality Assessment Mechanism | → | Inter-Provincial Credential Recognition |

CRITERIA
- includes a majority of institutional types
- has the trust of stakeholders and public
- leads to an easily understood and recognizable statement of quality.

Optimal State (Long Term)

| Assurance of Institutional Quality | → | Comprehensive National Quality Assessment Mechanism | → | International and Interprovincial Credential Recognition |

3. Project Methodologies

Exploration of institutional accreditation options requires three separate expeditions: the first is a comparison of alternative approaches, the second is an assessment of current methods, and the third is an appraisal of current attitudes and perspectives among stakeholders.

First, it is necessary to understand the different general models of quality assurance that are in place outside of Canada, in terms of their common elements, distinctive characteristics, and comparative strengths and weaknesses. This comparison begins with a discussion of Van Vught and Westerheijden's (1994) general model of quality assessment, which identifies common elements among different models. These common elements then form the basis for a comparison of three modes of quality assurance: assessment, audit, and accreditation. Key examples of each of these modes are presented and their comparative strengths and weaknesses are discussed.

A second branch of investigation seeks a working knowledge of current systems and approaches to quality assurance in Canada, including AUCC membership, internal program review managed by institutions, and newly established provincial quality assessment boards. As with the initial review of international quality assurance models, the study of Canadian mechanisms focuses upon their organizational and procedural elements, with an aim to providing insight into responses received in the stakeholder survey.

A third approach in exploring options for Canadian post-secondary education seeks a better understanding of stakeholder attitudes and perspectives toward current trends and possible models for accreditation. Consistent with this study; overall approach, the survey portion of this study focuses on the organizational and procedural elements that may define a future Canadian model.

4. Survey Design

Target Population

Although the problem under investigation is national in scope, the survey portion of this study is directed primarily toward soliciting the opinions and perspectives of stakeholders in British Columbia. The issues involved in accreditation are extremely complex. Time and resource constraints in this study did not permit a preliminary evaluation of potential participants' previous knowledge of credential recognition and quality assurance issues in Canada. As such, it was necessary to target respondents known to possess the knowledge and experience required to provide informed answers to questions.

To this purpose, the survey primarily targets individuals in British Columbia who were known to the researcher to have a high level of pre-existing knowledge of quality assurance methods in Canada, the changes that Canadian post-secondary education is undergoing, and issues arising with regard to credential recognition. These stakeholders include institutional administrators (presidents, vice-presidents, and registrars), faculty and instructors, members of quality assurance organizations, researchers, and government officials.

Although time and resource constraints made it impossible to conduct a national survey, a small number of individuals from outside of British Columbia were also invited to participate in this survey. This secondary target population consists of individuals from other provinces who were known to the researcher to have the knowledge and experience desired of potential respondents. These individuals either work in positions requiring such knowledge and experience or present and research related subjects.

Aside from the researcher's extensive network in British Columbia, there are numerous other reasons for primarily targeting educators and administrators in that province for this survey:

- British Columbia has been one of the most pioneering provinces in introducing new types of degree granting institutions, ranging from special purpose universities (Royal Roads University, Thompson Rivers University), to hybrid institutions (university colleges), to college degrees in applied fields, to private-for-profit degree granting institutions;
- British Columbia has an extensive system of articulation and transfer among its institutions, creating an academic culture receptive to some level of collaboration and coordination among autonomous institutions;
- British Columbia's Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB) has been in operation for almost three years, a period sufficient to enable the forming of opinions toward the DQAB's methods and procedures;
- Degree programs from non-AUCC institutions in British Columbia have reached sufficient maturity and number to lead to a substantial number of their graduates being affected by emerging credential recognition issues, as such, the issue may be viewed as pressing; and,
- A national survey, though desirable, was not possible within the scope of this project.

Recruiting Participants

Participants were recruited in two separate groups. The first group included candidate participants who were from colleges, government, quality assurance agencies or other post-secondary education organizations, and researchers. Only faculty and administrators from the University of Victoria were included in this first group, which included 64 candidates. An email inviting those in this group to participate in this study was sent on May 15, 2006. An attachment to this email was an invitation letter providing information necessary for informed consent. This letter is included for reference in Appendix A.

The University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) approved the survey-based research undertaken in this project. However, concerns were identified by the HREB as to whether the staff and faculty of other large universities would require the approval of this research to be approved under their own ethical review procedures. As a result, the researcher was required to send a preliminary email to a second group of eight individuals requesting that they provide the researcher with assurance that additional permission or ethical review was not necessary for their participation in the study. Only after the receipt of such an assurance could the full invitation could be sent.

Aggregating these two groups of candidates results in a total candidate pool of 72 potential participants. Of these 72, 56 candidates were from British Columbia (78%), and 16 were from other provinces (22%). As explained previously, candidates from British Columbia were the primary target population, while candidates from elsewhere in Canada were a secondary target. This anticipates a response group skewed toward the British Columbian perspective.

Survey Design

The survey is a component of an overall research methodology that is exploratory in nature. Therefore, the survey was not designed with the purpose of testing any particular hypothesis. Its chief aim is to gather perspectives from those involved in Canadian post-secondary education as to what the critical organizational and procedural elements a system of institutional quality assurance may require in order to be soundly established.

Post-secondary education in Canada is a consultative environment. In the policy development context, these consultations often involve extensive deliberation by numerous departmental levels

within institutions and governments in the crafting of a formal, institutional, or departmental response. The survey sought to limit the potential for such responses in the context of this research. To this end, the survey was deployed through a web-based platform, and is designed to be easy, informal, and likely to elicit "gut-level" responses based on individual experiences and opinions. A copy of the complete survey as presented in this platform is included for reference in Appendix B.

The survey consists of four main areas of questioning, explained in detail in Appendix C. The first area seeks to establish the *attitudes and awareness* of participants toward current trends in Canadian post-secondary education, and quality assurance organizations and methods. The second area relates to which *organizational elements* would be desirable in an organization managing accreditation in the Canadian context. A third area concerns *procedural elements* that would best fit the envisioned institutional quality assurance process. A fourth and final area of questioning seeks to measure the *appetite for the implementation* of an institutional quality assurance mechanism, as well as perspectives on the level of pre-existing *organizational capacity* in Canada to deliver the envisioned process. To be clear, the survey does not seek advice regarding the standards or benchmarks of quality against which post-secondary institutions should be judged. It is only concerned with the organizational and procedural model underlying such judgements.

Throughout the survey, numerous questions relate to the same key concept, enabling the use of indexing, thus facilitating the reporting of results, particularly in the *attitudes and awareness* category. For instance, questions 2, 6, 7, and 13 all relate to the concept of problem identification. Assigning each possible response a value from one to four enables the scoring of each respondent on a problem identification index. Possible scores range between 4 and 16, with higher scores indicating higher degrees of problem identification. Similar indexes were employed for a group of questions relating to respondent attitudes toward aspects of the shifting paradigm of Canadian post-secondary education, such as for-profit private institutions, and expansion of degree granting authority. A third index relates to Question 14, which asks respondents to report their level of awareness and involvement with 11 different quality assurance organizations and methods. Tables explaining the methods for calculating index scores in all three indexes are available in Appendix D.

The results of the survey are presented in the findings section, which also offers more information about the survey's respondents. However, before the survey's findings are presented, the next section provides information gleaned from the two reviews of quality assessment policy and literature.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Quality assurance has long been intrinsic to the operations of higher education institutions. Van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) describe two fundamental models of quality assurance that date back to medieval times: "the French model of vesting control in an external authority," and the "English model of a self-regulating community of fellows."(pg. 355) In recent decades, quality assurance organizations and mechanisms have emerged in many countries, and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has member agencies in over 65 countries.

One of the most vexing problems in academic quality assurance is developing a commonly accepted definition of quality, a problem that has likely existed since the emergence of the medieval French and English models. There is rarely a shared opinion about what constitutes quality among the many higher education stakeholders. Moreover, stakeholders evince different views in different contexts.(Westeheijden, Brennan and Maasen, 1994) Recognizing that "quality, like `liberty', `equality', `freedom' or `justice', is a slippery concept," Harvey and Green (1993) endeavoured to group various definitions of quality in higher education into five main categories:

- quality as exceptional;
- quality as perfection or consistency;
- quality as fitness for purpose;
- quality as value for money; and,
- quality as transformation.

Any procedural approach taken toward assuring post-secondary education quality will have one or more of these definitions at its foundation. The definition of quality employed may be affected by the overall purpose of the quality assessment exercise. The primary aims are usually internal improvement and external accountability.

Definitions of quality underlying these approaches are outside the scope of this study. If "power and responsibility for the assurance of educational quality in higher education rest with the collegial parties on every campus responsible for designing, reviewing, delivering, and monitoring students' programs of study,"(Dill, Massy, Williams, & Cook, 1996) then this is also the locus of responsibility for devising working definitions of academic quality. This project is not directly concerned with defining quality in higher education; rather, it is concerned with the methods and processes through which institutions are measured against standards of quality. In what follows, we review a general model of quality assurance, and consider variations on this general model, along with international examples of these variations.

A General Model

Van Vught and Westeheijden (1994) identified four common elements among various approaches to quality assurance in Western Europe and North America that "can be combined into the core of a general higher education quality assessment system." These four elements are:

An agent or organization managing the quality assessment system. Providing quality assurance requires a managing agency. Despite wide variations in their constitution and authority, Van Vught and Westerheijden identify "managing agents" as a common element of quality assurance systems. However, beyond having managing agencies in each system, there is much variation in

the agencies themselves. Their authority may derive from legislation, or from power invested in them through voluntary association. Such agencies may be established at either national or sub-national levels. Moreover, their scope of authority may be limited to university-level education, or include all post-secondary credentials. Some agencies focus their quality evaluations at the institutional level, while others evaluate the quality of individual programs. Another significant variable concerns the background and expertise of its administration and their proximity to the academy. Van Vught and Westerheijden believe that agents should act independently of government politics and policies, and have the responsibility of managing the quality assurance system at a meta-level.

Self-evaluation. This often takes the form of a self-study or self-assessment, and may be undertaken at the program or institutional level. Martin, Manning, and Ramaley (2001) observe that "the self-study process was designed to create the impetus for strategic change and establish a foundation on which to build a set of common goals and purposes that would unite the disparate experiences, values, methodologies, and worldviews of the disciplines." Not only can self-evaluation rally faculty from diverse disciplines together with the administrative culture in a collective quality management exercise, the involvement of faculty members is critical to the legitimacy of the quality assurance exercise. Van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) assert that, "in order for academics to accept and implement changes, they must trust and 'own' the process in which problems are defined and solutions are designed."

Peer review and site-visits. Peer-review is a key method for evaluating research, and a salient characteristic of many quality assurance systems in many jurisdictions. Site-visits are common aspect of peer-review. External experts generally visit an institution for one-or more days, using the self-evaluation report as a basis for more in-depth discussions with faculty and administrators. In some cases, students, staff and alumni are also included in these conversations. To be perceived as legitimate "it is crucial that these external experts should be accepted by the institution to be visited as unbiased specialists in the field."(Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994) For this reason, the size of the pool from which experts are selected, the means of selection of experts, and the training of experts in preparation for the exercise are variables of key importance. Moreover, all of these are "influenced by the focus of the review (teaching, research, management, etc.), the level of the review (institution, department, subject, individual), and the purposes of the review (usually a combination of accountability and improvement)." (Brennan & Shah, 2000, pg.58) This study does not examine variations in approaches to peer selection; however, this aspect of a quality assurance exercise should not be overlooked.

Reporting. Reporting of "the results of and experience with the methods used" in any quality assurance exercise is crucial to both the purposes of improvement and accountability. On the one hand, peer-review reports can give a unit the opportunity to see, from an external perspective, its strengths and weaknesses, and to receive advice on means for improvement. Where reviews are more formative, greater emphasis is placed on recommendations for improvement. (Brennan & Shah, 2000, pg. 59) In some cases, the process may even allow "an opportunity to the institutions and units that have been visited to comment on a draft version of the report and to formulate counter-arguments, if necessary."(Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994) Where reviews are more summative, reports will consist of "explicit-often quantifiable-statements of outcomes." (Brennan & Shah, 2000, pg. 59) Such reports lend themselves to an accountability function and, to this end, some quality assurance systems may involve distributing reports to a wider audience, through publication of rankings or even reports on the Internet. However, broad publication may lead to fear of being maligned and may reduce the willingness of participants to engage in frank and open discussions with external reviewers during site visits. Levels of transparency in reporting vary among quality assurance systems, and this may influence the level of buy-in those systems enjoy in the broader community. Where calls for increased transparency are not

satisfactorily met, external constituencies may suspect that information has been withheld (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994).

These four elements of Van Vught and Westerheijden's general model can be seen in various quality assurance systems worldwide, although each has its own mix of methods, purposes, and agents.

Modes of Quality Assurance: Three Variations on a Theme

This section identifies and illustrates three modes of quality assurance: assessment, audits, and accreditation. However, these are general terms, and when used in various contexts, they are often applied colloquially to quality assurance systems that do not necessarily conform to the descriptions given below. Each general description of a quality assurance model of is followed by an example.

Assessment. The term "assessment" can refer to "procedures used for evaluating what has been learned by individuals or groups of students", a meaning prevalent in North America. Internationally the term refers to "what Americans might describe as systematic program review," where the focus is on teaching quality (Dill et al., 1996). The following list describes seven characteristics of assessment:

1) Assessment evaluates the quality of specific activities within academic units;
2) Assessments are generally directed at the subject or program level;
3) Assessments use a combination of performance indicators, self-study and peer review;
4) Assessment can be conducted by an external agency, an internal consortium, or within institutions themselves;
5) Assessment results are often published in a way that allows for comparison of results among institutions;
6) Assessment defines quality relative to an institution's mission, not according to universally established standards;
7) Assessment is conducted on a cyclical basis, usually at an interval of five to ten years.(Dill et al., 1996)

An example of the assessment approach is that of the Association of Cooperating Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). VSNU was established as a "private organization which is financed and governed by the 14 Dutch universities," and provides services that include the management of external quality assessment, provision of courses and seminars, and "acting as a representative of universities in negotiations with central government." (Brennan, 2000, pg. 62) VSNU undertakes reviews at the program level, and tours the country, assessing all participating programs in a given discipline. Van Vught and Westerheijden (1994) describe this process:

> *…the focal point of the VSNU quality assessment procedure is the visiting committee that reviews all study programmes in a given area of knowledge in the country, the approach is by disciplinary fields, rather than institutional. In a fixed six year cycle; in principle all study programmes are covered by the procedure.*

Following the general model, in preparation for the visit of the committee, each participating program writes a self-evaluation that follows a fixed-format prescribed by a checklist provided by the VSNU. The fixed-format provides a framework for comparison among different programs under assessment.

The same committee visits all the programs in a discipline in a given review cycle. Committee members are proposed "by the collective deans of the participating faculties and nominated by the boards of the VSNU." (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994, pg. 362) The resulting committee consists of about seven members including four disciplinary experts, a "member with expertise in the education sciences," a student member and a VSNU secretary (Brennan, 2000, pg.62).

The findings of VSNU visiting committees' reviews are communicated at many levels. First, a preliminary report of the committee's conclusions is presented orally at the end of visits by the committee chair. Then, an interim report is sent to the faculty board responsible for managing the program, which is given an opportunity to comment on the visiting committee's assessment. At the conclusion of the review cycle, a final report that includes each program covered in the review is made publicly available and circulated to key actors, such as the Ministry of Education, media, and the Inspectorate of Higher Education.(Brennan, 2000, pg.63)

Through this Inspectorate, which reports directly to the Minister of Education, unsatisfactory VSNU assessments may have significant consequences. The Inspectorate has the responsibility for follow-up and monitoring of external reviews and for the assessment of the overall quality system. Should those responsible for a program provide an inadequate response to VSNU recommendations, the Minister may be informed, and the program may be struck from the register of recognized programs. However, in the few cases where the Inspector has intervened, such drastic measures were not required (Brennan, 2000, pg. 64).

The Netherlands' non-university sector follows principles similar to those of VSNU (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994, pg. 361). The Dutch chose to replicate this model in other sectors of its post-secondary system because the VSNU is a "good example of a national system in which disciplinary values appear to predominate."(Brennan, 2000, pg. 64) The Dutch system strikes a balance between the dual quality assurance purposes of improvement and accountability. One characteristic of this balance is the level of transparency in the process. Reports are widely distributed, and procedures are broadly inclusive.

The VSNU approach also allows for a quality assessment process predominantly managed by representatives from institutions, and provides a bridge between the independent academy and government oversight by placing the responsibility for follow-up in the hands of a public office. This may be explained by an exercise undertaken in the 1980s to restructure the relationship between the government and higher education institutions, wherein institutions were provided a greater degree of autonomy in exchange for the institutions' undertaking to "prove to society that they delivered quality higher education."(Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994, pg. 361)

Audit. Academic audit is the external review of an institution or program's processes of internal assessment of the quality of its own programs and processes. This presupposes the existence of internal assessment processes. Audit is "founded on the principle that good processes will produce good results, but that faulty processes will prevent even good people and plentiful resources from producing optimal outcomes."(Dill et al., 1996) Audits are similar to assessment and accreditation because they display the general model's elements of a self-study, site-visits by external experts and published reports. However, audit is different from assessment and accreditation because

> *…audits make no attempt to comprehensively review an institution's or programme's resources and activities, nor to directly assess the quality of teaching or student learning. Rather academic audits are focused on those processes by which academic institutions exercise their responsibility to assure academic standards and improve the quality of their teaching and learning.*(Dill, 2000, pg. 188)

Massy (2003) suggests a key component of an academic audit is "structured conversation" that focuses participants on key areas for quality assessment and improvement. First, "participants in audits must identify the underlying purpose of the education offered at their institution, and determine the desired learning outcomes." Such outcomes may be defined in terms of desired degree or qualification standards describing what a student should know and be able to do on completion (Massy, 2003). An audit must also determine how an institution ensures these outcomes are met, in terms of curriculum and delivery. Audit does not evaluate for quality, this is left to internal assessments; rather, audit evaluates these assessments' effectiveness and comprehensiveness as quality assurance mechanisms at the program level.

A good example is the audit process of the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance agency for Higher Education (QAA). The QAA was established in 1997 as an "independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education and through contracts with the main higher education funding bodies." (QAA, 2006c) The QAA's institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review…at the centre of [this] process is an emphasis on students and their learning." (QAA, 2006b)

The UK has developed qualifications frameworks that describe the skills and knowledge one can expect to have obtained with the completion of a given higher education credential. Links between the institutional audit process and qualifications frameworks ensure a "consistent use of qualification titles," which is premised on the notion that "public confidence in academic standards requires public understanding of the achievements represented by higher education qualifications." (QAA, 2001) A chief aim is to ensure

> …that universities and colleges in England and Northern Ireland have effective means of ensuring that the awards and qualifications in [higher education] are of an academic standard at least consistent with those referred to in The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) and are, where relevant, exercising their powers as degree-awarding bodies in a proper manner.(QAA, 2006b)

Audits occur every six-years, and include the audited institution's preparation of self-evaluation documents, and a site visit. Student involvement is a key component and student representatives participate by providing documentation to audit teams, as well as participation in audit meetings.

In making a judgment, the audit team "expresses 'broad confidence', 'limited confidence', or 'no confidence' in an institution, that can reasonably be placed in the soundness of the institution's present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards."(QAA, 2006a) Reports set out the audit team's judgments and recommendations; however, while a summary document is publicly available, the full report is shared only with the institution (QAA, 2006a).

Audits can help "build the capacity of academic institutions to maintain academic standards and improve the quality of teaching and student learning in the new competitive context" where institutions increasingly self-regulate (Dill, 2000, pg. 204). However, Dill (2004) notes some foundational assumptions of audit may be flawed. First, many academics and institutional administrators may not have a clear conception of what constitutes academic quality assurance processes. (pg. 196) Second, improving quality assurance processes might not improve students' academic outcomes. (pg.203) Ideally, the former assumption will become valid over time, as more and more of those involved in post-secondary education engage in quality assurance and become familiar with the discourse. The second assumption will be tested over the next few decades, should the use of institutional audits increase.

Accreditation. In North America, the term *accredited* is often synonymous with *recognized.* Accreditation can function as a brand, as "having a product with the collegiate 'Good Housekeeping seal of approval'."(Bogue & Saunders, 1992, pg. 29) Dill et al. (1996) suggest that accreditation processes can serve the purpose of determining "whether an institution or program meets threshold quality criteria and therefore certifies to the public the existence of minimum educational standards." Therefore, accreditation results can be expressed in terms of pass or fail.

Dill et al. (1996) suggest that accreditation has some elemental characteristics:

- *Accreditation encompasses both the objectives and the implementation of objectives: for example, it determines whether the objectives are appropriate for the institutional or degree level, and whether the resources are available to produce the desired outcomes.*
- *Accreditation is criterion-referenced; that is, it compares observed performance against preset standards usually determines by the accrediting agency.*
- *Accreditation is always performed by an agency external to the institution itself.*
- *Accreditation may be performed at the institutional or program level, with program-level accreditation being most common in professional fields like accounting, business, law, and engineering....*
- *Accreditation cycles are typically in the range of 10 years unless serious problems are uncovered; such problems will lead to shorter cycle times or probationary status.*
- *The final outcome of accreditation...is always published; such publication is necessary for accreditation to perform its certification function. However, details may be withheld to avoid adversarial relationships....*

Perhaps the most well-known accreditation system has evolved in the US, with private non-profit agencies established specifically for accreditation. These organizations are funded primarily by membership dues paid by participating institutions and programs, which are also required to cover the cost of accreditation reviews. US accreditation, as a formal system of quality assurance, has a much richer tradition than do the previously described methods. Indeed, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, one of America's six regional accreditors, was established in the late nineteenth century.

Accreditation is voluntary: accreditation status does not bestow upon an institution its license to operate. There are three types of accrediting agencies in the US, each with separate purviews. First, six regional accrediting organizations accredit both public and private post-secondary institutions, most of which are not-for-profit and degree granting. Second, there are national organizations that accredit at the institutional level; however, they focus primarily on faith-based institutions and for-profit institutions (Eaton, 2001, pg. 92). Finally, there are agencies that accredit programs in professional and specific areas; however, accreditation is mainly handled at the institutional level. Institutional accreditation is a predominantly recognized method of quality assurance in the US. Institutions face reviews on a ten year cycle, and are largely self-regulatory, enjoying a quality assurance system that allows for a high degree of institutional autonomy (Alderman, 2005, pg.18).

Post-secondary education in the US is delivered through a system of institutions that is vast in scale and complexity, and the accreditation system is similarly complex. The proliferation of accreditation mills, unrecognized organizations that bestow accreditation on questionable institutions without requiring any evidence of quality, raises an ancient question: "who guards the guardians?" In the US, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and the federal Department of Education recognize and validate legitimate accreditors. In recognizing accrediting organizations, CHEA requires that accreditors "advance academic quality,

demonstrate accountability, encourage purposeful change and needed improvement, employ appropriate and fair procedures in decision-making and continually reassess accreditation practices." (Eaton, 2001, pg. 95)

Although a voluntary, non-governmental process, accreditation is required to give an institution's students access to US federal student financial aid. In theory, an institution catering to wealthy students need not seek accreditation, but accreditation has other benefits: it can provide the subject of the review with valuable improvement advice and the imprimatur of quality that bestows significant advantage to students seeking credit transfer or credential recognition in educational and employment markets.

In comparison to the audit process, American accreditation's strength is the attention paid in the process to matters of a budgetary and fiscal nature.

> *An American accrediting commission will want to inform itself as to the financial soundness of the institution it is being asked to accredit or re-accredit.… The reason for this is quite simply - and quite rightly – that these matters impinge directly on the quality of the education provided, and on the prospects of that quality being preserved in the future.* (Alderman, 2005, pg. 20)

Despite its long tradition, American accreditation is facing mounting pressures from those who would see the system reformed. The foremost pressure is for increased public accountability and transparency; however, further pressures include those seeking a more outcomes-based approach, and to expand key accreditors' scope of activity from regional to national. (Eaton, 2001, pg. 96) The Commission on the Future of Higher Education of the Secretary of Education has recently released a draft report for higher education reform that includes the following accreditation related recommendations:

- *Reform the accreditation system away from spending and other inputs and toward achieving world class outcomes in teaching and learning….*
- *Accreditation should provide greater transparency – expanded and more useful information to the public about institutional performance and student achievement – as a condition of accreditation.*
- *The accreditation process should be more open and accessible by making the findings of reviews easily accessible to the public and increasing the proportion of public representatives in the governance of accrediting organizations, and members of review teams form outside higher education.* (Commission for the Future of Higher Education,2006)

Initial responses to such recommendations are ambiguous. Judith Eaton, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, acknowledges that "in today's society, a self-regulatory enterprise such as accreditation may now require a higher level of evidence and transparency than we are currently providing….to sustain faith and trust in the enterprise." (Eaton, 2006) At the same time, Alan Contreras, administrator of the Oregon Office of Degree Authorization, responds with frank words and skepticism toward government intentions, particularly with regard to the recommendation that accreditation should orient itself toward world-class outcomes

> *The principal difficulty with this lofty goal is that outside of a few rarefied contexts, most people do not want our educational standards to get higher. They want the standards to get lower.…The brutal truth is that higher standards, applied without regard for politics or any kind of screeching in the hinterlands, would result in fewer colleges, fewer programs, and an enormous decrease in the number and size of the schools now*

accredited by national accreditors. The commission's report pretends that the concept of regional accreditation is outmoded and that accreditors ought to in essence be lumped together in the new Great Big Accreditor, which is really Congress in drag. (Contreras, 2006)

Conclusion

The ultimate effect of the Commission's deliberations and recommendations upon the US accreditation system is yet to be seen. However, a reasonable expectation would be that it may evolve to incorporate some characteristics of academic audit and assessment systems emerging elsewhere in the world. However, in the near future, while the US will likely implement some level of accreditation reform, Canada will also grapple with issues of how best to ensure the public of the quality of the post-secondary education provided by its institutions and the global recognition of their credentials.

This review exercise has focused upon key organizational and procedural characteristics of general and particular models of quality assurance in post-secondary education. However, this review has not discussed the standards of quality that form the basis judgement in these models. Nevertheless, this review has illustrated the possibility for a wide variation in fundamental, organizational and procedural characteristics that impact how these judgements are reached and communicated.

This review suggests that the models of assessment, audit, and accreditation are valid and effective models; however, it is unlikely that any one of these models can, by itself, provide quality assurance and credential recognition according to the criteria defined in this project. Assessment focuses its attentions to individual programs, and assessment is made in the context of standards relative to the institutional mission. Where advanced systems of assessment allow for the transparent reporting and comparison of results, as with the VSNU model, assessment strikes a balance between the opposing interests of improvement and accountability. However, in less advanced assessment systems, where assessment is internal to institutions and there is no central agency for the coordination, comprehensive reporting, or meta-evaluation of these institutional systems, the accountability function is lost.

The institutional audit can fill this accountability gap, as it presupposes that assessment processes are in place, and functions to coordinate the meta-evaluation of these systems' quality assurance. Moreover, in cases where audit is linked to qualifications frameworks, audit can provide the public with assurance that an institution's programs are leading their graduates toward the expected outcomes. Therefore, a combination of audit and assessment has the possibility to assure both the quality of institutions and their programs, but neither mode can achieve this on its own.

Accreditation's main advantage is that it bestows an easily communicable passing grade that indicates that institution has been determined to satisfy externally developed standards of organizational capacity to deliver quality programming, or that a program has met external criteria for curriculum content and delivery. A second advantage is that the process, criteria, and managing organization itself are developed by, and consist of, institutional faculty and administrators. This ownership may lead to high levels of support for accreditation from the academy; however, faculty and administrators are not the only stakeholders in education. Accreditation's closed-door characteristics can lead to skepticism and calls for greater accountability, particularly if higher standards of quality are sought than those being employed by the accreditors.

The conceptual framework section of this report outlined three criteria that a quality assurance mechanism must meet in order to function in facilitating credential recognition. One of these criteria was that the system must have the trust of post-secondary education stakeholders and the public. This review of general and particular post-secondary education quality assurance models above elucidates some pre-conditions for the satisfaction of this criterion

- support or "ownership" of faculty and academic administrators, achieved through their involvement or management of the process;
- appropriate situation of the organization between government and institutional interests;
- balancing the interests of improvement and accountability; and,
- transparency regarding the process and its outcomes.

These conditions should be kept in mind as the discussion moves on to Canadian mechanisms for quality assurance.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CANADIAN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

While there is no national system of institutional accreditation formally established in Canada, this does not mean that there are no quality assurance mechanisms. In most cases, quality assurance mechanisms exist at the institutional level, such as internally managed program review processes. Secondly, quality assurance mechanisms managed by professional and institutional associations exist at both provincial and national levels, such as AUCC and professional accrediting bodies. Provincial-government-initiated quality assurance mechanisms can be found in some provinces. Finally, there are mechanisms that do not fit the general model outlined above but still add to Canadian post-secondary education's quality assurance spectrum. These include student outcome surveys, transfer and articulation processes, and published rankings according to performance indicators.

The following list provides a brief overview of some key mechanisms and organizations participating in the quality assurance of Canadian post-secondary education. Unfortunately, these mechanisms and organizations do not lend themselves to compartmentalized comparison. Each is unique in its origins and purposes. However, the four elements of the general model can be found in each. The following list will concentrate on the distinguishing features and salient characteristics of each approach and organization.

Internal and External Program Review. According to the AUCC, "robust institutional quality assurance policies and processes are the foundation of the Canadian higher education quality assurance regime."(AUCC, 2005b) Academic program review is a common quality assurance method in Canadian universities, and some institutions conduct reviews at both the institutional and program level. Generally, these reviews will include external academic expertise. Moreover, the executive heads of each institutional member has endorsed the AUCC's *Principles of Institutional Quality Assurance in Canadian Higher Education* (Appendix F), and this document provides a common framework to guide the internal quality assurance efforts.

For example, the University of Victoria is an AUCC member, and in accordance with the *Principles*, the university has in place a "formal, approved, transparent policy committing it to ensuring the quality and continuous improvement of its academic programs."(AUCC, 2005c) The stated purposes of *Policy 2700 - Academic Program Review* are "to provide for regular and systematic reviews of the operation and objectives of academic departments and programs," the key objectives of those reviews being "internal and public accountability," and "ongoing improvement and academic direction."(University of Victoria Senate, 2004) Every academic unit in the university should undergo a review based on self-evaluation and peer review every five to seven years. These reviews

> *…provide the occasion for units to systematically reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses, to receive external feedback, validation and advice, in order to determine actions to further enhance the quality of its programs, and to consider academic objectives and directions in the context of the wider objectives of the Faculty and the University.* (UVic, 2004)

University of Victoria program reviews result in reports that are publicly available through the Office of the Vice-President, Academic, although this availability is "subject to issues of privacy and confidentiality." (UVic 2004)

Program Accreditation. Formal accreditation systems do exist at the national level for specialized programs such as nursing, architecture and engineering. Those responsible for these programs "participate in the establishment and review of postsecondary curriculum standards and consult on other professional issues governing students' preparations for entry into professions."(CICIC, 2004a)

For instance, the Canadian Engineering Accrediting Board (CEAB), accredits undergraduate engineering programs in Canada. Programs accredited by the CEAB meet or exceed criteria established by the CEAB to set educational standards ensuring that programs provide graduates with the academic qualifications necessary for professional engineering registration in Canada (CEAB 2005, pg.7). As such, CEAB accreditation criteria focus heavily on curriculum content. A distinctive feature of the CEAB accreditation process is that, while the process and criteria are publicly accessible,

> *…records and deliberations of CEAB are kept confidential. The list of accredited programs maintained by CEAB includes only those programs that have been accredited by CEAB, together with the effective date or dates.* (CEAB, 2005, pg. 24)

Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada. The CEAB is one of over 25 member agencies of the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada (AAAC). The AAAC is a voluntary organization of member agencies that accredit professional post-secondary education programs, and "provides a forum for exchange of ideas and methods, for monitoring national and international trends in education and accreditation, and for promoting the importance and acceptance of accreditation." (AAAC, 1999) The AAAC's *Guidelines for Good Practice of Academic Accreditation of Professional Programs* (1999) consist of 11 provisions including the following:

- *The accreditation process is transparent, consistent, fair, and maximizes objectivity and confidentiality.*
- *There are sufficient financial, human, and other resources to carry out the operations of accreditation effectively.*
- *There is a mechanism for training peer reviewers.*

Strangely, the first provision demands both transparency and confidentiality in the accreditation process. All three of the listed provisions call for consistency. Variances in the preparation levels of reviewers or in the amount of resources available would likely have a deleterious effect on consistency of accreditation processes.

AUCC Membership. Membership in the AUCC requires that an institution meet its membership criteria (Appendix E). Gaining institutional membership can be considered as a quality assurance process having all four elements of the general model: an agent responsible for the system, a self-evaluation process, peer review through a site visit, and published reports. If an institution is successful in applying for membership, then it is listed on the AUCC web site as an institutional member. Once a member, it is expected that the institution will adhere to the *Principles of Institutional Quality Assurance in Canadian Higher Education* (Appendix F); however, membership does not require further review or reaffirmation.

AUCC does not claim to be an accrediting agency; however, of the three modes of quality assurance outlined above, the AUCC membership process most resembles accreditation. The process is criterion-referenced, voluntary, managed by an association of institutional members, and results in a pass/fail decision. However, AUCC membership is not a quality assurance option for many new providers. Membership is not open to private for-profit institutions, institutions

that lack an academic decision-making body akin to a senate, institutions with a majority of programs at the diploma or certificate level, or institutions that lack a mission statement that demonstrates a commitment to research and scholarship as well as the dissemination of knowledge through teaching. (AUCC, 2005a)

Legislative Restrictions. Marshall has referred to the Canadian approach as a system of "accreditation by legislation." (2004, pg. 3) Canadian post-secondary institutions were traditionally able to grant degrees or label themselves as a university only if they had a statute or charter enabling them to do so. According to the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials

> *…in each of Canada's ten provinces and three territories, legislation is used to some degree by governments to establish, govern, recognize, or ensure the quality of postsecondary educational programming. Through legislation, the use of the term "university" or "college" may be restricted; the power to establish universities or colleges may be the exclusive right of the respective legislature.* (CICIC, 2004b)

Where provinces have opened up the restrictive environment to allow new providers to grant degrees and perhaps even become designated as universities, this is also achieved through provincial legislation. Hence, provincial legislation has enabled the establishment of new provincial quality assurance bodies.

Ontario's Post-Secondary Education Quality Assurance Board. Ontario's *Post- Secondary Choice and Excellence Act, 2000* was enacted to increase choice for Ontarians who wish to pursue a degree. This *Act* restricts the use of the word "university" and the provision, sale and advertisement of degrees and degree programs to those authorized to perform these activities under statute. The *Act* also provides an avenue through which the Minister may provide consent to an institution making an application under the *Act* to do any of the restricted activities.

The *Act* establishes the PEQAB to review these applications and make recommendations to the Minister vis-à-vis consent. The *Act* enables the PEQAB is to establish review panels for assessing the quality of proposed degree programs, to establish criteria and procedures through which to conduct reviews, and to establish advisory committees and conduct research suitable to its purposes. The Lieutenant Governor in Council appoints the Chair of the PEQAB, while ten other members are Ministerial appointments.

The PEQAB is assisted in its efforts by a Secretariat that, in addition to providing administrative support, also undertakes research and drafts the Board's policies and procedures. The Secretariat consists of a Director and Senior Policy Advisors all of whom possess an advanced academic degree and professional experience relative to post-secondary education.

The following organizational types may make an application under the *Act*

> • existing public organizations in Ontario, such as Colleges of Applied Arts and Training
> • existing public and private organizations outside Ontario or Canada
> • existing private organizations in Ontario, either for profit or non-profit; and
> • *de novo* public or private degree-granting organizations, within or outside Ontario.
> (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2000)

Since Ontario's universities had statutory authority to grant degrees prior to the *Act,* their new degree programs are not subject to PEQAB review. On the other hand, the *Act* makes no exceptions for institutions of a faith-based nature, so even institutions seeking to offer degrees in programs of ministry, theology or divinity are subject to review. Applicants fill out an

application following a prescribed format that may vary according to the type of organization. Although the main function of the PEQAB is to assess the educational quality of proposed degree programs, private applicants may also be subject to an organization review.

For organization and program Reviews, the Board (with the assistance of the Secretariat) establishes a panel of external experts to assess the applicant against published criteria established by the PEQAB. Organization review criteria include benchmarks in such categories as administrative capacity, ethical conduct, dispute resolution and academic freedom. Experts invited to participate in an organization review panel will have qualifications such as an accounting designation, experience with accreditation and regulatory bodies, or experience in institutional admissions or registrars' offices (PEQAB, 2006, pg. 12).

Experts sought to participate in program review panels will have qualifications such as an advanced degree in a related discipline, related professional experience, or experience in an academic situation as a professor, administrator. In general, the Board seeks external experts who are free of conflict of interest, open minded, and committed in principle to quality assurance in education (PEQAB, 2006, pg. 18). Program review criteria include standards relating to program content and delivery, as well as credential recognition, accreditation and program evaluation. A key standard in the program review relates to the proposed degree level. Extensive descriptions of the educational outcomes and competencies expected of graduates of different degree-levels are available on the PEQAB website. Applicants must convince the Board and its expert panels that its proposed degree programs will produce the desired learning outcomes in their graduates.

The Board, in making its recommendations to the Minister regarding consent, considers reports of the review panels and the comments of the applicants. The Minister must ensure that the applicant has made arrangements for safe storage and access of student records, and has provided financial security to protect the interests of students in the event of unforeseen institutional closure. (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2000) Only when the consent decision is final can the Minister's decision be posted on the PEQAB website and the applicant notified of the outcome of the process.

British Columbia's Degree Quality Assessment Board. Similar in both intent and language to the *Post Secondary Choice and Excellence Act,* BC enacted legislation loosening restrictions on degree-granting in its *Degree Authorization Act, 2002* (DAA). Like Ontario's *Act*, the DAA prohibits the provision of degrees and degree programs, and the use of the word university, to those with legislative authority for those activities. Moreover, the DAA established a quality assurance process through which private and out-of-province organizations can apply for Ministerial Consent to grant degrees and use the word university. However, unlike Ontario's *Act,* under the DAA, discretion to establish the criteria under which to award consent, and to establish quality assurance processes rest with the Minister.

While Ontario's PEQAB is established in legislation, its BC counterpart, the Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB) is appointed by the Minister, but is not established in legislation. Rather, the DAA only requires that the Minister be satisfied the met the criteria established under the Act by successfully undergoing a quality assessment process. The DAA does not specify which quality assessment process or which organization is responsible for that process ("Degree Authorization Act," 2002). While the DQAB does not review new degree programs in religious subjects, the DQAB reviews applications for all other new degree programs made under the DAA, and, in the case of a private organization, may determine that an organization review is necessary.

BC's Minister of Advanced Education approves new degree programs from all public institutions. Therefore, through policy, the Board also reviews proposals for new degree programs from public institutions, including applied baccalaureates and applied master's degrees proposed by the province's public colleges, university colleges and institutes. However, institutions that have 10 years of demonstrated success in providing degree programming at a given credential level may be deemed to have *exempt status* to that level. These institutions' new degree proposals are not generally reviewed by the Board, but go directly to the Minister for approval following a period of opportunity for peer review and comment through an online and public proposal system.

Campus Alberta Quality Council. Alberta's *Post-Secondary Learning Act, 2003* was the result of a comprehensive review of that province's post-secondary education system. The *PSLA* replaces and combines four separate acts that previously governed the provinces' colleges, universities, technical institutes, and the Banff Centre. In also established the Campus Alberta Quality Council, appointed by the Minister, to "review proposals from both private and public institutions wishing to offer degrees" and to make recommendations to the Minister based on an organizational review of the institution and a review of the proposed degree program to ensure quality (Alberta Learning, 2004). Under the *Post-Secondary Learning Act Regulation, 2004*, the Council has the must establish minimum organizational conditions and standards of program quality to guide the reviews.

A key feature of the CQAC review process is that, unlike the PEQAB and DQAB processes, the potential for an organization review is not limited to private institutions. All institutions whose degree proposals are referred to the Council by the Minister may be subject to a full review including both an organization and program review by external experts. However, an applicant institution may request a fully or partially expedited review process. In a fully exempted review process "neither an organizational evaluation nor Council appointed external program evaluators are needed." (CAQC, 2005) One of six criteria for an expedited review is that well-established internal assessment practices exist. Moreover, "the use of external assessment and consultation with stakeholders in the initial proposal strengthens the case for an expedited review." (CAQC, 2005)

Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission. The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission has quality assurance as one of four broad responsibilities. The Council of Maritime Premiers established MPHEC in 1974 as a regional agency representing governments and institutions in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island (MPHEC, 2006). MPHEC's quality assurance takes on two main formats: program assessment, and monitoring institutional quality assurance policies and procedures. Program assessment aims to provide assurances that programs meet established standards of quality, and is a mechanism for approving proposals for new and modified academic programs among institutions under MPHEC's ambit. The monitoring of institutional quality assurance procedures recognizes that "the cornerstone of quality assurance is self assessment by the institutions," and determines whether the procedures used by institutions to assess the quality of their programs and functions "are performing adequately as quality control mechanisms." (MPHEC, 2005) The monitoring process asks whether the institution is following its own quality assurance policies, and whether those policies could be adjusted to better ensure the quality of the institution's academic programs and services. This process monitoring of institutional quality assurance procedures, as well as MPHEC's regional scope of authority, set MPHEC apart from the three provincial quality assurance bodies outlined above.

Credit Transfer and Articulation. While the purpose of credit transfer systems is not quality assurance per se, transfer involves a comparison of courses at one institution to courses offered at another institution with the aim of establishing equivalency. In systems where formal course-to-course and program articulation is extensive, this establishment of equivalency creates a de facto standard among different autonomous institutions, and this can be seen as advancing and providing assurances of the quality of articulated courses.

Regional Accreditation (US). BCCAT (2006) notes the rather ironic strategy of Canadian public post-secondary institutions applying to America's regional agencies for accreditation. The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools has accredited Alberta's Athabasca University, and BC's Capilano College has applied for accreditation by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. This may signify institutional intent to pursue student enrolments in the American market. Athabasca offers its programs primarily through distance delivery, and its achievement of accreditation puts the American student at the institution's doorstep. However, the recognition of US regional accreditation as an indicator of institutional quality extends beyond North America to a far greater degree than Canadian mechanisms outlined above. These external agencies might provide Canadian institutions with a greater degree of global recognition than our homegrown quality assurance methods.

Pan-Canadian Efforts: In a statement that supports this project's problem definition, the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, administered by the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, notes that:

> *The complex array of current mechanisms, the lack of national and provincial/territorial accreditation bodies, the absence of evaluation mechanisms to assess Canada's systems of quality assurance or evaluate transnational education providers/programs, and the absence of information on how Canadian education systems align with those of other countries and how Canadian credentials are received in other countries make the assessment of Canada's quality assurance mechanisms a considerable but not insurmountable challenge.* (CICIC, 2004a)

Recognizing this challenge, the Advisory Committee of Deputy Ministers of Education established in 2004 a Pan-Canadian Committee on Quality Assurance in Degree Programming. The Committee was mandated to draft a qualifications framework describing the desired general learning outcomes and competencies of degree-holders at each given level, and a pan-Canadian approach to the external validation of the quality of programs against those described outcomes. The Committee was also tasked with developing common standards for rigorous program reviews (Pan-Canadian Committee on Quality Assurance in Degree Programming, 2005).

In August 2005, the Committee released a report recommending that the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada endorse a *Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada* as a guideline for decision making relating to new degree programs and new degree-granting institutions within a province/territory. A further recommendation was that Ministers establish a committee of representatives from quality assurance systems in each jurisdiction to discuss issues arising from the implementation of the *Ministerial Statement* and advise on the development of quality assurance systems in each jurisdiction (Pan-Canadian Committee, 2005).

The *Ministerial Statement* is envisioned as a touchstone to which governments and institutions can look for generally accepted Canadian degree-level standards and procedures for quality assessments. As an inter-provincial collaboration, the committee can avoid some of the jurisdictional pitfalls characteristic of education in Canadian federalism. Moreover, the Committee is shrewdly diplomatic in that it does not encroach too much upon provincial

jurisdiction or the autonomy of institutions. It does not go so far as to advise on how to implement these standards and procedures, on who should be responsible for the implementation and ongoing operation of these assessment systems, or on what consequences failure to follow the *Ministerial Statement* might incur. Moreover, the *Ministerial Statement* is described as a "guideline for decision making relating to new degree programs and new degree granting institutions," conveying the curious assumption that established programs and degree-granting institutions need not be reviewed under similar criteria and processes. This may instigate a system of at least two tiers: those institutions and programs that require external quality review under the *Ministerial Statement's* guidance and those that do not. What meaning does this convey to the public in terms of the general quality of institutions and programs in either category?

Conclusion

This review not only provides basic information about quality assurance in Canadian post-secondary, but it also illustrates one of this report's central premises: while the current array of quality assurance methods for Canadian post-secondary education may be effective and valid, there are too many different approaches to be clearly communicated and well understood by the public. Each of the three modes of quality assurance is present in Canada. Assessment is performed within institutions, and in some provinces, by newly established quality assessment boards. Accreditation exists for specialized programs, and the option of seeking institutional accreditation by a US agency is open to Canadian institutions. Institutional accreditation is also present in the form of AUCC membership, despite reluctance to label it as such. Finally, MPHEC manages an institutional audit process. However, these various mechanisms are uncoordinated and disjointed.   Taken as a whole, Canada's various quality assurance methods fall short of meeting the established criteria for a quality assessment system that facilitates credential recognition.

In summary, a useful analogy for quality assurance systems in Canada is that of the patchwork quilt. The majority of post-secondary education in Canada is covered under some portion of this patchwork. However, there are areas where the fabric overlaps, and areas where there are gaps. Moreover, the fabric is strewn together in a fashion that lacks methodical intent: it is an amalgam of pre-existing parts, each with different shapes and consistencies, loosely fashioned into a composite whole. To a lay person, such as a prospective student, plain explanations of which institutions are recognized for what and by whom are difficult to find. For educational professionals, these explanations are difficult to provide. The research presented in the following sections of this report explores avenues toward a potential framework to enable a common-sense understanding of institutional quality in Canada.

SURVEY RESULTS AND FINDINGS

1. Respondent Profile

The data set consists of 37 complete responses to the web survey. Of these 37 respondents, six chose to remain anonymous, and some chose not to answer some specific questions. However, the web-platform allows participants to share the URL link with individuals outside the intended participant group. As a result, the researcher was able to identify three unsolicited responses in the data set. However, since the individuals providing the unsolicited responses identified themselves as having the required knowledge and experience to provide an informed response, their responses were not excluded. Including these three respondents in the overall number of recruited participants brings the total number of recruited participants to 75, resulting in an overall response rate of 49.3%.

Table 2:   Respondent Characteristics

Respondent Characteristics	Recruited	Responded	Percent
British Columbia	56	27	48%
Outside British Columbia	16	4	25%
Unsolicited or Anonymous	3	6	N/A
Total	75	37	49%

Individuals from British Columbia showed a high level of participation (48%). The response rate for individuals outside of British Columbia is comparatively low, resulting in a small number of participants from other provinces. Only four of the 16 recruited to participate from outside of BC can be identified in the respondent group. These four respondents make up only 11% of the overall respondent group. However, the research anticipated the skewing of results toward the British Columbian perspective.

Question 27 asked respondents to identify their primary institutional/organizational affiliation. As Figure 3 below indicates, while there were spikes in the number of responses from those affiliated with public universities (24%) and public colleges (24%), responses were received from those who identified with each category. In this response profile, no category of organization is extremely under- or over-represented.

Figure 3: Question 27 – Organizational Affiliation
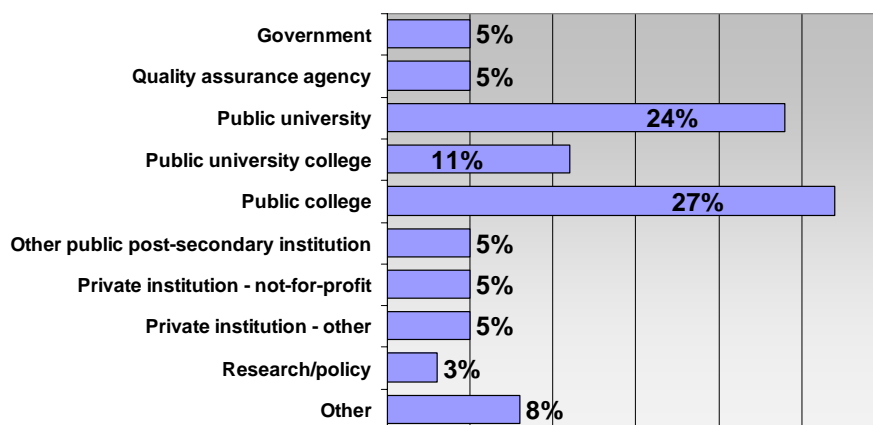
2. Findings

The forthcoming section will follow the four areas of questioning identified in the conceptual framework: *attitudes and awareness, organizational elements, procedural elements,* and *appetite for implementation and assessment of organizational capacity.* Where the questionnaire provides opportunity for open comment, only comments of particular interest, or comments that exemplify a larger group of comments of a similar vein will be provided. A fuller discussion of these results and their implications follows in the next section.

Attitudes and Awareness

This area of questioning aims to set the context for respondents' comments, and focuses upon the extent to which they identify a problem in Canadian quality assessment that requires attention, their attitudes towards changes to the traditional model of Canadian degree-granting, and their levels of awareness of various quality assurance organizations and methods. This section involves 12 of the 30 questions included in the web-based survey. To facilitate the reporting of results in this section, the researcher employed indexes in the three categories of problem identification, attitudes, and awareness. Tables explaining the calculation of index scores are available for reference in Appendix D.

As previously noted, the problem identification index included answers to Questions 2, 6, 7, and 13. Index scores fall within the range of four, being the lowest possible score, and a maximum possible score of 16.

Table 3: Problem Identification Index Scores

Measure	Score	Percent of Total Possible Score
Minimum	8	50%
Median	13	81.25%
Maximum	15	93.75%
Mean	12.43	77.70%

Table 3 shows that participants were likely to consider issues such as credential recognition, the need for new quality assurance mechanisms, and the confusing nature of the current spectrum of quality assurance methods in Canada as problematic. Both the mean and median index score falling above the index's mid-range value of 10 indicate high levels of problem identification in the respondent group.

The conclusion that participants identify the issues outlined in this study as problematic is supported by the responses to some of the individual questions included in this index.

Table 4: Question 2

Question 2: There is a growing problem of credential recognition among Canadian institutions.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Disagree	3	8%
Agree	14	38%
Strongly Agree	20	54%
Total	**37**	**100%**

Only 8% of participants disagree with the premise that there is a growing problem of credential recognition among Canadian institutions, while many respondents (54%) strongly agree with this premise. Moreover, as shown in Table 5, a strong majority of respondents (71%) either disagrees or strongly disagrees with the statement that current methods for ensuring quality in Canadian universities are sufficient.

Table 5: Question 7

Question 7: Current methods for ensuring quality in Canadian universities are sufficient.		
Strongly Disagree	5	14%
Disagree	21	57%
Agree	8	22%
Strongly Agree	3	8%
Total	**37**	**100%**

Question 13 relates to one of the central ideas put forth in this report, namely, that while quality assurance methods currently in place in Canadian post-secondary education are effective and valid, there are too many different approaches to be clearly communicated and well understood by the public. Only 14% of respondents disagreed with this proposition, while a strong majority (86%) either agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 6: Question 13

Question 13: Although the quality assurance methods currently in place in Canadian post-secondary education are effective and valid, there are too many different approaches to be clearly communicated and well understood by the public.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Disagree	5	14%
Agree	23	62%
Strongly Agree	9	24%
Total	**37**	**100%**

Responses received in relation to problem identification substantiate the utility and timeliness of this study. Moreover, these responses impart confidence that respondents are well aware of the issues. However, consideration must also be given to respondents' ideological bent. Are they predominantly traditionalist, adhering to the belief that the Canadian paradigm of degree granting should be upheld, or are they open to the transformations that are taking place? The attitudinal index attempts to gain perspective on participants' levels of resistance or openness to change.

Table 7: Attitudinal Index Scores

Measure	Score	Percent of Total Possible Score
Minimum	11	45.83%
Median	22	70.83%
Maximum	17	91.67%
Mean	16.76	69.82%

Table 7 displays aggregate scores in the attitudinal index. The attitudinal index attempts to gain perspective on participants' levels of resistance or openness to change. The attitudinal index includes Questions 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, and 11, has a minimum score of 6, a maximum possible score of 24, and a mid-range value of 10. Results indicate a high level of openness among respondents toward the shifting degree-granting paradigm in Canada. As even the minimum score falls over the mid-range value, all participants had attitudinal index scores that place them on the side of being more open to change. The substantial number of participants associated with institutions that are not traditionally able to grant degrees may partially explain these results (27% from public colleges; 10% from private institutions).

The following three tables provide examples of responses to specific questions forming parts of the attitudinal index. Question 3 relates to the perceived connection between an institutional research mission and the provision of quality undergraduate programs. A majority of respondents (74%) dispute this connection, and either disagree, or strongly disagree that a research mission is necessary for the purposes of undergraduate education.

Table 8: Question 3

Question 3:	A post-secondary institution's mission must include a significant research component in order for it to provide quality undergraduate degree programs.	
Strongly Disagree	10	28%
Disagree	20	56%
Agree	6	17%
Strongly Agree	0	0%
Total	**36**	**100%**

In the context of the attitudinal index, respondents reporting openness to for-profit private institutions are seen to be more receptive to shifts in the paradigm of Canadian degree level education. However, this is one area where a majority of respondents displayed more traditionalist tendencies. Seventy-eight percent of respondents to Question 8 are more partial to not-for-profit private institutions.

Table 9: Question 8

Question 8:	As far as the increasing participation of private providers of post-secondary education, I feel more open to not-for-profit providers over for-profit ones.	
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Disagree	8	22%
Agree	18	50%
Strongly Agree	10	28%
Total	**36**	**100%**

As indicated in Table 10, all participants providing a response to Question 11 agreed, or strongly agreed that small and specialized institutions can provide quality degree programs in specific areas. This result contests the idea that comprehensive research universities are the appropriate locus of degree granting in all cases.

Table 10: Question 11

Question 11: It is reasonable that small and specialized institutions can provide quality degree programs in specific areas.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%
Agree	20	56%
Strongly Agree	16	44%
Total	**36**	**100%**

Scores in the awareness index are based on the results to Question 14, and have a minimum possible score of 11, and a maximum of 55, with the higher score indicating a higher level of awareness of, and experience with, given quality assurance organizations and methods. The mid-range value in the awareness index is 32.

Table 11: Awareness Index Scores

Measure	Score	Percent of Total Possible Score
Minimum	21	38.18%
Median	36	65.45%
Maximum	49	89.09%
Mean	36.51	66.39%

Table 12: Question 14

Question 14: Indicate your level of familiarity with the following organizations, quality assurance agencies and quality assurance methods:					
	Completely unaware of	Have heard of,	Vaguely familiar with	Familiar with	Have been involved with
DQAB	3%	3%	8%	43%	43%
CAQC	14%	8%	30%	43%	5%
PEQAB	16%	19%	22%	30%	14%
AUCC	0%	0%	11%	54%	35%
MPHEC	32%	14%	22%	30%	3%
Pan-Canadian Committee on Quality Assurance in Degree Programming	27%	19%	8%	32%	14%
INQAAHE	54%	19%	14%	11%	3%
Regional Accreditation Agencies (US)	3%	8%	19%	47%	22%
National Accreditation Agencies (US)	6%	14%	25%	44%	11%
CHEA	16%	19%	22%	43%	0%
External review of institutional department or program	3%	0%	3%	27%	68%

While some respondents were highly aware of most of the listed quality assurance organizations and methods, many were unaware of some of the particular organizations, and this may have had a diminishing effect on awareness index scores overall. For instance, a majority of respondents (54%) indicated that they were "completely unaware of" the International Network of Quality

Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. As could be expected from a respondent pool that is primarily British Columbian, 32% reported complete unawareness of the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission. Not surprisingly, however, many respondents reported having "been involved or worked with" AUCC (35%), and external review of an institutional department or program (68%). It is not any more surprising that respondents reported a high degree of awareness of that province's Degree Quality Assessment Board (86% were either familiar with the DQAB or had been involved with the organization).

These three indexes have established that, for the most part, respondents to the survey are well aware of the issues being discussed in this report, open to the changes that brought these changes about, and are sufficiently versed in quality assurance mechanisms and methods to provide informed responses in this study. The following section concerns their views regarding the desirable elements for an organization established to manage an institutional accreditation process.

Organizational Elements

Questions in this area relate to four key concepts: *source of authority, scope of activity, scope of authority, and organizational structure.* While questions relating to the first three of these categories were crafted to elicit responses from a limited set of options, the question relating to *organizational structure* was an open-ended question, and did not direct respondents to any particular vein of response. In many cases, comments received in this question reiterated the responses to previous questions.

There was no clear consensus among participants regarding a preferred source of authority for any future organization providing institutional accreditation. While few participants would prefer this organization to be situated within government, many (63%) would prefer government involvement although at arm's length. Among this group, almost twice as many respondents saw the provincial level of government, rather than the federal level, as the best place to situate such an organization.

Only 27% of respondents would prefer no government involvement through situating the responsibility for accreditation with a non-profit association of member institutions. This last model parallels the American accreditation model. However, responses to this question indicate is a high level of desire for government involvement in whatever process might come about. American-style accreditation is a model that emerged in an environment that was not so receptive to such government involvement.

Table 13: Question 20 – Source of Authority

Question 20: Which of the following types of organization would you think best to administer a quality assurance/accreditation system?		
Provincial Government	1	3%
Federal Government	3	8%
Quasi-Governmental Agency/Administrative Board, Provincial Level	15	41%
Quasi-Governmental Agency/Administrative Board, Federal Level	8	22%
Non-profit Association consisting of member institutions	10	27%
Total	**37**	**100%**

Although more respondents to Question 20 preferred the involvement of government at the provincial level (44%) to that of the federal government (30%), Table 14 shows a strong majority of respondents (57%) indicating that the national scope as the most desirable scope of activity for

an institutional quality assurance agency. The remaining responses were distributed evenly among provincial and regional scopes of activity. This may demonstrate a certain level of jurisdictional schizophrenia among participants. They are aware of the limitations that arise from provincial jurisdiction over educational matters, but ideally, they would like to see a centralized body established with a national scope of authority. No respondent indicated a preference for the organization to have an international mandate.

Table 14: Question 15 - Scope of Activity

Question 15: Please choose one of the following options as the most desirable *scope of activity* of an institutional quality assurance agency/ accreditor in Canadian post-secondary education.		
Provincial	8	22%
Regional/Multi-Provincial (e.g. Western Provinces)	8	22%
National	21	57%
International (e.g. US Accreditation Agency)	0	0%
Other, please specify	0	0%
Total	**37**	**100%**

The scope of authority discussed in Table 15 is defined as the parameters around which types of institutions or programs would be included under the scope of the organization's accreditation process. A majority of respondents (57%) felt that all institutions offering credentials that lead or ladder into degrees should be included under the purview of the organization managing the envisioned institutional accreditation process. Another 38% believe that all degree-granting institutions should be included. Only one respondent felt that institutional accreditation is only necessary for non-traditional degree granting institutions. One respondent used "other" category to indicate his or her preference that the scope of the organization should include all degree-granting institutions and all institutions offering credentials that lead to degrees.

Table 15: Question 16 – Scope of Authority

Question 16: Please choose one of the following options as the most desirable *scope of authority* of an institutional quality assurance agency/ accreditor in Canadian post-secondary education.		
All institutions offering credentials that may lead to or ladder into degrees (e.g. diplomas, certificates, associate degrees)	21	57%
All degree granting institutions (e.g. baccalaureates, master's, doctorates)	14	38%
All non-traditional degree granting institutions (e.g. colleges, private institutions)	1	3%
All private institutions	0	0%
Other	1	3%
Total	**37**	**100%**

Responses to the above three questions are ambiguous. The majority views described therein would lead us to construct a provincial quasi-governmental agency with a national ambit for accrediting institutions offering credentials that may lead to or ladder into degrees. Such an organization is not only difficult to conceive of, but also unlikely to address any of the issues identified in this discussion. It is more likely that the process described by these responses would further contribute to the problem, rather than alleviate it.

Fortunately, open-ended responses to the Question 21 provide some clarity as to what particular type or organizational structure participants envision.

Question 21: **Please explain briefly the type of organization you feel would best be able to provide an accreditation system for Canadian post-secondary institutions**

There were two different types of response to this question. The first further clarified previous responses. Some comments helped illustrate the connection that respondents were envisioning when they called for a provincial agency with a national mandate. Some examples follow:

- *Federal government advisory agency primarily consisting of heads of Quasi-Governemnt Provncial [sic] agencies.*
- *National organization with accreditation mandate; provincial representatives on board; collaboratively-developed standards and quality assurance framework.*
- *A set of quasi-governmental provincial agencies - consistent with the Canadian constitution as I understand it - participating voluntarily in a National Board.*
- *Ideally, a national and provincially agreed upon Non-profit association - with teeth - and effectiveness, accountability, and transparency.*
- *A quasi-government Agency whose membership includes academic, government, student and lay members.*

A second style of response offered a more lengthy description of the envisioned organization, as well as some other suggestions and advice.

- *…Government MUST be involved, since our Canadian democracy funds and depends on public institutions that serve the needs of our citizens. However, appropriate academic expertise is seldom found within the ranks of government departments themselves, so an agency or "arm" of the government with appropriately qualified staff and assessors would be the best solution.…*
- *There should be an overarching organization that is under the supervision of the Federal Government and that has appointed members from national post-secondary organizations, e.g. ACCC, AUCC. As well, there should be provincial and private industry appointments. There should be regional/provincial sub-organizations to assist with the self-study and evaluation processes. Provincial Governments could appoint members to these sub-organizations. Institutional fees should be charged depending on number of students, budgets, etc.*
- *The US accreditation boards which are peer based, peer operated, and primarily funded by memberships provide an interesting model for Canada. It would be preferable to operate such a body at the national level. The organization should have the support of CMEC but should not report to CMEC. The development of such a body would also impact AUCC and change how institutions perceive the role of this organization, so this would have to be considered. I would place accreditation in the hands of the institutions themselves as a peer body (they are the experts and know best how institutions should meet academic and service standards).*

While these comments help to address some of the confusion identified in responses to Questions 15, 16 and 20, many questions remain as to what organizational model would be best for an institutional accreditation system in Canada.

Three significant conclusions can be drawn from responses in this section. First, respondents are quite receptive to government involvement in the accreditation/quality assurance organization, although involvement at an arm's length is preferred. Second, including the review of

universities in the scope of the organization's authority is not entirely out of the question. Third, the organizational model should strive toward a national scope of activity in whatever procedures it develops, whether this national scope is derived through an association of provincial authorities or institutional members.

Procedural Elements

This section includes results for questions relating to the following categories *purposes and function, procedural features, decision utility and evaluative review.* However, technical problems were reported with Question 23, which asked participants to rank numerous pre-defined purposes of accreditation in terms of their applicability in the Canadian context. Many respondents reported difficulty and confusion with the behaviour of the ranking function and did not complete the question. In other cases, there were no reported problems and respondents were able to answer the question completely. Unfortunately, while Question 23 concerned a key concept addressed by this study, its results will not be reported, since the researcher does not feel the results are reliable.

In preceding discussions, considerable attention was paid to the reporting aspect of the general model and its variations. Transparency was depicted as a rather controversial theme in this regard. Some agencies withheld detailed reports of their reviews to encourage frank and honest conversations in the review process to identify opportunities for continuous improvement. Alternatively, with an eye to public accountability and comparability, the publication of more detailed information about quality assurance reviews and their respective findings are often called for. Respondents in this study are decidedly in favour of broad transparency, as shown in Table 16. 36 respondents to this question agreed with the premise that transparency of the deliberations and decisions of accreditation and assurance bodies is imperative. Moreover, a majority of respondents (69%) indicated that they strongly agreed with this statement.

Table 16: Question 10 - Transparency

Question 10: It is imperative that the decisions and deliberations of accreditation and quality assurance bodies in post-secondary education be accessible and transparent.		
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%
Agree	11	31%
Strongly Agree	25	69%
Total	**36**	**100%**

When asked whether quality assessment reviews should be conducted on a regular basis and what interval this review cycle should be based upon, a low, but nonetheless surprising, number (11%) of respondents did not feel that a successful review would need to be reaffirmed in a later review. The same number of respondents suggested a lengthy interval period of seven to ten years. However, over 80% of the 32 respondents who agreed that reviews should be conducted on a cyclical basis believed that a period of three to seven years between reviews to be an appropriate interval.

Table 17: Question 18 – Review Cycle Interval

Question 18:	Should quality assessment reviews be conducted on a cyclical/ regular basis? - If yes, how many years would be an appropriate interval?		
No		4	11%
Yes - no interval indicated		2	6%
Yes 3- 5 years		14	39%
Yes - 5-7 years		12	33%
Yes -7- 10 years		4	11%
Total		**36**	**100%**

Table 18: Question 17 – Procedural Elements

Question 17:	Please rate the following procedural elements of an institutional quality assessment model in terms of how desirable/important you feel they would be for inclusion in a Canadian model:				
	Not important at all	Not very important	Indifferent/ Don't know	Somewhat desirable	Highly desirable
Eligibility Criteria	3%	22%	3%	36%	**36%**
Candidacy Period	3%	16%	8%	57%	**16%**
Institutional Self-Evaluation against established standards	0%	3%	3%	30%	**65%**
External Evaluation by Academic Peers	0%	0%	3%	22%	**76%**
Site Visit by Academic Peers	0%	0%	5%	16%	**78%**
Published Reports of Institutional Reviews	0%	0%	8%	57%	**35%**
Published Criteria and Standards for Accreditation	0%	0%	0%	5%	**95%**
Transparent Procedures and Methods of Assessment	0%	0%	0%	8%	**92%**
Degree Level Standards/Descriptors	0%	3%	5%	32%	**59%**
Assessment of Student Satisfaction	3%	3%	5%	49%	**41%**
Assessment of Student Outcomes	0%	5%	5%	35%	**54%**

Table 18 shows that respondents identified nearly all the procedural elements of a quality assessment model described in the question as "highly desirable" for inclusion in a Canadian model. Of the 11 provided elements, only eligibility criteria, a candidacy period, and the assessment of student satisfaction were perceived of as relatively unimportant. Some elements that correspond to the Van Vught and Westerheijden's general model, institutional self-evaluation, external peer review, and site visits, were identified as highly desirable by large proportions of respondents (65%, 76%, and 78% respectively). Transparency was identified as highly desirable with regard to criteria and standards (95%), and procedures and methods (92%), but the majority of respondents classified published reports of institutional reviews as only "somewhat desirable" (57%).

Decision utility refers to consequences, benefits, and abilities upon which an institution's accreditation may have an impact. A key question embedded in Question 19 is whether participation in such a review process should be voluntary or mandatory. Many respondents (81%) felt that linking an institution's accreditation status to its license to operate would be either desirable or highly desirable, which would have the effect of making participation in the process mandatory. The highest proportions of respondents identified it as highly desirable should institutional accreditation be required in order for an institution to have the ability to grant degrees (59%), or advertise its accredited status (67%).

Table 19: Question19 – Decision Utility

Question 19: Please rate the following potential consequences/benefits in terms of how desirable it would be to have them attached to an institution's accreditation status.					
	Not at all desirable	Not desirable	Indifferent	Desirable	Highly desirable
Direct public funding	5%	8%	22%	32%	**32%**
Indirect public funding (e.g. student financial assistance)	0%	6%	17%	39%	**39%**
Federal research grants	0%	14%	19%	39%	**28%**
Ability to grant degrees	0%	0%	0%	41%	**59%**
Ability to recruit international students	5%	5%	19%	43%	**27%**
License to operate	3%	3%	14%	32%	**49%**
Ability to articulate and transfer courses	0%	3%	3%	41%	**54%**
Ability to have credentials recognized as a basis for admission to graduate/ professional schools at other Canadian institutions	0%	3%	0%	43%	**54%**
Ability to advertise accredited status	0%	0%	11%	22%	**67%**

Relatively low proportions of respondents felt that it would be highly desirable to have an institution's accreditation tied to public funding, whether direct (32%), indirect (39%), or through research grants (28%). Even fewer found it desirable to tie accreditation status to an institution's ability to recruit international students (27%). Alternatively, substantial proportions of respondents felt it highly desirable to link accreditation status to an institution's ability to articulate and transfer courses (54%), or to have their credentials recognized as a basis for admission (54%).

Although the exclusion of Question 23 leaves us without direction as to what purposes should be the driving forces behind the institutional accreditation process, some information in this regard can be garnered through responses to Question 22. This is because the evaluative focus of the institutional review relates to the larger objectives of the quality assessment process as a whole.

Table 20: Question 22: Evaluative Focus

Question 22: Which of the following should be the chief focus of quality assurance/accreditation reviews?		
Evaluating an institution's fitness for purpose e.g. How well is the institutional mission being carried out?	2	5%
Assessing whether established minimum standards of quality have been met	17	46%
Evaluating how well the institution's internal quality assessment systems are functioning	8	22%
Encouraging continuous improvement throughout the organization	3	8%
Other	7	19%
Total	**37**	**100%**

The largest proportion of respondents to this question (46%) see the preferred evaluative focus of the review of an institution as assessing whether established minimum standards have been met. However, 22% believe that the review should focus on evaluating how well the institution's internal quality assessment mechanisms are functioning.

Answers to Question 22 suggest that the accountability function of quality assurance is of more significance to respondents than the improvement function. Only 8% of respondents see encouraging continuous improvement as a desirable primary focus. At the same time, providing the public with assurances that minimum standards have been met provides a measure of public accountability but does little to encourage improvement in the institution. Perhaps some of the respondents who chose to provide their own specified response sought to balance these competing functions. Five of these eight respondents suggested that the evaluative focus should combine assessment for minimum standards with encouraging continuous improvement and/or evaluating how well the institution's internal quality assessment systems are functioning.

Appetite for Implementation and Assessment of Organizational Capacity

All the questions in this section permitted open-ended responses. The three questions relate to the following concepts identified in the conceptual framework: *gap analysis, program justification, and organizational capacity.*

Question 24: What do you consider to be the key differences between institutional accreditation and systems of quality assessment currently in practice in Canada?

This question was asked with the intention of having participants perform a gap analysis, and asks them to identify which elements are missing in quality assessment systems in Canada that prevent them from being considered "accreditation". Some respondents indicated that a key difference was that Canada did not have a system of institutional accreditation, but did not elaborate on what was different between accreditation and Canadian systems. Additional respondents felt that a key difference was the confusing and compartmentalized nature of Canadian systems:

- *Current systems are fragmented and mainly membership-based. They are not open to all institutions. They are not easy to measure or explain.*
- *Systems of quality assessment vary from province to province, region to region. We need one national accreditation system that works inter-provincially*
- *The key problem is that there are so many different forms of accreditation and quality assessment. There has to be a base standard to which all levels of government agree and that the public can understand.*

Other respondents felt that a key difference was the recognition of accreditation in comparison to Canadian methods:

- *Quality assessment is only provincial while accreditation should allow recognition across borders.*
- *institutional accreditation is a more formal process with transparent standards and an external stamp of quality assurance that is understood internationally*
- *It is my understanding the most systems of institutional accreditation assess the institution and not individual programs. Systems of quality assessment in Canadian provinces tend to focus on program-by-program assessment. Further, these are not labeled as "accreditation" and so have limited currency beyond our borders.*

Additional respondents felt that what distinguishes accreditation is the institutional level of review:

- *Current systems generally are program-specific rather than institution-specific. Both forms of assessment are desirable.*
- *…quality assessment in Canada is generally done at the program level by quasi-governmental agencies. The review is done for specific "authorization" to provide the program so therefore does not review the institution for outcomes (i.e. the review cannot take into consideration student outcomes in the program before full authorization is granted)*

Question 25 asks whether those differences, or deficiencies, identified in Question 24 are significant enough to warrant considering moving toward an accreditation style model? A strong majority (76%) felt that consideration of such a program is justified.

Table 21: Question 25 - Program Justification

Question 25:	Are the differences noted above significant enough, in your view, to justify consideration of moving toward an accreditation style quality assurance model?		
No		3	9%
Yes		26	76%
Other		4	12%
Total		**32**	**100%**

Only one respondent answering "no" to this question provided any explanation:

- *No...AUCC process is a good enough "institutional" quality assurance*

Many who answered "yes" cited reasons of increasing credential recognition and student mobility:

- *Yes because students in various parts of the country are being penalized, not because of quality but because of predjudice [sic].*
- *Accreditation is what is recognized internationally.*
- *The need is for national standards and acceptance rather than a new model, though a new model may be required to achieve national standards.*
- *Yes - there needs to be a nationally understood and acceptaed [sic] process - currently students are being disadvantaged - additionally it would most likely save a significant amount of money in the long run.*

- *Yes; as the system is now we have no national accreditation body in Canada and thus institutions in other provinces are making sweeping decisions on their own as to the quality of another province's degrees. This is paramount to institutional discrimination and counter-active to student mobility.*

Some respondents took the opportunity to provide their suggestions and advice regarding implementation and scope of such a process.

- *Yes, but it cannot just be added on to the exising [sic] system. Institutions do not want to go through accreditation, plus AUCC, plus these quality assessment processes set up by provinces. If it is peer based and can be used as a single route to recognition and quality assessment then it might work.*
- *Yes. In cases where an institution is newly established, new to a jurisdiction or moving to a new level of programming (e.g. diploma to degree; undergraduate to graduate degree) it is reasonable to expect that there be an external assessment of the institution's capacity to deliver the proposed level of programming within that jurisdiction.*

Question 26 addresses the issue of organizational capacity, and asks whether any existing organizations in Canada have the ability to provide the system envisioned by the respondents. Responses to this question were evenly distributed between "no" and "yes" answers, each receiving 47% of the 34 responses.

Table 22: Question 26 – Organizational Capacity

Question 26: Do you feel that any existing bodies in Canada have the capacity to deliver the type of system envisioned in your responses?		
No	16	47%
Yes	16	47%
Other	2	6%
Total	**34**	**100%**

Respondents who did not feel that any organization established in Canada had the capacity to deliver the system they envision provided explanations that were flavoured with skepticism or a lack of confidence toward those existing bodies.

- *No. AUCC comes with too much "anti-college" bias and a conflict of interest. I know that many universities with very expensive cash cow MBA programs are terrified of the colleges - undergrad programs too.*
- *No. I feel that there is a tendency for present organizations to 1) protect their own turf and/or 2) not understand the vargaries [sic] of provincial post-secondary models.*
- *no - BC, Ontario and Alberta has been developing provincial systems but none is mature enough yet.*

Table 23: Question 26 – Organizational Capacity

Question 26b If yes, which ones?		
DQAB, CQAC, PEQAB or some combination of these	5	31.25%
AUCC	5	31.25%
Professional Accreditation Bodies	1	6.25%
Other	5	31.25%
Total	**16**	**100.00%**

Of the 16 individuals who felt that the capacity to deliver the envisioned institutional accreditation system does exists in established organization in Canada, an even proportion (31.25%) allocated this capacity in one or more of the provincial quality assessment boards, AUCC, or some other organization. Those who felt that one or more of the provincial quality assessment boards could manage an institutional accreditation system provided the following comments:

- *My familiarity of existing bodies is limited to Alberta, BC and Ontario. All three of these bodies have the capacity to do this type of review.*
- *A combined DQAB and ACQC[sic] agency could be the genesis of a menaingful[sic] accreditation agency for Western Canada.*
- *Certainly PEQAB and CQAC do; I'm not sure about DQAB, but it probably does too.*

Those who identify AUCC as having the potential capacity to deliver an institutional accreditation system had the following comments:

- *ACCC and AUCC potentially have the capacity - but would need to make significant changes to their mandate and membership format.*
- *AUCC has the potential capacity. It is a national body with some of the pieces in place. the lack of a national [post secondary] education authority in Canada hurts us, particularly in the international marketplace.*
- *AUCC would be the logical choice but I doubt that, considering its mandate, it would take it on. CMEC could facilitate it, set up a non-profit society and providing initial funding.*

Comments like the ones that follow could not be categorized as allocating capacity for managing an institutional accreditation system to the provincial quality assessment boards of AUCC.

- *The bodies in Canada can continue to deliver a system of review, but the systems need to work together toward greater mutual recognition to balance bureaucracy vs quality. As well, the bodies need to be able to influence change in existing inst\tions[sic] to change their internal processes for quality assurance and greater understanding of each other's system.*
- *The possibility lies in the work on the Pan-Canadian protocol on degree-granting.*
- *Yes, some. Agencies such as BCCAT...*
- *The provinces are already performing the function. The problem is small minded isolationism. The Federal government should take a strong stand and leadership in facilitating the formation of national standards and definitions (use incentives and political coercison [sic] to force the provinces to reach agreement).*

What can be concluded is that while many organizations may have the capacity to deliver a system of institutional quality assurance at the national level, in order to be successful in doing so, their mandates and current processes would likely need review. In addition, there is no indication at this point that either the provincial quality assessment boards or the AUCC would be willing to take on this responsibility. Given that some negative attitudes exist towards these existing bodies, starting fresh with a new organization would likely offer the best chance for achieving broad support, as long as the process of gaining this support was managed strategically and carefully.

DISCUSSION

The two preceding sections present the outcomes of three explorations into options for institutional accreditation in the Canadian context. These explorations had as their point of departure the assumption that emerging credential recognition issues in Canadian post-secondary education have their source in a national array of discrete quality assurance mechanisms. This report characterizes this array as an uncoordinated patchwork, falling short of satisfying basic conditions for a quality assurance system that not only assures institutional and program quality, but also facilitates the widespread recognition of credentials. This project undertakes to explore options that would address these inadequacies, and focuses upon the key organizational and procedural elements that a successful Canadian system would require. This discussion sets the stage for the development of options and recommendations in this regard.

In order to provide both quality assurance and credential recognition functions, systems of institutional accreditation should aim to be inclusive, trusted, and understandable. In addition, the review of general models of quality assurance in post-secondary education identified further pre-conditions to consider in the development of options.

- Support or "ownership" of faculty and academic administrators, achieved through their involvement or management of the process;
- Appropriate situation of the organization between government and institutional interests;
- Balancing the interests of improvement and accountability; and,
- Transparency regarding the process and its outcomes.

An assessment of mechanisms currently in place in Canada revealed myriad approaches and mechanisms that, despite their lack of coordination, exemplify each of the three general models in place internationally, namely, assessment, audit, and accreditation. Whether conducted through provincial assessment boards, professional accreditation, or internal program review, the Canadian quality assurance system is rich in methods of program assessment. However, one aspect that Canadian systems lack in most cases is the meta-evaluation these program assessment methods at the institutional level. Such meta-analysis is characteristic of the audit model.

One aspect of the accreditation model that is desirable in the Canadian context is its certification function. AUCC membership has provided this function, in bestowing a status of recognized quality to its members. However, as this status is exclusive to certain institutional typologies, AUCC membership in its present form no longer provides an adequate accreditation function in the overall context of Canadian post-secondary education.

This illustrates a weakness of the accreditation model in a post-secondary education system undergoing massive, ongoing transformations. Externally referenced criteria forming the standards for accreditation judgements can quickly become outdated. Current trends and pressures in post-secondary education require regular revisiting of concepts of quality. The context of transformation may lead to the constant questioning of not only the currency of standards in place, but also of whose interests they serve.

The preceding review of quality assessment models in post-secondary education suggested that a combination of these models might be the best approach. Considering what the explorations undertaken in this project have discovered, a combination of assessment and audit is thought to be the best model for a Canadian system of institutional quality assurance.

It is conceivable that this combination might lead to the understandable statement of institutional quality and recognition that is the hallmark of the accreditation model, although achieving this aim may require some strategic public education and marketing efforts. The bestowing of an accreditation-type status is possible wherever the outcome a quality assurance process results in a clear statement. In this combined model, the question is, "Has institution X successfully gone through the audit process established to validate its internal quality assessment?" This question demands a categorical yes/no response and is synonymous with the question, "Is institution X accredited?"

The general combined model proposed in this report builds upon existing program assessment mechanisms through adding a institutional level of meta-evaluation of these assessments that can results in an outcome expressed as a yes or no statement with respect to an institution's ability to self-regulate and maintain program quality. This combined model is illustrated in Figure 4. Each of the four options developed in the following section correspond to this general combined model.

Figure 4: Combined Model of Quality Assurance
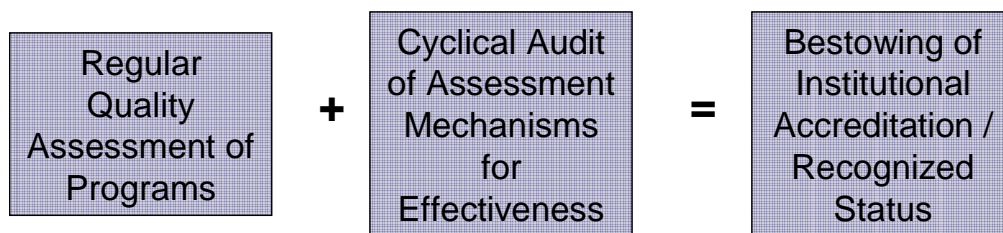
In a survey of stakeholders, predominantly from the British Columbian post-secondary system but also including individuals from other provinces, 76% of respondents display an appetite for further consideration of an institutional accreditation model for Canada. However, there is ambivalence as to whether existing bodies in Canada have the capacity to deliver such a system. In fact, as many respondents feel that no organization has such a capacity, as feel that such an organization exists in the form of either AUCC, or provincial assessment boards.

Accommodating these disparate interests requires the development of numerous options fitting the combined model above. We can speculate options that build on existing mechanisms, such as AUCC membership and provincial assessment processes. However, the development of some options that offer wholly new models of institutional accreditation is also necessary. The final section of this discussion will extract and summarize the wisdom this exploration has uncovered toward implementing a new model.

AUCC Membership
As revealed in a previous discussion, AUCC membership is the mechanism in Canada that most closely resembles the institutional accreditation model. Moreover, AUCC is national in scope, and provides its members with validation of institutional quality, guidelines for their internal quality management, and, in some cases, recognition of their graduates in consideration for admission to advanced study.

However, as more and more types of institutions enter the degree granting realm, AUCC membership remains exclusive to those institutions closely resembling universities. As such, the process is not as inclusive as it could be, engendering distrust from those degree-granters who are on the outside looking in. Such distrust is exemplified in the following comments.

- *….AUCC comes with too much "anti-college" bias and a conflict of interest. I know that many universities with very expensive cash cow MBA programs are terrified of the colleges – undergrad programs too.*
- *….I feel that there is a tendency for present organizations to 1)protect their own turf and/or 2)not understand the vargaries [sic] of provincial post-secondary models.*
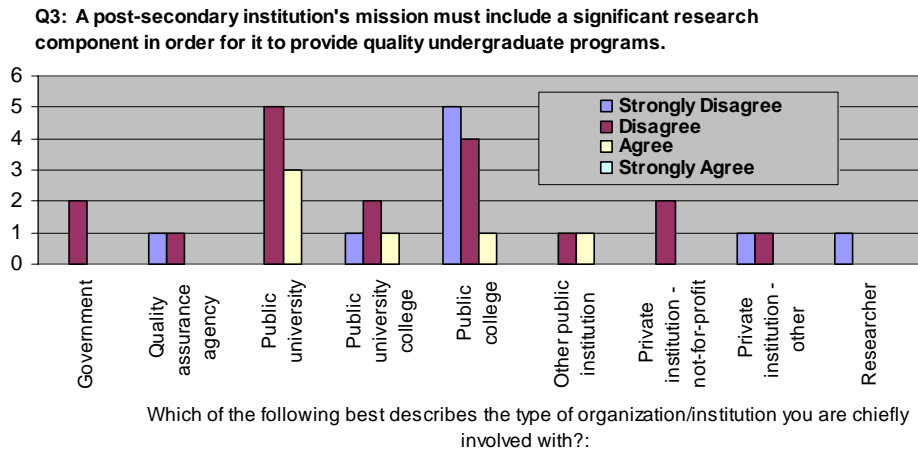
Three survey questions were specifically designed to gain perspective on participants' attitudes toward scholarly activity, range of programming, and for-profit private institutions. These aspects of AUCC membership criteria are particularly problematic toward the inclusion of new degree providers. With regard to scholarly activity, AUCC membership criteria require the following of an institution seeking membership:

- *…an approved, clearly articulated and widely known and accepted mission statement and academic goals that are appropriate to a university and that demonstrate its commitment to: (i) teaching and other forms of dissemination of knowledge; (ii) research, scholarship, academic inquiry and the advancement of knowledge; and (iii) service to the community.*
- *…a proven record of scholarship, academic inquiry and research, expects its academic staff to be engaged in externally peer reviewed research and to publish in externally disseminated sources, and provides appropriate time and institutional support for them to do so.*(AUCC, 2005a)

Earlier in this report, a quote from Alan Ruby asked (2005) whether the "decoupling of the creation of knowledge from its dissemination lower[s] the quality of education?" The connection between research and quality teaching in post-secondary education is a subject of debate, and this debate is outside the scope of this project. However, as Table 8 above indicates, a majority of respondents to this survey (84%) do not find it necessary that an institution's mission include a significant research component in order to provide quality undergraduate programming.

While college respondents were most likely to disagree strongly with this assumption, disagreement was also present among respondents from universities, the traditional ambit research. Surprisingly, the tendency to associate research with quality undergraduate degrees is present in all types of public institutions, including colleges, although all groups of respondents were more likely to disagree. Figure 5 below shows the breakdown of opinion toward the connection between research mandates and quality undergraduate programming broken down by the organizational affiliation of survey respondents.

Figure 5: Question 3 according to Organizational Affiliation

Q3: A post-secondary institution's mission must include a significant research component in order for it to provide quality undergraduate programs.

Which of the following best describes the type of organization/institution you are chiefly involved with?:

With regard to range of programming, the following AUCC criteria for membership require member institutions to have significant operational dimension.

- *It offers a full program or programs of undergraduate and/or graduate studies that animate its mission and goals, and that lead to a university degree or degrees conferred by itself or, if federated or affiliated with, or a constituent of a university, by the parent institution.*
- *Its undergraduate degree programs are characterized by breadth and depth in the traditional areas of the liberal arts and/or sciences, and first degrees of a professional nature - such as medicine, law, teacher education, engineering - have a significant liberal arts and/or sciences component.(AUCC, 2005a)*

Given these criteria, it is striking that no respondents to Question 11 (Table 19) disagreed with the premise that it is reasonable to believe that small and specialized institutions can provide quality degree program in specific areas. However, one participant declined to answer this question. Finally, AUCC membership is not open to institutions that operate on a for-profit basis. Responses to Question 8 seem to uphold that restriction, as 78% of respondents feel more open to the inclusion in post-secondary education of not-for-profit institutions over for-profit providers.

Were AUCC membership expanded to include small, specialized institutions that do not have a research component in their mission that meet all other standards and criteria, the AUCC membership process may provide a viable option. AUCC has already established *Principles of Institutional Quality Assurance in Canadian Higher Education* that could guide a process of institutional audit. Moreover, AUCC membership is already recognized as a signal of institutional quality in Canada. However, one obstacle may disqualify AUCC from providing this function. As noted by one respondent:

- *AUCC would be the logical choice but I doubt that, considering its mandate, it would take it on.*

Provincial Assessment Boards
When considering options for a combined model including provincial assessment boards, an obvious limitation is that they do not exist in all provinces. This confounds efforts to coordinate their processes toward providing a national system. Secondly, public universities and established programs are often exempt from these agencies' program assessments. Thirdly, these organizations and their processes are relatively new, and are not fully understood in academic circles, let alone the broader public sphere. Respondent comments illustrate these issues:

- *… the provincial bodies are too fragmented. Some provinces have bodies/some don't, there are different processes/criteria, and limited peer engagement or buy-in.*
- *Institutions are not involved in the process. QAB's are not transparent and don't have "face validity".*

One advantage of provincial assessment is that it results in a clearly understood statement of quality, as it is linked to new program approval and private institutions' license to begin and continue operations. However, respondent comments identify a potential issue in this regard. As one respondent indicated,

- *QA should be based on student outcomes at the program level, of all degree granting institutions, conducted by a third party, and done against set of national standards/benchmarks that are consistent with those being applied internationally. The result of the process should not be "accreditation", but the legal ability to continue to*

operate - i.e., ought not to be "accredited" and "non-accredited" schools, but only those that meet the defined quality standards. A few of the existing bodies operate in this manner on a provincial level, and their operations/procedures could easily form the basis of a national body.

At the same time, a second respondent identified an order of operations issue, and questioned how a process based on student outcomes can result in the granting of authorization to operate.

- *…quality assessment in Canada is generally done at the program level by quasi-governmental agencies. The review is done for specific "authorization" to provide the program so therefore does not review the institution for outcomes (i.e. the review cannot take into consideration student outcomes in the program before full authorization is granted)*

Provincial quality assessment boards are relatively new on the scene in Canada. Issues identified in comments such as a lack of institutional involvement, transparency issues, and the order of operations issue outlined above, will likely be addressed as these systems mature. During this maturation, opportunity exists to marshal provincial organizations towards an inclusive combined model, adding institutional audit processes to their procedural inventory. One avenue for taking advantage of this opportunity is the Pan-Canadian Committee on Quality Assurance in Degree Granting. A second avenue may be inter-provincial integration and coordination. Alberta and British Columbia, neighboring provinces that both contain new degree providers and quality assessment organizations, would be a logical partnership in efforts toward a more inclusive and transparent regional system.

New Models

Should any new model strive to be as inclusive as possible, the willingness of universities to participate is a significant issue. When discussing the possibility of a comprehensive institutional accreditation system in Canada, one commonly hears comments along the lines of "the universities would never go for that." Granted, quality assurance efforts and reporting are extremely time consuming and costly, and therefore it is understandable that long established institutions might seek exemption.

Survey results, however, indicate that some perceive the need for additional quality assurance measures with regard to universities. As this question is specific to universities, responses suggest that any new quality assurance method should include Canadian universities within the scope of its reviews. At the same time, 38% of respondents felt that all degree granting institutions, including established universities, should be included in the scope of review of any new institutional quality assessment mechanism.

As shown in Figure 6, some respondents from public universities disagree, and even disagree strongly, with the statement that current methods for ensuring quality in Canadian universities are sufficient. Interestingly, this finding supports the combined model developed above. Universities in Canada, for the most part, are AUCC members. Moreover, they have mature internal processes of program review, all of which presumably follow the AUCC's *Principles.* The missing element is the meta-evaluation of those internal review processes that an audit provides.

The involvement of universities any new model is crucial, and their participation in the accreditation review process is necessary to achieve a comprehensive and cohesive system. Should the development of comprehensive institutional accreditation system be attempted,

persuading universities to participate will be a significant challenge, and may require financial incentives.

Figure 6: Question 27 by Organizational Affiliation

Q7: Current methods for ensuring quality in Canadian universities are sufficient.
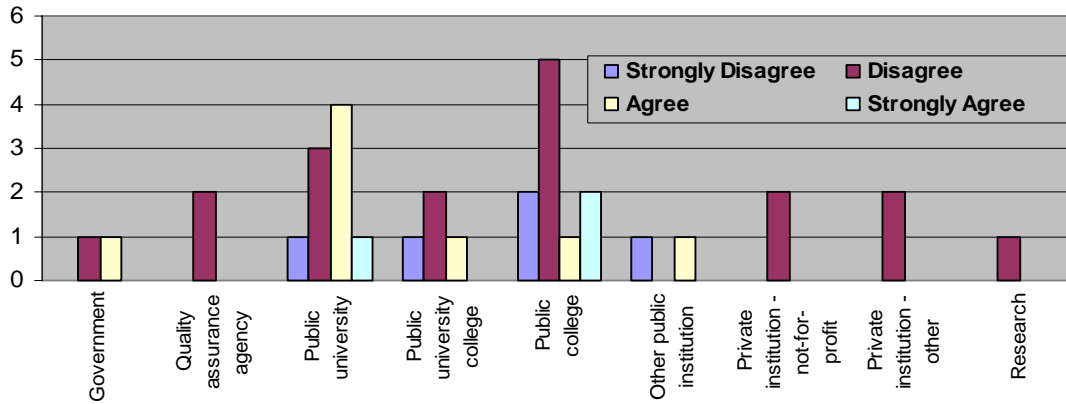
Which of the following best describes the type of organization/institution you are chiefly involved with?:

Moreover, receptiveness toward government involvement may indicate fertile ground for the implementation of a new model. According to Van Vught and Westerheijeden (1994), an exercise for establishing and defining relationships between institutions and government in the Netherlands created the foundation for the VSNU assessment system. (pg. 361) Moreover, it is arguable that the problems currently under the Spellings Commissions' scrutiny are in part due to the absence of such a tacit agreement regarding institutions and governments' respective domains in the management of education. Government involvement in the public education system is not viewed with so much skepticism. Nevertheless, as we consider new models of institutional accreditation, we must balance government involvement with the involvement of institutions, administrators, faculty, and instructors from across the spectrum of degree granting institutions.

OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section outlines four speculative options corresponding with the combined model of program assessment and institutional audit. The first builds upon the AUCC membership process. The second and third provide pan-Canadian and regional models founded upon provincial assessment boards. The fourth consists of a new model for a centrally managed, national process. A schematic model illustrates each of the four options, and a brief description follows. The final discussion compares and evaluates these models.

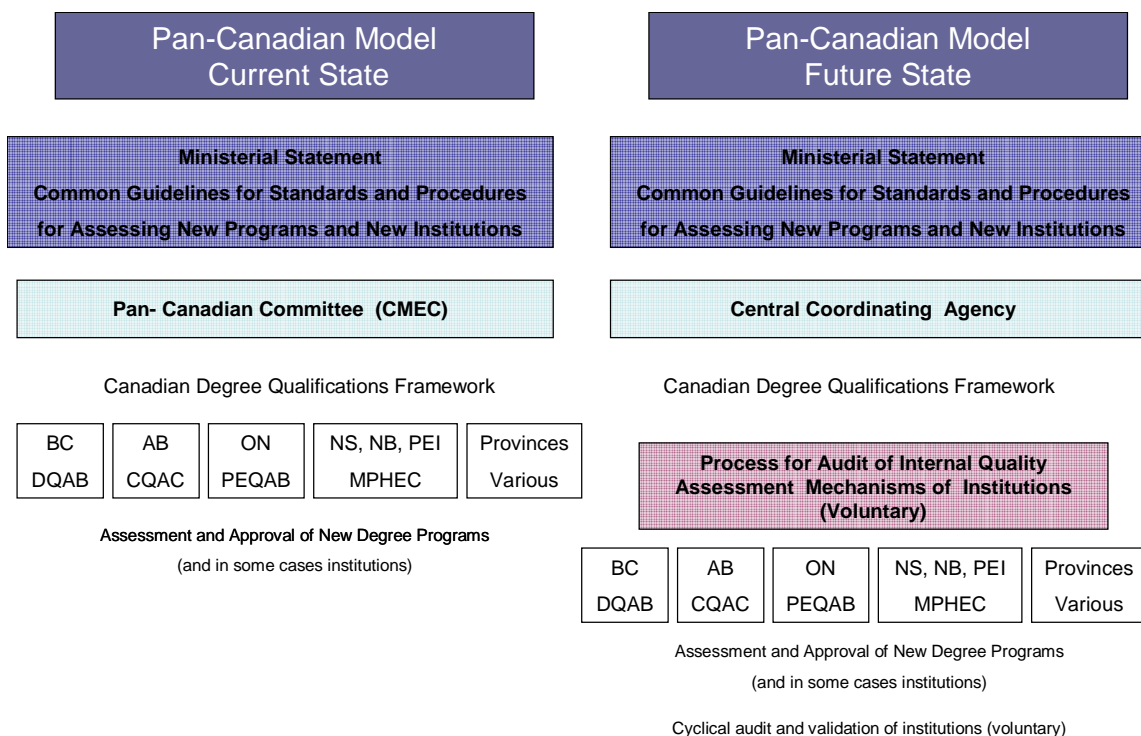## Option A: Expanded AUCC Membership

Figure 7: Option A
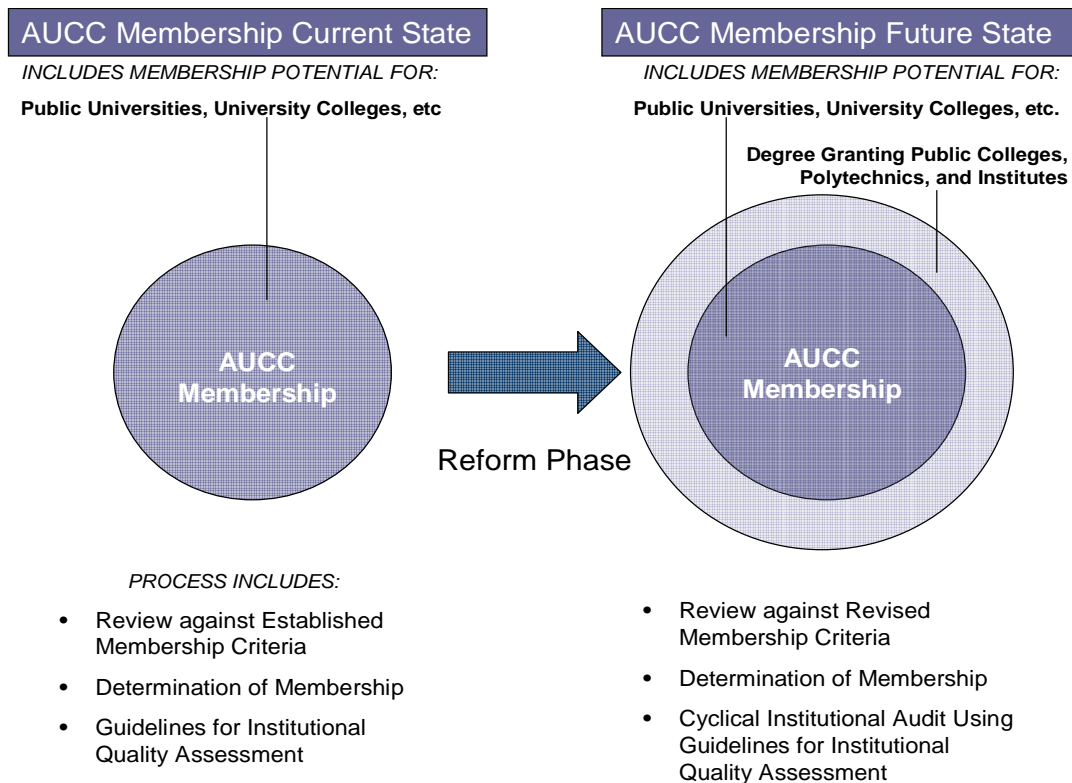
As discussed in the preceding section of this report, this option requires the revamping of AUCC criteria to include degree-granting colleges and other new providers. However, this option does not go so far as to suggest the criteria enable membership of for-profit institutions. A criteria review process that on one hand expands opportunity for membership, could at the same time ascertain whether criteria are consistent with international standards and current concepts of institutional quality in Canada.

However, the expanded membership is only one component this option. A second element is the implementation of a cyclical system of monitoring audits guided by AUCC's *Principles.* As such, the reform phase would require the review of these *Principles,* in addition to a criteria review process. In order to be successful, these AUCC reforms would require the inclusion of stakeholders from new providers and potential new providers, as well as traditional AUCC members.

Option B: Pan-Canadian Coordination of Provincial Quality Assessment

Figure 8: Option B

Pan-Canadian Model Current State	Pan-Canadian Model Future State
Ministerial Statement **Common Guidelines for Standards and Procedures** **for Assessing New Programs and New Institutions**	**Ministerial Statement** **Common Guidelines for Standards and Procedures** **for Assessing New Programs and New Institutions**
Pan- Canadian Committee (CMEC)	**Central Coordinating Agency**

Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework (Current State)

BC DQAB	AB CQAC	ON PEQAB	NS, NB, PEI MPHEC	Provinces Various

Assessment and Approval of New Degree Programs
(and in some cases institutions)

Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework (Future State)

Process for Audit of Internal Quality Assessment Mechanisms of Institutions (Voluntary)

BC DQAB	AB CQAC	ON PEQAB	NS, NB, PEI MPHEC	Provinces Various

Assessment and Approval of New Degree Programs
(and in some cases institutions)

Cyclical audit and validation of institutions (voluntary)

The Pan-Canadian Committee discussed in earlier sections of this report, supports a *Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada* for use as a guideline for decision making relating to new degree programs and new degree-granting institutions within a province/territory. In some jurisdictions, this falls within the ambit of provincial assessment boards, in others, it is the responsibility of a coordinating agency. A key component of the *Ministerial Statement* is a qualifications framework of generally accepted Canadian degree-level standards.

The committee recommends that Ministers establish a committee of representatives from quality assurance systems in each jurisdiction to discuss issues arising from the implementation of the *Ministerial Statement* and to advise on the development of quality assurance systems in each jurisdiction. However, in the future state envisioned in this option, the committee is aided by a central coordinating agency of full-time professionals at arm's length form government, similar to the PEQAB Secretariat. Under the leadership of the committee, and in consultation with various stakeholders this agency develops, implements and manages a voluntary system of institutional audit, open to all degree-granting institutions operating in Canadian jurisdictions. This voluntary audit process is complements the assessments done at the provincial level and functions as part of the ongoing reporting and monitoring of the programs and institutions receiving license to operate through their approvals.

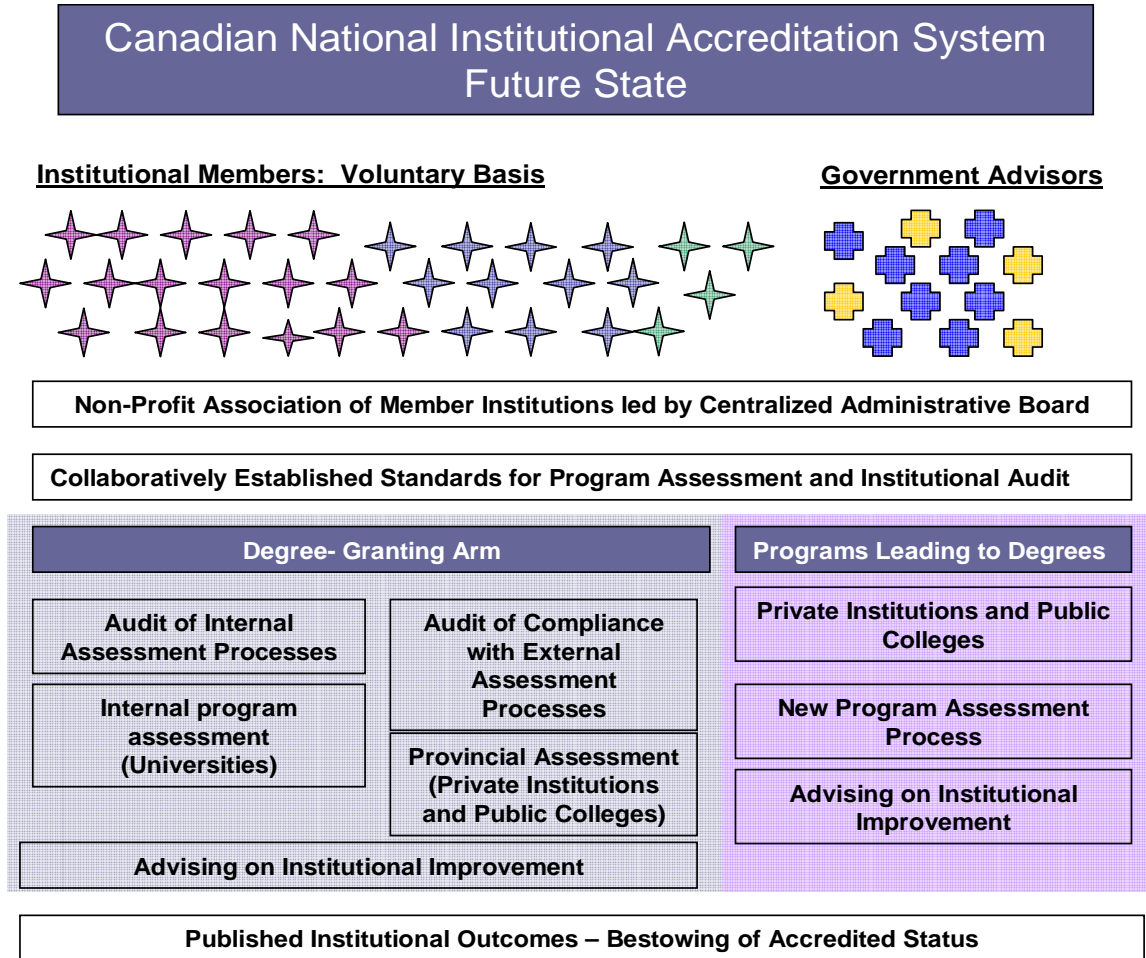## Option C: Western Provinces Regional Model

Figure 9: Option C
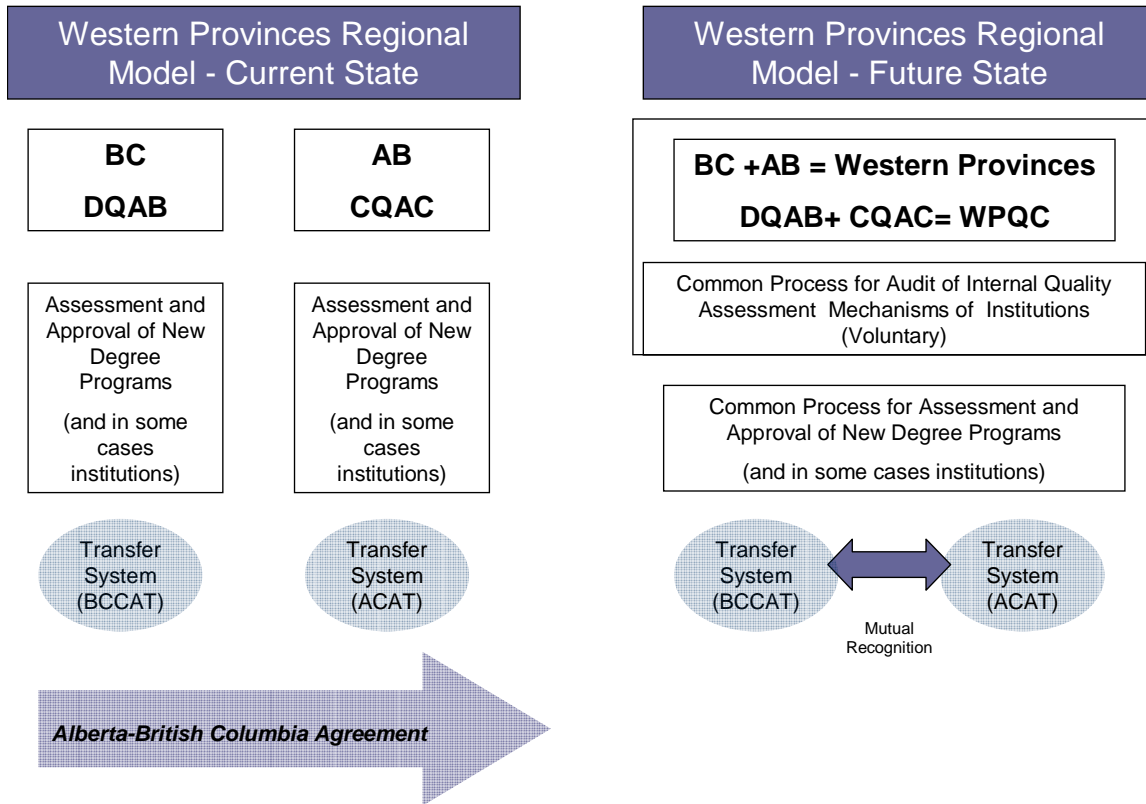
The Western Provinces model is similar to the Pan-Canadian model; however, it is limited to a regional scope that initially encompasses the provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. In this model, the CQAC and DQAB are combined into one quality assessment board overseeing the region, with secretariats providing operational support in both provinces. The regional agency has one common set of processes and criteria for the assessment and approval of new degree programs and new institutions, as well as a process for institutional audit that is voluntary for all degree-granting institutions except for those who have achieved license to operate through their reviews. For those new institutions, institutional audit is mandatory, and occurs on a more regular basis. In essence, this model replicates to some degree the MPHEC apporach, through collaboration between the existing provincial quality assessment boards.

This institutional audit provides assurances of quality that may eventually facilitate mutual recognition between each province's transfer system, creating a regional block wherein student mobility is facilitated. The Alberta-British Columbia Trade, Investment, and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) was reached in April 2006. One of the chief aims of this arrangement is to facilitate labour mobility between the two provinces. The Western Provinces model outlined here is consistent with that objective. It is hoped that a successful regional model may eventually expand to include other provinces.

Option D: Canadian Accreditation System Model

Figure 10: Option D

Canadian National Institutional Accreditation System Future State

Institutional Members: Voluntary Basis   **Government Advisors**

Non-Profit Association of Member Institutions led by Centralized Administrative Board

Collaboratively Established Standards for Program Assessment and Institutional Audit

Degree- Granting Arm		Programs Leading to Degrees
Audit of Internal Assessment Processes	**Audit of Compliance with External Assessment Processes**	**Private Institutions and Public Colleges**
Internal program assessment (Universities)	**Provincial Assessment (Private Institutions and Public Colleges)**	**New Program Assessment Process**
Advising on Institutional Improvement		**Advising on Institutional Improvement**

Published Institutional Outcomes – Bestowing of Accredited Status

The fourth model is the most complex and speculative option. It involves the creation of a national administrative board. This board could be established by an initiative of the federal government, or through the incorporation of a not-for-profit society. In either case, government's involvement would be minimal, and primarily advisory in nature. Beyond the parameters of its original constitution, the organization's institutional members develop, implement, and manage the organization and its processes.

Membership is voluntary, providing the benefit of recognized status through the use of the combined model. In the model outline above, program assessment of new programs approved through provincial assessment processes are assessed in terms of their continuing compliance with those processes' standards and criteria. In addition, this model provides an avenue for the assessment and audit of institutions that do not offer degree programs, but offer programs that lead or ladder into degree programs at other institutions. Not only does this avenue provide an option that is broadly inclusive, this non-degree branch of assessment can serve to prepare potential degree granters for the culture, expectations, and protocols in the degree-granting branch.

Options – Further Permutations

These four speculative options do not exhaust the possibilities for a model of comprehensive quality assurance or accreditation in Canada. They are simply basic models. An astute observer will see that there are essentially only two organizational models, the first an association of institutions, the second an association of provincial government agencies and departments. Beyond those two distinctions, elements of each of the four options might be combined into further permutations.

Should the Western Regional model expand to include further neighbouring provinces such as Saskatchewan and Manitoba, where applied degrees and private-degree granting institutions are beginning to emerge. Another logical expansion of the regional model would be to include Ontario and its PEQAB, which are similar in vein to British Columbia's DQAB and Alberta's CAQC. With the inclusion of Ontario, this model would cease to be regional in scope, but rather consist of those provinces where legislation has enabled the existence of new providers. This mirrors the origins of pan-Canadian efforts currently underway, however, in this speculative model, the scope of authority of the inter-provincial approach sets out with the intent of including, either on a voluntary or mandatory basis, all degree-granting institutions, not simply new providers and their new degree programs.

Option D creates a wing for the assessment of institutions offering programs leading to or laddering into degree programs, and for those programs themselves. However, this expanded scope of authority could be attached to any one of the optional models presented. For instance, a joint effort between and expand AUCC and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges could provide this dual model. In fact, while Option D as presented speculates a completely new Canadian accreditation organization, the schematic model for Option D, with minor adjustments, could represent this joint AUCC and ACCC model.

Further permutations involving some of the procedural elements described in the models are also possible. For example, some models have recommended a voluntary institutional audit component, although there may be some who would desire institutional audit to be a mandatory component of the combined quality assurance scheme. Mandatory institutional audits might an idea supported by the 71% of respondents to this study's survey who disagree with the notion that current methods for assuring quality in Canadian universities are sufficient (Table 5).

Recommendations discussed in the next section will focus upon the organizational elements of the four basic options described above. However, it should be kept in mind that beyond the fundamental organizational elements such as source and scope of authority, there are many combinations of the elements provided in these simple models, any of which might provide the best foundation for a comprehensive accreditation system in Canada.

Recommendations

This section compares and evaluates the four options laid out in the previous section, resulting in recommendations as to which options represent the best model upon which to base a course of action. The models are simple, and require extensive further analysis and development; should their implementation be considered. Nevertheless, they provide basic options to consider in moving forward. Preceding discussions reveal a number of criteria upon which to base this comparative evaluation. A central condition for any option is that it be comprehensive and inclusive. Table 24 outlines the organizational elements of the four options, using the terminology employed in the survey.

Table 24: Comparison of Options: Organizational Elements

	Option A Expanded AUCC	Option B Pan-Canadian	Option C Western Regional	Option D Canadian Accreditation
Source of Authority	Institutional Membership	Governments and Institutional Participants	Governments and Institutional Participants	Institutional Membership
Scope of Activity	National	National	Regional	National
Scope of Authority	Public Degree-Granting Institutions Meeting Revised Criteria for Membership	New Institutions, New Providers, and Volunteer Degree-Granting Participants	New Institutions, New Providers, and Volunteer Degree-Granting Participants	Institutional Participants offering degree programs and those offering programs leading to degrees.

Table 24 reveals comparative degrees of inclusiveness and comprehensiveness among options. It would seem that an expanded AUCC process is the most promising in this regard, being national in scope, and encompassing potential members from both traditional and new sets of degree program providers, with its only exclusion being for-profit institutions. Option C is perhaps the least inclusive model, owing to its regionally limited scope of activity. Based on such comparisons, each optional model has been accorded a score between one and five in the *Inclusiveness and Comprehensiveness* category of Table 25.

Table 25 evaluates each option according to the degree to which they demonstrate a number of criteria and conditions that this study identifies as attributes of a successful system that provides not only quality assurance, but also facilitates credential recognition. However, three of these identified conditions are not included in this table, as they are heavily dependent upon the processes, procedures, and strategies that a system implements. For instance, evaluation of transparency is dependent on the degree of disclosure post-implementation, and it is impossible to establish a priori whether any option can strike the appropriate balance between government and institutional interests.

Institutional Engagement and Ownership is a key mechanism for developing the trust among academics and institutions that an accreditation or quality assurance system is effective and sufficient to establish and maintain current standards and conceptions of quality. In this category, AUCC and the Canadian accreditation model receive high scores, by virtue of being associations of institutional members. However, as the national accreditation has greater overall potential for institutional involvement, it receives the lowest score. As AUCC membership is already a

recognized signal of institutional quality, this option receives a high score in the *Understandable Statement of Quality* category. The speculative Canadian accreditation model receives a low score, as the potential to build recognition of this model's outcomes exists.

A high level of government involvement is characteristic of both the second and third options. As this research discovered attitudes that were receptive to government involvement, the researcher interprets government involvement as a beneficial quality. Both the Pan-Canadian and Western Regional model score higher in this category by virtue of being established through collaboration between provincial governments and their agents. The highest score in the *Existing Organizational Capacity* category is allocated to AUCC, the most mature organization in the group of options. Conversely, a low score goes to the model that is entirely new, national accreditation.

Table 25: Evaluative Comparison of Options

	Option A Expanded AUCC	Option B Pan-Canadian	Option C Western Regional	Option D Canadian Accreditation
Inclusiveness and Comprehensiveness	5	3	2	4
Institutional Engagement and Ownership	4	2	2	5
Understandable Statement of Recognition	5	4	4	2
Government Involvement	2	4	4	1
Existing Organizational Capacity	5	4	4	2
Feasibility	1	3	4	2
Total	**22**	**20**	**20**	**16**

Unlike the other categories in Table 25, the *Feasibility* category has not been discussed in this report as a criterion or condition for a model of quality assurance. However, in recommending an option for implementation, it would be foolish not to include concerns of feasibility. A model that involves prohibitive costs, or that is unlikely to garner the necessary political will for implementation does should not be extensively considered. Table 25 identifies Option C as most feasible. British Columbia and Alberta are fertile ground in which to plant a regional model. Not only are their governments collaborating towards addressing trade and mobility issues, the provinces' educational systems are in close alignment.

While the expanded AUCC membership option displays the elements of a model most likely to serve as an effective institutional accreditation mechanism in the Canadian context, it is doubtful that AUCC would be amenable to the suggested reforms. Moreover, while a Canadian accreditation system is a promising model, its only certain quality is its cost. This leaves policy makers to choose between two equally acceptable models: the Pan-Canadian model being more comprehensive, and the Western Provinces model being more feasible.

This report identifies the lack of comprehensiveness and coordination as the principal deficiency of current quality assessment mechanisms in Canada, in terms of their effectiveness in providing a recognition function. Nonetheless, it is plain that the more feasible option should be recommended for implementation. Credential recognition and quality assurance issues are presently affecting Canadian students, and action should be taken quickly to address this, before the rest of the world hears of our internal recognition problems and passes judgement. The preliminary step of moving toward a regional model does not preclude further analysis and policy development on the national front.

The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer is in an ideal position to influence the development of a collaborative quality assurance model between British Columbia and Alberta. However, BCCAT's mandate is to facilitate admission, articulation and transfer arrangements among BC post-secondary institutions. Extra-provincial admissions and recognition issues are peripheral to the BCCAT mandate, and quality assurance is properly the realm of the Degree Quality Assessment Board and the Ministry of Advanced Education. However, BCCAT's Executive Director, Frank Gelin, sits on the Degree Quality Assessment Board as an ex officio member, and can bring this report and its recommendations to the DQAB table for consideration at its October 2006 meeting.

Similar partnership efforts are currently underway, that correspond with the idea of a Western Provinces educational bloc. For instance, BCCAT and the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer are undertaking a joint effort to increase the level of assurance that students of both provinces will receive transfer credit for courses or programs they have successfully completed. This partnership could go far in influencing a similar partnership between the two provinces' quality assessment boards.

Moving toward the Western Provinces regional model will requires the establishment of political will for such an initiative is established through a broad consultation between the provinces' governments, quality assessment boards, and post-secondary institutions. Should the Board and Ministry be amenable, BCCAT could work in partnership with the DQAB to organize a partnership a forum of key stakeholders from the two provinces to convene and discuss the possibility of a regional quality assurance agency. Occurring as early as May 2007, this forum could provide the momentum for initiating the Western Provinces model.

CONCLUSION

Through offering insight into different approaches to quality assurance, as well as the opinions and attitudes of those who provide leadership in post-secondary education in British Columbia and Canada, this project's overarching goal is to recommend as to whether Canadian jurisdictions should consider a new quality assurance regime, and to provide potential new models to consider in that context. The strategic focus of this goal is to outline a system that has the potential to address emerging credential recognition issues in Canada, and provide a solid foundation for the continuing global recognition of the quality of Canadian institutions of post-secondary educations, their credentials, and their graduates

This project departed on a journey to explore options for institutional accreditation in Canada. It is interesting, therefore, that the journey's end brings us to the recommendation of a combination of two quality assessment models, neither of which is accreditation. Perhaps this should not be surprising in an environment where the label of accreditation is applied to models that are not accreditation, as the organizations that do perform accreditation shy away from the label.

The general, combined model proposed in this report combines elements of each of the assessment, audit, and accreditation models, and is not accreditation per se. However, as previously discussed, in colloquial use, the word "accredited" is synonymous with the word "recognized". Therefore, the word itself becomes a brand in which the concepts or quality, recognition, and validation are all bound. To call a quality assurance system "accreditation', although it does not ascribe to the accreditation model, is a semantic faux-pas. At the same time, using the accreditation label can provide a shortcut to the public understanding required of a quality assurance system functioning as a method for facilitating credential recognition. For this reason, application of the accreditation label to this combined model is worth consideration, despite the label being somewhat of a misnomer.

Accreditation is a word on many lips in Canadian post-secondary education. It would be advantageous if this curiosity could be harnessed towards further research efforts. A national survey of stakeholder opinions similar to this study's survey would go far in providing policy makers with the information required to implement a successful and effective national strategy. Moreover, there are opportunities for those involved in Canadian post-secondary education to increase their knowledge and awareness of the numerous quality assurance models and efforts being implemented worldwide. This knowledge is both a professional and an organizational asset, and such learning efforts should be encouraged through avenues for professional development. It is incumbent upon institutions of post-secondary education to foster a culture of self-evaluation, as self-evaluation represents the foundational procedure for quality assessment and improvement.

British Columbia can be viewed as a microcosm of the quality and recognition issues confronting the larger Canadian post-secondary education landscape. New public and private degree providers increasingly appear on the scene in the province. However, a comprehensive system assuring the quality of all degree-granting institutions does not exist in the province. Credential recognition among British Columbia's mosaic of institutions has yet to become a significant concern, perhaps owing to the high degree of collaboration fostered through the province's transfer system. In the spirit of self-evaluation, a further study that may provide insight toward quality assurance and credential recognition in the larger Canadian sphere is a review of the strengths and weaknesses of the British Columbia post-secondary education system. Such a review might focus on how a quality is assessed and ensured across all institutions, how and to what degree a parity of quality is established between universities and new providers, and how

recognition of credentials is facilitated in this increasingly differentiated group of institutions. Such a review could provide a framework for similar efforts in other jurisdictions that may facilitate further inter-provincial quality assurance efforts.

In its continuing efforts toward fostering a culture for the resolution of Canada's credential issues, the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer is currently shifting from discussions surrounding the nature of the problem, to the consideration of solutions. In coming months, BCCAT will be engaging in conversations elucidating options for accreditation. This study has substantiated BCCAT's notion that these discussions of quality assurance options for Canada are worthwhile endeavours. The project's explorations have discovered appetites for new quality assurance mechanisms in Canadian post-secondary education, and defined the gaps in the current array of Canadian quality assurance methods.

This report goes beyond its original intentions of providing a model for institutional quality assurance, and instead, presents a general model combining program assessment and institutional audit. This model can result in a status of recognition similar to that of accreditation, if strategic public education and marketing campaigns are successful in impressing this brand upon the review process, its managing agent, and its outcome. This report proposes four variations on this combined model as a set of options to consider; however, it focuses on very basic organizational and procedural elements only. There are many further variables that would need consideration and development in the implementation of a new model of quality assurance, and many opportunities for further research.

One worthwhile endeavour may be a broad comparison of methods and procedures of the self-evaluation, peer review, and reporting components of international approaches. It would be beneficial to Canadian quality assurance efforts to learn from the successes and frustrations of others as process issues are considered. Such issues might include

- How best to select and prepare external experts for reviews;
- How do systems with highly transparent reporting address issues of personal and proprietary issues;
- What kind of operational staff support is required in large educational jurisdictions with many institutions; and,
- What types of documentation are required to substantiate a self-evaluation in different systems;
- How long do different jurisdictions' approaches to institutional reviews generally take? What are features of the most efficient systems? and,
- How prescriptive should the self-evaluation process be? Should there be a template to guide institutions or should they be give a set of broad criteria and formatting guidelines instead?

This short list provides examples of the many questions that policy makers must grapple with when implementing a quality assurance mechanism. However, the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer is not the best organization to lead future research efforts toward addressing these questions. Such research is more germane to provincial assessment boards and governments. The work of the Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education has successfully engaged the American higher education community in a national dialogue that has the attention of many inside and outside the United States. Perhaps the replication of such an effort in Canada would be worthwhile in rallying our nation's post-secondary education stakeholders towards common quality and recognition objectives.

Through its explorations and assessments, this project has recommended a regional model that has the potential for implementation in the short term. It is hoped that should this model be implemented successfully, institutions that successfully undergo its combined evaluation will earn their graduates eligibility to qualify for advanced study in Canada and throughout the world. Such an achievement might persuade other provinces and institutions to either replicate or join this regional model.

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Appendix A: Invitation Letter/ Consent Form

May 15, 2006

To whom it may concern:

Re: **Invitation to Participate in Research Study: "Exploring Options for Institutional Accreditation in the Context of Canadian Post-secondary Education" through an online survey ([click here](#))**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled "Exploring Options for Institutional Accreditation in the Context of Canadian Post-secondary Education". I am pursuing this research as a graduate student of the University of Victoria, but I am also acting in relation to my position as an employee of the British Columbia Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT). The requirements for my master's degree in public administration include the completion of a research report done on behalf of a "client" in the public sector. My "client" in this research is BCCAT, although I am solely responsible for all aspects of the study.

Objectives of this Study: This study relates to issues of credential recognition among Canadian degree-granting institutions that have recently been drawing BCCAT's attention. In particular, it has come to light that some Canadian universities, by policy, will not consider for admission applicants to graduate and professional programs who have received their baccalaureate credential from any Canadian institution that is not a member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). The lack of an established system of post-secondary accreditation in Canada is cited as part of the rationale behind such policies. This project seeks to evaluate the claim that a system of institutional accreditation can provide a means for increasing the global recognition of Canada's post-secondary credentials, through ensuring and validating the quality of Canadian post-secondary institutions themselves.

Selection of Participants: You are being asked to participate in this study because, through being part of BCCAT's network, you have been identified as having the requisite level of knowledge and understanding of the Canadian post-secondary system and issues of credential recognition and quality assurance to answer the questions being posed.

Conditions of Participation: If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include responding to an online survey that will take approximately 30 minutes of your time. You may decline to answer any question. Aside from the time it takes you to complete the online survey and respond to any potential follow-up questions, it is unlikely that participation in this study would cause you any inconvenience. **The survey will close on June 30, 2006.**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. However, if you wish to withdraw from the study after submitting the online survey, it will be logistically impossible to remove your individual data. I will be the only person with access to the raw data and will ensure that your identity and responses be kept confidential, and that all raw data will be destroyed three months after the completion of this study.

Follow-up Questions and Ongoing Consent: The online survey will ask for your name and email address, and permission for me to contact you with follow-up questions. However, if you prefer to remain anonymous, you may refrain from giving your name and contact information. Follow – up questions will only be necessary where a response is unclear or where elaboration on a particular point in the survey response is sought. If follow-up is sought, I may contact you for a brief telephone conversation.

I will refer to this letter and remind you that responding to the online survey, providing contact information for follow-up and answering any follow-up questions will be taken as consent. I will also provide you with an opportunity to answer any questions about the procedures of this study, your participation, and the use of your data before proceeding to ask any questions. You may decline to answer any questions at any time.

Reporting of Results: The results of this research will be reported on in the project final report, as well as presented to BCCAT and its committees. At no time will the identities of participants be linked to their data in any presentation or report.

Contacting the Researcher: If you have any questions about this study or your participation, please contact me at soldford@bccat.bc.ca . My research supervisor is Dr. Evert Linquist, Director of the School of Public Administration. You may contact Evert with any questions at 250-721-8084. You may verify the ethical approval of this study by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545).

Your participation in the online survey available at this link will be understood as indicating that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher. You may receive an email within the next few weeks reminding you of this survey.

I would appreciate greatly your willingness to participate, and hope that you will take the time to do so.

Best regards,

Stephanie Oldford

pc: Dr. Frank Gelin
        Dr. Evert Linquist

Appendix B: Web-Based Questionnaire

Exploring Options for Institutional Accreditation in the Context of Canadian Post-Secondary Education

You are invited to participate in research being undertaken by Stephanie Oldford as part the requirements of a Master's degree in Public Administration at the University of Victoria. This project also has the support of the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer, although the author is solely responsible for all aspects of the study.

The lack of an established system of post-secondary accreditation is often cited as part of the problem behind issues of credential recognition in Canadian post-secondary education. This project seeks to evaluate the claim that institutional accreditation can increase the global recognition of Canada's credentials, through ensuring and validating the quality of Canadian post-secondary institutions themselves. This survey seeks advice regarding the key features of an accreditation model that might be applicable in the Canadian context.

If you have been asked to participate, you have been identified as having the requisite level of knowledge and understanding of the issues to answer the questions being posed. Aside from the time it takes you to complete the online survey, it is unlikely that participation in this study would cause you any inconvenience. There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Completing this online survey will take no longer than 30 minutes of your time. Your participation must be completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you prefer to remain anonymous, you may refrain from giving your name, contact information or permission to be contacted. Your identity and responses will be kept confidential.

If you have any questions about this study or your participation, please contact soldford@bccat.bc.ca or by phone at 604-412-7791.

Agreeing to participate in this survey indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher. Please keep in mind that the deadline for responding is June 16th, 2006.

I agree.

POWERED BY
zoomerang

Exploring Options for Institutional Accreditation in the Context of Canadian Post-Secondary Education

Questions in this section are intended to gain some insight about your attitudes toward current issues and trends in post-secondary education in Canada.

1

Increasing diversification in Canadian public and private post-secondary institutions will likely result in an increase in the overall quality of post-secondary education available to students.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

2

There is a growing problem of credential recognition among Canadian institutions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

3

A post-secondary institution's mission must include a significant research component in order for it to provide quality undergraduate degree programs.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

4

The increasing participation of private providers of post-secondary education in Canada will increase students' access to post-secondary education.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

5

It is imperative that well-established methods of quality assurance exist for all post-secondary institutions, whether public or private.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

6

The increased expansion of degree granting abilities to institutions other than universities requires new methods of quality assurance.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

7

Current methods for ensuring quality in Canadian universities are sufficient.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

8

As far as the increasing participation of private providers of post-secondary education, I feel more open to not-for-profit providers over for-profit ones.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

9

It is necessary to expand degree granting authorities to non-traditional providers (e.g. colleges, private institutions) in order to effectively respond to the ever increasing demand for post-secondary education and provide the range of choices that today's students are looking for.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

10

It is imperative that the decisions and deliberations of accreditation and quality assurance bodies in post-secondary education be accessible and transparent.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

11

It is reasonable that small and specialized institutions can provide quality degree programs in specific areas.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

12

I understand the distinction between academic degrees and degrees of an applied, occupational or professional nature, and find such distinctions necessary.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

13

Although the quality assurance methods currently in place in Canadian post-secondary education are effective and valid, there are too many different approaches to be clearly communicated and well understood by the public.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4

Continue

Survey Page 1

Questions in this section concern procedural and organizational elements of quality assurance and accreditation.

15

Please choose one of the following options as the most desirable **scope of activity** of an institutional quality assurance agency/accreditor in Canadian post-secondary education.

- ○ Provincial
- ○ Regional/Multi-Provincial (e.g. Western Provinces)
- ○ National
- ○ International (e.g. US Accreditation Agency)
- ○ Other, please specify

[ ]

16

Please choose one of the following options as the most desirable **scope of authority** of an institutional quality assurance agency/accreditor in Canadian post-secondary education.

- ○ All institutions offering credentials that may lead to or ladder into degrees (e.g. diplomas, certificates, associate degrees)
- ○ All degree granting institutions (e.g. baccalaureates, master's, doctorates)
- ○ All non-traditional degree granting institutions (e.g. colleges, private institutions)
- ○ All private institutions
- ○ Other, please specify

[ ]

17

Please rate the following procedural elements of an institutional quality assessment model in terms of how desirable/important you feel they would be for inclusion in a Canadian model:

1	2	3	4	5
Not important at all	Not very important	Indifferent/ Don't know	Somewhat desirable	Highly desirable

Eligibility Criteria (e.g. to apply requires a certain number of programs, or years of operation)

1	2	3	4	5

Candidacy Period (e.g. requirement of 2 years between attaining eligibility and applying for accreditation)

1	2	3	4	5

Institutional Self-Evaluation against established standards

1	2	3	4	5

External Evaluation by Academic Peers

1	2	3	4	5

Site Visit by Academic Peers

1	2	3	4	5

Published Reports of Institutional Reviews

1	2	3	4	5

Published Criteria and Standards for Accreditation

1	2	3	4	5

Transparent Procedures and Methods of Assessment

1	2	3	4	5

Degree Level Standards/Descriptors

1	2	3	4	5

Assessment of Student Satisfaction

1	2	3	4	5

Assessment of Student Outcomes

1	2	3	4	5

18

Should quality assessment reviews be conducted on a cyclical/regular basis?

[YES]   [NO]

If yes, how many years would be an appropriate interval?

[   ]

19

Please rate the following potential consequences/benefits in terms of how desirable it would be to have them attached to an institution's accreditation status.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all desirable	Not desirable	Indifferent	Desirable	Highly desirable

Direct public funding

[1]   [2]   [3]   [4]   [5]

Indirect public funding (e.g. student financial assistance)

[1]   [2]   [3]   [4]   [5]

Federal research grants

[1]   [2]   [3]   [4]   [5]

Ability to grant degrees

[1]   [2]   [3]   [4]   [5]

Ability to recruit international students

[1]   [2]   [3]   [4]   [5]

License to operate

[1]   [2]   [3]   [4]   [5]

Ability to articulate and transfer courses

[1]   [2]   [3]   [4]   [5]

Ability to have credentials recognized as a basis for admission to graduate/professional schools at other Canadian institutions

[1]   [2]   [3]   [4]   [5]

Ability to advertise accredited status

[1]   [2]   [3]   [4]   [5]

20

Which of the following types of organization would you think best to administer a quality assurance/accreditation system?

○ Provincial Government

○ Federal Government

○ Quasi-Governmental Agency/Administrative Board, Provincial Level

○ Quasi-Governmental Agency/Administrative Board, Federal Level

○ Non-profit Association consisting of member institutions

21

Please explain briefly the type of organization you feel would best be able to provide an accreditation system for Canadian post-secondary institutions.

[text box]

[Continue]

Survey Page 3

22

Which of the following should be the chief focus of quality assurance/accreditation reviews?

○ Evaluating an institution's fitness for purpose e.g. How well is the institutional mission being carried out?

○ Assessing whether established minimum standards of quality have been met

○ Evaluating how well the institution's internal quality assessment systems are functioning

○ Encouraging continuous improvement throughout the organization

○ Other, please specify

[text box]

23

Please rank the following purposes of accreditation on a scale of one to 10, one being not at all applicable in the Canadian context, and 10 being the most applicable.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

To inform prospective students and/or their parents about institutional choices

To encourage continuous improvement in post-secondary institutions

To assist in ensuring accountability for public funds

To assure that new institutions meet established minimum standards

To differentiate institutional status

To encourage inter-provincial comparability of credentials

To increase international recognition of credentials

To assist in increasing student mobility

To better inform the rest of the world about how Canada verifies the quality of its post-secondary education institutions

To control expansion of degree granting institutions

24

What do you consider to be the key differences between institutional accreditation and systems of quality assessment currently in practice in Canada?

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                                                              ▲

                                                              ▼
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25

Are the differences noted above significant enough, in your view, to justify consideration of moving toward and accreditation style quality assurance model?

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                                                              ▲

                                                              ▼
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26

Do you feel that any existing body or bodies in Canada have the capacity to deliver the type of system envisioned in your responses? Which one? Please explain your answer.

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                                                              ▲

                                                              ▼
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Continue

This is the last section of this survey. Questions in this section ask for your personal information. Please be reminded that you may choose to remain anonymous by refraining to answer these questions.

27

Which of the following best describes the type of organization/institution you are chiefly involved with?

○ Government

○ Quality assurance agency

○ Public university

○ Public university college

○ Public college

○ Other public post-secondary institution

○ Private institution - not-for-profit

○ Private institution - other

○ Research/policy

○ Other, please specify

[   ]

28

If you choose to do so, please enter your name, organization and contact information.

Name:	
Organization:	
Title:	
Address :	
City:	
Province:	
Postal Code:	
Telephone:	
Email Address:	

29

May the researcher contact you to follow up on any of your responses?

| YES | NO |

Any preference as to when to be contacted?

30

Please provide any further comments, suggestions or thoughts that your participation in this survey has evoked.

Continue

Appendix C: Survey Areas of Questioning Defined with Examples of Questions

Key Concept	Questions
1. Attitudes and Awareness	
Problem Identification Provides the definition of the problem employed in the study, and asks participants to rate the problem in terms of its perceived significance.	• Do participants identify a growing problem of credential recognition in Canada? • Do participants agree that there are too many different approaches to quality assurance in Canada to be well understood?
Attitudes Seeks to identify the attitudes of participants toward new degree providers, applied degrees, and Canada's responses to massification?	• Do participants feel that large, research universities are the proper locus of degree-granting? or, • Do they feel that expansion of degree-granting authorities to institutions other than universities is necessary?
Awareness Establishes the extent to which participants are aware of different quality assurance agencies and their methods.	• Have participants been involved in the work of quality assurance organizations in Canada? • To what extent are participants aware of various quality assurance agencies outside of Canada?
2. Organizational Elements	
Source of Authority Seeks to identify the best source for the legitimacy and authority of an organization responsible for an institutional accreditation process.	• Would participants prefer that the organization be established within government, through a quasi-governmental agency, or through an association of member institutions? • If government involvement is preferred, do participants envision this involvement being from the provincial or federal level?

Scope of Activity
The organization could be provincial, regional, national, or international in scope.
	• Do participants envision an organization that is limited to a provincial scope of activity? Or,
	• Do they see the most desirable scope of activity as
	   ▪ multi-provincial;
	   ▪ national;
	   ▪ or international.

Scope of Authority The types of institutions subject to the review of the organization?	• Should a new institutional accreditation process be inclusive of all degree granting institutions public and private, including universities and new providers? or, • Should the process be limited to new providers or private institutions only?
Organizational Structure The composition of managerial leadership of the organization.	• What type of organization would be most able to provide an institutional accreditation system for Canadian institutions?

Key Concept	Questions
3. Procedural Elements	
<u>Purposes and Functions</u> The overarching goals and objectives that underlie the quality assessment process.	Should an institutional quality assurance model in the Canadian context seek to: • inform prospective students? • increase international recognition of credentials? • enable student mobility? • encourage continuous improvement of institutions? • ensure accountability for the use of public funds? • control expansion of degree granting institutions? • differentiate institutional status? or, • assure that new institutions meet minimum standards?
<u>Procedural Elements</u> The methods and procedures that make up the quality assessment process.	• Is a degree qualifications framework and assessment of student learning outcomes against this framework desirable in the context of institutional accreditation? • Should quality assessment reviews be cyclical in nature? • Is transparency desirable with respect to the process, criteria, and review outcomes? • Is a candidacy period where institutions establish their eligibility for accreditation a desirsable feature?

<u>Decision Utility</u>
The consequences or benefits the status or being accredited might accord to an institution.
	• Should accreditation be mandatory in order for an institution to operate? or,
	• Should it be voluntary, and linked to other benefits, such as:
	  ▪ access to funding;
	  ▪ the ability to articulate and transfer courses with other institutions; and,
	  ▪ the ability to grant degrees?

<u>Evaluative Focus</u> The chief focus of the review procedures undertaken at the institutional level.	Should the review focus on: • whether minimum standards of quality have been met; • how well the institution's internal quality assessment systems are functioning; or, • encouraging continuous improvement throughout the organization.
4. Appetite for Implementation and Assessment of Organizational Capacity	
<u>Gap Analysis</u> Identifies what features are lacking in existing systems in comparison to "institutional accreditation".	What do participants identify to be the differences between "institutional accreditation" and quality assessment mechanisms currently in place in Canada?
<u>Program Justification</u> Participants' ultimate judgements as to whether implementation of institutional accreditation is merited.	Do participants find the identified differences significant enough to warrant the consideration of implementing an accreditation-style quality assurance model?
<u>Organizational Capacity</u> The perceived ability of existing organizations to support, implement and manage an institutional accreditation mechanism.	Do participants feel that any existing organizations in Canada have the capacity to manage the quality assurance system they envision?

Appendix D: Explanatory Tables for Problem Identification, Attitudinal, and Awareness Indexes

Table D-1: Problem Identification Index
(Min 4 Mid 10 Max 16)

	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q2	There is a growing problem of credential recognition among Canadian institutions.	1	2	3	4
Q6	The increased expansion of degree granting abilities to institutions other than universities requires new methods of quality assurance	1	2	3	4
Q7	Current methods for ensuring quality in Canadian universities are sufficient.	4	3	2	1
13	Although the quality assurance methods currently in place in Canadian post-secondary education are effective and valid, there are too many different approaches to be clearly communicated and well understood by the public.	1	2	3	4

Table D-2 Attitudinal Index
(Min 6 Mid 10 Max 24)

	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q1	Increasing diversification in Canadian public and private post-secondary institutions will likely result in an increase in the overall quality of post-secondary education available to students.	1	2	3	4
Q3	The increasing participation of private providers of post-secondary education in Canada will increase students' access to post-secondary education.	4	3	2	1
Q4	A post-secondary institution's mission must include a significant research component in order for it to provide quality undergraduate degree programs.	1	2	3	4
Q8	As far as the increasing participation of private providers of post-secondary education, I feel more open to not-for-profit providers over for-profit ones.	4	3	2	1
Q9	It is necessary to expand degree granting authorities to non-traditional providers (e.g. colleges, private institutions) in order to effectively respond to the ever increasing demand for post-secondary education and provide the range of choices that today's students are looking for.	1	2	3	4
Q11	It is reasonable that small and specialized institutions can provide quality degree programs in specific areas.	1	2	3	4

Table D-3: Awareness Index: Values assigned to Responses
(Min 11 Mid 32 Max 55)

Response	Completely unaware of	Have heard of, but unfamiliar	Vaguely familiar with	Familiar with	Have been involved/ worked with
Score	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix E: Criteria to Become an Institutional Member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada

By-law number one being the general By-law regulating the transaction of the business and affairs of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada

Be it enacted by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada as a by-law of the Association as follows:

1. Definitions

Whenever used in these By-laws the following words and phrases shall have the meanings set out below:

(a) "Associate Members" shall have the meaning set out in paragraph 3.(3);

(b) "Association" means the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada;

(c) "Board" means the board of directors;

(d) "Canadian" means established pursuant to the laws of Canada or one of its provinces or territories, having its head office in Canada, and not controlled or the property of a foreign entity;

(e) "Honorary Associates" shall have the meaning set out in paragraph 4.;

(f) "Institutional Members" and "Institutional Membership" shall have the meanings set out in paragraph 3.(1);

(g) "Members" means the Institutional Members, Regional and Provincial Members and Associate Members;

(h) "Not-for-Profit" means not established for the purpose of distributing profits to individual directors, employees, owners or shareholders;

(i) "Regional and Provincial Members" shall have the meaning set out in paragraph 3.(2);

(j) "University President" shall include a "Principal" and a "Rector" as applicable;

(k) "Voting Members" means the Institutional Members.

2. The association

The Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada is the national Association of Canadian public and private not-for-profit universities and university-degree level colleges established pursuant to appropriate legislation and fulfilling the requirements for Institutional Membership in the Association.

3. Membership

There shall be three categories of membership in the Association as follows:

(1) Institutional Members

Institutional Members shall be those universities and colleges named in the Schedule to the Act of Parliament incorporating the Association and such other Canadian universities and university-degree level colleges as are from time to time recommended for Institutional Membership by the Board and are approved by vote of the Association, provided that each of such universities and university-degree level

colleges, including those federated with, affiliated to or a constituent portion of a university, shall satisfy the following conditions:

(a) It has the powers it purports to exercise pursuant to authority granted by the Crown or by Statute or by formal agreement with its affiliated or federated university, or the university of which it is a constituent portion;

(b) It has governance and an administrative structure appropriate to a university, including:

- Authority vested in academic staff for decisions affecting academic programs including admissions, content, graduation requirements/standards, and related policies and procedures through membership on an elected academic senate or other appropriate elected body representative of academic staff;

- An independent board of governors, or appropriate equivalent, that:

   o is committed to public accountability and functions in an open and transparent manner;

   o has control over the institution's finances, administration and appointments;

   o includes appropriate representation from the institution's external stakeholders (including the general public), from academic staff, from students and from alumni; and

   o uses the institution's resources to advance its mission and goals.

- A senior administration normally including a president and vice-presidents and/or other senior officers appropriate to the size of the institution and the range of its activities.

(c) It has an approved, clearly articulated and widely known and accepted mission statement and academic goals that are appropriate to a university and that demonstrate its commitment to: (i) teaching and other forms of dissemination of knowledge; (ii) research, scholarship, academic inquiry and the advancement of knowledge; and (iii) service to the community.

(d) It has as its core teaching mission the provision of education of university standard with the majority of its programs at that level.

(e) It offers a full program or programs of undergraduate and/or graduate studies that animate its mission and goals, and that lead to a university degree or degrees conferred by itself or, if federated or affiliated with, or a constituent of a university, by the parent institution. Indicators will include:

- Highly qualified academic staff holding the PhD or other appropriate terminal degree, and relevant professional experience where appropriate;

- Undergraduate programs taught by senior academic staff;

- A quality assurance policy that results in cyclical or continuous assessment of all of its academic programs and support services, and which includes the participation by those directly involved in delivery of the program or service, as well as by other institutional colleagues and external experts and stakeholders;

- Provision for the periodic evaluation of the performance of academic staff including a student assessment component;

- Access to library and other learning resources appropriate to the institution's mission, goals and programs;

- The periodical monitoring of graduate outcomes, and established and transparent processes for disseminating this information inside and outside the institution;

- Academic counselling and other student services appropriate to its programs;

- Financial resources to meet its mission statement and goals;

(f) Its undergraduate degree programs are characterized by breadth and depth in the traditional areas of the liberal arts and/or sciences, and first degrees of a professional nature - such as medicine, law, teacher education, engineering - have a significant liberal arts and/or sciences component.

(g) It has a proven record of scholarship, academic inquiry and research, expects its academic staff to be engaged in externally peer reviewed research and to publish in externally disseminated sources, and provides appropriate time and institutional support for them to do so. Indicators of this commitment will include policies and programs pertaining to the creation of knowledge, the development of curriculum and the execution of research projects.

(h) It ensures an atmosphere that:

- promotes and protects the honest search for knowledge without fear of reprisal by the institution or third parties;

- protects the communication of knowledge and the results of scholarship and research;

- values intellectual honesty, fairness and integrity, and promotes accountability;

- encourages the highest standards in scholarship and research;

- respects the academic freedom and rights of others; (see AUCC statement pdf) and

- expects the exercise of academic freedom in a reasonable and responsible manner

In this regard, the institution has approved and clearly articulated policies on academic freedom, intellectual integrity and the ownership of intellectual property, and a plan for informing students and academic staff about their roles and responsibilities.

(i) If it is a freestanding institution, neither in a formal relationship of affiliation or federation nor a constituent portion of a member university, it has in the academic year in which it makes application for membership, and has had in the two preceding years, an enrolment of at least 500 FTE students enrolled in university degree programs.

(j) If it is a constituent of an Institutional Member, its application for membership is supported by its parent institution.

(k) It operates on a not-for-profit basis.

(l) It satisfies the Board, after receiving a report by a Visiting Committee appointed by the Board, that it is providing education of university standard and meets the criteria for membership in the Association.

An institution that does not meet all of the criteria for membership may not re-apply for a period of three (3) years.

(AUCC members are invited to reaffirm their adherence to the criteria for membership in the association every five years commencing in 2005.)

(2) Regional and Provincial Members

Regional and Provincial members shall be the Association of Atlantic Universities, the Conference of Rectors and Principals of Quebec Universities, the Council of Ontario Universities, the Council of Western Canadian University Presidents and such other regional and provincial organizations that are from time to

time recommended for membership by the Board and are approved by vote of the Association, provided that each of such organizations has region-wide membership in the area it purports to represent.

(3) Associate Members

Associate members shall be national organizations of university and college personnel that are from time to time recommended for associate membership by the Board and are approved by vote of the Association, provided that each of such national organizations shall satisfy the following conditions:

(a) it has objects consonant with those of the Association;

(b) it is not a government department or agency;

(c) it has a Canada-wide membership;

(d) it represents major academic or administrative divisions or interests within universities and university-degree level colleges.

4. Honorary associates

Honorary Associates of the Association shall be such bodies as have objects consonant with those of the Association and are from time to time recommended by the Board and are approved by vote of the Association as Honorary Associates.

Appendix F: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
Principles of Institutional Quality Assurance in Canadian Higher Education

AUCC webpage available at: *http://www.aucc.ca/qa/principles/index_e.html*

The following principles have been endorsed by the executive head of each member of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

Each AUCC member institution has a mission statement and objectives which underpin the development and assessment of its academic programs. Each university is committed to ensuring that appropriate standards are achieved and maintained in its programs and that it is offering a high quality education. To these ends:

Quality assurance and improvement

The institution has in place a formal, approved, transparent policy committing it to ensuring the quality and continuous improvement of its academic programs.

Where applicable, the institution is also in compliance with the requirements of a provincial or regional authority having responsibility for quality assurance either through that agency's verification that the institution's quality review policy and processes meet an agreed standard, or through the agency's own assessment of the programs offered.

The authority responsible for implementation of the institutional policy and for action in response to recommendations resulting from the quality assurance process is clearly identified.

There is a procedure for the regular review of the institution's quality assurance policy and related processes.

Scope and frequency of reviews

The policy applies to current and planned programs.

The policy is comprehensive in its coverage of all undergraduate and graduate programs.

The policy applies to all programs whether campus-based or delivered at a distance, in Canada or across borders.

The full range of the institution's academic programs is subject to review on a regular cycle.

The policy defines the elements of the program reviews.

The policy includes an appropriate mechanism to review interdisciplinary programs.

Key characteristics of the quality review

The quality assessment process is based on self-evaluation and peer review.

The process includes, as a fundamental dimension, the involvement of external disciplinary experts.

The process involves internal and external stakeholders including students, faculty, and the administration of the institution, and may also involve alumni and representatives of the community.

Where accreditation or certification processes exist for certain professional and other programs, the institution typically participates in them, and these standards are integrated into the institution's own quality review processes for these programs.

Information to the public

There is documentation to guide the quality assurance process, and this documentation is public.

In the interests of transparency and accountability, the results of the quality assessment are made public.

The policy, related processes and the calendar for assessments are known within the institution and among external stakeholders including government and the public-at-large