

**EXEMPT STATUS
CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES**

November 2006

Acknowledgements:

This version of the Exempt Status Criteria and Guidelines was established and published by the Minister of Advanced Education in November 2006.

This version of the criteria and guidelines, which outlines the requirements for submitting an application for exempt status, and the assessment criteria for giving or refusing approval, has been prepared with advice from stakeholders and quality assessment experts.

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Modifications to Policies, Criteria, and Guidelines

The board recommends to the Minister of Advanced Education policies, criteria and guidelines that will apply for the purposes of giving or refusing consent/approval or attaching terms and conditions to consent.

The Minister of Advanced Education reserves the right to modify policies, criteria and guidelines from time to time and will post current versions on the website.

It is the applicant's responsibility to use current policies, criteria and guidelines.

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What is Exempt Status?

The purpose of Exempt Status is to provide an expedited review process for institutions that have demonstrated:

- A history of successfully offering quality degree programs at a given level for at least ten years in British Columbia;
- An established organizational capacity for degree-granting (including faculty) sufficient to ensure that quality degree level education; and
- The establishment of rigorous, ongoing program and institutional quality assessment processes, both internal and external.

Institutions with proven track records (10 years' history in British Columbia of enrolling students in programs at a particular degree level) and appropriate governance mechanisms in place may apply for "Exempt Status" at a specific degree level. For example, if an institution meets the 10-year prerequisite period for baccalaureate degrees **and** satisfies other criteria for Exempt Status, the institution could apply for Exempt Status in respect of new baccalaureate degrees.

Institutions with Exempt Status would still require Ministerial consent / approval for each new degree. However, once the institution achieves Exempt Status, the quality assessment process would be expedited so that new degree proposals, up to the degree level of exemption specified, would be forwarded directly to the Minister for review and consent / approval. As such, Exempt Status represents an exceptional condition. For these reasons, Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB) applies the highest standards and expectations of quality in its review of applications for Exempt Status.

When an institution has been granted Exempt Status at a certain degree level, proposals submitted for new degree programs at that level would go directly to the Minister of Advanced Education for approval / consent following the 30-day public review of the new degree program proposal via the Ministry's degree quality assessment website. This enables the general public (including academic experts from inside and outside British Columbia) the opportunity to review the application and provide comments to the submitting institution and the Board. The DQAB will not review the proposal unless the Minister has concerns about it and refers it to the DQAB.

The Board will review the Application for Exempt Status according to the criteria established by the Minister.

See attachments:

- Degree Program Approval Process Workflow for Institutions with Exempt Status
- Degree Program Approval Process Workflow for Non-exempt Institutions

Submission Format

Institutions seeking Exempt Status up to a particular degree level must submit an application through the Post-secondary Institution Proposal System. In order to make applications through the Post-secondary Institution Proposal System, an institution must first obtain a User ID and password from the DQAB Secretariat. The institution will be required to confirm its institutional information in prescribed data fields before submitting its application for Exempt Status in Adobe PDF format as an attachment.

Note: When creating Adobe PDF files, navigation tools such as “**bookmarks**” must be incorporated into the document(s) to allow the reader to navigate quickly to a particular page or section within the document. Information on navigation tools can be found in the Adobe Acrobat documentation.

Submission Guidelines

The length of the application may vary, but should be approximately 5,000 words (additional information may be added to the application in the form of appendices). The complete application will be posted on the Post-secondary Institution Proposal System website and will be open for public comment for 30 days. This is intended to provide the public with an opportunity to view and comment on the application in order to meet the DQAB’s commitment to an open and accountable process.

Information that the institution considers proprietary should be included in appendices to the exempt status application. Examples of proprietary information may include referee letters, letters of support etc (which contain personal information such as names and addresses, financial information etc.)

An Application for Exempt Status must provide information in a format that addresses the areas below in the order specified:

1. Executive Summary

The Executive Summary must present, in a succinct manner, the purpose of the application and an explanation of how the institution meets the criteria for Exempt Status. The Executive Summary must be no longer than 1,000 words and must also include the following information:

- a. an overview of the organization’s history, mission and academic goals;
- b. location of the institution (and any branch campus operations, etc.);
- c. identification of any partnerships or collaborative arrangements with other institutions;
- d. written confirmation of the authorization of the representative of the applicant institution to enter into a binding application (including name, title, address, telephone number and e-mail address);

- e. identification of any instances of non-compliance with legislation governing those institutions and any relevant regulatory bodies; and
- f. to enable the Board to fulfill its obligation to make informed recommendations to the Minister, written authority for the Board to enter into communications with third parties, including accrediting bodies.
- g. **Name, title, phone number and e-mail address** of the institutional contact person in case more information is required.

2. Application for Exempt Status

- a. Indicate the purpose of the application and specify the degree level for which approval for Exempt Status is being sought (e.g., baccalaureate, masters, doctoral).
- b. Indicate how the institution meets the prerequisite period for approval to grant degrees up to a particular level.

Note: the 10-year prerequisite period refers to the time period that the institution has had authority to grant degrees in its own name up to a particular level; has been enrolling students in approved degree programs at that level; and, has a ten-year history of granting degrees in British Columbia.

- i. Indicate the name(s) of the approval body, accrediting body and/or statutory authority, as appropriate, and indicate where, and for how long, the institution has been operating.
- ii. Indicate, by degree level, when the institution received approval or authority to grant degrees.
- iii. Indicate, by degree level, the number of years that the institution has been enrolling students in the degree programs.

Organization Review

In assessing the organizational capacity for applications by all private and out-of-province public post-secondary institutions, the Board may determine that an organizational review is required. If an Organizational Review is required, the board will also determine whether any prior accreditations can be recognized as satisfying all or part of the British Columbia's Organization Review criteria.

Submission Criteria

An application for Exempt Status must demonstrate that the institution meets the prerequisite time period and has the necessary organizational capacity.

Prerequisite Time Period

The prerequisite for an institution to be considered for Exempt Status is that the institution has, for 10 years:

- had approval to grant degrees in its own name up to a particular level;
- been successfully enrolling students in approved degree programs at that level and,
- has a ten-year history of granting degrees in British Columbia.

If the institution demonstrates that it meets the 10-year prerequisite period to be considered for Exempt Status, the submission will be assessed to determine organizational capacity in the following categories:

- mission and policies;
- governance, faculty, services and facilities;
- accountability and financial capacity; and,
- other.

Organizational Capacity

If an institution applying for Exempt Status has satisfied the 10-year prerequisite period of approval to grant degrees up to a particular level, the board will assess the applicant's organizational capacity for Exempt Status. Exempt Status, if granted, will be to the degree level that the institution has had degree-granting authority and been enrolling students in degree programs for the 10-year period in British Columbia.

In determining an institution's organizational capacity, the board may consider the institution's achievement of a successful review or accreditation under comparable standards.

Organizational capacity for Exempt Status will be assessed based on the following categories and criteria:

Mission and Policies

To ensure degree quality and relevance, the institution has in place:

- an approved, clearly articulated and published mission statement reflecting goals that are appropriate to an academic institution of high standard;
- appropriate policies and processes concerning academic integrity and standards, including the admission and recruitment of students and the evaluation and awarding of academic credit;

- policies and processes to ensure that the institution conforms to principles of academic freedom and responsibility; and,
 - when students or staff are asked to sign or adhere to a statement of faith and/or a code of conduct that might constitute a constraint upon academic freedom, a policy in which the applicant:
 - notifies staff and students as an initial step in the employment or admission process; and,
 - has adequate procedures in place to ensure the principles of natural justice are followed, in the event of alleged violations of any contractual arrangement concerning such required statement of faith and/or code of conduct.

Furthermore, the institution must publish the policies noted above and makes them available to students in an academic calendar or other publication.

Governance, Faculty, Services and Facilities

- The institution has a governance structure and administrative capacity appropriate to that of an academic institution of high standard, with an acceptable level of faculty involvement in governance.
- The institution has appropriate faculty, services and facilities sufficient to ensure the quality of the degree programs for which it has consent/approval.
- The institution has appropriate internal processes for developing and approving new degree programs.

Accountability

- The institution can demonstrate that it has a policy and process for the quality development of new programs that require peer / external review by appropriate experts.
- The institution can demonstrate that it has rigorous, ongoing program and institutional quality assessment processes, both internal and external.
 - Program review usually includes:
 - A self-study undertaken by faculty members and administrators of the program based on evidence relating to program performance, including strengths and weaknesses, desired improvements, and future directions;
 - An assessment conducted by a panel consisting of experts external to the institution that normally includes a site visit;
 - A report of the expert panel assessing program quality and recommending any changes needed to strengthen that quality; and,
 - A formal institutional response to the recommendations in the report.
 - Exempt Status implies that all of an institution's operating degree programs have been reviewed periodically by a panel of independent experts, the majority of whom are senior academics. The Board expects such a program review process to be in place in institutions applying for Exempt Status, and

may request to review associated documentation for any of the programs to be offered by the institution in British Columbia.

- The institution can demonstrate that it has an established and ongoing institutional and program planning cycle and process to assess the effectiveness of its educational programs and services, and for continuous growth and improvement.
- The institution can demonstrate that it has appropriate accountability mechanisms functioning for both the academic programs and research activities.

Other

- Where there are partnerships or collaborative arrangements with other institutions, the institution has clearly articulated and appropriate policies and processes in place.
- The institution has in place programs that can be appropriately integrated with the provincial post-secondary system in program transfer and articulation.
- The institution has the financial stability and resources appropriate for an institution seeking Exempt Status.
- Any other information or condition the board deems necessary to determine the organizational capacity of the institution.
- Note: the DQAB may use its discretion in applying these criteria.

Conditions for Maintaining Exempt Status

If an institution's application for Exempt Status is approved, the institution's Exempt Status will not normally require renewal or reapplication.

The Minister reserves the right to revoke, suspend or amend an institution's Exempt Status. The Minister shall request a review by the DQAB for recommendation on the revocation, suspension or amendment of Exempt Status of an institution; if the Minister believes a review is necessary, or if:

- a. the quality of the institution's degree offerings has fallen into disrepute;
- b. the institution has failed to comply with any terms and conditions or any legislative obligation; or
- c. the institution no longer appears to meet the criteria for Exempt Status.

If an institution's application for Exempt Status is denied, it may reapply two years after the date of its original application.

New Degree Program Proposals

An institution with Exempt Status must continue to submit new degree proposals to the Minister for Ministerial consent (approval or Minister's Order in the case of British Columbia public institutions) by posting an application for a new degree program (including the Executive Summary) on the Post-secondary Institution Proposal System. The documentation the institution used for its internal program approval process, or a link to the website where this information is available, must be attached to the application on the Post-secondary Institution Proposal System. Applications by British Columbia public institutions with Exempt Status are subject to peer review during the 30-day public review period for new degree program proposals.

The Minister reserves the right to require any exempt institution's degree proposal to be reviewed by the DQAB if the Minister believes a review is necessary or if:

- a. the request represents a significant departure from programs historically offered by the institution, or is inconsistent with the institution's mission;
- b. the quality of the institution's degree offerings has fallen into disrepute; or
- c. the financial stability of the institution is in doubt.

For private and out-of-province public institutions, the standard terms and conditions attached to all consents, and any individual terms and conditions addressing the specifics of each proposal, provided by the Minister will continue to apply notwithstanding the Exempt Status of the institution.