2023/24 QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESS AUDIT
NORTH ISLAND COLLEGE

The Summary was prepared by the Degree Quality Assessment Board Secretariat using the Institutional Report, the Expert Panel Report, and the Response to the Expert Panel Report. North Island College was one of four post-secondary institutions to undertake the Quality Assurance Process Audit in 2023/24.

Introduction

The Terms of Reference for the Degree Quality Assessment Board establish that audits will be based on information provided by public post-secondary institutions to ensure that rigorous, ongoing program and institutional quality assessment processes have been implemented.

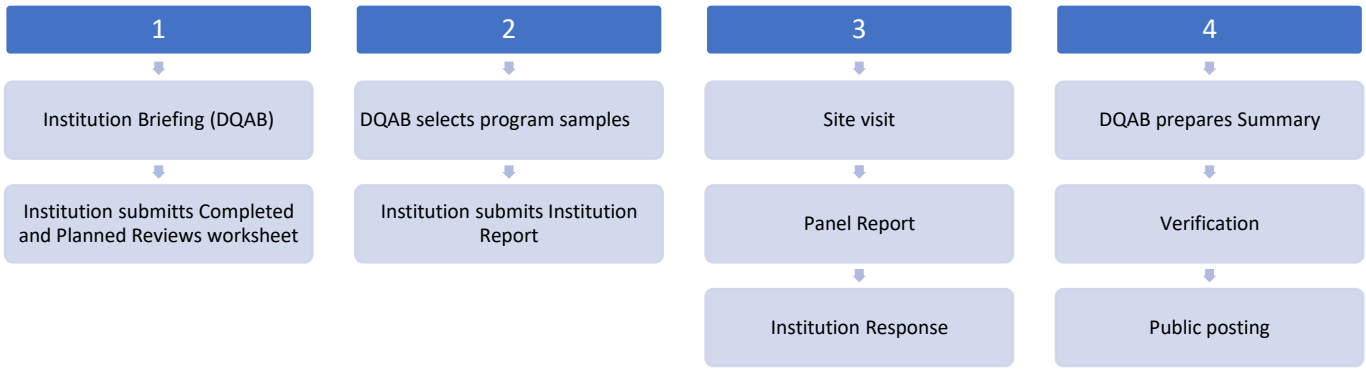
The main objectives of the quality assurance process audit (QAPA) are to ascertain that the institution:

a) Continues to meet the program review policy requirements outlined in the DQAB's *Exempt Status Criteria and Guidelines* and the *Degree Program Review Criteria and Guidelines,* as applicable to the institution;
b) Has and continues to meet appropriate program review processes and policies for all credential programs; and
c) Applies its quality assurance process in relation to those requirements and responds to review findings appropriately.

The QAPA assessment is focused on answering questions in two categories:

1. Overall process
    a. Does the process reflect the institution's mandate, mission, and values?
    b. Is the scope of the process appropriate?
    c. Are the guidelines differentiated and adaptable to respond to the needs and contexts of different units, e.g. faculties or departments or credential level?
    d. Does the process promote quality improvement?
2. Review findings
    a. Were the responses to the sample program review findings adequate?
    b. Does the process inform future decision making?
    c. Are the review findings appropriately disseminated?

Figure 1: QAPA Process



North Island College – Institutional Context

North Island College (NIC or "College") is a comprehensive community college that serves the people and communities of the middle to northern Vancouver Island and parts of the BC Central Coast from Bamfield to Bella Coola. NIC serves the largest population of all BC rural colleges with campuses in Campbell River, Comox Valley (main campus), Port Alberni and Port Hardy, as well as, a learning centre in Ucluelet. The College is honoured to acknowledge operations within the traditional territories of 35 First Nations inclusive of the Nuu-chah-nulth,Kwakwaka'wakw and Coast Salish traditions.

North Island College abides by legislated structures and governance processes to function as a college. Per the *College and Institute Act*, the institution has a governance structure including a Board of Governors and an Education Council. Education Council has an advisory role to the Board on various educational policies and academic programming.

NIC has an active Indigenous Education Council (IEC) which includes representatives from the 35 Nations, Métis Chartered Communities, and Indigenous organizations. The IEC provides guidance in the delivery of education and support services relevant to the needs of Indigenous people and to ensure that the College works with Indigenous people in culturally appropriate ways.

The College is guided by key strategic plans, *BUILD 2026* (strategic plan, 2021), *Working Together* (Indigenization Plan, 2021), *Widening Our Doorways 2026* (Academic Plan, 2021), and *Journeying Together* (Indigenization and International Plan, 2022).

The College offers credentialed programs through five academic areas:

- Health and Human Services including Access and Learning
- Trades, Apprenticeship and Technical Programs
- Arts, Science and Management including Upgrading (Adult Basic Education)
- Continuing Education and Training
- Indigenous Studies

Table 1: Student enrollment

	Undergraduate	**Graduate**	**Degree Programs**	**Non-Degree Programs**
Full-time equivalent (FTE)	2,670	N/A	209	2,461

Table 2: Program offerings

Credential Type	# of Programs
Advanced Certificate	1
Advanced Diploma	3
Apprenticeship	16
Associate Degree	3
Bachelor's Degree	4
Certificate	44
Developmental Certificate	1
Diploma	21
Post-Degree (Post-Graduate) Certificate	1
Post-Degree (Post-Graduate) Diploma	7
Continuing Education/Short Certificate	16

Institution Self-Study

The QAPA review was initiated with an institution briefing on March 31, 2023. The briefing was conducted virtually by video conference. The briefing provides an overview of the QAPA process and the documentation institutions are requested to submit. At its meeting on July 7, 2023, the Quality Assurance Audit Committee reviewed the Completed and Planned Review worksheet submitted by NIC and selected the following for sampling: Business Administration (degree, diplomas and certificates with specializations); Human Services (diploma and certificates); and Associate of Arts.

Self-Evaluation Approach

The College approached the self-evaluation as an opportunity for a comprehensive review of its policies and practices that support quality student learning. The Vice President, Academic (VPA) and the Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation led the process.

In Fall 2021, the first gathering of the Academic Quality Enhancement Working Group took place with the goal to uncover the preparatory work and discuss the plan for the QAPA process. The group now comes together once a month to discuss the changes and directions needing to happen across the institution to develop a more robust and structured approach to improvement of student learning experiences and ongoing evidence gathering for decision-making.

The working group includes the members listed below:

- Vice President, Academic (Co-Chair)
- Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation (Co-Chair)
- Dean, Arts, Science and Management
- Dean, Trades and Technical Programs
- Dean, Health and Human Services
- Executive Director, Indigenous Education
- Director, Student Affairs

- Registrar
- Director, Institutional Research and Planning
- Education Council Chair and Chairs of Standing Committees
- Department Chairs Working Group Co-Chairs
- Student Representative
- Teaching and Learning Faculty Developer – Program Review, Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation

Consultations were held to ensure various areas of the College were aware of the QAPA process, had insights into what was required of their area, and where new policies and processes will evolve after NIC's response to the QAPA panel's report.

An online course called the NIC Academic Quality Primer was designed and built in the institution's digital learning platform, Brightspace. The intent was to provide the entire campus community (students and employees) with an opportunity to learn more about quality assurance, quality enhancement, and the QAPA process through six core modules in a self-serve format.

The self-study method was based primarily on a document review and consultations to confirm current practices. A comprehensive review was undertaken of College policies, procedures, informal practices, supporting documents, samples of programs and courses, and the terms of reference, agendas, and minutes of related committees. Meetings with individuals and departments were used to gather information and insights on current practices at the College and their experiences. The goals were to assess the adequacy and currency of the College's quality assurance infrastructure, identify any gaps, and develop action plans where opportunities for improvement were identified. The process focused on student success as a primary driver. While there was a particular focus on new program development and program review and renewal processes, the quality of instruction, quality of student learning, supports, and services for student success were also explored.

A key part of the self-study process was engaging the campus community in helping create a NIC definition of quality student learning. Since quality student learning is the core component of post-secondary education, it seemed fitting to weave all the self-study conversations and activities around student learning rather than accountability or program review or academic renewal. It was a topic that was easily understood by students, support staff, administrators and instructors, and created immediate engagement in unpacking what it meant to the College community. Because there is no single definition of what is quality student learning, conversations and input was varied and allowed for lots of perspectives and interpretations.

The report was drafted through the Offices of the Vice President, Academic and the Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation, in consultation with Academic Quality Enhancement Working Group members and other stakeholders. The institutional report was shared via iterative drafts to individuals as it pertained to their work. The final version was reviewed in September and shared with the Education Council and Board of Governors before submitting the report to the Degree Quality Assessment Board.

Quality Assurance Policy and Practices

The College's Academic Quality Framework guides the work of quality student learning, in addition to the work ahead in the areas of quality assurance, quality enhancement and improvement of teaching and learning practices:

- Quality Assurance covers the obligatory assessment and review of policies, processes, legislation, and Ministry-mandated accountability measures.
- Quality Enhancement outlines the individual and department actions to review, renew and reflect on the student learning experiences through work on enhancing courses and programs.
- Improvement of Practice is the work of faculty and deans improving and advancing their practices and pedagogies to ensure instruction and assessment is evidence-informed, relevant, and aligned.

Much of the College's quality enhancement activities are rooted in institutional policies. NIC ensures that all new programs fit within the mandate of the College and align with strategic and academic plans to address labour market needs through its *Program Revisions and New Program Approval Policy*. The program review process (Policy 3-11) requires all credentialed programs to engage in a review every seven years supported by a newly created teaching and learning centre.

In 2019, NIC hired a director (reporting to the Vice President, Academic) for advancing a college culture of teaching and learning, including quality enhancement activity (QAPA preparation, program review, curriculum development etc.) and starting up the Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation (CTLI). The CTLI co-ordinates and manages the institutional program process and quality assurance activities while providing supports on the submission of new and revised changes to programs and courses. CTLI also provides faculty professional learning opportunities and supports enhancements of student learning experiences and curriculum development.

<u>Program Development</u>

NIC's Policy 3-07 focuses on the development of new programming. New courses and programs are aligned with the College's strategic plan, *BUILD 2026*, integrated enrolment planning process, government requirements and legislation, along with meeting the educational needs of students, and satisfying labour market demand and societal needs.

A new program may come about because of an action item in the program review process or from a department undertaking regular reflections and renewal activities to enhance the program or from a dean or others who feel the community of learners would benefit from a new program. A new program may also come about as part of a Ministry supported direction.

Program development is a consultative process that brings together interest groups including faculty, staff, external partners, and institutional research to support the gathering and interpreting of relevant data to inform the proposal, approval, planning, and implementation processes.

All new program proposals begin with the dean bringing the request to the Education Team for approval via a Program Concept Form. The Program Concept then goes to the Leadership Team for review. If approved, the decanal area will complete a Program Feasibility Form intended to identity short- and long-term demand for the program, associated costs, and impacts to the institution. There are also consultations required as part of the feasibility process.

For credentialled program development that requires Indigenous community planning components, there are additional components to consult with the Indigenous Education Council. The dean seeks approval at the Education Team Level with review by the Leadership Team.

The decanal area then develops a program submission through the Curriculum Committee process seeking Education Council approval. Tuition approval requires an additional step. Then there is the Post-Secondary Institutional Proposal System review, if applicable.

Finally, the Board of Governors approves the credential and the tuition.

Program Review

The *Program Review Policy* (Policy 3-11) existed prior to 2019, but it was not comprehensive nor aligned with the requirements of the QAPA. It did not involve an external review phase. It also was rarely enacted. In 2019, the policy was updated to include a self-study and external review team.

The Vice President, Academic (VPA) oversees the program review process with the director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation (CTLI) leading the work. Annually the VPA consults with Education Team members and approves the program review schedule.

Programs progress through the program review process with the assistance of CTLI. Departments can choose to progress through the first five phases in one or two academic years. The institution's program review process consists of:

- Planning Phase: The department engages in a couple of kick-off meetings along with planning sessions to organize and outline the entire set of phases.
- Data Gathering and Analysis Phase: The department examines data that has already been gathered, engages with NIC support areas to learn more about students and learning, creates questions for surveys and focus groups to gather additional data from interest groups, and analyzes the data.
- Self-Study Phase: The department writes a narrative reflection about the program's academic quality reflecting on feedback from the data gathering and analysis phase, aligning with the five key dimensions of quality, while considering future directions, recommendations, and actions.
- External Review Phase: Three people external to the program/department engage in a two-day site visit which consists of interviews with students, faculty, and support members. Two members are external to the College. One is a member from within the College. The external review team provides an assessment of academic quality and comments on the self-study recommendations. The team then writes a summary report with recommendations.

- Final Report and Action Plan Phase: The department writes a report reflecting on the data gathered, the self- study recommendations, the external review team's report, and reflections about the entire student learning experience. A final draft of this report goes to the dean for feedback.
- One-Year Follow-Up Report Phase: The department produces an update on the status of action plan items. A final draft of this report goes to the dean for feedback and their feedback may or may not be incorporated into the final version.
- Ongoing Curriculum Renewal Phase: The department engages in ongoing renewal activities such as completing action plan items, conducting student surveys and focus groups, continuing to meet with the Program Advisory Groups etc. and provides updates to their dean and department area on an ongoing basis.

All the reports developed during the program review process are shared via an internal SharePoint team site, and the schedule and final reports are posted on an institutional webpage.

QAPA Review

The QAPA panel conducting the assessment were Robin Hicks, panel chair, and panel members Peter Geller and Meg Stainsby. The site visit was held at the Courtenay campus on November 16-17, 2023. Dao Luu, a member of the DQAB Secretariat also attended. The QAPA panel submitted its report on November 29, 2023. The panel report provided commendations, affirmations and recommendations.

Commendations are areas where the institution has shown exemplary practice. Areas of exemplary practice:

1. Commitment to Quality Assurance

The External QAPA Panel (EQP) commends NIC for their genuine and collective commitment to QA and continuous improvement. The strategic and operational plans, with detailed action plans and reporting mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, are truly impressive, and employees seem to be well aware of these institutional documents and are using them to guide their work on program reviews and development. The creation and revitalization of many policies and procedural guidelines, such as the Academic Quality Framework, have laid a strong foundation for quality education at NIC.

2. Commitment to Indigenization and Truth and Reconciliation

One of the greatest strengths noted by the EQP was NIC's commitment to working with Indigenous partners to meet the educational needs of students and communities. The Working Together Indigenization Plan confirms the College's commitment to reconciliation through tangible actions and the Journeying Together plan takes this one step further to transform NIC's approach to Indigenization and internationalization. The EQP commends NIC for its active engagement with the Indigenous Education Council, which includes representatives from 35 First Nations, Métis Chartered Communities and Indigenous organizations to provide guidance to the College on educational needs, programming and support services. Also of note is the

establishment of the Working Together Working Group, an internal body which is facilitating the implementation of the Indigenization plan by engaging faculty and staff across NIC. Throughout the site visit, it was evident that employees at all levels are committed to reconciliation efforts.

3. A Culture of Continuous Improvement

The EQP notes that NIC took a very deliberate approach to the self-study and the site visit which demonstrated a deep commitment to building an institution-wide commitment to QA and continuous improvement. There was a very high level of transparency and honest self-assessment in the institutional report that was consistent in the discussions throughout the site visit. It was widely accepted that the institution is introducing new policy, new processes and new concepts that require change management and learning new ways of approaching program currency and effectiveness, which lead in turn to quality student learning. The extensive guidelines and resources created to support that learning and the obvious effort put into preparing for the self-study and site visit are evidence of a genuine understanding that QA is an ongoing process that requires a full team effort to succeed. By engaging many people as observers of the process, NIC has likely accelerated this effort, and hopefully inspired their broad team as to the value of continuous quality improvement.

4. Creation of the CTLI

As further demonstration of NIC's commitment to QA, the leadership prioritized scarce resources—among many competing priorities and in the context of a global pandemic—to create the Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation (CTLI) and hire a very skilled and experienced Director. It was obvious to the EQP that this resource has been transformational for the institution and significantly accelerated progress on QA tools and mechanisms. The extensive development of policy, materials, resources, training, and even an online course on QA, are just a few of the invaluable ways that the CTLI has laid the groundwork to support continuous improvement.

Affirmations are areas where the institution has identified weaknesses and intends to correct it. Areas the institution identified for improvement:

1. Training and Development

The EQP heard from the leadership team that it is working to address consistency and thoroughness in the self-studies through a variety of means, including through ongoing orientation and training, and revision to the tools as needed. The EQP affirms and encourages these ongoing efforts.

2. Program Advisory Committees

NIC identified in their institutional self-study and in the site-visit interviews that they are actively working to expand and refresh Program Advisory Committees (PACs) for greater consistency and engagement across the institution. The EQP applauds these efforts and suggests that the creation of a new PAC policy and guidelines, such as standardized templates for meeting agendas, can be useful tools to clarify the purpose of PACs and ensure consistent practice.

3. Adapting Processes for Program Variability

It is evident that program administrators recognize the need to create specific processes, guidelines, and templates that will support the range of NIC's program areas. Current work is underway to provide this support to Trades and Technical programs as they approach their first program review. Further work is anticipated for Health and Human Services programs to avoid duplicating content that is part of accreditation programs. This flexibility is important to ensure meaningful outcomes for these programs without requiring inefficient duplication of reporting activity.

4. Faculty Professional Development

Faculty members in all three program review sessions noted the positive impact of program review in opening up conversations surrounding a more strategic approach to professional development (PD), including sharing results of individual PD activities and planning for department-level PD activity on topics such as developing learning outcomes and curriculum mapping. The EQP suggests that ongoing tracking of faculty PD would assist departments in demonstrating currency during program reviews and the planned biennial reviews ("scans").

Recommendations are areas needing improvement. The panel identified the following areas:

1. Curriculum Design

The EQP recommends that NIC embed guidelines in the program self-study process to ensure that review of program learning outcomes, curriculum mapping and alignment with assessments of student learning are part of the process. Putting these activities at the forefront of the process should provide clarity and focus for any recommended curricular changes that arise from the review.

2. Realistic Action Plans

The EQP also suggests providing guidelines (limits) on the number of recommendations to come out of a program review, as a way to focus departments on a feasible number of high-impact goals both for the short term and within the period between review cycles. In addition, the EQP suggests that after the initial cycle of program reviews, NIC assess the effectiveness of action plans and one-year follow-up reports in relation to how recommendations from program reviews support institutional-level planning and resourcing.

3. Evidence-informed Decision Making

The EQP recommends that NIC consider strengthening expectations and direction given to faculty review teams to ensure consistent and thorough engagement with relevant data and evidence in each component of the self-study. In particular, that analysis should consider student, labour market, and social needs and the program's alignment with those components.

4. External Review of Programs

The EQP recommends that NIC consider introducing more flexibility on the structure of its External Review Teams, to allow the auditing panel to vary according to the size and/or complexity of scope in a given program review. For instance, a single external reviewer may

suffice to audit the self-study arising from a single certificate-level program, whereas two externals would be important when auditing the self-study of a degree program. Virtual site visits and/or the flexibility to consider one-day vs. two-day site visit agendas may help to engage more reviewers.

The EQP recommends that NIC revise Policy 3-07 *Program Revisions and New Program Approvals* to commit to external review by peer experts during an appropriate stage within the program development and internal approvals process, to ensure this feedback is considered prior to the PSIPS posting stage. The external review could involve a desk audit of program materials and/or a site visit. The College might find useful models by consulting comparable policies at other BC post-secondary institutions.

NIC provided a response on March 27, 2024, that included an action plan to address the recommendations.