REVIEW OF THE DEGREE APPROVAL PROCESS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

REPORT OF THE ADVISORY PANEL

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MANDATE OF THE PANEL

On September 1, 2010 a temporary moratorium on the approval of new degree proposals was put in place until March 1, 2011 in order for government to review processes and criteria currently employed for evaluating and approving new degree proposals. An Advisory Panel was established to undertake this review and make recommendations to government about how the process might be improved and redesigned to better serve the needs of students, institutions, government, employers and the public.

Over the past decade there has been a significant growth in the number of students attending post-secondary degree granting institutions in BC. In the autumn of 2009 approximately 150,000 students were enrolled in degree programs in one of the 22 public and 17 private and out-of province institutions offering degree programs. Since 2001, over 300 new degree programs have been approved bringing the number of programs to over 1,900. This figure will increase in the years ahead, particularly as the newer degree granting institutions expand their offerings in an economic and social environment that both requires, and puts an increasingly high premium on, quality post-secondary education at all levels. Past and prospective expansion has added, and will add, to further differentiation in the kinds of institutions and types of degrees available in BC as will the growing internationalization of the education market.

It is thus timely to examine how degrees are approved and to ensure that the process meets the objectives of all parties and, at its core, provides a high degree of assurance of quality programs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In developing its recommendations (See Appendix I), the Panel has been guided by two principal interests: 1. ensuring quality degree programs that serve the needs of students in British Columbia's post-secondary education system, and 2. a concern to balance institutional autonomy with public accountability.

Using these two ideas as the filters through which the recommendations of this report were developed, the Panel has advanced a series of recommendations that will sustain and enhance the quality of degree programs offered in the province, clarify and expedite the degree program approval process, and improve transparency. This will ensure that all degree granting post-secondary institutions in BC will have the opportunity to strengthen

institutional autonomy and reinforce public accountability when developing new academic programs and reviewing established ones.

The Panel has recommended that a set of objectives and principles for degree program approval be made explicit in the work of the Ministry of Advanced Education and the Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB). The Ministry needs to examine questions that have apparently arisen over the terminology and value of Applied Degrees. After nearly a decade of operation, the composition of the DQAB and a number of its procedures should be changed to deal with the dramatically different post-secondary landscape of 2011. More transparency should be introduced, the standards for the use of the word "University" need to be strengthened, some approval and consent processes streamlined, and the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability be made more explicit.

Recommendations are presented that, when fully implemented, will create the conditions where all degree granting institutions will have the opportunity for an internal expedited degree program approval process balanced by an external audit of their degree program approval and academic unit/degree program review procedures. These recommendations build on long established practice and policy currently in place in many of the province's post-secondary institutions. Ministerial approval of all degree programs would still be required.

In the increasingly accreditation driven world of higher education, where this province competes nationally and internationally for students, the Panel recommends that the question of an accreditation process be carefully examined. The Ministry, in conjunction with key stakeholders, should convene a working group to better understand the implications of accreditation for the provincial post-secondary education system. On this question, as with many of the recommendations in the report, the Panel calls for practices and policies which are compatible with those of other jurisdictions in Canada and beyond. This, too, is the case with the recommendations that are advanced to make more visible the descriptions of degree categories and degree-level standards that were adopted by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada in 2007.

The recommendations that the Panel has advanced in this report are designed to build on well-established and respected practices in the existing post-secondary sector in this province and beyond. We are confident that these proposals will enhance transparency, make the system more effective and responsive, and strengthen the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability.

PROCESS

In the autumn of 2010 the then Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development (now the Ministry of Advanced Education) appointed an Advisory Panel and a consultant (who chairs the panel) to review the Degree Approval Process. Drawing on the Project Charter Summary (See Appendix A), which initially outlined the purposes and processes of the review, together with discussions with Ministry staff, the Panel prepared a series of seven key questions (See Appendix B). These were submitted to institutions, organizations and individuals seeking written responses and, when requested, interviews. The Panel received 21 written submissions (See Appendix C) and the consultant undertook 18 interviews (See Appendix D) from late December 2010 to early February 2011. The Panel has met face to face on two occasions over three days, had two teleconferences and numerous email exchanges as part of the process of preparing this report.

The Panel reviewed materials relating to degree approval processes in other Canadian and international jurisdictions. Also, the Panel explored the Alberta degree program review process in some depth, benefiting from the experience of two panel members. The consultant and two members of the Panel have served on the BC Degree Quality Assurance Board [DQAB].

This report is best seen as a high level review, and not an in depth analysis, of the degree program approval process in British Columbia. As such, it reflects the brevity of the time available to us and resulting limitations in our ability to examine fully all of the issues we have explored. In the pages that follow, we lay out a series of detailed recommendations that we believe will improve the process and generate greater trust in, and more transparency of, the system. Given the pace of this review, it will be important for all parties to consider these recommendations carefully before proceeding to implementation and, in some cases, to take time to examine both the questions explored and the recommendations offered more fully than was possible during our review.

OBJECTIVES OF THE DEGREE PROGRAM APPROVAL PROCESS

All new degree programs in this province must ultimately have the formal written approval of the responsible Minister. The paths to such approval vary and reflect the provisions of various *University Acts*, the *Degree Authorization Act* (2003) and amendments to the *College and Institute Act* in 2003. For most of the past decade there have been three different routes to gain provincial degree approval with each approach reflecting the same set of

hitherto implicit objectives. These were directly referenced for the first time in this review's consultation documents and received favorable support from almost all respondents. There was widespread agreement that they should be made explicit in the future.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE DEGREE PROGRAM APPROVAL PROCESS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA ARE INTENDED TO ENSURE:

- Student access to programs that are of a high standard and that result from excellent internal and external quality assurance processes;
- Quality degree programs and institutions that will be recognized within the province, Canada and internationally;
- Accountability and transparency (making public information that otherwise would be routinely accessible through freedom of information requests) to stakeholders and the general public;
- Coordination of the post-secondary system through cooperation and collaboration among institutions to facilitate student mobility and success;
- Program quality assessment built on an institution's current state of development including an appropriate process of self-assessment followed by peer/external review;
- A timely, efficient and effective degree program approval process;
- Access to programs which meet the educational, social, economic and cultural needs of students, employers, and society at large as well as addressing current government objectives;
- Encouragement of resourcefulness, innovation and responsiveness to current and future societal needs.

Recommendation 1

That these objectives be made explicit on Ministerial websites, on the DQAB website and in all printed and electronic materials related to the degree program approval process in this province.

Principles to guide and inform the Degree Program Approval Process

The foregoing objectives of the degree program review process should be rooted, in turn, in some basic principles that guide the work of the Ministry and the DQAB. Some of these principles are formally part of the *Terms of Reference* (2003) for the DQAB where it is noted that Board operations are to be affordable, accountable, efficient and effective. Other principles have been implicit over the years while others are anticipated in the objectives noted above.

Principles that should guide the degree program approval process include:

- Approving degrees of quality that will be recognized nationally and internationally;
- Following approval practices that are consistent, equitable, transparent, accountable, affordable, efficient and effective;
- Ensuring, in so far as possible, that the degree program approval processes in BC are compatible with those in other Canadian provinces.
- Ensuring due process while respecting institutional policies and procedures in a differentiated system;
- Supporting a post-secondary system that is as seamless as possible and that enhances opportunities for life-long learning;
- Enabling institutions to balance autonomy over their degree program approval processes, with appropriate internal and external accountability mechanisms;
- Ensuring the integrity and reputation of the post-secondary system by identifying and, if possible, minimizing the risks to sustainability and to student graduation in all degree programs approved;

Adherence to these principles will reassure institutions seeking degree approval that, although the processes will be different for institutions at differing stages of experience in the provincial system, they can all expect to be treated equitably and transparently. We therefore suggest that the foregoing principles, some of which were advanced in both written submissions and interviews, should be adopted. It should be borne in mind that this

list is by no means exhaustive and there is an interplay between the previously listed "objectives" and these "principles".

Recommendation 2

That the forgoing principles guide the degree program approval process and be made explicit in the future in all appropriate Ministerial and DQAB documentation.

HOW THE DEGREE PROGRAM APPROVAL SYSTEM WORKS NOW

There are three routes to degree program approval at the present time. Two steps---the posting of an institution's degree proposal for public and peer review on the Post- Secondary Institution Proposal System (PSIPS) database, and notification and posting of ministerial approval of the degree program--- are common to all routes.

1. Degree program proposals from institutions under the *College and Institute Act* must undergo an "applied Ministry review" to determine whether there is a fit with the institution's mandate and academic/education plan, whether there is student and labour market demand for the degree, and whether any duplication of the proposed degree is justifiable. If this review is successful (approximately two-thirds are), the proposal is then referred to the DQAB for a quality review and then, if approved, recommended to the Minister for final approval (See Appendix E).

2. Degree program proposals from institutions under the *University Act* or *Degree Authorization Act* (private and out-of-province colleges, institutes and universities) as well as from those public post-secondary universities that are seeking approval for degrees beyond the current level of their exempt status must proceed through the DQAB for a quality review (See Appendix F).

3. Public and private universities that have received exempt status for approval of degree programs at various levels—undergraduate, masters and doctoral---a status granted on the basis of experience and the demonstration of an ongoing internal degree program review process which requires peer/external review by appropriate independent experts, must post degree proposals. After the results of the posting process have been reviewed by Ministry

staff, the proposal will be sent to the Minister for approval. If the Minister has concerns, the proposal can be referred to the DQAB for review (See Appendix G).

The paths to degree program approval in British Columbia reflect the historical evolution of the system of post-secondary education in this province. For many years the number of degree-granting institutions was limited. It is only in the last decade and a half that there have been major changes with the opening of new universities, the transition of university colleges and most colleges, as well as institutes, to various levels of degree granting status. There has also been an expansion of degree granting activity by out-of-province universities and schools. The system has become much more complex, and this has led to expanded and different roles for the Ministries responsible for post-secondary education. It has also led to the establishment of the DQAB in 2003 as a body advisory to the Minister in this area and responsible for quality assurance in higher education.

Composition of the Degree Quality Assessment Board

Members of the DQAB are responsible not only for reviewing applications for new degree programs and establishing degree program review panels but also for providing advice to the Minister on the results of the reviews. Both roles require a good understanding of the constantly evolving post-secondary system and a commitment to ensuring high quality academic programs for students. The DQAB is an 11 person working board that places heavy demands of time and expertise on its members. Its workload and activity are comparable to similar bodies in Alberta and Ontario and, as is the case elsewhere, there is a notable commitment to the well-being of the system and a strong focus on ensuring that the interests and needs of students is the principal concern.

Criteria for Board membership were established in 2003 and were reflective of both the community and academic landscape at the time. Currently provision is made for four representatives from the public post-secondary system and two from the private post-secondary degree granting sector. Three representatives of the business community, one student and one person from the general public round out the Board's voting membership. Three non-voting and ex-officio members of the Board represent the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT), the Private Career Training Institutions Agency of British Columbia (PCTIA) and the Ministry responsible for post-secondary education. Given the changing face of the post-secondary system in British Columbia, the composition of the Board's membership needs to be reconsidered.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that consideration should be given to ensure that there is always representation from (1) degree granting institutions in the College and Institute sector, (2) those private and out-of- province institutions operating under the DAA, (3) the "new" teaching universities and (4) the other public universities. We recommend that the number of academics (and institutional experiences) on the Board be expanded.

It should be noted that approximately 73% of the degree headcount in BC (Fall 2009) is from the four research intensive universities, with 22% coming from the teaching universities, institutes and colleges and the remaining 5% from the DAA institutions.

While there is an important public need being addressed by having three representatives from the business community who are, as the 2003 terms of reference for the DQAB outline, "reflective of economic development priorities in large and small industries and employers, regionally and provincially, with background or interest in post- secondary education", finding, engaging and retaining such individuals is challenging. We believe that this public need could be satisfied equally well with a reduced number of business community representatives. There would still remain a place on the Board for one member of the general public who should be knowledgeable about higher education but should not have had previous/current employment in the post-secondary sector.

Finding and retaining a student representative "preferably a graduate student with degree program review experience" has also proved to be challenging.

Recommendation 4

The number of DQAB members representing the business community be reduced to two members to make way for slightly increased numbers of representatives from the academic institutions.

One of the issues that arises for graduate student representation, and is the case with some of the other positions on the Board, is the fact that future appointees are not to be paid any stipend for their work on the Board. The work of the Board, while very interesting, stimulating and centrally important to the evolution of higher education in British Columbia, is very demanding of time and some modest recognition of that is important for those who are not employed by either a post-secondary institution or a business organization.

Recommendation 5

The Panel recommends that the question of appropriate compensation be addressed by the Ministry, perhaps with reference to the practice of paying honoraria to members of quality assurance agencies with similar responsibilities in other jurisdictions or with reference to the stipends paid to review teams in British Columbia.

While it is valuable to have seasoned academic Board members from the post-secondary institutions "with experience in degree program review, as well as educational expertise", it is also important to ensure that there be some demographic and diversity mix for both this group and on the Board as a whole. As with the composition of degree review panels noted below, the experiences of recently tenured faculty could add value to the deliberations of the DQAB. It might very well be possible to make arrangements with the home institution of such Board members to have DQAB work accorded more weight as part of the "service" component of faculty performance reviews.

Recommendation 6

The Panel recommends that when DQAB appointments are made in the future, consideration be given to an appropriate diversity with respect to demographics, background, and experience.

Invaluable as the contributions of the DQAB have been over the past eight years, it, like the institutions it evaluates, needs to have its work examined in the context of the activities of other provincial and international quality assurance agencies. Such a process has been

undertaken in other Canadian jurisdictions and elsewhere and the agencies involved speak well of the experience.

Recommendation 7

The Panel recommends that the DQAB should commission a full arm's length review of its activities, using external reviewers, at least once every 8-10 years. The first such review should occur in 2013.

CHANGES TO THE DQAB PROCESS

It is not surprising to discover, as we have been told, that there is a very strong appetite for streamlining and improving the degree program approval system. There are a number of small/modest changes that could be made to the system and there is also the clear potential for some substantive changes that would simultaneously respect institutional autonomy while ensuring greater institutional and system accountability. A more streamlined and responsive degree approval process could evolve.

The use of the PSIPS database for the posting of new degree program proposals and the accompanying request for both peer review of, and public comment on, these proposals is an important component in ensuring that such degrees are of high quality. There are two distinct kinds of postings on PSIPS, one for the general public and one for peer review from public academic institutions. Transparency is ensured, the potential exists for improved proposals through the collegial peer review dialogue, and all parties gain experience and build capacity in quality assessment. Public institutions are also strongly encouraged to respond to public, as well as peer, comments while private institutions, which only receive comments via the public process, are also encouraged to respond to such comments. PSIPS postings serve to broaden and deepen the post-secondary system's knowledge of the range of degree program offerings in the province. In that sense this process adds to ensuring better system co-ordination.

At the present time not all institutions receive notification of all the degree proposals that are posted on PSIPS, although all proposals are accessible via the Ministry's website for anyone to view. Public institutions do not receive specific notice of new degree program proposals from DAA private and out-of- province institutions, while DAA institutions are

not notified about proposals coming from other DAA entities nor from the public institutions. The system is thus not fully transparent nor is the practice equitable.

Peer review and comment through PSIPS is an important element in ensuring that degree program proposals are of high quality. It should be made clear on the PSIPS site that the principal focus of these comments should constructively address the question: "Does this degree proposal meet the DQAB criteria?" As is the case now, proprietary information would not have to be posted but all relevant academic information about the proposal must be made available to ensure an informed and mutually beneficial peer review process.

Recommendation 8

For all parties to fully utilize the potential of the PSIPS system, postings of all new degree program proposals (including appendices) is required. The Panel recommends that each post-secondary institution in BC should have equal access to all new degree program proposals and the opportunity to offer peer comments.

Recommendation 9

The Panel recommends, further, that the DQAB define "proprietary information" which we believe would include only financial information, the curricula vitae of faculty, referees' letters, letters of support which contain personal information, and similar information. The objective should be to limit the range of material deemed proprietary and to make available as much academic information as possible when institutions post new program proposals on PSIPS. As already stated, the Panel maintains that it is important that all relevant academic information should be publicly available when determining the academic quality of proposed new offerings.

Recommendation 10

The panel recommends that as a longer term objective both the DQAB and the Ministry follow a practice of ensuring that all material posted on PSIPS should remain fully accessible on their websites once the degree program review process is complete and decisions have been communicated to the parties.

For all institutions peer review and comment through PSIPS is an important element in ensuring that degree programs are of high quality.

The next stage, which is at the heart of the degree approval process at the DQAB level, is the creation of a peer review panel that normally consists of three experts in the field. Membership of a panel is determined by drawing on names of potential reviewers (who may or may not be accepted by the Board) submitted from the institution being reviewed, from the Board's secretariat, and from members of the DQAB itself. The final determination of the membership of the review panel and its chair is an important responsibility of the DQAB.

Recommendation 11

The Panel recommends that institutions nominating potential reviewers should continue to ensure that their nominees are academically well respected in the field and have no real or perceived conflict of interests with the nominating entity. The DQAB should encourage those institutions that have limited experience in seeking degree program approval to consult in advance with others in their sector (or in the wider system) which have an established track record of experience with external academic program reviews.

Recommendation 12

When degree programs are proposed that have the potential to duplicate already existing programs in this province and reviewers might be drawn from such programs, the Panel recommends that the DQAB consider establishing an expert review panel with at least one reviewer from outside the province.

Members of degree program review panels must have no real or perceived conflicts of interest with either the programs or institutions being reviewed. They need to be carefully briefed by the Board secretariat about the process of degree review (including the distinctions between "traditional" and "applied" degrees), be familiar with the DQAB review handbook, have demonstrated academic expertise in the field under review and, in an increasing number of cases, have an understanding or experience of, and empathy for, pedagogy that utilizes web based/online learning and other emerging technologies.

Recommendation 13

To foster as much consistency as possible in degree program and institutional reviews, the Panel recommends that the DQAB should implement a more structured orientation process for all review teams and that a member of the secretariat should normally accompany review panels.

Both of these measures would require modest additional resources but would certainly strengthen and build further confidence in the level of quality assurance in the BC post-secondary system.

Recommendation 14

While experienced senior reviewers are invaluable in the review process, the Panel recommends that provision also be made for the inclusion of more junior, well qualified reviewers on the review teams as new degree program proposals become more reflective of different program foci, changing learning methodologies, and program delivery.

Recommendation 15

The Panel recommends that the DQAB augment its pool of reviewers by canvassing the post-secondary education sector every few years seeking nominations of qualified candidates from the offices of the Vice Presidents Academic/Education.

Some submissions for this review from institutions whose degree program proposals normally go through DQAB review asked for more use of desk reviews, preliminary reviews, expedited reviews or leaving reviews at the institutional level. There were also proposals for provisional approval by DQAB of new degree programs that could become final after several years of offering the degree.

The prospects for moving toward a more expedited degree program review process are explored later in this report. However, the Panel is of the view that provisional degree approval is not warranted. If the new degree did not work out for any number of reasons, provisional approval would leave the institution and, more importantly, the students enrolled in such a program in a very difficult situation. Both the principles and the objectives of the degree program approval process emphasize the importance of maintaining quality. This, we believe, requires either an expedited or a full review of all degree program proposals. The Panel believes that other approaches not be entertained at the present time and that the Ministry and the DQAB wait upon the experience of a more expedited degree program approval process.

System Coordination

The very considerable differentiation of the BC post-secondary system generated a wide range of responses about the meaning of, and need for, co-ordination of that system itself. While nearly all subscribe to the view that the market, especially student demand, should decide to some extent which degree programs should be offered, there are varying degrees of constraint on that thesis. Most obvious is the fact that colleges and institutes, which can only offer applied degrees, must go through an applied Ministry review that, as noted earlier, examines mandate fit, student and labour market demand and issues of duplication. This is system co-ordination by any definition, but it is limited to co-ordination only within the college and institute sector of the entire post-secondary system. Others in the system do not have to meet these criteria, but are still often constrained by funding limitations, the relative expenses of different programs, and the expectations of the marketplace. The current situation establishes institutional silos in the system and clearly reduces the opportunities for cross- sectoral coordination and collaboration in the province.

By way of contrast, all new degree program proposals in Alberta must first pass through the Ministry of Advanced Education and Technology where the primary filter is system co-ordination (as is the case for applied degrees in BC). If the proposal meets the Ministry criteria it is then referred to the Campus Alberta Quality Council for review. The Alberta model echoes the earlier practice in this province of having to file a letter of intent with the Ministry as the first stage in the degree program approval process. A return to this approach was suggested by some respondents and laid emphasis on the need for the co-ordination of regional learning opportunities through collaboration and cooperation among regional post-secondary institutions. The considerable success of BCCAT in facilitating student admissions and transfer suggests that one key resource for such a process is already in place and it might serve as model for developing system co-ordination of other matters. A fully transparent PSIPS database could also certainly assist in strengthening the prospects for system coordination.

At the heart of some of this discussion about system co-ordination is a concern about program duplication. How many degrees in "X" are needed in this province? As a first step, it is important to recast the issue as being a concern not about system duplication but about unnecessary system duplication. If there is a commitment to provide post-secondary educational opportunities as equitably as possible at the certificate, diploma, university transfer and undergraduate level, then what may seem to be unnecessary duplication to

some may not be seen in the same light in a particular region or educational institution which wishes to offer programming reasonably close to home. The increasing growth and sophistication of online web based learning opportunities may further render some of this issue moot.

Specific or implied institutional mandates and/or missions, as well as the motivation and expertise of private and out-of province institutions also pose questions about system co-ordination. Institutions and mandates have developed and evolved over time in ways that have not always been coordinated and, on occasion, have been subject to pressures that are not necessarily within the purview of the responsible ministries. The development of niche or very narrowly defined degrees has apparently sometimes occurred as a way of circumventing the duplication criteria or as a way for institutions to attract international students. Whether the needs of students and the system as a whole are being met by such an approach is open to question. In the end students will take the programs that interest them and not necessarily those that others think they should.

Recommendation 16

The Panel has concluded that the question of whether or not there is to be further system co-ordination in BC is a public policy question for government to determine.

Mixing questions and judgments about system co-ordination and the academic quality of new degree program proposals is not an appropriate role for the DQAB. If government decided to take on this system co-ordination role it would, as in Alberta and as was once the case here, have either to add knowledgeable and experienced staff at the Ministry level or create a new council/panel whose expertise would lie in this area and whose membership would have to be reflective of the post-secondary system. There would have to be adequate and experienced secretariat level support.

Whether there is unnecessary system duplication rests largely in the eye of the beholder. It appears to be the case that no one Ministry or individual has a full understanding of the current highly complex post-secondary system in this province.

Recommendation 17

A. That government undertake a full inventory of existing degree programs (including collaborative agreements) in the entire post-secondary system; such an inventory could subsequently guide decisions about system duplication and help in identifying programming gaps. The inventory should be publicly accessible on the Ministry's website and should be updated annually.

B. Were such an exercise to identify gaps and/or areas of possible collaboration or cooperation between institutions in a region or among a common cluster of degree program interests, or were institutions themselves to move in such a direction, the Panel recommends that the Ministry consider financial or other incentives to stimulate such system coordination endeavors.

EXEMPT STATUS

Institutions with proven track records (ten years' history in British Columbia in enrolling students at a particular degree level) and appropriate academic governance mechanisms in place (including their own external review process) may apply for exempt status as a specific degree level (i.e. bachelor's, master's, doctoral). This provision enables an eligible institution to proceed with an expedited review of the degree program proposal by the Ministry (not the DQAB) after it has passed through the institution's internal degree program approval process. Once exempt status is awarded, it normally does not require review or renewal, although all new degree programs still require ministerial approval. There is no provision for a periodic reassessment of exempt status, nor are there audits of the use of this status.

At present eight public, one private and one out-of-province universities have exempt status at one or more levels and two have applied, or are in the process of applying, for this provision. Applications from others in the system (public colleges, private colleges and universities, out-of -province universities as well as institutes) can be expected later in this decade.

For those unfamiliar with the post-secondary education system in this province, the term "exempt status" has the potential to be misleading. It could be read, in extremis, to mean that there are no internal or external quality assurance processes in place. The risk of such a reading is an increasingly important consideration in an era of globalized higher education where all jurisdictions are competing for increasing numbers of international students and where international recognition of their degrees is increasingly important for students. Since Canada is one of the few countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) without some system of national accreditation of post-secondary education, it would be unwise for BC to raise any unnecessary ambiguity about the scrutiny given to the quality of the degrees awarded here.

Recommendation 18

The Panel recommends that the term "exempt status" be replaced by the phrase "qualified for expedited reviews of new degree program proposals". It would remain the case that all degree granting institutions currently operating in BC would be potentially eligible for expedited reviews.

To continue to move in the direction of increasing institutional self-management of the degree approval process, subject always to the need for ministerial approval of all new degrees, is an appealing prospect. Managed correctly, it provides an appropriate balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability. Such an approach also builds on well-established provincial practices (Exempt Status: Criteria and Guidelines, 2006), of institutions progressively achieving exempt status. This status is determined through an organizational review by a three person external panel that examines the mission and policies of the institution, its governance structures, administrative capacity, faculty resources, services and facilities. The institution must have a successful ten year history of degree granting in BC. It must also demonstrate that it has a policy and process for the development of new degree programs that requires peer/external review by appropriate experts. Furthermore, it must also demonstrate that existing academic programs or units are periodically reviewed in an internal process that includes self- study, review by a panel of independent experts, the production of a written report of the review, the institution's written response to the report, and institutional commitment to a written follow up plan.

Recommendation 19

In the spirit of encouraging BC's post-secondary sector to continue to develop best practices for degree approval and quality assurance while building on well-established and widely respected practices in the province's older universities, which are themselves a reflection of higher education practices in many other jurisdictions, the Panel recommends the following framework for gaining and maintaining the status of "qualified for expedited reviews of new degree program proposals":

1. **All degree granting institutions in BC are eligible to seek expedited review status.**
2. **Institutions seeking expedited review status of new degree programs must have experience of offering successfully at least four separate and diverse degree programs over a ten year period at the level for which expedited degree program review is sought.**
3. **Institutions must have in place and have documented experience of program or academic unit reviews that occur at least every seven years normally using three independent experts and requiring a site visit. Such reviews are initiated by an internal self- study. The program review process and the results of such reviews, both successful and unsuccessful, and agreed follow up commitments and actions, must be publicly posted on the institution's website and on the DQAB website.**
4. **As is current practice, all expedited reviews will require ministerial approval. There may be occasions when the Minister may refer the proposed program to the DQAB for a full review because of its unique nature, complexity, ground-breaking disciplinary content for the institution, proposed location or its strategic importance to the Province.**
5. **An audit process (see below) will ensure that the practices and procedures established for expedited review are being fully followed.**
6. **In so far as possible, expedited degree program review policies and procedures will be compatible with such practices in other Canadian educational jurisdictions. This practice will assist all parties to move towards further mutual recognition of degrees and programs across Canada.**

AUDIT OF THE EXPEDITED DEGREE PROGRAM APPROVALS PROCESS

The balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability is a very important matter. As indicated above, we recommend that newer institutions should have the opportunity to exercise increasing autonomy over the degree program approval process in return for additional accountability measures. In their submission to the panel the research-intensive universities, which have extensive experience of the degree program approval process and quality assurance considerations, indicated that they were quite accepting of the prospect of auditing in this area. Similar acceptance was widespread among all the other responding institutions. In short, the introduction of some form of external auditing was seen as important for quality assurance and accountability, and there was an expectation that an audit system could be relatively easily designed and implemented. The Panel, drawing on Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic terms and Definitions (UNESCO, 2007), understands that an audit is an evidence-based process undertaken through peer review that investigates the procedures and mechanisms by which an institution ensures its quality assurance and quality enhancement.

The Panel notes that most of the foundational components needed to move towards an audit system of the expedited degree program approval process already exist in the policies and practices of the DQAB itself. Expert review panels are regularly established for new degree program proposals and, on occasion, to review institutional applications for exempt status. Over time a considerable reservoir of skilled expertise in the review process has been established. The Board has extensive and regular experience of reviewing the results of the reviews it commissions and the institutional responses to those reviews before making its own recommendations to the Minister. In turn, BC post-secondary institutions have growing experience of the degree program/academic unit review process—both internal and external. Building on the experience accumulated both by the DQAB and by most institutions in the province would further strengthen the credibility of the existing post-secondary system. An audit system should not be interpreted as a lack of trust in the existing internal review processes in the system, but rather a vote of confidence in it.

An audit process should maintain the balance between autonomy and accountability and should reflect evolving best practices in Canada and elsewhere. The experiences and practices of the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC), which is conducting a pilot project on an audit system, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (the Quality Council), the Ontario Post-Secondary Education Quality Assessment Board

(PEQAB) and The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC), all of whom do undertake audits, would all serve as an excellent set of resources from which to develop best practices and policies for this province. Additional resources and expertise could be accessed through membership of the International Network for Quality Assurance agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

Recommendation 20

The Panel recommends that an audit process be developed and overseen by the DQAB that is reflective of, and compatible with, the evolution of the BC post-secondary system and that maintains an appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability.

Recommendation 21

As part of the process of moving to an audit system, the Panel recommends that the DQAB become a member (as are a number of Canadian counterparts) of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

Recommendation 22

The Panel recommends that every seven or eight years BC institutions that have qualified for expedited reviews of new degree program proposals undergo an audit of their degree program approval and program/academic unit review procedures to ensure that the processes as described in their policies are being rigorously and regularly applied.

The following comments address our expectations of the elements to be found in an audit system:

- A sample of recently expedited degree program approvals and recently reviewed academic programs/academic units would be examined.

- Due attention would be paid to how the internal process of degree program/academic unit review is reflective of the institution's mission, whether the internal process gauges such things as how faculty scholarship informs teaching and continues to be a foundation for ensuring that programming is current and up to date, how learning outcomes are being achieved, and how student progress is assessed and measured.

- The audit would examine whether the original commitments made when degree programs were approved are being met.

Recommendation 23

In the interests of transparency and accountability, the Panel recommends that the results of the audits and the institutional responses should be posted on both the institution's website and the DQAB's website. Such institutional postings will make it apparent to all visitors to the website (including prospective domestic and international students) that the institution has been audited and found to meet DQAB standards.

Recommendation 24

The Panel further recommends that the annual reports of institutions to the Ministry provide a description of the degree program/academic unit review process at that particular institution and the results of the process in the past year.

RENEWAL OF CONSENT

The Panel looked at the question of whether or not there could be ways to streamline the review required of DAA private and out- of- province institutions every five years in order to provide them with consent to continue to operate in the province. At the time the institution is undergoing the renewal of consent process, this fact is noted on the PSIPS database and it can cause understandable concern for current and prospective students. The

criteria for renewal of consent are formally the same as those for the original consent process.

Once a year all DAA institutions are required to submit a detailed report on their operations and to host a visit or teleconference with DQAB secretariat staff. These annual reports are reviewed by the DQAB and the terms and conditions of consent may be adjusted or remain the same. Examining student and institutional outcomes, as measured against original objectives, should certainly be part of the renewal review. Consideration should be given to directly linking the fifth annual report and the renewal of consent review as one process. To give institutions further time to establish a track record it might be worth discussing whether initial consent should be given for a slightly longer period for institutions with a good track record. If the audit proposals in this report are instituted and are undertaken by the DAA institutions, consideration should be given as to whether further consent review is necessary.

Recommendation 25

We recommend that the DQAB examine this question and develop guidelines for changes to the renewal of consent process to make the process less onerous for institutions that have maintained a good track record since the last consent was approved.

ACCREDITATION

Replies to the question about whether or not British Columbia should explore developing or entering into an existing accreditation system produced a full range of responses from positive to negative. At a basic level the issue is that Canada, unlike many of its OECD counterparts, lacks a national accreditation system and this, it is asserted, weakens our ability to operate effectively in the context of an increasingly globalized higher education environment. Institutional membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) is explicitly not equivalent to accreditation and is seen to be so even less today than in the past both inside and outside the country. In the United States in 2008 there were 19 institutional accreditation agencies and 61 bodies concerned with program accreditation. The Bologna Accord, with its thrust toward European- wide degree standards, joint degrees and institutional partnerships, credit transfer and student mobility,

is one notable measure of the pressures for accreditation. The "massification" of higher education, the explosion of "border-less" online/web based learning, and the rapid growth of for-profit educational entities are other indicators of the accelerating and important changes in the higher educational landscape. Acknowledging the pressures these changes are creating for quality assurance and the protection of student interests, the Panel holds that the issue for the moment is whether BC should explore accreditation both for its own sake and in the hope that it might contribute to a pan-Canadian system of accreditation.

It is worth noting that the use of the term "accreditation" or terms that imply accreditation is already highly visible in the educational milieu of the province. Several post-secondary institutions in the province are actively seeking or exploring accreditation in the United States. Some professional programs offered in the post-secondary system are accredited by external agencies. Examples include programs in engineering, business, public health, teacher education, and medicine. As well, the Private Career Training Institutions Agency of British Columbia (PCTIA) is responsible for registering and accrediting such institutions in BC. The British Columbia Education Quality Assurance (EQA) designation has since 2009 provided "one standard provincial seal that can be recognized globally as a symbol of quality education and consumer protection." For some, as is the case for AUCC membership, the EQA designation can be confused with accreditation.

A further challenge to thinking about an accreditation system in British Columbia is the differentiation of the post-secondary system ranging as it does from major international research institutions to small remote community- based colleges, from public to private institutions, from BC-based to small sites of American- based universities and colleges, and from face-to-face through hybrid online learning programs. Many larger established institutions already have a suite of policies and procedures in place that would take them well down the road to accreditation as practiced elsewhere. However, the range of institutional missions is enormous, and this strongly suggests that there is a need to think very carefully about several quite different types of accreditation. One size would clearly not fit all.

This report argues for tightening the process whereby institutions qualify for expedited degree program review and, concomitantly, for the introduction of an audit system that would examine internal degree program approval processes and reviews, as major first steps in changes in the degree approval process in BC. We believe that such steps would strengthen quality assurance and contribute to continuous improvement in the post-

secondary system. The Panel is persuaded that there would be value in an increasingly accreditation- driven world in having the pros and cons of institutional accreditation examined in detail to determine whether the next step should be a consideration of a system of accreditation in BC.

There is a need for another panel to investigate whether and how accreditation might benefit BC's post-secondary system. Such a panel would consult extensively with the post-secondary institutions, with government, and other stakeholders. As with other recommendations in this report, we would urge that if proposals were developed as an outcome of the panel's work, they should positively contribute to the need for pan-Canadian standards that advance the work of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) in this regard. Mutual recognition of credentials of assured quality offered in various parts of Canada should be the ultimate objective.

Recommendation 26

The Panel is of the view that to propose concrete initiatives on the question of accreditation is premature, but that it is imperative that an exploration of accreditation possibilities proceed. The Panel recommends the formation of a panel to explore the experiences of other jurisdictions with respect to institutional accreditation and to recommend whether BC should move in the direction of accreditation and how this can be done so that pan-Canadian standards are recognized and upheld.

Recommendation 27

We also recommend that the Ministry consider very carefully the need for the rationalization of the use of the term "accreditation" in the entire post-secondary universe in British Columbia.

Unimplemented/Unoffered Degree Programs

Most respondents agreed that if approved programs were not implemented within a reasonable time frame, or not offered for several years, they should be deleted from all print and electronic listings of degree program offerings so as not to mislead current and prospective students. Defining what is "reasonable" and what should be required to re-authorize the offering of such programs produced a range of responses.

Recommendation 28

The panel recommends that all institutions should report unimplemented and unoffered degree programs in their annual institutional reports to the Ministry.

Recommendation 29

The panel further recommends that the DQAB have the right to require that (a) approved programs that have not been implemented within three years would have to go through the degree program approval process if they were now to be offered, (b) that programs that have been previously implemented but not offered for three years must go through the formal degree program approval process again before re-implementation, and (c) institutions that have not offered an approved program for three years must report such deletions to the Ministry and remove such programs from their websites and calendars.

Labour Market Needs

In responding to the question about how BC can be effective in aligning new programs in applied or professional areas with labour market needs, a number of respondents made the point that labour market considerations were but one element among many that shape the development of new degree programs. Colleges and institutes reminded the Panel that they do (and are required to) respond to this criterion. Once again there was considerable emphasis on letting the market play its role, and on allowing for duplication where it can be demonstrated that there is an unmet demand in a particular field or region. Not surprisingly,

some suggested that government use funding to target priority areas while others argued for tight linkages between system co-ordination and labour market needs as part of the process of allocating funding. Attention was drawn to the widely accepted thesis that the human capital needs of the province are facing a rapidly approaching labour scarcity. The adequate provision of timely and appropriate post-secondary educational programs that also make life- long learning and the laddering of educational opportunities a reality for an ever larger proportion of the population are seen as key elements in meeting these future needs.

Other views about this were also heard that reached beyond programs in professional or applied areas. The further one moves from these areas the more the case is made that the post-secondary system continues to do a very good job in providing the basic foundations for living a productive and engaged life. Graduates from the liberal arts and sciences programs (who are the vast majority of post-secondary students in the province) continue to find their place in the labour market and in the larger society. These graduates have developed reading, writing and critical thinking skills that allow them to integrate and apply diverse kinds of knowledge to workplace settings. Fundamental and transferable skills are certainly honed during post-secondary education, with the majority of graduates ending up working in fields different from the areas studied in their degree programs, but the breadth of that educational experience allows individuals to adapt fairly successfully to changing labour market demands. Students make decisions about programs and majors based on a mix of what they like, find stimulating, fits their schedules, and helps prepare them for their ultimate arrival in the labour market. Finally, it was often observed that developing degree programs (which takes a minimum of 6 years from planning to the graduation of the first cohort) based on labour market demands and projections has not always been successful.

As the above summation of our findings suggest, this is a challenging and, at times, even divisive question especially when moving beyond professional or applied degrees. We have two observations to make about notable things that are currently happening in the post-secondary system and that should be given further positive support.

1. All post-secondary institutions need to be able to access as much labour market information as possible to help to inform the decisions that they make about which new degree programs to develop. Institutions themselves must continue to invest in career planning and other related activities that help their students achieve a fuller understanding of the rapidly changing labour market. The responsible Ministries also need to be proactive

about this and engage in a continuous dialogue with the post-secondary system. The recent Labour Market Forum was seen as a good example of this type of outreach.

2. More partnerships linking different types of institutions in the system need to be encouraged and supported. As BCCAT data indicates, there is already a significant and impressive amount of multi-directional student movement among institutions which contributes to, and further strengthens, an increasingly seamless system of higher education. Mission partnerships and not necessarily mission creep is another way to define the post-secondary system.

CANADIAN DEGREE QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

In 2007 the Council of Education Ministers, Canada (CMEC) issued a ministerial statement on "Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada". Three documents are included in the statement that outlines:

1. Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework
2. Procedures and Standards for New Degree Program Quality Assessment
3. Procedures and Standards for Assessing New Degree-granting Institutions

Since British Columbia is a signatory to this statement, the work of the DQAB and the Ministry in approving new degree programs generally follows the procedures, expectations and standards in these documents. Similar practices are followed, to a greater or lesser degree in all the provinces and territories of Canada. Almost inadvertently a national framework for a number of key issues relating to questions of quality assurance has come into place. The importance of this is sometimes overlooked in the angst over the lack of a truly national accreditation system. Reference to the existence of, and adherence to, the CMEC Accord has proved helpful in the internationalization initiatives of Canadian institutions.

Particularly important in the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework document are its two principal elements, the first of which offers detailed descriptions of three degree categories—bachelors, masters and doctoral and, secondly, equally full descriptions of the degree-level standards (or expected outputs/skills) for these three degrees.

There was widespread support for the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework from respondents to our survey.

Recommendation 30

The Panel recommends that the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework become much more visible and specifically referenced both electronically and in print as an essential part of the criteria that have to be met in the degree program approval process used by both the DQAB and the Ministry.

The Panel also recommends that all degree granting institutions in the province embed the Degree Qualifications Framework in their internal degree program approval procedures with particular attention being paid to the learning outcomes outlined in the Framework.

In the case of out-of-province institutions operating under the DAA, most of whom offer only graduate programs, it is particularly important that there is a clear awareness of these standards being the required norm for degree program approval in BC.

Recommendation 31

The Panel recommends that the DQAB should review and, if necessary modify, the Degree Qualifications Framework requirements for graduate level programs and ensure that they are accurately reflected in DQAB graduate degree program review materials.

Recommendation 32

The Panel recommends that the BC government and the DQAB should continue to encourage the pan-Canadian use and heightened visibility of the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework.

Among "generic skills" that were felt to be in need of more visibility in the Framework were: collaboration, teamwork, innovation, global relationships and understandings and foreign languages.

Recommendation 33

The Panel recommends that these generic skills, including collaboration, teamwork, innovation, global relationships and understandings and foreign languages be given more attention in the degree program approval process.

Other Issues

In addition to the questions posed and answers received based on the documentation sent to participants in this project, a number of other issues were raised. What follows is a brief list of other matters the Panel thinks worthy of further consideration and/or action.

1. Use of the term "University". As noted above, this is an extremely important matter. How a University is defined is open to endless debate using criteria ranging from numerical models of numbers of students, numbers of faculty members, degree programs offered , mix of undergraduate and graduate degrees, historical experience to a sense that someone just "knows" that this or that organization is a university. AUCC, to name one specific example, has a working definition that is generally reflective of the evolution of the university system in Canada.

Recommendation 34

That the DQAB, which for several years has had a moratorium in place on the use of the word "University", give this matter careful attention in the near future. Strengthen the standards for the use of this term to include: high academic quality, the practice of active scholarship, a contingent of core and continuing faculty, a breadth of degree programs, adequate long term financial resources and a stable administrative structure.

2. Use of the term "Applied Degree". The Panel received a few comments from colleges about the place of Applied Degrees in the BC post-secondary system. The value and importance of the degree is not in question but its nomenclature is. Specifically, it is seen by some as a "terminal" degree that does not allow for easy progression to post-graduate education. It may be the case that the degree is so specialized that there is no obvious next step for graduate studies. But a cursory examination of several of the existing degrees indicates that there are sufficient general education credits to at least challenge the implication of narrowness in the degree requirements. Other issues that arise are the fact that some universities in BC, like those in other parts of Canada, do offer degrees that are certainly seen as, and are sometimes called, "applied" and that other jurisdictions in Canada do not recognize the Applied Degrees that are awarded by BC colleges. There are also reports that these degrees are not seen by some prospective employers as carrying the same value in the marketplace as traditional bachelor's degrees. Furthermore, the Panel would note that while only one of the BC college degree programs has "Applied" in the title, the term is widely used in ministerial and DQAB documentation.

Recommendation 35

The Panel recommends that the place and nomenclature of applied degrees in BC be examined by the Ministry, in consultation with appropriate post-secondary institutions, as part of a process of defining the scope and content of degrees that can be offered by BC public colleges.

3. Expedited/preliminary degree program approvals. The Panel reviewed a number of suggestions that touched on this matter. Institutions are interested in processes that are as expeditious as possible and some would like to see both the DQAB and the Ministry play more of a facilitative and iterative role in crafting new degree proposals that will be approved.

If more institutions are able to undertake expedited degree program approvals, are subjects of audits of their degree program approval process and are thus able to bypass the DQAB stage, degree program approval should become more expeditious. In the interim, as the prospects for either the DQAB or the Ministry playing a more formative role are not feasible, the Panel would recommend, as we have done elsewhere in this report, that

institutions actively share their experiences of degree program approval with nearby or like institutions or through their respective provincial organizations. More collaborative and co-operative programming might ensue and this would be a net benefit to the province.

CONCLUSION

As this report has emphasized, the recommendations that are offered here are, in many cases, well rooted in the existing good practices of the Ministry, the DQAB and the post-secondary education system in British Columbia. The report proposes to strengthen and deepen the balance between institutional autonomy in the development of new degree programs and public institutional accountability for the quality and currency of approved academic programs. Although the work of this Panel is best seen as a high level review, we are confident that our recommendations will generate greater trust in, and more transparency of, the current degree program approval processes.

APPENDICES

A. Project Charter

1.0 Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to review the degree approval process in order to identify opportunities for improvement and redesign.

Outputs from this project are expected to be used to: improve the degree approval process; ensure it is accountable, rigorous, transparent; and ensure the programs approved are responsive to the needs of institutions, students, employers and the public.

2.0 Project Background

On September 1, 2010 a temporary moratorium on new degree proposals was put in place until March 1, 2011 in order for the Ministry to review processes and criteria currently in place for new degree approvals.

Since 2001, over 300 degree programs have been approved and currently 22 of the 25 public institutions and 17 private and out-of-province public institutions have approval to offer at least one degree program. Ministry staff have noticed a trend towards more narrowly focused degrees and/or degrees with perceived high demand for international students. Coordination between public institutions is informal at best, and in some cases institutions may be working in more of a competitive rather than a coordinated fashion.

Presently, new degrees from non-exempt institutions undergo a quality review by the Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB); exempt institutions undergo their own internal review and approval process which may or may not include external review. Only degree applications from colleges are required to be reviewed for labour market or system coordination which is overseen by the Ministry. All degree programs must be approved by the Minister of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development.

The DQAB is currently undertaking a review of its criteria and processes for the quality review of new degree proposals and use of the term "university", and expects that the outputs from this process will inform the DQAB's review.

Quality assurance continues to be a key international post-secondary issue and, given BC's rapid growth in degree granting institutions, the perception by other jurisdictions needs to

be taken into account as well as other international trends regarding of coordination and mobility of students such as Europe's Bologna Accord.

This project will complement the 2007 *Campus 2020: Thinking Ahead* report which recommended changes to the degree approval process to take into account system coordination and regional planning function and to make the process more transparent.

Objectives

The Ministry will convene an independent expert advisory panel (the panel) which, in consultation with the post-secondary sector, will make recommendations to the Ministry on the process for new degree applications. The expert panel is to be comprised of knowledgeable, neutral individuals with post-secondary experience in BC that are currently not affiliated with any particular post-secondary institution. The following were asked to nominate up to three individuals (from which the Ministry will choose one each) to serve on the panel:

- BC Colleges
- BC Association of Institutes and Universities
- Research Universities Council of BC
- Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development
- Non-affiliated public post-secondary institutions (RRU and TRU)
- Non-affiliated Private BC based degree granting institutions

The Ministry has engaged a consultant familiar with the current review and approval process to support the panel and consult with the 25 public and a number of private post-secondary institutions, Ministry staff as well as other interested stakeholders (e.g. CUFA, FPSE, professional colleges, employers, students) to inform panel discussions.

The types of questions/issues the panel may be asked to address include:

- What should the principles and objectives of a degree approval process be?
- What are the key criteria against which the Ministry and the DQAB should evaluate new degree programs?

- Given international trends, should BC explore options on periodic institutional audit or accreditation for continuous quality improvement?

- Could the current new degree approval process (e.g. posting, public comment, timing) be streamlined / improved in terms of accountability, rigor, transparency and responsiveness to the needs of institutions, students, employers and the public?

- Is there value in a policy that requires institutions to sunset dormant or undersubscribed degree programs before requesting new degree programs?

The panel will recommend various actions or improvements to be reviewed by Government and/or the DQAB.

4.0 Project Work Plan Timeline

Deliverable / Milestone	Target Completion Date
Engage consultant	October 2010
Creation of Expert Advisory Panel	November 2010
Consultation process	December 2010 - February 2011
Expert Advisory Panel provides recommendations	February - March 2011

B. Covering Letter and Questionnaire

1. Covering Letter

To:
BC Private Degree Granting Post-secondary Institutions
BC Public Post-secondary Institutions Presidents
BC Public Post-secondary Institutions Vice Presidents, Academic
BC Colleges
British Columbia Association of Institutes and Universities
British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer
Canadian Federation of Students
Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC
Degree Quality Assessment Board
Federation of Post-secondary Educators of BC
Research Universities' Council of British Columbia

January 10, 2011

Dear Colleagues,

Following some initial consultations and meetings of the advisory panel, this note is to provide further information and clarification of the current review of the Degree Approval Process in British Columbia. As you were advised in the fall 2010 by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, the purpose of this project is to review the degree approval process in order to identify opportunities for improvement and redesign. I have attached the Project Charter Summary which was circulated in the autumn and which some of you have discussed (or will be discussing) with me in the next little while. This note adds some further refinement to the questions raised in the Project Charter.

The Ministry of Regional and Economic Development and the Ministry of Science and Universities have asked me to Chair an advisory panel and lead a consultation process in order to provide advice beyond the criteria and work of the DQAB to ensure that the entire process meets the objectives of interested parties while maintaining good practices in quality assurance.

The external advisory panel consists of the following individuals:

Dr. Ronald Bond, Chair, Campus Alberta Quality Council and Provost and Vice-President Academic Emeritus at the University of Calgary;

Dr. Frank Gelin, Executive Director Emeritus of the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer;

Dr. Harro Van Brummelen, Professor Emeritus and former Dean of Undergraduate Studies at Trinity Western University; and

Dr. John Waterhouse, Professor Emeritus and former Vice President Academic and Provost, Simon Fraser University.

The degree program review process was established in 2003, and in 2006, the DQAB updated its assessment criteria and processes particularly to provide greater transparency for those undertaking a DQAB review. The review I am undertaking was deemed advisable given the greater number of degree granting institutions, and is intended to look at questions such as the role of system coordination, international expectations in quality assurance and an institution's internal quality assessment processes.

The advisory panel plans to review outcomes of the consultation as well as any formal responses that you wish to provide to the questions in the attached consultation document in early February. In addition to meeting in January and early February with sector groups and individual institutions and organizations insofar as is mutually possible, I would appreciate any written responses to the following questions and other observations you would like to provide for this process.

Please provide comments to me by February 7, 2011 via email at: jstubbs@sfu.ca

I can also be reached at this e-mail address if you wish to meet with me to discuss the project.

Thank you for your assistance with this undertaking.

With best wishes.

Sincerely,

John Stubbs

2. Questionnaire

Review of the Degree Approval Process in British Columbia

Please provide responses/comments to John Stubbs by February 7, 2011 via email at: jstubbs@sfu.ca

Questions:

1. **Background:** The implicit objectives of the degree approval process are to ensure:

☐ Quality degree programs and institutions recognized within the province, Canada and internationally;

☐ Accountability and transparency to the general public;

☐ Integration of the post-secondary system so as to assist student mobility and success;

☐ Programme quality assessment built on an institution's current state of development including an appropriate process of self-assessment followed by peer/external review;

☐ A timely process;

☐ Access to programs which meet the needs of students, employers and government objectives.

Questions:

a) Do you concur with these objectives?

b) Are there any substantive revisions you would recommend?

c) Should these objectives be made explicit?

2. **Background:** The key criteria against which the Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB) evaluates new degree programs for BC public institutions are found here:

http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/degree-authorization/public/degree-program-criteria.htm

The key criteria for private and out-of-province institutions are found here:

http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/degree-authorization/private/degree-program-criteria.htm

http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/degree-authorization/private/criteria-org-review.htm

Additionally, the key criteria against which the Ministry evaluates new degree programs for public colleges and institutes prior to the DQAB review are found here:

http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/degree-authorization/public/new-mandate-applied-degrees.htm

Question:

Should the degree approval process (e.g. posting, public comment, timing) be streamlined / improved in terms of accountability, rigor, transparency and responsiveness to the needs of institutions, students, employers and the public? If yes, what specific recommendations would you make in this regard?

3. **Background**: Institutions with proven track records (ten years' history in British Columbia in enrolling students in programs at a particular degree level) and appropriate governance mechanisms in place (including their own external review process) may apply for "exempt status" at a specific degree level. Once exempt status is awarded it normally does not require renewal. New degree programs from institutions with exempt status still require ministerial approval under legislation.

Exempt status does not provide for a periodic reassessment or audit function. In a report regarding the Ontario graduate program approval process, Dr. Richard Van Loon indicated that BC's exempt status process may not be considered fully adequate or sufficiently rigorous by other jurisdictions.[1]

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission has implemented an external periodic review (i.e. an audit) of the quality assurance policies and procedures within the Maritime universities, and other provinces may be looking into similar mechanisms.

[1] 1 Van Loon, Richard. Ontario Graduate Program Appraisal Review. Council of Ontario Universities Nov 2007. Pg. 19 http://cronus.uwindsor.ca/units/senate/main.nsf/947f0bc672983a17852568b60051f690/3692e36d681d8052852573ad00646734/$FILE/Sa080110-5.1a%20(Van%20Loon%20Report).pdf

Questions:

a) Should the exempt status policy remain in place or should it be amended? Please provide a rationale for your response.

b) Given international trends, should BC explore other options such as periodic institutional audit or accreditation to ensure institutions continue to sustain and to apply both rigorously and in a timely fashion their internal quality assurance processes in an effort to produce continuous quality improvement of degree programs?

c) If yes, should BC endeavor to do this in conjunction with one or more other provinces?

4. **Background:** Once public institutions are given the authority to offer new degree programs, that approval remains in place indefinitely. Private institutions are normally granted consent to offer degree program for a period of five years, then consent must be renewed. Private and out-of- province institutions are also required to implement new degree programs within three years of receiving consent or consent will lapse.

The Maritimes Higher Education Commission requires degree programs that have not been offered over a set period of time to seek re-approval should an institution wish to re-implement the program.

Question:

Should there be a policy that requires institutions to withdraw degree programs that have not been implemented or offered for several years which would then require that institution to seek approval/consent if it wished to offer the same program again at a future date?

5. **Background:** Over the past few decades, private higher education has expanded with very little strategic planning by governments. Furthermore, competition within and among post-secondary institutions is growing. In BC, there may also be unnecessary duplication within the public post-secondary system. In some jurisdictions this has led to system-wide

coordination of degree programs. Currently only proposed applied degrees at public colleges and institutes are required to undergo a system coordination review.

Questions:

a) How should system-wide coordination of degree programs occur in British Columbia?

b) How can British Columbia be effective in aligning new programs in applied or professional areas with labour market needs?

6. **Background:** The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada endorsed the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework, which forms part of the Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada (http://www.cicic.ca/docs/cmec/QA-Statement-2007.en.pdf). The DQAB criteria for degree level standards are consistent with the pan-Canadian qualifications framework.

Question:

a) Taking into account the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework, are the generic skills that all graduates of degree programs should possess adequately described? If no, what should these essential generic skills be?

b) In your view, are these generic skills used adequately in the degree development and approval processes?

7. **Final Question:**

Are there any other comments or recommendations that you wish to make with respect to the current approval process?

C. List of Written Submissions

Adler School of Professional Psychology

Alexander College

BC Association of Institutes and Universities

BC Colleges

British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer

Camosun College

Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC

Douglas College

Fairleigh Dickinson University

Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC

Gonzaga University

Langara College

Okanagan College

Dr. Donald Page

Research Universities Council of British Columbia (VPs Academic)

Quest University

Royal Roads University

Dr. John Driver, VP Academic, Simon Fraser University

Sprott-Shaw Degree College

Dr. David Strong

Thompson Rivers University

Trinity Western University

Vancouver Community College

D. List of Interviewees

Dr. Larry Axelrod, Adler School of Professional Psychology

Board of BC Colleges

Board of the British Columbia Association of Institutes and Universities

Dr. Ron Burnett, Emily Carr University of Art and Design

Dr. Allan Cahoon and Dr. Thomas Chase, Royal Roads University

Mr. Rob Clift and Dr. David Mirhady, Confederation of University Faculty Associations, BC

Members of the Degree Quality Assessment Board

Mr. Jock Finlayson, British Columbia Business Council

Dr. Rob Fleming, British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfers

Dr. Brian Gillespie and Dr. John Watson

Dr. David Helfand, Quest University

Dr. Verna Magee-Shepherd, University Canada West

Dr. John Munro

Mr. Geoff Plant, QC

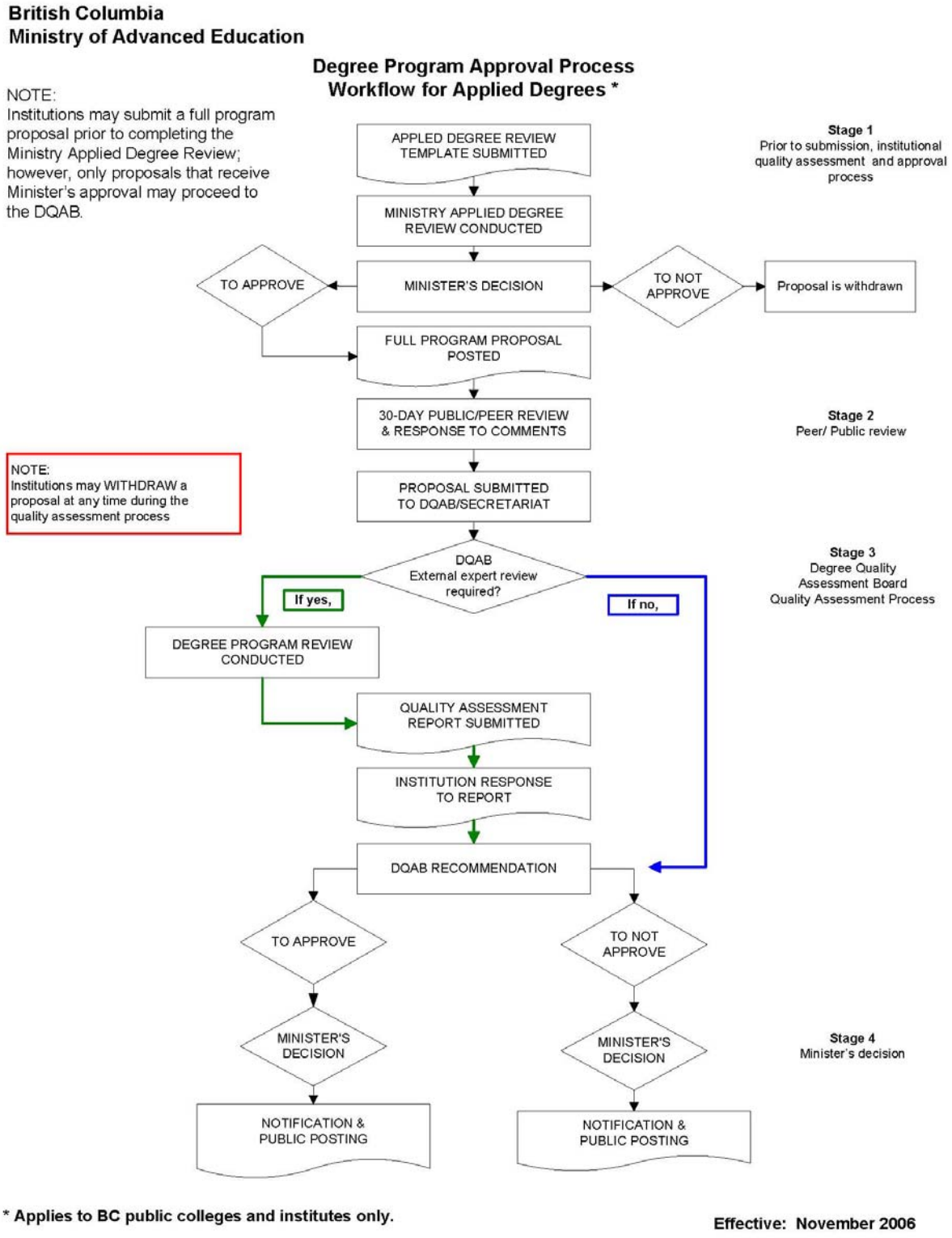
Dr. Jonathan Raymond and Dr. Dennis Jameson, Trinity Western University

Dr. Alan Shaver and colleagues, Thompson Rivers University

Vice-Presidents Academic, Research Universities Council of British Columbia

Mr. John Winter, British Columbia Chamber of Commerce

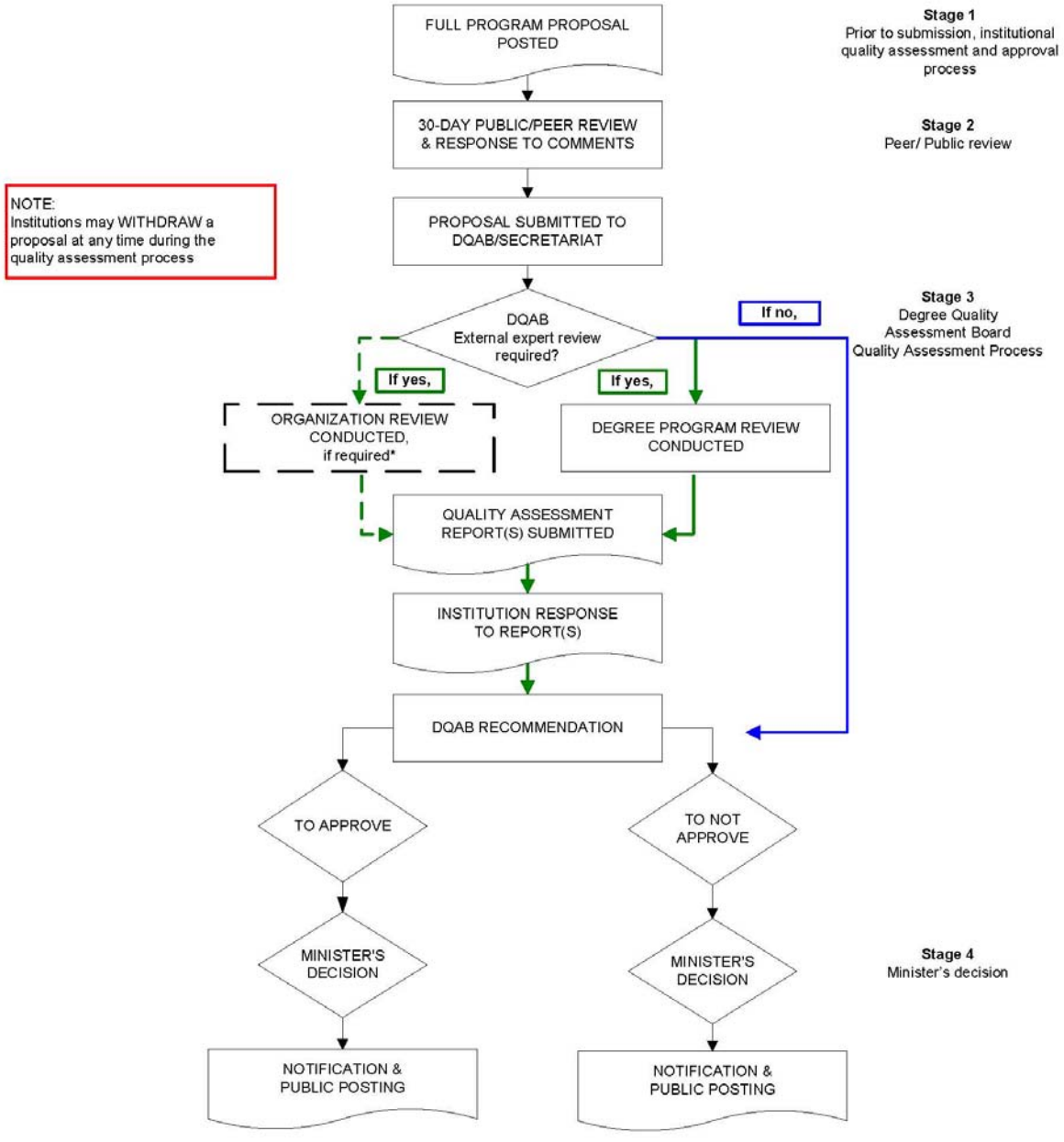
E. Degree Program Approval Process for Institutions under the College and Institute Act



F. Degree Program Approval Process Workflow for Non-exempt Institutions

British Columbia
Ministry of Advanced Education

Degree Program Approval Process
Workflow for Non-exempt Institutions



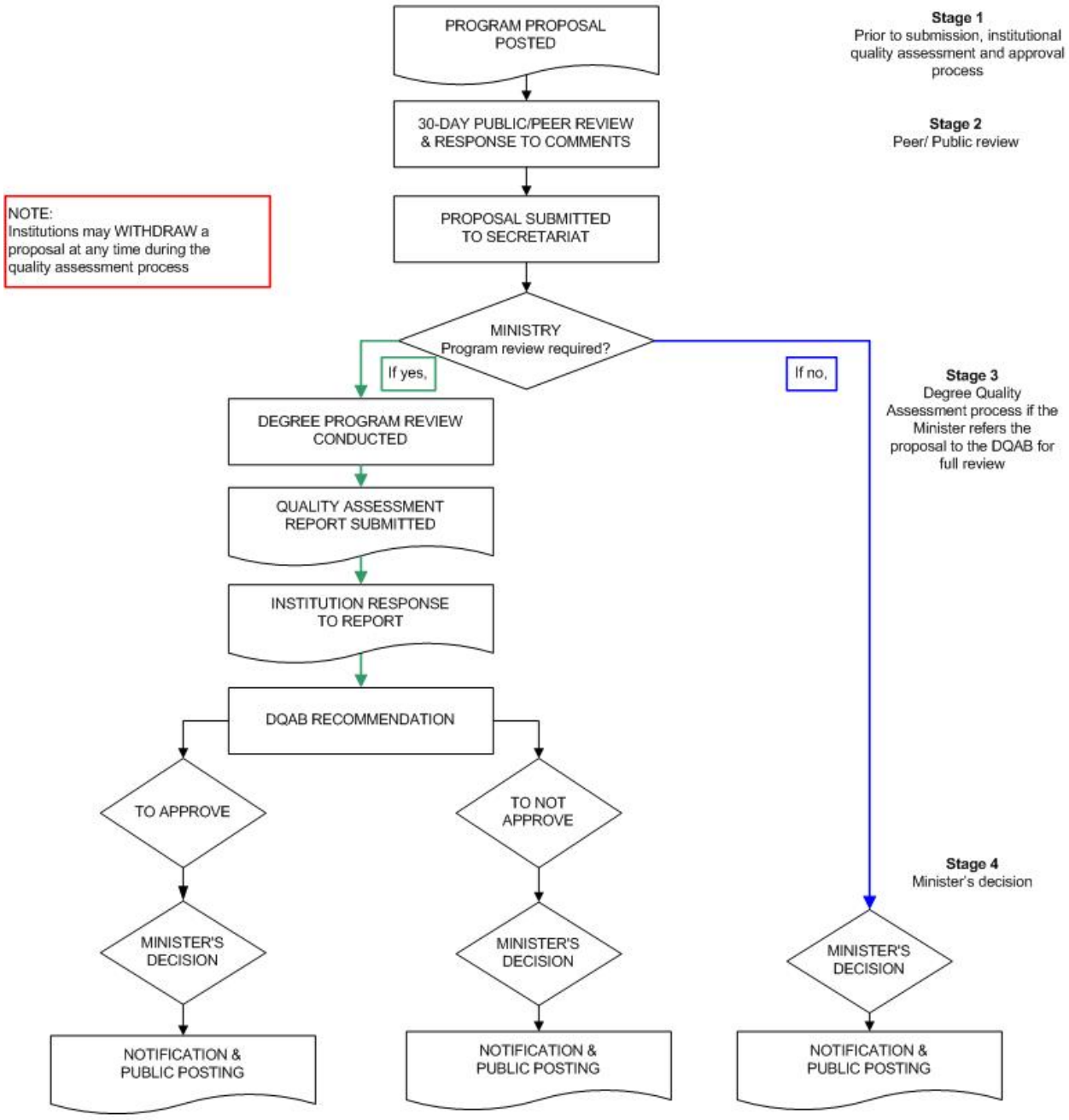
*BC public institutions are not required to undergo organization review

Effective: November 2006

G. Degree Program Approval Process Workflow for Institutions with Exempt Status

British Columbia
Ministry of Advanced Education

Degree Program Approval Process
Workflow for Institutions with Exempt Status



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H. Acknowledgements

The Panel warmly acknowledges the invaluable administrative support of Ms. Dorothy Rogers and Ms. Dao Luu for all their help with this review.

I. Panel Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That these objectives be made explicit on Ministerial websites, on the DQAB website and in all printed and electronic materials related to the degree program approval process in this province.

Recommendation 2

That the forgoing principles guide the degree program approval process and be made explicit in the future in all appropriate Ministerial and DQAB documentation.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that consideration should be given to ensure that there is always representation from (1) degree granting institutions in the College and Institute sector, (2) those private and out-of- province institutions operating under the DAA, (3) the "new" teaching universities and (4) the other public universities. We recommend that the number of academics (and institutional experiences) on the Board be expanded.

Recommendation 4

The number of DQAB members representing the business community be reduced to two members to make way for slightly increased numbers of representatives from the academic institutions.

Recommendation 5

The Panel recommends that the question of appropriate compensation be addressed by the Ministry, perhaps with reference to the practice of paying honoraria to members of quality assurance agencies with similar responsibilities in other jurisdictions or with reference to the stipends paid to review teams in British Columbia.

Recommendation 6

The Panel recommends that when DQAB appointments are made in the future, consideration be given to an appropriate diversity with respect to demographics, background, and experience.

Recommendation 7

The Panel recommends that the DQAB should commission a full arm's length review of its activities, using external reviewers, at least once every 8-10 years. The first such review should occur in 2013.

Recommendation 8

For all parties to fully utilize the potential of the PSIPS system, postings of all new degree program proposals (including appendices) is required. The Panel recommends that each post-secondary institution in BC should have equal access to all new degree program proposals and the opportunity to offer peer comments.

Recommendation 9

The Panel recommends, further, that the DQAB define "proprietary information" which we believe would include only financial information, the curricula vitae of faculty, referees' letters, letters of support which contain personal information, and similar information. The objective should be to limit the range of material deemed proprietary and to make available as much academic information as possible when institutions post new program proposals on PSIPS. As already stated, the Panel maintains that it is important that all relevant academic information should be publicly available when determining the academic quality of proposed new offerings.

Recommendation 10

The panel recommends that as a longer term objective both the DQAB and the Ministry follow a practice of ensuring that all material posted on PSIPS should remain fully accessible on their websites once the degree program review process is complete and decisions have been communicated to the parties.

Recommendation 11

The Panel recommends that institutions nominating potential reviewers should continue to ensure that their nominees are academically well respected in the field and have no real or perceived conflict of interests with the nominating entity. The DQAB should encourage those institutions that have limited experience in seeking degree program approval to consult in advance with others in their sector (or in the wider system) which have an established track record of experience with external academic program reviews.

Recommendation 12

When degree programs are proposed that have the potential to duplicate already existing programs in this province and reviewers might be drawn from such programs, the Panel recommends that the DQAB consider establishing an expert review panel with at least one reviewer from outside the province.

Recommendation 13

To foster as much consistency as possible in degree program and institutional reviews, the Panel recommends that the DQAB should implement a more structured orientation process for all review teams and that a member of the secretariat should normally accompany review panels.

Recommendation 14

While experienced senior reviewers are invaluable in the review process, the Panel recommends that provision also be made for the inclusion of more junior, well qualified reviewers on the review teams as new degree program proposals become more reflective of different program foci, changing learning methodologies, and program delivery.

Recommendation 15

The Panel recommends that the DQAB augment its pool of reviewers by canvassing the post-secondary education sector every few years seeking nominations of qualified candidates from the offices of the Vice Presidents Academic/Education.

Recommendation 16

The Panel has concluded that the question of whether or not there is to be further system co-ordination in BC is a public policy question for government to determine.

Recommendation 17

A. That government undertake a full inventory of existing degree programs (including collaborative agreements) in the entire post-secondary system; such an inventory could subsequently guide decisions about system duplication and help in identifying programming gaps. The inventory should be publicly accessible on the Ministry's website and should be updated annually.

B. Were such an exercise to identify gaps and/or areas of possible collaboration or cooperation between institutions in a region or among a common cluster of degree program interests, or were institutions themselves to move in such a direction, the Panel recommends that the Ministry consider financial or other incentives to stimulate such system coordination endeavors.

Recommendation 18

The Panel recommends that the term "exempt status" be replaced by the phrase "qualified for expedited reviews of new degree program proposals". It would remain the case that all degree granting institutions currently operating in BC would be potentially eligible for expedited reviews.

Recommendation 19

In the spirit of encouraging BC's post-secondary sector to continue to develop best practices for degree approval and quality assurance while building on well-established and widely respected practices in the province's older universities, which are themselves a reflection of higher education practices in many other jurisdictions, the Panel recommends the following framework for gaining and maintaining the status of "qualified for expedited reviews of new degree program proposals":

1. **All degree granting institutions in BC are eligible to seek expedited review status.**
2. **Institutions seeking expedited review status of new degree programs must have experience of offering successfully at least four separate and diverse degree programs over a ten year period at the level for which expedited degree program review is sought.**
3. **Institutions must have in place and have documented experience of program or academic unit reviews that occur at least every seven years normally using three independent experts and requiring a site visit. Such reviews are initiated by an internal self- study. The program review process and the results of such reviews, both successful and unsuccessful, and agreed follow up commitments and actions, must be publicly posted on the institution's website and on the DQAB website.**
4. **As is current practice, all expedited reviews will require ministerial approval. There may be occasions when the Minister may refer the proposed program to the DQAB for a full review because of its unique nature, complexity, ground-breaking disciplinary content for the institution, proposed location or its strategic importance to the Province.**
5. **An audit process (see below) will ensure that the practices and procedures established for expedited review are being fully followed.**
6. **In so far as possible, expedited degree program review policies and procedures will be compatible with such practices in other Canadian educational jurisdictions. This practice will assist all parties to move towards further mutual recognition of degrees and programs across Canada.**

Recommendation 20

The Panel recommends that an audit process be developed and overseen by the DQAB that is reflective of, and compatible with, the evolution of the BC post-secondary system and that maintains an appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability.

Recommendation 21

As part of the process of moving to an audit system, the Panel recommends that the DQAB become a member (as are a number of Canadian counterparts) of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

Recommendation 22

The Panel recommends that every seven or eight years BC institutions that have qualified for expedited reviews of new degree program proposals undergo an audit of their degree program approval and program/academic unit review procedures to ensure that the processes as described in their policies are being rigorously and regularly applied.

Recommendation 23

In the interests of transparency and accountability, the Panel recommends that the results of the audits and the institutional responses should be posted on both the institution's website and the DQAB's website. Such institutional postings will make it apparent to all visitors to the website (including prospective domestic and international students) that the institution has been audited and found to meet DQAB standards.

Recommendation 24

The Panel further recommends that the annual reports of institutions to the Ministry provide a description of the degree program/academic unit review process at that particular institution and the results of the process in the past year.

Recommendation 25

We recommend that the DQAB examine this question and develop guidelines for changes to the renewal of consent process to make the process less onerous for institutions that have maintained a good track record since the last consent was approved.

Recommendation 26

The Panel is of the view that to propose concrete initiatives on the question of accreditation is premature, but that it is imperative that an exploration of accreditation possibilities proceed. The Panel recommends the formation of a panel to explore the experiences of other jurisdictions with respect to institutional accreditation and to recommend whether BC should move in the direction of accreditation and how this can be done so that pan-Canadian standards are recognized and upheld.

Recommendation 27

We also recommend that the Ministry consider very carefully the need for the rationalization of the use of the term "accreditation" in the entire post-secondary universe in British Columbia.

Recommendation 28

The panel recommends that all institutions should report unimplemented and unoffered degree programs in their annual institutional reports to the Ministry.

Recommendation 29

The panel further recommends that the DQAB have the right to require that (a) approved programs that have not been implemented within three years would have to go through the degree program approval process if they were now to be offered, (b) that programs that have been previously implemented but not offered for three years must go through the formal degree program approval process again before re-implementation, and (c) institutions that have not offered an approved program for three years must report such deletions to the Ministry and remove such programs from their websites and calendars.

Recommendation 30

The Panel recommends that the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework become much more visible and specifically referenced both electronically and in print as an essential part of the criteria that have to be met in the degree program approval process used by both the DQAB and the Ministry.

The Panel also recommends that all degree granting institutions in the province embed the Degree Qualifications Framework in their internal degree program approval procedures with particular attention being paid to the learning outcomes outlined in the Framework.

Recommendation 31

The Panel recommends that the DQAB should review and, if necessary modify, the Degree Qualifications Framework requirements for graduate level programs and ensure that they are accurately reflected in DQAB graduate degree program review materials.

Recommendation 32

The Panel recommends that the BC government and the DQAB should continue to encourage the pan-Canadian use and heightened visibility of the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework.

Recommendation 33

The Panel recommends that these generic skills, including collaboration, teamwork, innovation, global relationships and understandings and foreign languages be given more attention in the degree program approval process.

Recommendation 34

That the DQAB, which for several years has had a moratorium in place on the use of the word "University", give this matter careful attention in the near future. Strengthen the standards for the use of this term to include: high academic quality, the practice of active scholarship, a contingent of core and continuing faculty, a breadth of degree programs, adequate long term financial resources and a stable administrative structure.

Recommendation 35

The Panel recommends that the place and nomenclature of applied degrees in BC be examined by the Ministry, in consultation with appropriate post-secondary institutions, as part of a process of defining the scope and content of degrees that can be offered by BC public colleges.