BRITISH COLUMBIA'S

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

April 4, 2012

DISCUSSION PAPER

INTRODUCTION

British Columbia's integrated post-secondary education system offers a range of education and training options for students. The current quality assurance system served British Columbia well when the province had a smaller, less diverse post secondary education system. The province's post secondary system has evolved and grown in complexity. In response, BC's quality assurance processes must adapt.

Strengthening quality assurance standards and processes are needed to ensure that students receive the best possible education and that employers can have confidence in the quality of education provided to their current or potential employees. The public also needs to be assured, given the substantial public investment in the system, that value for money is being achieved.

The Quality Assurance Framework outlines the plan for strengthening quality assurance across the entire post-secondary education system and developing new standards that will apply to all institutions. A system of quality assurance that is fair, accountable, transparent and strong, following internationally recognized standards and practices, will ensure that BC's reputation for excellence in post-secondary education is maintained and enhanced. The framework will be used to create a new Quality Assurance Act for all post-secondary institutions delivering education in or from BC.

The framework also takes into account previous reports on the quality of post-secondary education commissioned by the Ministry of Advanced Education as well as national and international commitments:

> ### *Quick Facts – BC Post Secondary System*
>
> - Public Post-secondary Institutions consisting of 11 universities, 11 colleges and three institutes. These institutions have over 440,000 students offering 1,900 educational and training programs.
>
> - 17 Private and Non-BC Public Post-secondary Degree Granting Institutions with approximately 7,400 students taking 66 programs.
>
> - Approximately 340 Private Career Training Institutions with over 51,000 enrolments in approximately 2,900 programs.
>
> - 13 Private Post-secondary Theological Institutions offering credentials in theological education only.
>
> - An unknown number of private post-secondary academic (non-degree granting), private language schools and on reserve Aboriginal Schools which do not fall under provincial legislation.

- **Private Career Training Institutions Act Review (Watson Report) -** An independent review of the Private Career Training Institutions (PCTI) Act was undertaken in the summer and fall of 2007. In addition to enhancing outcomes based quality assurance and institutional commitment to continuous improvement, the final report recommended streamlining policies, procedures and practices between the PCTI Act and the Degree Authorization Act and exploring the potential for a single act.

- **Degree Process Review Report (Stubbs Report) –** An independent review of the degree approval process was undertaken in 2011. Through extensive consultation with stakeholders the report provided 35 recommendations with the themes of greater transparency, data collection, process improvements, system coordination and periodic institution reviews.

- **Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework (2007) - Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)** The framework describes degree categories and sets out degree-level standards. This framework provides a context for identifying how degree credentials compare in level and standard among jurisdictions, with a view to facilitating continuous improvement, the education and training of an internationally competitive
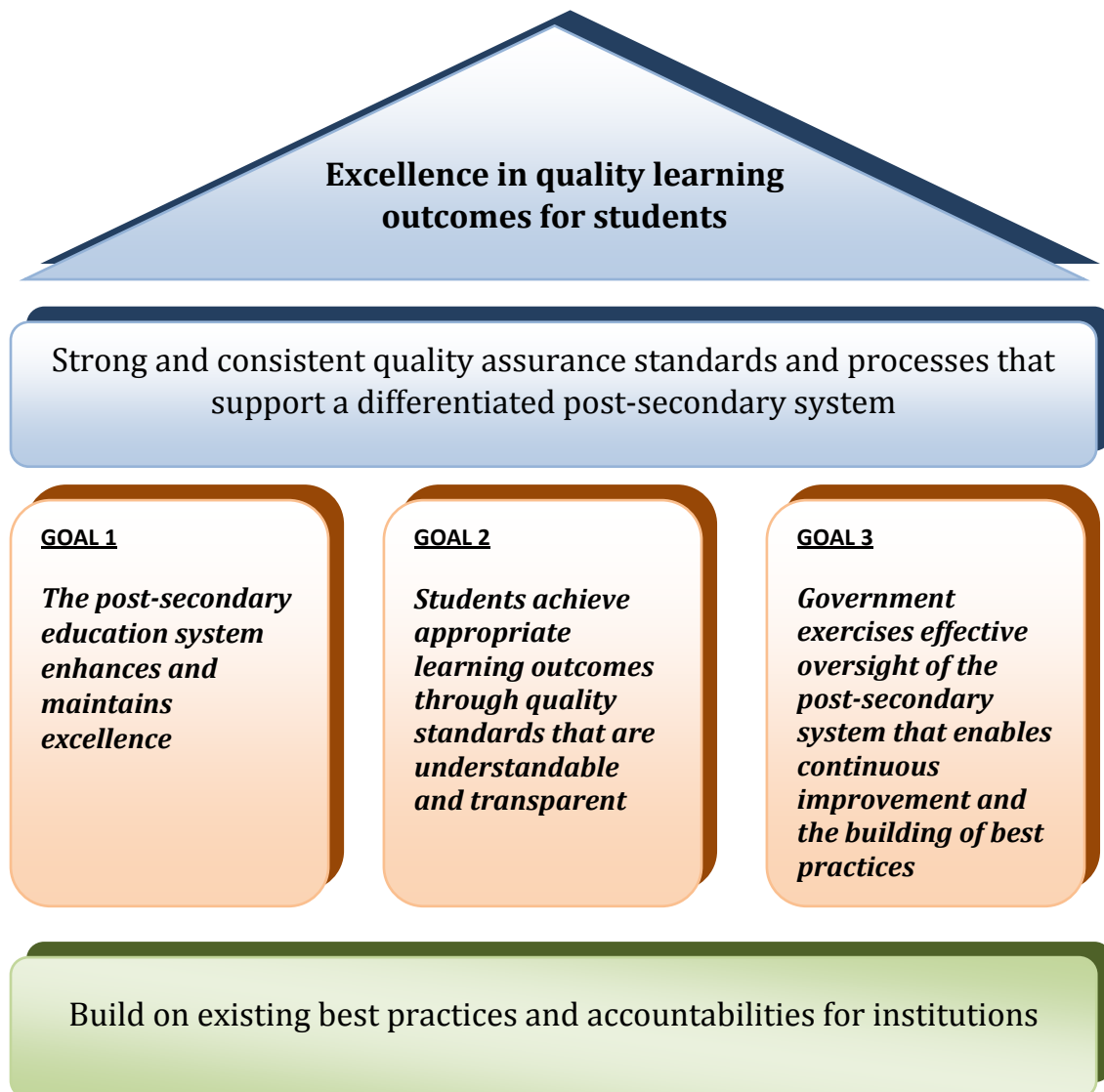
workforce, and international recognition of the quality of Canadian credentials.

- **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Guidelines for Quality in Cross-Border Education (2005)** – The Guidelines provide an international framework to protect students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision from providers engaged in cross-border education.   As Canada is a member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development there is an expectation that all countries that adopted the guidelines abide by them.

The following goals and objectives have been identified as key elements for improving the quality assurance of post-secondary education in British Columbia.

QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR THE FUTURE

Excellence in quality learning outcomes for students

Strong and consistent quality assurance standards and processes that support a differentiated post-secondary system

GOAL 1

The post-secondary education system enhances and maintains excellence

GOAL 2

Students achieve appropriate learning outcomes through quality standards that are understandable and transparent

GOAL 3

Government exercises effective oversight of the post-secondary system that enables continuous improvement and the building of best practices

Build on existing best practices and accountabilities for institutions

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Goal 1: Post-secondary education system enhances and maintains excellence

Objective 1.1   A quality assurance framework that encompasses all BC post-secondary education providers

BC's post-secondary education quality assurance system differs by type of institution and program. There is also a broad range in institutional and programmatic review practices across the system. External validation of the quality of programs and institutions provide assurance to students and the public that minimum standards have been met or exceeded.

The Degree Quality Assessment Board oversees degree programs and the Private Career Training Institutions Agency regulates private career training institutions. In addition, BC also has the Education Quality Assurance (EQA) designation that signals to students that an institution's program meets minimum quality assurance standards.   Multiple bodies overseeing the quality assurance of the post-secondary education system has led to inconsistency in standards as well as regulatory gaps across the system. Consequently, students and other stakeholders have found it difficult to compare institutions and programs.

> "Quality – Regardless of the mode of delivery and the type of institution, organization or business providing lifelong learning, individuals must be provided with a learning experience that meets or exceeds provincial norms or standards for high-quality learning."
>
> *A Guiding Principle from the Confederation of University Faculty Associations' Campus 2020 Submission*

To protect students and the integrity of the system, the new quality assurance framework could encompass a broader range of educational providers such as language schools and theological institutions.

Questions:

a) The *Degree Process Review Report* recommended that the principles identified below guide the degree approval process.   Should similar principles be expanded to all programs to guide development of the new quality assurance framework?

- 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.

b) What governance structure is needed to provide oversight for the new quality assurance framework?

c) Many jurisdictions are moving to more inclusive oversight of <u>all</u> institutions that provide adult education. The *Private Career Training Institutions Act Review* recommended that all private English as Second Language institutions be brought under the PCTIA Act.   What would be an appropriate level of oversight for these institutions?

Objective 1.2   The new framework establishes consistent quality standards

The new quality assurance framework will build upon strengths and key features of the current framework as well as on good institutional review practices and accountabilities at BC's post-secondary institutions.

Questions:

a) What standards and processes are critical for ensuring effectiveness and credibility of the quality assurance framework?

b) How can comparability of standards be achieved for BC's differentiated post-secondary system?

Goal 2: Students achieve appropriate learning outcomes through quality standards that are understandable and transparent

Objective 2.1   Identify and demonstrate high quality outcomes

Articulating, measuring and reporting outcomes provides increased accountability to students and their families, employers, the public, government and other stakeholders. Of increasing prominence are learning outcomes.

In British Columbia, post-secondary institutions have traditionally established the name and type of credential awarded. The Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework sets out degree-level standards that institutions are required to observe and the Degree Quality Assessment Board confirms adherence to these standards through the quality assurance process. At the diploma and certificate level, there are some expectations of what those credentials represent particularly in regulated professions where competency-based standards have been established. However, there still remains a large portion of programs where there are no agreed upon standards on what those credentials represent or what the learning outcomes are. Greater consistency in learning outcomes across the entire system will make it easier for students and employers to assess the value of these credentials.

> "The quality assurance (QA) process should be founded on two premises:
>
> - Institutions should be accountable for the extent to which students achieve the outcomes promised or implied in their programs and advertising.
>
> - Institutions must have a commitment to continuous improvement."
>
> *Watson Report*

Qualifications Frameworks are used in other countries to outline the expected learning outcomes at each qualification level. A qualifications framework will provide clarity to students, prospective employers and other stakeholders on what students should know and be able to do by the end of a program regardless of where the student receives their education.

Questions:
   a) How can learning outcomes be effectively measured?
   b) What other outcomes measure student experience and should be incorporated within the new quality assurance framework?

Objective 2.2   ***Students and the public have access to readily accessible and easy to understand information to make informed decisions on their education options***

Students and families make large investments, both in time and financial resources in order to receive a post-secondary education that meets their personal and career goals. To support their investment, they need information comparing programs and institutions. This information is currently limited. At present, the data collected from the post-secondary system do not aggregate to a comprehensive core of information. Current legislative changes to the *School Act* will allow the expansion of the Personal Education Number (PENs) to private institutions so that analysis and research on student trends and transitions can be completed for all students within the BC post-secondary system. Consistent information collection of core data across the post-secondary system and making it available to the public is needed to help students make informed choices; provide information to stakeholders on the achievement of quality outcomes; and inform and assess public policy. Access to high quality information will enable the post-secondary education system and government to be more responsive to the needs of students and employers.

Questions:

   a) What information will be most useful to students when they are considering programs and/or institutions?
   b) What role do the institution and the Ministry have in ensuring students and the public have information that is readily available, comparable across institutions and easy to understand?
   c) What data is useful to the entire system in order to make it a better system?

Goal 3: Government exercises effective oversight of the post-secondary system that enables continuous improvement and the building of best practices

Objective 3.1   Effective and balanced oversight of the post-secondary education system

Initially, institutions and their programs will undergo a process that determines whether the institution or program has maintained and will continue to maintain quality. The depth of future reviews will be based on an institution's track record of maintaining quality assurance standards. This approach allows for continued monitoring of the system while providing for reduced oversight of institutions that have demonstrated low risk.

Questions:

   a) What checks and balances should be taken into account when determining the appropriate level of oversight for institutions and programs to ensure maintenance of quality and continuous improvement?
   b) What key factors should be taken into consideration when determining whether an institution has demonstrated low risk?

Objective 3.2   Safeguarding the reputation of BC's post-secondary education system

BC institutions are increasingly innovative in their delivery methods and increasingly entrepreneurial, offering programs to students in other countries, often through international partnerships or consortia. These factors create pressure to ensure that all programs, regardless of delivery method or where the program is offered, meet the same high quality standards in order to safeguard the EQA brand. Widely-publicized incidents have had a damaging effect on the entire post-secondary education system.

> "A rigorous quality assurance process is critical to ensure the quality of degrees in BC is upheld nationally and internationally. RUCBC would emphasize the need to ensure a consistent process for the public and private sectors."
>
> *Research Universities' Council of British Columbia comments during the Stubbs Review*

Questions:

a) How can high quality standards be assured for the diversity of delivery modes (e.g., distance education) and collaborative arrangements (e.g., joint degrees)?

b) What institutional and government processes need to be in place to safeguard the reputation of BC's post-secondary education system?

c) Do the guidelines in the *OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality in Cross-Border Education,* specifically those for educational providers, comprise an appropriate baseline standard expected of institutions engaging in delivering programs outside of BC?

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Glossary

Career Training – Under the *Private Career Training Institutions Act* career training is defined as credentials at the non-degree level, described in the National Occupational Classification scheme as an occupation where the tuition is greater than or equal to $1,000 and the program is longer than or equal to 40 hours.

Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB) - The *Degree Authorization Act* establishes a quality assessment process for degree approval (all institutions) and use of the term university (private and out of province public institutions). The DQAB was established to undertake the reviews on behalf of the Minister.

Learning Outcomes – Students and graduates can demonstrate what they actually "know and are able to do" rather than the list of topics or courses they have been taught.

Personal Education Numbers (PENs) - a unique nine-digit personal education number (PEN), assigned to every student entering the K-12 or public post-secondary education system.

Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA) – Under the *Private Career Training Institutions Act*, PCTIA has the authority to regulate private career training institutions in British Columbia. This includes responsibility for establishing standards of quality for voluntary accreditation and enforcing basic education standards for all registered institutions.

Quality Assurance in Post-Secondary Education - a planned or defined review of a program or institution to determine it meets, maintains, and enhances standards relating to education, teaching and financial status and capacity.

Qualifications Framework - the expected learning outcomes of different post secondary credentials. Learning outcomes explain what students should know and be able to do by the end of a program.

Referenced Readings:

- **Private Career Training Institutions Act Review (Watson Report) -** An independent review of the Private Career Training Institutions (PCTI) Act was undertaken in the summer and fall of 2007.   http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/publications/docs/PCTIA-Review.pdf

- **Degree Process Review Report (Stubbs Report) –** The 2011 Report regarding the British Columbia degree approval process and standards. http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/degree-authorization/documents/Stubbs-Report.pdf

- **Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework (2007) - Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)** The framework describes degree categories and sets out degree-level standards. http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/95/QA-Statement-2007.en.pdf

- **OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality in Cross-Border Education** (2005) – The Guidelines provide an international framework to protect students and other stakeholders from low-quality provision when operating in another country. http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/51/35779480.pdf

- Examples of Qualifications Frameworks:
    - o Australia - http://www.aqf.edu.au/
    - o Ireland - http://www.nfq.ie/nfq/en/
    - o Ontario - http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/programs/oqf/