



Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC)

Background Information

Ratification of the first generation of the UNESCO convention

In 1989, Canada ratified the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region 1979, in light of the agreement expressed by all provinces and territories. This meant that provincial and territorial governments had to put in place their collective network of national implementation structures to ensure compliance with the international legal instrument.

The National Information Centre is part of these structures, based on the competent authority's constitutional situation. In Canada, provincial and territorial governments determined that the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) would be mandated in this capacity. In some countries, their respective national information centre is responsible for providing academic credential assessment reports to individuals and thus for making recognition decisions. However, CICIC was not given this responsibility.

Provincial and territorial governments had to define which organization(s) would provide expert, non-binding opinions on the assessment of an academic credential to support the settlement in Canada of internationally educated individuals wishing to work or to pursue further studies.

Inception of ACESC

The precursor of the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC) was the Provincial Assessment Committee (PAC), a committee of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) under the responsibility of CICIC. PAC was formed in the mid-1990s “for the purpose of sharing information on assessment methodologies used in each province [and territory] and to establish codes of good practices and to identify common assessment principles.” In particular, PAC recognized the:

- need for fair, credible, and standardized methods in the assessment of international academic credentials;
- need for consistency among the provinces in the assessment of international academic credentials;
- importance of portability of academic credential assessments from one province to another;
- importance of articulating a conceptual framework for the assessment of international academic credentials to promote consistency; and
- advantages of working collaboratively to address issues related to the assessment of international academic credentials.

PAC convened by teleconference and in person, as needed. It was initially made up of representatives from CICIC, the International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES) from British Columbia, International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) from Alberta, the *Service des équivalences* from Quebec, and the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training as an observer.

The first meeting of PAC was held in Montebello, Quebec, on March 1–2, 1996. The meeting focused on areas of collaboration and was designed to “build the trust and confidence necessary to begin discussions on portability of assessments among provincial services.” In particular, the meeting report noted that “similarities in principles are numerous and that differences are more the results of historical or financial context than basic philosophical positions.” One of the key agreed next steps of that meeting was that members would identify three or four countries with a high number of applicants, review the education systems of those countries, and discuss and compare actual documents and assessment outcomes. They identified 12 principles that were common to existing provincial services, and that could form the basis of a common methodology. They also agreed to collaborate in researching education systems in other countries, particularly where access to information was difficult or where significant changes were occurring. Finally, they reviewed a funding proposal, to be submitted to the Government of Canada—through the Department of Human Resources Development (HRDC), Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), and Heritage Canada—for a review of assessment services with a view to harmonizing their practices. At subsequent teleconferences, they also discussed how to connect PAC with the Canadian Network for Credential Evaluation (CNCE), a group composed of representatives from all provinces, HRDC, CIC, and Heritage Canada.

The first order of business for the group involved developing the General Guiding Principles for Good Practice in the Assessment of Foreign Credentials, which incorporated many elements from the Draft Recommendation on the General Procedures and Criteria for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications developed under the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region 1997, commonly known as the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC). Many of the elements from these initial guiding principles have persisted and were incorporated into the CICIC *Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials*, published in 2012. The executive committee of the Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC) was invited to review the principles and generally found them to be “useful, applicable/relevant, and consistent with the practices of their institutions.”

As early as 1996, meeting notes suggest that PAC was already considering the need to expand its group to include private academic credential assessment services. In 1997, PAC presented at the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA) and convened with other credential evaluators in the United States and Europe. Their key area of work was how to achieve portability across assessment services.

Signature of the second generation UNESCO convention

In 1997, upon the agreement of all provinces and territories, Canada became a signatory to the second generation convention: The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region 1997, or the LRC.

Gradual transition from PAC to ACESC

By 1999, PAC had developed a Web presence as ACESC and had begun communicating its general guiding principles via presentations and communications with the CNCE, the Association of Community Colleges of Canada—now known as Colleges and Institutes Canada—ARUCC, other evaluation services, the ENIC-NARIC Networks, and the general public.

In 2003, two more services joined ACESC: World Education Services (WES) in Ontario and the Academic Credential Assessment Service (ACAS) in Manitoba.

In 2005, members of ACESC met with the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) to discuss the Foreign Credential Recognition Program and to discuss various strategic goals and priorities of ACESC, including:

- building and strengthening relationships with end-users and stakeholders (e.g., sector councils, postsecondary educational institutions, professional regulatory bodies);
- identifying the need for academic credential assessment services in the Atlantic provinces;
- strengthening research capacity on issues related to academic credential assessment services;
- developing strategies to improve the portability of assessments across Canada;
- developing mechanisms for academic credential assessors to share information through pan-Canadian and international networks; and
- strengthening the “brand” for ACESC to build credibility and visibility among end-users.

Formal establishment of ACESC

In 2008, members met and discussed governance, including terms of reference, the chair, membership, finances, and the incorporation of ACESC. The governance questions continued to be raised at subsequent meetings. In 2011, a survey of members was developed to solicit their views on governance and its role in implementing the LRC.

In 2012, members revised their membership criteria to reflect a change in policy in Ontario regarding academic credential assessment services. ACESC welcomed two new members: Comparative Education Service (CES) and the International Credential Assessment Service of Canada (IQAS). This revision ensured that ACESC represented all seven academic credential assessment services across Canada.

In September 2013, ACAS of Manitoba ceased operations and formally submitted a notice of intent to withdraw from the ACESC Secretariat. The decision to withdraw became effective immediately. ACAS was an ACESC member from 2003 until September 2013.

Supporting the implementation of international legal instruments in Canada

ACESC (and initially PAC) has greatly contributed to the implementation of international legal instruments related to recognition in Canada, mainly through:

- providing expert, non-binding opinions on the assessment of academic credentials, as opposed to formal recognition, to support the settlement in Canada of internationally educated individuals wishing to work or continue further studies;
- collaborating to ensure consistency and portability of academic credential assessment reports among ACESC members;
- benchmarking policies and practices against one another, and in some cases, changing practices;
- helping create an informal network of academic credential assessors who share information;
- helping raise awareness of the importance of academic credential assessment;
- contributing to the capacity and consistency of academic credential assessment in Canada, both through the training and information sharing experts on staff have provided to the broader community of academic credential assessors in professional regulatory bodies and postsecondary educational institutions, and through participation in HRSDC-funded projects.

Members have been able to make strong statements at the pan-Canadian and international levels about the quality of assessment reports issued by members, and assure internationally educated individuals and end-users (e.g., employers, postsecondary educational institutions, professional regulatory bodies) that they can rely on this information to facilitate recognition as an end goal.