



Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC)

Terms of Reference

1. Purpose

Recognizing the autonomy of organizations involved in assessing academic credentials in Canada, members of the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC) will:

- assume the responsibility conferred by competent authorities in Canada (i.e., provincial and territorial governments) in its implementation structure in compliance with qualification-recognition-related international legal instruments adopted by Canada. This is achieved by providing an expert, non-binding opinion on the assessment of an academic credential through the issuing of assessment reports for internationally educated applicants in Canada. In turn, these reports can be submitted to competent recognition authorities that require assistance with this process.
- improve the quality and consistency of academic credential assessments with a view to facilitating the integration of internationally educated students and professionals in Canada. This can be achieved by supporting the pan-Canadian assessment community's:
 - broad acceptance of the principles and guidelines outlined in the ***Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials*** (QAF); and
 - expertise through information sharing aimed at supporting their policies and practices.
- support the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) in:
 - the QAF's management to ensure its continuous improvement, and to guide organizations in applying the framework's principles. This work is accomplished through the QAF Steering Committee, where one elected full member of ACESC serves a two-year term as an official member; and
 - reporting evidence-based information on compliance to the QAF, and qualification-recognition-related international legal instruments adopted by Canada.
- promote the QAF's adoption among various sectors of the pan-Canadian academic credential assessment community in line with Canada's international obligations regarding assessment and recognition of international academic credentials. This includes adoption within their own organization, and

demonstrated compliance through a peer-review process between ACESC members, and a review by the QAF Steering Committee.

2. Membership

Membership application process for new applicants

Membership in ACESC is open to any public or private organization in Canada that offers academic credential assessment services. Organizations interested in submitting a new application for membership to ACESC shall send a completed membership application form and supporting documents to the Secretariat of ACESC. A \$5,000 non-refundable fee is payable to the ACESC Secretariat for the submission of any new ACESC membership application by an organization. All subsequent communications regarding a new membership application should be directed to the Secretariat of ACESC, whom is responsible to coordinate this process.

There are two types of membership in ACESC:

1. **provisional membership:** a member whose application for membership has not yet been fully confirmed, but who may participate in limited activities of ACESC, with the exception of holding an elected role as ACESC chair or vice-chair.
2. **full membership:** a member whose application for membership has been fully confirmed, without any limitations.

The Secretariat of ACESC will:

- confirm receiving the applicant's completed membership application form and supporting documents within one month;
- provide all received documentation to current members of ACESC for their review.
 - This process will begin only after all the information requested has been received.
 - ACESC members will review the completed membership application form and supporting documentation to ensure the applicant meets the terms of membership.
 - Under normal circumstances, ACESC will complete this review within six months of receipt of the completed membership application form. In cases of substantial delay, the Secretariat will inform applicants of the reason for the delay, and the approximate time required to review the application.
- provide all received documentation to current members of the Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials (QAF) Steering Committee.
 - QAF Steering Committee members will review the completed membership application form and supporting documentation to ensure

- the applicant demonstrates adherence to all principles and recommendations outlined in the QAF;
- Under normal circumstances, the QAF Steering Committee will complete this review within three months. In cases of substantial delay, the Secretariat will inform applicants of the reason for the delay, and the approximate time required to review the application;
- The QAF Steering Committee will then report back on its review to the ACESC, whom is responsible to finalize the application process;
- notify the applicant in writing of the results of the ACESC and QAF Steering Committee review process.

Initially, an applicant would achieve provisional membership in ACESC if their membership application form and supporting documentation is consistent with the terms of membership and quality assurance criteria. In situation where ACESC provisional membership was not offered to the applicant, ACESC will identify any inconsistencies raised during their review of the applicant's documents and where possible, suggest mechanisms to address inconsistencies.

An applicant would achieve full membership in ACESC only after completing at least one year of provisional membership, and subject to the review of all criteria (especially focused on experience and quality assurance), and approval of members of:

- ACESC; and
- Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials (QAF) Steering Committee.

All information submitted through the application process remains confidential. Access to this information is limited to an ACESC subcommittee and QAF Steering Committee members, whom are responsible for the initial documentation review of the applicant. The ACESC subcommittee and the QAF Steering Committee then reports back to all ACESC members, whom are responsible for the final decision on the membership application process for any new applicant.

Terms of membership

To become an ACESC member, the following **two requirements** (i.e., A and B) must be met and maintained at all times by the organization:

- A. ACESC members are well-established academic credential assessment services that meet **at least one** of the following criteria. The organization must:
1. operate in Canada as part of a provincial or territorial authority;

2. be mandated¹ by a provincial or territorial authority in Canada to provide international academic credential assessment services in Canada; and/or
3. demonstrate that its assessment reports are recognized² by at least four public institutions³ in the province/territory of operation in Canada⁴.

B. In addition, ACESC members must meet **all** of the following criteria. The organization must:

- demonstrate compliance with the *Pan-Canadian Quality Assurance Framework for the Assessment of International Academic Credentials (QAF)*, including its *Pan-Canadian Code of Good Practice in the Assessment of International Academic Credentials*.
- serve a broad-based clientele, and not be limited to individuals applying for general employment, admission to further education, or professional licensure/membership/certification with only one type of competent recognition body (e.g., university, college, professional regulatory body or association, employer).
- provide multi-purposed assessments/reports:
 - to be used and recognized⁵ in Canada for further education, professional licensure/membership/certification, and general employment;
 - based on expert non-binding opinions, anchored on a process that situates the applicant's international academic credential in context of the relevant issuing education system outside Canada, and determines whether it is comparable to an academic credential issued within at least one of the 13 provincial and territorial education systems in Canada, in

¹ The organization must have received a clear mandate for providing academic credential assessment services to the population from a provincial or territorial ministry in Canada. This mandate should:

- originate from a competent authority in this ministry;
- specify the nature of the deliverable services;
- indicate the duration of the mandate;
- mention any limitation; and
- specify any accountability or reporting mechanisms between the organization and the ministry.

² Demonstration of recognition of assessment reports by publicly-funded institutions for purposes of further education, licensure, and employment.

³ For these purposes, publicly-funded institutions include: professional regulatory bodies, professional associations, elementary/secondary school boards or districts, postsecondary educational institutions, and employers. Such publicly-funded institutions must derive their mandate from provincial, territorial and/or federal legislation in Canada.

⁴ Subject to- and in compliance with- legally binding provisions in provincial, territorial, federal and international legal frameworks (e.g., 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention, 2019 Global Convention, fair registration practices legislation for professional regulating bodies, personal information protection and exchange of electronic data legislation), including formal business operations in a province or territory of Canada, and when applicable, collecting the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST), and/or other provincial sales tax on taxable services.

⁵ Demonstration of recognition of assessment reports by publicly-funded institutions for purposes of further education, licensure, and employment.

- respect of levels, types, and particular characteristics typically found in Canada⁶; and
- covers a full range of issuing education systems outside Canada, disciplines, and levels of credentials (e.g., secondary through doctorate levels, academic or vocational/career programs).
- have complied with the above criteria for at least one year and issued a significant number of assessment reports for use and recognized⁷ in Canada (at least 1,500 during this time period).

Full membership renewal process

Full membership in ACESC is two years in duration. Renewal is based on a peer-review process where continued compliance with the ACESC terms of membership and the QAF is explicitly demonstrated.

The process requires:

- ACESC members to submit a completed peer-review process form to the Secretariat of ACESC;
- the Secretariat of ACESC to make these documents available to all ACESC members for their review;
- individual ACESC members to formulate any request for additional information and provide comments to their peers (as needed);
- the Secretariat of ACESC to submit resulting documentation to the QAF Steering Committee for their review;
- the QAF Steering Committee to provide any comments, as necessary, and confirm if individual members of ACESC continue to be in full compliance with principles of the QAF; and
- the Secretariat of ACESC, based on the initial peer-review by ACESC members and subsequent review by the QAF Steering Committee, to issue a letter to confirm if individual members of ACESC continue to be full members of ACESC.

In cases where a member of ACESC requires corrective measures to be implemented before full membership can be reaffirmed, the Secretariat will issue a letter to confirm provisional membership, conditional upon the implementation of said corrective measure(s) within a specific timeframe. A verification at a specific date will be carried out, to ensure follow-up.

Withdrawal of membership

⁶ Competent recognition bodies and assessment services in Canada may use various terminology, such as but not limited to: assessment against Canadian education standards; comparative evaluation of studies taken outside Québec (comparative evaluation).

⁷ Demonstration of recognition of assessment reports by publicly-funded institutions for purposes of further education, licensure, and employment.

A member may withdraw its membership from ACESC by submitting to the Secretariat of ACESC a notice of intent to withdraw. Their decision to withdraw becomes effective immediately, and the organization must cease to use any reference to ACESC.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Secretariat of ACESC

The Secretariat of ACESC is the **Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC)** at the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).

The Secretariat is responsible for:

- managing logistics of ACESC teleconferences and meetings, in accordance with the CMEC policies and procedures. This includes drafting and translation of agendas, proceedings, and records of decisions (as required).
- coordinating the ACESC membership applications process from new applicant organizations and provide them guidance based on the requirements set out in ACESC's Terms of References (i.e., the membership application process);
- coordinating the peer-review process of current ACESC members, with the assistance of the QAF Steering Committee, to confirm compliance on qualification-recognition-related international legal instruments adopted by Canada;
- facilitating communication between members by providing a forum for representatives of ACESC members;
- facilitating dialogue between ACESC members and end-users of assessment reports (e.g., Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada);
- sharing information with ACESC members on issued related to the services they provide;
- promoting pan-Canadian and international cooperation, especially with the ENIC-NARIC Networks, and the Secretariat of legal instruments (i.e., UNESCO, Council of Europe);
- collecting evidence-based information on ACESC members' compliance to the QAF, and qualification-recognition-related international legal instruments adopted by Canada; and
- working closely with the chair and vice-chair of the ACESC to plan teleconferences and meetings, to ensure progress on the work plan, but also attendance to external teleconferences and meetings.

Members of ACESC

Members of ACESC are responsible to:

- assure the quality of their respective service and maintain standards of good practice;

- inform all members of ACESC of any changes in circumstances that might prevent their organization from complying with any terms of membership, and indicate how to remedy the situation;
- recommend, review, and implement policies, standards, and criteria related to the development and maintenance of a quality assurance process for ACESC;
- develop, maintain, and disseminate ACESC's policies and procedures;
- promote and raise awareness of ACESC with stakeholders and organizations within their respective provinces and territories;
- participate in the activities, teleconferences, and meetings of ACESC;
- review ACESC membership applications from new applicant organizations and provide guidance based on the requirements set out in ACESC's Terms of References (i.e., the membership application process).
- participate in the peer-review process and review ACESC members' completed forms to provide guidance based on the requirements set out in ACESC's terms of membership and QAF.
- provide to the Secretariat of ACESC evidence-based information on their respective compliance to the QAF, and qualification-recognition-related international legal instruments adopted by Canada;
- review the QAF and propose amendments as required to the QAF Steering Committee, ensuring the continuous quality of the QAF;
- agree on a three-year work plan, by identifying issues of common interest where collaboration could assist members of ACESC. Each element in the work plan will be assigned a specific member of ACESC responsible for its leadership; and
- ensure continual liaison with CICIC, other ACESC members, and the ENIC-NARIC Networks.

4. Governance

Official representatives of the Secretariat of ACESC are employed by CMEC and work within the CICIC unit. ACESC members are composed of senior staff responsible for the management of assessment services that issue academic credential assessments to internationally educated applicants in Canada.

Election process

One chair and one vice-chair of ACESC shall be elected from among the ACESC full members.

At least one elected representative shall be employed by a public organization full member of ACESC, either in the role of chair or vice-chair.

Elected representatives will serve a two-year term. After the two-year term is completed, a fair rotation shall be observed to avoid having the same representatives serving two consecutive terms, unless agreed upon by all ACESC full members.

Roles and responsibilities of elected governance

The ACESC's chair and vice-chair will:

- chair meetings and teleconferences in accordance with the Terms of Reference;
- authorize the invitation of guests who are not ACESC members, in consultation with the Secretariat of ACESC;
- exercise the authority to amend these Terms of Reference at any time in response to changes in trends in the field, and in consultation with ACESC full members;
- represent ACESC members at external meetings or teleconferences (e.g., QAF Steering Committee, Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee), using an agreed-upon communication by all ACESC members prior to the event; and
- perform other related duties.

In the absence of the chair and vice-chair, a representative of the Secretariat of the ACESC will perform those duties.

5. Rights of ACESC members

Trademark

Under the federal *Trademarks Act R.S.C., 1985, c. T-13*, the “*Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC) / Alliance canadienne des services d'évaluation de diplômes (ACSED)*” is a registered Trade Name owned by the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC).

Unless authorized in writing by the Secretariat of ACESC, the unauthorized use of the trademark is strictly prohibited.

Communication

Members of ACESC are committed to developing effective communication strategies. This ensures that all potential users of academic credential assessments benefit from the QAF. Membership in ACESC signals to all applicants requiring an assessment report and to all organizations who use these assessment reports that ACESC members conform to quality assurance criteria. As well, ACESC members acknowledge the importance of the portability of academic credentials, and they therefore ensure mechanisms are in place for the recognition of assessments conducted by other ACESC members.

Members of ACESC have the exclusive rights to:

- use the trademark and official name: Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada/Alliance canadienne des services d'évaluation de diplômes;
- imply membership in ACESC using the terminology "the Alliance" or the acronym "ACESC" / "l'Alliance" ou l'acronyme "l'ACSED";
- inclusion in the CICIC and ACESC Web sites as well as other promotional materials; and
- use the following statement in their official communications, such as on assessment reports issued to applicants:

"The [FULL NAME OF THE ORGANIZATION] is a member of the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC). ACESC ensures that individuals have access to fair and credible academic credential assessment services. Members of ACESC follow principles of good practice that are consistent with international standards. Get more information on its Web site [<http://www.canalliance.org>] or by contacting members of ACESC."

6. Limitations and liabilities of membership

A member of ACESC cannot transfer its membership to another organization.

ACESC members may not use any language that implies that this membership gives them any authorization, certification, licensure, or other forms of legal recognition.

Neither ACESC nor individual members are liable for other members of ACESC. Each member is responsible for assuring the quality of its own assessment services and for applying standards of good practice as defined in this document.

Nothing in these Terms of References shall be construed as creating a partnership or as imposing upon any member any partnership duty, obligation, or liability to the other parties. Each ACESC member shall indemnify and hold harmless the other members, their employees, and their agents from any and all claims, demands, actions, and costs whatsoever that may arise out of, directly or indirectly, the indemnifying member's performance or participation in ACESC or that of the indemnifying member's employees or agents. Such indemnification shall survive the dissolution of ACESC.

Other than an organization part of a provincial or territorial public administration in Canada, each ACESC member shall, at its own expense and without limiting its liabilities herein, be responsible for insuring its operations under a contract of Comprehensive General Liability, in an amount not less than \$1,000,000 per occurrence (annual general aggregate, if any, not less than \$2,000,000) insuring against bodily injury, personal

injury, and property damage, including loss of use thereof. Coverage shall include blanket contractual liability, and shall include employees as additional insureds. An appropriate self-insurance or self-assumption program is considered compliance with the insurance requirement. Written evidence of an appropriate self-insurance or self-assumption program at the required levels or above will be accepted in the place of a certified copy.

7. Teleconferences and meetings

Teleconferences and meetings will always consist of a representative from:

- each member of ACESC; and
- CICIC, acting as the Secretariat of ACESC and as a non-voting member.

They will be conducted:

- primarily using videoconference or teleconference, to promote timely communication exchanges while minimizing costs, in English and in French; or
- in rare circumstances, in-person at the discretion of the Secretariat of ACESC, in consultation with the chair and vice-chair and according to available budget.

During these teleconferences and meetings:

- the chair (in collaboration with the vice-chair, as needed) will be responsible for managing interactions, timekeeping, and summarizing the decisions of members.
- quorum shall be attained by a simple majority of ACESC full members.
- decisions will be made by consensus, either orally or by written poll, on the principle of one vote per ACESC full member, including the Chair.

8. Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest is deemed to exist when an ACESC member is confronted with an issue in which they have an interest or an issue or circumstance that could frustrate the individual's capacity to serve as an ACESC member.

For any potential situation that could be construed as a conflict of interest between a member and a matter pending before ACESC, the member shall:

- disclose such interest to the ACESC;
- not vote on the matter; and
- not attempt to influence the decisions of other ACESC members.

9. Remuneration

ACESC members are not paid honoraria for their contribution to the collective work of ACESC and/or for participating in its activities.

10. Amendments

The Terms of Reference were reviewed, and then adopted by ACESC on January 26, 2023. It is recommended that the Terms of Reference be reviewed at least every three years or initiated by ACESC's chair and vice-chair anytime. Any changes are subject to the unanimous approval of ACESC full members.