



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 this 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 responsibility is achieved by providing an expert, nonbinding 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 goal 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.
 - reporting evidence-based information on compliance with the QAF, as well as compliance with 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 objective includes adoption of the QAF within their own

respective 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 are invited to send a completed membership application form and supporting documents to the ACESC Secretariat. A \$5,000 nonrefundable fee will be payable to the ACESC Secretariat upon submission of any new ACESC membership application. All subsequent communications regarding a new membership application should be directed to the ACESC Secretariat, who is responsible for coordinating new and existing memberships.

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 certain limited activities of ACESC. Note: provisional members may not hold an elected role, i.e., these members may not occupy the role of ACESC Chair or Vice-Chair.
2. **full membership:** a member whose application for membership has been fully confirmed and who participates in ACESC without any limitations.

The ACESC Secretariat will:

- confirm receipt of the applicant's completed membership application form and supporting documents within one month of the submission;
- provide all received documentation to current members of ACESC for their review.
 - This review process will begin only after all the information requested from the applicant 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 ACESC Secretariat will inform the applicant of the reason for the delay and indicate the approximate time required to review the application.
- provide all received documentation to current members of the 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 ACESC Secretariat will inform the applicant of the reason for the delay and indicate the approximate time required to review the application.
 - The QAF Steering Committee will then report back on its review to the ACESC Secretariat, who is responsible for finalizing the application process.
 - notify the applicant in writing of the results of the ACESC and QAF Steering Committee review process.

Initially, in typical circumstances, 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. Members will maintain their provisional status for one calendar year, upon which full membership status will be conferred (see below for more information on the requirements for full membership). In situations where ACESC provisional membership was not initially 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 achieves full membership in ACESC only after completing at least one year of provisional membership; undergoing a successful review of all criteria (especially focused on experience and quality assurance), and obtaining the approval of members of:

- ACESC; and
- the 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, who are responsible for the initial documentation review of the applicant. The ACESC subcommittee and the QAF Steering Committee then report back to all ACESC members, who are responsible for the final decision with respect to the membership application of any new applicant.

Terms of membership

ACESC member organizations must meet and maintain the following **two requirements** (i.e., A and B) at all times:

- 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 Canada.⁴

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

- demonstrate compliance with the 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, or public-sector employer).
- provide multipurpose assessments/reports:
 - to be used and recognized⁵ in Canada for further education, professional licensure/membership/certification, and general employment;
 - based on expert, nonbinding opinions, anchored to a process that both situates the applicant's international academic credential in the context of the relevant issuing education system outside Canada, and also determines whether the academic credential is comparable to an academic credential issued within at least one of the 13 provincial and territorial education systems in Canada, taking into consideration the

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

- originate from a competent authority in this ministry or department;
- 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/department.

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 public-sector 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 or territorial sales tax on taxable services.

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

- levels, types, and particular characteristics of academic credentials typically found in Canada;⁶ and
 - that cover a full range of issuing education systems outside Canada, as well as a broad spectrum of 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 have issued a significant number of assessment reports (at least 1,500 during this time period) for use and which are recognized⁷ in Canada.

Full membership renewal process

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

The renewal process requires:

- ACESC members to submit a completed peer-review process form to the ACESC Secretariat;
- the ACESC Secretariat 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 ACESC Secretariat 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 ACESC Secretariat, 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 ACESC Secretariat will issue a letter to confirm provisional membership, conditional upon the implementation of said corrective measure(s) within a specific timeframe. Verification that these corrective measures have been effectively implemented will be carried out at a specific date, to ensure follow-up.

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

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

Withdrawal of membership

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

3. Roles and responsibilities

ACESC Secretariat

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

The ACESC Secretariat is responsible for:

- managing logistics of ACESC teleconferences, videoconferences, and in-person meetings, in accordance with CMEC policies and procedures. This includes drafting and translation of agendas, proceedings, and records of decisions (as required).
- coordinating the ACESC membership application process and providing new applicant organizations guidance with respect to the application process based on the requirements set out in ACESC's Terms of Reference (i.e., this document);
- coordinating the peer-review process of current ACESC members, in concert 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 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is an example of an end user);
- sharing information with ACESC members on issues related to the services members provide;
- promoting pan-Canadian and international cooperation, especially with the ENIC-NARIC Networks, and the co-secretariats of legal instruments (i.e., UNESCO, Council of Europe);
- collecting evidence-based information on ACESC members' compliance with the QAF, as well as compliance with qualification-recognition-related international legal instruments adopted by Canada; and
- working closely with the Chair and Vice-Chair of ACESC to plan teleconferences, videoconferences, and in-person meetings, to ensure progress on the work plan, but also to coordinate attendance to external teleconferences, videoconferences, and in-person meetings.

Members of ACESC

Members of ACESC are responsible for:

- ensuring the quality of their respective service(s) and maintaining standards of good practice;
- informing all members of ACESC of any changes in circumstances that might prevent their organization from complying with any terms of membership, and indicating to members how they plan to remedy the situation;
- recommending, reviewing, and implementing policies, standards, and criteria related to the development and maintenance of a quality assurance process for ACESC;
- developing, maintaining, and disseminating ACESC's policies and procedures;
- promoting and raising awareness of ACESC with interested parties and organizations within their respective province or territory;
- participating in the activities, teleconferences, videoconferences, and in-person meetings of ACESC;
- reviewing ACESC membership applications and providing new applicant organizations guidance with respect to the application process based on the requirements set out in ACESC's Terms of Reference (i.e., this document).
- participating in the peer-review process and reviewing ACESC members' completed forms to provide guidance based on the requirements set out in ACESC's Terms of Reference and the QAF.
- providing to the ACESC Secretariat evidence-based information on their respective compliance with the QAF, as well as compliance with qualification-recognition-related international legal instruments adopted by Canada;
- reviewing the QAF and proposing amendments as required to the QAF Steering Committee to ensure the continuous quality of the QAF;
- agreeing 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 to a specific member of ACESC responsible for its leadership; and
- ensuring continual liaison with CICIC, other ACESC members, and the ENIC-NARIC Networks.

4. Governance

Official representatives of the ACESC Secretariat are employed by CMEC and work in 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, either in the role of Chair or Vice-Chair, shall be employed by a public organization.

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 teleconferences, videoconferences, and in-person meetings in accordance with the Terms of Reference;
- authorize the invitation of guests who are not ACESC members, in consultation with the ACESC Secretariat;
- 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 teleconferences, videoconferences, and in-person meetings (e.g., QAF Steering Committee, Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee), using a list of key messages agreed-upon 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 ACESC Secretariat will carry out these 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 ACESC Secretariat, the unauthorized use of the trademark is strictly prohibited.

Communication

Members of ACESC are committed to developing effective communication strategies. This commitment ensures that all potential users of academic credential assessments benefit from the QAF. Membership in ACESC signals to all academic credential assessment 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; and/or "l'Alliance" and/or the acronym l'ACSED;
- inclusion in the CICIC and ACESC websites 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. Visit <http://www.canalliance.org> for more information or contact members of ACESC directly."

6. Limitations and liabilities of membership

A member of ACESC cannot transfer their 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 their own assessment services and for applying standards of good practice as defined in this document.

Nothing in these Terms of Reference 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.

Excepting organizations which are part of a provincial or territorial government 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, videoconferences, and in-person meetings

Teleconferences, videoconferences, and in-person meetings will always consist of a representative from:

- the Chair and Vice-Chair [or designate(s)];
- each member of ACESC; and
- CICIC, acting as the ACESC Secretariat and as a non-voting member.

ACESC's work will be conducted:

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

During these teleconferences, videoconferences, and in-person 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; and
- 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 a matter in which they have an interest, 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 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 May 15, 2023. It is recommended that the Terms of Reference be reviewed at least every three years; a review of the Terms of Reference may also be initiated by ACESC's Chair and Vice-Chair at anytime. Any changes are subject to the unanimous approval of ACESC full members.