



STUDY OF QUALIFICATIONS ASSESSMENT AGENCIES



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The Office of the Fairness Commissioner is an arm's-length agency of the Ontario government, established under the Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006. Its mandate is to ensure that certain regulated professions have registration practices that are transparent, objective, impartial and fair.

We thank HealthForce Ontario and Global Experience Ontario for sharing their stories of candidates' experiences with qualifications assessment.

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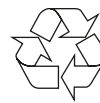
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MESSAGE FROM THE FAIRNESS COMMISSIONER



I am pleased to present *Study of Qualifications Assessment Agencies*, a report about the organizations that assess academic and other qualifications on behalf of Ontario's regulated professions.

In initiating this study, my office was driven by the importance of these agencies. Of the 35 regulators my office oversees, 27 use outside agencies to assess qualifications.

We hear a great deal in the media and in the regulatory world about recognition of foreign credentials. Often commentators are referring to the activities of regulatory bodies, employers or governments. However, the role of qualifications assessment agencies is seldom acknowledged.

The purpose of the research was to learn more about the many organizations — often at arm's length from the regulators — that are key to registration and licensing in Ontario. Qualifications assessment agencies are important because they directly affect who gets into the professions and who does not.

This is the first time a study of this type has been done. The results confirm that the process to qualify to practise in many professions can be lengthy, costly and difficult. They also reveal examples of good practices in organizations that are working to improve the fairness of their assessment processes.

I hope this report will draw attention to these important bodies, and I would like to thank the organizations that participated in our research for their time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JA', written over a faint horizontal line.

Hon. Jean Augustine, PC
Fairness Commissioner

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study by the Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC) was to understand and document how qualifications assessment agencies in Ontario perform their work. When access to regulated professions in Ontario is examined, attention has tended to focus on regulatory bodies. However, the assessment agencies are also key players in access to the professions, so it is important to consider how they can contribute to fair and equitable treatment of candidates and applicants.

The Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006 (FARPA) and the amendments to the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 (RHPA) refer to assessment agencies as “third parties” that are relied upon by regulated professions to assess qualifications.¹ One of the Fairness Commissioner’s functions is to monitor these organizations to ensure that assessments are transparent, objective, impartial and fair.²

Regulated professions are identified in FARPA as the bodies corporate or associations that are responsible for the governance of identified professions.³ In the RHPA, organizations that are responsible for the governance of professions are referred to as colleges. Both types of organizations will be referred to collectively in this report as regulatory bodies.

The assessment of qualifications is the most critical part of the registration process. Decisions about qualifications determine whether an individual may enter the profession, how quickly that entry can occur and what additional steps, if any, must be taken in advance of registration.

Regulatory bodies may rely on agencies to assess qualifications for a number of reasons. These organizations may offer expertise in assessments that the regulator lacks. A regulator may rely upon a national agency that provides services to provincial regulators. Agencies may also offer qualifying or bridging programs that candidates are required to take in order to enter a profession.

Qualifications assessment agencies that participated in the study are of three types: post-secondary educational institutions, credentials assessment agencies and profession-related assessment agencies. “Credentials assessment agencies” are services that provide credentials evaluation to individuals. The organizations referred to in this report as “profession-related assessment agencies” include a range of entities such as professional associations and examining or certification boards established by the professions. These organizations perform assessments as part of their mandate to advance their professions, and most also perform other tasks.

The study results will inform the OFC’s recommendations to regulatory bodies and government, and will provide insights to support dialogue between regulatory bodies and the qualifications assessment agencies they work with.

“What Applicants Say

The examination results we received included a section-by-section breakdown, so you knew how well you did. I believe that English fluency is very important for passing these exams because there is lots of reading, and that your skill in taking exams and exam preparedness are also key components.”

– Ontario medical graduate

¹ FARPA s. 10(2), Schedule 2 to RHPA s. 22.4(2)

² FARPA s. 13(3)(d), Schedule 2 to RHPA s. 22.5(1)(f)

³ FARPA s. 2

QUESTIONNAIRE METHODOLOGY AND ADMINISTRATION

For this study, the OFC wrote and administered a questionnaire for qualifications assessment agencies called “Assessment of Qualifications for Entry to Practice.”

Questions were based on the Fair Registration Practices Code in FARPA, Schedule 2 of the RHPA and the OFC’s *Guidelines for Fair Registration Practices Reports* (2008). A research consultant reviewed and vetted the first draft of questions to ensure relevance and clarity. An online version of the questionnaire was developed. Eight qualifications assessment agencies were invited to test it and provide feedback to the OFC before it was made available to all potential participants. The final version of the questionnaire (see appendix A for excerpts) reflected suggested revisions.

In August 2008 each qualifications assessment agency identified by the regulatory bodies was sent a personal e-mail from Hon. Jean Augustine, Fairness Commissioner, inviting it to participate in the survey. The invitation included the survey website address, a unique login and password information for each participant and a deadline for completion.

The website containing the questionnaire was designed to enable users to input information over more than one site visit, so that users did not have to complete it entirely in one sitting. A series of questions were presented, and participants used text boxes to describe their processes in their own words, with no restriction on the length of responses. For each respondent the website generated an e-mail confirmation, acknowledging receipt of the completed questionnaire and including a copy of the participant’s responses.

The majority (71 per cent) of 41 agencies invited to participate did respond and provided thoughtful answers. Several others did not participate, and others offered only minimal responses. A few organizations committed to submit their questionnaires but had not done so by the time this report was written.

OFC staff were available to answer any questions or address concerns but received very few inquiries from participants seeking clarification or assistance. One qualifications assessment agency reported that its staff were unable to complete the survey because of technical difficulties.

Appendix B lists the qualifications assessment agencies relied upon by regulatory bodies. All were invited to participate in the study.

“What Applicants Say

We welcome the opportunity to have our credentials evaluated. However we need to support our families in addition to paying expenses involved with taking qualifying exams, practical tests and language tests and attending interviews. While some of us have accepted clerical and service-sector jobs so as to earn income, we would prefer to work in the profession for which we have been trained.”

– *An internationally trained dentist*

TYPES OF QUALIFICATIONS ASSESSMENT

The questionnaire consisted of five sections, one for each type of assessment. Participants were instructed to complete the section for each type of assessment they offer in Ontario:

- *Degree equivalency assessment*: the assessment of academic credentials to determine whether they are equivalent to another academic credential.
- *Occupation-specific credentials assessment*: the assessment of credentials to determine whether they are equivalent to credentials for a specific occupation.
- *Competency assessment*: the observation and judgment of skills, knowledge and/or abilities to determine whether an individual has achieved a competency standard.
- *Prior learning assessment*: the assessment of skills and knowledge obtained through formal or informal learning.
- *Examination*: a test of knowledge, skill or ability.

The most common types of qualifications assessments are examinations and assessments of degree equivalency. Twenty-four out of 29 respondents provide one or both of these types of assessment in Ontario.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Twenty-nine organizations completed the questionnaire. The majority (24) are located in Ontario; two are in Alberta, one in Nova Scotia, one in British Columbia and one in Alabama.

Most responding qualifications assessment agencies have fewer than 50 employees; only two have more than 100.

Number of Employees	Number of Agencies
0–10	12
11–50	11
51–100	4
100+	2

What Applicants Say

I felt really discouraged and found this situation really very hard to solve. The agency responsible for assessing my credentials doesn't accept the documents the way the university sent them and the university won't send the documents the way the agency requires. It is very unpleasant to be here in Canada and incurring all these expenses without being able to resolve the situation.

– *An internationally trained candidate*

Twenty-one agencies conduct assessments for specific professions; five are credentials assessment agencies that handle credentials from a range of professions, and three are educational institutions. Twenty deal with health professions, four deal with non-health professions, and the remaining five deal with both health and non-health professions.

An organization may conduct one or more types of assessment. Most respondents offer only one type.

Number of Assessment Types Offered	Number of Agencies
1	21
2	6
3	1
4	1

Examinations and degree equivalency assessments are the most commonly provided types of assessment.

Assessment Type	Number of Agencies
Degree equivalency	12
Occupation-specific credentials assessment	2
Competency assessment	2
Prior learning assessment	4
Examinations	19

Most agencies provide assessments that are accepted by a number of provincial regulatory bodies. Some are specifically mandated to do assessments for a particular province, and two are international organizations with offices both in Canada and abroad.

Scope of Assessments	Number of Agencies
Provincial/local	10
National	18
International	2

The agencies were asked to report what percentage of their candidates every year, from all the professions they serve, were educated internationally and what percentage were educated in Canada. Most work with a greater percentage of Canadian-educated candidates than of internationally educated candidates.

Canadian or Internationally Educated Candidates	Number of Agencies
Majority Canadian-educated	15
Majority internationally educated	9
Evenly split between internationally and Canadian-educated	2
No answer	3

In summary, most qualifications assessment agencies can be described as small national or provincial organizations that offer one type of assessment for entry into a specific profession. Individuals who have been educated in Canada constitute the majority of their candidates, but most also assess qualifications of internationally trained individuals.

“What Applicants Say

For one attending a Canadian medical school or residency it is pretty easy to figure out the processes for registering for these exams. I feel that the College of Family Physicians of Canada examination process is fair and reasonable for what it aims to achieve as a practice licensing exam. The results are not very detailed for those who pass but this is understandable due to the important need for privacy.”

– *Physician trained in Canada*

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

DEGREE EQUIVALENCY ASSESSMENT AND OCCUPATION-SPECIFIC CREDENTIALS ASSESSMENT

Study results about degree equivalency assessment and occupation-specific credentials assessment practices are based on analysis of the answers of 12 agencies. Two of these agencies provided answers about both types of assessment. Results for the two assessment types have been combined because the questions about them were identical. The two types are referred to collectively as credentials assessment.

Credentials assessment is normally required for internationally trained candidates or candidates trained outside Ontario. But in some cases, graduation from an accredited program enables candidates to avoid going through credentials assessment. Accreditation means that the program meets certain standards and has been formally recognized by an accrediting institution. Three out of 12 agencies accept international accreditations for professional programs.

Credentials assessment is carried out both by credentials assessment agencies (four out of 12 respondents) and profession-related assessment agencies (eight out of 12).

Key Observations

- The length of the process and the significant backlogs in some cases raise questions about the relevance and necessity of the internal policies that certain assessment agencies follow.
- Certain practices require substantial amounts of time:
 - “Double verification”: some profession-related assessment agencies do their own assessment but also require assessment from an outside agency. In such cases, the applicant must pay the fees twice and must wait longer.
 - Obtaining original transcripts, other documentation and source verification from abroad: in the most significant example, one overseas institution took three and a half years to respond to a request for documentation.
- Overall, assessment practices are consistent from one credentials assessment agency to another, with similar assessment requirements and practices in place.
- The credentials assessment process focuses on factors external to the individual such as recognition of the institution and program level and duration. The process does not assess learning outcomes.

Main Findings

Length of process

The entire credentials assessment process — from when candidates initiate the process to when they receive a final assessment decision — takes from two weeks to almost a year to complete.

The 12 agencies stated that the credentials assessment process can be started from outside Canada.

Required documentation

Out of 12 respondents, 10 require candidates to submit transcripts, one requires proof of graduation, and one did not answer the question about the documentation it requires. Most agencies (11 out of 12) require that documents in other languages be translated into English or French. Six out of 12 require course descriptions, and three profession-related assessment agencies require proof of registration in the country of origin.

Four credentials assessment agencies offer no options to candidates who do not have direct access to transcripts or other documentation or whose documents are unavailable or destroyed. Seven agencies have processes to assist applicants, such as further assessment of prior learning or accepting notarized documents, and one did not answer the question.

Fees

Fees vary greatly according to the type of assessment and the kind of organization that does the assessment. Credentials assessment agencies offer the most uniform fees, which vary from a range of \$100–\$125 for a basic evaluation of a diploma to a range of \$200–\$300 for a detailed course-by-course evaluation. Profession-related assessment agencies that do credentials assessment themselves charge higher fees, with greater variation (from \$250 to \$1,300).

One agency charges substantially different fees for applicants from accredited schools (\$115) than for applicants from non-accredited schools (\$1,300).

Appeal or review process

Ten of 12 respondents have an appeal process or both review and appeal processes, and they allow submissions in support of reviews or appeals. One agency did not respond to the question, and one does not have an appeal or review process.

Agencies usually impose a deadline for review or appeal submissions (30 to 60 days).

Five respondents offer both reviews and appeals. Typically candidates may request an appeal following a review if they disagree with the results of a review. Appeals are typically handled through formal processes with separate staff and with protocols for documents, timelines and fees. Reviews are normally less formal, and may involve the same staff who made the initial assessment decision.

Key challenges faced by internationally trained candidates (as reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Language barriers
- Obtaining documentation
- Access to programs or courses
- Length of the licensure process
- Costs
- Out-of-date original training or gaps in training
- Getting information about the immigration process
- Passing examinations

Key challenges faced by the agencies in improving access for internationally trained candidates (as reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Lack of resources (e.g., financial, staff, technological)
- Persuading educational institutions to offer training
- Getting responses from officials to verify documents

Two out of 10 respondents charge fees when a formal appeal is requested; eight charge no fees for a review/appeal process.

Credentials assessment methods

The majority of assessment agencies (eight of 12) evaluate various components of an international academic credential to determine equivalency to a Canadian credential. These components include admission criteria, level of program (e.g., university or secondary school), recognition of the academic institution by authorities in its own jurisdiction and the access to other programs that can be obtained on the basis of the qualification. Two others rely on the accreditation status of the institution at which the credential was obtained, and one relies on the assessment of another outside agency to determine equivalency. One organization did not respond.

Training

Eight of 12 agencies provide training to individuals about conducting credentials assessments. Two others provide no training at all, and another two have policies or guidelines that assessors are expected to follow.

By contrast, most agencies do not provide any training about making decisions on internal reviews or appeals. Of those that responded, only one provides training. Among those that offer no training, three agencies responded that they rely on the experience or educational background of the individuals responsible for reviews or appeals.

Communication with applicants

Communication with applicants usually occurs through e-mail, phone or mail. Most agencies (11 out of 12) respond to phone calls; only one does not accept phone inquiries. Most agencies did not report any standard policies for timely responses. One has a policy of replying within 48 hours.

Source countries of candidates

Where candidates were initially trained (as listed most frequently by respondents):

- India
- Egypt
- Canada
- Philippines
- Israel

COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT

Study results about competency assessment practices are based on analysis of the answers of two agencies. Generalizations about competency assessment are not possible given the limited number of respondents; however, the responses received offer insights into how this type of assessment is being used in two professions in Ontario.

Competency assessment is required for internationally trained candidates or for candidates from other provinces that have no agreement with the Ontario regulatory body.

Key Observations

- Few agencies undertake competency assessment. It is the assessment category with the fewest respondents.
- One competency assessment process is part of the registration process for its profession; the other is used to determine admission into a program that is required in order for internationally trained applicants to qualify to practise.
- The competencies evaluated in an assessment are first identified by a separate process that establishes required skills, knowledge and abilities. This study did not examine the competency identification process because it is not done by assessment agencies.
- In order to undergo competency assessment, candidates must first either be admitted to an academic program or submit their transcripts (or statutory declaration) to demonstrate their level of professional education.

Main Findings*Length of process*

The entire competency assessment process takes six months at one of the agencies that responded and 10 months at the other.

Required documentation

Both agencies require academic transcripts, proof of professional registration in the home country and proof of language proficiency. Notarized translations into English or French by a certified translator are required for documents that are produced in other languages.

Fees

Competency assessment fees may be costly for some candidates. In one case, fees for the assessment are \$1,475; in the other, candidates are required to pay over \$40,000 for assessment, admission and program costs.

Appeal or review process

Both agencies offer access to an appeal or review process. In one instance the appeal process is conducted not within the assessment agency but by the regulatory body. The other agency has an extensive, multi-level in-house appeal process.

Key challenges faced by internationally trained candidates (as reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Language barriers
- Gaps in original training
- Cultural differences regarding professional relationships, ethics and communication
- Inadequate academic background
- Lack of familiarity with profession-specific terminology
- Differing definitions of the profession in other countries
- Difficulty understanding the structure of the evaluation

Key challenges faced by the agencies in improving access for internationally trained candidates (as reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Resource constraints (e.g., space, equipment, staffing)
- Number of places for candidates limited by budget and space
- Small number of candidates makes assessment process costly to run

Competency assessment methods

One agency conducts competency assessments using a written test, an objective structured practical examination and a comprehensive practical examination. The other uses examinations and grading.

In both cases, the assessment agencies are not responsible for identifying the competencies that are required to practise the professions. Either a provincial or a national body specific to the profession identifies the competencies.

Policies on conflict of interest, bias and discrimination

Both agencies have policies and processes requiring that persons who make assessment decisions declare conflicts of interest. Similarly, they have policies to control for discrimination and bias. At both agencies the assessment process has more than one step, and each step involves different persons. In addition, one agency identified a specific staff member who has responsibility for ensuring an equitable and non-discriminatory policy.

Source countries of candidates

Where candidates were initially trained (as listed most frequently by respondents):

- China
- India

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT

Study results about prior learning assessment (PLA) practices are based on analysis of the answers of four organizations. Generalizations about PLA are not possible given the limited number of respondents; however, the responses received offer insights into how this type of assessment is being used in four professions in Ontario.

PLA, also known as prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), is conducted by three national profession-related assessment agencies and one university. It is a document-driven process for internationally trained candidates only. PLA is never the only step for entry to practice, but it is always used in these four professions to determine eligibility to undertake either an examination or a program of studies.

Key Observations

- Not all responding agencies ensure that decision-makers are appropriately trained.
- One agency has much less structure and control in its processes than the other three. For example, it provides no training to decision-makers and offers no appeal or review process. The agency did not respond to questions about controls for conflict of interest and about ensuring impartial and non-discriminatory judgments or accommodation for candidates with special needs.
- Not all respondents have a review or appeal process.

Main Findings*Length of process*

On average, the entire PLA process takes two weeks to nine months.

Questionnaire participants were asked about candidates whose assessments take longer than average to complete. Up to 20 per cent of candidates take longer than average to assess.

Required documentation

All four agencies require academic transcripts and proof of language proficiency. Three organizations have a process for accepting alternative documents; one stated that options were “limited” for candidates who do not have direct access to transcripts or other documentation or whose documents are unavailable or destroyed.

Fees

PLA fees may be costly for some candidates. Total PLA fees range from \$400 to \$15,000.

Appeal or review process

Three agencies have an appeal or review process; one does not.

The three that have an appeal process impose a deadline for an appeal submission (either 30 or 45 days), charge a fee for an appeal and allow formal submissions in support of an appeal.

Training

Three agencies provide training about conducting prior learning assessments. The staff of one organization has received on-site training from a national association specializing in PLA.

Two agencies have provided training about making review or appeal decisions regarding PLA.

Prior learning assessment methods

In three of four cases, candidates must meet eligibility requirements in order to access the prior learning assessment. Candidates must either complete a credentials assessment process or achieve a sufficient examination score and demonstrate a required level of proficiency in English.

Three agencies conduct a document review to assess education plus a review of work experience. The fourth did not describe its methodology.

Key challenges faced by internationally trained candidates (as reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Access to courses, training, bridging programs
- Cost
- Urgent need to complete assessment because candidates have been offered jobs
- Employment references that lack sufficient detail
- Time and financial constraints imposed by “survival jobs” that impair candidates’ ability to take training
- Obtaining documentation

Key challenges faced by the agencies in improving access for internationally trained candidates (as reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Lack of resources (e.g., financial, staff, technological)
- Need for profession-specific testing and training
- Lack of program places to accommodate additional candidates
- Dealing with credentials from increasing numbers of jurisdictions

PLA benchmarks are determined in all cases by either a committee or a council on certification. These entities may exist within the PLA agency or as separate organizations.

Source countries of candidates

Where candidates were initially trained (as listed most frequently by respondents):

- India
- Philippines
- Canada

EXAMINATIONS

Study results about examinations are based on analysis of the answers of 19 agencies.

Most agencies that conduct examinations are national profession-related assessment agencies. There is only one independent testing company.

In general, both Canadian and internationally trained candidates write the same examinations for certification. In only a few instances is a different exam set for internationally trained candidates.

Key Observations

- Examinations are the most widely used type of assessment (19 agencies out of 29 use them).
- The most common exam format is multiple-choice, followed by short answer, oral interviews, oral exams and objective structured clinical exam. Most agencies use paper and pencil as opposed to online exams.
- Canada is the top source country for candidates taking examinations. Therefore the processes are often geared toward domestic graduates. Other types of assessment are usually geared toward internationally trained candidates.
- Most agencies (12 of 19) have already undertaken initiatives to improve access for internationally trained candidates. Several organizations provided detailed information about their plans for working toward improved access.

Main Findings

Length of process

The length of the examination process ranges from two to 28 months. Factors affecting the length of time include the nature and quantity of documentation required, the number of examination components required, the frequency of exam offerings, and the examination date selected by candidates.

The average time to complete the examination process does not differ for Canadian and internationally trained candidates being examined by 13 of 19 agencies. When there is a difference, it is due to documentation requirements or additional steps required to qualify for the exam.

Required documentation

Documentation required from internationally trained candidates varies among many examining agencies. Academic transcripts and verification of program completion are the most commonly required documentation. Proof of identification and proof of professional registration in the home country may also be required.

Of the 19 responding agencies, 13 require candidates to supply some form of documentation themselves. These agencies may require certified translations into English or French. The other agencies do not require documentation directly from candidates because the regulatory bodies handle this part of the process.

Candidates from some jurisdictions are unable to arrange for documentation to be sent directly to Canada because of war, instability or strife in those countries. Four agencies have a process for accepting alternative documents in such circumstances. Two agencies provide no options for such candidates, and others may accept alternative documents on a case-by-case basis.

Fees

Examination fees may be costly for some candidates. Total examination fees range from \$421 to over \$6,000.

Fees	Number of Agencies*
Under \$500	3
\$501–\$1,000	7
\$1,001–\$5,000	8
Over \$5,000	1

* Two agencies have different fees depending on the candidate’s residency status, or depending on whether the candidate is a graduate of an accredited institution. Two respondents indicated that they do not charge fees because fees are collected by the regulatory body.

Communication with applicants

All respondents provide information about the examination process to candidates in a range of ways, including websites, e-mail, information packages and response to phone inquiries.

Key challenges faced by internationally trained candidates (as reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Language barriers
- Lack of familiarity with the Canadian practice environment, including the role and scope of practice
- Passing the examinations
- Lack of familiarity with multiple-choice exams or competency exams
- Lack of adequate preparation
- Obtaining documents from abroad at all or in a timely manner
- Obtaining visas to come to Canada to write the exam
- Recalling foundational knowledge for the exam, after having been in practice for some time
- Becoming eligible for exams through PLA process

Key challenges faced by the agencies in improving access for internationally trained candidates (as reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Providing more and better information online
- Increasing the number of exam locations

Three agencies stated that improving access is the responsibility of the regulatory body. One agency said it was not aware of any challenges faced by internationally trained candidates in taking examinations. Some respondents also indicated that while mutual recognition agreements are not currently in place, they would support a process to enable further recognition of credentials.

Candidates typically receive not only their examination results, but also details regarding their performance. Candidates who are unsuccessful on the exam may receive additional performance information.

Appeal or review process

The majority of examining agencies have appeal or review processes. Those that do not indicated that the regulatory body handles appeals. Several types of appeal or review were reported: candidates may initiate appeals regarding examination conditions, extenuating circumstances affecting exam performance, allegations of cheating on an exam, or examination results.

Typically, staff involved in exam scoring or administration are not also involved in appeals.

Training

Most agencies (15 of 19) provide training about conducting examinations, usually through in-person sessions or by making training materials available.

Fewer agencies offer training to staff about conducting appeals or reviews. Five provide no training at all, three provide formal training, five provide guidelines for making decisions, and three engage persons with appropriate qualifications. Three organizations did not answer this question.

Examination methods

Criterion-referenced scoring is much more widely used than norm-referenced scoring (see sidebar for definitions). Other scoring methods reported were a combination of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced, rating scales and/or checklists, and "passing grade."

The number of rewrites permitted varies widely, from two to unlimited.

All examination organizations ensure that knowledge and skills being tested reflect the current state of the professions by utilizing practice or content experts to validate exam questions, basing questions on a competency profile or conducting a practice analysis.

Most examinations must be written in Canada, although the application process can be initiated abroad. Several examining agencies reported that internationally trained candidates may have difficulty obtaining visas to enter Canada to write exams.

Criterion-referenced tests (CRTs) are intended to measure how well a person has learned a specific body of knowledge and skills. Multiple-choice tests for driver's licences and on-the-road driving tests are both examples of criterion-referenced tests. As on most other CRTs, it is possible for everyone who knows about driving rules and who drives reasonably well to earn a passing score.

In contrast, **norm-referenced tests (NRTs)** are made to compare test-takers with one another. On an NRT driving test, test-takers would be measured to see who knows most or least about driving rules or who drives better or worse. Scores would be ranked by percentages, with half scoring above and half below the midpoint.

www.fairtest.org/criterion-and-standards-referenced-tests (Last accessed November 18, 2008)

Among the 19 agencies, 14 outsource some part of the examination process to an outside organization. Exam site administration and statistical analysis are the most commonly outsourced functions.

Policies on conflict of interest, bias and discrimination

Processes used to control for bias vary widely. They include extensive multi-step processes that include reviewers from a variety of backgrounds and regions, flagging items with unusual response patterns, item-writing protocols and basic methods such as processing questions through a plain-language service.

Source countries of candidates

Where candidates were initially trained (as listed most frequently by respondents):

- Canada
- India
- USA
- Saudi Arabia
- Philippines
- Egypt
- Israel

CONCLUSIONS

The OFC's study has confirmed that qualifications assessment agencies play a pivotal role in access to regulated professions in Ontario. Many candidates for registration must deal with at least one and sometimes two or more assessment agencies, in addition to their interactions with a regulatory body, in order to enter their professions. The study results are reflected in the stories of individual applicants for registration who have shared their experiences with the OFC.

“What Applicants Say

I came to Canada in August 2004. It was terrible then. You can name pretty much any problem and it was there. Number one, identifying where to get the information.... [Eventually] I was given the information, when the exams were, what were the options that were available, and a very realistic appraisal of the difficulties that I would face. If I had had the information then — in 2004 — [that] I can have now I would simply have proceeded ahead and gone to write my exams rather than waiting this three-year period. So many people are coming to Canada, to Ontario, with their dreams, working in the health sector. So I'm very optimistic that things are going to be very positive, different from what I faced. ”

– *An international medical graduate, with an advanced degree in health policy*

Difficulties in Qualifications Assessment

The following aspects of the assessment process were identified through the study as being of particular concern.

Length of the Process

The time needed to complete an assessment varies significantly. It can take from two weeks to over two years to go through the process, depending on how quickly documentation from abroad can be obtained, how often exams are offered or the number of steps in the qualifying process.

The length of the process and the significant backlogs in some cases raise questions about the relevance and necessity of the internal policies that certain assessment agencies follow.

Required Documentation

Qualifications assessment agencies require academic transcripts in almost all cases in order to undertake an assessment. Other documents such as proof of language proficiency, program verification, proof of work experience and proof of professional licensure may also be required.

Obtaining documents from overseas is a major cause of delays in the assessment process and can prevent persons from practising in their profession for months or years.

Most agencies have a process to accept alternative documentation when a candidate is unable to obtain originals, or they defer to the regulatory bodies to resolve the issue. However, six of the 29 organizations that responded to the OFC questionnaire offer no options to candidates who are unable to obtain required documents because of instability or strife in their home countries. Insisting upon original documentation without offering alternatives may prevent persons from practising in the professions.

Fees

The cost of assessment can be a barrier to access for candidates. When candidates must pay hundreds or thousands of dollars in order to gain access to a profession, affordability becomes a factor — unrelated to knowledge and skill — in determining who completes the process.

Appeal or Review Process

Two of the responding organizations have no appeal or review process. Failure to provide candidates with an opportunity to appeal decisions or have decisions reviewed is inconsistent with the concept of fair access.

What Applicants Say

As an Ontario medical school student you go through the program knowing that you have to write exams. Information about the qualifying exams was relatively easy to find, and through school we had access to practice exams and prep courses. I felt that exam fees were expensive, numerous and incurred at a time when you had to pay licensing fees, insurance and many other new costs. The practical component of the College of Family Physicians of Canada exams involves assessors and actors; therefore, human error is possible.

— Ontario medical graduate

Assessment Methods

In most cases, qualifications assessment agencies have criteria to determine the equivalency of a credential or to test knowledge, skills or competencies. When comparing international and Canadian qualifications, they typically consider criteria such as admission standards, level of the program, recognition of the issuing institution in its own jurisdiction and whether the credential provides access to other programs. If work experience is considered, recency of practice is relevant. Regulatory bodies and assessment agencies should be aware that the evaluation of a person's credentials will not provide a complete picture of their skills and abilities.

Training

Most organizations provide training to staff on conducting assessments; however, 13 qualifications assessment agencies provide no training to individuals on making internal review or appeal decisions.

FARPA and the RHPA require regulated professions to ensure that decision-makers receive training.⁴ Results of this study show that there are inconsistencies with regard to training in two areas: the conduct of assessments, and internal review or appeal decisions.

Not all organizations provide training, and among those that do, some provide training in one area but not the other.

Assessment Decisions

Candidates are not always provided with the rationale for decisions made in their case. These decisions are not transparent and are therefore inconsistent with the concept of fair access.

Key challenges faced by internationally trained candidates (challenges most frequently reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Language
- Cost
- Access to programs or courses
- Obtaining documentation
- Length of the licensure process
- Gaps in original training

Key challenges faced by agencies in improving access for internationally trained candidates (challenges most frequently reported by questionnaire respondents):

- Lack of resources (such as staff, equipment, or financial or technological resources)
- Lack of space in educational institutions

What Applicants Say

Being a new immigrant, I had my credentials evaluated by an evaluation service. I had to go to India to have my transcripts sent from various institutions. On the basis of the credential report that I received, I was able to find employment but not in my field of study. Within the same year I also applied for a licence to practise in my profession, but the regulatory body did not accept my evaluation report. In order to complete their process I have to arrange for the same transcripts to be sent from India all over again.

– *An internationally trained candidate*

⁴ FARPA s. 11 and RHPA s. 22.4(3)

Promising Practices

The OFC was encouraged to learn through this study that many qualifications assessment agencies are already addressing the difficulties faced by candidates. Some organizations have practices that can be shared and adapted to promote timely, transparent and equitable access to professions. These include:

- Communicating specific turnaround times for application processing and appeals
- Offering assistance to applicants who have encountered difficulty obtaining documentation for reasons beyond their control
- Publishing a privacy policy to govern how candidates are identified and how documentation that contains identifying information is handled
- Clearly communicating credentials evaluation criteria, such as level of program (university or secondary school), recognition of the academic institution by authorities in its own jurisdiction, access to other programs based on the qualification, and accreditation status of the institution
- Providing candidates with the opportunity to challenge decisions through an appeal or review process
- Clearly communicating within decision letters the basis upon which particular assessment decisions were made and next steps for the candidate
- Ensuring that evaluators and decision-makers have received training on how to conduct assessments and how to make review or appeal decisions
- Following clearly defined processes to control for conflict of interest, discrimination and bias, such as removing identifying information from documentation used in appeal decisions; having conflict-of-interest agreements with all decision-makers; and ensuring that decisions on reviews or appeals are made by persons who were not involved in the original decisions

Qualifications assessment agencies have their own processes, costs and timelines that shape the experience of candidates who must undergo assessment in order to practise in their professions. While there are agencies whose practices are open and timely, others have practices that are costly and lengthy and leave candidates without reasons for decisions made in their case and without opportunities to challenge those decisions. These qualifications assessment agencies must improve their practices.

As a result of undertaking this study and publishing its results, the Fairness Commissioner has provided organizations that conduct assessments of qualifications with information about the practices of agencies similar to their own. Each organization should now be able to reflect on its own processes in light of this study and identify practices that work well and others that require improvement.

“What Applicants Say

I don't know how the evaluation process was done, who undertook the evaluation or what their assessment credentials are. I was never provided with any sort of record of the evaluation to show what my deficiencies are relative to Ontario standards, or comprehensive report. Nor was I provided with the reasons for the decision made in my case. ”

– *An internationally trained lawyer*

RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment of qualifications is a central component of registration practices in Ontario. These processes must be transparent, objective, impartial and fair in order to ensure that qualified persons who wish to practise in the profession for which they have been trained are not barred from doing so unnecessarily. Qualifications assessment agencies must examine their own processes and work to remove barriers to access. In addition, regulatory bodies are responsible for taking reasonable measures to ensure that if they rely on an outside agency to assess qualifications, the assessments are done in a manner that is transparent, objective, impartial and fair.

Recommendations to Qualifications Assessment Agencies

Streamline Overlapping Processes

Regulatory bodies and qualifications assessment agencies should take every opportunity to streamline overlapping processes so that candidates do not have to go through costly and lengthy duplicate verification processes.

Assist Candidates to Secure Documentation

Respondents reported that internationally trained candidates often have difficulty obtaining documents from abroad. Some assessment organizations have agreements to allow original documents received directly from issuing institutions to be shared with other assessment organizations, with permission from the candidate, so that original documents do not have to be obtained repeatedly. Other organizations will sometimes contact issuing institutions on behalf of applicants who are experiencing difficulty to facilitate the submission of required documentation.

Clarify Documentation Requirements

Qualifications assessment agencies should publish detailed documentation requirements on their websites that specify the types of documents required, the manner in which they must be sent, the information that they must contain and any other important criteria. Examples of correct and incorrect submissions may prove useful. In addition, agencies might follow the lead of the organizations that are already publishing country-specific documentation information so that candidates have access to relevant guidelines. To be more helpful, agencies may wish to encourage candidates who have studied overseas to make the necessary arrangements to have documents sent to Canada while they are still abroad.

Conduct Credentials Assessments Upfront

Credentials assessments that are conducted before a candidate has moved to Canada will alleviate difficulties in obtaining documents from overseas and will provide candidates with important information about whether and how their credentials will be recognized. Candidates who are aware before they leave home that they are required to fill gaps in knowledge, complete courses or take additional steps may be in a better position to plan for their families, finances and career options than candidates who receive credentials assessment decisions while settling in a new country.

Consider Alternatives to Unavailable Documentation

When candidates are unable to obtain original documentation because of strife or instability in their home countries, qualifications assessment agencies should consider alternatives. Respondents to this survey offer a range of alternatives, such as accepting notarized photocopies or sworn statements, working with candidates on an individual basis to identify an appropriate solution and accepting attestations from individuals who are registered in the same profession and have knowledge of the candidate's practice.

Provide Clear Assessment Criteria

Respondents often stated that internationally trained applicants face challenges in satisfying assessment criteria. Qualifications assessment agencies can enhance information provided to candidates by including clear assessment criteria. Internationally trained candidates may begin the assessment process from overseas; providing information about language requirements and assessment online may enable individuals to prepare in advance of their arrival in Canada.

Candidates may have gaps in their training that make it difficult for them to meet assessment criteria. Providing information about assessment criteria at the outset would help candidates to fill those gaps before applying for registration. Qualifications assessment agencies can play an important role by clearly communicating the criteria required in order for a candidate's credentials to be deemed equivalent to Canadian credentials, and the level of knowledge required to pass a particular assessment. Some qualifications assessment agencies offer self-assessment tools (such as online questions, quizzes and checklists) that allow candidates to determine their own likelihood of being successful in the actual assessment. This is a promising practice that helps candidates prepare adequately for the assessment process.

Provide Opportunities for Appeal

As established by Judge George M. Thomson in *Review of Appeal Processes from Registration Decisions in Ontario's Regulated Professions*, the opportunity to appeal decisions is an important aspect of fair registration practices.⁵ All qualifications assessment agencies should have an appeal process so that candidates may challenge decisions made in their case.

Clarify Requisite Language Skills

Qualifications assessment agencies reported that internationally trained candidates often face language difficulties. If language testing is required, agencies should publish the language test scores that are required for candidates to advance in the assessment process.

Even when language testing is not part of the process, qualifications assessment agencies stated that internationally trained candidates may be unable to meet other assessment criteria because of language barriers. By clarifying the level of language proficiency that is necessary to be successful in the assessment, agencies can play a helpful role in enabling candidates to prepare. One approach would be to identify language test scores associated with the level of ability necessary to be successful.

⁵ Thomson, George M., *Review of Appeal Processes from Registration Decisions in Ontario's Regulated Professions* (2005), pp. viii, xv, 5

Recommendation to Regulatory Bodies

Engage with Qualifications Assessment Agencies

Whenever a regulatory body relies on an external agency to make qualifications assessments, it is the responsibility of the regulator to ensure that the practices of the agency are consistent with the principles of fairness outlined in the legislation to which the regulatory body is subject.⁶

Regulatory bodies must take this responsibility seriously not only because it is the law, but also because of the impact that qualifications assessment agencies have on applicants and the professions that they regulate. As noted in *Ontario's Regulated Professions: Report on the 2007 Study of Registration Practices*,⁷ most regulatory bodies are moving toward registration practices that are transparent, objective, impartial and fair. It is incumbent upon the regulatory bodies to ensure that the practices of their external partners are in keeping with the fair registration practices that they themselves are working toward.

As a first step, regulators should engage directly with the qualifications assessment agencies that they rely on. Regulators should ask whether the agencies participated in this study and ask participating agencies to share their responses. Second, regulators and assessment agencies must endeavour to establish an ongoing dialogue about how their processes can align most effectively. Every effort should be made to streamline processes and eliminate duplication so that the costs borne by applicants and the time needed to complete assessments can be reduced.

⁶ FARPA s. 10(2), RHPA s. 22.4(2)

⁷ Office of the Fairness Commissioner, *Ontario's Regulated Professions: Report on the 2007 Study of Registration Practices* (June 2008), p. 8

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE SECTIONS

This appendix reproduces two of the questionnaire's five sections, those directed at agencies that conduct degree equivalency assessment and examinations. The other three sections were similar to the degree equivalency assessment section.

DEGREE EQUIVALENCY ASSESSMENT

For the purposes of this questionnaire "degree equivalency assessment" refers to the assessment of academic credentials to determine if they are equivalent to another academic credential.

Degree Equivalency Assessment Process for Candidates

1. List and describe ALL the steps in the Degree Equivalency Assessment process that candidates undertake.

In particular, please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

1. How does a candidate initiate the process?
2. Can a candidate begin the assessment process before arriving in Canada? If yes, please describe when and how.
3. After a candidate initiates the process, what additional steps do they undertake?
4. At any point, does the assessment process differ for internationally trained individuals? If so, please describe when and how.

2. On average, how long does the ENTIRE Degree Equivalency Assessment process take for an individual candidate to complete?

Please note that for the purpose of this question, "entire assessment process" refers to the period from when a candidate initiates the process to when they receive a final assessment decision.

- 2a. Does the average time differ for internationally trained individuals? If so, why?

3. Currently, approximately how many candidates do you have whose "time in the assessment process" exceeds the average length of time it typically takes?

Please ensure that your description addresses the following questions:

1. What percentage of your current total candidate pool do these candidates represent?
2. What percentage of these candidates are internationally trained individuals?

4. Based on your experience in the last two years, what is the minimum amount of time that it takes for a candidate to go through the entire assessment process? What is the maximum amount of time?

5. What is the nature and frequency of contact between candidates and your organization?

In particular, please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

1. What mechanisms do you use to communicate with individual candidates about their application (e.g., e-mail, phone, letter, in-person meetings, other)?
2. What is the frequency of communication with individual candidates about their application?
3. Are there standard times in the assessment process at which you communicate with individual candidates about their application? If so, please describe these milestones and the communication mechanism.
4. Is the nature and frequency of communication different for internationally trained individuals?

Documentation/Evidence for Degree Equivalency Assessments

1. What documentation and/or other evidence is required for the Degree Equivalency Assessments offered by your organization?

Please check all that apply.

- Academic transcripts Course descriptions Job references Proof of professional registration in home country Language proficiency please describe type of evidence Other

- 1a. If answer to question 1 is "other", please specify.

2. Does the required documentation differ for internationally trained candidates? If so, how does it differ?

3. What is the process for dealing with documents or other evidence provided in languages other than English or French?

4. What options are available for candidates who do not have direct access to transcripts or other documentation or whose documents are unavailable or destroyed?

Fees for Degree Equivalency Assessments

Please list all fees that an applicant must pay in order to undergo the assessment.

Provision of Information about Degree Equivalency Assessment Process

1. Indicate how you make information about the following aspects of your assessment process available. Please check all that apply. If you check "other" please identify your method.

- A) The steps a candidate must undertake in the assessment process

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question A) is "other", please specify.

- B) The amount of time that the assessment process usually takes

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question B) is "other", please specify.

- C) Documents required for assessment and acceptable alternatives

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question C) is "other", please specify.

D) The role of professional associations, regulatory bodies, or educational institutions in the process for which credential assessment is being pursued

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question D) is “other”, please specify.

E) Information about all fees associated with the assessment

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question E) is “other”, please specify.

F) How decisions are conveyed to candidates

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question F) is “other”, please specify.

G) The criteria that will be used in the assessment

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question G) is “other”, please specify.

H) Relevant policies

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question H) is “other”, please specify.

I) How the appeal process works

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question I) is “other”, please specify.

J) Country-specific information

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question J) is “other”, please specify.

2. Does your organization make other resources available to candidates?

Please check all that apply.

- Application checklist Self-assessment tool Contact information regarding support or study groups Courses, workshops etc. Sample examinations Study guides, preparation guides Other
-

2a. If answer to question 2 is “other”, please specify.

3. How is the final assessment decision conveyed to the candidate? What information concerning the assessment decision made in their case is available to candidates?

4. In your provision of information about assessments, how do you accommodate candidates with special needs, e.g. visual impairment?

Appeals Process for Degree Equivalency Assessments

1. Is there an appeal or review process?
 Yes No

2. If yes, describe how you inform candidates of any rights they have to request a further review of, or appeal from, the Degree Equivalency Assessment decision.

3. How are candidates informed of the steps to take in order to request an appeal or review?

4. Describe the steps to request an appeal or review.

5. Do candidates have the opportunity to make submissions in support of an appeal?

6. What information is available to candidates concerning the decision made in their case?

7. How do candidates request access to information concerning the decision made in their case and how is it conveyed to them?

8. What are the deadlines to request an appeal or review and to make submissions?

Degree Equivalency Assessment Policies

1. How are individual candidates identified on internal documentation for Degree Equivalency Assessment purposes?

2. How does your organization record Degree Equivalency Assessment decisions?

3. How long are Degree Equivalency Assessment decisions kept on file?

4. Must assessments be performed within a maximum period after application to the regulatory body? Are the assessments valid for only a limited period? If so, what are these time limits?

5. How are complaints concerning the Degree Equivalency Assessment process handle

6. Do you outsource any part of the Degree Equivalency Assessment process to an outside organization? If yes, please describe what elements you outsource and why.

7. How are your organization's Degree Equivalency Assessment policies documented?

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Who is involved in the administration of the assessment and what are their roles and responsibilities?

2. Describe any policies you have regarding separation of jobs and/or responsibilities for individuals who administer assessments.

In particular, please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

1. Do the individuals who make the assessment decisions have a role in the appeal process? If so, please describe the role.
2. If your organization provides examinations, and at least one other type of assessment (e.g., competency, prior learning, credential), do the same individuals administer the exams and administer the other assessments?

-
3. What training does your organization provide to individuals on how to conduct Degree Equivalency Assessments?

Please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

1. Currently, what proportion of individuals who conduct Degree Equivalency Assessments have received this training?
2. Who or what organization provides the training?
3. Is this training mandatory for all individuals who assess qualifications? Is it required or taken by any other staff members?
4. How often is this training updated?

-
4. What training does your organization provide to individuals on how to make internal review or appeal decisions regarding Degree Equivalency Assessments?

Please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

1. Currently, what proportion of individuals who conduct internal reviews or appeals for Degree Equivalency Assessments have received this training?
2. Who or what organization provides the training?
3. Is this training mandatory for all individuals who conduct internal reviews or appeals? Is it required or taken by any other staff members?
4. How often is this training updated?

-
5. How do you ensure that individuals who make decisions about examination results are free from any conflict of interest?

-
6. How do you ensure that individuals who make decisions about examination results make impartial and non-discriminatory judgments?

Internationally Trained Candidates

1. What are the key challenges faced by internationally trained candidates who apply to your organization for assessment?
-
2. What are the key challenges your organization faces in continuing to improve access for internationally trained candidates? What plans do you have to address these challenges?
-

Degree Equivalency Assessment Practices

1. Describe how your organization ensures that information used in the assessment about educational systems and credentials from outside Canada is current and accurate.
2. Do staff use previous assessment decisions to assist in maintaining consistency when assessing credentials of candidates from the same jurisdictions/institutions? If so, how?
3. How does the status of an institution in its home country impact recognition of the credential by your organization?
4. Please name and describe any mutual recognition agreements that you have entered into to recognize qualifications from other jurisdictions.
5. Are there any jurisdictions in the world that produce graduates who are automatically assessed as equivalent to Canadian graduates? If so, please list the jurisdictions and credentials for each profession.
6. Describe the criteria that must be met in order for academic credentials to be deemed equivalent to the Canadian credential to which they are being compared.

In particular, please ensure that your description addresses the following questions

1. How does your organization determine the level (e.g., baccalaureate, master's, Ph.D.) of credential presented for assessment?
2. What criteria are applied to determine the type (e.g., engineering, dentistry) of credential presented for assessment?
7. Describe the criteria that must be met in order for academic credentials to be authenticated.

Statistics and Information (Ontario)

1. List the top five source countries and number of candidates for whom you provide Degree Equivalency Assessments (in order of number of candidates in all professions).

	Countries where candidates were initially trained in the profession 2007		Countries where candidates were initially trained in the profession 2006		Countries where candidates were initially trained in the profession 2005	
	Number of candidates 2007	Number of candidates 2007	Number of candidates 2006	Number of candidates 2006	Number of candidates 2005	Number of candidates 2005
1st						
2nd						
3rd						
4th						
5th						

2. If your organization provides Degree Equivalency Assessments to individuals pursuing registration in more than one profession, list the top five professions being pursued in Ontario by internationally trained candidates undergoing these assessments (in order of number of candidates).

	Professions 2007	Number of candidates 2007	Professions 2006	Number of candidates 2006	Professions 2005	Number of candidates 2005
1st						
2nd						
3rd						
4th						
5th						

3. For your entire applicant pool, state the number of Degree Equivalency Assessments and appeals of those assessments. (Assessments & Appeals)

	Number 2007	Number 2006	Number 2005
Successful Appeals			
Decisions Appealed			
Assessments Completed			
Assessments Requested			

4. List the home country of candidates for whom you handle the largest number of appeals. (Appeals)

	Countries 2007	Countries 2006	Countries 2005
Successful Appeals			
Decisions Appealed			

5. List the professions of candidates for whom you handle the largest number of appeals.

	Professions 2007	Number of candidates 2007	Professions 2006	Number of candidates 2006	Professions 2005	Number of candidates 2005
1st						
2nd						
3rd						
4th						
5th						

6. List the professions of candidates who have had the largest number of successful appeals.

	Number of Professions 2007	Number of candidates 2007	Number of Professions 2006	Number of candidates 2006	Number of Professions 2005	Number of candidates 2005
1st						
2nd						
3rd						
4th						
5th						

7. Indicate the languages in which application information materials for Degree Equivalency Assessments are available. (Language)

	2007	2006	2005
English	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
French	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
Other			

Additional Information

1. Please provide any additional comments about your practices or the questionnaire here (optional).

EXAMINATIONS

For the purposes of this questionnaire, “examination” refers to a test of knowledge, skill or ability.

Examination Process for Candidates

1. List and describe ALL the steps in the Examination process that candidates undertake.

In particular, please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

1. How does a candidate initiate the process?
2. Can a candidate begin the examination process before arriving in Canada? If yes, please describe when and how.
3. After a candidate initiates the process, what additional steps do they undertake?
4. At any point, does the examination process differ for internationally trained individuals? If so, please describe when and how.

2. On average, how long does the ENTIRE Examination process take for an individual candidate to complete?

Please note that for the purpose of this question, “entire examination process” refers to the period from when a candidate initiates the process to when they receive a final examination decision.

- 2a. Does the average time differ for internationally trained individuals? If so, why?

3. Currently, approximately how many candidates do you have whose “time in the examination process” exceeds the average length of time it typically takes?

Please ensure that your description addresses the following questions:

1. What percentage of these candidates are internationally trained individuals?

4. Based on your experience in the last two years, what is the minimum amount of time that it takes for a candidate to go through the entire examination process? What is the maximum amount of time?

5. What is the nature and frequency of contact between candidates and your organization?

In particular, please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

1. What mechanisms do you use to communicate with individual candidates about their application (e.g., e-mail, phone, letter, in-person meetings, other)?
2. What is the frequency of communication with individual candidates about their application?
3. Are there standard times in the examination process at which you communicate with individual candidates about their application? If so, please describe these milestones and the communication mechanism.
4. Is the nature and frequency of communication different for internationally trained individuals?

Documentation/Evidence for Examinations

1. What documentation and/or other evidence is required for the Examinations offered by your organization?

Please check all that apply.

- Academic transcripts Course descriptions Job references Proof of professional registration in home country Language proficiency please describe type of evidence Other

- 1a. If answer to question 1 is “other”, please specify.

2. Does the required documentation differ for internationally trained candidates? If so, how does it differ?

3. What is the process for dealing with documents or other evidence provided in languages other than English or French?

4. What options are available for candidates who do not have direct access to transcripts or other documentation or whose documents are unavailable or destroyed?

Fees for Examinations

Please list all fees that an applicant must pay in order to undergo the examination.

Provision of Information about Examination Process

1. Indicate how you make information about the following aspects of your examination process publicly available. Please check all that apply. If you check “other” please identify your method.

A) The steps a candidate must undertake in the examination process

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question A) is “other”, please specify.

B) The amount of time that the examination process usually takes

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question B) is “other”, please specify.

C) Documents required for examination and acceptable alternatives

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question C) is “other”, please specify.

D) The role of professional associations, regulatory bodies, or educational institutions in the process for which credential examination is being pursued

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question D) is “other”, please specify.

E) Information about all fees associated with the examination

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question E) is “other”, please specify.

F) How decisions are conveyed to candidates

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question F) is “other”, please specify.

G) The criteria that will be used in the examination

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question G) is “other”, please specify.

H) Relevant policies

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question H) is “other”, please specify.

I) How the appeal process works

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question I) is “other”, please specify.

J) Country-specific information

- Website E-mail response to individual query E-mail information package Information package, available via mail, or in person Telephone response to individual query Other

If answer to question J) is “other”, please specify.

2. Does your organization make other resources available to candidates?

Please check all that apply.

- Application checklist Self-examination tool Contact information regarding support or study groups Courses, workshops etc. Sample examinations Study guides, preparation guides Other
-

2a. If answer to question 2 is “other”, please specify.

3. How is the final examination decision conveyed to the candidate? What information concerning the examination decision made in their case is available to candidates?

4. In your provision of information about examinations, how do you accommodate candidates with special needs, e.g. visual impairment?

Appeals Process for Examinations

1. Is there an appeal or review process?

- Yes No
-

2. If yes, describe how you inform candidates of any rights they have to request a further review of, or appeal from, the Degree Equivalency Assessment decision.

3. How are candidates informed of the steps to take in order to request an appeal or review?

4. Describe the steps to request an appeal or review.

5. Do candidates have the opportunity to make submissions in support of an appeal?

6. What information is available to candidates concerning the decision made in their case?

7. How do candidates request access to information concerning the decision made in their case and how is it conveyed to them?

8. What are the deadlines to request an appeal or review and to make submissions?

Examination Policies

1. How are individual candidates identified on internal documentation for Examination purposes?

2. How does your organization record Examination decisions?

3. How long are Examination decisions kept on file?

4. Must examinations be performed within a maximum period after application to the regulatory body? Are the examinations valid for only a limited period? If so, what are these time limits?

5. How are complaints concerning the Examination process handled?

6. Do you outsource any part of the Examination process to an outside organization? If yes, please describe what elements you outsource and why.

7. How are your organization's Examination policies documented?

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Who is involved in the administration of the examination and what are their roles and responsibilities?

2. Describe any policies you have regarding separation of jobs and/or responsibilities for individuals who administer examinations.

In particular, please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

 1. Do the individuals who make the examination decisions have a role in the appeal process? If so, please describe the role.
 2. If your organization provides examinations, and at least one other type of examination (e.g., competency, prior learning, credential), do the same individuals administer the exams and administer the other examinations?

3. What training does your organization provide to individuals on how to conduct Examinations?

Please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

 1. Currently, what proportion of individuals who conduct Examinations have received this training?
 2. Who or what organization provides the training?
 3. Is this training mandatory for all individuals who assess qualifications? Is it required or taken by any other staff members?
 4. How often is this training updated?

4. What training does your organization provide to individuals on how to make internal review or appeal decisions regarding Examinations?

Please ensure your description addresses the following questions:

 1. Currently, what proportion of individuals who conduct internal reviews or appeals for Examinations have received this training?
 2. Who or what organization provides the training?
 3. Is this training mandatory for all individuals who conduct internal reviews or appeals? Is it required or taken by any other staff members?
 4. How often is this training updated?

5. How do you ensure that individuals who make decisions about examination results are free from any conflict of interest?

6. How do you ensure that individuals who make decisions about examination results make impartial and non-discriminatory judgments?

Internationally Trained Candidates

1. What are the key challenges faced by internationally trained candidates who apply to your organization for examination?
-
2. What are the key challenges your organization faces in continuing to improve access for internationally trained candidates? What plans do you have to address these challenges?
-

Examination Practices

Please fill in the information below for each exam offered by your organization.

Name of Examination I:

Number of Rewrites Permitted:

Format (Please check all that apply): Multiple-choice Short answers Essay Online Pen/Pencil and Paper Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

Scoring Method: Norm-referenced Criterion-referenced Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

Name of Examination II:

Number of Rewrites Permitted:

Format (Please check all that apply): Multiple-choice Short answers Essay Online Pen/Pencil and Paper Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

Scoring Method: Norm-referenced Criterion-referenced Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

Name of Examination III:

Number of Rewrites Permitted:

Format (Please check all that apply): Multiple-choice Short answers Essay Online Pen/Pencil and Paper Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

Scoring Method: Norm-referenced Criterion-referenced Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

Name of Examination IV:

Number of Rewrites Permitted:

Format (Please check all that apply): Multiple-choice Short answers Essay Online Pen/Pencil and Paper Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

Scoring Method: Norm-referenced Criterion-referenced Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

Name of Examination V:

Number of Rewrites Permitted:

Format (Please check all that apply): Multiple-choice Short answers Essay Online Pen/Pencil and Paper Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

Scoring Method: Norm-referenced Criterion-referenced Other

If answer is “other”, please specify.

1. How do you ensure that the knowledge/skills being tested reflect the current state of the profession that the candidate is pursuing?

2. Describe how each exam is tested for validity and reliability. If results are below desired levels, how do you correct the deficiencies?

3. How often do you update exam questions, and what is the process for doing so?

4. How do you ensure that the examination questions are free of bias?

5. Do you provide accommodation for candidates with special needs? If so, please describe.

Statistics and Information (Ontario)

1. List the top five source countries and number of candidates for whom you provide Examinations (in order of number of candidates in all professions).

	Countries where candidates were initially trained in the profession 2007	Number of candidates 2007	Countries where candidates were initially trained in the profession 2006	Number of candidates 2006	Countries where candidates were initially trained in the profession 2005	Number of candidates 2005
1st						
2nd						
3rd						
4th						
5th						

2. If your organization provides Examinations to individuals pursuing registration in more than one profession, list the top five professions being pursued in Ontario by internationally trained candidates undergoing these assessments (in order of number of candidates).

	Professions 2007	Number of candidates 2007	Professions 2006	Number of candidates 2006	Professions 2005	Number of candidates 2005
1st						
2nd						
3rd						
4th						
5th						

3. For your entire applicant pool, state the number of Examinations and appeals of those assessments. (Assessments & Appeals)

	Number 2007	Number 2006	Number 2005
Successful Appeals			
Decisions Appealed			
Assessments Completed			
Assessments Requested			

4. List the home country of candidates for whom you handle the largest number of appeals. (Appeals)

	Countries 2007	Countries 2006	Countries 2005
Successful Appeals			
Decisions Appealed			

5. List the professions of candidates for whom you handle the largest number of appeals.

	Professions 2007	Number of candidates 2007	Professions 2006	Number of candidates 2006	Professions 2005	Number of candidates 2005
1st						
2nd						
3rd						
4th						
5th						

6. List the professions of candidates who have had the largest number of successful appeals.

	Professions 2007	Number of candidates 2007	Professions 2006	Number of candidates 2006	Professions 2005	Number of candidates 2005
1st						
2nd						
3rd						
4th						
5th						

7. Indicate the languages in which application information materials for Examinations are available.
(Language)

	2007	2006	2005
English	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
French	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> yes <input type="checkbox"/> no
Other			

Additional Information

1. Please provide any additional comments about your practices or the questionnaire here (optional).

APPENDIX B: QUALIFICATIONS ASSESSMENT AGENCIES USED BY THE REGULATED PROFESSIONS

As reported by the professions in the OFC's 2007 Study of Registration Practices.

Profession	Qualifications Assessment Agencies
<i>Used by most</i>	World Education Services (WES)
<i>Used by some</i>	International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)
<i>Used by some</i>	University of Toronto, Comparative Education Service
Architects	National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (US) Canadian Architectural Certification Board
Audiologists and Speech- Language Pathologists	International Credential Evaluation Service
Chiropodists	Michener Institute for Applied Health Sciences
Chiropractors	Canadian Chiropractic Examining Board
Dental Hygienists	National Dental Hygiene Certification Board
Dental Surgeons	National Dental Examining Board of Canada Royal College of Dentists of Canada University of Toronto, Faculty of Dentistry University of Western Ontario, Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry
Dental Technologists	International Credential Assessment Service of Canada
Denturists	International Credential Assessment Service of Canada International Credential Evaluation Service
Dietitians	Alliance of Canadian Dietetic Regulatory Bodies
Lawyers	National Committee on Accreditation of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada
Management Accountants	Society of Management Accountants of Canada
Massage Therapists	Centennial College, Centre for Applied Research in Health Technology and Education
Medical Laboratory Technologists	Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science
Medical Radiation Technologists	Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists
Midwives	Ryerson University, International Midwifery Pre-registration Program
Nurses	Assessment Strategies Incorporated Canadian Nurses Association

Profession	Qualifications Assessment Agencies
Occupational Therapists	Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
Opticians	National Association of Canadian Optician Regulators
Optometrists	Canadian Examiners in Optometry
Pharmacists	Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada
Physicians and Surgeons	College of Family Physicians of Canada Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada Centre for the Evaluation of Health Professionals Educated Abroad Medical Council of Canada
Physiotherapists	Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators
Psychologists	Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards
Respiratory Therapists	Canadian Board for Respiratory Care Michener Institute for Applied Health Sciences Algonquin College
Social Workers	Canadian Association of Social Workers
Veterinarians	American Veterinary Medical Association National Examining Board of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association

