

A Regulators' Guide to Improving Qualification Recognition Practices: Credential Assessment Users' Manual

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Introduction

A credential is the documented evidence of learning based on completion of a recognized program of study, training, work experience, or prior learning assessment. Degrees, diplomas, certificates, and licences are all examples of credentials.¹ Foreign credential assessment refers to the process of determining how academic credentials earned from educational institutions outside Canada compare to those earned within Canada.

In most regulated occupations, credential assessment is only one component of qualification assessment. Canadian regulatory authorities may also evaluate an individual's regulatory history, practical training and work experience from another jurisdiction. Foreign qualifications are normally compared to the expectations for Canadian-trained entrants to the occupation.

For the purposes of this Guide, credential assessment refers to the process of evaluating an individual's academic qualifications earned from an education institution to determine if the qualification is substantially equivalent to the education requirements for a Canadian-trained professional.

Regulatory authorities in Saskatchewan face increasing demands to assess credentials obtained in other jurisdictions for the purposes of licensing in Saskatchewan. Some regulators use their own staff to assess credentials; others rely on a third party agency. In either case, regulators use the information from the assessment to make licensing decisions. They need to ensure that the information obtained from an assessment is valid and reliable. There is also increasing pressure for regulators to ensure that their credential assessment practices and decision-making processes are fair, transparent, objective, and impartial. Smaller organizations may discover that they do not have the necessary resources or expertise to appropriately assess credentials. These organizations would be well advised to seek external expertise.

A Regulators' Guide to Improving Qualification Recognition Practices: Credential Assessment was created to assist regulators in reviewing their own practices against emerging best practices in credential assessment. The content of the tool was designed using currently available documents describing both the technical requirements for valid and reliable credential assessments and supporting processes that need to be in place to demonstrate fairness, transparency and objectivity. The content of *A Regulators' Guide* is specific to credential assessment practices; however, many of the principles can be applied to other aspects of the qualification assessment and recognition process (e.g. examinations, appeals etc.)

Purpose

A Regulator's Guide to Improving Qualification Recognition Practices: Credential Assessment was designed to assist regulators to:

- 1) Understand what constitutes best credential assessment practices;
- 2) Review their organization's credential assessment processes to ensure they are transparent, objective, impartial, and fair;
- 3) Document their current practices compared to best practices;
- 4) Identify where improvement or enhancement is needed;
- 5) Gather ideas about what other organizations have done to improve their practices; and,
- 6) Take action to continually improve their credential assessment practices.

¹The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (n.d.). *General guiding principles for good practice in the assessment of foreign credentials*. Retrieved 2010-02-25.



Principles Underlying Best Practices in Credential Assessment²

- 1) Holders of foreign qualifications should have adequate access, upon request, to an assessment of their foreign qualifications.
- 2) Assessments should be free from any form of racial, religious, political or sexual discrimination.
- 3) Assessment procedures and criteria should be clear, rational and reliable to ensure all applicants receive a fair consideration of their application and that consistent determinations are made.
- 4) Assessments should be performed by appropriately trained individuals.³
- 5) The general approach to foreign credentials and how they are compared to a particular system should take into account the diversity of education traditions in the world.
- 6) Procedures for the assessment of foreign credentials should be periodically reviewed with a view to increasing clarity and eliminating, when possible, requirements leading to undue complications in the procedure.
- 7) Applicants should receive standardized information concerning fees, processes, timelines, assessment criteria and clear reasons for decisions.
- 8) Applicants who disagree with a decision should have access to an appeal or review of the decision. Applicants should have access to the records concerning their assessment.

How the Principles Translate into Action

A Regulators' Guide is divided into five sections.

Section 1 Providing Information to Candidates: Applicants should be provided with clear and understandable information about the credential assessment process.

Section 2 Assessment Process: Regulators should ensure their processes are transparent, impartial, objective, and fair, whether completing their own credentials assessments or using a third party. There are key technical aspects to credential assessment that should be considered.


Section 3 Decisions, Responses, Reason and Appeals: Regulators should provide decisions about credential assessments in writing and in a timely manner. The decision should include the reason for the decision, and options for appealing the decision in a timely way.

Section 4 Access to Records: Regulators should establish a process to provide applicants with access to the regulator's records that are related to the applicant's credential assessment or appeal.

Section 5 Reporting and Reviewing Practice: Regulators should periodically review their procedures to increase clarity and eliminate undue complications in the procedures.

²The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (n.d.). *General guiding principles for good practice in the assessment of foreign credentials*. Retrieved 2010-02-25.

³The Government of Ontario (2006). *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006*. Chapter 31. Retrieved 2010-02-25.



Each section contains a chart. The left hand column consists of a list of “Best Practice Indicators” that describe observable features of a strong credential assessment process. “Current Practices” provides a space to record what processes your organization currently uses compared to each indicator. In the “Potential Enhancements” column, you can record opportunities for improving your organization’s practices. Finally, there is a column for “Action Plan and Expected Outcomes.” Use this space to list the concrete actions that can be taken. Across the bottom of the chart is an area entitled “Ideas and Resources.” In this area, we have begun to record things that various organizations have found helpful in their work. The final page of *A Regulators’ Guide* is a Work Plan that allows you to summarize your top priority actions, assign responsibility and establish timelines.

Planning your Review

A Regulators’ Guide can be used in a variety of ways. Your choice of methods will depend on how your organization is structured and the resources available. The first page of the Tool provides space for you to record the method you used and the individuals involved. This will be helpful in future years when you undertake a subsequent review of your processes.

The information required to complete *A Regulators’ Guide* will generally be gathered from:

- 1) The individuals (or third party agencies) that perform assessments, those who are responsible for decisions based on these assessments, and those who have overall responsibility for the organization’s policies and functioning.
- 2) Documents such as the following:
 - Template(s) of letters to applicants;
 - Policies and Procedures;
 - Credential Assessment(s) guides or resources; and,
 - Orientation or Training materials your organization provides to staff conducting credential assessments.

Consider using *A Regulators’ Guide* by:

- Planning a workshop that includes staff/board members;
- Scheduling a round table discussion involving all staff;
- Establishing a committee or team; and,
- Contacting your third party credential assessment agency.

You can complete all sections at once, or one at a time. You may want to complete the “Current Practices” column for all sections and then schedule a second session to consider “Potential Enhancements” and create an Action Plan. If you require more space to complete the sections, please continue on a separate page.



Steps to Using *A Regulators' Guide*

Step One: Read through *A Regulators' Guide* to become familiar with its format and the information included. Establish your review method, decide who will be involved and gather all relevant documents.

Step Two: Read the best practices indicators in a section. Once you are familiar with these concepts, you will be ready to start thinking about your organization's processes compared to these best practices and how you can demonstrate your current process.

Step Three: Note key aspects of your organization's practice in the "Current Practices" column. This process may involve discussions with external (i.e. third party assessors) and internal stakeholders and reference to documents. The process will likely affirm strengths of your current processes and help you to identify areas in which you want to improve.

Step Four: Next you will want to focus your thinking on opportunities for improvement. Reading the "Ideas and Resources" section, or reflecting on the following questions may be helpful.

- How accessible is information about your organization's credential assessment processes? To immigrants? To the public?
- What feedback have you had from applicants concerning your practices?
- How does your organization ensure the information provided is clear and understandable?
- How well and how consistently does your organization demonstrate each indicator? Would an external observer be able to see those indicators of best practices consistently demonstrated?
- Were you confident that you could provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate how you met each indicator?

Step Five: Once you have identified potential enhancements, you can document the necessary actions that will need to be carried out. You will likely not be able to implement all the changes at once, so the Work Plan can help you focus on actions that will make the biggest difference.

What Next?

Once the information is gathered, recorded, and analyzed to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement, you will be able to decide where to focus your efforts. Once there is agreement on the key areas for enhancement, we recommend developing a work plan. The work plan should identify what specific actions will be taken, who will be responsible for completing them, what resources are needed, what priority the action has been given and when it will be completed. A template is provided.

Consider whether some of the information you documented (i.e. current practices) could be disseminated to stakeholders as part of your communication strategy.

Example

Section 2. Assessment Processes

Whether completing their own credential assessments or using a third party, regulatory bodies must ensure that processes used are transparent, impartial, objective and fair.

2.1 Integrity of Process			
Best Practice Indicators	Current Practices	Potential Enhancements (What would improve the process?)	Action Plan and Expected Outcomes
Identify activities, (including the use of third parties for foreign credential assessment) that could, if not subject to appropriate controls, affect confidentiality, objectivity or impartiality.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidentiality agreements are signed by assessors. - If a conflict of interest is identified; assessor withdraws. 	Review confidentiality requirements with assessors.	Revisit current policies and develop new ones, if required.

2.6 Training Assessors			
Best Practice Indicators	Current Practices	Potential Enhancements (What would improve the process?)	Action Plan and Expected Outcomes
Ensure that individuals conducting assessments or making decisions (including responding to appeals) have the information and training to perform their assigned duties and responsibilities.	On-going professional development is provided via workshops or through existing relationships with third party assessors.	Consult with colleagues in other jurisdictions regarding their process and policies.	Increase knowledge base through relationships with internal and external experts in the field.

Section 3. Decisions, Responses, Reasons and Appeals

Regulated professions should provide written decisions about credential assessments and results of appeals. Processes should be transparent, impartial, objective and fair.

3.2 Appeals			
Best Practice Indicators	Current Practices	Potential Enhancements (What would improve the process?)	Action Plan and Expected Outcomes
No person who acts as a decision maker of a credential assessment should act as a decision maker in any part of an appeal process.	Appeals are dealt with by Council. A briefing note maybe supplied by the staff member who made the decision regarding the credential assessment.	Formalize the appeal process into policy. Applicant, staff, and Council will need to know policies and procedures. Ensure briefing materials provided by staff will not compromise Council's independent review of the case.	Add policies and procedures to Council and Staff Orientation Manuals. Include policies on what information can and cannot be provided to Council by the staff person who made the original decision.



References

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