

Overview of Canadian Post-Secondary Education System

Part of the content in this section is derived from the websites of the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials and International Credential Evaluation Service. This is for general reference only. For the most up-to-date info, please contact the relevant authorities.

Universities

In Canada, education is under the jurisdiction of the provincial and territorial governments. Degree-granting institutions are commonly referred to as **universities**. However, some **colleges, schools** and specialized **institutes** also perform the same function. Universities range in size from small liberal arts colleges to large, comprehensive institutions with a wide range of undergraduate, graduate and professional degree programs.

There are about 90 university level institutions in Canada. They are generally publicly supported. A few private institutions, usually with religious affiliations, have also received provincial charters that allow them to grant degrees. In 1995, BC passed legislation to enable five university colleges and two specialized institutes to grant undergraduate degrees independently.

Universities in Canada are highly autonomous. Although they share the primary functions of responding to the educational needs of the society, they set their own admission standards and degree requirements. Because education is a provincial or territorial responsibility, these institutions vary in mandate, management models and policy frameworks.

While Canadian universities do not constitute a system, there is considerable cooperation between and among institutions through a variety of administrative and academic networks.

Community Colleges and Other Non-degree-granting Institutions

Unlike universities, which may have both teaching and research mandates, **community colleges** are primarily teaching institutions. Their mandate is to respond quickly and flexibly to training needs and changing priorities of the society. Very often, through serving on college advisory committees, representatives from the community, business, industry and labour provide input to college program planning.

The term **college** generally refers to a wide range of post-secondary institutions, public or private, that offer associate degree programs or vocationally focused programs. Depending on the province or territory, these institutions may be called **colleges of applied arts and technology**, regional or **community colleges, institutes of applied arts and science, institutes of technology**, or, in Quebec, **collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEPs)**.

The college system in western Canada, specifically in BC and Alberta, incorporates a **university transfer** system; i.e. in cooperation with a provincial university, a community college can offer the first two years of university degree programs.

Currently, there are more than 200 publicly-funded colleges and institutes in Canada, some of which may have multiple locations. The number of private-sector colleges is much higher and they serve a wide range of students in a diverse selection of programs.

Accreditation

There is no pan-Canadian accrediting body to evaluate the quality of degree programs offered at degree-granting institutions. However, Canada enjoys reputation for its uniform quality of undergraduate programs across the country.

Similarly, although a number of agencies or associations perform the function of accrediting some professional programs at the college level, again there is no pan-Canadian accrediting body governing the standards of these colleges. Each college sets up its own academic policies, and chooses to belong to different associations such as Association of Canadian Community Colleges, Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario, Canadian Alliance of Education and Training Organizations, National Association of Career Colleges, and so on. Some provincial governments have begun to attempt to establish certain accrediting policies but they are recognized at the provincial level only.

Foreign Credentials Evaluation

In Canada, education is the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, and education systems vary from one jurisdiction to another. There is no single authority governing the evaluation and recognition of foreign credentials. Individual colleges and universities have the sole authority to recognize foreign programs and degrees as qualification for further study in Canada.

However, confronted with constant changes in the world's education systems and qualifications, and presented with an increasing number of applications from various educational backgrounds, Canada's employers, educational institutions and regulatory bodies face a growing challenge on how to evaluate the credentials obtained in another country, how to compare the education from another country with requirements in Canada, and how to know if an assessment of foreign credentials is credible and consistent with good practice.

Credential evaluation services have been established in some provinces to provide expert opinion regarding the value of foreign credentials. In this connection, the **Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC)** serves to provide a platform for service providers to share information on assessment methodologies, identify assessment principles and establish quality standards and codes of conduct.

Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC)

www.canalliance.org

ACESC is made up of credential evaluation services from across Canada. Alliance members offer fair, credible and standardized assessment of foreign credentials to help clients make informed decisions regarding applications for employment, education and professional membership.

Members of the Alliance undergo a rigorous self-evaluation process including a review of assessment procedures, experience, file management, personnel qualifications, documentation methods and reference material base.

To qualify for Alliance membership, an assessment service must demonstrate that it complies with established quality standards and must agree to maintain those standards. Therefore, they are able to provide accurate and comprehensive information on the comparability of foreign qualifications with Canadian education systems.

In order to ensure their members offer consistent and accountable evaluation services, the Alliance has called upon representatives from the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, the International Credential Evaluation Service (British Columbia), the International Qualifications Assessment Service (Alberta), and the *Service des Équivalences* (Quebec), to form the **Provincial Assessment Committee**, with two observers from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture, and Recreation and the Manitoba Ministry of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. The mandate of the Committee is to share information on assessment methodologies used in each province, as well as to establish codes of good practice and identify common assessment principles.

Given the inherent diversity of education systems in Canada, the Provincial Assessment Committee recognizes:

- The need to promote fair, credible, and standardized methods in the assessment of foreign credentials.
- The need to promote consistency among the jurisdictions in the assessment of foreign credentials.
- The importance of the portability of educational evaluations from one jurisdiction to another.
- The importance of articulating a conceptual framework for the assessment of foreign credentials to promote consistency.
- The advantages of working collaboratively to address issues related to the assessment of foreign credentials.

As a result, Alliance clients can expect the following:

- Fair and credible services: All applicants are treated in an equitable manner.
- Quality assurance: Alliance members must conform to established principles of good practice and maintain internationally recognized standards of quality.
- Portability: Assessments are accepted by other members and are widely recognized by employers, educational institutions and regulatory bodies.
- Consistency in approach: While decisions may vary according to provincial or territorial systems of education, consistent application of standards ensures similar cases are treated in a similar manner.
- Accountability: Because members are mandated by provincial or territorial authorities to provide foreign credential assessment services, they are accountable to the public.

The founding members of the Alliance are:

- Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC)
- International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES)
- International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)
- *Service des Équivalences d'études*

Located in the province of BC, the ICES is extensively used by holders of foreign credentials and widely recognized by Canadian institutions.

The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC)

www.cicic.ca

In Canada, CICIC plays an important role in acting as a national clearing house and referral service to support the recognition and portability of Canadian and international educational and occupational qualifications.

CICIC was established in 1990, after Canada ratified the UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region to assist Canada in carrying out its obligations under the terms of this convention. The convention promotes international mobility by advocating wider recognition of higher education and professional qualifications.

CICIC collects data about procedures for recognizing academic and occupational credentials in different Canadian jurisdictions. This information is stored in a regularly updated database covering more than 800 professional organizations.

CICIC advises individuals on what they need to do to have their credentials evaluated and recognized in Canada, and refers them to appropriate institutions and organizations for specific assistance. CICIC does not itself grant equivalencies or assess credentials, nor does it intervene on behalf of applicants or participate in appeals. Only the college or university to which a person applies, or, for professional qualifications, the appropriate licensing body, may recognize overseas programs or degrees. Although these evaluations are not binding, they do provide useful comparison with credentials obtained in a Canadian province.

At the national level, CICIC brings together people and organizations with common concerns, encouraging collaboration, information-sharing, efficient use of resources, and awareness of international policies. It facilitates access for Canadians to information on foreign assessment procedures and on new developments in education systems abroad.

At the international level, through maintaining links with relevant international organizations, CICIC provides a Canadian focus for international activities in credentials evaluation and recognition. This focus is especially important because education systems and recognition practices in Canada are complex and decentralized.

Although CICIC does not make policy, through its networks it advocates measures that lead to more uniform assessment practices, more efficient resource sharing, better understanding of terminology, and greater awareness of the need to reduce barriers to students and workers moving into or across Canada.

CICIC reports to the provincial and territorial ministers of education through the Council of Ministers of Education Canada and to the Federal Government through the Department of Human Resources Development. It is accountable to both levels of government, where appropriate to their jurisdiction, on matters related to information on education and training qualifications, while ensuring that the interests of governmental and non-governmental organizations are represented.

Provincially-mandated Evaluation Services

Alberta

International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)

4th Floor, Sterling Place

9940 - 106 Street

Edmonton, Alberta

T5K 2V1 Canada

Tel: 780 - 427-2655

Fax: 780 - 422-9734

E-mail: iqas@gov.ab.ca

<http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/iqas/iqas.asp>

British Columbia

International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES)

4355 Mathissi Place

Burnaby, British Columbia

V5G 4S8 Canada
Tel: 604 - 431-3402
Fax: 604 - 431-3382
E-mail: ICES@ola.bc.ca
<http://www.ola.bc.ca/ices/>

Manitoba

Academic Credentials Assessment Service - Manitoba (ACAS)
Manitoba Labour and Immigration
Settlement & Labour Market Services Branch
5th Floor, 213 Notre Dame Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3B 1N3 Canada
Tel: 204 - 945-6300
Fax: 204 - 948-2148
E-mail: glloyd@gov.mb.ca
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/labour/immigrate/english/newcomersservices/7.html>

Ontario

World Education Services -Canada (WES Canada)
45 Charles Street East, Suite 700
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 1S2 Canada
Tel: 416 - 972-0070
Fax: 416 - 972-9004
Toll-free: 866 - 343-0070 (from outside the 416 area code)
Email: ontario@wes.org
<http://www.wes.org/ca/>

Quebec

Service des évaluations comparatives (SEC)
Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration
800, boulevard de Maisonneuve Est, 2e étage
Montréal, Québec
H2L 4L8 Canada
Tél: 514 - 864-9191
Fax: 514 - 873-8701
Email: equivalences@mrci.gouv.qc.ca
<http://www.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/anglais/education/educational-report.html>

Saskatchewan*

International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS)
Alberta Learning
4th Floor, Sterling Place
9940 - 106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2V1 Canada
Tel: 780 - 427-2655
Fax: 780 - 422-9734
E-mail: iqas@gov.ab.ca
<http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/iqas/iqas.asp>

* The Government of Saskatchewan provides this service through an interprovincial agreement with the Government of Alberta.

Other provinces and territories

Any of the services listed above may be contacted for credentials evaluation services in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Nunavut, the Northwest Territories or the Yukon.

International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES)

www.ola.bc.ca/ices

The ICES was established in 1995, with start-up funding from the provincial government of British Columbia, to help people gain the recognition they need to pursue their career and educational goals in Canada. ICES is part of the Canadian Learning Bank. (www.ola.bc.ca/clb/)

Using well-established evaluation methodologies, ICES evaluates the credentials of people who have studied in other provinces or countries and determines comparable levels in BC and Canadian terms. The results of an ICES assessment are provided in evaluation reports that are objective, consistent, and reliable. They help individuals pursue a variety of goals: career planning, job search, education, professional recognition, licensing, immigration, and more. They also help licensing bodies, employers, and educational institutions determine if an individual's credentials meet requirements for licensure, employment, or admission.

ICES evaluations measure the level of education, not the content of the courses, and do not specifically mention which courses in the country of a client's education match courses and programs in BC or Canada. Courses will be listed in a comprehensive evaluation and the grades and credits will be converted to a Canadian scale, but the decision of whether or not these courses satisfy BC requirements is left to the person or institution who receives the report.

ICES is a founding member of the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada. It operates out of an office in Burnaby, BC, Canada, but its services may be directly accessed from anywhere in the world by submitting an application form, which is available on its website.

Credit Review Service

The Credit Review Service, also part of the Canadian Learning Bank, is a unique national service developed by the Open Learning Agency (OLA) to evaluate workplace-based training programs and courses in order to award academic credit. Individuals may then apply these credits toward certificate, diploma, or degree programs offered at OLA and other participating institutions across Canada.

The Open Learning Agency is a fully accredited educational institution founded by the government of British Columbia. For over 20 years, the Open Learning Agency has provided comprehensive educational programs and services to provincial, national, and international markets through the BC Open University and Open College. Assisted by an advisory board made up of representatives from post-secondary institutions and corporations across Canada, the Credit Review Service is available to business, industry, labour unions, public and private training providers, professional and trade associations, and government agencies.

Post-secondary institutions across Canada have recently been invited to participate in the Canadian Learning Bank by recognizing credit for courses approved through the Credit Review Service. Individuals who have successfully completed approved courses must first enrol with the Open Learning Agency's Student Registry, which provides a permanent record of learner performance and verifies the assessment and successful completion of their courses. The Open Learning Agency can then issue official transcripts showing learner achievement.

Individuals who wish to use the credit they have been awarded through the Open Learning Agency's Canadian Learning Bank are encouraged to contact participating institutions to complete their desired credentials.