

CAQC SITE VISITS

A GUIDE FOR SITE VISIT TEAMS AND HOST INSTITUTIONS

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UPDATED: JUNE 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this Guide

The purpose of this Guide for CAQC Site Visits is to provide guidance both to members of the evaluation team in planning and conducting its activities and to the applicant organization in hosting the site visit.

This Guide applies to Organizational and Program Evaluation Site Visits. Site Visit Teams (SVT) and Host Organizations should refer to the correct section of each Handbook for information relevant to their Site Visit. Contact CAQC Secretariat if additional guidance is required.

1.2 Mandate of Council

Council is legislatively mandated to evaluate all proposed degree programs and all institutions wishing to offer degree-level programming (whether public or private, resident or non resident), and to make recommendations to the Minister of Advanced Education. The exception is that Council does not evaluate proposals for degrees in divinity. CAQC also monitors existing degree programs and degree-granting institutions to ensure they continue to meet quality standards.

1.3 Review of Degree Proposals in Alberta

All applications for new degree programs to be offered in Alberta are to the Minister of Advanced Education. The two-stage approval process is outlined in both CAQC Handbooks – Degrees and Organizations and is summarized here.

1.3.1 Stage 1: System Coordination Review

The first stage of the program approval process is a system coordination review by the Ministry to determine the need and impact of such a program on the post secondary system in Alberta. This stage includes feedback from other post-secondaries in Alberta. Once that review is completed and a recommendation made to the Minister, the Minister may then refer the proposal to CAQC.

1.3.2 Stage 2: CAQC Review

CAQC's full review includes two phases, an organizational evaluation (if not already completed) to determine the institution's readiness to implement and sustain the degree program and a program evaluation to look at the quality of the proposed program.

Institutions that are proposing their first degree program, a first degree at a new level, or other precedent-setting degree will normally first successfully undergo an Organizational Evaluation prior to the completion of the Program Evaluation.

For Organizations that have already undergone the Organizational Evaluation and been approved to offer degree, new degree proposals will be evaluated using one of three processes – Standard Program Evaluation with Site Visit, Expedited Program Evaluation, or Delegated Program Evaluation (for Organizations with Delegated Review Status only). See *Degrees Handbook Section 2.4 CAQC Evaluation Types*. Council's Organizational and Program Evaluation processes culminate in a recommendation to the Minister.

1.4 Types of Evaluations

CAQC conducts three types of evaluations involving Expert Review Teams and Site Visits:

1. An Organizational Evaluation, which evaluates the capacity and readiness of a proposing institution to offer degrees – this Evaluation is required for any Organization proposing to offer its first degree or for any Organization proposing to offer a first degree at a new level (i.e., a graduate degree), or a precedent setting degree.
2. A Standard Program Evaluation, which examines degree program proposals in detail.
3. A Comprehensive Organizational Evaluation, which is a function of Council’s Monitoring role and takes place approximately six years after the institution’s first degree is implemented following submission of Cyclical Program Evaluations to Council.

For Organizations that have already been approved to offer degrees, upon referral, Council determines which of three possible Program Evaluation processes to apply:

1. Standard Program Evaluation: Council conducts a Program Evaluation using external evaluators;
2. Expedited Program Evaluation: Institutions approved to offer degrees may request an Expedited Program Evaluation. Council then determines whether the Program Review Standing Committee (PRSC) can perform a desk review and make a recommendation regarding the proposed program directly to the Minister, without involving external evaluators, or whether the Program must undergo a Standard Program Evaluation; and
3. Delegated Program Evaluation: Only for institutions which hold Delegated Review Status as described in the CAQC Organizations Handbook.

For more information, please refer to the CAQC Organizations Handbook and the CAQC Degrees Handbook.

1.5 Peer Review

Peer review is an essential component of all of Council’s evaluation processes (Core Principle 6). The principal elements of the Organizational and Program Evaluation processes are common to most quality assurance agencies throughout the world and meet the standards set by the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework.

To assist in the assessment of an institution’s application for a degree program, CAQC appoints an SVT to provide independent opinion about the potential academic merits of the proposed program(s) and to advise the Council as to whether, in its opinion, the proposed program(s) should be recommended for approval by the Council.

2. THE SITE VISIT TEAM (SVT)

External Evaluators on SVTs provide thoughtful assessment of:

1. the Organization’s readiness to offer high-quality degrees (Organizational Evaluation);
2. the Organization’s continued ability to offer high-quality degrees (Comprehensive Evaluation);
3. the proposed program’s alignment with Council’s Program Standards.

For Organizations, Council’s role is to determine readiness for degree-granting. Using the institution’s self-study and insights gained from a site visit to the applicant institution, the SVT, comprised of members with relevant and recent senior academic experience, provides a thoughtful

assessment of the applicant institution's readiness and capacity to offer and sustain degree-level programs. Using Council's Organizational Standards, the evaluators provide an independent opinion on the extent to which the institution meets the following Standards:

1. Governance infrastructure codified in policies and procedures aligned with best practices among Canadian degree-granting institutions.
2. Resource sufficiency, institutional stability and student protections
3. A culture of excellence in teaching and learning
4. Commitment to research, scholarship, and creative work
5. A culture of quality assurance
6. Systemic commitments to equity, diversity, Indigeneity, ethical practice, inclusion, and accessibility

And for private institutions, an assessment of risk to help determine Council's financial security requirements should the program be approved.

For Programs, as Council works to ensure that all degree programs it recommends to the Minister are of sufficient breadth and rigour to meet national and international standards, it asks its teams of peer evaluators to assess whether or not the level of learning to be achieved is consistent with that which is expected at the proposed degree level, and whether it is comparable in quality to similar programs (if any) offered in Alberta and elsewhere. The team's on-site appraisal and report are expected to aid the Council's understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the institution's proposal.

In addition, the team's visit and report are intended to facilitate program refinement by the institution. Council provides the team with the applicant's submitted documentation (PAPRS Proposal Template, called Part A, Part B Degree Template, appendices), and a Report Template specific to the type of Evaluation aligned with Council's Standards for Programs or Organizations. SVT are also provided with copies of the relevant CAQC Handbook and Appendices such as the [Alberta Credentials Framework](#) and the [Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework](#) (see also the CAQC Handbook Appendices for the excerpts from the ACF and CDQF) and which reviewers are asked to use to ensure the proposed program(s) meets national standards at the baccalaureate or graduate level.

2.1 Recruitment and appointment of the evaluation team

Council appoints the members of the evaluation team and designates one of them as the Chair. Although the final decision regarding the composition of the evaluation team rests with Council, the Institution is required to submit a list of potential reviewers which is combined with names provided by Council Members or the CAQC Secretariat. The complete list of nominees is sent to the institution and Council members for comment prior to recruitment. Council reserves the right to add other potential reviewers if recruitment to a particular date proves to be difficult. Once the team is recruited and its membership ratified by Council, the institution is informed. It is important that potential members of the evaluation team declare any conflict of interest at the time of their nomination (see Appendix A, Code of Conduct, for definitions of Conflicts of Interest). Once Council has ratified the membership, members will be notified and will be asked to sign a Letter of Agreement (LOA). This Guide serves as an addendum to that LOA.

2.1.1 Size and composition

Normally, the team will consist of between two and five external (peer) subject area experts, depending on the nature of the Organization or Program being reviewed. Most SVT consist of three members including the Chair. The Manager of the CAQC Secretariat, or designate, may act as an advisory member of the team.

SVT for Organizational and Comprehensive Evaluations normally have senior academic officer experience (Vice-Presidents, Presidents, Deans) from comparable or exemplar institutions, preferably with representation from Alberta, and may have experience in the field of study of the proposed programs.

SVT for Program Evaluations are comprised of Senior Academics in the field of study such as Deans, Chairs, or Full or Associate faculty members. They must have both content expertise and program oversight/administrative expertise.

Site Visit Team members may be from within or outside Alberta but it is preferable to have at least one member with experience within Alberta.

2.2 Roles of Site Visit Team Members

2.2.1 Chair

The Chair bears overall responsibility for finalizing the site visit; will speak for the team; will assess the expertise and experience of team members and decide their assignments; will consult with team members to ensure they are comfortable with the assignments; will assume responsibility for the preparation and production of the final report to Council; and will present the team's findings (normally by telephone) at one of Council's meetings. With respect to the site visit schedule, the CAQC Secretariat Advisor will work with the institution to prepare a first draft of the site visit schedule and then will act as the liaison with the institution to make changes as instructed by the chair and team members.

2.2.2 Members

Team members will be responsible for specific functions, as determined by the Chair. Receiving a specific assignment does not preclude the need for each member to review the entire documentation.

2.2.3 CAQC Secretariat Advisor

To facilitate the team's work, the CAQC Secretariat Advisor will coordinate the review and serve as an advisory member of the team during the site visit, will work with the institution to prepare a draft schedule for the site visit for consideration by the chair of the team, and will be the liaison with the institution with respect to logistics and information requests of the team prior to the site visit. During the site visit, this individual will liaise with the institutional contact should the team seek further information or clarification. This member will have access to all material relevant to the external evaluation and will take part in the team's orientation and discussions, but will not be involved in writing the report. After the site visit, the Advisor will receive the team's report and forward it to the institution for response.

2.3 Conduct

Evaluation team members are bound by the *CAQC Handbook, Section 2.5: Policy on the Release of Information* (in both the *Degrees* and *Organizations* Handbooks). Evaluation team members must respect the confidential nature of the information submitted by the institution and restrict the use of this information to their work in relation to Council. All material must be shredded or returned to the CAQC Secretariat when the activity for which it was required is completed. As well, team members are reminded that any records in the custody or under the control of Council are subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act. This includes the report of the SVT to Council, as well as the institution's response to the report. During the recruitment process, Council relies on the personal and professional integrity of individuals to declare if there is any potential conflict of interest. At the orientation meeting with the CAQC Chair or designate, all team members will be asked to sign a copy of the Code of Conduct, which is found in Appendix A.

3. ARRANGEMENTS

3.1 Communication

As soon as the team has been recruited and the team's membership ratified by Council, the members will receive communication from the CAQC Secretariat Advisor informing them of the preliminary arrangements, and the names of the other members of the team. This e-mail also asks for important information (home address, name of consulting company if preferred, etc.) that is needed for the Letter of Agreement, which outlines the expectations of Council and the Ministry. Throughout the planning of the site visit, the Secretariat Advisor will be in contact with team members regarding travel and accommodation and scheduling of the site visit. Team members can also expect to hear from the team chair regarding any preferences and suggestions that the chair may have concerning the work of the team.

3.2 Materials provided to members of the SVT

Each member of the team will be provided with the materials noted earlier in this document. Of particular importance for program evaluations is the institution's program proposal which has been prepared in accordance with Council's guidelines. These documents or access to them will be provided electronically; paper copies will not be provided.

3.3 The site visit

As noted earlier, before the evaluation visit occurs, a detailed schedule for the visit will be arranged by the Secretariat in consultation with the team and institution. The schedule will include plans for team members to interview students/alumni, faculty, administrators and governance board members, as well as to observe facilities, examine records (excluding individual records of students) and assess resources. It is important that the expectations for each activity are identified for the institution prior to the visit.

For the meeting with the CAQC Chair prior to the campus visit, the Secretariat normally will reserve a meeting room in the hotel or at the institution.

The institution will have arranged a suitable meeting room at the institution for the exclusive use of the SVT where they can review materials, meet in camera and interview institutional representatives. If additional information is being provided via the internet, computers should be

also available, along with the telephone number of a technology support person. The room is to be locked when team members are elsewhere. Members should inform the Secretariat Advisor if they plan to use their laptop during the interviews so that the institution can arrange for extension cords and, if needed, access to the Internet.

Parking arrangements and campus maps will be provided, as will meals and snacks. If any team member has dietary restrictions, he/she should let the Secretariat Advisor know so the information can be provided in advance to the institution.

3.4 Accommodations and expenses

Each team member is responsible for making his/her own travel arrangements in time for the orientation meeting. Unless there is compelling reason to do otherwise, the Secretariat will arrange for all out-of-town members to stay in the same hotel. If guest rooms are to be provided on campus, the institution will make reservations for the team and inform the Secretariat. Each team member should ensure the Secretariat is aware of travel arrangements, including arrival and departure times, and all members are expected to attend the orientation meeting with the CAQC Chair.

Team members' honoraria and reasonable travel expenses (i.e., economy air fare), including transportation, meals and lodging, will be paid by CAQC. Costs of the review are then billed to the applicant institution. The Secretariat Advisor will inform the team if the institution has arranged with the hotel to direct bill it for members' accommodation costs. When the report has been received by CAQC, members will need to send an invoice to the Secretariat Senior Manager. The invoice should:

- state the contract number and address of the contractor,
- include a separate item for the honoraria being claimed as per contract,
- include a separate item for the total expenses being claimed as per contract (**as all GST/HST must be removed, the honoraria has been adjusted to provide compensation**), and
- include any relevant receipts for allowable expenses (i.e., accommodation, transportation and meals).
 - It is important that you keep documentation (such as taxi receipts, boarding passes, restaurant bills, etc.), to claim expenses.
 - Please note that there cannot be any reimbursement for alcoholic beverages. Consequently, the government requires that, in the case of meals, receipts that itemize the food items purchased be submitted rather than the credit card statement.

In the case of the team chair, an interim invoice may be submitted when the report is forwarded to CAQC. The chair's final invoice can then be submitted after speaking to the report at a CAQC meeting.

3.5 Hospitality

Although not encouraged or expected, institutions may wish to make arrangements for hospitality. If such is the case, it should only happen after consultation with the team chair and the CAQC Secretariat.

4. THE SITE VISIT

4.1 Expectations of Council

Council has the following expectations related to Site Visits.

4.1.1 The Host Institution

The Host Institution, as the Applicant, is responsible for working with the CAQC Secretariat to

1. Create a list of qualified potential members of the Site Visit Team for review by Council to determine the final composition of the Site Visit Team.
2. Finalize details of the Site Visit, including logistics such as accommodations, meals, and technological supports.
3. Ensure all institutional representatives are available and prepared for the Site Visit.
4. Follow all guidelines, including for the Release of Information, per the CAQC Handbooks.

For additional responsibilities of the Host Institution, please see Section 5: Arrangements.

4.1.2 The Site Visit Team (SVT)

The following is not intended to restrict the scope of the Site Visit Team's review.

The SVT should draw Council's attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the Institution and/or its proposed program(s) based on the Site Visit Team's evaluation against the appropriate Standards (Organizational or Program). As noted earlier, the Team is expected to use the CAQC Organizational Standards or Program Standards (provided in the CAQC Handbooks in full and in the provided Report Template for each Site Visit).

As well, Council would like to be informed of any opportunities the team perceives for improving the Institution's readiness and/or the proposed program(s) as well as any suggestions the team has for overcoming perceived weaknesses or shortcomings.

Council expects the team to note any Conditions and Recommendations (see the CAQC Handbook Appendix A: Glossary) and to note if the number or weight of the Conditions and Recommendations, and the Institution's perceived ability to respond to the Conditions and Recommendations, would preclude a positive recommendation.

Overall, Council expects constructive criticism where that is warranted, and a fair presentation of the positive side of the institution's proposal. It is important to stress that the team's report is to be made to Council and not to the institution.

4.1.3 Date and length of the SVT visit

The SVT visit to the institution normally will take place when classes are in progress, at a time convenient to the institution and the team, and normally will take one and one half or two days. If not already determined at the time of appointment of the team, the date(s) for the visit will be determined by the Secretariat in consultation with the team chair and members and the institution, normally the vice-president academic or designate. A meeting of the team including an orientation meeting with Council's Chair will precede the time on campus. The meeting normally takes place at

the hotel the evening before the start of the site visit. See the Sample Site Visit Schedule under Templates on the CAQC website.

4.1.4 Preparation for the visit

Prior to the site visit, team members will receive a set of materials from the CAQC Secretariat that normally include the following:

- a chronology of the application and any applicable correspondence between the Council and the institution,
- information about Campus Alberta, the PSLA, and PSR,
- applicable excerpts from the CAQC Handbook,
- specific questions or areas of concern noted by Council, and
- for Organizational Evaluations, the Institution's Self Study and all supporting documents and appendices, **OR**
- for Program Evaluations, the Institution's program proposal(s), normally comprised of PAPRS Submission Part A, Part B, and appendices, and any other relevant supporting materials submitted as part of the Program Proposal.

Depending on the type of Site Visit, Team Members may receive some materials prior to receiving the final package (i.e., the Organizational Self Study or Program Proposal). Team Members may also seek additional information from the publicly posted information on the Applicant's institutional website prior to the Site Visit.

Team members are encouraged to study the material and familiarize themselves with the appropriate Standards from Council's Handbooks (Organizational Standards or Program Standards) in advance of the orientation meeting. Some teams agree to contact each other via e mail or telephone prior to the first face-to-face meeting. When reviewing these documents, team members are encouraged to ask themselves questions such as those listed below.

- Is there anything that requires further clarification?
- What additional information is desirable?
- What are the key questions that need to be addressed during the visit and in which interview session?
- Who are the principal people to be interviewed?
- How can the team best be deployed in conducting the evaluation?

The Secretariat Advisor should be informed of the need for any additional or clarifying information well in advance of the team's initial meeting.

By being prepared, team members will be better able to take systematic notes during the visit, develop insights based on their site visit observations, and participate with focus in the team deliberations.

4.1.5 Establishing the site visit schedule

As noted earlier, prior to the visit, the CAQC Secretariat Advisor will work with the institution's vice-president academic or designate to establish a first draft of the site visit schedule for review by the review team chair. They may identify other groups or specific individuals with whom they wish to

meet. Specific areas for discussion or the assessment standards to be addressed will be identified for each interview session. These are intended only as a guide as often the responses to questions lead to other topics or issues.

During the visit, the team will wish to interview faculty, administrators, students and alumni. Depending on the type of review, they may also wish to meet with support/collaborating staff and examine facilities (library, computer labs, etc.) and other resources, and analyze relevant institutional policies and practices, review student work or observe classes in session. The team's expectations need to be made clear prior to the site visit. Typically, the team will operate as a single group, but, at the discretion of the team, they may split into subgroups to hold concurrent sessions with more interviewees within the time on campus.

The institution may be responsible for the selection of students, alumni and faculty to be interviewed in line with parameters established by the team. In other cases, the team may ask that all or some of the faculty or students self-select or be selected by their representative organizations. Some teams may wish to have open sessions designated on the schedule when faculty or other interested people can make an appointment (or drop-in) for brief interviews (e.g., 10 minutes) with the team. Such open sessions allow for specific input to be provided by individuals outside the groups and categories identified by the institution and team. If a team wishes to have an open session, the opportunity should be advertised by the institution in advance of the visit and a schedule established.

Normally, the team asks that administration not attend interview sessions with students/alumni and faculty.

If a tour of the facility is arranged and there are time restrictions, the team may wish to suggest that the tour be limited by naming specific areas they wish to see.

4.1.6 Conduct of the visit

Team orientation and meeting with CAQC Chair

Prior to the on-campus visit, the CAQC Chair, or designate, and Secretariat Advisor, will meet with the team to provide an orientation to the work of the CAQC, to the specific Evaluation process, the Handbook, and the Organizational or Program Standards. This meeting normally takes place the evening before the on-campus visit. The CAQC Chair will alert members to any matters of particular concern to Council and answer questions the team might have. Any uncertainties the team members have about Council's policies, procedures, or standards should be discussed and addressed. The CAQC Chair will indicate when the team's report to CAQC is due, which is typically within two-three weeks of the site visit.

Initial meeting of the team

Immediately following the orientation, the team and Advisor will hold their first meeting (normally over a working dinner). This meeting is critical as it provides team members with an opportunity to share preliminary impressions, review the team's schedule, identify issues to be raised during each interview session, review individual assignments and discuss the format and preparation of their report. All members should come to the meeting fully prepared for the visit by having a list of questions emanating from the documentation and a list of the proposed program's strengths and weaknesses. Members can then determine the most appropriate questions to ask in each interview session.

Site visit interviews

As noted earlier, the team will likely wish to interview faculty, administrators, support/collaborating staff, and students and alumni; examine facilities and resources; and analyze relevant institutional policies and practices. The team's chair might begin each interview session by framing the objectives of the interview and posing an open-ended question. This could then be followed by more specific, probing questions and final statements confirming impressions. The questions should evoke analysis and dialogue.

Team members should avoid preceding a question with a wordy preamble, stringing several questions together, making too many references to how things are done at the member's home campus, or presenting a monologue.

The team should create an atmosphere of genuine dialogue by acting as colleagues and peers rather than as inspectors or interrogators.

Members are encouraged to take careful notes of each interview session as they will be invaluable when writing the report.

Team conferences

Throughout the day, time should be scheduled when the team can meet in camera to share findings and identify questions that may require a deeper investigation. These sessions also provide time for the team to remind itself of the focus of subsequent interviews.

Normally, the team will informally debrief over dinner on the first evening of the site visit. At or near the end of the visit, the team should have a "wrap up" conference in camera to reach consensus about the probable substance of the external evaluation report in preparation for the exit meeting.

Exit meeting with senior officials

Before leaving the campus, the team will meet with senior officials (often the president and VPA, or their designates for Organizational Evaluations and the VPA or designate and Program Leadership for Program Evaluations) to provide an opportunity for response to outstanding questions that may have arisen during the visit. As well, the exit meeting provides an opportunity for the team to advise the institution of the principal elements of the report without referring to the team's actual recommendation.

It is highly desirable that the report does not contain any major surprises; information and concerns noted in the report should be communicated to senior officials by the team before it leaves campus.

At the end of the meeting, the Secretariat Advisor will outline Council's expectations with respect to the next steps in the review process.

Final team conference

Immediately after the exit meeting, the team holds its final in-person meeting before leaving the institution. This meeting will provide an opportunity for the team to begin preparing the report by

- considering any additional information pertinent to its task,

- making decisions on the form and substance of the report,
- reaching consensus concerning the significant strengths and weaknesses which will be communicated to Council, including Conditions and Recommendations, and
- confirming individual responsibilities and timelines for discharging them.

The Secretariat will provide an electronic outline of the report which is designed to clearly show that the report is addressing Council’s standards and criteria.

Contact with the institution

It is inappropriate for the chair or any member of the evaluation team to visit the campus prior to the site visit unless the institution and Secretariat have first been advised.

During or after the evaluation process, team members should not independently give any member of the institution feedback or advice regarding the evaluation. If an individual or individuals from the institution attempt(s) to contact a team member for advice or feedback regarding the evaluation, they should be referred to Council’s Chair or Secretariat. As well, team members should not contact individuals at the institution to discuss the outcome of the evaluation. **Any communication with the institution should run through the Secretariat Advisor.**

5. REPORT OF THE SVT

As previously noted, the team’s report is to Council, not the institution. The team will complete its report using the template provided by Council/Secretariate and designed to align with the Organizational or Program Standards in the CAQC Handbooks. Within each section of the Report, Council requests that Conditions and Recommendations (if any) be noted specific to each Standard. The Report can also include commendations and areas for improvement. The site visit schedule should always be attached as an addendum to the report; it can be affixed by the Secretariat once the report is submitted electronically as a Word Document

5.1 Overall Recommendation

Overall Recommendation – The report must contain:

- in the case of Organizational Evaluations, a specific and clear recommendation with respect to the applicant institution’s readiness to implement and sustain the level and type of degree program(s) being proposed to help Council determine if the application can be moved to the program evaluation phase. The recommendation must be supported by substantive comments and documentation of the team’s findings. If there are any caveats or conditions on the recommendation, they should be clearly stated as such along with their rationale.
- in the case of Comprehensive Evaluations, a specific and clear recommendation with respect to whether the approved degree programs (some or all) should be reaffirmed and maintained, or whether Council should recommend to the Minister that the approved degree programs (some or all) be suspended or that the institution’s approval be withdrawn. The recommendation must be supported by substantive comments and documentation of the team’s findings. If there are any caveats or conditions on the recommendation, they

should be clearly stated as such along with their rationale.

- in the case of Program Evaluations, recommend to the Minister that the program(s) be approved. The recommendation must be supported by substantive comments and documentation of the team's findings. If there are any caveats or conditions on the recommendation, they should be clearly stated as such along with their rationale. Conditions for approval can be required prior to program approval or implementation.

Teams should note that a significant number of Conditions and/or Recommendations may preclude a positive recommendation.

5.1.1 Examples of Overall Recommendations

Positive Overall Recommendations

- **Organizational Evaluation** – The Organizational Evaluation Team has concluded through its investigation that the institution has sufficient organizational procedures, planning and structures in place to implement and sustain degree programs. Therefore, we recommend that Council move the application to the program evaluation phase of CAQC's review process.
- **Comprehensive Evaluation** – The Comprehensive Evaluation Team has concluded through its investigation that the institution maintains sufficient organizational procedures, planning and structures in place to continue to sustain degree programs. Therefore, we recommend that Council that the programs offered by reaffirmed and maintained.
- **Program Evaluation** – The Program Evaluation Team recommends that the proposed program be approved.

Positive Overall Recommendations with Conditions

- **Organizational Evaluation** – The Organizational Evaluation Team has concluded through its investigation that the institution has sufficient organizational procedures, planning and structures in place to meet most of Council's organizational assessment standards for degree programming. Therefore, we recommend that Council move the application to the program evaluation phase of CAQC's review process. However, we recommend that the institution address the following areas of concern while the program evaluation is taking place and report on them to CAQC by the time that CAQC is considering the results of the program evaluation:
 - Clear articulation of a statement on academic freedom that includes procedures to ensure that the principles of natural justice are followed in the event of an alleged violation of the policy.
 - Clear articulation of workload expectations for faculty in degree programs and the time allotted for scholarly activity.

For Organizational Evaluations, Positive Recommendations with Conditions may require that Conditions are met before the Program is moved to Evaluation rather than while the Program is undergoing evaluation.

- **Program Evaluation** – The Program Evaluation team recommends that the proposed program(s) be approved provided the following conditions are met:
 - a fourth appropriately qualified full-time continuing faculty be hired prior to implementation (or perhaps prior to offering the fourth year of the program).
 - the admission requirement is changed to require students to present.....
 - the nomenclature of the degree be changed from proposed title to recommended title because... (rationale should be provided).

Negative Overall Recommendations

- **Organizational Evaluation** – The Organizational Evaluation Team has concluded through its investigation that the institution does not have sufficient organizational procedures, planning and structures in place to implement and sustain degree programs and therefore recommends that the application not be moved to the program evaluation stage. We have concluded that the institution does not meet Council’s organizational assessment standards for degree programming in the following areas:
 - The institution does not have appropriate strategic policies and processes in place to enable it to prepare appropriately for offering undergraduate degree program and addressing this will be onerous/time consuming for the institution.
 - The institution has not provided sufficient evidence of its commitments with respect to support and facilitation of academic staff in scholarly activities.
 - The institution does not have sufficient full-time/continuing faculty who are qualified to mount and sustain degree programming.
- **Program Evaluation** – The Program Evaluation Team recommends that the proposed program(s) not be approved based on the following reasons:
 - the program does not meet the degree level standards in the following areas.....

5.1.2 Additional Comments

Council is also very interested to learn the strengths of the proposed program(s). Reports will typically highlight areas of commendation along with other favourable comments throughout the text.

Before electronically submitting the report to the Secretariat, it should be checked to ensure that:

- It speaks directly to Council’s Organizational or Program Standards.
- It has a clear recommendation along with the rationale (stated in terms of Council’s Standards) and evidence that the findings support the recommendation.
- It has provided sufficient attention to the positive aspects of the proposal (commendations) as well as any areas of concern.
- It clearly lists Conditions and Recommendations and distinguishes between these and any suggestions for improvement.
- It does not raise any issues that were not addressed during the site visit. However, if a new issue is presented in the report, the issue should be clearly identified as not having been discussed during the site visit.

5.1.3 Conditions and Recommendations

Conditions and Recommendations are requirements of Council that Applicants must meet for a Positive Recommendation. Conditions and Recommendations differ in that Council generally expects Conditions to be met on a shorter timeline, often prior to Program Implementation, than it expects for Recommendations. In many cases, a proposal may meet CAQC's Standards if additional information is provided, or specific steps are completed by the institution (e.g. expanding library resources, hiring additional faculty, revising specific policies, providing update curriculum mapping). The Site Visit Report will provide Conditions and Recommendations to Council as part of their report. The Applicant will be given opportunity to respond to the Site Visit Report and respond to all Conditions and Recommendations noted by the Site Visit Team. Following this process, Council will review and determine which Conditions and Recommendations must be met as criteria for a positive recommendation to the Minister.

Conditions and Recommendations are placed on a Positive Recommendation only if Council is confident that an Institution can meet or commit to meeting the Conditions or Recommendations within established timelines (e.g. Pre-Implementation) without substantial alterations to the proposal that would require additional review by experts. These are communicated to the Applicant through a Preliminary Outcomes or an Outcomes Letter to the Institution. In some cases, Council may require Fundamental Conditions be met before an Organization or Program Evaluation can be completed. A large number of Conditions and Recommendations may combine to result in a Negative Recommendation given the time and resource allocation required for the Applicant to meet the standards.

If a Proposal Fails to Meet the Standards, the Proposal contains significant deficiencies in meeting Council's Standards and addressing these will require extensive time and resources on the part of the Applicant, possibly including additional submissions to Council and additional Review by Independent Academic Experts. In cases of a Negative Recommendation to the Minister, Council may provide some guidance on the Conditions and Recommendations required to meet deficiencies.

The following definitions are provided to Reviewers:

- **Meets or Exceeds the Criteria:** The proposal meets the criteria without any revisions. As the criteria are minimum standards, expert reviewers can make suggestions to the CAQC and the institution through the report that may improve the proposal beyond the minimum standards indicated in the criteria. Institutions will not be required to implement these suggestions before or after receiving approval.
- **Meets the Criteria with Conditions:** In some cases, the proposal may meet the established criteria if additional information is provided, or with specific steps that can be completed with reasonable ease by the institution (e.g. hiring an additional faculty member). The team may provide advice to the CAQC and to the institution through the report that the proposal meets the criteria on the condition that specific actions are taken. The institution is expected to respond to any conditional requirements provided by the team and the CAQC will take the team's advice and the institution's response into consideration when making its recommendation to the Minister. This assessment should only be applied if

the team is confident the institution can meet or commit to meeting the criteria without extensive revisions to the proposal which might require an additional review by subject experts and/or Council members.

- **Fails to Meet the Criteria:** The proposal contains significant deficiencies to an extent that it fails to meet the established criteria. This assessment should be applied if the proposal has weaknesses that will require extensive time and resources on the institution's part to make the necessary changes to meet the criteria. This could necessitate substantial revisions to the proposal and might require an additional review by subject experts and/or Council members.
- **Number of Conditions:** A large number of conditional criteria may have the cumulative effect of an overall assessment of fail, particularly if the required changes become so encompassing that the institution would not be able to make the changes without significant revisions to its proposal or within a reasonable time frame, or if there are questions about whether the institution has the ability (e.g. expertise and/or resources) to meet the required conditions. If there are a number of conditional criteria, the team should advise Council whether it believes the institution will be able to meet the conditional requirements.

5.2 Preparation of the report

The members of the team will determine their relative roles and responsibilities in preparing the report. Typically, the chair writes the introductory and concluding sections of the report and edits the contributions of other members. The Secretariat Advisor will not be involved in the writing of the report but does participate in the site visit and but should not be cited as one of the authors of the report. As well, when listing names of team members in the report, any institutional affiliation of members should not be included.

The chair will send a draft of the report to each team member for comment prior to its submission to Council, normally within three weeks. The team chair is required to send an electronic version of the report to the Secretariat when it is finalized at which time the Secretariat will append the final site visit schedule.

5.2.1 Distribution of the report

Upon receipt of the report, the CAQC Secretariat will forward a copy to the applicant institution with a request that comments on the report be made in writing to Council, normally within two weeks. A copy of the institution's response will be forwarded to the evaluation team when it is received.

5.2.2 Consideration of the report and response to it

The chair of the SVT will be asked to speak to the report at a meeting of Council (normally at an online meeting of Council). Similarly, representative(s) of the institution may be asked to be on standby should Council need them to answer questions following the meeting with the chair.

Subsequently, Council will consider the outcomes of the overall evaluation process and formulate its recommendation(s) to the Minister. The institution and the members of the SVT will be informed of Council's recommendation(s).

5.2.3 Feedback

After the report and the institution's response to it have been considered by Council and the outcome determined, the Secretariat will ask each evaluator to respond to a questionnaire designed to assist Council in improving the evaluation process and, specifically, to identify any 'best practices' that can be used as an 'exemplar' to be shared with other applicants. The institution is also asked to complete a similar questionnaire.

5.2.4 Additional information

Requests for additional information and/or questions of clarification may be directed at any time to the CAQC Secretariat:

Campus Alberta Quality Council
19th Floor, Commerce Place
10155 – 102 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L5
Phone: (780) 427-8921
E-mail: caqc@gov.ab.ca
Web: <https://caqc.alberta.ca/>

UPDATED: JUNE 2025

6. APPENDIX A: Code of Conduct for Reviewers

6.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Code is to establish rules of conduct to govern the professional and ethical responsibilities of reviewers engaged by the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) as it carries out its stated responsibilities for organizational, program and comprehensive reviews.

The Code is based on the principles of integrity, honesty, openness and concern for the public interest. It is designed to maintain the effectiveness of CAQC as a whole and to ensure the fairness of all CAQC procedures and decision making. It addresses common situations that reviewers may experience as they carry out their responsibilities, while recognizing that not all situations can be anticipated. All reviewers have a responsibility to consider appropriate standards of behavior and to conduct themselves in an ethical and professional manner. The Code assumes that it is not only the actual situation but also the perception others may have of it that may lead to a perception of bias or conflict of interest.

6.2 To Whom Does the Code Apply?

The Code applies to all reviewers appointed by CAQC to enable it to make informed recommendations and decisions about approval and monitoring of degree programs.

6.3 When is This Code Applicable?

The Code governs the conduct of reviewers from the date of appointment. It also includes the continuing responsibilities of reviewers after the completion of their terms with respect to decisions made by CAQC while the person was a reviewer.

6.4 General Rules of Conduct

All reviewers shall complete a statement attesting that they have read and agreed to the statements included in the Code of Conduct.

6.4.1 Sample Statement

I, _____, have been appointed as a member of an SVT reporting to the Campus Alberta Quality Council. I have read and understand the CAQC Code of Conduct for reviewers.

I agree to comply fully and to the best of my ability with the provisions of the Code.

Dated at _____ this _____ day of _____.

Reviewers should be committed to the principles and practices of quality assurance in post secondary education. When considering the program proposal, or other matters referred to them, reviewers shall make their recommendations on the merits of the information available, and shall

consider the information provided in good faith and to the best of their ability, not being concerned with the prospect of disapproval from any person, institution, or community.

Reviewers shall be sensitive to issues of gender, race, language, culture and religion that may affect the conduct of a review, the recommendations considered by Council, or a decision.

a. Confidentiality

A reviewer shall agree that all information related to a review, including information provided by an applicant institution, is confidential and shall treat such information in strict confidence and with the care and security required to ensure that the information is not disclosed without CAQC's prior written consent. A reviewer will not use the information provided for any purpose outside that of undertaking work for CAQC.

A reviewer must respect the confidential nature of third-party information submitted by the applicant and restrict the use of this information to CAQC work. Reviewers shall return (or attest that they have shredded) all material used in assessing applications when the activity for which it was required is completed. All electronic copies of confidential material should be disposed of within a term specified by agreement between the reviewer and the Ministry.

“Information” means all information, data, material and documents obtained by a reviewer before, during, or after the review and includes program proposals, institutional self-studies, information obtained during a site visit and all other information furnished or disclosed to him/her by CAQC, the Secretariat or an institution whether directly or indirectly, in written, oral, magnetic, electronic or other forms.

The confidentiality requirement set out in this Code does not apply to any part of the information which is in the public domain at the date of disclosure to the reviewer or which after that date enters the public domain, other than by any act or failure to act on the part of the reviewer.

A reviewer shall, at all times, adhere to the intent and requirements of Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act which applies to all information, material and records relating to, or obtained, created, maintained, submitted or collected during the course of a review.

b. Conflict of Interest

A reviewer must avoid any conflict of interest or appearance of conflict of interest that might impair, influence or impugn the independence, integrity or impartiality of CAQC. Conflict of interest is any interest, relationship, association or activity that is incompatible with a reviewer's responsibilities as an impartial assessor. Reviewers shall ensure that they:

- (i) conduct their duties with impartiality and disqualify themselves from dealing with anyone with whom a prior relationship could bring their impartiality into question;
- (ii) refrain from furthering their private interests;
- (iii) avoid accepting any commission, discount, allowance, payment, gift (other than a small token gift) or other benefit that is connected, directly or indirectly, with the performance of their duties related to the review, that causes, or would appear to cause, a conflict of interest;

- (iv) have no financial interest in the business of a third party that causes, or would appear to cause, a conflict of interest in connection with the performance of their duties related to the review; if such financial interest is acquired during the term as identified in the agreement between a reviewer and CAQC, the reviewer shall promptly declare it to CAQC;
- (v) decline to participate in a review for CAQC that involves a party or representative with whom they were formerly in a significant professional relationship until a period of 12 months has elapsed since the termination of that relationship. A significant professional relationship includes, but is not limited to, employment or consulting, collaboration on a project, supervision of students in the program, and providing expert advice during development of a proposal; and
- (vi) do not participate in any advisory council or implementation committee for programs or institutions they have reviewed for CAQC for six months from the time of the Minister's decision.

The Chair shall ask all potential reviewers to indicate, prior to appointment, whether they have any reason to be in a conflict of interest if they were to review a given program or institution.

A reviewer with a conflict of interest in regards to an application must decline to serve as a reviewer. If unsure whether a conflict of interest exists, the reviewer shall inform the Chair about his/her circumstances. The Chair will determine whether a conflict of interest exists and will inform a reviewer of his/her decision.

c. Public Statements

A reviewer shall not make public statements, orally or in writing, on any issues with respect to the institution or program he/she was involved in reviewing. In cases where it is not clear what a reviewer may say publicly about an issue, discretion should be used, and the reviewer should consult with the CAQC Chair or the Secretariat.

A reviewer shall refrain from communicating with the media regarding the deliberations or decisions of CAQC. All inquiries from the media or other parties shall be referred to the CAQC Chair or the Secretariat.

Reviewers should review carefully CAQC's Policy on Release of Information, especially section B, which outlines the responsibilities of reviewers. The policy is available on CAQC's website.