



Ministry of Colleges and Universities

# Ontario Qualifications Framework (OQF)

## Questions and Answers

### 1. What is the Ontario Qualifications Framework (OQF)?

Qualifications frameworks are specifications of the knowledge and skills (learning outcomes) which each credential or qualification (e.g., certificate, diploma, bachelor, masters, or doctoral degree) is intended to achieve.

In 2002, an Ontario government agency, the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB), created by the Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000, introduced the first qualifications framework in Canada. The Ontario Qualifications Framework (OQF) is the first complete framework in Canada, and it details a full range of postsecondary credentials including apprenticeship certificates. The OQF specifies the qualifications offered by Indigenous Institutes, the qualifications for Private Career Colleges, the qualifications awarded by Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) and those offered by universities and other authorized providers.

### 2. What is the relationship between the OQF and quality assurance?

A qualification framework, in detailing the learning outcomes for each credential, provides a solid basis for quality assurance. Also, the specifications of the OQF provide assurance that a credential offered in Ontario, such as a degree, meets the same high standards, regardless of whether it is offered by a university, college, Indigenous Institute or other postsecondary institution.

The OQF is a key piece of Ontario's strategy to maintain the quality, accessibility and accountability of its postsecondary education system. The knowledge and skills expectations may be seen as standards, and these may be taken into account when assessing, selecting or developing programs. The framework helps institutions to study how well their programs are meeting expectations, and it assists them in putting into place internal quality assurance systems.

### 3. How do credit transfer, prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), and academic requirements fit into the OQF?

The OQF describes normal minimum requirements to enter each credential level. Each Ontario institution will have its own policies and practices for recognizing formal and non-formal prior learning as it may lead to advanced standing within a program. For apprenticeship certificates, the ministry sets academic equivalencies or PLAR in policy.

The OQF provides a tool to compare the learning expectations of different types of qualifications. Postsecondary institutions are responsible for determining the amount of credit that they award for learning achieved at other institutions. Decisions are based on how similar the programs are as well as on the student's performance. The OQF offers institutions a measure against which they can create policies on credit transfer and credential recognition by mapping out both the level and expectations of each qualification, and setting out what knowledge and skills a student may have already achieved before entering a program at a particular level.

Because the OQF was developed, where possible, to be consistent with similar frameworks in other areas, it helps institutions compare expectations in Ontario with those set out elsewhere.

#### **4. Do programs have to meet the typical length listed in the OQF?**

The hours or semesters set out in the OQF are the typical length of a program at each level for students who enter with the minimum admission requirements. In some cases, the programs' lengths are a pre-determined minimum so that they comply with legislative requirements. For example, Certificate 1 is a minimum 40 hours to comply with the Private Career Colleges Act, 2005 which requires all Private Career College vocational programs to be at least 40 hours long to be approved by the ministry.

As another example, the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) Credentials Framework is built into the OQF. In this Credentials Framework each program leading to a credential may provide for a range of hours to achieve the learning outcomes. It is the responsibility of the CAAT to design each program's curriculum and decide how it is delivered. Colleges approve programs and credentials, and ensure that they are consistent with the CAAT Credentials Framework.

#### **5. What is the link between the standards outlined in the OQF and those set by professional/industry associations or employers?**

The OQF identifies the qualifications that recognized Ontario postsecondary institutions may award, and the knowledge and skills expected of holders of each credential. For the purpose of licensing or certification, professional associations and/or regulating bodies may identify the knowledge and skills that graduates need to enter practice.

#### **6. What does the OQF mean for public college program standards?**

While the OQF describes broad learning expectations, program standards set out the job-related skills (vocational learning outcomes), other workplace skills (essential employability skills) and general education requirements for programs of study in the Ontario public college system.

The OQF does not replace program standards nor does it address content delivery (curriculum); these are the responsibility of each college under the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002.

Together, both the OQF and program standards are key parts of the Ontario Government's quality framework.

#### **7. Where do college degrees fall within the OQF?**

Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology may apply for Ministerial consent to offer degrees only in applied areas of study. These bachelor degrees (honours) are quality assured by the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) which makes a recommendation to the Minister for consent.

#### **8. How can the OQF be used for program design?**

The OQF sets out clear guidelines for each credential including its main goals, normal admission requirements and typical length. It also sets out the generic skills that the holder of each qualification should be able to demonstrate. The descriptions in the OQF can assist institutions or program developers when they design new programs and determine which credential will be awarded.

## **9. Who can award each of the credentials (e.g. degree, diploma, apprenticeship certificate)?**

Qualifications are not tied to type of institution. If a program from a particular institution meets all legislative and regulatory requirements, that institution may offer the credential. In cases where more than one institution type may offer the same credential, they must meet the same criteria.

### **Certificate of Apprenticeship/Certificate of Qualification**

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities awards the Certificate of Apprenticeship and Certificate of Qualification as a part of the Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act, 1990 and the Apprenticeship and Certification Act, 1998. Approved training delivery providers are authorized to deliver apprenticeship programs.

### **Certificates**

Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology and Indigenous Institutes are authorized to award a Certificate or a Graduate Certificate.

### **Diplomas**

Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology and Indigenous Institutes are authorized to award a Diploma or an Advanced Diploma.

### **Degrees**

Under the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000 (PSECE), Ministerial consent or an Act of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario is required to operate a university and/or offer a degree. Currently, Ontario public colleges as well as some private organizations and out-of-province private and public organizations are authorized to grant degrees through Ministerial consent under the PSECE Act, normally based on a recommendation from the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB).

Indigenous Institutes are exempt from provisions in PSECE which require Ministerial consent to offer degrees. Under the Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017, Indigenous Institutes can offer degrees on the approval of the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council.

Publicly-assisted Ontario universities and some private institutions are authorized to award degrees through an act of the Ontario Legislature. All degree-granters in Ontario must meet the same standards.

## **10. How does the OQF get reviewed and updated?**

The Ministry is responsible for monitoring developments in the postsecondary education system to ensure that the OQF remains current and aligned with changes to legislation and regulation, and reflects any changes in credential names and government policy directives. The OQF will also be updated to include new qualifications as they are established.

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