

INDEPENDENT ACADEMIC EXPERTS

Council's *Degree Program Proposal Checklist* normally requires institutions, including those requesting fully expedited reviews, to include with the submission of new degree program proposals the full report(s) of an independent academic expert (or experts) engaged by the institution, along with the institution's response. The applicant institution should provide short résumés of the academic experts involved and a rationale as to why they were selected.

Note that these academic experts, engaged by an institution when it is developing a proposal, are not to be confused with CAQC's peer evaluators, who are invited by Council to join review teams established later in the program approval process by Council.

The following are guidelines with respect to the selection and use of independent academic experts:

- Academic experts must have doctoral degrees (or terminal degrees in the discipline) and hold (or have held) academic appointments at the senior level.
- Academic experts should have experience in the design, delivery or administration of a similar program offered at a degree-granting institution.
- In order to avoid conflict of interest and to ensure objective assessments, any connection between an academic expert and the applicant institution must be disclosed. Institutions are wise to avoid potential and perceived conflicts by selecting experts who have no connection with the institution or faculty/administrators of the proposed program, or who are from institutions that are not affiliated with the applicant institution.
- Given *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* considerations, the institution should seek permission from the expert for submission to Council of the expert's resume.
- Academic experts should be provided with terms of reference, including specific issues/areas to be addressed in the review (see below for a sample that can be adapted to suit the particular institution and program being proposed).
- For some program proposals, the institution should consider the merits of having an academic expert visit the campus to assess the institution's infrastructure, including library holdings and information access arrangements pertaining to the program area, as well as other physical resources such as laboratories.
- If an expert's report fails to address critical elements of the proposed program, the institution should consider engaging another expert to assist it in the development of a strong proposal.

Sample Terms of Reference

The following exemplifies terms of reference that an institution might give to independent academic experts commenting on program proposals. They may be adapted to suit the institution and program being evaluated.

1. Does the proposed program meet or have the potential to meet national and international quality standards for degree programs?

2. Does the proposed program have the appropriate academic breadth and depth of knowledge as outlined in the expectations for degree level standards in the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework?
3. Will the proposed program offer similar learning outcomes and opportunities for advancement as those offered to graduates of similar programs at Canadian post-secondary institutions?
4. Have institutional administrators and faculty made a realistic assessment of demands that will be created by the proposed program (e.g., finances, adequacy of current and proposed faculty resources, workloads, support for scholarship of faculty, etc.)?
5. Does the institution have both the academic resources (e.g., supporting disciplines) and the infrastructure (e.g., classrooms, information resources, labs, offices, equipment, etc.) to implement the proposed program?
6. Given the over-all quality of the institution's operations, does the expansion of programs, as proposed, seem to be a viable and realistic proposition?
7. Do you endorse the proposal without conditions? If yes, for what reasons? Do you endorse the proposal subject to stated conditions? If yes, with which conditions and for what reasons? If you do not support the proposal, what are your reasons?
8. Has the institution adequately assessed demand for the program? Has it provided realistic enrolment projections?

In order to assist academic experts with their assessments, it is recommended that they be provided with information about the degree approval process, the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework and CAQC's program standards. In the case of undergraduate degrees, the applicable guidelines with respect to staffing, degree structure and curriculum content, etc. should also be provided.