

# Guidelines for Quality Assessment of Offshore Programs

## Overview

A Cooperative Education Agreement, (CEA), or equivalent document, is associated with each program<sup>1</sup> offered by Algonquin College and the offshore program partner. The CEA outlines the terms of the agreement including details regarding program delivery. Quality Assurance of these programs is an integral part of any CEA and generally falls into three components:

- Initial **Status Check** of the program, conducted at start-up phase, ideally before, or at the start of a new program delivery.
- Periodic **Quality Assessment** of the program, initially annually or biennially, with scope as outlined in the CEA. The scope may be extended in consultation between Algonquin College and the host institution.
- Comprehensive **Program Quality Review**, conducted as per a defined schedule for each unique Ontario College Credential prepared by Algonquin College.

The intent of the Quality Assurance activities is to ensure that quality standards expected of the programs delivered by host institutions are, and continue to be, met. Both strengths and challenges for each program may be identified during the reviews. Excellence in quality should be recognized, and recommendations put forward which support the ongoing continuous quality improvement of the program, with timelines for implementation established with the partner institution.

## Purpose of this Document

This document provides guidelines for conducting **periodic quality assessments** of programs offered at offshore institutions. Status checks are conducted at the outset of the program delivery. Comprehensive program quality review is conducted as per the College schedule for program quality reviews.

## Structure of this Document

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<sup>1</sup> In some instances, a service or other entity may be under review. The term 'program' may be replaced as appropriate in this document. Note this only applies to periodic quality assessment, not to the comprehensive program quality review.

## Periodic Quality Assessment – Process

The quality assessment follows four main phases:

- The **Planning** phase, where those involved in conducting the quality assessment are determined.
- The **Pre-Site Visit** phase, where the quality assessors prepare for the Site Visit by requesting and reviewing information, and setting up an agenda with the host institution. The report starts to be drafted during this phase.
- The **Site Visit**, where the on-the-ground quality assessment is conducted.
- The **Post-Site Visit** (wrap-up) phase, where the report is finalized and the host institution requested to provide a plan to implement the recommendations.

Communication and planning meetings should be conducted in a manner suitable for the parties involved, and can include, but are not limited to, face-to-face, teleconference, e-mail and telephone. An important consideration throughout the process is flexibility. During the planning and pre-Site Visit preparations, be sure to have contingency plans in place. Interruptions to power, internet, as well as other schedule changes during the Site Visit may occur, so prepare for the unexpected.

Phase	Main Tasks	Those Involved (Key Players in Boldface)
<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set timing of quality assessment Site Visit</li> <li>• Confirm Algonquin College liaison</li> <li>• Confirm host Institution liaison</li> <li>• Assign quality assessor(s)</li> <li>• Provide awareness training (if applicable) for local customs and expectations.</li> <li>• Make note of areas of concern or excellence that must be further explored during quality assessment.</li> <li>• Assign timelines for Site Visit preparations<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Set debrief meetings for post-Site Visit.</li> <li>• Set report reviewing meeting(s) with PQAA and academic administrators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>International Education Centre</b></li> <li>• <b>Applicable Dean/Program Chair</b></li> </ul>
<b>Pre-Site Visit Preparation</b>	<p><u>Stage 1</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Download and review QA report template.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Quality Assessor(s)</b> as appointed by Algonquin College</li> <li>• Algonquin College Liaison</li> <li>• Host Institution Liaison</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> The Program Quality Assurance Administrator (PQAA) and Manager, Offshore Program of Study Administrator (MOPSA) can advise on timelines. While it is prudent to give sufficient lead-time to the Site Visit (say six weeks) and to close the report in a timely fashion (within one month after the visit), flexibility on timing should be maintained.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare and request list of materials to review pre-Site Visit, and during Site Visit.</li> <li>• Provide Host Institution with <b>draft</b><sup>3</sup>agenda; work with host institution to update. Note: the host institution may be invited to add specific items to the agenda that they may wish to be assessed.</li> </ul> <p><u>Stage 2 – after receipt of requested materials</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge receipt.</li> <li>• Review draft materials (i.e., after pre-Site Visit materials have been reviewed).</li> <li>• Tabulate and include in draft Site Visit report.</li> </ul> <p><u>Stage 3 - after review of requested materials (generally just prior to departure for Site Visit)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality Assessors start to draft report. Quality Assessment Goals/Criteria are revisited. Agenda is revisited. Additional materials required at Site Visit identified.</li> <li>• Review agenda and additional requirements with Host Institution.</li> </ul>	
<b>Site Visit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occurs as per planned agenda (aim is to follow agenda goals, knowing that flexibility needs to be maintained).</li> <li>• Suggest that daily entry and exit meetings are met to firm up proceedings for day and day ahead.</li> <li>• Quality Assessors document their findings each day, updating draft quality assessment report.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality Assessor(s)</li> <li>• Host Institution Liaison</li> <li>• Senior Administration</li> <li>• Faculty</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Recent Graduates</li> <li>• Employers and other external stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Post-Site-Visit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debrief with onshore international management team – immediately on return</li> </ul> <p><u>Complete the draft report (timeline as per agreed in planning stage)</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Quality Assurance Administrator/Manager, Offshore Program of Study Administrator</li> <li>• Applicable Dean/Program Chair</li> <li>• Algonquin College Liaison</li> <li>• Host Institution Liaison</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> That the agenda is in draft must be noted. The agenda may change once pre-site visit materials are reviewed, or to make accommodations.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide draft report to PQAA for review. Once report meets level of satisfaction,</li> <li>• Quality Assessors provide the draft report to Algonquin and Host Institution for comment before finalizing.</li> </ul> <p><u>Finalizing the report.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality assessment report is finalized. Host institution is requested to respond to the recommendations with a response and an implementation plan within timeline provided.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Wrap up meeting as required.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality Assessor(s)</li> </ul>
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## The Site Visit

The Site Visit should include:

- Commencement and Debrief meetings with Senior Administration.
- Interviews / Focus Groups or equivalent<sup>5</sup> with the following:
  - Recruiters (HR)
  - Faculty
  - Advisory Committees/Potential Employers
  - Students
  - Graduates
  - Those responsible for Faculty/Staff evaluations
  - Those responsible for Student Support/Orientation
  - Those responsible for Faculty Support/Orientation
- Observations and reviews
  - In-class observations
  - In-lab observations
  - Review of student work
  - Review of grades and testing
  - Review of course outlines and course section information
- Tours
  - Tours of facilities

A draft agenda should be issued prior to the Site Visit to the host institution, in order to allow sufficient time for their preparations.

Note that quality assessments are to be conducted in a culturally appropriate manner, while meeting the requirements of the assessment. For example, it may be more appropriate to gather student feedback via a questionnaire rather than a focus group meeting. Advice should be sought as to local adjustment of practices where applicable.

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<sup>4</sup> A written response from the host institution is preferred; however it may be more practical, given language and cultural considerations, to obtain a response through another means. The method for documenting the implementation plan and status of actions should be confirmed with the Host Institution at the time of finalizing the report.

<sup>5</sup> Where focus groups and interviews are either impractical or contrary to local customs, modify as appropriate to effectively gather the required information/insight.

## Materials Required for Review

The following table captures the type of materials that may be reviewed as part of the quality assessment, and requested ahead of time. Where materials are not available in English, a mechanism for their review must be determined. Additionally, the host institution may choose to conduct a self-study to be submitted prior to the Site Visit. The structure and scope of the self-study should be planned in advance by the host institution and communicated to the Quality Assessment team.

What	Why?	When?
Academic Policies and Procedures, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admissions</li> <li>• Student Feedback Mechanisms</li> <li>• Faculty Feedback Information</li> <li>• Faculty Orientation</li> <li>• Evaluation of Student Learning</li> <li>• Grading System</li> <li>• Credit Transfer, Prior Learning</li> <li>• Academic Advising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To determine their existence, scope. The extent to which they are in operation may be assessed during the Site Visit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pre-Site Visit. A weblink to the information is acceptable.</li> </ul>
Program Promotional or Informational material or equivalent, for example, the program monograph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure for consistency, clarity and accuracy of the information presented.</li> <li>• Review that Program of Study and Duration of program is in alignment with the credential granted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ahead of site visit</li> </ul>
Program Curriculum <sup>6</sup> or part thereof – may request program of study, selected course outlines and course section information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the extent to which the Course Outlines convey the curriculum taught, assessed and culminated.</li> <li>• Review the extent to which the instructors operate within structured</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ahead of Site Visit, with the proviso that additional course outlines and section information may be requested during the Site Visit.</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Note that Program Quality Review re-maps the entire Curriculum, and hence a full mapping may be requested but is not mandatory for Quality Assessments.

	work plans (course section information).	
Student Timetables (selection only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review for time balancing, access to labs etc.</li> </ul>	
Student Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To ensure a feedback mechanism is in place and is happening</li> </ul>	
Examples of student work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To ensure that assessment of student work is happening, and is consistent across the program.</li> </ul>	

## Interview / Focus Groups

Focus groups and/or individual interviews are conducted to gain a multitude of perspectives on how the program is functioning. Agendas for each interview/focus group should be prepared in advance, based on the review of the pre-Site Visit material. As the Site Visit is conducted, questions may be added, dropped or modified based on the information garnered to date. Clearly stated standard questions are preferred. Although there is no prescribed order for the interviews / focus groups, it is useful to speak with faculty, then employers and then students, wrapping up with a second faculty meeting if required. Agendas should be adjusted as appropriate prior to each meeting based on information obtained to date. As previously noted, where focus groups and interviews are either impractical or contrary to local customs, the focus group meetings may be modified as appropriate to effectively gather the required information/insight.

Interviews/ focus groups are recommended for the following groups. Use your judgment to adjust as required:

- Senior Administration  
Meetings with Senior Administration establish the manner in which the operation is run, and whether it supports student success in the program offered at the host institution.

In addition to the focus group meeting/interview you must also complete a debriefing. This is generally the last thing on the agenda. During the meeting, thank the administration for hosting the assessment. Present your key findings and let the administration know what areas are expected to be referenced in the QA Report. Note that this meeting is not an open discussion. It is simply an opportunity for the findings to be explained.

- Faculty  
Faculty meetings should focus on the program delivery, curriculum, alignment of evaluations, and workload balancing, in addition to faculty orientation and support. Student support procedures may also be discussed. The program promotional material (monograph) is a useful resource to have at this meeting, as it provides a focus on the Program of Study, and what has been advertised to the students.
- Employers/External Stakeholders  
Employers and other external stakeholders should be consulted to ascertain whether graduates of the program are performing at the expected level for credential appropriate positions. They may also be consulted for curriculum currency and relevancy. Program

promotional materials, monograph, or equivalent should be distributed for review ahead of the meeting.

- **Recent Graduates**  
Recent graduates bring a unique perspective to the quality assessment. They can support or counter the observations made by both employers and current students. For example, students enrolled in a program may not see the applicability of the 'soft-skills' introduced, whereas graduates and employers may validate that these are necessary and valued skills in the industry.
- **Students**  
Student's observations and experiences are gathered during the quality assessment to determine whether applicable policies and procedures are in place, and are working well, and whether the program meets their expectations.

Refer to the *Conducting Focus Groups* document for detailed instructions on how to conduct the focus group interviews. Templates for note taking and agendas are also provided.

## Writing the Report

The report should be drafted during the Site Visit, and finalized shortly after (ideally within a month including [review and sign off](#)). Use of a standardized Quality Assessment template is preferred, but a locally determined template may be used. The report must include:

- Purpose of the Site Visit
- The location and dates of the Site Visit
- The names and affiliation of the quality assessors
- A listing of materials received and reviewed
- The outline of the review process used, and areas assessed
- An overall assessment of quality
- Comments on the findings of the self-study, if applicable
- Recommendations for quality improvement.

Refer to the following documents for more information:

- How to Write the QA Report*
- QA Report Template*

## Report Review and Sign Off

The draft report is reviewed by the PQAA and the Program Chair/Dean. Once the report is finalized, the formal review and sign-off procedure is followed:

- Review and sign off by PQAA, Program Chair/Dean
- Forward report to Director, International for review/approval.
- Forward report to Vice President, International and Vice President, Academic for review/approval.

The completed sign off sheet indicates that the report is approved and may be shared with the offshore partner or campus. The master copy of the Offshore Quality Assessment report is stored electronically by International and provided to Academic Development. A hard-copy can be provided on request.

## **Implementation Plan and Follow Up Reports**

Once the PQAA receives notification from the Vice Presidents that the Quality Assessment report has been approved, an implementation plan resulting from the review is developed in consultation with the offshore partner. The MOPSA guides this development in coordination with the appropriate onshore International liaison. A schedule for follow up reports is also defined, and the implementation plan is tracked to completion.