

**College Baccalaureate Degree Approval Processes
in Other Jurisdictions**

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Summary

1. This study examined aspects of approval processes for baccalaureate degree programs in colleges in the following 11 jurisdictions: Alberta, British Columbia, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Flanders, Florida, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. More detailed profiles are provided for seven of the jurisdictions. In order to make the data more relevant for the Ontario reader, some comparisons with characteristics of the baccalaureate degree approval process in Ontario are noted.
2. The proportion of baccalaureate degree activity accounted for by colleges is at least 20% in the jurisdictions outside North America and is nearly 40% or greater in six of them. It is about 5% or less in the three North American jurisdictions.
3. There is considerable diversity in the characteristics of approval processes for baccalaureate degree programs offered by colleges in these jurisdictions. Still it is possible to discern some general patterns.
4. In six of the eight jurisdictions for which it could be determined, the approval process consists of two distinct stages. In the first stage, the Ministry conducts a review that focuses on student and employer demand, economic implications, and possible duplication with programs of other institutions. Only if a proposed program passes this review, does it proceed to the second stage, that of quality assurance.
5. Quality assurance is handled in a variety of different ways: the program assessment model; the institutional accreditation model; the institutional process audit model; and various combinations of these models. Of the 11 jurisdictions, one uses the institutional process audit model; one uses institutional accreditation; two use a mix of institutional accreditation and program assessment, and the others use the program assessment model. At least one of the latter is experimenting with the process audit approach.
6. In the program assessment model, a proposed new program undergoes an assessment by team of external evaluators which involves a site visit. Policies with respect to periodic re-assessment of programs vary, from no re-assessments of programs, to “desk” audits on a selective basis, to full program assessments of all programs every five, six, seven or eight years.
7. In the institutional accreditation model, there is a major external review at the time a college proposes its first baccalaureate program, and more limited reviews of subsequent new programs. An institution must seek a re-affirmation of its accreditation every ten years, but there is no periodic re-assessment of programs.

8. In the institutional process audit model, the institution is responsible for the quality of its new and ongoing programs, and the institution is subject to an external audit of its quality assurance processes.
9. Four of nine jurisdictions have instituted practices of expediting their quality assessment processes, by reducing or eliminating assessment requirements for institutions that have a proven record of offering programs at a particular degree level and/or programs of a particular type, and have acceptable quality assurance processes. However, in the two Canadian jurisdictions, expedited assessment has thus far been used only in the university sector.
10. In two of the 10 jurisdictions that do external program assessment, quality assurance for degree programs of colleges is handled by a different agency than quality assurance for degree programs of universities. In another two of these 10 jurisdictions, there was a separate agency for college degree programs until quite recently, and it is not yet clear if separation by sector will continue to any extent within the program approval framework of one of these jurisdictions. In six of 10 jurisdictions, a single agency has been responsible for the quality of degree programs of all colleges and all universities. The Ontario practice of having a quality assurance agency for colleges and just some universities (private and out-of-province ones) appears to be unique.
11. Even where the degree programs of colleges and of universities are under the authority of a single quality assurance agency, various ways are used to recognize the difference between the academic orientation of university programs and the more applied orientation of college programs. These include ensuring that qualifications frameworks include learning outcomes of a vocational or professional nature; differentiating between applied and academic programs in the assessment process; and having different sets of intended learning outcomes for college and university baccalaureate programs.
12. There is considerable variation in the length and amount of detail in the degree level standards of different jurisdictions. Degree level standards in Europe and New Zealand are more concise and focused more on general principles than is the case with the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework. The more detailed the degree level standard, the less flexibility there is in applying it to diverse institutions and programs. The Canadian degree level standard ranges from three to almost ten times the length of degree level standards in most other jurisdictions.
13. Similarly, with the partial exception of Alberta, in the jurisdictions examined in this study, quality standards/benchmarks tend to be formulated as general principles rather than as detailed requirements. All those jurisdictions have substantially fewer

- and substantially less detailed quality assessment benchmarks than are employed by the PEQAB in Ontario. In Alberta, the standards are described as norms to be applied flexibly, rather than as prescriptive requirements.
14. In all the jurisdictions examined in this study, quality standards for admissions, advanced standing and transfer, and academic progression are formulated in terms of general principles, with few or no numerical requirements. Generally, it is left to institutions to formulate specific course and grade requirements, though in some cases a Ministry may do this. Ontario differs from the jurisdictions examined in this study in having effectively ceded this responsibility to a quality assurance agency (PEQAB), and it has far more numerical requirements in this area than are found in the other jurisdictions. In most of the jurisdictions examined, the admission requirements for college baccalaureate programs are quite different from those for university baccalaureate programs.
 15. In only one of the 11 jurisdictions examined in this study – Florida - has a quality assurance agency stipulated a minimum requirement for the proportion of faculty who teach in college baccalaureate programs who must have a doctoral or terminal degree. In Florida, at least 25% of the course hours in the major field must be taught by faculty who have a doctorate or terminal degree in the field. By contrast, in Ontario at least 50% of faculty who teach in the program must have a doctorate or terminal degree in the field regardless of how many hours they teach. The actual percentages of faculty who have doctorates in nine college systems in Europe for which such data could be obtained, including three examined in this study whose programs are almost exclusively at the degree level, are substantially below the percentage requirement in Ontario.
 16. The paper concludes with some observations about how the degree approval processes in some jurisdictions do more than those of other jurisdictions to value the differences between the more applied degrees of colleges and the more academic degrees of universities. It notes that in general, this type of differentiation is more apparent in the approval processes of European than of North American jurisdictions, and that it is less apparent in Ontario than in any of the jurisdictions examined in this paper.

College Baccalaureate Degree Approval Processes in other Jurisdictions¹

Introduction

This paper examines the processes for approval of baccalaureate degree programs offered by colleges in other jurisdictions. The identification of such institutions, along with the decisions about which jurisdictions to focus on in this paper, is addressed in this introductory section. Following a brief introduction, Part I of the paper is organized around key themes in the approval process, such as the types of approval that may be needed for a program to be offered. Part II consists of profiles of the program approval processes in the seven jurisdictions for which it was possible to get the most information: British Columbia, Alberta, Florida, New Zealand, Netherlands & Flanders, and Finland. In some cases, I have repeated material in both Parts, such as a few examples of degree standards. A summary of selected characteristics for all 11 jurisdictions is provided in Table 1.

In order to make the information in this paper more relevant to the reader, comparisons are made with the corresponding aspects of the degree program approval process in Ontario. However, the paper is *not* intended to provide an analysis of the process for approval of degree programs in Ontario colleges.

Although there is some provision for colleges to award baccalaureate degrees in four provinces of Canada besides Ontario (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island), only in British Columbia and Alberta have a substantial number of colleges awarded baccalaureate degrees. The approval processes in these two provinces are profiled in Part II. There is an important contextual difference between Ontario on the one hand, and British Columbia and Alberta on the other in regard to colleges offering baccalaureate programs. In the two western provinces, the colleges that were the largest providers of baccalaureate programs have become universities or degree-granting polytechnics. Thus, unlike Ontario, the degree program approval processes in those two provinces no longer have to address a situation where baccalaureate granting is a major activity for several colleges. In regard to the relative scale of baccalaureate granting, the Ontario college system's only peer in North America is the Florida system of colleges. Its other peers are on other continents.

In the United States, 57 community colleges in 18 states have received approval to award baccalaureate degrees (Russell, 2013). However, in most of these states, approvals have been granted through *ad hoc* or pilot project arrangements. Nearly one third of American institutions

¹I would like to thank Katharine Janzen and David Trick for their comments and suggestions on an earlier draft.

that are offering baccalaureate programs are in Florida, and that state has the most formalized and well documented approval procedures in the United States. Thus, in the United States, I have profiled the approval process only for Florida.

When we look beyond the North American continent, the selection of comparator jurisdictions to include in the study becomes more difficult. In some countries universities are the only postsecondary institutions that award baccalaureate degrees. In a number of countries, there is a sector of postsecondary institutions besides the universities that awards baccalaureate degrees, but these institutions go by a variety of names.

A common pattern in Europe is to have tertiary education delivered by *three* separate sets of providers (Slantcheva-Durst, 2010). One set is that of traditional, research-focused universities which offer degree programs that have an academic orientation. Then there is a set of institutions that offer baccalaureate programs with an applied or professional orientation, and these institutions may also offer some postgraduate programs. These institutions constitute a *parallel* degree granting sector to the universities, using the same degree titles as the universities, but with their programs distinguished by their applied, or professional orientation (Slantcheva-Durst, 2010). Institutions in this sector may engage in applied research, with considerable variation from country to country and from institution to institution in the scale of research activity. Where these institutions often differ most from Ontario colleges is that their instructional activity consists exclusively or primarily of programs that are at least at the baccalaureate level. Examples of such sectors are the *Hogescholen* in the Netherlands and the *Fachhochschulen* in Germany.

In many European countries, these institutions have taken to translating their names into English as “Universities of Applied Sciences” (UAS), although generally they are not allowed to use the word “university” in their names in their national languages. Other names in English that are common for these types of postsecondary institutions are Institute of Technology (Ireland) and Polytechnic (Finland). I will refer to these institutions generically as colleges.

When one looks at the aims and content of baccalaureate programs in these institutions, they seem quite similar to those of the baccalaureate programs in Ontario colleges. The striking difference between these European institutions and Ontario colleges is the absence in the former institutions of the shorter duration vocational and adult education programs that comprise the predominant portion of the activity of Ontario colleges. In many European countries, the programs that correspond to Ontario college certificate and diploma programs, trades training, and short term vocational and adult education are the responsibility of a third set of providers. For example, in the Netherlands there are 14 universities, 42 *Hogescholen*, and

a third sector of 70 vocational colleges. In some countries, the third sector of tertiary education is referred to as the VET – vocational education and training – sector.

Because of the apparent similarity of the baccalaureate programs of these European institutions to those of Ontario colleges, it is important to include this type of institution in this study. The polytechnic-type institutions in the Netherlands and Finland are profiled in Part II. Because the agency that accredits programs in the Netherlands also has jurisdiction over higher education programs in Flanders, the Netherlands profile will also cover some aspects of the approval process in Flanders. In addition, reference will be made in Part I to institutions in other European countries: Austria, Denmark, Ireland and Germany. This was not a good time to profile the institutes of technology in Ireland (IOTIs), because a revamping of quality assurance processes is now under way following a recent merger of all the country's quality and qualifications agencies. Although information was collected from Germany, that country was not profiled in Part II because of the difficulty obtaining materials in English and because of the "super-complexity" (Kehm, 2006, p. 10) of the German system of accreditation. For example, postsecondary institutions in Germany have the choice of seeking institutional or program accreditation, and a choice of which accreditation agency from which to seek approval.

In addition to the jurisdictions noted so far, institutions in New Zealand are also profiled in Part II. These institutions are known as institutes of technology or polytechnics, and are referred to collectively as ITPs. In terms of composition of activity, the ITPs in New Zealand appear to be the most similar institutions to Ontario's colleges of any institutions outside North America. Although baccalaureate granting activity is substantially larger in New Zealand ITPs than in Ontario colleges, enrolment in diploma, certificate, and other non-baccalaureate programs still comprises over 70% of enrolment in the ITPs (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010, p. 26). In contrast to New Zealand, in Australia the awarding of baccalaureate degrees by technical and further education institutions (TAFEs) is a recent phenomenon and still of relatively small scale (Wheelahan, Moodie, Billet & Kelly, 2009). For that reason, and because the national accreditation agency, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency, was established only last year, Australia is not included in this study.

An estimate of the proportion of baccalaureate degrees or baccalaureate activity that is accounted for by colleges in some of the countries or regions studied for this paper is as follows: Netherlands, 75%; Flanders, 65%; Finland, 60%; Ireland, 52%; Germany, 39%; New Zealand, 20% (for the sources of these estimates, see Table 1).

The information contained in this paper was obtained from documents and web sites of relevant government departments and agencies, and of quality assurance and sector agencies,

and from about two dozen personal contacts by email and telephone with officials of those agencies and academic experts.

Several limitations were encountered in the research for this paper. The information needed for a comprehensive analysis of approval processes in other jurisdictions was difficult to obtain, and in some cases, to interpret. Often, handbooks and other resource materials were not as complete or as clear as they might be. Frequently, information on some aspects of the approval process was unavailable for some jurisdictions, and on other aspects of the approval process for other jurisdictions.

Part I: Key Findings Regarding Approval Processes

This part of the paper presents key findings regarding the approval processes in the selected jurisdictions. The findings are organized around major themes: stages of the approval process; assessment, accreditation, and audit; location of responsibility for external quality assurance; approaches to formulation of quality standards; learning outcome standards; treatment of admissions; and treatment of faculty qualifications.

Stages of the approval process

In many jurisdictions there are two separate and distinct stages in the approval process. In the first stage, a program is reviewed by the relevant Ministry or government agency for evidence of student demand, labour market demand for graduates of the program, and possible duplication of programs offered by other institutions. In the Netherlands, this stage review is conducted by the Higher Education Efficiency Commission (for which CDHO is the acronym in Dutch), which advises the Minister. The review by the CDHO is called a “macro-efficiency check”, or “macro-efficiency test”, and is required for all programs of both universities and *Hogescholen* which seek government funding. For programs that do not seek public funding, institutions may proceed directly to the second stage, the quality review. The *Hogescholen* will be referred to in the rest of this paper by their acronym in Dutch, HBOs.

In British Columbia and Alberta, the first stage review is sometimes referred to as a “system coordination” review. In Alberta, the first stage is defined as “a system coordination review of the proposed program by the Ministry to make a determination of the need for the program and how it fits with other programs currently offered in Alberta’s post-secondary system” (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2011, p. 6). In Alberta, new program proposals of *both* universities and colleges are subject to a system coordination review, but in British Columbia only the new programs of colleges are subject to this kind of review. In Florida there is an

extremely detailed review by the state board of education that occurs before any quality assessment. Besides the items addressed in other jurisdictions, this review also covers costs to students and expected earnings of graduates. On the other hand, in New Zealand issues pertaining to student and employer demand and possible duplication are left to the market.

In these jurisdictions, after a college receives first stage approval from the relevant government department, it then submits the proposal to a quality assurance agency. For example, in Florida, after stage one approval from the state board of education, the college must obtain approval from the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Commission on Colleges (referred to in this paper as SACS). In the Netherlands, after a successful review by the CDHO, the next stage is a quality review by the national accreditation agency, the NVAO. Similarly, in British Columbia, after a proposed program passes the system coordination review, it is sent to the Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB).

The rationale for the two-stage process is that there are two different types of issues concerning a proposed new program, efficiency and quality. Since a quality review can be, depending upon the particular quality assurance regimen, a very arduous and time-consuming process, it is sensible to avoid that process if a new program would fail an efficiency test. In the jurisdictions that use a two-stage process, some program proposals are screened out at the first stage. The consequences of not separating these stages could be either wasting effort in a quality review, or making it difficult to reject a program that has passed a quality review but is of dubious merit on economic grounds, because of all the effort that has gone into the quality review by the time the proposal gets to the stage of the efficiency review.

The program assessment process in Ontario seems to merge what in many other jurisdictions are two separate stages of review. In Ontario, all proposals for programs that fall under the Postsecondary Education Choice & Excellence Act are referred to the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB). The last two standards in the quality assessment are Economic Need, and Non-duplication, items that in many other jurisdictions would have been addressed in a separate – and prior – review.

Assessment, accreditation, and audit

A variety of approaches are employed in different jurisdictions and sectors for providing the legal authority for a postsecondary institution to award a particular degree. In this paper, I try to use the term “approval” as an umbrella term for all such approaches (though, following the European practice, I occasionally use the term accreditation).

In Ontario, all proposed new baccalaureate programs in the colleges must undergo an external assessment by a panel appointed by the PEQAB. While some jurisdictions have a similar practice, there are others that do not. Finland employs a process audit approach for both the polytechnics and the universities. Quality assurance of new and ongoing programs is the responsibility of each institution. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) conducts audits of each institution's quality assurance procedures to ensure that it has an effective quality assurance system. In the literature on quality assurance, supporters of the audit approach point out that it is less costly than other approaches. They also maintain that in the long run it is more effective than other approaches in improving quality, because it does more to develop an institutional culture of quality (Dill, Massy, Williams & Cook, 1996; Newton, 2000).

The next least intrusive approach is that of institutional accreditation, the approach that applies to institutions that award degrees in the United States. The regional accreditation agencies in the United States, including SACS, accredit institutions, not programs. However, one of the central outcomes of the accreditation process is the determination of whether the institution has the capacity to ensure the quality of all of its programs. Colleges that are accredited by SACS normally have a Level I accreditation, indicating their competence to award associate degrees. When a college *first* seeks to award a baccalaureate degree, it must apply to have its accreditation level changed to Level II, the level for institutions whose highest degree awarded is the bachelor's degree. This change, which confers recognition of the college's capability to award baccalaureate degrees, is considered a "substantial change" under the policies of the accreditation agency. Accordingly, advancing to Level II requires a substantial review of the institution by SACS.

However, after overcoming this initial hurdle, the subsequent demands on a program are significantly less in an institutional accreditation model than with a program assessment model, such as that employed by the PEQAB. When a college adds other baccalaureate programs, it must obtain prior approval from the accreditation agency if the new programs are in different areas from previously existing baccalaureate programs. The approval process for additional baccalaureate programs involves the submission of a "prospectus" of not more than 25 pages (plus appendices), and normally does not require the appointment of a team of external evaluators or a site visit. If the additional programs are in areas that are not too dissimilar from the areas of existing programs, simply notifying the accreditation agency of the new programs may be sufficient.

Further, in the institutional accreditation model, there is no requirement for a review of each ongoing program every five years. Institutions must have a reaffirmation of their accreditation

every ten years. During a reaffirmation review, the institution must demonstrate that it has the capacity to ensure the quality of all of its programs at the time of that review, but this is done in the context of an institutional review.

The assessment model involves a full review of each and every program initially and then periodically, typically every five, six, seven or eight years. The burden on institutions, and the cost of the quality assurance process, would seem to be significantly less with the process audit and institutional accreditation models than with the assessment model. These concerns were noted by an OECD panel that reviewed tertiary education in the Netherlands in 2008 (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008). The OECD team warned that the benefits of the program approval system “will reduce over time and the associated bureaucracy will outweigh the potential developmental benefits” (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2008, p. 88). The panel added that there would be “much merit” in moving to an institutional accreditation model, but noted that there did not seem to be sufficient political support for such a move. A similar suggestion to move to institutional accreditation had been made in a 2007 report that started with a self-evaluation by the NVAO itself and included an external review of the assessment process (Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, 2007).

These suggestions were partially adopted in a 2011 reform that combines a form of institutional accreditation with program assessment (National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation, 2011). In the new system, which applies to both the HBO and university sectors in the Netherlands, an institution may apply for an institutional quality assurance assessment. If it receives a positive institutional quality assurance assessment, it qualifies for “limited” program quality assessment. Institutions that do not qualify for limited program quality assessment undergo “extensive” program quality assessment. In the limited quality assessment regimen, the program has to satisfy three quality standards; while in the extensive version, there are 16 quality standards. This hybrid model of institutional accreditation and program assessment can be viewed as a way of expediting the program assessment process.

Different approaches to expediting the program assessment process have been adopted in British Columbia and Alberta, but thus far just for universities. In both provinces institutions that have demonstrated sound quality assurance practices over time and spanning several programs may be exempted from program quality reviews or be eligible for a “desk” review by the quality assurance agency that involves neither the appointment of an external evaluation team nor a site visit. In British Columbia, institutions that meet certain conditions may be exempted completely from the requirement for a quality review of new programs at particular

degree levels. It is not clear if colleges are eligible to apply for exempt status, but none have done so yet.

The difference in requirements for external quality review of programs between universities and colleges in British Columbia is striking. Nine of the 12 universities are exempt from external review of *new* programs at least at the baccalaureate degree level, and there is no requirement for external review of *ongoing* programs of the universities by the DQAB. For the colleges, on the other hand, there must be a full external review of every new program, and a full external review periodically of every ongoing program. None of the jurisdictions examined for this paper that uses the program assessment model has as great a disparity in requirements for external review by the quality assurance agency between universities and colleges as does British Columbia. This disparity in British Columbia is greater than Ontario's. A committee that examined the degree approval process in British Columbia recently recommended that the government consider modifying its approach to granting exemptions from quality reviews (Advisory Panel on the Degree Approval Process in British Columbia, 2011).

Alberta has provisions that allow institutions to qualify for an expedited quality review of new programs on a program-specific, rather than a degree-level, basis. Generally, programs that are precedent-setting for an institution or for the system will require a full external assessment. Also, the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) monitors approved programs and will require periodic external assessment on a selective basis, though normally involving a "desk review" by the Council's Proposal Review Standing Committee, without external evaluators. However, the existing applied degree programs in Alberta are in a somewhat anomalous situation with respect to the CAQC. These programs were approved by the Ministry before the CAQC was established, and the CAQC has not been given (or assumed) responsibility for their periodic review. There have been no new applied baccalaureate programs in Alberta colleges since the CAQC was established in 2004.

Location of the responsibility for external quality assurance

In most of the jurisdictions studied for this paper, the location of the responsibility for quality assurance of baccalaureate programs in colleges is a jurisdiction-wide quality assurance body that also has responsibility for programs in universities. There are, however, at least two exceptions. In Austria, the degree programs of the *Fachhochschulen* are approved by a sector-specific agency, the *Fachhochschule* Council (*Fachhochschule* Council, 2013; Sohn, 2008). An application for a program accreditation submitted to this agency must include a description not only of the jobs for which graduates of the program are qualified, but also of the types of enterprises that would likely employ the graduates and the positions that graduates would likely fill (Sohn, 2008, p. 15). In Denmark, quality assurance for the professionally-oriented

baccalaureate programs of the colleges is the responsibility of the Danish Evaluation Institute, while a different agency, the Accreditation Institution (ACE Denmark), is responsible for accrediting university programs (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2010).

In some jurisdictions the change from a sector model to a unitary model has occurred only recently and for reasons of economy or expediency. In New Zealand, until 2011, approval of baccalaureate programs in the institutes of technology and polytechnics was the responsibility of an agency entitled Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITPQ), which was operated by the association of Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics of New Zealand, ITPNZ. However, in 2009, six ITPs broke away from ITPNZ to form their own group (Tertiary Education Union, 2009). These institutions claimed that there were differences between their interests and those of other ITPs. With the split up of ITPNZ, it was no longer possible for the organization to maintain responsibility for quality assurance for the sector, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) took over the approval function for baccalaureate programs in the ITPs. Although the dissension in the ITPNZ seems to have been over other issues than quality assurance, the independence of its quality assurance process was a casualty of the split.

In Ireland, until November, 2012, different agencies were responsible for the approval of baccalaureate programs in Institutes of Technology (IOTIs) and universities. For the IOTIs, this was the responsibility of the Higher Education & Training Awards Council; and for the universities, the approval body was the Irish Universities Quality Board. However, as part of a major government initiative to rationalize the public sector, these two bodies were merged with the qualifications authority and another quality assurance body to form a new agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). This new body is in the process of working out its procedures and frameworks for quality assurance, and it is too soon to tell whether partitioning of the responsibility for quality assurance in the two sectors will continue to any extent.

In 9 of the 11 jurisdictions examined in this paper, Florida and Germany being the exceptions, the quality assurance agencies that have jurisdiction over baccalaureate programs in colleges were established by the government and report to the relevant Ministry, such as a Ministry of Education. In 8 of these 9 jurisdictions, the quality assurance agency is a statutory body. In British Columbia, the Degree Quality Assessment Board was established administratively by the Ministry using its statutory authority to enact a quality assurance process. In these 9 jurisdictions, board members of the quality assurance agencies are appointed by the Minister, in some cases according to various representational requirements. For example, in Austria, half the members of the agency must have several years of professional experience in fields relevant to the programs of the colleges.

The quality assurance agency for baccalaureate programs of Florida colleges is a non-governmental body whose membership consists of accredited colleges and universities, the governing board of which is elected by the members.

The quality assurance system in German higher education is overseen by a national Accreditation Council which was established through consultation between the conference of state (länder) ministers of education and the national association of postsecondary education institutions (Schade, 2004). This council is responsible for establishing the criteria for approval of degree programs and for approval of the accreditation agencies that do the actual program evaluations. Members of the Accreditation Council are appointed with the agreement of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder and the German Rectors' Conference, and represent different constituencies, i.e., the Länder, the professoriate, students, practitioners, and foreign experts (Accreditation Council, 2013).

There are six approved accreditation agencies, some of which concentrate on particular fields such as Health Care & Social Work; Computer Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Mathematics; and Business Administration. All of these agencies accredit programs of both universities and *Fachhochschulen*. The accreditation agencies are member-based. For example, the Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in the Field of Health Care & Social work (AHPGS) was founded by the Rectors Conference in Nursing Sciences, the Assemblies of the Faculties of Social Work and of Therapeutic Pedagogy, and the German Coordinating Agency for Public Health. Most of these agencies are international in scope. For example, the Institute for Accreditation, Certification & Quality Assurance (ACQUIN) which accredits Bachelor and Master Programs in Germany is an association of over a hundred higher education institutions in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary and the United States.

Even where the responsibility for approval of new programs in both sectors rests with a single agency, it is not necessarily the case that the two sectors are treated in exactly the same way in all respects.

Until recently in the Netherlands, the actual program assessments were done by commercial assessment agencies (VBIs) which were contracted by the higher education institutions and submitted their reports directly to the NVAO. Each institution would choose the assessment agency that it considered most appropriate. HBOs and universities each tended to choose the agencies that originated from their respective sectors (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008). Now the assessments are done by panels that are external to the NVAO and hired by the higher education institution, with the panel secretaries selected by the institution. The VBIs no longer have a formal role in the process, but many of those who are chosen to be panel secretaries were previously employed by VBIs. Thus, there is an opportunity

for each sector to ensure that at least some of the people who have a key role in the assessment have an understanding of that particular sector.

Another way of recognizing differences between sectors in the assessment process is to have different learning outcome standards for each sector's baccalaureate programs. That possible variation in learning outcome standards is discussed in the section on expected learning outcomes. Before turning to that section, the next section places expected learning outcomes in the context of the overall quality standards used in program assessment.

Quality standards

Learning outcome standards have a central role in almost all quality assurance systems, though frequently they enter into these systems under a different label. For example, in the PEQAB Handbooks, expected learning outcomes are listed under the heading, "Degree Level Standard". Generally a jurisdiction's expected learning outcomes for each qualification are listed in the jurisdiction's qualifications framework. In Ontario, the same learning outcomes for the baccalaureate degree that appear in the PEQAB's degree level standard appear in the Ontario Qualifications Framework under the heading "Qualification Standards.

Degree level standards are one of many categories of quality standards. Other commonly found areas of quality standards are admissions, curriculum, learning methods, resources, and faculty.

When one compares the format of program quality standards in different jurisdictions, one can't help but notice considerable differences in the style in which these standards are expressed. What in some jurisdictions are labelled standards are called benchmarks or criteria in other jurisdictions. In Ontario and some other jurisdictions, benchmarks are nested under each standard. Among different jurisdictions, there are substantial differences in the numbers of standards and/or benchmarks or criteria, and in how detailed, specific and narrowly focused they are. In some jurisdictions the standards and benchmarks are expressed more as general principles, while in others, they are more detailed and may even contain precise numerical requirements. Those quality assurance systems in which the standards and benchmarks are expressed as general principles seem to be designed in such a way as to give greater respect for institutional autonomy, and to accommodate the diversity of institutions and programs within a postsecondary education system. In contrast, those that are highly detailed and prescriptive seem to place the quality assurance agency in the possible role of managing the academic institutions that they are supposed to be accrediting or assessing.

The latter micro-management approach to quality assurance has been criticized by a number of observers of quality assurance (several of whom are cited by Stensaker, 2011 along with his own criticism), including a 2007 report of the European University Association (European University Association, 2007, also cited by Stensaker, 2011, p. 760):

Many higher education systems are currently being held back from Bologna implementation – and thus from offering improved services to students and society – by national QA systems that are costly, offer no evidence of overall quality improvement, and stifle institutions’ capacity to respond creatively to the demands of evolving European knowledge society (European University Association, 2007, p. 61).

In regard to differences in number of standards and/or benchmarks for program quality assessment, the Netherlands which uses three general standards in the “limited” assessment and 16 in the “extensive” assessment (and no benchmarks) stands at the opposite end of the continuum from Ontario, which requires assessment against 230 very specific benchmarks². In between these two is New Zealand with 58 and British Columbia with 74.

The style in which the standards and benchmarks are formulated may have implications for the capacity of the quality assurance system to foster, or to stifle, programmatic diversity. One of the Western Canadian interviewees observed that standards and benchmarks that were formulated as general principles could accommodate program diversity better than more detailed standards and benchmarks.

The next section provides more information on the use of learning outcomes standards. The last two sections deal with other areas of quality standards that have generated significant challenges in Ontario: admissions and faculty qualifications.

²In arriving at these totals, a standard was counted if there was no benchmark under it; where there were benchmarks, only the benchmarks were counted, not the standard. Only standards or benchmarks were counted, not submission guidelines. Alberta also seems to have fewer benchmarks than Ontario, but it is difficult to do a precise count for Alberta, because of the manner in which standards and benchmarks are embedded in text and the difficulty of separating the standards for different types of undergraduate programs. My conclusion about the scale of Ontario’s quality standards is consistent with the observation in the 2011 external evaluation of the PEQAB that its standards are “comprehensive, perhaps more so than those used in other provinces” (Crow, Marsden & Rubidge, 2011, p. 17).

Expected learning outcomes

Expected learning outcomes are expressed in a variety of ways in different jurisdictions. The chief variations are with respect to categorization and detail. At one end of the continuum are those that contain up to a half dozen single items without nested sub-items. An example is the statement of expected learning outcomes for the bachelor's degree in New Zealand (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2011, p. 18):

- demonstrate intellectual independence, critical thinking and analytic rigour
- engage in self-directed learning
- demonstrate knowledge and skills related to the ideas, principles, concepts, chief research methods and problem-solving techniques of a recognised major subject
- demonstrate the skills needed to acquire, understand and assess information from a range of sources
- demonstrate communication and collaborative skills.

Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta quality assurance bodies have tried to align their statements of learning outcomes with the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2007) which has six categories. The precise names of these categories vary slightly among users in different provinces, as do the formats of the textual descriptions. The names of the categories and numbers of items and sub-items in the Ontario degree level standard for the baccalaureate degree are: depth & breadth of knowledge (seven items and sub-items); conceptual & methodological awareness (three items); communications skills; application of knowledge (seven items and sub-items); professional capacity/autonomy (five items and sub-items); and awareness of limits of knowledge (one item) (Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, 2010). The Canadian statement of learning outcomes has 477 words, compared to 53 words in the New Zealand statement.

The New Zealand learning outcomes are similar in format and length to the statements of learning outcomes for the bachelor's degree in the national qualifications frameworks of many European nations. These nations have aligned their qualifications frameworks with the descriptors that were adopted in 2005 by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Like many qualifications frameworks, the learning outcomes in these statements reflect well the qualities that are expected of graduates of a traditional university bachelor's program. However, there is no reference at all in the New Zealand learning outcomes to the qualities that would be expected in a graduate of a program that focuses on workforce preparation. The EHEA Qualifications Framework contains one such statement: that graduates "can apply their

knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation . . . “(European Higher Education Area, n.d.).

That single statement notwithstanding, it is noted in the literature on qualifications frameworks that the EHEA qualifications framework, the QFEHEA, is largely university-oriented (Feltham, Mitchell & Trotter, 2013). It was for this reason that another qualifications framework was developed, the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF-LLL). The intention for the EQF-LLL was to include vocational education and work contexts, “including at the highest levels” (The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, n.d., p. 4). The EQF-LLL is even more concise than the QFEHEA. The expected learning outcomes for the bachelor’s degree in the EQF-LLL are (The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, n.d., p. 3):

The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning Level 6 (Baccalaureate Degree)

Knowledge:

advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles

Skills:

advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study

Competence:

manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; and

take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups

Similar to the QFEHEA, the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework consists mainly of learning outcomes expected of academically oriented programs of a traditional university.³ These learning outcomes comprise the single list of expected competencies for graduates of both university and college baccalaureate programs in Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta. *In addition* to attaining these learning outcomes, graduates of college baccalaureate programs in all three provinces are expected *also* to achieve some other vocationally oriented outcomes. For example, in British Columbia, graduates of programs with an applied or professional focus are supposed to achieve [unspecified] “appropriate articulated learning outcome goals” through “work experience, field placements, etc.” (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2008, p. 27).

The Alberta document affirms that graduates of applied degree programs are expected to meet the learning requirements of the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework, and then adds “while focusing on learning outcomes oriented to an occupational field of practice” (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2011, p. 73). In none of the handbooks of these three provinces is there explication of what such practice-oriented learning outcomes are, or discussion of how occupationally focused learning outcomes might be integrated with the academic learning outcomes that are listed in the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework. Somehow graduates of applied programs are expected to master both sets of outcomes⁴.

Although there has been some criticism in the literature on learning outcomes of the “broad generality” of higher level outcomes in statements like that of the EHEA, there has also been criticism of the narrowness and large number of outcomes in the more detailed statements of learning outcomes that are used in many quality assurance systems⁵ (Feltham, Mitchell &

³ The document acknowledges the diversity of baccalaureate degrees in Canada and mentions specifically four types of degree programs: “programs designed to provide a broad education as an end in itself; programs designed to provide in-depth study in academic disciplines; programs with an applied focus; and programs with a professional focus”. However, a single set of detailed degree standards is intended to cover the diversity of baccalaureate programs. This set of degree standards seems heavily weighted toward the characteristics of programs that are designed to provide in-depth study of an academic discipline. The Ontario standards differentiate between a baccalaureate degree and an honours baccalaureate degree, but both sets of standards are oriented primarily toward in-depth study of an academic discipline. The 2011 external evaluation of PEQAB noted earlier reported that “there is some concern from institutions that existing standards are over-weighted toward the academic culture of research universities, particularly in defining requirements for faculty” (Crow, Marsden & Rubidge, 2011, p. 18).

⁴ In this regard, college baccalaureate programs are the “Ginger Rogers of higher education”. As Fred Astaire’s dance partner in movies, Ginger Rogers was expected to do everything that Fred Astaire did, but to do it while dancing backwards and in high heels. Similarly, in their baccalaureate programs colleges are expected to accomplish the same learning outcome goals as universities plus meeting additional learning outcome goals.

⁵ The issue here is not with the idea of detailed statements of learning outcomes per se, but the practice of using narrowly defined outcomes for a diverse set of programs, i.e., all baccalaureate programs of all institutions in all fields. Detailed statements of learning outcomes are appropriate at the program level, particularly for programs

Trotter, 2013). One clear advantage of the higher level statements, though, is their ability to accommodate diverse learning contexts and orientations.

Some statements of expected learning outcomes for baccalaureate graduates seem more hospitable to practice-oriented baccalaureate programs than others by making at least some references to preparation for practice right in the list of outcomes, as the EQF-LLL does, and/or, as was suggested earlier, by expressing the learning outcomes in a more general way. The qualifications framework in Denmark, for example, demonstrates both of these properties. Here are the expected learning outcomes for the practice-oriented bachelor's degree programs of the 11 colleges and the academically-oriented bachelor's degree programs of the eight universities of Denmark (Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education, 2008), with the references to practice-oriented features in italics:

Qualifications Framework for Danish Higher Education

Bachelor's level

Persons obtaining degrees at this level:

Knowledge and understanding

- Must possess knowledge of the theories, methodologies and *practice of a profession* or one or more subject areas.
- Must be able to understand and reflect on theories, methodologies and *practice*.

Skills

- Must be able to apply the methodologies and tools of one or more subject areas as well as apply skills related to work within the subject area(s) *or in the profession*.
- Must be able to evaluate theoretical and *practical issues* as well as explain the reasons for and choose relevant solution models.
- Must be able to communicate academic issues and solution models to peers and non-specialists or collaboration partners and users.

Competences

that are occupationally-focused. Examples of such statements of learning outcomes are those for the Vocational Learning Outcomes in the published program standards for diploma programs in Ontario colleges (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2013).

- Must be able to handle complex and development-oriented situations in study *or work contexts*.
- Must be able to independently participate in discipline-specific and interdisciplinary collaboration *with a professional approach*.
- Must be able to identify their own learning needs and organise their own learning in different environments.

An alternative way of ensuring that the list of expected learning outcomes includes those appropriate for practice-oriented degree programs is to have separate lists of outcomes for academically-oriented and for practice-oriented programs. This was the approach that the PEQAB took initially when producing its degree level standards. Later, the separate list of learning outcomes for bachelor's programs in applied areas of study was eliminated. An example of this dual approach can be found in the Dutch Qualifications Framework which in addition to distinguishing between the levels of programmes, "also specifies their orientation" (Higher Education Qualifications Framework in the Netherlands, 2008, p. 11). The term "orientation" refers to academic (universities) or professional (HBOs). The first standard in the NVAO assessment process states that "The intended learning outcomes of the programme have been concretised with regard to content, level and *orientation*" (Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, 2011, p. 8, italics for emphasis).

A quite explicit distinction between learning outcomes of college and university baccalaureate programs is found in the NVAO criteria for assessment of baccalaureate programs in Dutch-speaking colleges in Flanders.⁶ The NVAO, it should be noted, is responsible for higher education quality assurance in both the Netherlands and Flanders, but some features differ between these two jurisdictions. Flanders has 6 universities and 22 university colleges, and over half the new entrants to baccalaureate programs enrol in the professionally-oriented programs in the colleges. The learning outcomes for both professionally-oriented and academically-oriented bachelor's programs are reproduced below (Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, 2005, p. 4):

⁶Van der Sanden, Smit & Dashorst (2012) present separate lists of learning outcomes for "scientific" and "professional" baccalaureate degrees in the Netherlands in a document that references the Dutch National Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework. However, it is not clear whether these two lists of qualifications constitute a work in progress or have yet been formally adopted.

Learning Outcomes for Professional and Academic Bachelor's Programs in Flanders

Bachelor's programme (professional orientation):

- general competences such as the capacity for logical thought and reasoning, the ability to acquire and process information, the ability for critical reflection and project-based work, creativity, the ability to perform simple supervision tasks, the ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialists as well as laymen, and a positive attitude towards life-long learning

- general professional competences like the ability to work together as part of a team, a solution-oriented attitude in the sense of being able to define and analyse independently complex problematic situations in professional practice, and the ability to develop and apply effective strategies to solve them, and to develop a sense of social responsibility in connection with the professional practice

- specific professional competences at the level of a newly-qualified professional

Bachelor's programme (Academic orientation):

- general competences such as the capacity for logical thought and reasoning, the ability to acquire and process information, the capacity for critical reflection, creativity, being able to perform simple management tasks, the ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialists as well as laymen and a positive attitude towards life-long learning

- general academic competences such as a research attitude, knowledge of research methodologies and techniques and the ability to apply them adequately, the ability to collect the relevant data that can influence the formation of an opinion about social, scientific and ethical issues, appreciation of uncertainty, ambiguity and the limits of knowledge, and the ability to initiate problem-driven research

- an understanding of basic academic, discipline-related knowledge inherent to a certain domain of the sciences or the arts, systematic understanding of the key elements of a discipline which includes acquiring coherent and detailed knowledge that is inspired partly by the most recent developments in the discipline, and an understanding of the structure of the specialisation and its inter-relatedness with other specialities

The differences between these descriptions of expected learning outcomes are considerable. The professional degree includes items not mentioned in the description of the academic degree requirements, such as the ability for project-based work, working as part of a team, and developing a solution-based attitude, and it contains references to professional competencies and professional practice. On the other hand, the requirements for the academic degree

include some things not mentioned for the professional degree such as matters pertaining to discipline-based knowledge and research skills.

Regardless of the approach that is taken to differentiate the applied baccalaureate programs of the college sector from the academic baccalaureate programs of the universities, the vocational orientation of college programs in the European countries examined here is clear in their accreditation frameworks. For example, in the elaboration on accreditation principles, the *Fachhochschule* Council in Austria states that:

The FH (*Fachhochschule*) degree programs offer scientifically sound vocational training at the higher education level. The curricula are to be designed in such a way that the graduates will stand a reasonable chance of finding a job that matches their qualifications. With reference to this educational mandate, the basic concept for an FH degree programme has to describe the connection between the vocational fields of activity, the related qualifications profile and the curriculum . . . (*Fachhochschule* Council, 2013, p. 4).

Admission & transfer

In most jurisdictions, the establishment of specific minimum requirements for admission to baccalaureate programs is either the responsibility of the Ministry or is left to each institution to decide. Generally, when a Ministry assumes this responsibility, as in the Netherlands, its purpose in doing so is to make admissions more open than would likely be the case if left to institutions. By contrast, in Ontario, it is a quality assurance agency, the PEQAB, that has established specific requirements for admission - and also for transfer, prior credit, academic progression and graduation.

In the European countries examined in this paper, there is a fundamental difference between the admission requirements in college and university sectors. To be eligible for admission to university a student must have completed the pre-university program in secondary school, whereas the requirement for admission to a baccalaureate program in the college sector is completion of a vocational or general program in secondary school. In Ireland, there is also a sharp distinction in baccalaureate program admission requirements between universities and institutes of technology.

In Alberta, beyond specifying the requirement for a secondary school diploma, the CAQC leaves the establishment of specific course and grade requirements for admission to institutions. In British Columbia, the Standard for Admission and Transfer/Residency is that:

The institution should demonstrate that the program is designed to provide flexible admission and transfer arrangements. Where appropriate, the program, courses or curricular elements are designed to facilitate credit transfer by other post-secondary institutions both within the province and other jurisdictions.

There are no numerical requirements in the BC admission and transfer benchmarks, only that the institution have “clearly established policies and procedures consistent with the level of the degree program” (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2008, p. 29). For college baccalaureate programs in Florida, the SACS standard is that an institution publishes admissions policies consistent with its mission (Southern Association of Schools and Colleges, 2012a). In New Zealand, the only requirement of the NZQA pertaining to admissions is that general and program-specific regulations are “clear, comprehensive and fair” (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2010, p. 9).

In Ontario, the PEQAB Handbook has one and two-thirds pages (about 800 words) of detailed regulations regarding the awarding of transfer credit and advanced standing. By contrast, the New Zealand document says only that an institution’s policies on these matters must be “clear, comprehensive and fair”. The British Columbia document has only a few lines on these topics, mainly asking that institutions have appropriate policies on them. The tenor of the approach in the BC document is suggested by one of the benchmarks:

The institution’s policy on admissions and transfer indicates a willingness to consider applicants applying to undergraduate, graduate and professional programs from any post-secondary institutions (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2008, p. 29).

While the DQAB standards in BC look as if they are intended to encourage transfer, until recently, the PEQAB standards in Ontario looked more as if their purpose was to restrict transfer. This is because the PEQAB stipulated limits on the amount of transfer credit that could be awarded to students who transfer from a diploma program to a degree program. Those limits were removed from the standards in July, 2013 (Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, 2013).

Academic qualifications of faculty

One of the categories of PEQAB standards that has provoked the strongest challenge in Ontario colleges is the one pertaining to academic qualifications of faculty, in particular the requirement that at least 50% of faculty teaching in both the major field and in non-core areas hold the Ph.D. or other terminal academic credential in the field of their teaching or in a closely related field.

Except in one case, the quality assurance protocols of the jurisdictions examined for this paper do not contain any such numerical requirement for the degrees held by faculty. In the only one that does provide such a specification, Florida, the percentage of faculty that are required to have a doctorate is substantially lower than the percentage required in Ontario colleges.

In Alberta, the expectations for academic qualifications of faculty are quite different for applied degree programs than for academic programs. While the CAQC's norm for academic programs is that the majority of faculty should have a doctorate, it defines the "desirable" qualification for faculty in institutions and programs with a technical or applied emphasis as at least a master's degree "with the understanding that a background of personal experience in relevant employment is an alternative to the desirable qualification" (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2011, p. 82).⁷

The section on faculty in the corresponding document of the Degree Quality Assessment Board in British Columbia does not contain any numerical requirements for faculty qualifications either. It states only that faculty have the "appropriate credential to develop and deliver the degree level being offered and program being proposed" (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2008, p. 31). Similarly, the faculty benchmark in New Zealand is that faculty "are qualified for the outcomes" of the program (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2010, p. 10). The benchmark of the program approval agency in the Netherlands is also similar. It states that "the staff is qualified for the realization of the curriculum in terms of content, educational expertise and organization" (Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, 2011, p. 17). According to a source (in personal communication) at one of the major accreditation agencies in Germany, Germany is another country in which there is no specific requirement in the quality assurance framework for the percentage of faculty who have a doctorate.

The accreditation agency in the region which includes Florida's colleges and universities does have a percentage requirement for the doctorate. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools requires that "at least 25% of course hours in each major at the baccalaureate level are taught by faculty members holding an appropriate terminal degree, usually the earned doctorate, or the equivalent of the terminal degree" (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2012b, p. 68). Not only is the requirement for Ontario colleges twice that of the Florida colleges, but unlike the Florida focus on the number of course hours taught by doctoral prepared faculty, the requirement for Ontario colleges focuses on the number of faculty regardless of how many course hours they teach.

⁷ The CAQC notes that where a separate standard is indicated for a particular type of program or degree, such as the applied degree, that standard "completely replaces the main standard" (Campus Alberta Quality Council, p. 54).

In the jurisdictions for which figures are available, the percentage of faculty who have a doctorate is well below the percentage required by the PEQAB. As of 2003, 16.8% of full-time faculty in Finnish polytechnics held either a Ph.D. or a Licentiate Degree (Valimaa&Neuvonen-Rauhala, 2008, p. 85). The Licentiate is at a level between a master's degree and a Ph.D., normally requiring two years of study, compared to four years for a Ph.D. According to a chart in a report of the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, as of 2009 about 45% of HBO faculty held a master's degree and about 4% had a doctorate (Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, 2009, estimated from chart on p. 26). A December 2012 Factsheet on the web site of the organization, UASNet, an association of Universities of Applied Sciences in Europe provides a chart that gives the percentages of faculty in these institutions that have a Ph.D. According to that chart, the percentages for countries listed are: Denmark, 4%; Switzerland, 9%; Netherlands, 11%; Estonia, 12%; Lithuania, 14%; Ireland, 20%; and Portugal, 22% (UASNet, 2012). These figures are for college-type institutions that call themselves Universities of Applied Sciences, and whose programs are exclusively or mainly at the baccalaureate and higher degree levels.

Table 1: Characteristics of College Baccalaureate Degree Approval in Selected Jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	College Bacc. Activity/Total Bacc. Activity	Program Duration (Yrs)	Approval Stages	Approval Model	Differentiation between sectors
Alberta	Negligible	4 (incl. 1 yr work experience)	2	Program Assessment	Some (e.g. in faculty qualifications)
Austria	21.2% (2003/04)	3	N.A.	Program Assessment	Separate agencies
British Columbia	3.7% (2012/13)	4	2	Program Assessment	Little
Denmark	40.7% (2010/11)	3-4, varies by program	N.A.	Program Assessment	Separate agencies; QF (y) has references to practice
Finland	60.2% (2008/09)	3.5-4, varies by program	2	Process Audit	Process audit facilitates differences
Flanders	53.0% (2007/08)	3 yr	2	Program Assessment	Different degree stds
Florida	5.5% (2009.19)	2 (after 2 yr assoc. degree)	2	Institutional Accreditation	Some (relating assessment to mission)
Germany	39.7% (2011/12)	3-4, varies by program	1	Choice of Prog. Assess. Or Inst. Accreditation	N.A.
Ireland	52.5% (2011/12)	3 & 4 yr degrees	N.A.	Program Assessment	Separate agencies until recently (x)
New Zealand	20% (2011/12)	3 & 4 yr degrees	1	Program Assessment	Separate agencies until recently (x)
Netherlands	75% (2012/13)	4	2	Mixed	Degree stds take sector orientation into account

(x) It is not clear whether the degree approval process will continue to be decentralized by sector to any extent; (y) QF = qualifications framework

Sources of estimates of the relative percentage of college baccalaureate activity in Table 1:

Alberta

With only six applied baccalaureate degree programs in the colleges, these could be assumed to account for a negligible percentage of total baccalaureate enrolment.

Austria

In the latest year for which data could be found, 2003-2004, 21.2% of *new entrants* to *Fachhochschulen* and universities were in the *Fachhochschulen* (Hackl, 2008, p. 18). This figure likely underestimates the relative proportion of *Fachhochschule* baccalaureate activity in Austria now both because of the inclusion of postgraduate students in the data and because of the rapid growth of the sector in recent years.

British Columbia

In the absence of data on enrolment in college baccalaureate programs, the number of such programs was related to the total number of bachelor's programs in the province. The Degree Quality Assessment Board (2013) shows 24 college *baccalaureate programs*, and the British Columbia Education Planner (www.educationplanner.ca) lists 651 undergraduate programs, resulting in a figure of 3.7%.

Denmark

This estimate is calculated from figures on *total enrolment* in the two sectors provided by the Danish Evaluation Institute (2010). Based on those figures, the professional higher education sector accounts for 40.7% of total higher education enrolment. The figure for just baccalaureate enrolment would likely be higher.

Finland

The estimate is calculated from data on *bachelor's degrees awarded* in Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 48, p. 64.

Flanders

This figure is calculated from data on numbers of *new entrants to baccalaureate programs* in the two sectors in 2007-2008 from Huys, Debackere, & De Kock, 2009, Table 3.1.

Florida

This estimate was derived, as explained in the text in Part II, by relating the figure for *enrolment in baccalaureate programs* in Florida colleges in 2009 (Floyd & Falconetti, 2013, p. 87) to upper division university enrolment in 2007, the latest year for which data are available on the web site of the State University System of Florida (State University System of Florida, 2013).

Germany

This estimate, based upon *the number of baccalaureate programs* offered in each sector in Fall, 2011, was provided (in personal communication) by an official of one of the higher education accreditation agencies in Germany. The estimate is consistent with older data on numbers of degrees awarded in the two sectors. According to data provided by Klumpp & Teichler (2008, p. 106), *Fachhochschulen* accounted for 34.4% of graduates in 2002, and those figures included postgraduate students as well.

Ireland

Data from the Higher Education Authority (2013) on *baccalaureate degrees awarded* in Ireland in 2011-2012 show that 52.5% of baccalaureate degrees were awarded by institutes of technology.

New Zealand

The figure is for *enrolment in baccalaureate programs* in 2011, estimated by interpolation from a chart in New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 75. The estimate is the same as that obtained (in personal communication) from a higher education agency official in New Zealand.

Netherlands

This is an estimate of the proportion of baccalaureate degrees awarded by HBOs, provided (in personal communication) by a staff member of the national organization of HBO institutions. According to Statistics Netherlands (2013), in 2011-2012, enrolment in the HBO sector was 423,719, and in the university sector, 245,041. The HBOs thus accounted for 63.3% of higher education enrolment. However, these figures would include postgraduate enrolment which is relatively larger in the universities than in the HBOs.

Conclusions

Allowing tertiary institutions whose mission is to provide applied/professional education that aims to prepare graduates for particular sectors of employment to award academic degrees at the baccalaureate and even higher levels is a relatively recent development in the long history of higher education. This practice dates back approximately four decades in Europe and two decades or less in North America.

Accommodating the idea that postsecondary institutions whose orientation is more applied than academic would also use traditional degree designations in their awards has presented both conceptual and practical challenges. On the conceptual side, this development has required educators to explicate just what a degree really means, and perhaps to stretch their idea of a degree⁸. On the practical side, the development has challenged agencies that accredit degrees to develop frameworks that can accommodate greater diversity of degree programs for which accreditation is sought.

The choice among different approaches to handling this diversity of programs is closely intertwined with the adoption of particular ideas of a degree, even if the latter is not always, or even often, made explicit. The different approaches and corresponding ideas of a degree can be thought of as arrayed along a continuum. At one end of the continuum is the idea that these newer applied, or professionally-oriented, degrees represent a somewhat different species of educational experience than traditional academic degrees, even if the two degrees have many characteristics in common. An example of this view is the statement of the agency that accredits *Fachhochschule* programs in Austria, cited earlier, that these degree programs “offer scientifically sound vocational training at the higher education level.” This view implies that there should be significant differences in the requirements for approval between the two types of degrees. For example, one might expect to find rather different sets of qualifications standards for graduates of the two kinds of degree programs, as is the case in Flanders. Or one might expect that different agencies would conduct the assessments of the programs of each sector, as has been the case in four of the jurisdictions examined in this study.

Other factors that contribute to differentiation in approval processes between sectors include sensitizing assessment agents to the differences in orientations between sectors (Netherlands) and taking greater pains to ensure that the common set of qualifications standards reflects the goals of college as well as university programs (Denmark).

⁸I have explored the concept of an applied degree in a recent publication (Skolnik, 2013). This is an area where practice seems to be far ahead of conceptualization.

The belief underlying such deliberate attempts at differentiation is that the more applied degrees awarded by colleges and the more academic degrees awarded by universities each serve important, though different, societal needs; and that a higher education system is stronger if it makes adequate provision for both. The factors that facilitate and work against valuing the differences between the applied degree programs of colleges and the more academic programs of universities are summarized in Table 2, which elaborates further on the last column of Table 1.

There are two groups that may be displeased with the approach described in the previous paragraph. One is traditionalists who might view that approach as degrading the degree by extending a traditional degree designation to a non-traditional type of degree program. Persons of this persuasion would prefer to push the accreditation process to the other end of the continuum: having a single set of qualifications and quality standards that reflect the values of the research university, and having the accreditation process administered by a single agency that also accredits university programs and is dominated by individuals from the university sector.

Traditionalists who identify with the university sector are not the only group that might be uncomfortable with the first end of the continuum of approaches to program approval. Some from the college sector might worry that acceptance of the idea that there are two different types of degrees could prove to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, differentiating degrees that are more applied from those that are more academic might help to achieve a better fit between the characteristics of college degree programs and the criteria by which they are judged. On the other hand, this approach could have as a downside that the degrees awarded by colleges might have lower status than those awarded by universities. This possibility would be particularly disconcerting for colleges if prospective students and prospective employers of graduates are responsive to such status differences. There is also a third possibility. In order to meet the requirements of a degree approval system that is designed along traditional university lines, a college might have to eliminate the features that differentiate its programs from those of traditional universities.

The business of designing accreditation systems for college degree programs involves a policy struggle and a political struggle about where to settle along the continuum of ideas about degrees and associated degree approval models and practices.

From my limited examination of degree approval processes in different jurisdictions, I can offer two tentative generalizations about such struggles and their outcomes. First, the European jurisdictions examined in this study appear to have practices that are closer than those of other jurisdictions to the end of the continuum that represents facilitating differentiation between

the programs of the different sectors of higher education. Some, such as Austria, Flanders, Denmark and the Netherlands, have practices that are further toward that end of the continuum. In other cases it is more difficult to judge due to lack of information. In contrast, the four non-European jurisdictions seem closer to other end of the continuum, however not as far toward that end of the continuum as Ontario, which would appear as an outlier in this analytical perspective.

Second, in researching the documentary history of degree approval in the selected jurisdictions, I was struck by the frequent substantial changes in approval models and practices in the European jurisdictions. This observation is not reflected in the paper, because my focus was on describing what I think are the *current* models and practices in these jurisdictions – though I did relate some of the changes that have occurred in recent years in the Netherlands. That the jurisdictions in which colleges have been awarding degrees for the longest times are still making frequent substantial changes in their accreditation practices suggests that it takes time, experiment, and adjustment to get these things right.

It is tempting to speculate on why the European jurisdictions in this study tend to be at a different end of the continuum than the North American jurisdictions. I can think of two possible reasons. One is that because the European jurisdictions have a longer history of colleges awarding degrees than do the North American jurisdictions, there has been more time for the idea of colleges awarding degrees that are of a more applied nature than university degrees to be accepted by educators, employers and the public.

The second possible reason for the greater recognition of differentiation in European accreditation systems relates to the fact that colleges are such major providers of baccalaureate degrees there compared to North America. Colleges offer baccalaureate programs in a relatively small number of states and provinces, and even there they account for only a small percentage of total baccalaureate enrolment. In Europe, colleges award degrees in many jurisdictions. In the seven European jurisdictions examined in this paper, colleges account for at least 20% of baccalaureate enrolment, and in four of those cases more than half of baccalaureate enrolment is in the college sector.

In jurisdictions that are so dependent upon colleges for baccalaureate education, it would be surprising if college representatives did not have considerable political clout in the design of the systems for accreditation of college programs. And even apart from political clout, it is hard to imagine that governments would support accreditation systems that do not recognize the characteristics of a large proportion of their jurisdiction's degree programs. Of course, there is a chicken-and-egg problem with this argument, as it does not explain why governments allowed or helped colleges to become such large providers of baccalaureate degrees in the first place.

Finally, although this paper was not intended to provide an analysis of Ontario's process for approval of baccalaureate programs, let alone offer recommendations for changes in that process, it has pointed out how Ontario compares with other jurisdictions with respect to major characteristics of degree approval processes. My hope is that seeing how Ontario stands in comparison with other jurisdictions will both stimulate and inform debate about whether, and if so, how, to modify our approval process for degree programs in the colleges.

Table 2: Characteristics of degree approval systems that facilitate and that work against having quality programs of an applied orientation in college sectors

Characteristics that facilitate the valuing of differences between baccalaureate programs of colleges and universities (other things equal)	Characteristics that work against the valuing of differences between baccalaureate programs of colleges and universities (other things equal)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process audit model (Finland) • Different agencies for assessment of programs in colleges and universities (Austria, Denmark) • Different sets of degree qualifications for college and university degree programs (Flanders) • Inclusion of vocational learning outcomes in composite set of degree qualifications (Denmark) • Taking a program’s orientation – applied or academic – explicitly into account in its assessment (Netherlands) • Making institutional mission a focal point in the assessment process (Florida) • Having quality standards that differentiate between applied and academic programs where appropriate, e.g., with respect to faculty qualifications (Alberta) • Formulating quality standards in terms of general principles (New Zealand, British Columbia) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other approval models • Having a single agency for assessment of programs in both colleges and universities • Having a single set of degree qualifications for college and university degree programs • Qualifications standards that reflect only/primarily the culture and goals of the research university • Not taking a program’s orientation – applied or academic – into account when conducting assessments • Uniform assessment criteria regardless of institutional mission • Applying exactly the same quality standards to both applied and academically oriented programs • Quality standards that are very detailed/prescriptive and laden with uniform numerical requirements such as those for admission, transfer, and faculty credentials

Part II: Profiles of Selected Jurisdictions

British Columbia

Under the College and Institute Act, the Minister of Advanced Education, Innovation and Technology may grant approval for applied baccalaureate programs at public colleges. There is a two-stage process for approval. Proposals for new programs are first reviewed by the Ministry to “determine whether there is a fit with the institution’s mandate and academic/education plan, whether there is student and labour market demand for the degree, and whether any duplication of the proposed degree is justifiable” (Advisory Panel, 2011, p. 7). The 2011 Advisory Panel on the degree approval process in British Columbia described this review by the Ministry as a “system coordination review”, as it deals with system coordination issues rather than with quality issues (p. 16).

If the proposed degree program passes the system coordination review by the Ministry, it is then referred to the Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB) for a quality review, and if it is deemed to meet the requirements of that body, it is recommended to the Minister for final approval.

According to the web site of the Degree Quality Assessment Board, there are currently 24 approved baccalaureate programs being offered in eight of the province’s 15 colleges (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2013).

Although the DQAB also has the responsibility for quality assessment of university programs, the approval process for college degree programs differs from the process for universities in two significant ways. First, new university programs do not undergo a system coordination review by the Ministry. Second, universities may obtain “exempt status” in which case their new degree program proposals do not undergo a quality review by the DQAB. In other words, many proposed new university degree programs do not undergo any type of review by an external agency. In contrast, all proposed college baccalaureate programs undergo both a system coordination review by the Ministry and a quality review by the DQAB.

The 2011 Advisory Panel expressed concern about the absence of anything resembling a system coordination review of proposed new university programs and recommended that the government give further consideration to this issue.

Postsecondary institutions that meet certain conditions may apply for exempt status. The criteria for obtaining exempt status include:

- A history of successfully offering quality degree programs at a given level for at least ten years in British Columbia;
- An established organizational capacity for degree-granting (including faculty) sufficient to ensure that quality degree level education; and
- The establishment of rigorous, ongoing program and institutional quality assessment processes, both internal and external (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2006, p. 1).

Exempt status refers to a particular degree level, (i.e., an institution may have exempt status at the baccalaureate level but not at the master’s level). The DQAB states that it “applies the highest standards and expectations of quality in its review of applications for exempt status” (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2006, p. 1). To date, eight of the province’s eleven public universities, including all of the older ones, have applied for and obtained exempt status, as has one private university. The 2011 Advisory Panel expressed some concerns regarding both the policy and practices pertaining to exempt status and recommended strengthening aspects of quality review for university programs, including the adoption of an audit process.

It is not clear from the criteria for exempt status whether colleges are eligible to apply for this status. In describing exempt status, the document refers to “institutions” rather than to “universities” (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2006, p. 1). It also states that some types of institutions whose authorization to award degrees in British Columbia is by consent rather than by provincial statute (private and out-of-province public institutions) may be granted exempt status. On the other hand, the fact that colleges are not mentioned along with other types of institutions that may combine exempt status with Ministerial consent to award degrees might imply that colleges are not eligible for exempt status. Of the three criteria for exempt status, the second one could pose a problem for an institution that offers only a few baccalaureate programs, as its capacity to offer programs at that level would likely be program-specific. In that case, exempt status would not be appropriate. Finally, it does not appear that any colleges have applied for this status. Thus, each new degree program proposal from a college will continue to be subject to a full quality review by the DQAB.

The review process and quality standards employed by the DQAB are described in a publication entitled, *Degree program review: Criteria and Guidelines* (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2008) that is similar in format to the Handbooks published by the Ontario Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB). The quality standards cover the following areas:

1. Degree Level Standard
2. Credential Recognition and Nomenclature
3. Curriculum/Program Content
4. Learning Methodologies/Program Delivery

5. Admission and Transfer/Residency
6. Faculty
7. Program Resources
8. Program Consultation
9. Program Review and Assessment

The benchmarks for the bachelor's degree level standard in British Columbia are similar to those in Ontario, both in format and in content. In fact, much of the text of these benchmarks is identical between the two provinces. British Columbia does not have different standards for baccalaureate and baccalaureate honours degrees like Ontario does. For the most part, the DQAB benchmarks parallel those for the honours baccalaureate in Ontario, but in a few places they are consistent with those for the ordinary bachelor's degree in Ontario. In the introductory part of the section on degree level standards, the BC document notes that there may be differences in emphasis with respect to intended learning outcomes among four types of baccalaureate programs: programs designed to provide "a broad education as an end in itself"; those designed to provide "in-depth study in academic disciplines"; programs with "an applied focus"; and programs with "a professional focus" (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2008, p. 16). However, a single set of benchmarks is intended to cover all four types of programs.

A striking difference between the DQAB document and the PEQAB Handbooks is that the DQAB benchmarks are formulated in terms of general principles, whereas the PEQAB benchmarks are highly detailed and prescriptive.

For example, while the PEQAB *Handbook for Colleges* (Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, 2010) devotes nearly three pages to admission and transfer and contains many numerical requirements, the corresponding section in the DQAB document is less than a page and contains no numbers. Moreover, the DQAB document *requires* flexibility in admission and transfer arrangements:

The institution should demonstrate that the program is designed to provide flexible admission and transfer arrangements. Where appropriate, the program, courses or curricular elements are designed to facilitate credit transfer by other post-secondary institutions both within the province and other jurisdictions (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2008, p. 29).

By contrast, the standard in Ontario is:

Admission, promotion and graduation requirements are consistent with the postsecondary character of degree granting organizations (Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, 2010, p. 21).

The DQAB benchmarks do not specify the types of courses that applicants must have taken in secondary school or stipulate minimum grade requirements for admission, promotion and graduation. Indeed, the DQAB section on transfer looks as if it were written to promote – if not require – transfer. In contrast, until July, 2013, the PEQAB policy on transfer included limits on the amount of transfer credit that could be awarded to students moving from a diploma program to a degree program. While those limits were removed in a recent policy update (Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board, 2013), the policy still does not exactly encourage transfer.

Similarly, the section on Faculty in the DQAB document states only that faculty have “the appropriate credential to develop and deliver the degree level being offered and program being proposed” (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2008, p. 31). Unlike the PEQAB Handbook, the DQAB document does not specify the proportion of faculty who must have a doctoral or terminal degree.

The DQAB document also recognizes the challenge of getting the right mix of academic and professional qualifications in programs of an applied nature:

Faculty teaching baccalaureate degrees with an applied or professional focus have an appropriate balance of professional qualifications, academic credentials and experience; (Degree Quality Assessment Board, 2008, p 32).

Taken together with the emphasis on general principles rather than numerical requirements, this suggests a more flexible approach to assessing the qualifications of faculty in applied baccalaureate programs than in Ontario, where the requirements for professional experience and qualifications are *additional* to meeting the precise numerical requirement for academic degrees.

Persons knowledgeable about the DQAB process in British Columbia told me that they didn’t feel that it was possible to devise a single set of numerical requirements that could be applied to all postsecondary institutions and programs because of the great diversity of institutions and programs.

Alberta

Colleges in Alberta became eligible to award applied baccalaureate degrees (known in Alberta simply as “applied degrees”) in 1995. A substantial majority of applied degree programs were offered by the larger institutions in Edmonton and Calgary: Grant MacEwan College, Mount Royal College, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), and Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT). During the first decade of this century, these four institutions became eligible to also award academic baccalaureate degrees, and they have not submitted a proposal for a new applied degree program since gaining that eligibility. MacEwan and Mount Royal are

now universities, and NAIT and SAIT have been formally designated as polytechnic institutions. All four continue to offer some applied degrees, but all of their new baccalaureate programs are academic baccalaureates, not applied baccalaureate degrees.

Until 2004, the review of proposals from colleges to offer applied degree programs was done entirely by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Career Development. When the Campus Alberta Quality Council (CAQC) was established in 2004, the responsibility for quality review of proposed new applied degree programs was transferred to the CAQC. From the time that CAQC assumed this responsibility, only one application for a new applied degree program from a college was submitted, and that application was withdrawn before completing the application process. Thus, there has not been a complete adjudication by the CAQC of a proposal from a college to offer a new applied baccalaureate program.⁹ In spite of this fact, the CAQC continues to include a considerable amount of material on the criteria for applied baccalaureate programs in its handbook for degree program applicants.

The CAQC web site is rich in information related to its review activities, but it does not have information on approvals of applied degrees *before* it was established in 2004. An examination of the web sites of postsecondary institutions in Alberta revealed six applied degree programs in the public colleges, two in each of three of the Province's 11 colleges. More than twice as many applied degree programs (13) are still offered by the two new universities and the two polytechnic institutions.

It is not clear why virtually no proposals for new applied degree programs have come forward from Alberta's colleges for at least a decade. Probably the biggest reason is that the four institutions that were the largest providers of applied baccalaureate programs have not added any such programs since they became eligible to offer academic baccalaureate programs. Any suggestions as to why the other colleges have not proposed new baccalaureate programs would be speculative. Perhaps it is because they find the procedures and criteria for approval of applied baccalaureate programs more daunting since the responsibility for assessment of proposals was given to the CAQC. Or, maybe it is because the perceived status of the Alberta applied degree was diminished as a consequence of the fact that the larger institutions in Calgary and Edmonton are no longer submitting proposals for new applied baccalaureate degrees – even if they continue to offer several of the applied degree programs that were initiated before the CAQC was established.

In Alberta, proposed new baccalaureate programs in colleges are (or would be) reviewed by the same agency that also handles proposals from the universities and the polytechnics, the CAQC. Like British Columbia, Alberta has a two stage process, but in Alberta, in the first stage the Ministry does a system coordination review for proposed new programs of all postsecondary institutions, including the universities. In contrast to BC where exemptions from review by the

⁹This conclusion is drawn from examination of the table on the CAQC web site which lists all recommendations made by CAQC for Alberta institutions since its creation in 2004 (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2013).

quality assurance agency are granted on a degree level basis, in Alberta, institutions may qualify for an expedited review on a program by program basis. A fully expedited review is one in which there is a “desk review” by the Proposal Review Standing Committee (PRSC) and the Secretariat, but no external evaluators are appointed, and there is no site visit (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2011, p. 9). Among the conditions that must be met in order to qualify for an expedited review is that the proposed program must be closely related to or build upon existing baccalaureate programs in the institution. Because none of Alberta’s colleges have yet been through a full program review by the CAQC, they would not likely qualify for an expedited review. However, the expedited review option might make sense in Ontario where some colleges have been through many program reviews by PEQAB and have been offering baccalaureate programs for several years.

The CAQC Handbook contains general sections that apply to all baccalaureate programs (including applied degrees) and other sections that provide specific information for particular types of baccalaureate programs: bachelor of arts and bachelor of science; bachelor of education; bachelor’s degrees in business; bachelor of music; baccalaureate degrees in nursing; bachelor of technology; and applied degrees. The sections on types of baccalaureate degrees comment on program design and degree structure; outcomes emphasis; admissions; and degree nomenclature.

In regard to degree structure, the CAQC Handbook states that (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2011, p. 73):

All proposals for Applied Degree programs must normally include 90 credits of academic study in the institution and 30 credits of work-related experience in the field. If successful completion of a diploma is required for admission to the program, the Applied Degree program may consist of 30 credits of academic study and 30 credits of learning gained in the workforce.

In other words, the applied baccalaureate degree programs normally consist of three years of classroom study and one year of directed field study. Typically these degree programs are offered in a 2 + 2 format. After completion of a two-year diploma, the next two years consist of one year of classroom study and one year of supervised work experience.

The document makes it clear that in regard to learning outcomes, baccalaureate programs of all types must conform to the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework. The fact that applied baccalaureate programs must conform to the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework *and* meet additional requirements that other baccalaureate programs don’t have to meet – such as achieving a high level of integration between academic and work-related components of the program – raises two questions. The first is how applied baccalaureate programs can achieve the same learning outcomes as other baccalaureate programs while they also meet other outcome requirements in the same four year period as other baccalaureate programs. The

second concerns the eligibility of graduates of applied degree programs for postgraduate study. The CAQC Handbook notes that “notwithstanding” their conformity with the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework, applied baccalaureate degree programs “are not expressly designed to prepare students for graduate study” (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2011, p. 73). If the programs are designed - expressly or not – to meet the Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework, then why wouldn’t they prepare students for graduate study?

In regard to the way that benchmarks are formulated, the CAQC is somewhere between BC’s DQAB and Ontario’s PEQAB. The Alberta document has fewer numerical benchmarks than Ontario, but has at least one that Ontario doesn’t have – the number of full-time faculty required in a major field, three in a four-year program, two in a three-year program (Campus Alberta Quality Council, p. 81). On the other hand, the Alberta benchmarks for admission and graduation are expressed in general principles without numerical requirements. This is mostly the case with transfer as well, except that there is a guideline for the number of academic credits taken in the institution that awards the degree. At least 60 credits must be taken in the institution that awards a four-year degree. In addition, at least 72 of the student’s credits must be at the “senior level” (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2011, p. 77). If “senior level” were defined as third and fourth year courses, this would be an obstacle to 2 + 2 arrangements. However, the document defines senior level as courses that involve knowledge beyond the “basic level” and may involve “prerequisites, co-requisites, linguistic ability, or quantitative skills” (p. 77). It is possible that some courses at the diploma level could meet this requirement.

Perhaps more importantly, the Handbook indicates that these guidelines are meant to describe norms rather than to be prescriptive:

Council recognizes that the strength of Campus Alberta rests, in part, on its flexibility, diversity and innovation. Therefore, Council will consider variations to the norm, as it recognizes that degrees that articulate with or embed diplomas can take different forms (Campus Alberta Quality Council, 2011, p. 77).

In other areas where the document provides numerical benchmarks, there are also statements that suggest that a flexible approach is to be taken in the application of the benchmarks. The section of the CAQC Handbook on qualifications of faculty who teach in undergraduate programs distinguishes between “minimum” and “desirable” qualifications (p. 82). A doctorate is regarded as a desirable rather than a minimum qualification. In general, the majority of faculty who teach in undergraduate programs are expected to have the desirable qualification. However, the desirable qualification for faculty who teach in applied baccalaureate programs in colleges is different:

For institutions and programs with a technical or applied emphasis, the desirable qualification of an academic staff member offering instruction is at least a Master’s degree (or equivalent),

with the understanding that a background of personal experience in relevant employment is an alternative to the desirable qualification specified above (p. 82).

Given the numerous statements in the CAQC Handbook that recognize the special circumstances of applied programs, it is a pity that there has not been a single case of a proposed applied degree program going through a CAQC review from which we might be able to draw some lessons.

Florida

With 113 programs, Florida is far and away the state with the largest number of community college baccalaureate programs in the United States. Eighteen of the state's 28 community colleges offer baccalaureate degrees, almost one-third of the total number of colleges in the United States that award baccalaureate degrees (Russell, 2013). Russell observed that in the United States, "Florida stands alone in the extent to which its policy makers have recognized a direct role for community colleges in meeting the state's baccalaureate needs" (Russell, 2013, p. 73). At the time of the state's first legislation in this area in 2001, which authorized St. Petersburg College to award baccalaureate degrees, Florida ranked 46th in the United States in baccalaureate access (Furlong, 2005). Between 2006 and 2009, enrolment in baccalaureate programs in Florida colleges increased from 2,834 to 8,155 (Floyd & Falconetti, 2013). Eight colleges offer nine or more baccalaureate programs, led by St. Petersburg College with 24 programs (Floyd & Falconetti, 2013).

Florida has a two stage process for program approval. The first stage is to seek approval from the State Board of Education (SBE). This stage begins with a submission to the Division for Colleges which addresses labour market demand, possible impact on other postsecondary institutions, needs for additional resources, costs to students, and budget plan (Florida Department of Education, 2013). Once SBE approval is obtained, then the college must obtain the appropriate approval regarding quality from the relevant accrediting agency, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS). The SACS is one of six regional accrediting agencies in the United States which exercise responsibility for assuring the quality of public and private non-profit educational institutions in the United States.

In the first stage, besides providing evidence of labour market demand for graduates of the proposed baccalaureate program, colleges must provide data also on the anticipated salaries of graduates of the baccalaureate program and how they compare to the salaries of graduates of associate degree programs in the same field. I was told of one case in which a program proposal was withdrawn after it was discovered that the anticipated salary gain for a baccalaureate degree over an associate degree was insufficient to warrant the additional investment by the student.

Another feature of the first stage is that public and private universities in the region are informed of the proposal and given the opportunity to submit alternative proposals for a new program in the field. There does not appear to have ever been a case where a university submitted an alternative program in the field of a proposed college program. A diligent college will have made sure that this is unlikely by prior consultation with universities in the region. In several cases universities have acquiesced to or supported college proposals for new baccalaureate programs because they recognized the need for the program and were themselves not interested in addressing the need because the program was deemed to be too applied for the university (Skolnik, 2011). In other cases, universities almost welcomed the college program because the college would admit students who did not make the grade cut-off for admission into the related university program.

It is important to note that the baccalaureate programs in Florida colleges are all in the 2 + 2 degree completion format in which the college baccalaureate program consists of the third and fourth years for students who have already completed a related two-year associate degree program. One of the main motivations for development of these baccalaureate programs was to overcome the considerable barriers that face students who complete two-year associate degree programs and want to continue on to a baccalaureate degree. In addition to admitting graduates of the college's own associate degree program in the same field, it may admit graduates of similar programs in other colleges, and individuals who have completed two years in a university and did not get admitted to third year in the field of their chosen major at the university. In several fields, such as Business, university students do not get formal admission to the field of their major until their Junior (third) year, and such admission depends upon their GPA during their first two years. As universities have raised the GPA requirement for admission to the major field, they are screening out more students from making this transition. College baccalaureate programs provide an option for some of these students.

In 2007, the latest year for which data are available on the web site of the State University System of Florida, upper division undergraduate enrolment in the state's public universities was 139,228 (State University System of Florida, 2013). There was an unprecedented spike in university enrolment in 2007, so it's not unreasonable to relate 2009 enrolment in college baccalaureate programs to 2007 upper division university enrolment. By this calculation, colleges were accounting for 5.5% of upper division enrolment in Florida's public colleges and universities. The state university system has 12 universities.

As noted, the second stage of the approval process is under the aegis of the regional accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, which I will refer as SACS. The practices of SACS are similar to the practices of the other regional accrediting agencies. It might be helpful to explain a few features of the regional accreditation process in the United States, using SACS as an example.

Community colleges and universities in each region of the United States are accredited by the *same* agency. What differs is their *level* of accreditation. An accredited community college in

Florida that does not offer any baccalaureate programs will have Level I Accreditation. An accredited four-year postsecondary institution whose programs are all at the baccalaureate level will have Level II Accreditation. When a community college seeks to offer its first baccalaureate program, it must apply to the accreditation agency to have its level of accreditation changed from Level I to Level II. This requires a substantial internal review, submission to the SACS, and the appointment of an external evaluation team.

Strictly speaking, an accreditation agency accredits institutions not programs. An accreditation takes into account all the programs that an institution offers, ensuring that the programs are appropriate to the institution's mission and that the institution has the resources, infrastructure, policies and processes necessary for each program to be of acceptable quality:

Accreditation by SACS Commission on Colleges signifies that the institution (1) has a mission appropriate to higher education, (2) has resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain that mission, and (3) maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers, and that indicate whether it is successful in achieving its stated objectives (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2012a, p. 1).

When an institution adds a new program that constitutes a substantive change in content or method of delivery, it needs approval of the change by the accreditation agency. Approval of such a change could be viewed as a de facto program approval.

Often determining when a new program constitutes a substantive change is a matter of subjective judgment. Since colleges are new to baccalaureate granting, initially SACS tended to treat all new programs as cases of substantive change and required colleges to seek approval of each new program, based upon the submission of a prospectus which is not to exceed 25 pages (plus appendices). However, after the first program, and the change in accreditation status to Level II, a site visit and the appointment of an external evaluation team are not normally required for review of new programs. Moreover, after the first half dozen or so new programs were approved, except in cases where a program is in an area that is totally different from any other baccalaureate program in the college, the tendency has been to require less detail for approval and/or to accept notification of the new program after the fact. On the other hand, the State Board of Education does a full "efficiency" review of each new program even if it is in a similar field to previously approved programs.

Once a new program has been incorporated into the institution's repertoire, there is no requirement corresponding to the periodic re-assessment of baccalaureate programs which all the baccalaureate programs of Ontario colleges must undergo. In the SACS accreditation system, submission of a prospectus for a new program is required only when the program is

first offered. After that any consideration of an ongoing program occurs in the course of the re-accreditation of the institution, which is done every ten years.

The criteria employed by SACS in its accreditation and substantive change reviews of colleges are the same as for universities. For the most part, the criteria are formulated as general principles rather than as prescriptive requirements. There are few numerical parameters in the criteria. In regard to admissions and transfer, SACS does not impose any numerical requirements. The principle regarding admission stated in the SACS manual is:

Sound admission policies are defined in relation to the institution's mission and are designed to ensure that students who are admitted to the institution or to a specific program can benefit from the institution's programs (SACS, 2012, p. 56).

Among the few numerical requirements in the SACS principles of accreditation is one pertaining to transfer and one pertaining to faculty academic credentials. The first is the requirement that at least 25% of the credit hours required for a degree be earned at the institution that awards the degree (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2012b, p. 66). This requirement poses no problem for a college that accepts one of its associate degree graduates into one of its baccalaureate programs, since all of the credits would have been awarded by the college that grants the degree.

The other numerical requirement pertains to the degrees held by faculty. It is that at least 25 per cent of the course hours in the major field of a baccalaureate program "are taught by faculty members holding an appropriate terminal degree, usually the earned doctorate, or the equivalent of the terminal degree" (SACS, 2012b, p. 68). This is a substantially lower threshold and more flexible policy on faculty academic qualifications than the PEQAB's requirement which is based on the number of faculty in the program.

New Zealand

In the mid-1980s, the Minister of Education in New Zealand "sought to remove perceived differences between technical institutes and community colleges by encouraging all of them to describe themselves as polytechnics" (Doyle, 2008, p. 254). Soon thereafter, all but two of the institutions adopted the term polytechnic in their name. The 1989 Education Act recognized the terms institute of technology and polytechnic as equivalent, and some institutions reverted back to calling themselves institutes of technology. Currently, about half the institutions call themselves polytechnics and half are institutes of technology. Thus, the sector is referred to as the Institute of Technology and Polytechnic Sector, and collectively the 18 institutions that comprise the sector are referred to as ITPs. New Zealand has eight universities.

The ITP sector accounts for about 20 per cent of total enrolment in baccalaureate programs in New Zealand.¹⁰ Although large in comparison with Ontario, baccalaureate enrolment in New Zealand's ITPs constitutes a minority of their enrolment. Enrolment in diploma, certificate, and other non-baccalaureate programs still comprises a little over 70% of enrolment in the ITPs (Tertiary Education Commission, 2010, p. 26).

The approval process for baccalaureate programs in the ITPs consists solely of a review by a quality assurance agency. Programs are *not* reviewed by the Ministry of Education or the Tertiary Education Commission for student and labour market demand or duplication issues. These matters are to be left to the market.

Prior to 2011, approval of baccalaureate programs was the responsibility of a sector agency, Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITPQ), which was operated by the association of ITPs, ITPNZ. However, in 2009, six ITPs broke away from ITPNZ for reasons unrelated to quality assurance issues to form their own group (Tertiary Education Union, 2009). With the split up of ITPNZ, it was no longer possible for the organization to maintain responsibility for quality assurance, and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) took over the approval function for baccalaureate programs in the ITPs. When ITPQ performed this function, it did so under delegated authority from NZQA which is responsible for setting the criteria and guidelines for approval of all degree programs in New Zealand. However, by having control over the implementation of the criteria and guidelines for the ITPs, the sector could exert some influence on the process.

The quality assurance benchmarks employed by the NZQA for review of baccalaureate programs are far less detailed and prescriptive, and fewer in number, than those of the PEQAB. For example, the only conditions for admission requirements is that they must be "clear, comprehensive, and fair" (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2011, p. 4). The only statement pertaining to academic qualifications of faculty is that the academic staff "are adequate in number and appropriately qualified for the outcomes of the courses to be met" (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2011, p. 10).

There is, however, one other noteworthy requirement for faculty. The Education Act 1989 defines a degree as an award that is taught "mainly by people engaged in research" (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2011, p. 10). In elaborating on this requirement, the NZQA manual provides a very wide definition of research and notes that consultancy and professional practice may be deemed the equivalent of research. It notes also that staff engaged in studies to upgrade their knowledge, skills or qualifications would be regarded as being engaged in research. The manual notes further that some staff may be employed for their specific contribution to a program even though they are not engaged in research. The typical teaching load for faculty who do not teach in baccalaureate programs is 18-20 hours per week. Faculty who teach in baccalaureate programs are normally given a six hour reduction in teaching load

¹⁰Estimated from data in New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 75.

to enable them to participate in research. The intent of the provisions regarding faculty engagement in research seems to be to promote the development of a research culture in the ITPs without imposing rigid requirements for specific behaviours.

Although the ITPs (and the universities) offer both three-year and four-year baccalaureate degrees, the program approval manual does not distinguish between the two types of baccalaureate degrees. Presumably this is not necessary because the benchmarks are written in general language that focuses on what is appropriate for the program in question. In New Zealand, in both the ITPs and the universities, the four-year degree is an honours degree that is awarded after one additional year of study following completion of an ordinary (three-year) baccalaureate degree. A perusal of admission requirements for the baccalaureate degree at ITPs and universities indicated that the requirements are more demanding academically in the universities than in the ITPs. Generally, the universities require more credits at a higher level of educational achievement than the ITPs. If this observation is valid, it suggests that differentiation between minimum admission requirements of ITPs and universities is permissible within the quality assurance framework.

Netherlands and Flanders

The *Hogescholen*, or HBO¹¹, sector of higher education in the Netherlands evolved from a diverse array of technical and vocational institutions. The government encouraged the growth of the HBO sector between the late 1960s and the 1980s because they were less costly than the universities, and because the more applied type of education that they provided was thought to be beneficial for the growth of the economy (Huisman, 2008). It has also been suggested that in many European countries, including the Netherlands, having a parallel system of degree granting institutions with an applied focus serves to extend the academic-vocational streaming in the schools into postsecondary education, thereby opening up degree opportunities to students who have been streamed away from the university admission pathway in the secondary school (Slantcheva-Durst, 2010).

Through a process of mergers and consolidation, the HBO institutions became larger and more comprehensive, until today there are 42 HBOs in a higher education system that also contains 14 traditional universities. The HBOs have about 400,000 students, award about three-quarters of the bachelor's degrees in the Netherlands, and also offer master's degrees. The bachelor's degrees awarded by the HBOs are of four years' duration, and are described as having a "professional orientation"; while the research universities award three-year bachelor's degrees that are described as having an "academic orientation". The reason for the difference in the length of baccalaureate programs in the two sectors is that the pre-university stream in secondary school is one year longer than the secondary school general and vocational streams, which are the normal routes for entry to the HBO sector.

¹¹HBO is the Dutch acronym for higher professional education (Huisman, 2008).

In line with practices of comparable postsecondary institutions in several other European countries, the HBOs now refer to themselves in English as universities of applied sciences (UAS). Their main educational activity is the provision of bachelor's and to a lesser extent master's programs. They also award a relatively small number of associate degrees. In the Netherlands, there is another sector of institutions that provide shorter term vocational education and training (VET) and adult education. This is the MBO sector which consists of 70 institutions and serves over a half million students annually.

There is a two-stage process for approval of new baccalaureate and master's programs in the HBOs. The first stage is a "macro-efficiency" test by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science which is intended to prevent the "proliferation of similar/comparable programmes in places very near to each other" (OECD, 2008, p. 87). The macro-efficiency review is undertaken by a national agency, the Higher Education Efficiency Commission (called the CDHO), which advises the Minister. In this stage, the Ministry may also be concerned about duplication of programs with low enrolment on a national level. Besides duplication, the review in this stage is concerned also with whether there is a demand by the professional field for the program to be offered and whether there is sufficient labour market demand for graduates (Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, 2013). The macro-efficiency check is necessary only for programs that seek funding from the Ministry. For programs for which government funding is not sought, the HBO may proceed directly to the second stage, the quality review.

The second stage is accreditation of the program by the Accreditation Organization of The Netherlands and Flanders, the NVAO, following a quality assessment. In the Netherlands, accreditation takes place at the program level.

The NVAO is independent of the government although its activities are legally reviewable (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008). Ongoing programs are subject to a quality review every six years. Until recently, the actual program assessments were done by commercial assessment agencies (VBIs) which were contracted by the higher education institutions and submitted their reports directly to the NVAO. Each institution would choose the assessment agency that it considered most appropriate. HBOs and universities each tended to choose the agencies that originated from their respective sectors (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008).

Now the assessments are done by panels that are external to the NVAO and hired by the higher education institution. The secretaries of the panels are trained and certified by NVAO which publishes a list of certified secretaries from which the institutions can choose. The panel that carries out the assessment has to be approved by NVAO prior to the start of the assessment. The resulting panel report is enclosed with the accreditation request to the NVAO for accreditation of a program, and it forms the basis for the accreditation decision by NVAO. The VBIs no longer have a formal role in the process, but many of the panel secretaries on the list were formerly employed by VBIs.

There are two different assessment regimens for a program accreditation review: Limited or Extensive. An institution may request the NVAO to conduct an assessment of its quality assurance practices. If it receives a positive quality assurance assessment, then it qualifies for the Limited assessment for accreditation of its programs. In the Limited assessment, the assessment process involves only three quality standards (Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, 2011, p. 8):

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes of the programme have been concretised with regard to content, level and orientation; they meet international requirements.

Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, staff and programme-specific services and facilities enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Standard 3: Assessment and achieved learning outcomes

The programme has an adequate assessment system in place and demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

In the Extensive assessment, there are 16 quality standards. Besides the same quality standards as in the Limited assessment for Intended Learning Outcomes and Assessment and Achieved Learning Outcomes, there are six standards for Curriculum; three each for Staff and Quality Assurance; and two for Services and Facilities. In neither assessment regimen are there separately listed benchmarks for any of the quality standards.

In both regimens, the quality standards are expressed in the form of general principles or statements of goals, without any numerical requirements, except for referencing the statutory requirement for the number of ECTS credits that must comprise a program: 240 for bachelor's programs with a professional orientation, i.e., four years; and 180 for those with an academic orientation, i.e., three years.

Some of the standards in the Extensive assessment deal with more specific aspects of broad categories than the standards in the Limited assessment. For example, in the Limited assessment, admissions policies are not mentioned at all. In the Extensive assessment, however, one of the standards in the Curriculum category pertains indirectly to admissions (Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, 2011, p. 16):

Standard 5: The curriculum ties in with the qualifications of the incoming students.

According to the discussion, this standard is intended to ensure that admission requirements are “realistic” in relation to intended learning outcomes (p. 16).

In the Netherlands, requirements for admission to higher education institutions are established by the Ministry, and the requirements for admission to bachelor’s programs differ considerably between the universities and the HBOs. The normal route to university in the Netherlands is a six-year pre-university education, while for the HBO sector it is a five-year general secondary education, or a five-year secondary vocational education. Huisman reported that about 20% of students who enroll in bachelor’s programs in the HBOs have completed the six-year pre-university curriculum and thus would be eligible for admission to a university (Huisman, 2008).

In the Limited assessment, different areas of interest tend to be combined into a single standard. The standard pertaining to staff in the Limited assessment deals also with curriculum, services and facilities (p. 8):

Standard 2: The curriculum, staff and programme-specific services and facilities enable incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

In the Extensive assessment, these different areas are unbundled and given their own distinct standards. The standard that pertains to staff is (p. 17):

Standard 9: The staff is qualified for the realisation of the curriculum in terms of content, educational expertise and organisation.

In the elaboration on this standard, it is noted that the “factual expertise available among the staff ties in with the requirements set for professional or academic higher education programmes” (p. 17). Thus the evaluation of whether a program meets the standard for qualifications of staff would be different for the professionally oriented bachelor’s programs of the HBO institutions than for the academically oriented bachelor’s programs of the universities.

The NVAO quality standards do not indicate specific requirements for the academic degrees that faculty members must possess. According to a document published by the association of HBOs, as of 2009, the percentages of HBO faculty with postgraduate degrees were: master’s about 45%, and doctorate about 4% (Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences, 2009, estimated from chart on p. 26). A 2012 report of an association of universities

of applied sciences in Europe gave a figure of 11% for the percentage of faculty in the HBOs that possessed a Ph.D. (UASNet, 2012).

Another example of recognition of the differences in assessment expectations between academic and professional bachelor's programs is found with respect to intended learning outcomes. The Dutch Qualifications Framework distinguishes between baccalaureate programs according to their orientation (Higher Education Qualifications Framework in the Netherlands, 2008, p. 11). The term "orientation" refers to academic (universities) or professional (HBOs). The first standard in the NVAO assessment process states that "The intended learning outcomes of the programme have been concretised with regard to content, level and *orientation*" (Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, 2011, p. 8, italics for emphasis).

The NVAO has jurisdiction over higher education programs in both the Netherlands and Flanders. As of 2009, there were six Dutch universities and 22 *Hogescholen* in Flanders. In Flanders, the English translation used for *Hogescholen* is university college (Huys, Debackere, and De Kock, 2009). These 22 university colleges were the result of considerable merger activity. As recently as 1995, there had been 163 non-university postsecondary institutions in Flanders (Verhoeven, 2008). The NVAO has separate and distinct learning outcome standards for professionally-oriented bachelor's degrees and academically-oriented bachelor's degrees.

The difference in the treatment of professional and academic bachelor's programs in this document is sufficiently noteworthy to warrant reproducing it in total (Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders, 2005, p. 4):

LEVEL & ORIENTATION

The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond with the following descriptions of a:

Bachelor's programme (professional orientation):

- general competences such as the capacity for logical thought and reasoning, the ability to acquire and process information, the ability for critical reflection and project-based work, creativity, the ability to perform simple supervision tasks, the ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialists as well as laymen, and a positive attitude towards life-long

learning

- general professional competences like the ability to work together as part of a team, a solution-oriented attitude in the sense of being able to define and analyse independently complex problematic situations in professional practice, and the ability to develop and apply effective strategies to solve them, and to develop a sense of social responsibility in connection with the professional practice

- specific professional competences at the level of a newly-qualified professional

Bachelor's programme (Academic orientation):

- general competences such as the capacity for logical thought and reasoning, the ability to acquire and process information, the capacity for critical reflection, creativity, being able to perform simple management tasks, the ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialists as well as laymen and a positive attitude towards life-long learning

- general academic competences such as a research attitude, knowledge of research methodologies and techniques and the ability to apply them adequately, the ability to collect the relevant data that can influence the formation of an opinion about social, scientific and ethical issues, appreciation of uncertainty, ambiguity and the limits of knowledge, and the ability to initiate problem-driven

research

- an understanding of basic academic, discipline-related knowledge inherent to a certain domain of the sciences or the arts, systematic understanding of the key elements of a discipline which includes acquiring coherent and detailed knowledge that is inspired partly by the most recent developments in the discipline, and an understanding of the structure of the specialisation and its inter-relatedness with other specialities

The differences between these descriptions of required learning outcomes are considerable. The professional degree includes items not mentioned in the description of the academic degree requirements such as the ability for project-based work, working as part of a team, and developing a solution-based attitude, and it contains references to professional competencies and professional practice. On the other hand, the requirements for the academic degree include some things not mentioned for the professional degree such as matters pertaining to discipline-based knowledge and research skills.

Apparently having a sharper distinction between the requirements for academically and professionally oriented degree programs hasn't deterred students in Flanders from enrolling in bachelor's programs with a professional orientation. The university colleges in Flanders offer both professional and academic bachelor's programs. For the latest year for which data are available, 2007-2008, the number of new entrants to bachelor's programs in Flanders was (Huys, Debackere, & De Kock, 2009, derived from Table 3.1):

Professional Programs University Colleges	22,749
Academic Programs University Colleges	5,405
Academic Programs Universities	14,746

Overall, about 53% of new students were choosing professional bachelor's programs in the university colleges, and more than 65% of new students in either program orientation were choosing the university colleges. Verhoeven notes that since both universities and university colleges are open to all students who have completed secondary school, students decide which type of institution to attend largely on the basis of their study and career preferences (Verhoeven, 2008).

Finland

In 1992, the same year as the British polytechnics were converted into universities, the Government of Finland authorized the establishment of a new sector of technical colleges which were called polytechnics (Valimaa&Neuvonen-Rauhala, 2008). The initial 22 polytechnics were created through both consolidation of a variety of former vocational institutions and the establishment of new facilities. Today there are 29 polytechnics, and their chosen term for English translation is university of applied sciences (UAS). The Ministry of Education & Culture continues to refer to these institutions as polytechnics, while the quality assurance agency, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) uses the term university of applied sciences when referring to them. Finland has more than twice as many polytechnics as universities: there are 14 universities.

The Finnish polytechnics offer bachelors and masters programs. Bachelors programs in the polytechnics are of 3.5 to 4.0 years (210 to 240 ECTS credits), while bachelors programs in the universities are three years (180 ECTS credits). According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, the polytechnics award over 20,000 bachelor's degrees annually and about 200 masters degrees (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013a). In 2008, about 60% of bachelor's degrees in Finland were awarded by the polytechnics (estimated from data in Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 48, p. 64). In that year the universities awarded about 57% more masters degrees than bachelor's degrees. Thus, assigning a major role for baccalaureate production to the polytechnics has enabled the universities to concentrate more on masters and doctorate degrees (and research).

The polytechnics concentrate on bachelor's and master's degrees and continuing professional education. There are 210 providers of shorter term vocational and adult education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013b).

The Ministry must approve all new higher education programs, and in exercising this responsibility it tries to avoid unnecessary duplication of programs and over-production of graduates relative to labour market needs.

The responsibility for overseeing quality assurance in higher education rests with the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council. FINHEEC does not assess or accredit programs of universities and polytechnics. Instead it conducts audits that focus on the "procedures and processes that the institution uses to maintain, develop and enhance the quality of its operations" (Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, 2013, p. 1). Those institutions that pass the audit are deemed to have appropriate procedures and processes in place to assure the quality of their degree programs (Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, 2013). FINHEEC's audit model meets the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The institutional audits are conducted every six years. The audit process is the same for polytechnics as it is for universities.

Employing an external audit process for quality assurance, FINHEEC does not issue prescriptive requirements like those in the PEQAB Handbook.

In Finland, polytechnics and universities establish their own admissions criteria. According to Valimaa & Neuvonen-Rauhala, "In principle, there are no big differences in entrance requirements between polytechnics and universities, but in practice the differences are many" (Valimaa & Neuvonen-Rauhala, 2008, p. 87). One big difference is that the polytechnics give greater weight to practical orientation of applicants relative to academic factors than do universities. About 25% of polytechnic students reported in a survey that it was easier to gain acceptance to a polytechnic than to a university. Valimaa & Neuvonen-Rauhala also reported that there is a strong socio-economic class difference between universities and polytechnics in the make-up of their student bodies.

Valimaa & Neuvonen-Rauhala provide data on the academic degrees held by faculty in the polytechnics in 2003 (Valimaa & Neuvonen-Rauhala, 2008, p. 85). Overall, 16.8% of full-time faculty held either a Ph.D. or a Licentiate Degree. The Licentiate in Finland is a two-year degree, whereas the Ph.D. requires at least four years. The Licentiate is between a master's and a doctorate, and some regard it as similar to an English M.Phil. It is not possible to tell from the data provided by Valimaa & Neuvonen-Rauhala how many of 16.8% of polytechnic faculty with one or the other of these degrees held a Ph.D. The percentage with one or the other of these degrees was greatest, 64%, in the highest of the three categories of faculty, Senior Teacher. This category contains the smallest number of faculty of the three categories, less than one in six polytechnic faculty.

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