Welcome to the OCQAS Newsletter - your triannual peek behind the quality scenes at the OCQAS with quality news, updates, resources and more!

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• Transparency • Accountability • Collaboration • Growth • Potential
Ensuring quality and consistency across the post-secondary education system
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**Introductions**

We are excited to announce that our team is growing. Lisa Sinclair is back at OCQAS on secondment. She can be reached at sinclair@ocqas.org. Lisa’s work days are Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Lisa is the Coordinator, Quality Assurance & Administrative Projects at Loyalist College.

Lindi Prendi will continue her secondment for another six months. She can be reached at prendi@ocqas.org. Lindi’s work days are Mondays and Tuesdays. Lindi is the Lead Coordinator of Quality Assurance and Curriculum at St. Clair College.

When contacting CVS via email it would be beneficial to send the email to Karen, Lisa and Lindi in order to ensure a timely response. To that effect, CVS has created a common email address to ensure that emails are received by all CVS staff regardless of who is working that day.

The new common email address is cvs@ocqas.org.

**Communications**

OCQAS is engaging in a review of the Credential Validation Service (CVS) and has started the process by collecting feedback through a survey. The link is [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FS7YP89](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FS7YP89) and is available until September 4th, 2020. The review consists of four phases with the objective of identifying best practices and gaps in service and resources. The CVS team will also collaborate with all stakeholders to determine communication strategies that will ensure accurate and consistent flow of information that best meet their needs.

**Phased approach:**

1. Data collection – consisting of interviews, surveys and focus groups.
2. Analysis – results from the data collected will be analyzed.
3. Recommendations – a list of recommendations will be developed as a result of the results of the consultation.
4. Service benchmark – based on the recommendations, a service benchmark and communication plan will be established.
OCQAS – A Brief Overview

**Information**

Quality Assurance is not a foreign concept to the Ontario college sector. The need for public accountability, articulation of credential specific expectations, increased mobility of students between colleges and/or college – universities, as well as the shift of higher education toward Outcome Based Education (OBE) are some of the driving factors recognized in literature.

Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) have embraced quality assurance in every aspect of their operation. Each college has the freedom to approach and implement quality assurance processes in a way that best meets their specific needs. However, they all draw from the framework and services established by the Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS).

The OCQAS was established to provide efficient tools that ensure specific quality standards are consistently met by CAATs. The service is owned, operated and funded by the 24 public Ontario Colleges. The OCQAS is responsible for ensuring quality and continuous improvement at both:

- the program level through the Credential Validation Service (CVS);
- the institutional level through the College Quality Assurance Audit Process (CQAAP).

The following paragraphs will dive deeper in some of the core aspects of CVS and CQAAP.

**CVS**

A program level process that provides timely validation of programs of instruction to support colleges in responding to stakeholder needs for different programs of study. Services provided by CVS align with the Minister’s Binding Policy Directive, Framework for Programs of Instruction. The mandate, main functions, and support services provided by CVS are:

- Provides reasonable assurance that all programs of instruction conform to the Credentials Framework*.
- Maintains consistency with accepted college system nomenclature and/or program titling protocols.
- Maintains integrity of all credentials in order to protect the interest of students and employers.
- Supports vocational learning outcome development/revision for new or updated Program Standards.
- Provides training and support for new program development as well as program and title modification.
- Liaises with the MCU.
- Communicates regularly with stakeholders.

*Credentials Framework developed/owned by the MCU as part of the Minister’s Binding Policy Directive. It represents the minimum provincial requirements for credentials to be awarded and applies to all programs of instruction, regardless of funding sources. It is a guiding tool for program development and validation.

**CQAAP**

An institutional level process that involves regular and cyclical reviews of each college’s quality assurance mechanisms. The purpose is developmental and its intent is to ensure continuous improvement. OCQAS carries the following aspects of this process:

- Facilitates informal review of the self-study prior to submission to give colleges feedback and suggestions for improvement.
- Manages the audit process following the established guiding principles developed in 2003.
- Develops and maintains policy, criteria and procedures relevant to the audit process.
- Trains auditors and college staff.
- Publishes best practices at least once each year.
- Communicates regularly with all stakeholders.
Similarities and Differences Between CQAAP and CVS

**Similarities**

1. Services that ensure colleges are adhering to quality assurance best practices.
2. Both services/processes are managed by OCQAS.
3. There are existing criteria that drives/sets the expectations.
4. Allows colleges to respond to the needs of the unique communities they serve.
5. Decisions are made by peer review, a person external to the college.

**Differences**

1. CVS is at the program level, and CQAAP is at the institutional level.
2. CVS is, on average, a 21-day process, CQAAP is ongoing with a formal 5-year cyclical process.
3. CVS criteria is own by the Ministry, while CQAAP’s criteria is owned by OCQAS and is revised with input from colleges.
4. CVS promotes consistency, CQAAP celebrates uniqueness.
5. For program validation, the peer review is done by CVS staff; for CQAAP, the peer review is done by an audit panel.

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**CVS Guidebook**

CVS strives to provide efficient and transparent services that meet the needs of the 24 colleges in the system. As colleges work through processes of new program development and/or modification of existing programs, CVS staff provides guidance and support necessary for colleges to meet their goals, but also to ensure that programs align with the OQF and other Ministerial requirements.

A Guidebook was created in May/June 2020 in response to a system request for a more formal way of disseminating information. This Guidebook combines information from the program development/application rubric that was created in collaboration with George Brown College, information from newsletters, training materials, and in person communication. The Guidebook was sent to the HQM executive for review and feedback.

Currently, the document does not include any technical guidance on using the online CVS tool. Development of a technical user guide is underway at CVS and will be available soon.

**Next steps:**

- Gather feedback from curriculum developers and other stakeholders.
- Finalize the Guidebook and post it on the OCQAS website.
- Update the Guidebook regularly and communicate these changes to all stakeholders.
The Art of Writing Vocational Learning Outcomes

Credential Validation Services has always promoted the idea that writing Vocational Learning Outcomes (VLOs) is as much a science as it is an art.

The significance of these two elements is well articulated by Ann Patchett:

“Art stands on the shoulders of craft, which means that to get to the art you must master the craft. If you want to write, practice writing. Practice it for hours a day, not to come up with a story you can publish, but because you long to learn how to write well, because there is something that you alone can say”.

Over time, we have seen the system become very adept at writing VLOs, integrating both art and science.

CVS’ comments/suggestions in most cases speak to elements that commonly are missing. We try not to get too involved in the art, because each artist has their own way to say what they need their audience to hear, but we do focus on the science of writing VLOs.


The Science of Writing Vocational Learning Outcomes: Examples

Most of us have learned the science of writing VLOs and can recite by memory the three elements that have to be present: action, context, criteria.

- A description of what the graduate will be able to DO (verb)
- The context under which the graduate will perform the task
- The criteria for evaluating graduate performance (“to what end?”)

Outcomes missing the criteria for assessment:
1. Design, prototype, analyze, troubleshoot, as well as commission, install and repair a variety of photonics equipment and systems.
2. Use tools and equipment for basic installation manufacture, and repair of components.
3. Utilize management and administration skills in a mediation and/or alternative dispute resolution practice.

Most common errors in VLO writing
Outcomes containing the three elements of a VLO, but written from the instructor’s perspective, not the employer’s:
1. Evaluate the students own thinking throughout the steps and processes used in problem solving and decision-making.
2. Adapt to new situations and demands by applying and/or updating the students’ knowledge and skills.
3. Fabricate mechanical components and assemblies by applying workshop skills and knowledge of basic shop practices.

Outcomes that sound good, but the context and criteria are not connected:
1. Apply operational and business principles to determine metrics that are necessary for a success.
2. Employ project management, time and cost management, and customer relationship management practices to work in the role of interior decorator.
3. Participate as a member of a project team to support the effective management of a project.