

**SURVEY OF GOOD PRACTICES  
FOR THE RECOGNITION OF  
EQUIVALENCE OF CREDENTIALS  
AND TRAINING ACQUIRED  
OUTSIDE QUÉBEC**

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**Conseil interprofessionnel du Québec**

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## **1. PRESENTATION**

The access of immigrants to the regulated trades and professions has become a public interest issue because it is related both to Québec's current demographic situation and to labour mobility in the context of globalization. It also touches on the issue of fairness, a fundamental value of Québec society.

For the professional orders, this issue translates into a number of challenges in terms of prior learning assessment and recognition that must be met in a context of ongoing changes in immigration.

### **1.1 Principles underlying the recognition of equivalence**

To meet these challenges, the professional orders that are grouped in the Québec Interprofessional Council adopted a work plan in December 2001 concerning the admission of immigration into the professional orders (*Plan de travail sur l'admission des personnes immigrantes aux ordres professionnels*).

Among other things, the plan called for the identification of principles governing the recognition of equivalence and a list of associated practices with a view to their incorporation into the professional orders' equivalence recognition processes.

The document entitled *Principles for the Recognition of Equivalence of Credentials and Training Acquired Outside Québec* (February 2006) sets out the following six principles:

- Equality
- Fairness
- Objectivity
- Transparency
- Openness
- Periodic review

These principles also apply to the equivalence of additional conditions and terms of admission, in cases in which an order's regulations stipulate such provisions for the granting of a permit to practise.

### **1.2 Goals**

These principles are for the most part already incorporated in current professional legislation and regulations in Québec. Their application and renewal, however, constitute an ongoing challenge for professional orders.

This document is therefore designed mainly as a tool to:

- Assist professional orders in assessing their procedure for processing applications for recognition of an equivalence;
- Enable orders to monitor the need for ongoing improvement of this procedure due to the changing context of its application (target population, governmental policies and public expectations);
- Enable orders to optimize application of their equivalence recognition regulations.

This document is also meant to serve as a reference tool, particularly for individuals who are responsible for processing applications for recognition of an equivalence.

### 1.3 Structure of the document

In the following sections we present a summary and description of **good practices** and discuss application of the principles in the following areas: **administrative, methodological and procedural**. This is illustrated with several examples of the professional orders' practices. They were chosen based on their potential usefulness to other professional orders who may wish to improve their practice by drawing on relevant examples.

For example, section 2, on the administrative structure, presents good practices for a professional order in terms of information and human resources management and operational planning of the equivalence recognition process.

Sections 3 and 4, on methodology, present approaches and methods for evaluating a candidate's educational level and the content of the candidate's program or training. Among other things, we describe evaluation tools to enable:

- **Comparison** of the candidate's academic and experiential qualifications (i.e., work experience) with the knowledge and competencies required to practise a profession (comparative grid on training elements; comparative grid on competencies);
- Direct **measurement** of a candidate's declared qualifications (written examination, oral examination, observation/simulation, etc.).

Last, section 5, on procedure, proposes a framework for the equivalence recognition process and the relationship that should be established between a professional order and a candidate, again, with a view to implementing the principles mentioned earlier.

## 1.4 Sources consulted

The following are the main sources consulted in the writing of this document:

- Australian Council of Professions, *Policy on the recognition of overseas professional qualifications*, 1990.
- Deliberations and analysis of the MRCI's steering committee on the admission of immigrants to the professional orders, 1995 to 1997 and 2001 to 2004.
- Australian Government, Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *The Best Practice Guide for Professional Bodies*, Canberra: J.S. McMillan Printing Group, 1997.
- Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC): *Quality Assurance Framework*, 1999. ([www.canalliance.org/framework.htm](http://www.canalliance.org/framework.htm)).
- Government of Québec, *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* (May 2002) and its associated *Action Plan* (<http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/GR-PUB/menu-plans-a.htm>). Also, the work of the interdepartmental committee on prior learning assessment (*Table interministérielle sur la reconnaissance des acquis*) and its technical committee (2002 to 2004).
- Forum of Labour Market Ministers of Canada, *Agreement on Internal Trade - Guidelines for Meeting the Obligations of the Labour Mobility Chapter*, revised edition, 2003, (<http://www11.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/hrsdclmp/mobility/9999-000057/page01.shtml>).
- Documentation on the ISO Standard 17024 by the International Organization for Standardization: *Conformity Assessment - General Requirements for Bodies Operating Certification of Persons*, 2004. (<http://www.iso.org/iso/en/commcentre/pressreleases/archives/2003/Ref847.html>).
- Report of the Task Force on Access to Regulated Trades and Professions: *Les personnes immigrantes formées à l'étranger et l'accès aux professions et métiers réglementés* (February 2005). English version of the *Summary of Recommendations* is available ([www.micc.gouv.qc.ca/english/index.asp](http://www.micc.gouv.qc.ca/english/index.asp))
- Report and analysis of the work Group on the Recognition of Credentials and Skills of Persons Trained Abroad and its sub-committees, December 2005. ([http://www.micc.gouv.qc.ca/52\\_2.asp?pid=908](http://www.micc.gouv.qc.ca/52_2.asp?pid=908)).
- Experiences of the professional orders in the matter of recognition of equivalences.

The information gathered from these sources and others was adapted to take into account the reality of the professional system in Québec and the regulations of the professional orders with respect to the recognition of equivalence of credentials and training acquired outside Québec.



## **2. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE**

Keep in mind that the professional orders' regulations concerning equivalence stem from application of the *Professional Code* and as such, are approved by the government. Moreover, these regulations establish a compulsory framework with respect to:

- Equivalence standards for diplomas, training and the other conditions for permit issuance;
- Procedures regarding the processing of information and documents received or to be transmitted;
- Procedures regarding the decision and its review.

An adequate administrative structure enables a professional order to optimize application of its regulations and facilitates periodic review. Here are the main elements of such a structure.

### **2.1 Operational structure**

An effective procedure for the processing of equivalence recognition applications is defined and validated.

The system should inspire trust in its expertise, impartiality and integrity on the part of other concerned parties.

When the volume and complexity of applications justify doing so, it may be helpful to form a committee.

A system to manage information concerning achievement conforms with the principles mentioned earlier. The system is kept up to date. Its implementation affects all levels of the organization.

The following sections describe different aspects of the administrative structure.

### **2.2 Documentation**

Documentation is used to aid the processing of applications. Depending on the case, documentation would cover the following areas:

- description of various education systems;
- description of professional practice in different jurisdictions (see box below);

- sources of written and electronic documentation used in evaluating foreign credentials;
- accreditation methods of educational institutions and programs;
- practices for assessing foreign credentials;
- outcome of the assessment of different programs of study;
- means of verifying document authenticity;
- questions linked to the translation of documents.

For many of these points, professional orders can refer to the provisions of the protocol agreement signed on January 24, 2005, between the Québec Interprofessional Council and the *Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles* (MICC) on the exchange of factual information and expertise on assessing credentials issued outside Québec.

### **2.3 Assessing applications**

Methods to be used in assessing applications for recognition of equivalence are defined. Methods cover both the evaluation of diplomas, with respect to educational level and content, and work experience.

Based on the established methods, adapted evaluation tools are produced.

A methodology and appropriate procedures (such as the collection and updating of statistical data) must be defined to permit periodic confirmation of the fairness, validity, reliability and general execution of the evaluation methods and tools, and correction of any identified gaps.

When equivalence recognition tasks, for example, the design and administering of an examination are delegated to an outside person or agency, an agreement must be duly concluded. This agreement should contain the adopted provisions, including conformance with applicable standards, objectives with respect to the training and competencies needed by the candidate, confidentiality and prevention of conflict of interest.

The responsibility of granting an equivalence with a view to issuing a permit cannot be sub-contracted. This condition does not, however, prevent the use of expertise, for example an agency, educational institution or committee that could be called on to formulate recommendations.

A policy and procedures are defined to provide a framework for resolving candidates' disputes regarding the application process, evaluation and decisions' review. It is generally accepted as desirable that the persons considering such disagreements and reviews not be the individuals who rendered the initial decision.<sup>1</sup>

***Sample practice: information management***

**Formulating descriptions of professional practice  
by country of origin  
*Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec (nurses)***

The OIIQ uses the grid below when assessing an application to obtain a rapid and comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of nursing practice in a given country. It can then serve as a reference when considering similar applications.

DESCRIPTION OF COUNTRY: X
<p><b>1. Regulatory framework</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.1 National regulations</li><li>1.2 Permit to practice and registration</li><li>1.3 Examination for admission to the profession</li></ul>
<p><b>2. Training</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>2.1 Level of training</li><li>2.2 Content</li></ul>
<p><b>3. Professional practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>3.1 Entry-level competencies and professional standards</li><li>3.2 Organization of care in care settings</li></ul>
<p><b>4. Specific aspects related to the profession</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>4.1 Demographic indicators</li><li>4.2 Social/health system</li></ul>
<p><b>5. Language</b></p>
<p><b>6. Information sources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>6.1 Resource people</li><li>6.2 Web sites</li><li>6.3 Bibliography</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> However, the legal framework established by the public authority for several professional orders allows the decision-making body concerned to review its own decision.

## **2.4 Fees**

Criteria are determined to calculate the cost of processing an application and assessing a candidate. Fees should closely reflect the actual cost generated by these operations.

## **2.5 File management**

The system for managing applicants' files should enable rapid access to desired information while protecting the confidentiality of personal information. Information management involves the following:

- Record-keeping procedures;
- Duration of document retention;
- Methods for consulting prior decisions;
- Procedures for protecting personal information;
- Procedures for managing original documents.

File management makes it possible to refer to earlier decisions in an organized and systematic manner in order to ensure uniform processing of applications.

For some cases, you can establish a description of professional practice in the country of origin or a description of the program offered by different educational institutions.

## **2.6 Personnel and human resources**

The administrative structure includes the definition of competency requirements of employees or contract workers involved in processing equivalence recognition applications.

Depending on the available resources, a sufficiently large staff, directed by a responsible superior, is on duty. Documented instructions describing their functions and responsibilities are provided to regular employees or personnel on contract. These instructions are kept up to date.

Personnel involved in activities related to the recognition of equivalence must possess the appropriate training, knowledge and experience. Moreover, employees or contract workers are familiar with prior learning assessment methods for measuring and assessing competencies. They are capable of producing fair evaluations of uniform quality. They keep themselves informed by taking part in continuing education activities.

Personnel are also trained and equipped to respond to the specific conditions experienced by immigrants. Training and tools may include the following elements:

- Knowledge of relevant regulations and standards that must be applied;
- Comprehension of the objectives of the equivalence recognition process;
- Evaluation of credentials and training;
- Evaluation of work experience;
- Knowledge of the profession;
- Knowledge of the conditions of access to the profession in other jurisdictions;
- Knowledge of education systems outside Québec ;
- Knowledge of the clientele ;
- Communications in a context of intercultural relations.

Many observers in the field consider that, depending on the inherent complexity of the competencies being assessed, it is desirable that professional personnel have among them at least one individual who has at least one year of supervised practical experience assessing foreign credentials. It would be appropriate that such an individual have a background in education, andragogy or test evaluation. The experience should be recent and related to the services offered. When examinations are required, examining officers must satisfy competency requirements.

## **2.7 Potential contribution of a training committee**

When so stipulated by government regulation, a professional order is required to form a committee on training that, among other things, is mandated to evaluate the quality of training offered by programs that, in most cases, are offered by the Québec education system.

Quality of training means “the appropriateness of training in relation to the professional skills to be acquired to practise a profession.” Pursuant to its mandate, the committee on training must therefore report on the current state of knowledge of skills in the field of practice of the profession, in particular, given the context in which the profession is being practised.

The work of the committee on training may be useful to the person responsible for the recognition of equivalence (or the committee mandated to this end) within the professional order as a reference for evaluating credentials and training acquired outside Québec. The professional order could then institute collaboration among the concerned bodies.

### 3. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS: ASSESSING EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Two aspects must be considered to establish equivalence:

- The **educational level** corresponding to the diploma earned outside Québec compared with the Québec diploma giving access to a permit and serving here as a benchmark;
- The **content** of said diploma in comparison with the Québec benchmark.

In this section we discuss the evaluation of educational level. In section 4 we will discuss evaluation of program content.

#### 3.1 Information on foreign credentials

An essential condition of the process is access to relevant supporting information on programs and diplomas earned outside Québec. These are the main aspects needing documentation:<sup>2</sup>

- Exact title of the evaluated document, the transliteration<sup>3</sup> of the title or its translation in French or English if transliteration is not available;
- Translation of the title, its origin (name and qualifications of translator) and date of the translation;
- Official approval: the authorities responsible for issuing the diploma, the country (State, province, etc.) in which the authorities issued the diploma and the year in which the diploma was earned;
- Type of document (original document, certified copy, etc.) and any other details: the name appearing on the academic document if different from the name of the document holder, year of issuance of the document in the case of a copy, etc.;
- Other documents supporting the application: for the most part these would be course transcripts;
- Level of the program of study within the education system in which credentials were earned and the nature of training;

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<sup>2</sup> Source: *Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles* (Québec), *Service des évaluations comparatives d'études*.

<sup>3</sup> Word for word translation; transcription of each letter of a text into a different alphabet or writing system.

- Official duration, on a full-time basis, of the program of study leading to a diploma;
- Conditions of admission to the program: required diplomas, courses and examinations, mentioning the number of school years preceding admission at the time in which studies were done;
- Field of training as it appears on the academic documents being evaluated;
- Specific aspects of the program of study: the respective durations of theoretical and practical components, workshops, laboratory courses, training periods thesis preparation, etc.;
- Purpose of the program of study in the country where training was done: access to the labour market, practice of a profession or trade, continued studies, etc.;
- Language(s) of instruction.

The professional order can develop its own database of programs which can be expanded gradually as applications are assessed. Classed by country, university and year, the program database will expand over the years and allow candidates to submit their application to the Order rapidly with no fear their application will be delayed or refused because of missing documents.

These aspects can also be documented, thanks to the protocol agreement signed on January 24, 2005, between the CIQ and the MICC on the exchange of factual information and expertise on assessing credentials issued outside Québec (see also section 3.2).

The Order could also contact other orders in Québec, its counterparts in Canadian provinces, and other agencies that are specialized in the field of education or the assessment of international credentials, in order to share information and discuss common issues (see section 5.5 on partnerships).

### **3.2 Method**

The collected data will be used to draw a comparison between a diploma recognized as giving access to a permit and that presented by candidates to support their application for recognition of an equivalence.

The method consists of the following steps:

- Verification of the authenticity of submitted documents and accuracy of the translation, if applicable;
- Confirmation that the institution and program of study have been recognized by a competent authority;
- Analysis of the program of study based on its principal characteristics and its educational level within the education system in which the program was offered;
- Consultation of the official documentation on national education systems and consideration of the notices issued by international credential assessment services;
- Determination of a comparison with Québec's academic benchmarks. The comparison is made:
  - by using as a benchmark the Québec diploma that most closely corresponds to the program of study outside Québec;
  - by expressing in terms of years of study the portion of the program that substantially exceeds the employed benchmark;
  - by juxtaposing field of study to educational level.

A detailed description of the comparative evaluation procedure and method used by the MICC in conducting comparative assessments of studies done outside Québec can be found in the documentation produced by the Québec Interprofessional Council during a day-long work session held in May 2003 on prior learning assessment and recognition methods and tools.

Also available are the comparative guides for studies done outside Québec produced by the MICC (French only: [www.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/francais/education/guides\\_-\\_comparaison.html](http://www.immigration-quebec.gouv.qc.ca/francais/education/guides_-_comparaison.html)). These guides offer useful information for making a general comparison between a country's or a province's official education system and that of Québec. As of autumn 2005, guides on France, Morocco, China and Chile were available.



## 4. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS: EVALUATING THE CONTENT OF A DIPLOMA OR TRAINING

At this stage of the evaluation the question needing to be resolved is this: in terms of required competencies (knowledge and skills), is the content of the credentials or training supporting the application *comparable* to the reference diploma giving access to a permit?

*Comparable* does not mean *identical*. Equivalence can exist even when differences are observed between diplomas, for example, in terms of educational approach, structure and pedagogical process (duration and frequency of particular activities). Indeed, many competencies may be gained through multiple combinations of training and experience. The important thing is the equivalence of the outcome of these combinations, in other words, the competencies acquired by the person in question. Remember the saying, "You can't see the forest for the trees"—and take care to avoid this trap.

The equivalence being sought is *substantial*, meaning that it enables us to affirm with reasonable confidence that the candidate possesses the competencies required for entry-level practice, in a manner to prevent prejudice associated with the practice of the profession concerned.

### 4.1 The notion of professional competence

All professions are organized around a comprehensive body of knowledge, expertise and practical applications. They are all governed by regulations that prescribe the specific training and preparation required of the individuals who practise them. Last, all professions involve a cluster of interactions (between professionals and their clients) and exist within a larger social context that is itself in flux.

A competency therefore exists only in relation to a particular context. Competency in the context of professional practice is the capacity to act in an effective, timely and ethical manner, drawing on one's own resources and those available in one's environment.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Definition proposed by the *Ordre des conseillers et conseillères d'orientation et des psychoéducatrices et psychoéducateurs du Québec*.

Here is another interesting definition: “Professional competency represents the degree to which individuals use their knowledge, skills and judgement in the situations that arise in the course of professional practice.”<sup>5</sup>

## 4.2 The question of method

The evaluator’s job is to discern the knowledge and skills acquired by the candidate in a context of possibly quite diverse learning activities. These could include academic activities (program, courses), but could also involve non-academic activities, for example, work experience.

To this end, the evaluator takes into account:

- The state of knowledge and skills in the field related to professional practice and the conduct expected of future professionals;
- The future context where such knowledge, skills and aptitudes will be applied, in this case, Québec, with its legislative and regulatory framework, underlying values, organization of services, technological choices, etc.

Taken as a whole, these aspects constitute the **benchmark** against which the evaluation is conducted. This benchmark is reflected in the program(s) recognized by the government as giving access to a permit to practise. It is also found in regulations concerning equivalence in the form of a list of subjects or curricular material and the number of hours of training required for an equivalence to be granted.

Two complementary approaches are possible for the evaluation. The first may be qualified as a *comparative approach* and the second, a *measurement approach*.

## 4.3 The comparative approach

This approach consists of identifying and noting the elements of a training program or work experience, *comparing* them with the benchmark reference and *deducing* whether or not the candidate has acquired the knowledge and skills required for professional practice.

Comparisons are drawn more precisely on the content of *each* academic or non-academic activity completed by the candidate relative to the content of activities in a program giving access to a permit.

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<sup>5</sup> Carlos Brailovsky, François Miller, « L'évaluation de la compétence dans le contexte professionnel », in *La formation continue et l'amélioration de la compétence*, Colloquium of the Québec Interprofessional Council, held on May 12, 2000, page 24.

Note that in this approach, the other aspects of a program or training experience—for example the title of the program and courses and its purpose and declared aims—are taken into account, but only with reservation, given their frequent promotional aspect. Indeed what a program *is*, is one thing; what it *pretends to be*, is another. The same is true of work experience; the tasks actually accomplished by the candidate are more significant than a job title or functions within an organization.

#### 4.3.1 *The comparative grid on training elements*

The experience of many professional orders and other agencies has shown that a relevant tool for this approach is the comparative grid on training elements, a grid used to compare learning activities in the program being assessed with those of the reference program. Here, we will be comparing the list of courses and other activities by subject or curricular material, approach (theoretical or practical), and duration. The grid serves as a kind of “map” detailing the activities in question and instils rigour and uniformity in the processing of applications.

This is a useful tool when candidates submit credentials as evidence of preparation for professional practice in the field in question or a similar field, or when they present elements of a training program that is broader in scope but just as formalized (another diploma, courses, or training period).

In both cases, following the inferred deduction, the fact that a competent authority (for example, an educational institution) has approved activities completed by the candidate based on success indicators clearly specified by said authority, will be considered by the evaluator as a relevant demonstration of acquired competencies.

##### - *Subjects or curricular material*

The evaluation therefore mainly consists in comparing completed accredited activities with the benchmark established as the requirement for professional practice, usually in the form of the designated program recognized as giving access to the professional permit.

Keep in mind that the regulation concerning equivalence that a professional order must apply lists the subjects that should ideally be covered by the credential or training being assessed. This list corresponds to the content of the reference or benchmark program. Because some regulations may not contain this list, an order can formulate its own list before analyzing the program that is the object of the application for equivalence.

Learning activities are grouped by categories according to this list (established by regulation or by the Order). The structure of the program designated as giving access to a permit from the Order may also facilitate the task.

- *Theoretical and practical aspects*

The regulation concerning equivalence or the benchmark established by the order may also contain references to the proportion of theoretical and practical components in the learning activities.

These components are sometimes clearly indicated (for example, by the course title), but frequently they are blended into the same learning activity, thereby complicating analysis.

- *Duration*

In Québec, the *unit* (college level) and the *credit* (university level) correspond to 45 hours of theoretical or practical learning activities.<sup>6</sup> A college or university course usually equals 135 hours. In other education systems, the unit of measure may be different, which can complicate the comparison with Québec standards.

Depending on the profession, the unit (college) or credit (university) may serve as the reference in regulations concerning equivalence. Yet, increasingly, regulations are using *hours of training* as the unit of measurement.

Given all these differences, the task of the evaluator consists of establishing the duration of activities carried out within the program and formulating this in terms of total hours of training; evaluators must also calculate the total training hours of each subject, course or other activity applied to either the theoretical or practical dimension.

- *Grid model*

To illustrate what we mean, the next page offers a sample comparative grid between a fictional Québec diploma and a diploma earned outside Québec. The centre column (*Equivalence*) presents the result of this comparison for each course and the overall result.

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<sup>6</sup> In these 45 hours of learning, the proportion devoted to theoretical and practical dimensions may vary depending on the discipline or field of studies the activity is connected with.

REFERENCE DIPLOMA (program giving access to the professional permit)					EQUIVALENCE Yes/No Gaps	DIPLOMA EARNED OUTSIDE QUÉBEC				
Course	Subject	Type	Credit	Conversion in hours		Course	Subject	Type	Hours	Conversion in credits
1	A	Theoretical	3.0 cr	135 h	Partially, if we compare the number of hours allocated to the theoretical aspect.	1	A	Theoretical Practical	90 h Theor.: 60 h Pract.: 30 h	2.0 cr
2	B, C	Practical	3.0 cr	135 h		Partially: dimension C is missing.	2	B	Theoretical Practical	110 h Theor.: 70 h Pract.: 40 h
3	D, E	Theoretical	3.0 cr Theor: 2 cr Pract.: 1 cr	135 h Theor.: 90 h Pract.: 45 h	Partially: dimension E is missing.	3	D	Theoretical	75 h	1.5 cr
		Practical				4	C	Practical	30 h	0.5 cr
		5	E	Theoretical Practical	95 h Theor.: 15 h Pract.: 80 h					
<b>Total : 3 courses</b>	<b>A, B, C, D, E</b>	<b>Theoretical Practical</b>	<b>9.0 cr Theor.: 5.0 cr Prac.: 4.0 cr</b>	<b>405 h Theor: 225 h Pract.: 180 h</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>Total : 5 courses</b>	<b>A, B, C, D, E</b>	<b>Theoretical Practical</b>	<b>405 h Theor.: 225 h Pract.: 180 h</b>	<b>9.0 cr Theor.:5.0 cr Pract.: 4.0 cr</b>

In this example, the courses in the program being assessed are arranged differently to the reference program, including number and type (theoretical and practical) of courses.

Yet, after analysis we would conclude that, as a whole, the two programs are equivalent, given:

- Number of required credits (9 credits), that we converted into hours of learning (405 hours);
- Proportion of credits/hours allocated to theoretical and practical learning;
- Required courses and their content (A, B, C, D, E).

#### 4.3.2 *The comparative grid on competencies*

Another comparison tool is the grid on competencies related to professional practice. This grid is also called a “competency profile” or “competency table.”

From observation of the experience of professional orders we see that existing competency profiles were initially developed for the purpose of professional inspection or professional development. This tool could be adapted, however, and become very useful in the equivalence recognition process.

In this respect, certain program development practices at educational institutions encourage the design and use of a competency grid by a professional order. College-level technical programs and some university programs are in fact designed using the *competencies approach*. Competency grids developed in this way must be adapted, however, for the purpose of prior learning assessment and recognition.

##### - *Designing a comparative grid on competencies*

The competencies grid is designed based on a detailed analysis of the work situations corresponding to a field of study or professional practice. The design process follows this sequence of activities:

- Inventory of general and specific tasks (professional activities) achieved by a member in the context of professional practice;
- Grouping of tasks (professional activities) by fields of competency based on an approach that is at once generic (connected to the definition of the profession) and contextual (related to the responsibilities of said profession);
- Identification of key competencies that the candidate must master. If applicable, a distinction should be made between basic competencies and specific competencies.

A professional order desiring to explore this avenue should consider the profession from the perspective of the tasks (activities) associated with its practice. Outside expertise may be called on for this.

### 4.3.3 *Evaluating work experience*

To practise several professions, work experience is one of the requirements for the granting of an equivalence. In the case of other professions, work experience is not a requirement in itself, but rather, a complementary factor for assessing a candidate's profile. Whatever the case, professional orders consider candidates' work experience in examining an application for prior learning assessment and recognition.

When taking work experience into account, the evaluator may deduce the acquisition of the knowledge and skills required for professional practice by comparing the context, content and duration of the experience with the elements of training or competencies listed in a grid. In this respect, the competencies grid, unlike the training elements grid, may be particularly useful because of its close correspondence with employment situations.

Given its specific dimension, the evaluation of work experience may require that the professional order adapt the process. Among other things, they could incorporate these elements:

- Candidates' participation in the process through the creation and submission of a portfolio or presentation of their experiential achievements;
- An interview with candidates with a view to ensuring proper comprehension of the submitted elements;
- The determination of what elements can be recognized by comparison;
- And last, the determination, if applicable, of competencies that must be measured and the appropriate tools for this purpose (see section 4.4 below regarding the measurement approach).

***Practice example: comparative grid***

**An on-line self-assessment tool  
of the *Ordre des chimistes du Québec* (chemists)**

The *Ordre des chimistes* has made an equivalence self-assessment questionnaire available on the Web so people can determine their potential eligibility for admittance to the Order. The questionnaire takes both training and work experience into account. If the candidate does not possess all the competencies required for admission into the Order, the questionnaire indicates the areas that must be addressed and the various documents and certificates that must be gathered before submitting a formal application to the Order.

The self-assessment serves as a guide; on request, and after payment of the prescribed fee, the Order will conduct a formal analysis of the file in conformance with its regulations.

In addition, the tool is completed with an *Integrated Support Guide* containing questions and relevant information guiding candidates through all the steps, in order to prevent or minimize errors and consequently, optimize the quality of the diagnostic and generated profile.

This tool was made possible by financial assistance from the MICC.



#### 4.4 The measurement approach

In examining a file, you may find situations that do not lend themselves easily to the comparative approach and the deductive reasoning that it involves. Here are some common examples:

- All or part of a candidate's training is to some extent incomplete, un-integrated and unstructured.
- All or part of the completed training was not certified by a competent authority based on clearly defined success indicators;
- A candidate submits work experience, but the evaluator has trouble deducing by comparison the individual's achievement of the competencies required for professional practice.

In addition, some professional orders prescribe a training period, either as a general or an individual requirement.

In such situations, the type of evaluation will be based on a direct measurement of the qualifications submitted by the candidate rather than on a comparison of training elements and the context and the content of work experience.

##### 4.4.1 Tools

Here are some of the measurement tools currently available to the professional orders.

- Script concordance test;
- Structured objective examination (health professions: Objectively Structured Clinical Examination);
- Structured oral examination;
- Audit;
- Direct observation grids;
- Autoscopia (method for assessing a practice based on self-observation);
- Simulated clients.

In the case of a training period, an evaluation grid (measurement/observation) should be produced by the Order and filled in by a competent individual who has been in close contact with the candidate.

The choice of a tool may be influenced by the nature of the competencies being verified and also by the route taken by the candidate. Objectives are clearly defined and do not duplicate other forms of assessment applied to the candidate.

The metrological quality of the tools must be ensured, also, that their design reflects the conditions of professional practice.

#### 4.4.2 *The specific case of assessment by means of an examination*

The equivalence recognition regulation of several professional orders authorizes them to prescribe an examination (or a course or training period), when justified, to confirm that a candidate possesses the knowledge and skills required for professional practice.<sup>7</sup>

##### - *Design*

The examination must be designed in a rigorous manner with the aid of expert advice on measurement and assessment. Objectives are clearly defined and do not duplicate other forms of assessment or qualifications applicable to the candidate.

The questions are clear and are preserved in a secure database. The procedure is tested. Questions are updated and renewed on a regular basis to enhance security. The method for determining the mark and pass mark is clearly spelled out.

##### - *Information provided to candidates*

Other than the usual information (cost, location and date, registration details, number of times the examination can be taken over to achieve a passing grade), candidates should be informed of the purpose of the examination, its format and the knowledge and skills it will cover.

##### - *Preparation assistance for candidates*

Some candidates may benefit from assistance in preparing for an examination. This could be true of immigrants who are unfamiliar with measurement approaches and would therefore be at a disadvantage when it comes to demonstrating their competencies.

Several forms of assistance could be considered:

- Workshop to familiarize candidates with the examination;
- Simulation;
- Course on aspects of professional practice in Québec;
- Tutoring or mentoring;
- Reading guide, study manual, bibliography, reference works.

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<sup>7</sup> For some professions, successful completion of an examination (often call the *professional examination*) constitutes an additional condition for the granting of a permit applied to all candidates, regardless of the basis of their admission (recognition of an equivalence or possession of a diploma giving access to a permit). The pass mark of this examination must be identical for all candidates regardless of the basis of their admission (diploma giving access to a permit, credential recognized as equivalent, or training acquired outside Québec recognized as equivalent).

***Practice examples: preparation for examinations***

**Professional Examination Preparation Guide  
of the *Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec* (nurses)**

The Order produced a guide intended for candidates trained outside Québec who are preparing for the professional examination. One of the aims of the document is to familiarize candidates with examination procedure, format and content. It includes questions similar to those found in the exam, accompanied by answers and explanations to facilitate candidates' comprehension and enhance their knowledge. The tool is accompanied by another more general document on the context of the practice of nursing in Québec.

This initiative has helped to raise the Order's examination success rate. Financial assistance by the MICC was solicited to carry out this project.

***... and the Ordre des agronomes du Québec (agrologists)***

The *Ordre des agronomes du Québec* produced a reference guide entitled *Le Mémento de l'agronome du Québec*. The eight modules of this guide inform foreign candidates on the practice of agronomy in Québec and prepare them for the professional examination.

The MICC granted financial assistance for this project.

**A tutoring system to prepare for the examinations  
of the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec* (engineers)**

A tutoring project, designed at the behest of *Comité d'adaptation de la main-d'oeuvre – Personnes immigrantes*, has been offered for four years to facilitate the successful completion of equivalence recognition examinations by candidates trained outside Québec. The measure consists in collaboration with a university to provide tutoring for candidates studying for these examinations.

This measure raised the success rate of candidates taking the Order's examination. The project received financial assistance from Emploi-Québec.

***Practice examples: preparation for the examination (cont.)***

**Workshops and study groups to prepare for the examination of the *Collège des médecins du Québec* (physicians)**

Workshops to prepare for the Objectively Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE), which is one of the steps in gaining credential recognition for the purpose of practising the profession in Québec, were designed and administered by the *Centre d'évaluation des sciences de la santé* at Université Laval (CESSUL). The OSCE is part of the clinical medical science examination of the *Collège des médecins*.

The purpose of the workshops is to familiarize candidates with the format and procedure of the OSCE, the aim of which is to evaluate candidates' professional competency using the problem-solving approach. Workshops consist of mini-OSCEs and duplicate the conditions candidates experience during the actual examination. In other words, they are confronted with standard clinical situations in which they must demonstrate their ability to analyze the situation, produce a diagnosis and solve the problem by proposing actions. This process is described in the documentation produced by the CIQ concerning a day-long working session held in April 2005 on the methods and tools used for prior learning assessment and recognition.

In the same vein, study groups, led by resident physicians, complement the workshops by serving as opportunities for mutual aid and sharing of experiences and a source of additional support for immigrants. These groups are coordinated by two associations of foreign-trained physicians.

The workshops and study groups are offered with the financial assistance of the MICC. Space is provided with the assistance of Québec's health and social service ministry (*Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*.)

***Practice example: designing an examination***

**Design of a tool to assess experiential learning  
at the *Ordre des orthophonistes et audiologistes du Québec*  
(speech therapists)**

The Order and the Université de Montréal designed a tool for assessing the experiential learning of candidates already established in Québec so that competencies gained on the job could compensate for gaps in training.

The examination consists of case studies that were rigorously formulated and tested to ensure the tool's validity and objectivity and to prevent bias, particularly cultural bias.

Based on the results, the Order makes recommendations to the candidate. Financial assistance from the MICC was obtained to carry out this project.

#### **4.5 After the evaluation comes the decision**

Whether the comparative or measurement approach is used, and whether comparison is based on academic (courses or programs) or non-academic activities (work experience), you must be sure that the *overall* outcome of the evaluation is based solely on the quantified data.

The example presented in section 4.3 is a good one. In this example, the total number of training hours of the program being assessed is identical to the number contained in the reference program giving access to a permit (405 hours). But suppose that it were not identical and there were fewer accumulated hours (395 hours) in the program being assessed. How would you decide in such a case?

Here, the evaluator's judgement comes in to decide whether the gap is significant in terms of the knowledge and skills needed for professional practice, and to ensure the protection of the public.

#### **4.6 Assessment of command of the French language**

Québec is a society where Francophones form the majority. The Québec National Assembly therefore adopted the *Charter of the French Language* that establishes French as the official language.

The importance of a command of the French language in the context of professional practice with the Québec public is recognized by the Charter. It states that candidates applying for professional permits must have appropriate knowledge of this language. When necessary, candidates whose credentials or training were obtained outside Québec must pass a test administered by the *Office de la langue française*.

Under the Charter and its regulations, appropriate knowledge of French is equivalent to that of a secondary school student. However, the professional orders have found that this level often does not match the command of the language appropriate for communications in the context of professional practice.

In this respect, language training tools could be developed by competent authorities. They could take the form of glossaries, specialized vocabularies, and courses on oral and written French for professional practice, etc.

#### **4.7 Problems related to the documentation of credentials**

For individuals who have good reasons for being unable to furnish the required supporting documents (e.g., refugees), the Order could make every possible effort to establish special provisions.

For example, keeping in mind the need to protect the public, the Order could determine special evaluation procedures for these candidates so they have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and aptitudes. In section 4.4, concerning the measurement approach, we have included a list of appropriate evaluation tools. Here again, the competency-based approach could be useful.

#### **4.8 Prescription of bridge training**

The regulations stipulate that professional orders must inform candidates of courses, training periods or other activities they must complete to fill any gaps in the competency profile required by the Order for the issue of a permit.

The nature of the gaps and the type and the duration of the learning activities needed to fill them can be determined by the Order based on the comparison grid described in section 4.3 or by a measurement tool. The same grid can be used to help the candidate make arrangements to receive the required training that is lacking, in consultation with the Order.

A cooperative relationship with educational institutions will help to harmonize the training needs observed in the equivalence recognition process with the development of particular courses and programs.<sup>8</sup>

***Practice examples: prescription of bridge training***

**Establishment of a course list  
at the *Ordre des comptables agréés du Québec*  
(chartered accountants)**

An example of partnership between the Order and Québec universities as described in section 5.5, a form was designed to enable a university to determine a list of undergraduate courses with a view to upgrading the learning of some candidates.

The university examines the candidate's academic records and determines the required courses.

The list is validated by the Order to ensure compliance with the professional regulations in effect.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, workforce sector committees signed a protocol with Québec's general and vocational colleges federation (*Fédération des cégeps*) in 2003, establishing conditions to facilitate coordinated action to determine Attestations of Collegial Studies (ACS). Although it involves a clientele other than immigrants desiring to practise a regulated profession, this type of agreement could inspire professional orders and concerned educational institutions. Moreover, talks are underway between the CIQ and *Fédération des cégeps* on this issue. Discussions will be held shortly between the CIQ and the Conference of Rectors and Principals of Québec Universities (CREPUQ) at the university level.

***Practice examples: prescription of bridge training (cont.)***

**Bridge training programs to practise the nursing profession**

Two programs were developed by the *Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec* in response to the training needs of certain candidates possessing foreign credentials:

- A short program of 505 hours of professional integration into nursing practice in Québec.
- A long program of 895 hours with two additional training components: on nursing care for the elderly (240 hours) and mental health nursing care (150 hours).

These programs include theoretical courses, laboratory learning activities and clinical training periods. They are the fruit of a collaboration between the *Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec*, the *Cégep du Vieux-Montréal*, the *Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport*, the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*, *Emploi-Québec* and the MICC.

**... to practise the profession of engineer**

The *École polytechnique*, in collaboration with the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec*, developed a 30-credit certificate program to help candidates trained outside Québec prepare for the Order's examinations.

**... and the profession of speech therapist**

The *Université de Montréal*, in collaboration with the *Ordre des orthophonistes et audiologistes du Québec*, designed a micro-training program (advanced graduate program) in speech therapy.

The program is addressed to individuals who trained in speech therapy abroad and whose training is not recognized as equivalent to a master's in speech therapy earned in Québec.



## 5. PROCEDURE

The different procedural elements constitute the framework for the steps of the equivalence recognition process and the relationship established between a professional order and a candidate.

### 5.1 Information transmitted to candidates

The regulations applicable to professional orders stipulate that candidates should submit a written application to the professional order. Usually, the Order must then send a copy of the regulation concerning equivalence, information about the process, and, where applicable, a form to be completed by the candidate.

The Order should also provide a simplified version of the regulation concerning equivalence, for the legal language and vocabulary of Québec's professional system may be a barrier to candidates' proper comprehension of the process.

#### 5.1.1 Information kit

An information kit and forms should also be available on the Order's Web site and at its head office. Diverse agencies, both in and outside Québec, could also be identified and documents transmitted to them. The kit is periodically revised and updated.

For the candidate's benefit, the Order ensures uniformity of information on the procedures and evaluation criteria for assessing credentials and training acquired outside Québec. Documents are written simply and clearly. Information provided to candidates could cover the following elements:

- The Order's role in the recognition process;
- Presentation of the profession in Québec (practice context and description of professional activities);
- Requested documentation and requirements concerning the authentication and translation of documents;
- Required conditions in terms of training, and if applicable, work experience or other conditions, to obtain a permit to practise;
- Outline of the evaluation process;
- Approximate duration of the assessment process
- Application processing fee;
- Procedure for the review of a decision.

Documentation may also include information about:

- The professional system in Québec (creation, operations, institutions), which can be found on the home page of the CIQ's Web site at [www.professions-quebec.org](http://www.professions-quebec.org) (information on the site is available in French, English and Spanish).
- The employment situation within the profession (obtained from Emploi-Québec or other sources) and labour market services and integration programs available to immigrants. To this end, it might be useful to collaborate with the concerned immigration and employment departments.

Information sessions could also be organized.

***Practice example: information about the profession***

***The Mémento de l'agronome du Québec (agrologists)***

The *Ordre des agronomes du Québec* produced a reference guide called *Le Mémento de l'agronome du Québec*. This guide informs foreign candidates about the practice of agronomy in Québec and prepares them for the professional examination by means of eight modules that describe: the agricultural and agri-food context in Québec, the professional system, the Order's operations, the route to becoming an agronomist, the professional framework of agronomy, continuing education and legislation connected with the Québec agri-food industry. One of the modules is a guide to offering professional agronomy services.

Financial assistance from the MICC was obtained to carry out this project.

**5.1.2 Internet and e-mail**

The Web and e-mail are a low-cost means of communicating with a diverse and distant clientele. They reduce the delay time for the Order to analyze and respond to applications - an important point given that time is a crucial issue for immigrants awaiting admission.

***Practice example: accessible information***

**An on-line self-assessment tool  
at the *Ordre des chimistes du Québec* (chemists)**

The *Ordre des chimistes* offers an equivalence self-assessment tool on the Web for candidates to determine their chances of gaining admittance to the Order (see section 4.3).

When informed ahead of time, candidates can then obtain any missing elements in their country of origin and prepare their application for admission to the Order. Another advantage of this tool is that it cuts costs for candidates and shortens the delays for analysis and response by the Order.

Financial assistance to carry out this project was obtained from the MICC.

## **5.2 The application and constitution of a file**

The Order encourages candidates to initiate the equivalency recognition process from their country of origin. The application form is clear and precise. A guide may be sent with the form to assist candidates in completing the questionnaire. The supporting information and documents are necessary for the processing of the application.

Once the application has been received the Order sends the candidate confirmation of reception and if necessary, indicates the missing elements. Even if the file is incomplete, the Order can conduct a partial examination of the application. Once the file is complete, the Order examines the application within a reasonable time limit. In exceptional cases, for example, refugees and others who have good reasons for being unable to furnish the required supporting documents for certain elements, the establishment of special provisions could be considered (see section 5.3).

Keep in mind that the *Professional Code* enables the Bureau of the Order to pass a regulation stipulating an acceptable alternative to any required document for the purpose of issuing a permit (section 94 (n), *Professional Code*).

All submitted documents must be examined to ensure their authenticity. An expert can be asked to check the authenticity of original documents and other certified documentation of academic achievement. If a document is suspected to be false, the issuing institution or body in the country of origin will be contacted for verification.

Translations will be required for essential documents only. Important academic records issued in a language other than French must be translated by translators who have been certified by a competent authority - in Québec this would be the *Ordre des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec*.

### **5.3 Problems regarding fee payment**

For individuals who have good reasons for being unable to pay the required fees in one payment, the Order could establish special provisions, for example, spreading payment over several instalments.

The Web also offers secure payment methods that reduce delays.

### **5.4 Delays**

Delays in the different stages of recognizing equivalence must be reasonable, and reflect the complexity of the file and assessment methodology.

When the Order acknowledges reception of the application, it should indicate the normal delay for processing a file, from reception until the decision is rendered.

Candidates are able to obtain information on the progress of their application for admission to the Order, including from within their country of origin. Candidates are given an answer to information requests within a reasonable time limit.

The delay is usually calculated from the moment all the necessary documentation has been furnished by the applicant and any other concerned bodies.

In cases where the delay is unusually long, the Order will inform the person of the reason for the delay and if possible give an idea of how much more time is required for completion of the assessment.

## 5.5 Partnerships

Keep in mind that the *Professional Code* enables professional orders to sign an agreement with any agency, inside or outside Québec, to facilitate the process for recognizing equivalence of credentials and training. This agreement must comply with the equivalence standards established by regulation (see section 86.0.1, par. 7, *Professional Code*).

### 5.5.1 Agreement concerning recognition

When it receives a substantial number of applications for recognition of equivalence from the same location or associated with the same education system, a professional order should consider the possibility of concluding a mutual recognition agreement with a competent agency. Such an agency could be in another Canadian province (as under the *Agreement on Internal Trade*) or in another country. Note that in some locations this type of agreement may be referred to as a “reciprocal agreement.”

A recognition agreement offers multiple advantages.

- Accelerated processing of files;
- More standardized processing of applications (equivalence, bridge training, etc.);
- Information exchange on programs and the development of a profession in contexts other than the Québec context.

In Canada, the conclusion of this type of agreement between provincial and territorial regulating bodies is mentioned in Chapter 7 (Labour Mobility) of the AIT. Under the AIT, a mutual recognition agreement involves the obligation, on the part of the concerned bodies, to recognize, *de facto*, the conformance of their members’ qualifications, in whole or in part, with their respective professional standards, requiring no further examinations, evaluation or training.

Note, however, that the agreement contains obligations in addition to the recognition of qualifications, such as the creation of accommodating mechanisms when differences are observed.

Last, it should be emphasized that there is no strict obligation for the agreement to be *mutual*: it could have as its object only to facilitate the processing of applications from a jurisdiction outside Québec (and not the reverse).

### 5.5.2 Program certification

In a context other than a recognition agreement, an agreement could deal specifically with programs leading to professional practice, designated by the notion of certification (or accreditation).

In this case, signing parties agree that their certification criteria, policies and procedures for programs leading to professional practice are comparable and that certification decisions granted by one signing party are accepted, in whole or in part, by the other signing parties.

#### ***Practice example: partnership in Québec***

### **Order-University Partnership at the *Ordre des comptables agréés du Québec* (chartered accountants)**

The Order established a partnership with universities in order to simplify and standardize the process of evaluating credentials gained outside Québec, specifically in terms of educational level.

These are the main aspects of the procedure:

- Candidates address the educational institution directly and furnish all the required information. The educational institution assesses candidates' educational level.
- The institution selects and recommends, from a list approved by the Order, the upgrading courses required by the Order.
- With this course list, candidates can submit their file to the Order (including course transcripts, diplomas, etc.). The Order then determines the *final list* of courses that must be completed.

This partnership was presented in detail during a day-long working session on prior learning assessment and recognition methods and tools, organized by the CIQ and held in May 2003.

***Practice examples: partnership outside Québec***

**Partnership at the *Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec* (engineers)**

The Order established a partnership with regulatory agencies of the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers (CCPE) to develop common mechanisms for facilitating assessment of foreign programs of study and admission to the Order. These mechanisms are: The Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (CEAB), the Canadian Engineering Qualifications Board (CEQB) and mutual recognition agreements.

- Role of the CEAB: certifies undergraduate university engineering programs in Canada and evaluates accreditation systems in other countries relative to the Canadian system. Agreements were concluded with the following countries: France, United States, South Africa, United Kingdom, Hong-Kong, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand.
- Role of the CEQB: concerns assessment of engineering credentials not covered by the accreditation system or agreements. It establishes a reference list of foreign institutions according to different criteria (educational level of the diploma, training quality, etc.).

**... and the *Ordre des technologues professionnels du Québec* (technologists)**

As a member of the Canadian Council of Technicians and Technologists, the Order maintains partnerships similar to those of the *Ordre des ingénieurs* with several countries:

- 1995: Agreement with the National Institute for Certification in Engineering Technologies of the United States, which entitles the professionals concerned to hold the local professional titles.
- 2001: Sydney Agreement with Australia, Hong-Kong, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa and United Kingdom.
- 2002: Dublin Agreement with Ireland, South Africa and United Kingdom.

These last two agreements are mutual recognition agreements whereby signing parties recognize the criteria, policies and procedures of their respective educational programs.

## 5.6 Communication of the decision

The regulation concerning equivalence stipulates that the Order's decision should be transmitted to the candidate in writing within the prescribed time limit.

The candidate is informed of the reasons justifying a decision not to recognize equivalence or justifying only partial recognition. To this end, the comparative grid used in assessing a diploma or work experience (see section 4.3) could be transmitted to the candidate.

In addition, when the Order prescribes training (courses or training periods), it should transmit comprehensive information to the candidate concerning the availability of training (location, duration, cost, resource persons, and quotas).

## 5.7 Review of the decision

According to the existing regulatory framework, a candidate may ask the Bureau to be heard concerning the decision. The Bureau must then render a final decision within the prescribed time limit.

To facilitate this process and remind candidates of this possibility, the Order could furnish a form to be distributed as needed.

It is generally accepted as desirable that the persons considering an application for review not be the individuals who rendered the initial decision. However, the legal framework established by the public authority for several professional orders allows the decision-making body concerned to review its own decision.

### SHARE YOUR PRACTICES WITH US!

Has your professional order developed practices related to the subject of this document that might be of interest to other orders? Send us the relevant information for inclusion in the next version of this document.

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