



MARITIME PROVINCES HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION – The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission’s Quality Assurance Role in Post-Secondary Education in the Maritimes

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Fredericton (NB) — The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) aims to assist institutions and governments in enhancing the post-secondary learning environment in the Maritime Provinces. The MPHEC recently approved with conditions Cape Breton University’s (CBU) 8-month online Bachelor of Education (BEd) program, following which CBU decided to cancel the program and publicly raised concerns about the MPHEC’s approval process for this program.

As per its mandate, the MPHEC serves a role in providing assurances that university programs in the region meet established standards of quality (through its [program assessment process](#)) and that universities have rigorous quality assurance policies and practices in place to ensure the ongoing quality of their programs (through its [quality assurance monitoring process](#)). Quality assurance standards have been adopted around the world and are widely recognized as vital components of a reputable post-secondary education system.

All 15 public universities in the Maritimes are required to submit for approval a program proposal for any new or significantly modified certificate, diploma or degree program prior to implementation. The program assessment process has two main outcomes. First, it aims to provide third-party impartial validation that programs meet established standards of quality; and, secondly, to improve the quality of academic programs in the region. The process is meant to be supportive, iterative and collaborative, with the end goal of approval and student success.

An important feature of the MPHEC’s program assessment process is that it allows for leeway to test new and innovative program designs or approaches, for example, by approving a program as a pilot, attaching conditions to the approval, and monitoring program implementation. This flexible approach is what allowed CBU’s 8-month online BEd pilot to be approved for both the 2024 and 2025 cohorts, particularly given that, as designed, it is the first online BEd program in Canada to be completed in this condensed period of time.

The MPHEC’s recent decision regarding CBU’s continuing BEd pilot outlined that the program shows promise and may continue in 2025. The MPHEC recognized the value of providing eligible applicants the ability to complete their degree online from anywhere in Nova Scotia. It also recognized the accelerated, intensive nature of the program, making it appropriate to limit admissions to only those with related P-12 experience, including permit holders who are currently teaching in NS schools without a BEd degree. Conditions of approval will ensure that students are well informed, and the program will gather data to inform future cohorts and program changes for continual improvement.

“We wish to thank the MPHEC for its guidance as we worked through what we saw as real obstacles to delivering the program,” said Rod Nicholls, Vice-President Academic at CBU. “After further discussions with the MPHEC, we now feel we are in a better position to offer the program



while meeting the required conditions and recognizing MPHEC's objectives of upholding quality assurance standards for all academic programs. We look forward to welcoming students on January 6, 2025."

"The MPHEC is pleased that CBU has reinstated the program and has committed to meeting the conditions of approval", said Dr. Greg Naterer, MPHEC Chair. "On behalf of the MPHEC, I wish CBU the best in implementing and delivering this unique program."

The MPHEC approach to quality assurance is grounded in a student-centred approach that is based on national and international standards including peer review, external, independent validation, and balancing public accountability with university autonomy. The MPHEC's primary concern is ensuring that student interests and needs are at the forefront of program design, development and implementation. It looks forward to the continued success of graduates and the post-secondary system overall in the Maritimes.

Established in 1974, the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission is an arm's-length organization accountable to the Ministers responsible for post-secondary education in the Maritimes. The Commission Board is made up of 20 members representing universities, the public-at-large (including students), and the three Maritime provincial governments. The Commission's mission is to assist institutions and governments in enhancing the post-secondary learning environment. It achieves this by providing assurances that university programs in the region meet established standards of quality and by conducting research on post-secondary education.

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