



Ontario  
College of  
Teachers  
Additional  
Qualification  
Consultation on  
Teaching LGBTQ  
Students

# Additional Qualification Consultation on Teaching LGBTQ Students Report and Recommendations - May 2010

At its June 3-4, 2010 meeting, College Council approved the inclusion of a Schedule C Additional Qualification course "Teaching LGBT Students." It also approved the addition of the letter "Q" after LGBT.

## Background

As part of its mandate to provide for the ongoing learning of its members, the Ontario College of Teachers engaged in a lengthy period of review of, and consultation about, teachers' qualifications. Following this review, College Council approved the addition of 60 new qualifications in 2007. Additional Basic Qualification courses (ABQs) allow teachers to add another division or subject area to what they are already qualified to teach. Additional Qualification (AQs) courses allow members to expand their knowledge and skills within divisions and subjects in which they are already qualified or to acquire knowledge in new subject areas.<sup>1</sup>

A number of those additional qualification courses were specifically designed to address issues associated with teaching identified groups of students or teaching in particular teaching environments, and included:

- Outdoor Experiential Education (Schedule C)
- Alternative Education (Schedule C)
- Aboriginal Peoples: Understanding Traditional Teachings, Histories, Current Issues and Cultures (Schedule C)
- Enseignement en milieu minoritaire (Schedule C)
- Teaching in the Catholic School System (Schedule C)
- Inclusive Classroom (Schedule D)

### Existing College Additional Qualification Courses

The three-session specialist AQ, “Inclusive Classroom”, introduced in 2008, focuses on equity and diversity in the classroom, and addresses individual and systemic biases that contravene human rights legislation. The AQ also deals with such issues as culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally proficient leadership and advocacy. While the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students (LGBT) are an important part of the AQ course guidelines, they are not the sole focus.

The broad focus of the Inclusive Classroom AQ course led to concerns that the needs of LGBT students may not be sufficiently addressed. Accordingly, the College Council decided to re-examine the need for an AQ course having a specific focus on teaching LGBT students, and at its November 2009 meeting, asked that a consultation be held with the College's community and education stakeholders to gather recommendations for the possible introduction of a new Schedule C (one session, 125 hours) AQ outlining the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for teaching LGBT students.

## College Consultation Sessions – Discussion Summary

Two consultations were conducted with community and education stakeholders—one in Toronto (April 9) and a bilingual one in Ottawa (April 19). Representatives from 32 organizations attended the Toronto session. Representatives from 14 organizations attended the Ottawa session. (See Appendix) The consultation participants were asked to consider, and provide feed-back with respect to, four questions. A summary of the groups' discussions under each question follows:

<sup>1</sup> *Professional Advisory—Additional Qualifications: Extending Professional Knowledge.*  
[http://www.oct.ca/additional\\_qualifications/advisory.aspx?lang=en-CA](http://www.oct.ca/additional_qualifications/advisory.aspx?lang=en-CA)

**1. In your view, how are teachers currently prepared to work effectively with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students? What education policies, procedures and teacher education programs are in place that prepare teachers in this area?**

**Existing Resource Documents/Legislation**

A number of recent initiatives in the area of working with LGBT students were cited by the participants: Bill 157 (*Education Amendment Act (Keeping Our Kids Safe at School)*, 2009<sup>2</sup>; Ministry of Education’s policy document *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009)<sup>3</sup>; and the Safe Schools Action Team Report, *Shaping a Culture of Respect in our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships* (December 2008)<sup>4</sup>. It was also noted that pursuant to Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 (PPM 119 2009)<sup>5</sup>, boards were required to put equity policies in place by September 2010. Human rights legislation and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* were also cited as being relevant resource documents. Also noted were initiatives undertaken by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (“Creating Safe and Positive Space for LGBTQ Newcomers”<sup>6</sup>); a document developed by the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Pastoral Guidelines to Assist Students of Same-Sex Orientation”; guidelines contained in “Il est bon que toute personne soit.”

**Available Training—Pre-Service and In-Service**

Notwithstanding these resources identified above, however, there was general agreement among the participants that the resources were “piece meal” and available on an “ad hoc” basis. A number of participants in the Ottawa session felt that there were fewer French resources available relative to those available in English. Further, there was general agreement that there is little to no formal training with respect to LGBT issues at either the pre-service or in-service levels, and what training was available was voluntary through the pursuit of the individual College member. Those who attended LGBT workshops did so out of personal interest and in an attempt to expand their scope of professional knowledge. While there was recognition that Ontario teachers had minimal literacy in this area, participants in both sessions believed that teachers were “woefully unprepared” and were given “insufficient information” about LGBT issues, leaving teachers to rely on their own knowledge and experience, which may not be sufficient to effectively address these issues.

Some thought there was more information and assistance in respect of these issues available through in-service programs, through independent workshops and through some professional associations. For example OSSTF has designated workshops on gender-based violence, homophobia, bullying and cyber-bullying, and AEFO’s and ETFO’s respective workshops were also cited. Again, however, attendance was strictly voluntary and some felt that a one-hour or one-day workshop format was simply too short to address issues adequately.

In contrast to in-service programs, however, it was felt pre-service programs provided information on an even more limited basis, or as one group put it, on a “hit and miss” basis, in a manner that touched on issues only briefly. In conjunction with this issue, participants proposed that faculties of education should be well informed so that they can be in a position to deal knowledgeably with these issues, and, in turn be prepared to convey this knowledge to their students.

2 Royal Assent, June 5, 2009.

3 <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf>

4 <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/RespectCulture.pdf>

5 <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/119.html>

6 <http://www.ocasi.org/index.php?catid=188>

### Format and Structure of AQ

Participants in both the Toronto and Ottawa sessions agreed that the development of a new AQ was a good “first step”, but that it was one step in a larger process. There was, however, no consensus with respect to the means through which issues should be addressed. This divergence of views on the structure of the AQ figured prominently throughout the Toronto consultation session and during the discussions of each of the four questions.

While there was recognition that there may be problems associated with a “narrowly focused” course, some participants felt that a general document was “too vague” to work effectively. Some believed that an “independent stand-alone” course was needed, and not simply a course that fit under the general category of “equity”, as such an approach had proven to be ineffective. Although critical to equity issues, it was felt that LGBT issues were largely absent from the current equity measures/programs.

A number of participants drew an analogy between having a general three-part special education AQ and a more focused AQ for a specific issue arising in the content of special education—teaching autistic students. In other words, having a general AQ on inclusive classrooms should not preclude the development of an AQ that dealt more specifically with teaching LGBT students.

Others, however, were of the view that there was a danger of isolating issues if a stand-alone course were offered, and believed that any course/program should take a holistic approach and be linked to “other forms of oppression”, such as racism. In this regard, it was also noted that segregation may lead to a “battle of oppressions”, i.e., “which group is the most oppressed.” There was also some support for incorporating the issues into every AQ.

Insofar as the structure of an AQ was concerned, some felt that a Schedule C course was the preferred structure, as more teachers would be inclined to take it. There was, however, a question with respect to “who” would or should take the course, and a fear that those who already had an interest in this area would be the ones who would readily take it.

Regardless of how and the format in which the AQ was to be delivered, there was general agreement that the goal was to change societal and personal beliefs to establish a truly inclusive learning environment.

### Leadership, Discomfort and Stigma Issues

It was felt that in addition to teachers, those in administrative and leadership roles, such as principals and superintendants played a “huge role” in establishing a safe school climate and encouraging teachers to develop expertise in the area. In this regard, some participants noted that some boards had been resistant to introduce training through the means of external trainers.

Participants generally agreed that there tended to be a high degree of discomfort in addressing LGBT issues—in particular, in talking about it in the classroom—that is not present in discussions of other issues such as racism. This discomfort may be compounded by the context in which it is addressed. Participants noted that there was a “fear factor”—and it’s “not just about sex”—the fear may be connected to the stigma associated with, or discrimination that may result from, taking a course and/or talking about LGBT issues in the classroom. Again, this was an issue that arose in discussions about a number of the questions participants were asked to consider.

## 2. How would the establishment of an AQ specifically focused on teaching lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students help teachers further enhance professional practice in this area?

### Benefits for Teachers' Professional Practice

Participants also believed that the AQ could be viewed as an “institutional sanction”, thereby having the potential to provide a “positive affirmation” for LGBT students and staff members.

A number of groups felt that an AQ specifically focused on teaching LGBT students would make those who completed the AQ a “better teacher”, enhancing their professional practice by allowing them to develop the sensitivity and language skills required to address LGBT issues proactively and with a greater measure of comfort. It would provide the necessary background, by exposing teachers to a “narrative of LGBT rights” and discrimination, and would enable them to create safe and welcoming learning environments for all students. It would also provide teachers with a clear understanding of the intersection between LGBT issues and other “isms”, such as race and gender.

The proposed AQ would also enable teachers to speak to a student as the “whole person”, to become a role model and a leader, and to interact with students. This, in turn, may result in an improvement in the students’ academic performance and in the students’ ability to participate in co-curricular activities, and might have broader implications for society through, for instance, expanding the notion of true inclusiveness for all and not just some members of society.

It was suggested that an AQ dealing with the “development of health sexuality, including LGBT and heterosexuality” would be most useful as the school years were a time when students’ sexual identity and orientation were developing, and might serve to “normalize” the LGBT concept.” Such course might also enable teachers to “feel healthy about their own sexual orientation and identity.”

### Teachers as Leaders, Role Models

Many believed that the teacher was the “single most important factor” in combating bullying, discrimination and isolation, all of which can lead to depression, self-esteem issues, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide. Participants noted that teachers served both as a source of knowledge and a role model for their students, and in addition could provide a link between the community and parents of LGBT students.

### Practical Advantages

Many participants were of the view that the AQ could provide learners with something tangible to take back to their respective schools, so that the positive effects would be more widely disseminated beyond the classroom and into the schools generally as well as the community. For instance, the AQ could address not only how to teach knowledgably and accurately about LGBT issues with ease in the classroom, but also could address practical issues, such as how to deal with negative actions, comments, and/or behaviour in other areas such as school gyms, hallways, playgrounds and staffrooms. It must also prepare teachers to deal with parents who object to the content of classroom discussions, assignments or courses.

**3. If the Council of the Ontario College of Teachers were to recommend establishing an AQ specifically focused on teaching lesbian, gay, lesbian and transgender students:**

**What would be the specific knowledge, skills and attitudes beneficial for a teacher to acquire?**

There was broad consensus among the participants with respect to the content and the goals of the of the AQ course—teaching tolerance, which then leads to acceptance, and ultimately a celebration of diversity.

There was, however, no consensus with respect to the format—on the one hand, some participants felt strongly that the issues are sufficiently important to merit a stand-alone course, and on the other hand, some felt that it should be subsumed within existing AQs.

The participants proposed a number of issues and topics that a potential AQ should address:

**The AQ should include the following general goals:**

- be leadership-based so that the knowledge gained from such a course could be more broadly disseminated, and prepare teachers to move from their role as a teacher in the classroom to that of a mentor, “courageous ally” and leader
- prepare teachers for the possibility that students may first disclose their sexuality to a teacher and enable teachers to empower their students
- be proactive rather than reactive, and should emphasize positive aspects, not just “negative realities”, through, for example, the identification of LGBT role models and “heroes”
- provide a greater understanding of LGBT issues, healthy sexuality generally and its relationship to one’s identity to demonstrate that the issues are not restricted to a minority but have a broader effect.
- cause teachers to question their own beliefs, biases, stereotypes, attitudes and actions, as well as those in society, which may perpetuate and/or contribute (intentionally or unintentionally) to further marginalization and isolation of LGBT students (such as what a “normal” family looks like or intrusive questions about personal matters)
- provide a safe learning environment for teachers who take the AQ that accommodates the participants’ different levels of knowledge and awareness and enables them to share experiences or ask questions safely without creating further divisions.

**The AQ should include the following content:**

- enable teachers to recognize risk factors and understand the correlation between a positive student identity and student achievement, perhaps through the use of relevant statistics and studies (e.g., staff and student surveys conducted in Ontario)
- provide information on factors that do and do not promote healthy sexuality, and “distinguish the varieties of healthy sexual orientation from disorders of sexual orientation such as pedophilia and hebephilia”
- engage in “myth busting” and dispelling stereotypes
- emphasize cross-cultural, religious and international perspectives

- provide in-depth knowledge of relevant human rights legislation, case law and the legal rights under such legislation, the history and current status of the LGBT movement, achievements in attaining some measure of equality, and contemporary manifestations of the issues
- enable teachers to recognize that children of LGBT parents have their own distinct needs
- include a discussion of the diverse issues associated with, and faced by, each group comprising the LGBT community.

**The AQ should enable teachers to acquire the following specific skills:**

- enable the teacher to recognize when expertise is required to resolve issues, and provide knowledge of community resources that are already available and that may be used as teaching tools, and demonstrate how to use them in the classroom
- have a practical aspect, and must include tools on how to implement what is learned once the teacher or administrator returns to his or her school system
- provide the means to address groups or individuals who oppose the teaching of LGBT issues in a manner that is consistent, informative and respectful of their views
- enable teachers to recognize and respond appropriately to harassment and discrimination, whether from students, colleagues, parents or the general community
- develop skills in advocacy, conflict resolution, negotiation and navigating difficult classroom discussions (or discussions outside the classroom)
- understand family dynamics, particularly where a student’s immediate and extended family does not accept or has difficulty dealing with his or her sexuality
- enable teachers to talk comfortably about sexuality and LGBT issues, to use appropriate language, to recognize terms and symbols, and to be aware of various important days for the LGBT communities
- teach how to create a network to enable teachers to share experiences and teaching strategies (similar to “professional learning communities” established by French teachers)
- develop knowledge on how to implement and support efforts such as gay/straight alliances (GSAs) and positive spaces and an understanding of their importance
- provide insight into how to modify existing lesson plans and develop new age-appropriate plans and tools to better reflect LGBT students of all ages and education levels and how to provide a safe, welcoming and inclusive learning environment that is gender-neutral. In this regard, teaching tools such as posters, books reflecting the LGBT community, and exercises, such as “Gay-for-a-Day” were suggested.

**4. If the Council of the Ontario College of Teachers were to recommend establishing an AQ specifically focused on teaching lesbian, gay, lesbian and transgender students:**

**What issues would you identify about introducing such a qualification?**

Participants identified a number of issues in connection with the introduction of an AQ course. Although there was general support for the premise that the mere existence of an AQ implied “institutional permission” and validation of LGBT issues, its development seen as one of the initial steps in the process. Practical issues, such encouraging interest in the course, were the focus for many of the discussions under this topic.



### **Timing of the AQ Development Process**

Given the importance of addressing LGBT issues and the scarcity of resources available to do so now, timing was identified as crucial. It was felt that the process of development of the AQ should be “speeded up.”

### **Identifying Participants, Providers and Experts**

Participants felt that a trained critical mass or a dedicated core of teachers and administrative staff was required to shift a school’s organizational culture.

Participants questioned how one would generate interest in, or provide incentives for, taking the course. They also asked whether education leadership positions could be predicated on completing the AQ and if participation be mandatory, and if so, how it could be made mandatory.

Related to these questions was the issue of whether providers would be willing to offer a course. Participants asked if incentives could be used, and if so, how they might be used. If the decision to offer a course is based solely on the economics of supply and demand, it may be difficult to establish a sustainable AQ if there is insufficient demand to justify the expense of providing the course. Participants also discussed the College’s role in accrediting courses, and were of the view that the College should ensure that LGBT issues are included in courses as a condition of accreditation.

Participants also asked how the AQ would be weighted and valued relative to other courses, who and how would determine the content and focus of the AQ, and how these issues would be resolved. In this regard, it was noted that those who were selected to design and teach the course would determine its credibility, and that care was needed in selecting the experts and the providers, given the difference viewpoints among the various LGBT communities.

### **Overcoming Resistance, Providing Support to Teachers and Communication Strategies**

Participants in both sessions felt strongly that other cultures and belief systems must be accommodated. Related to this issue were the “politics” associated with, and the “inevitable resistance” to, taking the course.

It was suggested that such factors might act as a barrier to taking the course, especially if teachers feared that they would become the target of discrimination in their present or future employment (from parents and/or administrators) when their qualifications, for instance, are included on the College’s public register. Participants were also concerned that those who would take the AQ might be labeled as the “problem teacher” or the “gay teacher.” Support from the school boards and administration was deemed critical to overcome these legitimately-held fears so that it is clear that the AQ is for all teachers and not just for those who are members of the LGBT community.

Participants also identified as an issue the question of how the AQ course would be “marketed” in education systems that were, or would be expected to be, resistant to having LGBT issues addressed in the classroom, or whether there was a general denial that a problem existed. In other words, a clear and effective communication strategy was required. Participants noted that some school systems may need assistance in implementing the course. It was also felt that the “name” of the AQ would be important factor in drawing participants, and could act as either a detriment or an attraction.

It was also suggested that the AQ be developed and delivered through a multi-pronged/sectoral approach, with school boards, federations, the Ministry of Education, the College of Teachers and community groups working together as partners. There should be ongoing support provided through various means, such as funding, legislation and administration.

### **Intersection with and Relationship to other AQs**

Participants in both sessions again identified an issue that figured prominently in discussions about each of the three previous questions: would the AQ course intersect or connect with other available courses and curricula, or would it operate as a stand-alone course. One group identified a downside to the latter format as being similar to “preaching to the converted.” In other words, those who have some knowledge of, or interest in, LGBT issues will be more likely to take the course, but these are not necessarily the individuals who should be taking the course.

In contrast, it was felt that a more broadly based AQ would result in a wider diversity of participants, which, in turn, would increase the impact of the course through a more extensive application of the principles and tools needed to address LGBT issues. Some participants noted that if the issues were subsumed within a larger pre-existing AQ, the ensuing “monetary gain” might encourage more teachers to take the course.

### **Format and Content of the AQ**

Insofar as content of the AQ was concerned, participants felt that providers should be required to meet specific expectations related to the College’s accreditation standards. Participants also believed that the AQ should contain a means “to take stock” and to measure progress in dispelling myths and creating a safe school environment.

The mode of delivery was important to the participants, and varied according to the context in which it would be offered. For example, participants asked how teachers in smaller or rural communities would have access to the course, and whether distance learning would be an appropriate method of delivery (An online course offered by ETFO was cited as an example.)

Participants were also concerned that the AQ be provided in a safe learning environment for teachers that would accommodate participants’ different levels of knowledge and awareness and enable them to share experiences or ask questions safely without creating further divisions. One group asked whether an AQ was the sole means through which LGBT issues could be addressed, and proposed a model under which in-service teachers and pre-service students learned together.

Some participants suggested that the course be delivered over a longer term (i.e., a number of courses offered over a longer period of time) to ensure that the impact was long-lasting.

## Recommendations

In response to the undertaking of the Registrar to consult stakeholders and community partners concerning the addition of a Schedule C Additional Qualification course “Teaching LGBT Students”, the following is recommended:

Based on the feedback received at the Toronto and Ottawa consultation (see participant list in attached Appendix), it is recommended that Council support the inclusion of a Schedule C Additional Qualification course “Teaching LGBT Students.”

## Appendix 1 Materials Considered

Consultation on Additional Qualification Course for Teaching Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Students–April 2010

Additional Qualification Course Guideline–Inclusive Classroom Specialist–Schedule D, Regulation 184/97, Teachers’ Qualifications–August 2009

Additional Qualification Course Guideline–Inclusive Classroom Specialist –Parts I and II, Schedule D, Regulation 184/97, Teachers’ Qualifications–August 2009

The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct, Policy/ Program Memorandum No. 128, October 4, 2007

Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools, Policy/ Program Memorandum No. 119, June 24, 2009

*Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009)

*Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships*, Safe Schools Action Team, December 11, 2008

## Appendix 2 Toronto Consultation Participants

The representatives from the following organizations participated in the Toronto consultation session or provided written submissions:

- Anti-Racist Multi-Cultural Education Network of Ontario
- Association of Chief Psychologists with Ontario School Boards (written submissions only)
- Canadian Centre for Diversity
- Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Toronto (written submissions only)
- Catholic Principals’ Council of Ontario
- Conference of Independent Schools of Ontario
- EGALE Canada
- Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario
- Equity Summit Group
- Greater Essex County District School Board
- Halton District School Board
- Harmony Movement
- Independent School Association of Ontario
- Institute for Catholic Education
- Ministry of Education
- Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools
- Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies
- Ontario Association of Deans of Education
- Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education
- Ontario Catholic Schools Trustees’ Association
- Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers Association
- Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations
- Ontario Principals’ Council
- Ontario Public School Boards’ Association
- Ontario Public Supervisory Officials’ Association
- Ontario School Counsellors’ Association
- Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation
- Ontario Student Trustees’ Association
- PFLAG Toronto
- Sherbourne Health Centre
- Toronto Catholic District School Board
- Toronto District School Board
- Waterloo District School Board
- York Region District School Board

## Appendix 2 Ottawa Consultation Participants

The representatives from the following organizations participated in the Ottawa consultation session:

- Around the Rainbow Project
- Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens
- Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques
- Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario
- Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions
- Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario
- Centretown Community Health Centre
- Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne
- L'Office Provincial de l'Éducation de la foi Catholique de l'Ontario
- Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
- Parents Partenaires en Education
- PFLAG Ottawa
- University of Ottawa/Université d'Ottawa
- Youth Services Bureau
- Student, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa





Ontario  
College of  
Teachers

Ordre des  
enseignantes et  
des enseignants  
de l'Ontario

For additional information:  
Ontario College of Teachers  
101 Bloor St. West  
Toronto ON M5S 0A1

Telephone: 416-961-8800  
Fax: 416-961-8822  
Toll-free in Ontario: 1-888-534-2222  
E-mail: [info@oct.ca](mailto:info@oct.ca)  
[www.oct.ca](http://www.oct.ca)