

**Report to PCCAT
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Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission**

Scope and Mandate

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC), an “Agency of the Council of Maritime Premiers,” was established in 1974. In June 1997, the Ministers of Education in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island agreed, after extensive review, to renew and refocus the Commission’s mandate through an “Agreement respecting the renewal of arrangements for regional cooperation concerning post-secondary education.” This renewed mandate was ratified by the Council of Maritime Premiers. In January 2005, the new Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission Act was proclaimed, giving full force to the Commission’s renewed mandate.

The legislation defines the Commission’s mandate as follows:

“The Commission shall, in carrying out its duties, give first consideration to improving and maintaining the best possible service to students as life-long learners by:

- a) Taking measures intended to ensure that programs of study are of optimum length and best quality;
- b) **Stressing prior learning assessment and recognition, and credit transfer, to implement the principle that duplication of effort is not required in order to gain credit for learning which has been successfully accomplished;**
- c) Promoting smooth transitions between learning and work;
- d) Promoting equitable and adequate access to learning opportunities, including making those opportunities available at times and places convenient to the student; and
- e) Taking measures intended to ensure teaching quality.”

The Commission aims to assist institutions and governments in enhancing the post-secondary learning environment through the following nine objectives:

1. Providing assurances that programs developed by institutions within the MPHEC’s scope meet agreed-upon quality criteria.
2. Confirming that institutions within the MPHEC’s scope have appropriate policies and practices to ensure the ongoing quality of their programs.
3. Facilitating and promoting cost-effectiveness of, and accessibility to, the broadest range possible of programs.
4. Collecting, storing and maintaining quality, comprehensive and relevant information across all mandated functions.
5. Devising data and information products that provide stakeholders with value, across all mandated functions, especially related to key post-secondary education issues.
6. Increasing awareness of, and dialogue on, Maritime Post-Secondary Education (PSE) issues and opportunities, both in the Maritimes and nationally.
7. Promoting and facilitating cooperation within the Maritimes and with other provinces and external partners to, among other things, facilitate, among institutions and among governments for example, the development of cost-effective and collaborative approaches to PSE administration, programs and policies.

8. Providing advice and services to the Provinces, as requested.
9. Ensuring the effective and efficient management of Commission resources (corporate objective).

The Commission focuses primarily on university education. There are currently eighteen post-secondary institutions within the scope of the MPHEC, sixteen of which are publicly-funded universities. Of these sixteen, two (Cape Breton University and Nova Scotia Agricultural College) also offer college-level or technology-based certificate and diploma programs in addition to degree programs. The remaining two institutions (Holland College in Prince Edward Island and the Maritime College of Forest Technology in New Brunswick) offer solely non-degree programs (Holland College can, and does, grant applied degrees).

Operational Framework

The Commission includes:

- the Chief Executive Officer as an ex-officio non-voting 21th member
- a collective of 20 members (akin to a board) representing government, public-at-large/students and universities
- the committees established by the Commission (which include, as required, a combination of commission members and representatives from stakeholder groups - primarily institutions and governments)
- 12 FTE

What work done at the MPHEC relates to credit transfer?

As noted above (see shading), the MPHEC's legislation defines a potential role for the Commission with regard to credit transfer. To date, the MPHEC's role in supporting credit transfer has been limited to facilitating standardised degree nomenclature through the Maritime Degree Level Qualifications Framework and to encouraging joint programming (known as articulated programs) between universities and "other" institution (normally a community college). For the purpose of the MPHEC, an articulated program is not limited to credit transfer, although it will likely include a provision of credit transfer agreements between institutions. The general aim of such programs is to expand the opportunities for graduates to acquire both occupation-specific and general post-secondary education competencies.

The MPHEC collects data on institutions' programs and course offerings, student demographics, programs and courses registration, and credentials granted information. The database format used is the Post-Secondary Student Information System (PSIS), the national database format designed by Statistics Canada to provide longitudinal student records to enable the generation of standardized statistics and to facilitate research on post-secondary issues such as retention, attrition, mobility and graduation rates. PSIS includes seven files:

1. Institution Description File
2. Institution Program File
3. Institution Course File
4. Student Description File
5. Student Program File
6. Student Course File
7. Student Transfer File

The seventh file on Student Transfer contains one record for each credit course the student was granted for courses taken and/or for experiences outside the current postsecondary institution. To the extent that this information is stored in the administrative system of the postsecondary institution, the transfer course record contains the number of transfer credits, the source of the credit, the date it was granted and the equivalent course at the receiving institution. It is to include all transfers to the student since the student first registered at the postsecondary institution, not just for the current program. Courses taken at another postsecondary institution under a formal brokering agreement are to be excluded if the institution has reported the course as one of its student's "student course" records (under file 6). (For more detailed information, please refer to Appendix A)

Nationally, approximately 65% of universities and 65% of community colleges are reporting through PSIS. In the Maritimes, universities have been submitting PSIS data since 1999. The reporting of the Student Transfer File is optional; however, 12 out of the 16 universities within the MPHEC's scope populate, to various degrees, this file. The Student Transfer file has not been audited by the MPHEC so the quality of the data is not known. There is potential for the Student Transfer File to be a valuable source of information to support decisions related to credit transfer. **The question the MPHEC is interested in learning through the PCCAT forum is where other jurisdictions stand on the PSIS agenda and the Student Transfer file in particular.**