



Council Highlights

From the Chair • February, 2009

Council meetings for the BC College of Teachers were held between Feb. 3 & 6th. There were several items of business that may have significant impact on education in the province. The most notable was the direction the College established in relation to their obligations under the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT).

The College has, over the course of more than a decade, been involved in discussions to establish a single set of standards for teacher qualification across Canada. The work that went into the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) between BC and Alberta created common qualifications that closely matched those of all provinces in Canada except Ontario. Ontario has about 40% of the teachers in Canada and the lowest initial certification requirements of any province. Regretfully, TILMA provisions were not accepted for national use. Since the AIT requires that BC accept graduates from Ontario, the result is a serious reduction in teacher qualifications in BC.

In order to maintain BC's higher standards of certification, the College had two other avenues to explore. The first avenue was to utilize the wording of the AIT agreement that would allow the College to individually assess applicants from Ontario on the basis that Ontario issues a 'restricted certificate'. In practical terms, this method could only work if there was unanimous agreement from all the other provinces. Such agreement was not forthcoming.

The next possibility was to request an exemption to the agreement, called a 'legitimate objective'. Several factors make this a difficult avenue to utilize. The Ministry of Education would have to draft the objective, the Premier would have to approve it. The Council ultimately decided that this would not be a viable option at this time.

The last avenue to consider was for the College to establish two 'categories of certificate'. One category's qualifications would be based on the lower initial Ontario qualifications and the second category would establish a higher set of 'professional' qualifications as established by the College. The College would then engage in discussions with the Teacher Qualification Service (TQS) to ensure that higher pay categories are matched with the 'professional' qualification certificates.

After much discussion the College Council passed a motion that reflected this last option. They directed staff to begin work on bylaw and policy amendments that would establish two levels of certificates. One outcome of this decision was the need to revisit TILMA as the provisions of TILMA could limit the College's ability to establish their

own standards for the new 'professional certificate'. A subsequent motion gave the required one year's notice that the College will withdraw from TILMA unless amendments to this agreement can be effected that will address the College's concerns.

The College continues to work on the legislated requirements outlined in the Criminal Records Review Act (CRRRA). Out of approximately 15,000 members processed so far this year, there are fewer than 60 members of the College who are not in compliance with the Act.

The College continues to be opposed to the provisions of the CRRRA because it provides little additional safety to students. At this time the College has solicited broad support from all partner groups to formulate a set of principles that could guide the government in making amendments to the Act. This lobbying effort will require time.

The College has also passed a motion that will pay for all members' costs related to the Criminal Records Checks for the 2009 year (this will affect all members whose last names begin with the letters F to J – last year's group was A to E). The costs will be taken from the College's current unrestricted operational surplus. It is hoped that the CRRRA would be amended before the College's unrestricted surplus declines to the point where the College is unable to subsidize the costs.

Some discussion was given to the topic of College sponsored conferences. Council passed a motion giving direction to staff to begin planning for a conference sometime in 2010. A further motion to hold College sponsored conferences once every two years was also passed.

The Communications Committee – Council adopted changes to Bylaw and Policy that were brought forward by Communications. These changes were mostly focused on internal procedures such as: establishing parameters around special general meetings of Council, electronic attendance at Council meetings, the necessity of written notice when candidates withdraw from elections for College Council, not providing support to non-College conferences except by donation of services, identifying appropriate items for 'in-private' meetings and placing a year's exclusion for any former council members applying for staff positions at the College. The committee is also preparing recommendations for a long-term strategy of outreach and member education. It is expected that these recommendations will come before future council meetings.

As noted above, the Finance Committee had recommended the motion to pay for the next set of criminal records checks for members. The also recommended that there be no fee increases for the coming year. After consideration, Council passed their recommendation that the fees for the 2009/2010 year remain unchanged.

The Teacher Education Sub-Committee recommended and Council approved, a Developmental Standard Term Certificate program from Thompson Rivers University/ Nicola Valley Institute of Technology. Council also approved Bylaw changes that effected the establishment of the Teacher Education Sub-Committee. They also reported that the College was in the final stages of an agreement with the Deans of Education that would outline practices related to approval of the 'Attainment of Standards Reports' (ASR). The ASR framework took the place of a 'program approval' system that is used mostly now for programs new to BC. All of these changes were developed under a 'Letter of Understanding' (LoU) signed by the College and eight of the teacher education programs in BC.

The Discipline Committee was successful in obtaining Council's approval for Bylaw and Policy changes that allow the College to deal with matters of incompetence due to medical conditions. These changes reflect recent alterations to the Teaching Profession Act. The Committee is also examining methods to improve the scheduling of hearings and reviewing aspects of the informal dispute resolution processes. They also asked for financial support to effect improvements in the Hearing Room facility.

The Qualifications Committee gave notice of motion that would empower the Fitness Investigation Sub-Committee (FISC) to have final authority over the issuance of Letters of Permission (LoP). LoPs are issued when a Board

or Authority cannot find a qualified teacher for a position and wants to hire a non-certified candidate. These LoPs are most often sought for positions requiring unique qualifications such as chef instructors, hair dressers and French immersion teachers, to mention a few. Sometimes areas like counseling generate these requests, especially if the stated qualifications are set at a Masters' degree. In order to approve an application for an LoP, the College relies on written submissions by the employer that warrant that the Board has advertised for a certified and qualified teacher and has notified the local Teachers' Association (if the position is within the public system). It is important that both employers and local Associations (where applicable) have done due diligence in ensuring that a suitable candidate with teaching credentials has not been overlooked. Up to now the College granted LoPs when each written request was vetted and approved by the Fitness Investigation Sub-Committee (FISC) and subsequently approved by the full Council. The proposed system will allow FISC to grant or deny the LoPs unconditionally.

Council also passed a motion that allowed for streamlining of applications for LoP's in instances where the application was approved in the preceding year for the same candidate in the same position. Qualifications also put forward a notice of motion to increase the period of validity of a conditional certificate from 58 months to 60 months.

The next set of Council meetings is scheduled for March 31 to April 3rd at which time the Council will likely be selecting a new Registrar to replace Marie Crowther, who will be retiring as of December 31, 2009.