Case Study – Canada (Ontario)

Canada (Ontario) - Country Overview

Ontario is the most populous of the 13 territories and provinces of Canada, a federal parliamentary democracy in North America. Ontario is in the east of Canada, bordering the province of Manitoba to the west, Quebec to the east and Hudson Bay and James Bay to the north. To the south lie the US states of New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Minnesota. Ontario contains Ottawa, Canada’s capital city, and Toronto, Canada’s largest city by population.

Algonquian and Iroquoian-speaking peoples had lived in and around Ontario for around 12,000 years before French and British settlers arrived from the 17th century. Following around two centuries of rule from France and then the UK, Canada was established as an independent political entity within the British Empire in 1867. However, it was not recognised as co-equal with the UK until 1931. Since then, Canada has been greatly influenced economically and culturally by its proximity to the USA and by immigration from a diverse range of countries.

In PISA 2015, Canada was a high-performing country, particularly in reading, where only Singapore achieved a result that was higher in a statistically significant way. Furthermore, Canada scores well in terms of achieving good results for students regardless of their socio-economic background (OECD 2018b). Nevertheless, responsibility for education in Canada is wholly at provincial level. A breakdown of PISA 2015 performance in science by province shows that the difference between Ontario and the Canadian mean is not statistically significant (Education Quality and Accountability Office 2016).

Canada (Ontario) - Professional Development

Ontario’s education system is characterised by reasonably high entry requirements to the profession along with formally undifferentiated status once admitted. In other words, there are not levels or grades of teacher in the way that Singapore has achieved (see below). Ontario requires its teachers to be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers (2018b): this involves obtaining accreditation from a provider of initial teacher education, applying to the Ontario College of Teachers and paying annual membership and registration fees (Ontario College of Teachers 2018b). Taking these steps results in a formal status known as the Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT) (Ontario College of Teachers 2018f). However, Ontario is distinctive in having formalised the notion and practice of career progression through a regulatory system of ‘Additional Qualifications’ (AQs) and ‘Additional Basic Qualifications’ (ABQs) for teachers. These are certified and accredited through the Ontario College of Teachers, though the College establishes the regulatory framework and approves providers rather than creating or delivering the qualifications itself. Importantly, the teaching certificate provided and validated by the College is dynamic: it is updated to contain all the additional qualifications that a teacher may undertake and so becomes a de facto marker both of differentiated status and of progression through a teaching career. This information is also available on a public register.

Canada (Ontario) - Teachers’ Career Pathways

Ontario teachers may progress in their careers through completing ABQs and AQs. These are assigned to one of six schedules, A-F. These are described by the College as follows:

- **Schedule A**: One-session Additional Basic Qualifications courses prepare members to teach in another division or general education subject area. They also support a teacher’s professional practice by extending skills and knowledge in design, delivery and assessment in the division or subject.

- **Schedule B**: One-session Additional Basic Qualifications courses prepare members to teach additional technological education courses. They support a teacher’s professional practice by adding to technical proficiency and pedagogical knowledge and skill.
Schedule C: One-session Additional Qualifications courses extend teachers’ knowledge and skills in design and delivery of specific programs. They also support professional practice by preparing teachers for specific roles.

Schedule D: Three-part specialist courses develop professional knowledge and teaching practice in a particular subject or in cross or integrated curriculum areas. They enable teachers to explore pedagogy related to a subject area without taking more subject-specific university courses. They also prepare a teacher to assume leadership roles such as co-ordinator or consultant for a particular course or program.

Schedule E: One-session honour specialist courses in general education and one-session honour technological education specialist courses develop leadership in teaching practice for the design and delivery of particular subject areas. They may allow a teacher to assume leadership roles for particular courses or programs.

Schedule F: One-session courses to provide technological education teachers with the opportunity to gain a greater depth of knowledge in their broad-based technology area.

So, as an example, a teacher qualified for instruction at secondary phase (in Ontario, intermediate/senior divisions) might undertake an ABQ in schedule A in order to qualify to teach also in the primary phase. The Ontario College of Teachers sets out the statutory guidelines within which providers must design their qualification: these guidelines contain, *inter alia*, the overarching conceptual framework for the qualification; how it constructs both learner and educator; guiding concepts for inquiry; the particularities of the Ontario context; learning environments and learning strategies; assessment; and the regulatory professional standards for teachers in both ethics and practice (Ontario College of Teachers 2016a).

Completing AQs and/or ABQs may contribute to progression up the ‘General Education Chart’ (Qualifications Evaluation Council of Ontario 2018). Teachers are categorised as either A, A1, A2, A3 or A4. This depends on their initial degree and subsequent additional qualifications. There are many ways to achieve a given categorisation, and so it is possible that a new teacher may enter the profession directly on A4 if s/he already had, for instance ‘an acceptable five year undergraduate university degree (first or second class standing)’ (Qualifications Evaluation Council of Ontario 2018, number 24). In this sense, the system may or may not constitute a career pathway.

Canada (Ontario) - Leaders’ Career Pathways

There is no multi-level career structure for school principals in Ontario. Progression to the principalship is dependent upon completion of a mandatory qualification, the Principal’s Qualification Program (see Ontario College of Teachers 2017), which is taught and assessed by one of Ontario’s universities. This requirement is in addition to others concerning experience, academic accreditation (undergraduate and master’s or “Additional Qualifications” as a teacher) and certification in three age phases (Ontario Ministry of Education 2018).

Serving principals can take advantage of bespoke AQs: the Principal’s Development Course, for example, is designed for proactive, reflective and collaborative educational leaders to explore, in-depth, the essential dimensions for increasing leadership capacity … Through the exploration of various topics (for example, effecting change, visioning and goal setting, understanding the importance of collective empowerment, building efficacy, instructional leadership and emotional intelligence) candidates will interpret and reflect to create professional growth’ (Ontario College of Teachers 2016b, p. 1). (It should also be noted that a number of other AQs focus on developing leadership in classroom teachers, particularly for middle-leadership roles: see schedules D and E above.)

Career progression after the principalship is formally focused on advancing to the level of Supervisory Officer. This public post-holder is responsible for the schools within her / his district, and is more-or-less homologous with the District Superintendent in the USA. Again, the Ontario College of Teachers
publishes the guidelines that frame this programme’s development and delivery (Ontario College of Teachers 2017b).