CEWIL Canada Accreditation Council: the impact of COVID-19 on accredited co-op programs

In response to the continuing and unprecedented impact of COVID-19 on accredited co-operative education programs across Canada, the Accreditation Council wishes to reaffirm the quality standards for co-operative education while at the same time provide suitable flexibility for individual institutions to make program adjustments to support both students and employers.

During the period of time impacted by COVID-19 and effective until April 30, 2021, the Accreditation Council continues to encourage accredited co-op programs to maintain minimum 12-week / 420-hour work terms of full-time employment but acknowledges that standard may not always be possible during the pandemic. As a result, the accreditation standard that both work and academic terms be full-time and follow a formalized sequence has been amended temporarily as follows:

- the total amount of co-op work experience is normally at least 30% of the time spent in academic study. For programs of two years or less, the total amount may be a minimum of 25%. A work term is defined as a minimum of 8 weeks and/or 280 hours paid experience.

Accreditation Council standards are grounded in extensive research and well-established best practices. In order to preserve the quality of co-op programming across Canada, all other co-op standards remain the same. Accredited co-op programs must continue to ensure that:

- work terms are developed in partnership with the employer and approved by the co-operative education program as suitable learning environments;
- students are engaged in productive work for which they receive remuneration;
- work term experiences are assessed via work term consults with both students and employers (conducted remotely as necessary);
- co-op curriculum supports students’ learning goals, personal evaluation and reflection (i.e., reflection and learning continue to be at the core of the work term);
- student performance in the work place is supervised and evaluated by the student's employer; and,
- student progress during the work term is monitored by the co-op program and students debrief following the work term.

Institutions that maintain these standards will not jeopardize their accreditation status.

A review of these accommodations coupled with an assessment of the status of the pandemic will be conducted in early 2021 with the intention of returning all accreditation standards to normal for co-op work terms beginning May 2021.