

PATHWAYS TO PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION

A CONVERSATION WITH THE NS EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR

Nova Scotia Child Care Association
Professional Recognition Project: 2015 – 2019

NSCHILD CAREASSOCIATION.ORG

PATHWAYS TO PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION – A CONVERSATION

This dialogue paper is to encourage conversation among individuals and groups in the early learning and care field.

The paper will help us to:

- develop a shared understanding of what “professional” and “professional recognition” mean,
- talk about what professional recognition for ECEs could look like in Nova Scotia, and
- plan how it can be achieved.

The Nova Scotia Child Care Association (NSCCA) Professional Recognition Project is made up of several components and guided by an Advisory Committee accountable to the NSCCA Board of Directors. The Committee monitors the project’s progress and serves as a resource to the consultants.

The PRP work plan includes:

- scans of the literature on professional infrastructure components, professionalization processes, and professional recognition models;
- consultation with NSCCA members and related organizations regarding entitlements, membership categories, and core values; and
- a comparative worth study.

Phase one of the PRP is now finished. It includes a literature review, a scan of professional recognition models in other professions in Canada and internationally, and case studies of the professionalization process of other occupations in Nova Scotia such as nursing and social work. It provides a foundation for an informed dialogue on professional recognition.

The NSCCA is a non-profit organization that recognizes child care practitioners as the main ingredient in high quality child care. The goal of the PRP is a business and strategic plan for achieving professional recognition for early childhood educators (ECEs) in Nova Scotia. **The purpose of the PRP is to make the work of ECEs more visible, respected, acknowledged, and rewarded.** This includes fair wages, access to high quality education and professional development, and support to practice.

CONTACT

Nova Scotia Child Care Association
3845 Joseph Howe Drive, Suite 102
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3L 4H9
902-423-8199
nschildcareassociation.org



WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION?



People working in the field of early learning and care have many things to think and talk about when considering what professional recognition means. This dialogue paper is the first in a series that will contribute to that conversation.

There are many ways to define **professional**, and our ideas about what professional means are changing all the time.

Usually, an occupation can be considered a profession if:

1. Its members have a special body of **knowledge and expertise** that separates the group from other professions or occupations.
2. The work serves an important and valued **social purpose**, sometimes called the “public interest”.
3. Its members cooperate by being part of a **professional organization**.
4. Members and the profession as a whole have a certain amount of **independence** – sometimes called “autonomy”. They are considered experts and capable of making decisions based on their knowledge, skills, and judgement.
5. The profession has significant **control or influence** over:
 - a) Education and training standards. Usually, members must have formal training and preparation, and pass an exam or certification;
 - b) Licensing members and making sure they meet certain standards;
 - c) Continuous learning and development that is high quality and keeps members up to date in their field; and
 - d) Ethical and performance standards that the profession can enforce itself. This can include the ability to discipline members, or suspend or revoke licensing.
6. There is significant physical, psychological, emotional, financial, or legal **risk** to vulnerable people.
7. Members are seen with respect and the value of their service to society is acknowledged with **fair wages and good working conditions**.
8. **Licensing and accreditation of practice sites** is done by the profession or by the government.

Changes in gender roles, culture, technology, and the economy all affect how we think about professionalism. Traditionally, being a professional meant high social and community status. It also meant you earned a good wage that matched the educational investment you made and the level of responsibility you took on.

After a lot of work, nurses, teachers, and social workers have been recognized as professionals alongside physicians and lawyers. They have achieved professional recognition. At the same time, the word “professional” has been adopted by many occupations and trades. Our common understanding of what “professional” means is now broader. It is also, in some ways, less clear.

IMPORTANT FACTS TO THINK ABOUT

“Treat ourselves and our colleagues with respect; focus on what we want more of and avoid the negative – empower ourselves and our colleagues...”

– Key informant recommendation from NSCCA’s Pathways to Professional Recognition for Early Childhood Educators Report, February 2016, p. 156

Early learning and care matters.

All over the world, the importance of early years development is being researched, recognized, and shared. Early learning and care (ELC)* is earning a more secure position in public policy. Early childhood educators (ECEs)* enjoy more appreciation and recognition from parents and the general public than ever before. The formal education system is recognizing that the early years have a significant impact on success in school.

**As a field, we have not yet agreed on the name of our body of theoretical and practical knowledge or the name of the practitioners who deliver it. In this paper, we use early learning and care (ELC) for our knowledge and early childhood educator (ECE) for the person practicing it. On page 3, we talk more about this.*

ECEs are experts.

New scientific research in brain development is helping us better understand how early learning and care permanently shape children’s lives. Scientific and theoretical knowledge is important. We gain it through training and continuing education. Practical knowledge is just as important. We gain it through practice – working with children, collegial relationships, and building a range of professional experiences. Being able to apply the expertise we gain through education and experience is called “competency”. ECEs must have the competencies to provide age appropriate early learning and care to young children in their communities.

knowledge + skill + judgement = COMPETENCIES

“Scope of practice” refers to the activities, processes, and responsibilities undertaken by a practitioner – in this case, an early childhood educator. As a community, we agree that operating in a scope of practice without the proper qualifications and competencies would be a danger to the public – in this case, children and families.

As a profession, we are responsible for defining our exclusive body of knowledge, and identifying the competencies needed to work within our scope of practice.

ECEs own an identifiable, recognizable, and distinct body of knowledge – one of great value to our province’s social wellbeing and economic progress.

“[An] important message about brain development science – [in the] critical early years – ECEs have knowledge, skill and judgement to provide professional services in a complex field.”

– Key informant recommendation from NSCCA’s Pathways to Professional Recognition for Early Childhood Educators Report, February 2016, p. 154

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

“The more serious, focused, substantive PD ECEs do, the more they consider / recognize themselves as professionals; the more group problem-solving and networking they do, the more they see themselves as part of an important, interesting profession.”

– Key informant recommendation from NSCCA’s Pathways to Professional Recognition for Early Childhood Educators Report, February 2016, p. 152

What's in a name?

Professionals must be known by a “title” that is easily understood, recognizable, and protected – meaning you can’t use it unless you have the training and qualifications to do so. This way, members of the public know they can trust the quality of the services you provide. The title “early childhood educator” is in common use in Nova Scotia, but other terms include pre-school teacher, daycare worker, and child care provider. To support advocacy efforts and educate the general public about what we do, the title the sector chooses must reflect a professional and consistent image for those who practice.

What kind of education do ECEs need?

The field of early childhood education has become much more complex and science-based. It also requires creativity and a sophisticated understanding and application of care for young children to support their emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development. ECEs need a combination of research and theoretical knowledge and practice experience.

What kind of credentials should be required?

The length of training and the complexity of the skills and knowledge we learn are often used to evaluate professionalism. An ELC credential would require a good solid knowledge of theory and research, balanced with excellence in practice.

What about curriculum?

Establishing an ELC curriculum has many advantages. It bolsters the social worth of both young children and practitioners, and confirms the specialized body of knowledge and skills held by ECEs. It reinforces ELC as complex work that requires competently applying elements of health, social work, education, psychology, mothering, and early childhood development. While standard curriculum might help professionalize ELC, some people worry that too much focus on formal programming could take away from the creative, caring, and child-centred nature of ECEs’ work.

We need to work together – but how?

Members of a profession must present a “united front”, but there are different ways to do this. Professional associations look out for the best interests of their members. They advocate, promote public policy change, and provide professional development. Membership is optional.

In contrast, a professional regulatory body – sometimes called a “college” – is focused on the public interest. The regulatory body usually governs the competency, educational standards, professional development, and discipline of its members. Some colleges are responsible for inspecting practice sites. Membership is mandatory for all professionals to practice in that field.

How do “care”, “education”, and “professionalism” fit together?

A lot of research has focused on the similarities and differences between early learning and care and the formal education system – school. One of the concerns raised in this research is about focusing too much on the standards, regulation, formal credentials, and management of ECE professionalization. This could lead to placing less value on care in the early years, when care is understood and practiced by ECEs as the heart of ELC.

WHAT DOES PROFESSIONAL REPRESENTATION MEAN?

2

A paid occupation can be considered a profession when:

- It requires special training and a formal qualification
- It requires specialized knowledge and expertise, and practitioners have a certain amount of independence to make decisions and govern themselves
- The work serves an important social purpose and practitioners are respected by members of the community. Members of a profession can cooperate by forming a professional organization. The organization provides its members with professional representation – it represents the profession to the people it serves, to government, and to the general public.

What is a professional association?

The Nova Scotia Child Care Association (NSCCA) is a professional association. Early childhood educators (ECEs) formed the association to share their experiences, learn from each other, and develop professionally. The NSCCA promotes and encourages ethical practice, establishes standards of practice, and advocates for, supports, classifies, and credentials its members. Early childhood educators (ECEs) are not required to join.

Professional associations might also:

- offer courses, workshops, conferences, networking, and other professional development,
- represent the profession in discussions with other groups, the general public, or stakeholders, and
- provide members with benefits like group pricing on health services, insurance, and retirement savings plans.

Other types of professional associations include:

- Sector coalitions, or public policy advocacy alliances, which act on policy or practice issues affecting a profession. Membership is voluntary.
- Professional unions, or collective bargaining associations, which protect and advance the rights and advantages of practicing professionals. This is usually focused on wages and working conditions, although unions may also offer professional development to their members. Membership in a professional union may be mandatory in some workplaces.

What is a professional self-regulatory body?

Sometimes called a College, a professional self-regulatory body acts on behalf of a provincial government to make, monitor, and enforce laws related to a profession and the people practicing it. In simple terms, it is a form of government that watches over a profession. The College members elect a decision-making board or council from the membership. Government may also appoint public members to serve on the council. Membership is mandatory in order to practice in the profession and use a protected title, and members pay fees to cover the cost of operating the College.

The self-regulatory body also:

- conducts investigations in response to complaints and makes legally enforceable judgements,
- consults with members and other stakeholders about laws and regulations, policies, and other regulatory matters, and
- works to develop a strong understanding, identification, and relationship with its membership so it can effectively carry out its duties and responsibilities.

UNDERSTANDING PROFESSIONAL SELF-REGULATION

“Self-regulation is a privilege. Like all privileges, it can be taken away by the same government body that granted it... [S]elf-regulated professions are accountable to the public and the government to consistently satisfy their objectives of public safety. Accountability is inherent in the role of the self-regulating professional in Nova Scotia.”

– NSCCA’s Pathways to Professional Recognition for Early Childhood Educators Report, February 2016, p. 68

Regulations are created by governments to establish standards of conduct for members of a profession. Professional regulation is the process of creating, monitoring, and enforcing regulations on a profession and those practicing it. A profession can be regulated by the government, or by the profession itself – this is called professional self-regulation. Right now, early learning and care (ELC) in Nova Scotia is regulated by the provincial government.

Why do some professions self-regulate?

Because a specialized body of knowledge and expertise makes the practitioners of the profession the best choice to develop and set standards for education, competence, licensing, and practice. In Nova Scotia many professions have gained the authority to self-regulate, including nurses and social workers.

What is the goal of professional self-regulation?

The delivery of safe and competent services by members of a profession. This is particularly true in a profession where members of the public could be harmed if practitioners are negligent or incompetent.

When can a profession self-regulate?

When the authority to do so is granted by the provincial government through legislation or law. A regulatory body – or College – is created to carry out the activities of self-regulation, but the government keeps some control over the practice of the profession. The government establishes the basic rules, and the self-regulatory body of professionals develops regulations, by-laws, policies and the committees and processes to enforce them.

What does the self-regulatory body do?

Sets standards for:

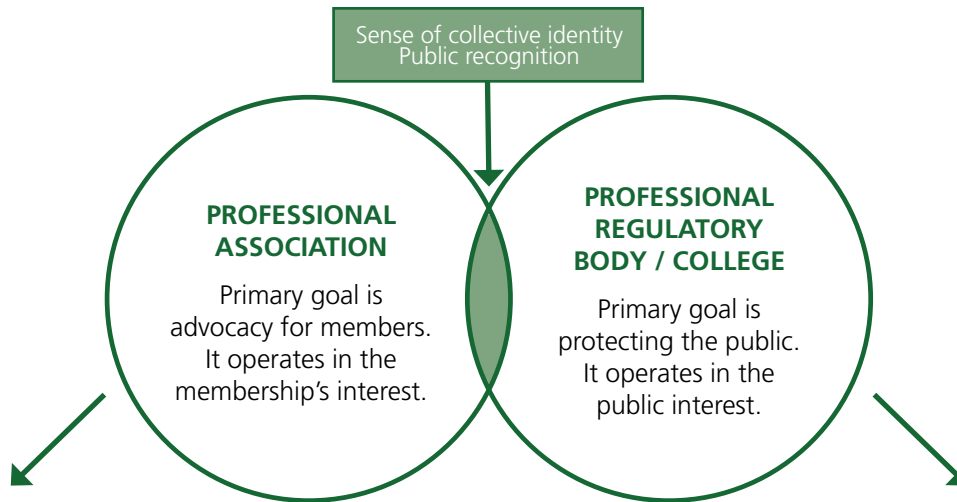
- Who may enter the profession
- Approval of education programs
- Practice and conduct of practitioners

Establishes and maintains:

- Standards of practice
- Code of ethics
- Continuous learning programs
- Registration, licensing, and professional conduct processes
- Policies and other documents to support the practice of its membership

Receiving the legal authority from government to self-regulate means a profession is trusted to carry out this authority in the public interest, and not in the interests of its membership.

HOW DO A PROFESSIONAL REGULATORY BODY & A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION COMPARE?



- Membership is voluntary and involves a small fee.
- Membership many include only a small percentage of practitioners.
- Provides professional development through conferences, institutes, and workshops.
- Promotes competent and ethical practice.
- Focuses on professional activities and issues such as compensation and professional image.
- Governed by a board of directors elected from the membership.
- Members do not govern the profession through legislative authority.

- Membership is mandatory, and involves a larger fee.
- Sets requirements for people to enter the profession and for the practice of the profession.
- Legally regulates the profession and assures the public of the skill and competency of its members.
- Provides license to practice.
- Develops and maintains disciplinary processes and the ongoing evaluation of its members.
- Governed by a board or council elected from the membership.
- Members govern the profession through legislative authority.

Associations are in the business of advocacy – they serve the interests of their members.

Regulatory Colleges are in the business of regulation – they serve the interests of the public.

As the chart above shows, there are advantages and disadvantages to each type of professional representation. Often, a College is formed when members of a professional association lobby government and push for professionalization. When a College is created, the existing professional association sometimes suffers because financial and human resources shift from the association to the College. While the nature and emphasis of the two are different, ideally the focus of each complements and strengthens the other.

In places where there is a College, but no association, the College will sometimes take on an advocacy role and provide professional development. Unlike a union, a College doesn't get involved in employer-employee relations. Becoming a self-regulating profession means taking on a great deal of responsibility. It can also mean gaining a greater sense of collective identity as ECEs, and more public recognition for what ECEs do.

What would it take to put a College of ECEs in place in Nova Scotia?

1. Consulting with practitioners and the government before drafting the legislation to govern the profession would take at least 12 to 18 months.
2. The process of creating and passing the legislation would take about 12 months.
3. Setting up the regulatory body would take at least 18 months.

If the ECE profession in Nova Scotia decides to go ahead with pursuing self-regulation, it would take at least three years.

WHAT DOES PROFESSIONAL REPRESENTATION LOOK LIKE?

3

“... child care practitioners are the main ingredient in high quality child care and provide a valuable service to society... NSCCA is dedicated to increasing the recognition of the important role of child care practitioners in providing quality child care to our children.”

– NSCCA’s Vision

Members of a profession can form a professional organization. Professional organizations take many forms, and they provide members with different kinds of professional representation. This dialogue paper gives examples of different kinds of professional representation.

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION: NOVA SCOTIA CHILD CARE ASSOCIATION

Professional associations provide professional development and networking for their members. They also advocate for the profession, the sector, and social and systemic change.

The Nova Scotia Child Care Association (NSCCA) is a non-profit society with the goal of professional recognition of early childhood educators (ECEs) in Nova Scotia.

The association:

- educates and facilitates the ethical practice of its members,
- educates and facilitates the use of standards of practice by its members, and
- advocates for and supports its members in their provision of quality child care.

About 11% of ECEs in Nova Scotia are members of the NSCCA. Membership is voluntary, and members pay an annual fee. NSCCA provides ongoing professional development, conferences, and resources to members and the early learning and care (ELC) sector. The association also gives out annual awards recognizing excellence in the field, and engages in many advocacy activities including worthy wage initiatives and the Professional Recognition Project.

As part of its advocacy efforts, the NSCCA has made a series of five proposals to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development that include:

1. Ensuring that all ECEs are consistently trained and meet qualification standards,
2. Holding ECEs accountable to an occupational standard of practice and code of ethics in a mentoring culture,
3. Recognizing ECEs as the key ingredient in quality early childhood education programs,
4. Ensuring ECEs are well-trained, fairly compensated, and supported through a stable and professional workforce, and
5. Acknowledging that high quality early childhood education is best achieved through ECEs who engage in continuous growth and development.

The NSCCA brings early learning and care (ELC) practitioners together and serves as a unified voice for the ECE community in Nova Scotia.

PUBLIC INTEREST SELF-REGULATION: COLLEGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS OF ONTARIO

“[Unlike a professional association]... a regulatory body is not allowed by its legislated mandate to advocate for the profession. Its duty is to ‘serve and protect the public interest’ and to regulate its members ‘in the public interest.’ Ideally both forms of professional representation could co-exist and operate in partnership, with each fulfilling its own specific mandate on behalf of the public and the profession.”

– Key informant recommendation from NSCCA’s Pathways to Professional Recognition for Early Childhood Educators Report, February 2016, p. 156

Professional groups regulate themselves because they have the most knowledge about themselves and their specialized field of practice. They are therefore the most capable of determining who can practice what, where, and how. Self-regulatory bodies – often called regulatory Colleges – are focused on protecting the public interest. Colleges of professionals act on behalf of government to make, monitor, and enforce laws related to a profession.

The College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) governs practitioners of early childhood education in Ontario. The Ontario provincial legislature passed the Early Childhood Educators Act in 2007. The Act sets out the framework, duties, responsibilities, powers, and authority of the CECE, and was recently revised at the College’s request to give early childhood educators greater authority to determine the conditions of ECE professional training and practice. The Ontario ECE community worked for decades through both their Anglophone and Francophone professional associations to achieve self-regulation on a par with other professions. The CECE is the first self-regulatory body for ECEs in North America. To date, the College has registered more than 58,000 ECE professionals, who are represented on the College’s governing council by elected members of the profession.

What’s the difference between a professional self-regulating body and a professional association?

- All members of a self-regulated profession must be members of the self-regulatory body governing it. In Ontario, “early childhood educator” and “registered early childhood educator” are protected titles. Only ECEs meeting entry-to-practice qualifications and registered with the CECE can use them or practice within a distinct and protected ECE “scope of practice” as defined in the ECE Act.
- A self-regulatory body is responsible for promoting high standards of quality within the profession. It determines and enforces rules about scope of practice and required competencies and educational qualifications of practitioners. It also accredits education programs and institutions, provides ongoing education to members, issues certificates of registration, and communicates with the public on behalf of the membership.
- Standards of practice and codes of ethics have a different purpose in a professional self-regulatory body than they do in a professional association. Since a College is a “mini-government”, standards of practice developed by and agreed to by members work like laws. Practitioners must abide by these laws in order to protect the public.
- The College takes appropriate actions to ensure that members know what is ethical and responsible practice. It provides a fair and open public complaints and decision-making process administered by members, and has the legal authority to discipline or suspend members who are proven to have behaved unprofessionally and put the public at risk of harm.
- The College has the legal authority to establish a member requirement for ongoing professional development and to monitor compliance. The CECE form of professional development requirement was determined by member consensus on best practice for the profession.

What happens to a professional association once a College is formed?

A professional association and a College can continue to exist side by side, sometimes under the same roof. This is true of the social work profession in Nova Scotia.

In other cases, a professional association can lose ground or even fold when a College is formed. This is partly because practitioners may not want to pay two membership fees.

The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO), for example, is working to build resilience and membership following the creation of the CECE.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING UNION WITH PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FEATURES: NOVA SCOTIA TEACHERS UNION

Collective bargaining unions protect and advance the rights and advantages of practicing professionals. This is usually focused on wages and working conditions, although unions may also offer professional development to their members.

The Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) has about 10,000 active members, including Primary to grade 12 public school teachers, Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority teachers, and the Nova Scotia Community College faculty and professional support staff. Its mission is to be a unified voice for the advocacy and support of its members, and to advance the teaching profession and quality public education. The goals of the NSTU are to protect and advance the professional development and economic welfare of its members.

Within the NSTU, there are 22 professional associations that offer professional development in a range of areas. Their mandate is to improve professional practice, share ideas and trends, advocate for specific interests in the teaching field, and advise the union leadership.

Recently, there has been a call for more public accountability and regulation of the teaching profession. Some groups have called for professional regulation to raise teaching standards, build public trust, properly evaluate teacher education programs, and safeguard students – in other words, greater accountability to the public interest.

COMBINED PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION & SELF-REGULATION: NOVA SCOTIA ASSOCIATION/ COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Some organizations combine the advocacy and professional development goals of a professional association with the public interest protection mandate of a self-regulatory body.

It took 30 years for social workers in Nova Scotia to move from voluntary registration to professional licensure in 1993. This mandatory regulation ensures that members of the public can be confident that registered social workers are qualified and operating ethically in the public interest.

Today, the Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers (NSASW) represents about 1800 social workers and is the only professional association of social workers in the province. Amendments to the Social Workers Act in 2015 changed the name of the NSASW to the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers.

The NSASW provides professional development, a code of ethics, standards of practice, and regulations to its membership. It also helps members work on social issues and social policy change.

An organization that is both a professional association and a self-regulatory body can face challenges. One is balancing advocacy for the membership with protecting the public interest. Sometimes, a physical and financial separation of the two roles is put in place within the organization.



Nova Scotia Child Care Association
3845 Joseph Howe Drive, Suite 102, Halifax
902-423-8199

NSCHILDCAREASSOCIATION.ORG