

## Teaching in Ontario

The testimonial below was provided in 2020. Some updates have occurred to the process since then.

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## 2020 First-person Testimonial

### Ontario College of Teachers

All teachers who work in publicly funded schools in Ontario have to be registered with the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). This is equivalent to the Teaching Council in Ireland. To learn more about becoming a teacher in Ontario, start by going to the [OCT website](#), where you will find a list of requirements for what an internationally accredited teacher needs to do to become certified to teach. Once you start an application with the College, a profile will be created for you (this takes a couple of weeks to be set up by them) with a list of documents that you need to provide in order for your application to be processed. This includes a police check by the R.C.M.P (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), and copies of your transcripts from all universities sent directly to the College. It is important to note, that in 2015, the requirements for a Bachelor of Education changed, from a one-year degree to a two-year degree. If you qualified in Ireland with a 4-year B.Ed degree or a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education, you will most likely have to complete additional courses to be fully certified. A “conditional” certificate would be issued, which outlines requirements that must be fulfilled within a certain time frame, in order to be fully certified. As far as I am aware, you can teach in the public system with a conditional certificate. This process can be lengthy and expensive, so I would recommend that anyone planning to teach in Ontario starts this process well before moving. OCT will not begin processing your application until all documents have been received, and it can take a couple of months from that point. The website says you will hear within 120 days, but from my experience, OCT is incredibly slow at processing documents.

### School Boards

There are four school systems in Ontario: English public, English Catholic, French public, and French Catholic. All four of these are publicly funded, not private schools. There are school boards for different areas of Ontario, and often more than one type of school can be found in the same

area. For example, in Toronto you will find the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board. In Ottawa there is the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, the Ottawa Catholic School Board, and the Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est, and the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario. A list of school boards and districts can be found [here](#).

The school boards are similar to the Education Training Boards in Ireland, in so far as that you have to apply to each one individually (more on that below). All school boards require that you are certified to teach by OCT, but they can also have additional requirements that vary from board to board. For example, I applied to two school boards. One required that I had more than one teaching subject, whereas the other one did not. There is a Facebook group called "Ontario Occasional Teachers" where you can post questions to get more board-specific information.

It is important to note that to be a teacher in the Catholic system, you need to be able to prove that you are a practicing Catholic. This is usually done in the form of a pastoral letter from a priest that says you are part of the community. I have heard anecdotally that this letter must be from a local priest, but if you plan on applying to Catholic schools, bring one from your parish priest in Ireland just in case. For some school boards, this letter is only needed to be eligible to apply for long-term and permanent contracts, but for most Catholic school boards this is needed to be on the supply lists.

### **Applying to School Boards**

Most school boards use a website called "Apply to Education" (ATE) to post vacancies and hire teachers. It is free to make a profile and view vacancies using this platform, however, to apply to jobs you need to buy credits to access each school board. These credits are around the \$10 mark and you have access to the jobs for a specified amount of time. It is important to keep your profile updated, as most hiring is done through this portal. The Toronto District School Board, the largest in Ontario, uses its own website, as do others.

### **Hiring in Ontario**

In 2013 Ontario brought in a rule (Regulation 274) that outlined a hierarchy for hiring teachers, which prioritized seniority on the board over qualifications and experience. In 2020, the Minister for Education announced that they were scrapping Reg. 274 due to hiring problems during the pandemic. It is uncertain at this time if it will come back, but school boards still use some form of it at the moment. A big difference between Ireland and Ontario is that hiring is done centrally, other than for permanent positions in schools.

Read about the interim hiring policy in Ontario currently

If you get hired by a school board you will most likely start as a daily occasional teacher (OT). Daily supply teachers have no guaranteed work and pick-up days at different schools. The reliability of work depends on the area you are in. In my first month as a supply teacher, I had three days where I did not work, but I have heard of teachers in other school boards only getting one day a week. Jobs

are posted through Apply to Education (or the website used by the board) and teachers are notified by email, text, or phone call that there is an available job. Once you have accepted a job it is added to your calendar and you will not be offered other jobs for that day. A daily supply rate is paid (around \$200 depending on the board). Plans and work will be left by the teacher you are covering. Although there is no real stability in this job, there is also a lot of flexibility. Being a daily OT allows you to set your own schedule as you can choose whether or not to work.

Long-term assignments are usually covering maternity leave or teachers who are off for a longer length of time. Long-term occasional teachers (LTOs) are paid a salary, prorated to the number of days your assignment is. You do not get paid for holidays, but you make slightly more each day than a permanent teacher (similar to prorated teachers in Ireland). In a LTO, you are responsible for all planning, assessing, etc.

### **Payscale – QECO/ Experience**

As I said above, once you are hired by a school board, in a LTO (long-term assignment), you will be paid a salary, rather than a daily supply rate. The level of pay depends on qualifications and experience. In order to have your qualifications assessed for the pay grid, you must submit an application to QECO.

For this application, you will need to send transcripts from your university directly to them. This process can take a few weeks, so I'd recommend doing it once you are hired by a school board so that you have your assessment if needed. It does not expire. Once QECO has completed their assessment you will be provided with a rating that determines which pay scale you are placed on (A1- A4). You will also be provided with a list of ways that you can upgrade your rating to be paid more. I initially was placed on A2 and completed a number of courses over a year that got me upgraded to A4 (the highest scale).

Once you receive your rating and are in an LTO, submit this to your school board to be placed on the pay scale accordingly. You will be placed at step 1 as you have no years of experience on the board. Some school boards will recognize your experience from overseas or outside the board and will move you up the scale relative to your experience. However, many school boards will not recognize experience that was not full-time and permanent. If you had a one-year contract in Ireland, this would not be recognized as it was not a permanent position.

### **School System**

There are three school levels in Ontario (elementary, middle, and high school). Elementary school is for children from kindergarten to grade 6. Middle school is for children in grade 7 and grade 8 (in some school boards, grade 6 is also in middle school). High school covers grades 9-12. Information about subjects and each grade level can be found on the [Ministry of Education website](#).

Elementary and middle schools run year-long courses (with three terms for reporting purposes), but high schools are semesterised. In high school classes are longer (75 minutes), but there are fewer classes in a day. From my experience, this is 4 classes a day.

### **Private Schools**

There are also private schools in Ontario, where OCT certification is not necessarily needed. There is a website “Canadian Accredited Independent Schools” ([CAIS](#)), where you can find information about the more reputable schools in Canada. I don’t have much knowledge or experience of the private schools system in Canada, but there are schools that will advertise themselves as private schools, and may be inspected by the Ministry of Education, but are less than reputable. These schools are often geared towards international students who wish to attend university in Canada. Exercise caution when applying to private schools and just make sure to research fully. Teaching unions for public teachers in Ontario are incredibly strong, and pay and working conditions are quite good (especially compared to Ireland). Teachers in the private system do not have the same job protections and are usually paid less than public teachers.

Overall, it is a long road to get certified in Ontario, and there are many steps. However, in my experience, the school system and working conditions for teachers are much more favourable than in Ireland. I’ve worked in a few different countries as a teacher, and by far my favourite experience has been in the schools here in Canada.