

Federation of
Law Societies
of Canada

Fédération des ordres
professionnels de juristes
du Canada

National Committee on Accreditation

2025-2026

Annual Report

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INTRODUCTION

The National Committee on Accreditation (NCA) is part of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada, the national organization that brings together Canada's 14 law societies. Through the development of national standards and policies, the Federation supports a consistent and effective regulatory framework for the legal profession across the country. The NCA contributes to this mandate by providing a national certification process for internationally educated lawyers and law graduates, and graduates of Canadian civil law programs seeking entry to common law bar admission programs in Canada.

For 50 years, the NCA has provided a single, national pathway for internationally educated lawyers and law graduates, and graduates of Canadian civil law programs, seeking entry into bar admission programs in Canada's common law jurisdictions. The NCA assesses applicants' legal education and professional experience to determine the requirements to earn a Certificate of Qualification.

The NCA remains the largest gateway to bar admission in Canada's common law jurisdictions.

Applicant volumes have grown significantly over the years. The NCA operates on a cost-recovery model, with all activities funded through assessment, examination, and related fees paid by applicants.

The NCA modernization initiative reached a major milestone in 2025/2026, advancing from design to implementation. Building on work underway since 2017, the new assessment framework and tools have been finalized, and implementation planning is well advanced. These changes will enhance the long-term sustainability of the certification process while supporting better outcomes for applicants.



Total Applications
Received
3,202



Total Assessments
Issued
2,772



Total CQs Issued
1,818

BACKGROUND AND MANDATE

Established in 1977, the National Committee on Accreditation (NCA) is a standing committee of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. The Committee establishes the policies and standards that guide the assessment and certification of internationally educated lawyers, internationally educated law graduates, and graduates of Canadian civil law programs seeking admission to the legal profession in Canada's common law jurisdictions.

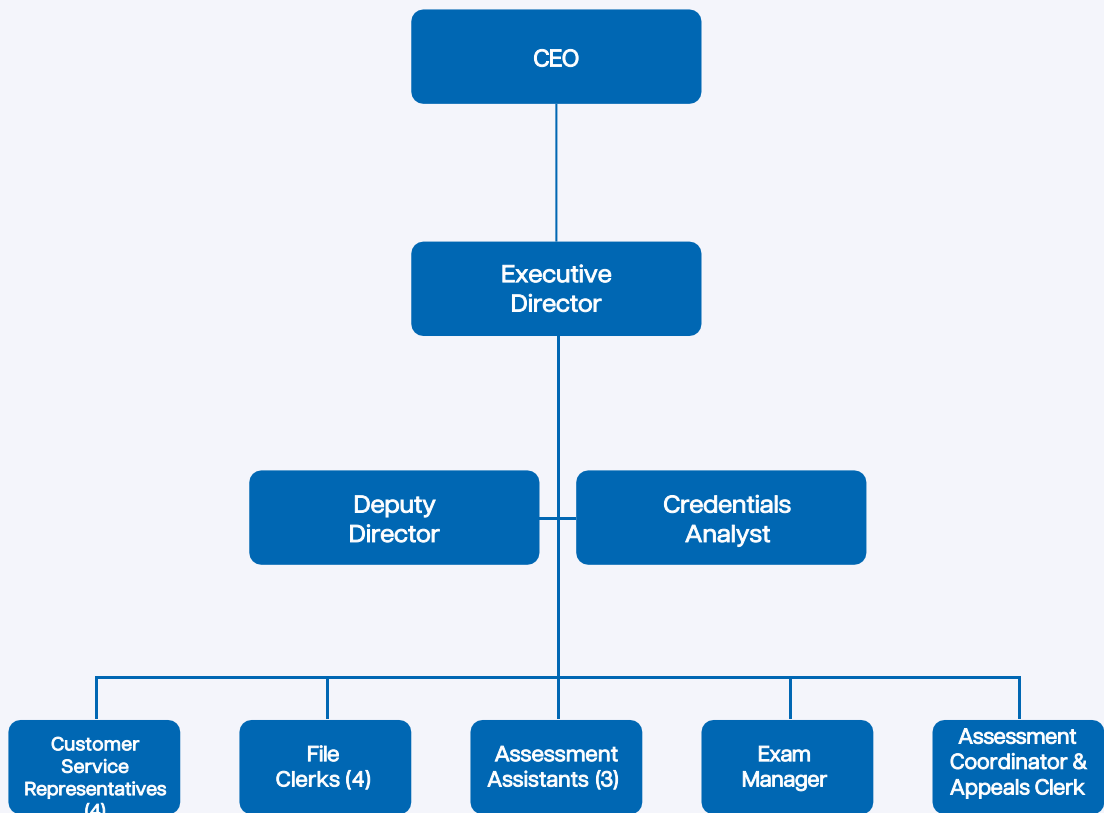
The NCA provides a nationally consistent assessment framework that helps ensure fairness, transparency, and mobility across jurisdictions. Through a standardized assessment process, the NCA determines whether applicants have demonstrated qualifications that are substantially equivalent to those of graduates of approved Canadian common law programs. The Barreau du Québec administers a separate assessment process for internationally trained lawyers seeking to practise law in Québec.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND STAFF

The NCA Committee comprises ten members drawn from across the legal profession, academia, and the regulatory sector. Members are appointed from the Council of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada, law society leadership and staff, the Council of Canadian Law Deans, the practising bar, and individuals from outside the profession with expertise in credentialing and regulation. At least one member must have successfully completed the NCA process, ensuring that the applicant perspective is represented. The Committee is responsible for providing policy direction to the NCA and adjudicating appeals of assessment decisions and findings of misconduct,

within the governance framework established by the Federation.

Day-to-day operations of the NCA are led by Executive Director Deborah Wolfe, who oversees the organization’s budget, strategic initiatives, and team of 19 staff. The Executive Director reports to Federation CEO Jonathan Herman.



POLICIES

The NCA regularly reviews and updates its policies to ensure they remain responsive, effective, and aligned with evolving regulatory and professional standards. In 2025/26, the NCA updated its policies to streamline requirements, clarify processes and timelines, and improve overall accessibility and readability. This year also saw the introduction of two important new requirements: a mandatory language screening assessment and a mandatory course on Indigenous Peoples and the Law in the Canadian context.

The Indigenous Peoples and the Law course was developed in response to Call to Action 27 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It provides applicants with foundational knowledge of Indigenous legal traditions, their relationship to Canadian law, and the principles and practices that support reconciliation. The course is designed to equip future lawyers with a deeper understanding of Indigenous legal issues and their professional responsibilities in this area.

Introduced in 2026, the language screening assessment is required for all NCA applicants before their credentials are evaluated. Available in English and French, the assessment takes less than one hour to complete and the cost is included as part of the application fee. The screening tool provides a more equitable measure of language proficiency than the previous approach, which relied solely on an applicant's country of education. Early results indicate that the new process more accurately identifies language competency: some applicants who would previously have been required to complete a full language test have demonstrated proficiency through the screening assessment, while others who would have been exempt are now required to complete additional testing. Applicants who do not meet the screening threshold must successfully complete a full language assessment before a Certificate of Qualification will be issued.

APPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS AND APPEALS

The NCA assesses each applicant's qualifications individually to determine whether their legal education and professional experience are substantially equivalent to those of a graduate of a Canadian common law program. Assessments are based on the National Requirement, the competency standard that all graduates of approved Canadian common law programs must meet before entering a law society bar admission program.

To satisfy the National Requirement, NCA applicants must demonstrate competency in eight core legal subjects, Canadian Legal Research and Writing (LRW), and, beginning March 1, 2026, Indigenous Peoples and the Law. Applicants must also successfully complete the Language Screening Test. Competency in the following five

Canadian-specific subjects may be demonstrated only through successful completion of NCA examinations or NCA approved courses at a Canadian law school:

- Canadian Administrative Law
- Canadian Constitutional Law
- Canadian Criminal Law
- Canadian Professional Responsibility
- Foundations Canadian Law

Applicants who hold a qualifying common law degree may be able to satisfy requirements in Contracts, Torts, and Property through their prior legal studies, where those courses meet NCA standards.

APPLICATIONS RECEIVED PER YEAR 1999-2026

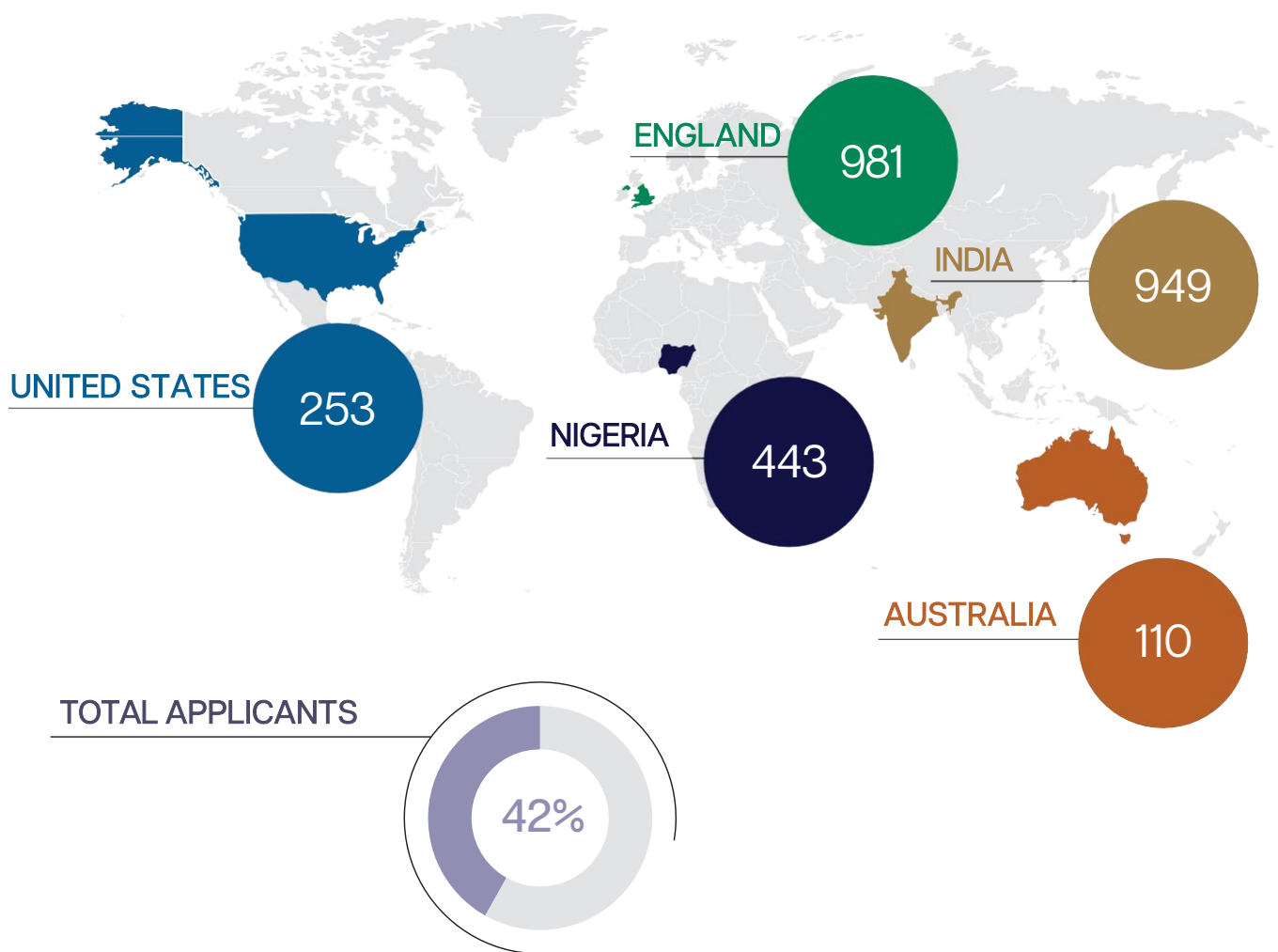


APPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS AND APPEALS continued

Following its assessment, the NCA provides applicants with an individualized assessment report outlining any additional education, examinations, or requirements necessary to demonstrate equivalency with the legal education provided by an approved Canadian common law faculty.

Applicants who wish to challenge an assessment decision may appeal to a three-member panel of the NCA Committee. In 2025/26, four appeal panels reviewed a total of 18 appeals, up from 14 appeals in the previous year.

MAIN SOURCE COUNTRIES FOR APPLICANTS' LEGAL EDUCATION



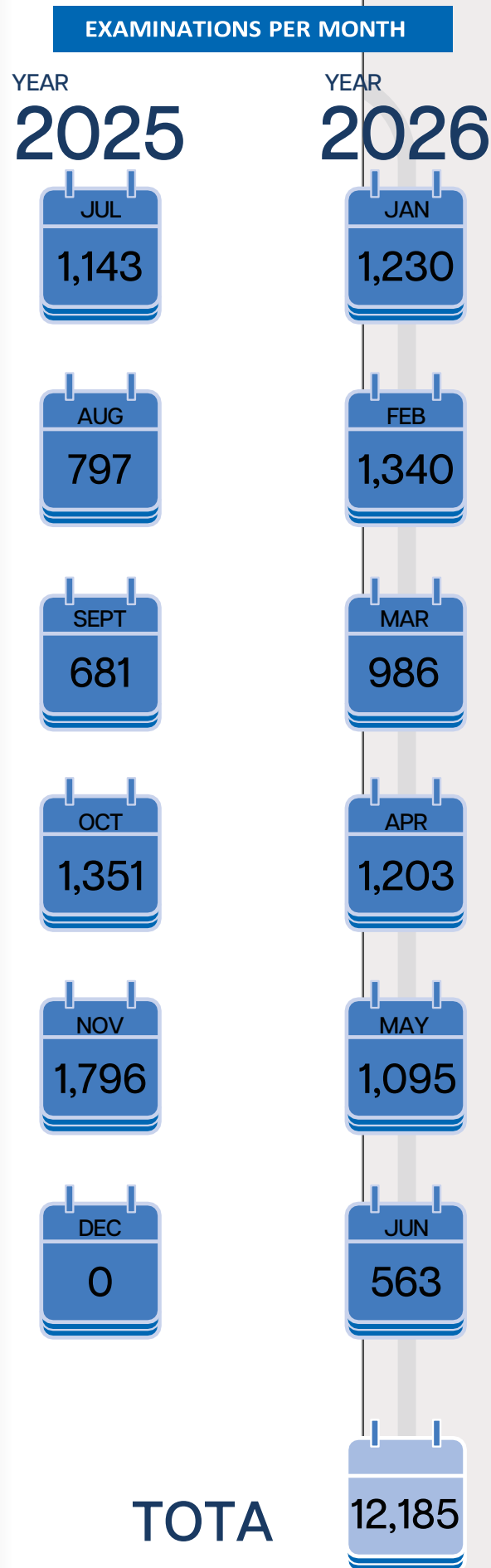
EXAMINATIONS

The NCA works with subject-matter experts from Canadian law schools to develop syllabi and create and assess examinations in mandatory, core, and elective subjects. The examinations are designed to reflect the standards and assessment formats commonly used in Canadian law faculties. To support applicants, the NCA provides a syllabus and sample examination for each subject. The assessment process is based on a self-directed learning model, with candidates responsible for mastering the required material independently.

To support applicants in meeting NCA requirements, a growing number of Canadian law schools offer complementary programs and courses. These include LL.M. programs focused on Canadian common law, bridging programs that combine academic instruction with career development support, and preparatory programs designed specifically for NCA examinations. Applicants may also satisfy certain requirements by completing individual courses at Canadian law schools.

Demand for NCA examinations remained strong in 2025/26, with nearly 12,200 examinations written across 12 examination sessions, compared with approximately 11,600 examinations in the previous year. All NCA examinations are delivered through a secure computer-based platform with remote proctoring, enhancing accessibility while maintaining the integrity and security of the examination process.

The NCA has also seen a significant increase in requests for accommodations related to grounds protected under human rights legislation. In response, staff worked with external experts to refine accommodation request processes, strengthen decision-making principles, and improve supporting documentation. The online examination platform provides greater flexibility in delivering accommodations and accessibility features, including applicant-controlled font sizing and other individualized supports.



CERTIFICATES OF QUALIFICATION

INCREASE IN CERTIFICATES ISSUED OVER TIME 1999-2026

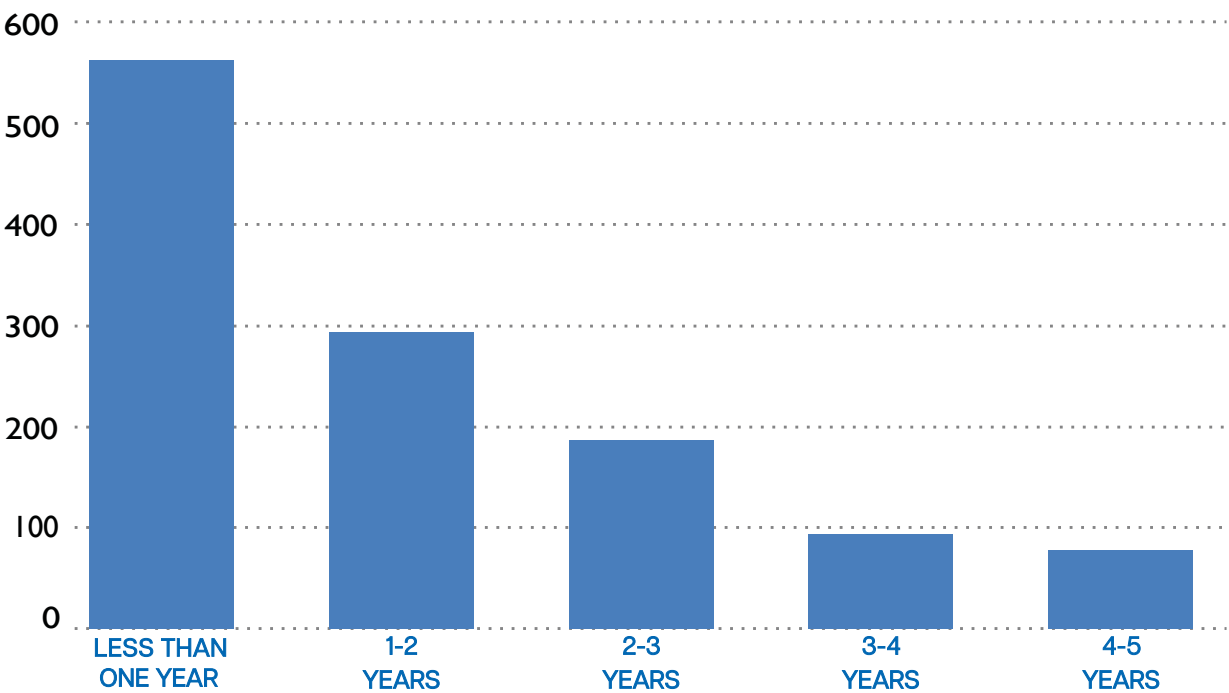


Applicants who successfully complete all assigned examinations, courses, and other requirements are granted a **Certificate of Qualification (CQ)**. The CQ confirms that an applicant has met the NCA’s requirements and is eligible to apply for admission to the bar admission program in any Canadian common law jurisdiction.

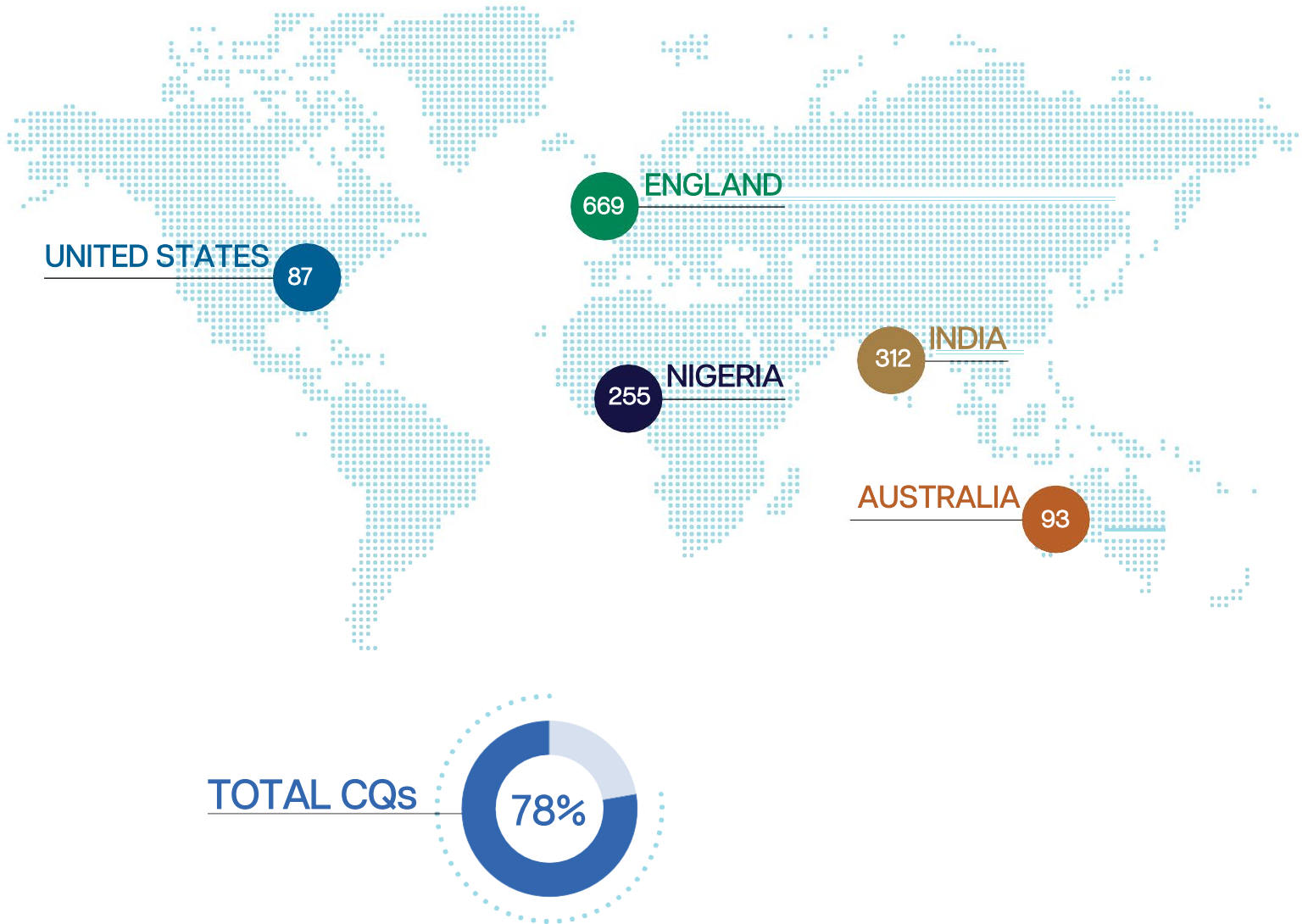
All law societies in Canada’s common law jurisdictions recognize the NCA’s Certificate

of Qualification as the academic prerequisite for entry to their bar admission processes. In 2025/2026, the NCA issued **1,818 Certificates of Qualification**, compared with **2,031** in 2024/25. The year-over-year decrease may be attributable to the timing of examination result releases at the end of the reporting period, particularly whether the results from the May examination session were issued before or after July 1.

NUMBER OF YEARS TO EARN A CQ IN 2025/2026



WHERE DID CQ RECIPIENTS EARN THEIR LAW DEGREES?



The NCA continues to attract applicants from around the world. The five countries that account for the largest share of Certificates of Qualification issued are Australia, England, India, Nigeria, and the United States. Together, graduates from these jurisdictions represent approximately **78%** of all Certificates of Qualification issued during the year.

NCA ASSESSMENT MODERNIZATION

The NCA's multi-year modernization initiative continued to make significant progress in 2025/2026. Building on foundational work undertaken since 2017, efforts during the year focused on implementing the new assessment framework, developing next-generation assessment tools, and designing the examinations that will support a phased rollout beginning in 2027, with full implementation expected in 2028.

Each year, thousands of internationally educated lawyers and law graduates rely on the NCA as a gateway to bar admissions in Canada's common law jurisdictions. The modernization project is transforming the assessment model from one focused primarily on legal knowledge to one that more directly evaluates the competencies required for entry-level legal practice. The new framework aligns with the 2024 National Requirement and supports law societies in fulfilling their public interest mandate by ensuring candidates demonstrate the skills, judgment, and professional competencies required of new lawyers.

Key features of the modernized assessment system include:

- A new **Competency Profile** encompassing eight domains of entry-level legal practice, including legal ethics, communication, advocacy, legal research, and intercultural competence.
- Modern **assessment tools** including multiple-choice examinations, simulations, and oral assessments, designed to evaluate applied knowledge and professional skills in authentic practice-based contexts.
- The integration of **psychometric expertise** into assessment design and validation, alongside subject-matter expertise from legal academics and practitioners.
- Enhanced **language proficiency screening** to ensure candidates can communicate effectively and professionally in either English or French.



Continuous evaluation will be a central feature of the modernized system. Ongoing feedback from applicants, law societies, and other stakeholders, combined with data-driven performance monitoring, will support continuous improvement and help ensure the assessment process remains fair, valid, reliable, and responsive to the evolving needs of the legal profession and the public it serves.

ENGAGEMENT WITH LAW SOCIETIES AND OTHER ASSOCIATIONS

Maintaining strong relationships with law societies, law schools, professional regulators, and related organizations is an important part of the NCA's work. These connections help ensure that NCA policies and processes are well understood, inform ongoing policy development, and enable the NCA to stay current with emerging trends and best practices in credential assessment and professional regulation. The NCA's governance structure, which includes representatives from law societies, legal academia, the practising bar, and regulatory experts, helps foster these relationships.

Engagement is further strengthened through the Executive Director's participation in meetings of law school admissions officials and the Association of Canadian Legal Education Directors (ACLED). Given that many NCA applicants complete assigned requirements through Canadian law schools, ongoing dialogue with legal educators remains particularly valuable.

Throughout 2025/2026, the Executive Director and Deputy Director continued to engage with applicants, law schools, and regulatory stakeholders to support awareness and

understanding of NCA policies, processes, and requirements. Key outreach activities included:

- Participating in the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) Law School Forum in Toronto, including presentations to prospective law students and one-on-one discussions with individuals considering legal studies outside Canada.
- Presenting to NCA applicants enrolled at Canadian law schools, including the University of Toronto, Osgoode Hall Law School, the University of Manitoba and the University of British Columbia.
- Delivering monthly virtual information sessions for students attending law schools in the United Kingdom and, for the first time, a virtual information session for students in Australia.
- Participating in meetings of law society admissions officials from across Canada.
- Presenting to law school admissions officials and gathering feedback on their experiences supporting NCA students.

THE YEAR AHEAD

The NCA enters 2026/2027 with a strong focus on advancing its modernization agenda. Building on the recommendations arising from the NCA Program Review, the Committee and staff will continue working to ensure that holders of the Certificate of Qualification are well prepared to succeed in bar admission programs and, ultimately, in legal practice in common-law jurisdictions in Canada.

Key priorities for the coming year include:

- Strengthening the NCA’s financial sustainability through continued collaboration between the Executive Director and the Director, Finance and Administration on budget and reserve management.
- Working with the NCA Committee and Policy Counsel to update and refine NCA policies to ensure they remain responsive, clear, and aligned with evolving regulatory requirements
- Advancing implementation of the Assessment Modernization initiative through the continued development, testing, and validation of new assessment tools.
- Further enhancing the online examination platform and expanding supports and resources for applicants.
- Continuing to evaluate NCA operations through interest holder feedback, including surveys of law societies and Certificate of Qualification recipients, to support evidence-based improvements and ensure the organization remains effective, efficient, and responsive.
- Strengthening engagement with law societies, law schools, professional regulators, and related organizations to support collaboration, information sharing, and the exchange of best practices.





The Committee and staff remain grateful for the ongoing collaboration and support of Council and staff at the Federation, law societies, legal educators, and interest holders across Canada. Together, they are helping to ensure that internationally educated legal professionals have a clear, transparent, and effective pathway to joining Canada's legal profession.



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