

**Ministry of Colleges and  
Universities**

Office of the Minister

438 University Avenue, 5<sup>th</sup> floor  
Toronto ON M7A 0B8

Tel.: 416 326-1600

**Ministère des Collèges et  
Universités**

Bureau de la ministre

438, avenue University, 5e étage  
Toronto ON M7A 0B8

Tél. : 416 326-1600



September 29, 2022

Dr. Karin Schnarr  
Chair  
Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario  
2500 – 88 Queens Quay West  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5J 0B8

Dear Dr. Schnarr,

As you begin planning for 2023-24, I am pleased to write to you in your capacity as Chair of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). Pursuant to the requirements of the Agencies and Appointments Directive, this letter sets out my expectations for HEQCO for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

Ontario's board-governed agencies are vital partners in ensuring the delivery of high-quality services to Ontarians. The work that you and your fellow board members undertake to establish the goals, objectives, and strategic direction for HEQCO ensures that the agency is meeting its mandate. It is important that this direction is consistent with government priorities, your agency mandate, key policies and directives and my directions, where appropriate. I thank you for your willingness to serve.

As you know, as outlined in the *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act, 2005*, your agency's mandate is to assist me in improving all aspects of Ontario's postsecondary education sector, including improving the quality of, and access to, postsecondary education, and enhancing the accountability of Ontario's publicly-assisted colleges and universities. HEQCO's mandate includes the monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the ongoing implementation of the Campus Free Speech Policy at publicly-assisted colleges and universities. Additionally, HEQCO's function includes any Minister-specified evaluations of the ministry's programs and services, or other postsecondary education programs and services provided or funded by the Government of Ontario.

## ***Agency Sector Priorities for 2023-24***

Government-wide expectations for agencies, to reflect in HEQCO's business planning process include:

### **1. Competitiveness, Sustainability and Expenditure Management**

- Identifying efficiencies and savings through innovative practices, and/or improved program sustainability.
- Operate within the agency's financial allocations.
- Complying with applicable direction related to supply chain centralization, including contract harmonization for planned and pending procurements, accounting practices and realty interim measures for agency office space.
- Leveraging and meeting benchmarked outcomes for compensation strategies and directives.

### **2. Transparency and Accountability**

- Abiding by applicable government directives and policies and ensuring transparency and accountability in reporting.
- Adhering to accounting standards and practices, and responding to audit findings, where applicable.
- Identifying appropriate skills, knowledge and experience needed to effectively support the board's role in agency governance and accountability.

### **3. Risk Management**

- Developing and implementing an effective process for the identification, assessment, and mitigation of agency risks, including COVID-19 impacts and any future emergency risks.

### **4. Workforce Management**

- Optimizing your organizational capacity to support the best possible public service delivery, including redeploying resources to priority areas, where needed.
- Supporting the implementation of the Community Jobs Initiative (CJI) by identifying opportunities to relocate new or existing agencies to lower cost communities.

### **5. Diversity and Inclusion**

- Developing and encouraging diversity and inclusion initiatives by promoting an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace.
- Adopting an inclusion engagement process to ensure all voices are heard to inform policies and decision-making.

### **6. Data Collection**

- Improving how the agency uses data in decision-making, information sharing and reporting, to inform outcome-based reporting and improve service delivery.

- Increasing data sharing with Supply Ontario when applicable regarding procurement spending and planning, contract arrangements and vendor relations to support data-driven decision-making.

## **7. Digital Delivery and Customer Service**

- Exploring and implementing digitization for online service delivery to ensure customer service standards are met.
- Using a variety of approaches or tools to ensure service delivery in all situations, including pursuing delivery methods that have evolved since COVID-19.

These are the government-wide commitments for board-governed provincial agencies. Please see the attached guide for further details of each priority.

### ***Postsecondary Education Priorities***

Ontario continues to rebuild – recovering from the impacts of the pandemic remains a priority throughout the province, including in the postsecondary education (PSE) sector. The 2022 Ontario Budget includes government investments in the PSE sector focused on expanding the health sector workforce. Additional investments in research and innovation in the postsecondary sector are being made to support economic growth and future pandemic preparedness.

The government is providing greater flexibility to postsecondary students by expanding college degree granting options and continuing to ensure that Ontario students have access to affordable high-quality postsecondary education by continuing the current tuition freeze for publicly-assisted colleges and universities for the 2022-23 academic year.

Other key priorities for the sector include the financial sustainability of postsecondary institutions, enhancing postsecondary education and training for Indigenous learners, and supporting Ontario's Francophone Community.

In 2023-24, I would like HEQCO's work to include the following priorities:

### ***Postsecondary Students' Mental Health***

We request that HEQCO conduct a scan of activities that Ontario PSE institutions - as well as institutions in other jurisdictions - are undertaking to support students' mental health. HEQCO could also conduct a review of available literature regarding mental health of PSE students. This work would identify key themes, issues, and potential opportunities.

### ***Program Evaluations - Services for Students with Disabilities***

We would like to request that HEQCO undertake an evaluation of ministry programs supporting students with disabilities. This evaluation was initially requested in 2020 by the ministry but was deferred.

To ensure that ministry special purpose grants achieve their purpose of assisting colleges and universities to meet their legal obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code of providing accommodations to students with disabilities, we request that HEQCO:

- Provide support to the ministry by researching and providing advice on the ministry's special purpose grants supporting services for students with disabilities.
- Working with the ministry, conduct research and engage with institutions on the impact of special purpose grants to institutions serving students with disabilities working with the ministry.
- Research best practices in other jurisdictions to identify ways to improve ministry funding administration related to students with disabilities and outcomes related to this funding.

### ***Campus Free Speech Policy***

HEQCO's role of monitoring and evaluating ongoing implementation of the Campus Free Speech Policy continues to be a priority for the ministry. I look forward to receiving your annual report summarizing and assessing institutions' implementation of the Policy.

I thank you and your fellow board members for your continued support, and for your valuable contributions. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Paddy Buckley, Director of the Postsecondary Education Policy Branch, at Paddy.Buckley@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Jill Dunlop  
Minister of Colleges and Universities

c: Dr. Janice Deakin, President and Chief Executive Officer, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario  
Paddy Buckley, Director of the Postsecondary Education Policy Branch  
Doug Brewer, Chief of Staff, Ministry of Colleges and Universities  
Shelley Tapp, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Colleges and Universities

Attachment:

- Government Priorities for Agency Sector Chart