

Ministry of Colleges and Universities

Office of the Minister

438 University Avenue, 5th 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, 2023

Shelley McGill
Acting Chair
Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
2500 – 88 Queens Quay West
Toronto, ON M5J 0B8

Dear Shelley McGill,

I am pleased to share our government's 2024-25 priorities for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

As Acting Chair, you play a vital role in helping HEQCO achieve its mandate. It is important that your agency's goals, objectives, and strategic direction continue to align with our government's priorities and direction. As part of the government of Ontario, agencies are expected to act in the best interests of the people of Ontario and ensure that they provide value for money to taxpayers. Agencies are also required to adhere to government policies and directives.

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.

Per the requirements of the Agencies and Appointments Directive, this letter sets out my expectations for HEQCO for 2024-25. These priorities include agency sector priorities and postsecondary education priorities.

Agency Sector Priorities for 2024-25

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

1. Competitiveness, Sustainability and Expenditure Management

- Operating within the agency's financial allocations.
- Identifying and pursuing, efficiencies and savings through innovative practices, and/or improved program sustainability.
- Complying with applicable direction related to accounting practices and supply chain centralization, including leveraging Supply Ontario's bulk purchasing arrangement and working with Supply Ontario on strategic procurement initiatives.
- Complying with realty interim measures for agency office space.
- Leverage and meet 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, and providing the Minister with annual skills matrices to ensure boards have qualified appointees.
- Reviewing and updating agency KPIs annually to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

3. Risk Management

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

4. Workforce/Labour 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 across Ontario (as per MBC Realty Directive, s. 5.4), if applicable.
- Aligning Human Resource and Accommodations strategies with OPS directives and policy.
- Adhering to TB/MBC labour and bargaining mandates.
- Prudently and efficiently managing operational funding and workforce size.

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, Sharing and Use

- 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.

Postsecondary Education Priorities

Postsecondary education continues to be a key driver for Ontario's economy. The 2023 Ontario Budget: *Building a Strong Ontario* includes government investments in a variety of postsecondary education areas including health human resources (e.g., nursing and medical education), micro-credentials (e.g., second round of the Challenge Fund), work-integrated learning (i.e., investment in Mitacs) as well as research initiatives to support productivity and economic growth. The ministry also launched the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant which provides funding for students studying in priority programs in priority communities in Ontario.

As you know, in March 2023, the ministry announced the establishment of a blue-ribbon panel to provide recommendations to keep Ontario's colleges and universities financially sustainable and focused on providing the best student experience possible. A Final Report is expected in Fall 2023. As the ministry looks ahead to supporting key priorities emerging from the blue-ribbon panel's work, the ministry is planning on focusing more attention to enrolment forecasting and how better forecasting can inform ministry planning and decision-making.

In 2024-25, I would like HEQCO's work to include the following:

Enrolment Projections and Population Demographics

I request that HEQCO, in partnership with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, work collaboratively to research and better understand postsecondary enrolment projections, with a particular focus on domestic students. Working with the ministry, I ask that HEQCO study enrolment and demographic trends for postsecondary education in Ontario. The ministry will provide HEQCO with relevant data, including applicable data from the Ministry of Finance related to population growth by age band and residency status. I ask that HEQCO and the ministry work together to analyze these trends and its impact on the postsecondary education system to inform ministry decision-making.

Part-Time College Enrolment

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities measures enrolment for full-time and part-time college students using different approaches in the funding formula for the core operating grant. A differentiated approach may lead to potential concerns that funding is inequitable or disincentivizes part-time enrolment and therefore limits access to postsecondary education. I request that HEQCO, in partnership with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, conduct research on:

- The current profile of part-time college learners, including their typical course loads compared to full-time students, the proportion that complete credentials, and length of time to complete credentials compared to full-time students.
- The data that colleges collect on part-time learners, including whether they apply to credential programs on a part-time basis at the point of intake or enrol on a course-by-course basis until they reach credential completion.
- Potential options for a revised funding approach for part-time students as part of the ministry's corridor model. In particular, identify potential options regarding how part-time enrolments could be measured in the Weighted Funding Units (WFU) enrolment measure that is used to determine funding levels in the corridor model, and provide any costing estimates at the current funding rate per WFU.

Campus Free Speech Policy

HEQCO's role of monitoring and evaluating ongoing implementation of the Campus Free Speech Policy has supported the ongoing application of the policy. I look forward to receiving your annual report for 2023 summarizing and assessing institutions' implementation of the Policy. In the months ahead, the ministry will work with you on next steps with respect to the Campus Free Speech Policy and HEQCO's role in that work.

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 Ivonne Mellozzi, (Acting) Director of the Postsecondary Education Policy Branch, at Ivonne.Mellozzi@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Jill Dunlop
Minister of Colleges and Universities

Attachment: Government Priorities for the Agency Sector Chart

c: Dr. Janice Deakin, President and Chief Executive Officer, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
Scott Allinson, Chief of Staff (Interim), Minister's Office
David Wai, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Colleges and Universities
Ivonne Mellozzi, Director (A), Postsecondary Education Policy Branch