

Time to introduce new postsecondary performance metrics, report argues

Ontario's postsecondary education system would be best served by a set of performance metrics that would measure, among other things, the skills students acquire during their studies, the link between programs and job success, and institutional financial performance, argues a new paper by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

In the 2019 budget, the Ontario government announced plans to increase the proportion of funding it provides to the province's colleges and universities that is tied to performance outcomes. The proportion will rise to 60% by the 2024–25 academic year from less than 2% currently. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities provides \$5 billion a year in operating grants to Ontario's 44 public colleges and universities.

The report, *Postsecondary Education Metrics for the 21st Century*, argues that it's time to take a fresh look at how to best evaluate the performance of the province's postsecondary system. It suggests that performance metrics be closely tied to government policy, focused on impact and outcomes rather than inputs, based on the best available data and motivated by a desire for improvement rather than accountability.

"Making sure that we reap the expected impact and value from our public investment in higher education is a legitimate and responsible function of government," the report states. "To accomplish this, it is necessary to have a system of performance measurement and a related series of metrics that are meaningful and informative."

The paper recommends that a new system of performance metrics do the following:

- Use the Ontario Education Number to calculate graduation rates and student mobility patterns. Use the data to improve retention, mobility and credit transfer, and program-level graduation outcomes.
- Initiate a province-wide assessment of core transferable skills that focuses on literacy, numeracy and critical thinking to improve outcomes for graduates entering the labour market.
- Use tax-linked longitudinal data sets to assess graduates' labour market outcomes such as employment rates and income, and use the data to drive improvement at the program level.

- Measure the participation rate and economic lift experienced by low-income and first-generation students, and use the data to tailor strategies that close the gaps in participation and labour market outcomes.
- Require institutions to measure and publish the true “all-in” rates of increase in individual employee remuneration, and use the data to inform sustainable compensation strategies.
- Require institutions to publish faculty workload data including teaching loads, research outputs and salary levels. Use the data to deploy faculty effectively, and to drive differentiation at the faculty and institutional levels.
- Monitor key financial health ratios of Ontario colleges and universities to identify and remediate emerging sustainability issues in a timely manner.

The report also suggests that these metrics apply to all elements of the province’s higher education and training system, including colleges, universities, private career colleges and the apprenticeship system. “Better data will result in better planning, stronger execution and increased differentiation, as well as the development of outcomes-based funding mechanisms and meaningful, intentional performance agreements between government and providers,” the paper states.

Postsecondary Education Metrics for the 21st Century is written by Harvey P. Weingarten, Martin Hicks, Amy Kaufman, Ken Chatoor, Emily MacKay and Jackie Pichette, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.