

## **Stakeholder Summary**

### **Adult high school students aiming for higher education**

Most adults return to high school because they want to pursue postsecondary education, according to a new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). The most often cited reasons for going back were the need for a better paying job, to train for a particular career, the desire to continue learning and/or to pursue personal interests.

#### **Project Description**

*Returning to High School in Ontario: Adult Students, Postsecondary Plans and Program Supports* examined the role of adult high school programs in supporting postsecondary access. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from approximately 500 adult students in Ontario to understand the adult high school population, their postsecondary plans and concerns, the adult high school learning environment and postsecondary transition supports.

#### **Findings**

Most of the students in this study were women, immigrants, or Aboriginal and tended to be from low-income backgrounds. Half of the students already had a high school diploma and were returning to acquire prerequisites for a particular postsecondary program or had a foreign credential that was not recognized by Canadian institutions or employers. Others did not complete high school in Ontario as adolescents due to difficulties in their personal lives, lack of interest in school, or wanting or needing to work.

While financial factors did not have a significant influence on plans to attend PSE, comments following the survey questions were predominantly about finances. However, students were knowledgeable about the options available for financing PSE such as OSAP and their eligibility and other government aid programs.

The majority of students planned to attend college rather than university. While aspirations may be high, only one-quarter of the students applied to PSE. Those that went tended to choose programs that have an explicit career path such as health care, engineering or technology.

Students noted the lack of guidance and career counselling in high schools as well as the misalignment with their courses and career aspirations. Students wanted to see course content that was more career-oriented and applied to the workplace.

This study is one of many initiated by HEQCO to explore the pathways to postsecondary education of “non-traditional” students and the policy changes that may ease their transition into and through Ontario’s postsecondary system.

*Returning to High School in Ontario: Adult Students, Postsecondary Plans and Program Supports* was written by Christine Pinsent-Johnson, Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA), Shannon Howell, CCI Research Inc. and Rebekka King, CESBA.