

## Stakeholder Summary

### **Affiliated /federated universities valuable players in Ontario's postsecondary system**

Ontario has 16 affiliated and federated universities that are historically church-governed but became associated with one of the province's publicly supported universities as primarily secular institutions. A new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) says that these institutions provide a distinctive educational experience and are potentially valuable players within a provincial higher education system that is seeking greater differentiation.

#### **Project description**

*Affiliated and Federated Universities as Sources of University Differentiation* examined these institutions' role within the postsecondary system and their contributions to system differentiation in Ontario. Focusing on affiliates whose students are primarily enrolled in secular academic programs rather than theology programs, the study included interviews with 12 presidents of the institutions, a review of documents from institutional websites and analysis of National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data.

#### **Findings**

Carleton, Laurentian, Ottawa, Toronto, Waterloo and Western each have one or more affiliated or federated institutions that offer primarily secular programs. Among typical (although not universal) characteristics, they are largely focused on undergraduate students and the liberal arts, emphasize a sense of community and value teaching at least as much as research. In fact, a majority of interviewees said that teaching was their priority and that faculty are hired based on their capacity for and interest in being great teachers.

These institutions also offer a small-campus experience; almost all interviewees cited data about small class sizes as an important distinguishing characteristic of their institutions. The institutions are often sites for academic innovation in teaching and learning and may incorporate a commitment to social justice and community service that is inspired by their religious heritage.

At the five institutions that report NSSE data, scores in student-faculty interaction and supportive campus environment are stronger than those of most publicly supported universities – consistent with claims that many interviewees made about the small-campus experience they offer.

#### **Recommendations**

In its early stages, the Ontario government's [differentiation policy framework](#) has focused on each of the publicly supported universities as a whole. As the policy matures, it would be reasonable to drill down into the role played by the affiliates in offering a distinctive experience within Ontario's higher education system, says the report's author. He adds that it should be possible for the government and

the parent universities to have frank discussions about how to protect this element of differentiation in the face of competing priorities.

Policymakers should also consider ways of identifying and encouraging other models of educational innovation within each of Ontario's publicly supported universities. Experimentation with innovative teaching and learning strategies, as emphasized by the affiliated and federated universities, may become an important strategy for improving the overall quality of undergraduate teaching and learning.

*Author of **Affiliated and Federated Universities as Sources of University Differentiation** is David Trick, president of David Trick and Associates Inc., consultants in higher education strategy and management.*