

Fact Sheet

Accountability Chapter 4: Third Annual Review and Research Plan

Multi-Year Accountability Agreements

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario has been actively collaborating with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to assist in the development of a new Multi-Year Accountability Agreement (MYAA) framework for the postsecondary education system. We have conducted an extensive consultation and research process, and HEQCO researchers have participated in a joint working group with Ministry staff. This is a summary of our work and recommendations to date.

We believe that an accountability framework has three key purposes:

- To report to the public on the performance of the PSE system relative to expectations;
- To provide a format for the Ministry and colleges and universities to use to record institutional priorities and to report on performances relative to expectations; and
- To bring about change in the PSE system or in activities of individual institutions as appropriate.

Thus, the framework we recommend has three components:

- system accountability;
- institution accountability; and
- planning.

The challenge is to design a framework that meets four key requirements. The first is to take full advantage of institutional autonomy. This delegation leaves delivery of PSE activities to those with the expertise and experience -- namely colleges, universities, and other educational institutions. This would provide scope for experimentation and innovation in how education and research are delivered and provide diversity in student choices. The other requirements follow directly from the three purposes: to ensure that system-wide objectives are met, to support an appropriate degree of monitoring of colleges and universities, and to provide clear direction of how change, where required, is to be achieved.

System Accountability

There are four steps in designing an accountability component for the postsecondary education system:

1. Define broad objectives for the PSE system.
2. Choose appropriate indicators and targets.
3. Devise a process for evaluating performance against those targets.
4. Develop a procedure for reporting to the public in a clear and transparent fashion.

Institutional Accountability

The institution accountability components of the proposed framework would be designed with two purposes in mind. The first would be to determine if the institution is meeting its expected contribution to achieving system-wide goals and targets. The second is to determine if it is meeting its individual goals and targets.

Mission-specific indicators would reflect institutional diversity and autonomy. Each institution works diligently to develop a strategic plan that is approved by its governing bodies. Their institutional goals should be recognized and targets agreed to, based on their stated intentions. Thus the number and type of indicators would vary, reflecting the diversity of the stated missions of the institutions.

Ideally, performance indicators would be measures of output or final outcomes because these are the variables of real interest, and are most easily understood by stakeholders and the general public. In some instances, however, it may be necessary to use input or process variables as proxy measures. If so, it is essential to understand their limitations.

Planning Component

Currently, targets are set with individual institutions, and overall reporting on the achievement of those targets is not done on the system as a whole. Analysis of reports on performance against planned targets can and should become more sophisticated, with deeper analysis of results at the institutional level.

Annual stakeholder consultations to determine sector-wide targets are both desirable and feasible. Conversations could be based on reporting by HEQCO and others on system performance relative to expectations. The government could build upon this to collaboratively establish system-wide goals and targets. Annual consultations with government and institutions should take place to determine how each institution will contribute to system-wide goals by setting institution-specific core targets that recognize the differentiated missions of institutions. Institutional consultations would also take place on institution-specific goals relative to objectives.

Figure 4.1 is a diagram of this proposed MYAA process.

FIGURE 4.1
The Annual Accountability Process

