

Review of the  
Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

Report submitted by Lorne A. Whitehead, September 28, 2011

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

This report presents the results of a review of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) carried out by Professor Lorne Whitehead of the University of British Columbia in August and September 2011. As requested under the terms of reference provided by the HEQCO Board, the review focused on four basic questions:

- In light of HEQCO's mandate as identified in the HEQCO Act, how would you assess (i) the scope and quality of the research and publications being conducted and (ii) the dissemination of the research and policy work?
- Overall, how well has HEQCO fulfilled its mandate to the government and public as identified in the HEQCO Act?
- How would you assess HEQCO's future plans as reflected in the 2011-2012 Research Plan and Communications Strategy?
- Are there strategic opportunities or challenges for HEQCO in the future in light of the changing postsecondary environment in Ontario, nationally and internationally and what should HEQCO do to seize these opportunities or meet these challenges?

The review methodology consisted of a review of HEQCO publications and interviews with key HEQCO personnel and representatives of stakeholders.

The first three questions called for an assessment of quality of work, fulfillment of mandate, and near-term plans. In each case a consistent picture emerged of work at the forefront of international excellence. A key to HEQCO's success has been to follow a middle path, carefully navigated by HEQCO management, that has enabled HEQCO to be responsive to the needs of its dominant funder, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, while maintaining a reputation as an independent trusted authority. HEQCO's leaders have a clear understanding of this need for balance. Their plans for successfully moving forward are clear, credible and integral to continued improvement of higher education in Ontario.

The fourth question concerned a longer time frame. Looking forward, most experts predict a significant acceleration of the rate of change within the higher education sector. For this reason a suggestion is presented for slightly expanding HEQCO's research portfolio to include a longer-term outlook for the sector and to consider possible implications for upcoming decisions. A related consideration is that much of HEQCO's research is valuable throughout Canada, which suggests that some form of inter-provincial collaboration on such research matters could be beneficial. With greater interprovincial cooperation, it could be possible to increase the overall level of needed research without increasing costs within Ontario, while also further enhancing HEQCO's reputation as an independent, trusted authority.

## 2.0 Terms of Reference

The terms of the review were provided in the following statement prepared by the Board of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario:

### **HEQCO Periodic External Review**

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) was established in 2005 by an Act of the Ontario Legislature with a mandate to assist the government -- and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities in particular – on a variety of matters to improve the accessibility, accountability and quality of Ontario’s colleges and universities.

HEQCO became operational in 2007 and since that time has published, completed, or has in progress, over 120 publications arising from research it has conducted internally or has commissioned from outside researchers, @Issue papers that summarize the state of research on a significant issue in postsecondary education (e.g. tuition policy options), policy analyses and recommendations for government and the sector (e.g. advice on “polytechnics” and greater differentiation of Ontario’s university sector), and annual reports and community reports.

It is an appropriate time to have an external expert review of HEQCO’s performance and its future plans.

Specifically, we are asking one or more experts in post-secondary education, who are at arms-length from HEQCO, to review HEQCO’s performance, contributions and future plans by answering the following questions:

- In light of HEQCO’s mandate as identified in the HEQCO Act, how would you assess (i) the scope and quality of the research and publications being conducted and (ii) the dissemination of the research and policy work?
- Overall, how well has HEQCO fulfilled its mandate to the government and public as identified in the HEQCO Act?
- How would you assess HEQCO’s future plans as reflected in the 2011-2012 Research Plan and Communications Strategy?
- Are there strategic opportunities or challenges for HEQCO in the future in light of the changing postsecondary environment in Ontario, nationally and internationally and what should HEQCO do to seize these opportunities or meet these challenges?

The review was carried out by Lorne Whitehead, a Professor at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. A brief biography for Dr. Whitehead is presented in Appendix A.

### 3.0 Review Procedure

The review began with telephone conversations during the month of August, 2011, with HEQCO Board Chair Dr. Frank Iacobucci and HEQCO CEO Dr. Harvey Weingarten. In the course of these discussions, an assessment procedure was agreed upon, commencing with HEQCO sending to Dr. Whitehead a set of recent relevant literature produced by HEQCO, as well as past and present operating plans and vision statements. In addition to reviewing these materials and the HEQCO website, Dr. Whitehead interviewed the following individuals, primarily during a series of meetings held in Toronto on September 13, 2011:

#### Meetings:

- Frank Iacobucci, Chair, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
- Harvey Weingarten, President and CEO, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
- Ken Norrie, Vice President, Research, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
- Alex Johnston, Executive Director, Policy & Research, Office of Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty
- Deborah Newman, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
- Marie-Lison Fougère, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy and Programs Division, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
- Ian Clark, Professor, School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Toronto
- David Naylor, President, University of Toronto
- Linda Franklin, President & CEO, Colleges Ontario
- Bill Summers, Vice President, Research & Policy, Colleges Ontario

#### 4.0 Introductory comments

Before commencing the discussions concerning HEQCO, it had already become clear to the reviewer that there are two quite different aspects of the organization, which are co-dependent and important in different ways. Over the course of the review it became clear that differentiating these two roles helped to bring clarity to numerous comments and opinions. Based on this observation, it was felt appropriate to begin this report with a discussion of these roles.

HEQCO's first role, clearly set out in the HEQCO Act (see Appendix B), is to provide the Government of Ontario and also institutions of higher education in Ontario with information and advice that will help them to make better planning decisions. Throughout this report, this will be termed HEQCO's "Advisory Role".

HEQCO's second role, which is required to support the first, is to carry out and commission research on factors influencing the quality of higher education in Ontario. Throughout this report, this will be termed HEQCO's "Research Role".

There is no doubt that HEQCO's Research Role is required to support its Advisory Role. However there are important differences in these two roles that are helpful to bear in mind. By far the most significant is that HEQCO's Advisory Role is highly specific to Ontario, whereas a great deal of the work and results associated with the Research Role are applicable not only in Ontario, but throughout Canada and elsewhere.

Another key difference is that the range of activities that fall within the Advisory Role is largely determined by those directly seeking HEQCO's advice (primarily the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities) and their needs are well-defined. In contrast, the range of activities that appropriately fall within HEQCO's Research Role must be determined by HEQCO, in alignment with its overall mandate, as the most effective way to meet the information needs of stakeholders. The focus in this second case is still ultimately on the needs of end users of the information, but the design process is more creative - there is a wide range of possible research that needs to be carefully considered as HEQCO plans its research program. While HEQCO's budget is not allocated according to these two roles, it is clear that the Research Role should require the majority of the funds; in discussions with HEQCO management this portion is estimated to be above 80%, which seems appropriate.

During the course of discussions and interviews, it was often found that a person's interest in HEQCO was primarily in one or the other of these two roles, and generally a brief discussion of the two roles was helpful to frame and clarify the conversation.

Several people also pointed out a role that HEQCO does *not* have, namely advocacy. As will be discussed in several places in this report, this "non-role" is an important contributor to HEQCO's reputation as a trustworthy, neutral authority.

Everyone interviewed was generous with their time, offering thoughtful and constructive advice. The reviewer did not encounter extreme or highly contradictory views, and a self-consistent straightforward picture emerged over the course of the discussions.

For this reason, the most efficient way to present these findings is not in specific reference to individual points of view, but instead according to the four key tasks described in the Terms of Reference for the project; this is the format will be followed in the remainder of the report.

## 5.0 The scope and quality of HEQCO research & its dissemination

HEQCO carries out and commissions a wide range of research and the resultant findings are disseminated in a commensurately wide range of publications and communication venues. It would be very difficult for one reviewer alone to expertly assess all aspects of the quality of this work. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to begin here with the reviewer's personal view, which is that both the quality of the research and the quality of its communication are, in a word, superb. Research in the scholarship of teaching and learning is challenging for several reasons – the discipline is complex, research with human subjects is and should be highly constrained, and it is challenging to clearly express the key ideas especially when communicating with diverse audiences. From this perspective, the opinion of this reviewer is that HEQCO is performing at the top level of international excellence.

Since this is just one person's view on a somewhat subjective question, it was felt important to keep the question of research and dissemination quality central to most of the interviews that took place. A strong consensus emerged that closely matched the reviewer's initial opinion.

Additionally, since those interviewed were not necessarily disciplinary experts over the full range of HEQCO's work, it was important to consider other metrics of quality. One such indicator is the quality of the HEQCO research staff. Under the research leadership of the respected economist and university leader, Dr. Ken Norrie, it is clear that HEQCO has attracted an expert research team that has the required know-how to critically assess both internal work and external research commissioned by HEQCO, providing a built-in quality control check.

Furthermore, about half of HEQCO's dissemination takes place in respected anonymously peer-reviewed scholarly journals and/or at scholarly conferences, providing an independent quality check. Certainly not all of HEQCO's dissemination should be via such scholarly channels, because this would not be the most efficient way to serve HEQCO's primary client. But the fact that much of the work is so published provides added assurance of its quality.

Additional evidence of this quality can be found in a recent book by University of Toronto Professor Ian Clark et al., entitled "Academic Reform: Policy Options for Improving the Quality and Cost-Effectiveness of Undergraduate Education in Ontario". The book cites important literature from numerous sources around the world, and the most heavily cited authority is HEQCO. One might surmise the reason is that both the book and HEQCO focus on Ontario. However this Ontario connection is of only minor relevance - the work is cited mainly because HEQCO has become a major "go to" source for knowledge about teaching and learning.

An important point of balance is worth mentioning here - one that arises also in discussion of HEQCO's advisory responsibilities: By design, HEQCO does commission, to a small extent, research that might be termed "non-academic" – work that has value for those carrying it out, but is unlikely to be suitable for publication in a scholarly journal. This has helped to broaden the base of inquiry to include those less familiar with top-level scholarly research, which helps to increase the overall system capability for needed advanced research. In so doing HEQCO brings

together people from a variety of institutions with a variety of skills, which in turn helps to increase the level of understanding and capabilities of all concerned.

Given the diversity of HEQCO's research findings, and means of dissemination, there is some risk in citing specific examples. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to mention one particular HEQCO publication, entitled "The Benefits of Greater Differentiation of Ontario's University Sector" prepared by HEQCO President & CEO Harvey P. Weingarten and HEQCO Research Director Fiona Deller. Without prompting, this report arose in several independent conversations as indicative of the quality and relevance of HEQCO's work, and perhaps more importantly as a demonstration that only an organization with the respectability and perceived independence of HEQCO could release such findings and have them respectfully considered by most of the relevant stakeholder groups. Furthermore, this value is not limited to Ontario. Leaders elsewhere in Canada face, to varying degrees, numerous issues that are very similar to those explored in that report.

In summary, HEQCO has achieved an extremely impressive quality of research and dissemination of the results of that research, and has done so in a practical, appropriate manner.

## **6.0 HEQCO's fulfillment of its mandate to the government and public**

It is clear that HEQCO is a highly respected organization in Ontario, throughout Canada, and likely elsewhere. Over the course of this review it became apparent that a key source of that respect arises from a careful “balancing act”, for which the HEQCO CEO and management team can be credited. In order to be respected, it is important that HEQCO be viewed as a neutral party interested only in findings supported by evidence. This requires a balance between two opposing influences – the first being the important needs of the provincial government that provides the funding for HEQCO, and the second being the needs of the institutes of higher education in Ontario and other stakeholders who understandably would hope that HEQCO, through its research findings, would indirectly advocate for them. There is a significant management challenge whenever an organization finds itself “between” stakeholders whose interests are not fully aligned. In the case of HEQCO, management has faced this challenge through a combination of clear, open communication, skill and hard work, and with excellent results. Perhaps this need to strike a delicate balance has helped HEQCO by building a creative tension that motivates excellence.

But that is not to say that there have not been areas of worry on the part of several stakeholders. In the case of the Ministry, in the past there has been a concern that HEQCO was insufficiently concerned about focusing on its immediate research needs. It is very difficult, but probably also unnecessary, to determine the severity of that problem, because fortunately it has been largely resolved – an improvement attributed at least in part to the current CEO. HEQCO now offers great value to the Ministry in providing credible, independent verification of important initiatives the government needs to pursue. Specifically the CEO's work on differentiation was seen as exceedingly important in this regard. More generally, HEQCO has remained true to its responsibility, under the HEQCO Act, to focus on the priority areas of accessibility and quality of higher education in Ontario and the accountability of the institutions providing it.

Quite understandably, the colleges in Ontario have had concerns that HEQCO should be, and has not been, an advocate for them, and also that HEQCO applies too much of its research attention to universities. It is easy to see how the perception of unfairness could incorrectly arise. After all, HEQCO commissions research, and most researchers are at universities not colleges, so there is an intrinsic asymmetry there. However, HEQCO has made efforts to mentor less experienced researchers to help level the playing field to some degree. This has provided people at colleges, who in many cases have research expertise and experience, the opportunity to participate in the research community of the scholarship of teaching and learning. But even setting that issue aside, there is a concern that HEQCO may be over-emphasizing problems found mainly at universities with the resultant exclusion of problems common at colleges. However, HEQCO certainly has commissioned research concerning problems predominantly found in colleges. Overall, this issue is clearly one to keep an eye on, but it was acknowledged that the trend in this regard, under the leadership of the current CEO, is probably in the right direction.

There has also been some distrust of HEQCO among universities and their presidents. There was a time when some felt the funding for HEQCO would be better spent by Ontario

universities. That situation has changed considerably in recent years – an improvement largely attributed to the expert high-level communication efforts of the current CEO.

The net result is that HEQCO is admired and trusted among most interest groups in the higher education arena. One exception could be the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA). OCUFA indicated some time ago that it did not wish to have direct communication with HEQCO and as a result their views were not solicited for this review.

Overall, HEQCO has clearly become accepted as the “go to” source for independent, credible information about higher education in Ontario. This is a significant, hard-won achievement.

## **7.0 HEQCO's future plans for 2011-2012**

The HEQCO 2011-2012 Research Plan and Communications Strategy document is presented in Appendix B. It provides a clear and coherent strategy for carrying out activities according to three basic themes of (a) Research, (b) Communication, and (c) Convening Role.

The plan itself is well written, complete, internally consistent and presents a credible and appropriate extension of HEQCO's recent work, with a continuation of the positive trends noted previously.

There is one element that could potentially be added to the immediate plan - an assessment of the long-term changes that are anticipated in higher education and some associated speculation of possible long-term roles for HEQCO, plus an assessment of what impact, if any, such considerations should have on HEQCO activities in the next few years. Probably this would require a slightly larger budget, which to this reviewer seems entirely justifiable. (The next section will consider that possibility from another perspective.)

HEQCO's three basic themes can also be evaluated in terms of the manner in which they support HEQCO's advisory and research roles.

### **7.1 Research theme**

Regarding the research theme, continuation of HEQCO's research excellence is an obvious requirement, and it is clearly HEQCO's responsibility to maintain an optimal balance between its advisory role and its research role in planning its activities. In order to be able to provide timely advice to the Ministry, HEQCO will ideally often have the required information at hand, which means that its identification of research priorities must be made thoughtfully, while bearing in mind what kinds of information are likely to be of greatest value to the Ministry.

Simultaneously, while being mindful of the needs of the Ministry, HEQCO should carry out research activities that are useful to other stakeholders in the Ontario higher education community. This requires continuation of the excellent compromises and balance for which HEQCO has become recognized. HEQCO's plans are appropriate from that perspective.

### **7.2 Communication theme**

HEQCO has recognized a need for which it is now investing appropriate resources – the aim to be known and trusted by those who may benefit from HEQCO findings. These needs are different with the different stakeholders. Because of this, substantial efforts are required to maintain appropriate awareness everywhere it is required. The plan is clear and appropriate in this regard and does a good job of providing a number of useful metrics for evaluating progress.

### **7.3 Convening role**

Convening means “to cause to assemble” and this is a very nice description of the catalytic characteristic HEQCO can have, in which it causes a much greater valuable effort to take place

as a result of its own leading work. HEQCO has demonstrated that it can bring together top-level researchers from diverse sectors within Ontario, and also from across Canada and beyond, for the purposes of sharing their best ideas, comparing research findings, and planning mutually reinforcing research collaborations. These activities help to make HEQCO more effective in its key advisory role to the Ministry, by providing better access to information from many sources, and it also helps to build the culture of evidence-based improvement of teaching and learning, which aligns with the needs of all stakeholders and further supports HEQCO's research role. Thus, the convening role is an inspired addition to HEQCO's strategic plan.

## **7.4 Funding requirements**

HEQCO's plan is financially sound – a reasonable continuation of what has worked so well in recent years. There is no need for substantial change, other than the minor adjustments that have already been carefully made in order to achieve the improvements described above.

As mentioned earlier, HEQCO's budget is not currently divided between its two primary roles – advisory and research - and indeed this would be difficult to do because the work is largely co-mingled. Nevertheless, it is still useful to separately consider their funding, because of a key difference in the time frame of the associated funding commitments.

Certainly, HEQCO's advisory role is compatible with the normal year-to-year funding procedures common for Crown agencies. However, HEQCO's research role is somewhat different, because it requires research endeavors that cannot be carried out in a single year. In fact, some of the most useful intervention studies may require between three and five years to yield meaningful results, and ideally would continue longer. Clearly it is desirable to attract the very best researchers to such work and it is often essential to convince colleges and universities to invest time and other resources in order to provide required administrative data. They are asked to make very serious multi-year commitments, yet HEQCO does not have the ability to offer such participants assured continuation of such projects over that time frame. This suggests that a slightly different funding arrangement might be preferable for the research role, in which a greater assurance of project completion could be provided to the researchers involved. Without intending to suggest any particular solution, it might be helpful to compare this situation to infrastructure funding, in which a commitment is made to fund a construction project that will require a number of years to complete. In such a case, if the funding commitment is weak, the best contractors may understandably choose not to become involved.

Another reason to consider modified funding arrangements for the research role is to help maintain HEQCO's perceived level of independence. This perception is important to the Ministry, but HEQCO's complete financial dependence on the Ministry's year-to-year funding has the potential to weaken that perception of independence.

For both these reasons, it may be a good time to consider whether additional sources of funding for HEQCO should be pursued. This idea also arises, for different reasons, in the next section.

## 8.0 A longer view of HEQCO's role in light of the changing environment

Speculation about the distant future is often remarkably incorrect and/or non-productive. But there are times when it would be imprudent *not* to carefully consider changes that are clearly coming and are bound to matter a great deal. One example involves recent major changes in personal banking – it was important for banks to understand the likely timing of the transition toward the current situation in which the dominant personal interaction with banks is through online banking and automated tellers. Banks needed to forecast this well for two reasons – first, it would eventually be essential to offer such services in order to retain their customers, and second, it would take a considerable amount of time to make the changes required to provide them, so it was critical to get the timing right.

Today, we face a somewhat similar situation in higher education. There are many different ways in which inexpensive but powerful computation and telecommunication can fundamentally change higher education. One example is the efficient sharing of highly effective “learning modules” that will make it possible for any skilled teacher to teach efficiently almost anything to almost anyone. Another example is high bandwidth videoconferencing that will allow close personal interaction among students and with teachers who are not in the same room – eliminating barriers of cost, borders, and distance that divide the world today.

For this reason, when leaders of institutions of higher education look ahead 20 years, most feel there will be much more profound change than in the last 20, in part for the reasons set out above. We do not yet have to understand those changes fully, but it does make sense to keep an eye on the future, in order to make sure that we have as much time as possible to adapt accordingly. We all know that unduly rapid change in organizations often causes unnecessary expenses and/or serious mistakes, whereas change carried out steadily at an optimal rate over a number of years can be much more successful. Timing is everything, and so therefore is long term planning.

This consideration again raises the question of the relevant time frame of HEQCO's work. For its advisory role, the government needs advice on current decisions that often matter most within the current election cycle, although most also wish to make the best decisions overall. It is in HEQCO's research role that a long term outlook would seem to be a natural fit. It seems prudent for a small portion of HEQCO's research to have a longer term focus, in order to better understand factors that higher education institutions will need to plan for.

This idea also connects to the previous observation that HEQCO's research role is beneficial to Canada as a whole. It is exciting to think that Canada's excellent public universities could cooperate to lead the world in facing upcoming change, and there are reasons to think Canada would be well suited to such a leadership role. One is that our universities have a lot in common and are largely able to collaborate with one another very effectively. A further advantage is our proximity and connectedness with the major US universities, while being independent of that much more complex system. And Canada has already taken a leadership role on the world stage. HEQCO itself is one example of this, as is the Carl Wieman Science Education Initiative at UBC. Such specific examples, combined with Canada's generally positive international

reputation, make it plausible that it could lead a renewed growth in excellence in higher education worldwide. Needless to say, it is much better to be a creator of change than to be a poorly prepared responder.

In concluding this report, it is interesting to consider the longer term future of HEQCO. Based on several factors mentioned above, this seems like an ideal time to expand the research role, to include a longer term outlook, and to more explicitly take into account the rest of Canada. This raises the question of how this could most efficiently be done. One idea to consider would be for other interested provinces to create their own provincial versions of HEQCO's advisory role, and to collaborate with one another in supporting what might eventually be described as the "Canadian Higher Education Research Council" – presumably with networked branch offices in participating provinces. Such a funding arrangement would enable an increase in overall research funding, which is a needed improvement that would enable an added long term perspective, while possibly slightly reducing the cost to Ontario. Such an interprovincial funding arrangement could also possibly enable HEQCO to offer a firmer funding commitment in support of multi-year research, further improving the quality and value of the work. This would also create a greater sense of independence from any single provincial government, thus further improving the perceived independence and credibility of this highly respected organization.

## **Appendix A Brief biography of the reviewer.**

Lorne A. Whitehead received a Ph.D. in physics from the University of British Columbia and is also a Registered Professional Engineer in the province of British Columbia. His career has involved sustained innovation in technology, business, and administration. From 1983 to 1993 he served as CEO of TIR Systems, a UBC spin-off company that grew to 200 employees and was recently purchased by Philips. Since joining UBC in 1994, he has been a Professor and held an NSERC Industrial Research Chair in the Department of Physics and Astronomy, carrying out studies of the optical, electrical, and mechanical properties of micro-structured surfaces, a field in which he holds more than 100 patents. His technology is used in many computer screens and televisions and he also helped to start three more new companies based on his research – Brightside (now Dolby Canada), Boreal Genomics, and most recently SunCentral Inc. In addition to his research at UBC, Dr. Whitehead has held a number of administrative positions including Associate Dean, Dean pro tem, Vice-President Academic and Leader of Education Innovation. In all these roles he has worked to apply the methodology of innovation to the improvement of teaching and learning. Currently, in collaboration with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, he is helping to organize a network of universities studying the influence that senior leadership can have on accelerating the adoption of evidence-based improvements of teaching and learning in higher education.

## Appendix B The HEQCO Act (2005)

### Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act, 2005

#### S.O. 2005, CHAPTER 28 Schedule G

(No Amendments).

#### Definitions

1. In this Act,

“Council” means the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario established under section 2; (“Conseil”)

“post-secondary educational institution” means a college of applied arts and technology established under the *Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002*, a university that receives regular and ongoing operating funding from the province for purposes of post-secondary education and any other institution prescribed by regulation; (“établissement d’enseignement postsecondaire”)

“post-secondary education sector” includes all post-secondary educational institutions in Ontario; (“secteur postsecondaire”)

“Minister” means the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. (“ministre”) 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 1.

#### Council

2. (1) A corporation without share capital is established under the name Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario in English and Conseil ontarien de la qualité de l’enseignement supérieur in French. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 2 (1).

#### Members

(2) The Council shall consist of the members of its board of directors. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 2 (2).

#### Appointment of members

(3) Subject to the regulations, the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall appoint no fewer than five and no more than seven members to the Council’s board of directors. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 2 (3).

## **Chair**

(4) The Minister shall designate one member to be the chair of the Council. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 2 (4).

### Ministry representative

(5) At least one member of the Council shall be an employee of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, but that member shall not vote in the deliberations of the Council nor be designated chair. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 2 (5).

## **Eligibility**

(6) A person may not be a member of the Council if the person is a member of the board or governing body of, or holds an executive or senior administrative position in,

(a) a post-secondary educational institution; or

(b) an association, advisory body or council established to promote the interests of such institutions or their employees or students. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 2 (6).

## **Management of board**

(7) The affairs of the corporation shall be managed by the Council's board of directors. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 2 (7).

### No personal liability

3. (1) No action or other proceeding for damages may be instituted against any member of the Council or any one acting on behalf of the Council for any act done in the execution or intended execution of the person's duty or for any alleged neglect or default in the execution in good faith of the person's duty. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 3 (1).

## **Crown liability**

(2) Despite subsections 5 (2) and (4) of the *Proceedings Against the Crown Act*, subsection (1) does not relieve the Crown of any liability to which it would otherwise be subject in respect of a tort committed by a person referred to in subsection (1). 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 3 (2).

## **Crown agency**

4. The corporation is a Crown agency within the meaning of the *Crown Agency Act*. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 4.

## **Object**

5. The object of the Council is to assist the Minister in improving all aspects of the post-secondary education sector, including improving the quality of education provided in the sector, access to post-secondary education and accountability of post-secondary educational institutions. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 5.

## **Functions**

6. The functions of the Council are,

(a) to develop and make recommendations to the Minister,

(i) on targets to be achieved in improving the quality of post-secondary education, on the methods of achieving those targets and on the time frame for doing so, and

(ii) on performance measures to be used to evaluate the post-secondary education sector;

(b) to evaluate the post-secondary education sector, report to the Minister on the results of the evaluation and make the report available to the public;

(c) to conduct research on all aspects of post-secondary education with a view to helping the Council achieve its object, including research,

(i) on the development and design of various models of post-secondary education,

(ii) on the means of encouraging collaboration between various post-secondary educational institutions in general and in particular in matters relating to the recognition by such institutions of courses and programs of study provided at other such institutions, and

(iii) on other matters specified by the Minister; and

(d) to do such other things as may be prescribed by regulation. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 6.

## **Access to information**

7. A post-secondary educational institution shall provide the Council or a person designated by the Council with access to any information in its custody or control that the Council or person may require for the purpose of carrying out its object and functions. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 7.

## **Reports**

8. [\(1\)](#) The Council shall deliver to the Minister,

- (a) a yearly report on its activities, within 120 days of the end of its fiscal year; and
- (b) any other reports required by the Minister, at such time as the Minister specifies. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 8 (1).

## **Tabling**

(2) The Minister shall table the yearly report referred to in clause (1) (a) in the Legislative Assembly within 60 days after receiving it from the Council or, if at the end of the 60-day period the Assembly is not in session, at the beginning of the next session. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 8 (2).

## **Regulations**

9. (1) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations,

- (a) prescribing institutions as post-secondary educational institutions for the purposes of this Act;
- (b) governing the Council's constitution, management and structure, including the number of members of the board;
- (c) prescribing objects of the Council in addition to the object described in section 5;
- (d) prescribing functions of the Council in addition to those set out in section 6;
- (e) respecting specific powers and duties of the Council and its members;
- (f) respecting factors to be considered in appointing members;
- (g) providing for the term of appointment and reappointment of Council members;
- (h) respecting compensation for Council members;
- (i) providing for a vice-chair of the Council;
- (j) respecting the nature and scope of the yearly report required by section 8;
- (k) respecting the frequency, nature and scope of reporting in addition to the yearly report required by section 8;
- (l) respecting staff for the Council, including the status of Council staff, and their compensation;
- (m) respecting funding for the Council;
- (n) respecting audits of the statements and records of the Council;

(o) providing whether or not the *Business Corporations Act*, the *Corporations Information Act* or the *Corporations Act* or any provisions of those Acts apply to the Council;

(p) governing the procedures and administration of the Council;

(q) authorizing personal information to be collected by or on behalf of the Council other than directly from the individual to whom the information relates, and regulating the manner in which the information is collected;

(r) providing for anything necessary or advisable to facilitate the carrying out of the functions of the Council;

(s) respecting any other matter that the Lieutenant Governor in Council considers necessary or advisable for carrying out the purposes and provisions of this Act. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 9 (1).

**Same**

[\(2\)](#) A regulation under this Act may be general or specific in its application, may create different categories or classes, and may make different provisions for different categories, classes or circumstances. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 9 (2).

**Same**

[\(3\)](#) A regulation authorized by clause (1) (m) may provide that the prescribed assets and revenues of the Council do not form part of the Consolidated Revenue Fund, despite Part I of the *Financial Administration Act*. 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 9 (3).

**10.** Omitted (provides for coming into force of provisions of this Act). 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 10.

**11.** Omitted (enacts short title of this Act). 2005, c. 28, Sched. G, s. 11.

## Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Multi-Year Business Plan 2011-12 to 2013-14

### Mandate

Created through the *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act, 2005* (the Act), HEQCO is an arm's length agency of the Government of Ontario that brings evidence-based research to the continued improvement of the postsecondary education system in Ontario. As part of its mandate, HEQCO evaluates the postsecondary education (PSE) sector and provides policy recommendations to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities to enhance the access, quality and accountability of Ontario's colleges and universities.

HEQCO explores key issues:

- Are students satisfied with their postsecondary experience?
- Do they acquire the knowledge and skills that prepare them for their personal and professional lives?
- What are the barriers to pursuing PSE, barriers to staying in School, barriers to graduating?
- How are under-represented groups faring in accessing and completing PSE and what strategies will improve their participation?
- What are the attributes of a responsive and efficient PSE system, and how can the system and its institutions be more accountable to the public and government for the use of public dollars?

HEQCO informs solutions:

- HEQCO conducts and commissions studies and evaluations, often in partnership with Ontario's colleges and universities, on key issues in accessibility, quality and accountability.
- HEQCO produces *@issue* reports that synthesize the most current data and research – providing postsecondary decision-makers and the general public with critical insight and information on emerging trends in postsecondary education.
- HEQCO evaluates the postsecondary sector and makes that evaluation available to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and to the general public.

## Governance

The Council is governed by a Board of Directors (the Board) of five to seven members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. The Board, through its Chair, is accountable to the Minister for setting goals, objectives and strategic directions within the Council's mandate as set out in the Act and the Memorandum of Understanding (the 'MOU') between the Minister and the Council.

The President and Chief Executive Officer (the 'President'), under the direction of the Chair, is accountable to the Board for implementing the Board's policy and operational decisions, and for the management of the Council's operations. A staff complement of 18.4 full time equivalents made up of 16 fulltime and 3 part time contract employees reports to the President.

The Council will continue to support the evolving postsecondary agenda of the Government. Initiatives and strategic directions reflected in this business plan have been discussed with and approved by the Board.

## Environmental Scan

A number of external challenges and opportunities are expected to be pertinent to the Council in the medium term:

External Factor	Implications for HEQCO
<p><b>1. Economic Recession:</b> While recovery from the economic recession continues to be relatively slow, the number of Ontarians seeking higher education will continue to increase.</p> <p>Public Resources for higher education may be constrained, challenging the system's ability to continue current activities and to meet increasing demands.</p>	<p>Ontario must continue to compete for new investments, in part through its highly skilled, knowledgeable population.</p> <p><i>The Reaching Higher in Postsecondary Education</i> initiative was introduced to create an accessible, relevant system in tune with the needs of students in an evolving global economy. HEQCO was established in response to an increasing need for strong research into higher education in order to promote coherent, long term policy decisions to meet the demands of the economy and support Ontario's competitiveness and prosperity.</p>
<p><b>2. Long-term growth in student demand for higher education:</b> Some analysts project an</p>	<p>Stakeholders will value research results that help to address how the system should</p>

External Factor	Implications for HEQCO
<p>augmented demand for higher education across the province by up to 95,000 students by 2015. This prediction has borne out in preliminary registration data for 2011/12.</p> <p>Increased demand will likely be felt around the province, but it is expected that the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) will bear the brunt of any surge in demand. Ontario institutions are already seeing indications of the predicted rise in demand for postsecondary education. Since 2002-03, there has been a 31% per cent increase in students attending postsecondary education– an increase of 120,000 students.</p> <p>Confirmed applicants for September 2010 entry into university undergraduate programs increased by 4.5% over September 2009 while at the same time Ontario colleges experienced a 1.7% increase in enrolments.</p>	<p>expand: what types of institutions, what types of programs, and how to do this in a way that is affordable to government and to students.</p> <p>Ontario will face some difficult decisions about how to address these pressures, including whether or not the province has the right mix of institutions, adequate and appropriate resources, sufficient inter-institutional collaboration, and adequate pathways for learners.</p> <p>In addition, some colleges have identified gaps in the programs offered by current universities and colleges.</p> <p>There is some evidence that distance education and “lifelong learning” could be factors in how postsecondary education is delivered in future.</p> <p>Taken together, the PSE system in Ontario will undergo significant change. The Council will have to provide relevant and current advice and to emphasize forward planning and accurate data in its research plan.</p>
<p><b>3. Knowledge-based economic development strategies:</b> Like many governments, the federal and Ontario governments have adopted economic development strategies based on increasing the overall education level of the population.</p> <p>Analysts hold competing views about how to translate this strategy into practical policy advice</p>	<p>Government and other stakeholders will value research and advice that shows how higher education can contribute to economic recovery and expansion.</p>

External Factor	Implications for HEQCO
<p><b>4. Government priorities for higher education:</b> The government has set out future priorities for higher education policy, focussing on participation, accessibility, and student choice.</p> <p>Some specific priorities include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Setting a 70% target for postsecondary attainment within the 25 to 64 age group as well as other key measures</li> <li>2. Improving participation by underrepresented Groups.</li> </ol> <p>Following the 2011/12 Budget, the Postsecondary Education Strategy will set targets for these priorities.</p>	<p>Government (and potentially other stakeholders) will value research and advice on these topics if it can be available within the government's timeframe.</p>
<p><b>5. Stakeholders:</b> All universities and colleges face the challenge of constrained resources. Many stakeholders have their own strategic priorities, e.g., new campuses, new buildings, a change in status, new programs, etc.</p>	<p>Stakeholders will expect the Council to provide fair treatment and transparent processes.</p>
<p><b>6. Other research-based organizations:</b> The national organizations involved in higher education research – the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, the Canadian Council on Learning, and the Canadian Policy Research Networks – have lost their federal funding and no longer exist.</p>	<p>HEQCO is the only organization of its type across Canada and cannot replace these organizations, but it can learn from their attempts to offer credible research and policy advice at the national level.</p>
<p><b>7. Ontario's fiscal situation:</b> The Ministry of Finance's projection for 2011-12's budget deficit is \$16.3 billion.</p>	<p>In this environment, there is likely to be more priority placed on measuring results and comparing the cost-effectiveness of different</p>

External Factor	Implications for HEQCO
	strategies for achieving public objectives. The Council will continue to publish research on the results that are being achieved by the higher education system, identifying where students are being well served and where there are gaps in the system.

**Strategic Directions**

The Council five major strategic goals for this three-year period are:

1. To be the authoritative source of up-to-date research on access, quality, and accountability in Ontario’s higher education system.
2. To be a valued source of evidence-based policy advice to government.
3. To share research findings with Ontario’s higher education institutions and other stakeholders in ways that encourage evidence-based decisions that will improve the quality of higher education.
4. To communicate with interested publics about where Ontario stands in attaining the vision of being an international leader in higher education.
5. To provide good governance and manage the Council’s financial, human, and information resources effectively.

**Key Initiatives and Performance Measures**

The Council will measure its performance against objectives and initiatives listed in this part of the three year plan. Initiatives listed have been sanctioned by the Council’s Board.

**1. Research Plan**

Early in 2010 the Council released its *Third Annual Review and Research Plan* which was well-received by stakeholders. Following this tradition, the Council plans to release its *Community Report* in May/ June 2011.

In 2010-11 the Council released 24 research reports prepared by external contractors for the most part from postsecondary institutions, three research reports that were produced internally by HEQCO (2 were co-authored with outside partners) and three @issue papers produced by HEQCO. In 2011-12, the Council projects the release of 26 multi-year projects prepared externally, 4 internal research papers and 10@issue papers currently underway. Please see Appendix 2 for a detailed list of these reports and @issue papers, and Appendix 3 for events and workshops held in 2010-11.

Total HEQCO Research Activity to date:

	<b>Published</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>Underway</b>	<b>Total Projects</b>
Accessibility/Participation	15	10	10	35
Accountability/System Design	12	5	3	20
Learning Quality	14	17	17	48
Internal Research (various)	13	2	8	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>126</b>

### **Areas of emphasis for new research 2011-14**

Although many of the projects listed below will be initiated in 2011-12, because some HEQCO research projects are multi-year efforts it can be assumed that these themes and a number of these research projects will carry through the three year timeframe of this Business Plan.

#### **a. Access and Retention**

Socio-cultural barriers to access, with a focus on under-represented groups

- @issue papers summarizing the current environment and research results of the last three years for specific under-represented groups: first generation students; Francophone students; low income students; students with disabilities
- building on access research to develop transition projects: life after high school; partnership project with Pathways to Education; potential financial literacy project

State of access for Ontario' Highest achievers

- Where do best and brightest go? Do they leave Ontario? Do they go to select Ontario universities?

Pathways for adult learners

- @issue paper on adult learners
- academic barriers; previous education recognition

Improving retention and graduation rates

- @issue paper on retention
- identifying students at risk of not completing; evaluating support programs

Data architecture

- continuing to promote the Ontario Longitudinal Student Survey (OLSS); data linking work

## **b. Quality**

### Teaching Effectiveness

- @issue paper on student success
- 13 projects underway on teaching and learning
- Effective practices in teaching large classes; effective use of technology in the classroom

### Learning Outcomes

- May 2011 international conference on measuring learning outcomes
- Potential collegiate learning assessment project: focus on measuring value added during the postsecondary experience
- Potential tuning project with Lumina Foundation: focus on discipline specific set of learning outcomes with faculty, students, graduates and employers

### Alignment of PSE with the Labour Market

- @issue paper
- Identifying best practices in apprenticeship retention
- Exploring labour market outcomes of doctoral students
- Social rates of return to PSE

## **c. Accountability**

- Financial Sustainability of public higher education institutions
- Differentiated funding models

## **2. Strategic Communications Plan**

The Council's aim is to:

- position HEQCO as the "go-to" organization for media, government policy-makers and the general public on key postsecondary education issues of access, quality and accountability
- help ensure that postsecondary education is on the public agenda
- increase the media and social media profile of HEQCO research
- expand communications and engagement with postsecondary-interested/affiliated business and community organizations
- rebrand HEQCO to reflect an organization that is dynamic, proactive, provocative and issues-oriented

- create a personal narrative – e.g. using the voices of HEQCO, researchers, students and the community

Between April and September 2010 there were 25 news clips featuring HEQCO or its research.

Between October 2010 and March 2011 there were 142 news clips. To date during 2010-11, there have been 3,839 visits to the HEQCO website, with 15,352 page views since January 2010.

In 2009-10, HEQCO had 231 e-subscribers, while in 2010-11 this more than doubled to 497. Two videotaped interviews – one entitled “Who Pursues Higher Education” and the other entitled “Informing Tomorrow’s Tuition Policy” were posted on HEQCO’s website in early 2011.

In early 2011, HEQCO began a redesign of its website to improve functionality. The new, redesigned website is expected to be launched in early April 2011.

### **3. Administrative and Operational Support**

The HEQCO Chair, Board, President, research and communications functions are supported with regards to:

- governance and accountability
- freedom of information and privacy
- financial services
- contracts management
- logistical support
- technology infrastructure

In 2010-11 some HEQCO policies were reviewed and updated to conform to revised Government Directives and audit requirements. These include:

- updates to the human resources policy
- adoption of the Government’s revised travel, meals and hospitality policies
- creation of a new delegation of authority framework (financial)
- realignment of financial processes to ensure preauthorization of expenditures, segregation of duties, to maintain controls and to create checks and balances

As well, a computer refresh was completed, updating the Council’s technology infrastructure.

In 2011-12, efforts will be directed towards:

- updating the research contracting process

- records management
- updating the performance management process
- renegotiation of HEQCO's Memorandum of Understanding with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities (expires in December 2011) in consideration of amendments to the Agency Establishment and Accountability Directive
- renewing the lease for HEQCO premises which expires in May 2012

**a. Budget and Funding Requirements**

The Council spent \$5.142 million of \$5.156 million budget allocation for 2009-2010. It is estimated that year end results will show the Council to have spent \$4.85 million of its \$5.0 million allocation for 2010-2011.

Appendix 1 provides an estimate of financial resources needed for 2011-12 to 2013-14. Approximately 70% of the budget is devoted to research and related activities, with 30% allocated to Council governance, Corporate Executive Services, administration and common expenses.

Salaries for 2011-2012 reflect the Bill 16 wage constraint with increases in following years based on cost of living. Staffing is projected to remain constant at 18.4 full time equivalents. Estimates also project increased costs for accommodation (rent inducements end in May 2011 and the lease expires in May 2012) and other common expenses.

**b. Risk Assessment and Management**

The Council regularly reviews its Risk Management Framework which forms the basis of a formal risk management and business continuity plan.

## Appendix 1: Financial Requirements

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS	Staff FTES	2011- 12	2012- 13	2013- 14
<b>Council Governance and Executive Office</b>				
<i>Board members' retainers/per diems</i>		60.0	62.0	65.0
Executive Office – President, Chief Administration Officer, Executive Director, Communications, Communications and Council Support				
<i>Salaries</i>	3.75	528.2	546.7	565.8
<i>Travel and Communications</i>		23.3	25.6	28.2
<i>Services, supplies and equipment</i>		105.1	108.3	111.5
<b>Subtotal Council Governance and Executive Office</b>		<b>716.6</b>	<b>742.6</b>	<b>770.5</b>
<b>Research Program</b>				
<i>Research Contracts, Seminars and Workshops – Activities</i>				
<i>Sub-Total:</i>		2,001.8	2,201.9	2,422.1
<i>Salaries and benefits</i>	11.65	1,259.6	1,303.7	1,349.3
<i>Travel and communications</i>		28.4	31.2	34.3
<i>Services, supplies and equipment</i>		299.4	308.4	317.6
<b>Subtotal Research Program</b>		<b>3,589.1</b>	<b>3,845.2</b>	<b>4,123.4</b>
<b>Administration</b>				
Corporate Services – Contract Management, Administration and Controllership				
<i>Salaries and benefits</i>	3.0	280.4	290.2	300.4
<i>Travel and communications</i>		4.1	4.5	5.0
<i>Lease at 1 Yonge Street</i>		216.7	298.6	298.6
<i>Services</i>		176.5	181.8	187.3
<i>Amortization and depreciation</i>		191.0	56.1	56.1
<i>Supplies and equipment</i>		25.2	26.0	26.8
<b>Subtotal Administration</b>		<b>893.9</b>	<b>857.2</b>	<b>874.1</b>
<b>Total Resource Requirement</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>5,199.6</b>	<b>5,445.0</b>	<b>5,768.0</b>

### Notes

1. Budget plan for 2011-12 and beyond is based on an allocation of \$5.0 million. Actual expenditures for 2010-11 are projected at approximately \$4.85 million.

2. Projected expenditures are reported on the accrual basis of accounting; therefore, non-cash items such as amortization and depreciation are shown as financial requirements although no cash outlay is requested. Similarly, revenue deferred from prior years is brought forward to current and future years.
3. Salaries for 2011-2012 reflect the Bill 16 wage constraint.
4. Inflationary increases have been added to such items as the operating cost component of the lease. The lease expires in 2012-13; a renewal is projected at a higher cost; as well, the rent inducement and leasehold improvements will have been written off.
5. Common expenses such as telephones, IT support, office supplies, and equipment, are shown in the Administration section.

Budgets presented are estimates only.