

Ministry of Colleges and Universities

Office of the Minister

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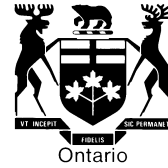
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Ministère des Collèges et Universités

Bureau du ministre

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January 15, 2020

Mr. Denis Mayer
Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
1 Yonge Street, Suite 2402
Toronto, ON M5E 1E5

Dear Mr. Mayer,

I would like to thank you for your willingness to serve on the board of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). Ontario's board-governed agencies are vital partners in ensuring the delivery of high-quality services to Ontarians. The people of Ontario depend on you and your fellow board members to provide leadership to the agency's management and staff. Together with your fellow board members, the people of Ontario rely on you to establish and advance the goals, objectives and strategic direction for the agency consistent with HEQCO's mandate, the government's priorities, and my directions where appropriate.

Pursuant to Management Board of Cabinet's Agencies and Appointments Directive (AAD), following a change in Minister, a letter affirming or replacing the most recent agency mandate letter is to be provided to the agency. This letter replaces and updates the previous agency mandate letter sent September 7, 2018 and acts as the mandate letter for the remainder of fiscal year 2019-20, and for 2020-21.

As you know, as outlined in the *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act, 2005*, your agency's mandate is to assist me in improving all aspects of Ontario's postsecondary education sector, including improving the quality of, and access to, postsecondary education, and enhancing the accountability of Ontario's publicly-assisted colleges and universities. In October 2018, HEQCO was given the additional function to research and evaluate how free speech is being addressed at these institutions and across the postsecondary sector, as well as to provide reports and recommendations to the ministry on the results of such research and evaluation.

In the 2019 Ontario Budget, the government set out a vision for building an innovative and sustainable postsecondary sector. The government is restoring accountability to Ontario's postsecondary education system to ensure that publicly-assisted postsecondary institutions are providing the positive economic outcomes that students and the people of Ontario need, as well as training people for the jobs of the future.

Pursuant to our Memorandum of Understanding and the requirements of the AAD, this letter outlines my expectations for HEQCO for the remainder of 2019-20 and the 2020-21 fiscal year, which reflect the government's priorities and policy direction. It is important for the Council's research, evaluations and recommendations to support priorities for the people of Ontario. HEQCO's 2019-20 and 2020-21 Annual Reports will outline achievements in fulfilling the expectations set out in this letter. Priorities identified below include several past priorities that were highlighted in the previous mandate letter from September 2018 as well as in the ministry's most recent letter dated May 30, 2019 regarding digital learning.

Conducting Evaluation Projects

On November 6, 2019 the government introduced Bill 138, which includes proposed changes to strengthen HEQCO's work. If passed, HEQCO's evaluation function would be expanded to include conducting evaluation projects specified by the Minister, including evaluations of postsecondary education programs and services provided or funded (in whole or in part) by the Government of Ontario.

It is anticipated that, going forward, evaluation projects will be an important part of HEQCO's work and will help to determine whether government postsecondary education programs are effectively meeting the needs of students and the sector and maximizing value for taxpayer dollars.

Access to Postsecondary Education

The ministry provides funding to postsecondary institutions and Pathways to Education to support increased access to postsecondary education for individuals facing barriers in transitioning to and completing higher education. To assist the ministry in its work on supporting access to postsecondary education, we request that HEQCO:

- Work with the ministry to research whether ministry funding for access programs, such as Pathways to Education and the Ontario Postsecondary Access and Inclusion Program (OPAIP), is directed to those who require it the most.
- Provide advice to the ministry on possible ways to improve/change these programs, including data collection and outcomes, as needed.
- Research best practices in other jurisdictions.

Services for Students with Disabilities

To ensure that ministry special purpose grants achieve their purpose of assisting colleges and universities to meet their legal obligations under the Ontario *Human Rights Code* of providing accommodations to students with disabilities, we request that HEQCO:

- Provide support to the ministry by researching and providing advice on the ministry's special purpose grants supporting services for students with disabilities.
- Working with the ministry, undertake research on the impact of special purpose grants to institutions serving students with disabilities working with the ministry.
- Research best practices in other jurisdictions to identify ways to improve ministry funding administration related to students with disabilities and outcomes related to this funding.

Priority Identified in May 2019

Digital Learning

As outlined in the May 30, 2019 letter, HEQCO was requested to: Provide insights on two existing digital learning programs (Contact North and eCampusOntario).

- Conduct research on all aspects of digital learning in Ontario with an emphasis on the considerations identified in the letter.
- Provide a final report and recommendations to the ministry by October 31, 2019.
- Thank you for submitting the report and recommendations.

Priorities Identified in September 2018

Protecting Free Speech on Ontario College and University Campuses

I would like to thank you for your first annual report on campus free speech in Ontario. To continue to assist me in improving the postsecondary education sector by supporting free speech rights on Ontario campuses, HEQCO will:

- Receive annual reports from each publicly-assisted college and university in Ontario regarding implementation of a free speech policy and develop an analysis report for the Minister.
- Assess whether each institution has satisfactorily implemented a free speech policy based on the minimum standard issued by the Minister, and whether all reporting requirements have been met.
- Report on free speech complaints against publicly-assisted colleges and universities that have been reported by the Ontario Ombudsman, and how many of these complaints are unresolved or unsatisfactorily resolved.
- Develop a public report annually that summarizes annual institutional reports, assesses whether institutions are compliant and the degree to which any institution is non-compliant. Evaluate system-level progress in implementing free speech policies.

Ensuring College and University Fiscal Sustainability

To ensure that all investments in postsecondary education are achieving results, HEQCO will:

- Work on sustaining quality while ensuring fiscal sustainability at Ontario's postsecondary institutions.
- Conduct further research into the factors related to labour costs in the postsecondary education sector, including compensation, faculty teaching and research workloads and pension rules.
- Research additional ways to improve efficiencies in the postsecondary sector, including improved productivity and opportunities to deliver services more efficiently.

Provide research and analysis in other areas as specified by the Minister

In order to provide ongoing support to inform the ministry's postsecondary policy development, HEQCO should work closely with the ministry to provide research-based evidence and analysis in a timely manner that can inform additional emerging policy issues and drive evidence-based policy-making on such other matters as may be specified by the Minister.

Agency Accountability

The government has a mandate to restore trust by ensuring that public money is spent with integrity. HEQCO's board is expected to fulfill accountability and transparency requirements in agency operations, including maintaining an effective system of internal controls, risk management and compliance in accordance with applicable government policies and directives to promote transparency, accountability, and prudent use of public funds in agency operations.

Please continue to refer to the Memorandum of Understanding as our primary administrative agreement that reflects the powers, authorities and accountabilities of HEQCO and the ministry, as set out in the applicable statutes, regulations, directives and policies.

To reiterate Section 8.3(k) of the Memorandum of Understanding, HEQCO's board is responsible for ensuring that the agency uses public funds "prudently, with integrity, honesty and effective controllership". As such, the government has an expectation that all Board expenses, including expenses and per diems, shall not exceed 1% of the Government of Ontario's funding for HEQCO per year. For this fiscal year, the total board expenditure should not exceed \$41,000. It is my expectation that the HEQCO Board exercise fiscal prudence and demonstrate efficient use of public resources in their work related to the Board. This is consistent with historical Board expenditure trends.

Ontario's postsecondary education system continues to be recognized worldwide for its top tier postsecondary institutions. HEQCO has an important function to both preserve this strength and to help drive system improvements towards an innovative and sustainable postsecondary sector that prepares students for the jobs of the future. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Hon. Ross Romano
Minister of Colleges and Universities

c: Dr. David Trick,
Interim President and Chief Executive Officer,
Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

Laurie LeBlanc
Deputy Minister,
Ministry of Colleges and Universities