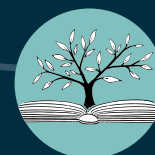




# Mapping the road ahead: HEQCO's research plan 2021–2024



# Vision

As the global economy continues to evolve and become increasingly competitive, a high-quality postsecondary education is more important than ever. Ontario's higher education system provides the building blocks for personal development, social mobility and economic success. Postsecondary graduates contribute to the vitality of the provincial economy fields such as medicine, construction, politics, business and the arts.



# Priorities

To sustain the province's strong postsecondary education system, HEQCO is committed to investigating critical issues and navigating important challenges in the sector. Our Strategic Research Framework is a roadmap that builds on our long-standing research into the interconnected priorities of **access**, **quality**, **sustainability** and **system design**. This roadmap will address current environmental factors shaping postsecondary education in Ontario and internationally: COVID-19; anti-racism and other social justice movements spearheaded by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) communities; the shifting labour market; and an ongoing emphasis on public accountability. Access, quality and sustainability may appear as distinct areas of focus, but these priorities overlap in significant and important ways.



# Purpose

HEQCO's research will continue to inform the government and the sector about the innovative teaching and learning opportunities available in Ontario; offer new ways to conceptualize and assess student learning and skills outcomes; inform policy-makers and institutional leaders as they navigate the post-pandemic landscape and work toward a more sustainable system; and provide guidance on how best to ensure equitable access for all students.



# Improving access

Over the next few years, equity of access, opportunity, supports and outcomes will be the focus of HEQCO's access research. This equity focus will expand our understanding of key questions: Who has access to postsecondary education in Ontario? What kinds of services and supports can they access?

**In 2021–2024, HEQCO's work on access will:**

- Extend our research on access to include equitable participation and outcomes for Ontario students.
- Illuminate disparities that are present in the postsecondary education system and could be compounded by the pandemic.
- Focus on equitable access and opportunities for students throughout their postsecondary experiences.
- Build our capacity to analyze and report on regional equity indicators in order to continue working towards provincial (system-level) data.
- Concentrate on entry points for lifelong learning.
- Explore the development and promise of microcredentials as a tool for retraining and reskilling.





# Quality at the core

Students, families, government and institutional leaders all benefit when quality indicators are clearly outlined and assessed. For this reason, quality and all the ways it relates to graduates' outcomes — employment, skills and learning — is at the core of our framework.

An immediate focus is transformations in digital teaching and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic compelled all colleges and universities to accelerate the development of online capacity and expertise. It will be important to understand the efficacy of emerging pedagogic, curricular and program changes resulting from this shift.

## HEQCO's work in 2021–2024 on quality will:

- Focus on understanding excellence in the digital learning environment, including experiential and work-integrated learning activities.
- Explore transferable skill development in digital and in-person learning environments.
- Analyze the evolving landscape of digital and in-person learning in the post-pandemic context.
- Pursue effective strategies to assess graduates' skills.
- Analyze students' understanding and articulation of their skills.
- Examine the effects of COVID-19 on earnings and employment outcomes for postsecondary graduates.



# Strengthening sustainability and system design

Financial stability for institutions across the province is an important area of focus. Questions of sustainability have occupied institutional leaders and policy-makers since long before the current global health crisis, but the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has raised new concerns for institutions about: declines in international enrolment; the costs of digital course development and delivery; and IT infrastructure needs.

## HEQCO's work in 2021–2024 on sustainability and system design will:

- Analyze current and historical strategies for financial sustainability, including internationalization and interinstitutional partnerships.
- Consider postsecondary costs and return on investment.
- Consider options in support of Ontario's evolving postsecondary policy context.
- Focus on differentiation, with particular consideration given to Ontario's Strategic Mandate Agreements and performance-based funding.



**Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario**

**Tel: 416-212-3893**

**Fax: 416-212-3899**

**Email: [info@heqco.ca](mailto:info@heqco.ca)**

**Web: [heqco.ca](http://heqco.ca)**