

Higher Education  
Quality Council  
of Ontario



*An agency of the Government of Ontario*

Conseil ontarien  
de la qualité de  
l'enseignement supérieur

*Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario*

# Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

## 2021–2024 Business Plan



## Mandate

“To assist the Ministry of Colleges and Universities in improving all aspects of the postsecondary education sector, including improving the quality of education provided in the sector, access to postsecondary education and accountability of postsecondary educational institutions” (HEQCO Act, 2005).

## Mission

HEQCO informs the future of Ontario higher education through authoritative research, effective communication of meaningful data and evidence-based options for solutions to the challenges facing Ontario’s postsecondary system.

## Vision

HEQCO seeks to influence the key decisions, practices and policies that will guide Ontario’s public postsecondary system to national and international leadership and provide Ontarians with the greatest opportunities for social mobility and economic success.

## Values

**Primacy of independent, high-quality research:** HEQCO maintains a distinctive position in the research community as a credible, authoritative and influential agency through a foundation of independent, objective, high-quality analysis to provide the best evidence-based advice to government and postsecondary institutions. Attentive to emerging trends, HEQCO has the agility to pursue promising new avenues of research as opportunities arise.

**Sustained engagement with leaders and practitioners worldwide:** HEQCO’s global perspective on higher education research, policy and practice brings the best ideas, research findings and insights to Ontario. Many of Ontario’s postsecondary education (PSE) challenges are shared by jurisdictions across Canada and worldwide. HEQCO’s work is strengthened through relationships with postsecondary institutions, non-profit agencies and community organizations. Through these connections, we ensure that the very best thinking from around the world is made available to Ontario decision-makers as a catalyst for informed decisions, collaboration and innovation.

**Accessible and meaningful communication:** In bridging the gap between research knowledge and its active use in addressing pressing challenges in higher education, HEQCO contributes to the effective movement of evidence-based solutions into policy development and best practice.

**An advocate for data collection and transparency:** Data is the lifeblood of evidence-based policy decision-making, yet our work is constrained by significant and persistent data gaps at both the provincial and national level. HEQCO remains an advocate for a more transparent, open and holistic approach to higher education data, in partnership with educational institutions, organizations and governments.

**Accountability is a foundational tool for system improvement:** Core to our accountability mandate, HEQCO explores system design models across the globe to improve postsecondary access and quality in Ontario.

**Responsive to government priorities and mandates:** HEQCO ensures that evidence-based research and evaluation of the highest quality informs policy decision-making and practice, in alignment with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

**Equipped to achieve our goals:** HEQCO is committed to ensuring that our organizational structure and staff capabilities maximize impact and drive toward the achievement of our vision for Ontario postsecondary education.

## Strategic Vision

A high-quality postsecondary education system is central to a successful Ontario. It provides Ontarians with exceptional opportunities for social mobility and economic success; acts as a magnet to recruit the best talent to Ontario; creates and supports a robust economy and jobs grounded in an increasingly competitive, knowledge-based, global economy; improves opportunities for regional, economic and social development; and fosters an engaged, socially-aware and civic-minded Ontario population. Through the talented students they educate, the discoveries and innovations they foster and the communities they support, Ontario's postsecondary education pathways are instrumental to the future success and prosperity of Ontario.

While there are notable strengths in Ontario's postsecondary education system, there are also important challenges in the current landscape. The COVID-19 pandemic is the most significant recent concern, but there are additional ongoing challenges associated with system differentiation, financial sustainability, defining and demonstrating quality and ensuring success for all students, regardless of their background. As the impacts of COVID-19 continue to change the way Ontarians live, work and study, higher education will be more important than ever. The colleges, universities and postsecondary education options of the province drive innovation and research, train and develop talented, globally competitive graduates and help the economy adapt and change to the new realities of the pandemic.

As the only organization of its kind in Canada, HEQCO's evidence-based research is focused on providing government, institutions, employers, students and parents with the critical information needed to meet the pressing challenges facing higher education, now and in the future. Through sustained engagement with leaders and practitioners in the sector, HEQCO continues to explore pathways to critically important student and system outcomes and provides the evidence needed to help Ontario's postsecondary system adapt and thrive.

Informed by ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and leaders throughout the province's higher education sector, HEQCO's research agenda focuses on the priorities of access, quality and sustainability that have been at the core of HEQCO's research for more than a decade. But higher education does not take place in a vacuum and for the system to be successful it must engage with the challenging issues facing society. HEQCO's new research agenda reflects the broader factors that are currently shaping postsecondary education in Ontario and internationally: COVID-19, anti-racism and other movements spearheaded by the BIPOC communities (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour), the shifting labour market, and an ongoing call for the sector to demonstrate its value.

In 2018, changes were made to the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act instructing HEQCO to research how free speech is addressed by postsecondary institutions. HEQCO was directed to develop annual reports and recommendations to the Minister on the results of the research and evaluation. Additionally, in 2019 the government expanded HEQCO's role to include evaluation projects specified by the Minister. This expanded mandate enables evidence-based, independent assessments to help the government in making better, more informed decisions.

## Environmental Scan

External Factors	Implications for HEQCO
<b>COVID-19 Pandemic</b>	
<p>The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people all over the world and Ontario is no exception. The reach of this global pandemic is unprecedented and while its effects can be felt most on the economy and sectors like healthcare, education is also profoundly affected.</p>	<p>In light of the current environment, HEQCO has adjusted its research plan to examine some of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the postsecondary sector as it unfolds.</p> <p>Like many other workplaces, HEQCO pivoted to a remote workplace due to the pandemic. Some previously available data sources became inaccessible due to this shift. Despite these complications, HEQCO’s research continues and new data sources and partnerships are being explored for future projects.</p>
<b>Government Priorities for Agency Sector</b>	
<p>As part of the government of Ontario, agencies are expected to act in the best interests of Ontarians by being efficient, effective, and providing value for money to taxpayers. This includes competitiveness, sustainability and expenditure management; transparency and accountability; risk management; workforce management; data collection; and digital delivery and customer service.</p>	<p>HEQCO has established a series of indicators to ensure sustainable, efficient, transparent and accountable operation. The shift to remote operation has increased efforts to deliver services digitally, where possible, and to explore new possibilities for stakeholder engagement, partnerships and data opportunities. The new HEQCO website launched in late 2020 will allow for increased functionality and an improved stakeholder experience.</p>
<b>Increased Attention to Racial and Social Justice Issues</b>	
<p>Issues of racial equity, social justice and systemic prejudices and barriers received increased attention in the past year with movements such as Black Lives Matter. There is a growing awareness of the differential equity challenges facing BIPOC students and others underrepresented in postsecondary education.</p>	<p>Equity of access has been a pillar of HEQCO’s research agenda since the agency was founded. The new 2021–2024 Strategic Research Framework extends this work with a focus on equitable access and outcomes for Ontarians. The research framework includes a number of access and equity topics, including the differential impact of COVID-19 on access and retention for students from traditionally underrepresented groups. Moving forward, access to data which utilizes the Ontario Education Number (OEN) is essential as HEQCO works to address these and other critical issues in postsecondary education sector.</p>

External Factors	Implications for HEQCO
<b>Government Priorities for Higher Education</b>	
<p>Communities across Ontario have been deeply impacted by the global pandemic. As we look to the future, Ontario’s postsecondary education sector is poised to play a key role in the province’s recovery. The pandemic has highlighted opportunities to modernize and strengthen Ontario’s postsecondary system and support a high quality and sustainable PSE sector. The Ontario government has outlined a number of priorities for higher education:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving the student experience by increasing funding for mental health initiatives on campus. According to <i>Ontario’s Action Plan: Protect • Support • Recover</i>, “this funding will help students by strengthening community partnerships.”</li> <li>- “Providing high-quality postsecondary education that is accountable, accessible and affordable is important in order to meet the current and future needs of Ontario’s labour market.”</li> <li>- Free speech on college and university campuses</li> </ul>	<p>HEQCO’s research priorities are aligned with the province’s higher education goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HEQCO continues to pursue research on improving the student experience including work related to retention of postsecondary students and the supports needed to improve student success.</li> <li>- HEQCO continues to conduct research as part of its evaluation function. Projects are underway that will help HEQCO provide recommendations on The Pathways to Education Program and the Ontario Postsecondary Access and Inclusion Program and ensure that funding is being directed where it is needed most.</li> <li>- HEQCO also expects to evaluate ministry special purpose grants in order to examine their impact on institutions serving students with disabilities.</li> <li>- In line with the government’s intention to “create a fund to incent the development of new micro-credentials that respond to regional labour market needs” HEQCO is compiling evidence to inform strategic approaches to microcredential development and delivery, which includes engaging employers and prospective students in order to understand how they perceive microcredentials and the potential role microcredentials could play in post-pandemic recovery efforts.</li> <li>- HEQCO continues to evaluate how free speech is addressed by postsecondary institutions and provide reports and recommendations to the minister based on the results of its evaluation. The second Freedom of Speech on Campus Annual Report was submitted to the Minister of Colleges and Universities in October 2020 and published in December 2020.</li> </ul>

External Factors	Implications for HEQCO
<b>Stakeholders</b>	
<p>Colleges and universities across the province are sharing their experiences of the hardships the COVID-19 pandemic is creating for students, faculty and administration, and support staff. Media coverage is focused on the ongoing pandemic, including its impact on the economy, labour market and the broader education sector.</p>	<p>Through consultations with leadership across the Ontario postsecondary sector, HEQCO's new research plan is focused on the priorities that matter to institutions, students and government. HEQCO's research priorities contribute to the broader conversation surrounding economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Examinations of topics such as accessibility of digital learning, microcredentials and apprenticeship pathways can help provide guidance on how best the postsecondary sector can contribute to pandemic recovery efforts.</p>

## Strategic Research Framework (2021 to 2024)

HEQCO has developed a comprehensive research framework (see Appendix 3) to drive the agency forward and provide valuable evidence-based guidance and insights at a time of challenge and change in postsecondary education. The framework explores critical issues in each of the core areas of HEQCO's mandate and was developed following consultation with sector colleagues and partners from colleges and universities, student associations, government, educational agencies in Ontario, and not-for-profit groups.

Several principles guided the research framework's development:

- Research activities should reflect, inform and improve the postsecondary priorities and policies of Ontario's government.
- Research activities should be responsive to Ontario's particular context but should also reflect larger national and international trends in postsecondary education and research.
- Research projects should leverage data available in Canada and Ontario, and should, where appropriate, introduce new data collection efforts.
- Research partnerships should support projects that are otherwise out of reach because of access to data, needed expertise or capacity challenges. Partnerships should offer true opportunities for collaboration in project execution and/or deliverables.
- Research publications should largely be generated internally. In some cases, more formal partnerships with external researchers, agencies or institutions will be needed to enhance or enable HEQCO's work.
- Research activities should aim to provide meaningful impact for government and/or sector stakeholders. Projects should bring information and analysis that would otherwise be unavailable to HEQCO's audiences.
- Flexibility should be built into the framework to accommodate unexpected issues such as data access challenges or additional real-time perturbations in the postsecondary sector.
- The new research framework should provide opportunities for HEQCO to build organizational expertise and capacity.

Access, quality and sustainability are represented in the framework as individual areas of focus, but as HEQCO research has shown over time, these priorities overlap in significant ways. For example, research focused on quality may also examine questions of access. It would be impossible to examine the quality of the remote learning experience without also considering the equity issues involved for students in remote areas or students who rely on campus support services to succeed.

### Access

HEQCO's research in the access priority area will largely focus on equity of access, opportunity, supports and outcomes. Over the next three years the research projects will extend our understanding of key questions: *Who* has access to postsecondary education in Ontario, and *what* do they have access to?



Research will evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on enrolment shifts and participation rates, as well as longer term impacts like labour market outcomes and earnings premiums.

HEQCO's work in the equity space will require building a robust data infrastructure, including data associated with the Ontario Education Number (OEN) that can be used to build a province-level understanding of equity across postsecondary institutions. HEQCO is leading a project in Hamilton bringing school boards, community groups and postsecondary education institutions together to share data on pathways and outcomes to better understand the equity issues impacting student success. Building these types of data tools is essential for understanding the complex factors driving inequities in higher education and identifying where more support is needed.

### **Quality**

An immediate focus in the quality priority area is transformations in digital teaching and learning. All colleges and universities have accelerated the development of online capacity and expertise as in-person courses have become temporarily untenable; it will be important to understand the efficacy of emerging pedagogic, curricular and program changes. This research plan also includes a focus on transferable skill development—critical thinking, problem solving, communication and teamwork, for example—in the digital environment.

Two projects are planned that will update and expand benchmarking research undertaken by HEQCO. The first is an update of *Canadian Postsecondary Performance: Impact 2015*, a performance and cost analysis for Canadian postsecondary education. In the refreshed approach, an additional layer of analysis will consider Ontario institutions by region. The second benchmarking project is an update of HEQCO's *Still Worth it After All These Years*, which looks at earnings premiums for Ontario graduates across credential types.

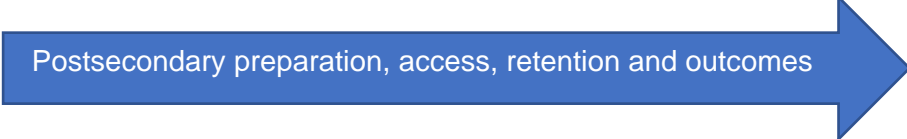

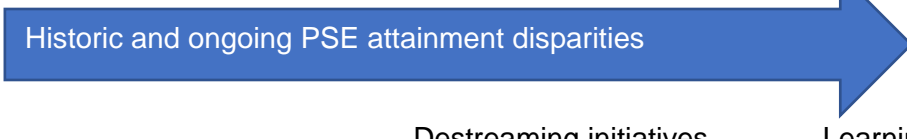
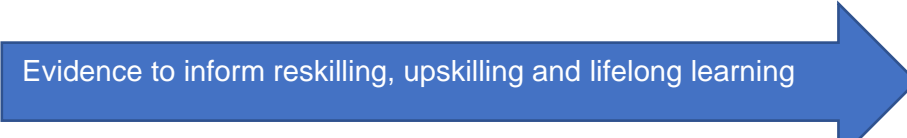
### **Sustainability**

Financial stability for institutions across the province is an important area of focus. As the pandemic unfolded, institutions expressed particular concerns about the decline in international enrolment; the costs of digital course development and delivery; and IT infrastructure needs. But questions of sustainability have long occupied institutional leaders and policymakers. HEQCO's plans in this priority area reflect immediate and historical issues, and the ways these are converging in the current environment. As the pandemic continues, research needs to be pursued on the longer-term effects on institutional stability. HEQCO's work will also consider costs and return on investment associated with postsecondary education.

Current instability concerns highlight the need to focus on the policy frameworks that provide infrastructure in Ontario's postsecondary sector. These policies — differentiation, growth and tuition, for example — have evolved over time and have shaped institutions' operational approaches. HEQCO's work will inform policy related to system sustainability, including levels of funding and differentiated missions to offer a range of credentials.

## HEQCO 2021–24 Research Framework Overview

HEQCO’s research plans are summarized in the framework below. Arrows included in the table signal topic development for projects that will build and evolve over multiple years. The topics listed below summarize project objectives, not specific publications. Issues of data availability, logistics, partnerships and ongoing efforts to define research questions may impact the publication type and timeline.

<b>Access</b>		
Goals:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand HEQCO’s access research to address equity in participation and outcomes for postsecondary students in Ontario.</li> <li>Elevate the impact of HEQCO’s work in access and retention.</li> <li>Build a data infrastructure to illustrate current access and equity challenges and identify promising solutions.</li> <li>Extend HEQCO’s research on entry points for reskilling and lifelong learning.</li> </ul>		
Year 1 focus	Year 2 focus	Year 3 focus
		
	Trends in enrolment, participation and retention	COVID-19 impact on student outcomes
		
	Equity benchmarking pilot projects	Equity benchmarking reporting
		
	Destreaming initiatives Apprenticeships pathways and completion	Learning requirements and campus infrastructure for student success
		
Microcredential landscape and definitions	Trends in participation and completion of alternative credentials	

# Quality

**Goals:**

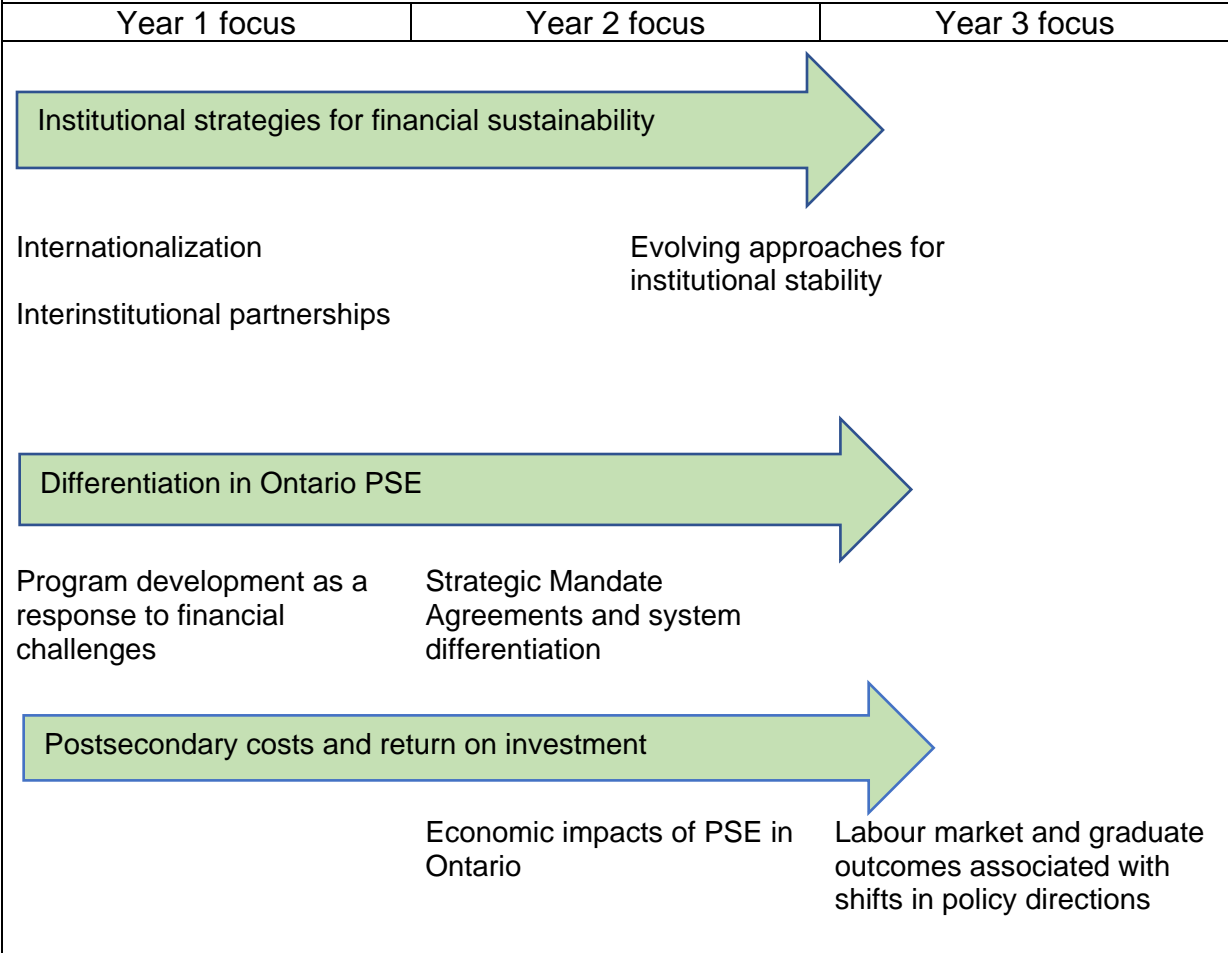
- Expand the impact of HEQCO’s work on learning outcomes.
- Further develop HEQCO’s understanding and evaluation of teaching and learning environments.
- Build a data infrastructure on the value of postsecondary education in Ontario, with a focus on skills and competencies.

Year 1 focus	Year 2 focus	Year 3 focus
<p style="background-color: #d9e1f2; padding: 5px;">Transformations in digital learning</p>	<p>Using learning outcomes to inform curriculum program design</p>	<p>Shifts in curriculum and pedagogy impacted by COVID-19</p>
<p style="background-color: #d9e1f2; padding: 5px;">Skills gap: trends, evidence and impacts</p>	<p>Students’ skill articulation</p>	<p>Transferable skill development in the digital environment</p>
<p>Work integrated and experiential learning participation and outcomes</p>	<p>Assessing students’ learning and skills outcomes</p>	<p>COVID-19 impact on skill development</p>
<p>Performance and cost analysis for Canadian PSE</p>		
<p style="background-color: #d9e1f2; padding: 5px;">Earning premiums for PSE graduates</p>		
<p>Value of Ontario credentials for graduates across programs and background characteristics</p>		<p>Earnings premiums for post-COVID-19 PSE graduates</p> <p>Effects of employment disruptions on longer term PSE graduate outcomes</p>

# Sustainability and System Design

**Goals:**

- Explore and critically review the PSE policy context in Ontario to chart a path to the future.
- Promote differentiation as a means to support academic quality and return on investment.
- Review Ontario PSE institutions' financial sustainability and cost structure.



## **Data Access and Ministry Engagement**

The realities of the COVID-19 pandemic have created new challenges for HEQCO research. In recent years, HEQCO has used Statistics Canada datasets stored at Research Data Centres to develop new insights into issues of equity of access, labour market outcomes, apprenticeships and the skilled trades, and more. With opportunities to access this data limited due to the pandemic, the importance of expanding available data is critical. Of particular relevance to HEQCO's research agenda is access to data sets including the Ontario Education Number – at the system level, which has the potential of transforming our understandings of students and their experiences. HEQCO will continue to work with the provincial government to take steps towards developing this underutilized resource.

## **Evaluations for Government**

As part of the expanded evaluation role announced in 2019, the Ministry requested that HEQCO review and make recommendations to improve and modernize the Ontario Postsecondary Access and Inclusion Program (OPAIP), Pathways to Education and disability funding. The OPAIP evaluation has been submitted to the Ministry for review and the Pathways to Education evaluation is underway. HEQCO also annually collects and reviews the annual freedom of speech on campus reports from colleges and universities and provides a summary report to the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Reports have been published for 2019 and 2020.

## **Summary**

The research framework will serve as a top-level guide as HEQCO works with government and partners to support Ontario's high-quality postsecondary system. It provides flexibility to adapt and develop multi-year projects that are responsive and reflect innovative ideas and strategies in postsecondary education.

HEQCO's work is strengthened through relationships with postsecondary institutions, non-profit agencies and community organizations. These relationships assist HEQCO researchers with dissemination of publications, peer review of draft reports, review of research materials such as surveys, and advice regarding publicly available data. External partners may also serve as co-authors on HEQCO projects.

In recent years, HEQCO has responded to the government's focus on fiscal sustainability and accountability by shifting to more internally developed research projects as opposed to funding work by external researchers. A focus on internal projects means that HEQCO research is not only responsive to government needs, but able to adapt to what is happening across the higher education sector.

## Agency Performance Metrics

HEQCO's performance metrics capture the impact and scope of the research agenda and the responsible, efficient use of public funds. These metrics are intended to provide transparent, output-driven metrics that are relevant and straightforward. The use of reporting metrics on research performance is a fraught process and adjustments will be required moving forward.

### Research:

Research is at the core of HEQCO's work. The metrics below offer a starting point for capturing both the research output and the activities of research staff in sharing information with stakeholders and collaborating on new projects and initiatives. Metrics for reporting research impact are challenging to develop and strict quantitative measures may not capture the scope and reach of HEQCO's work. Efforts are currently underway to develop an additional qualitative metric that can be included in future business plans.

Research output - Number of HEQCO authored publications, including research reports, government evaluations (including the freedom of speech annual review) and assessment projects, briefing notes, research summaries and opinion pieces.

Target: 12 annually based on current staffing FTE

Knowledge mobilization and sector outreach - The number of times HEQCO staff present at conferences, roundtables and seminars on HEQCO research projects, or serve as a convener for sector stakeholders. These include virtual/remote conferences or events.

Target: 10 annually based on current staffing FTE

### Administration:

As a government agency HEQCO works to use public funds in a responsible and efficient way that provides value to the government and people of Ontario. The metrics included for operational performance capture the success of HEQCO in making effective use of its allocated financial resources.

Percentage of administrative overhead - Ratio of administrative overhead to budget. This includes the salaries, benefits, IT, office equipment and operations costs of non-research staff.

Target: <10%

Management within budget - Deliver the mandate of HEQCO within the annual operating budget minimizing underspend. (Note: as a provincial agency HEQCO is prohibited from operating with costs beyond allocated revenues)

Target: <10% underspent

### Communications:

Addressing the challenges facing higher education requires more than government policy. HEQCO's commitment to sharing its work publicly is a valuable resource to help inform the Ministry of Colleges and Universities as well as institutional leaders, faculty, students, employers and the general public to have informed discussions to help solve the difficult problems facing the sector. The metrics for assessing communications help capture not only individual report readership, but how many are

interested in continuing to read HEQCO's work. These metrics reflect the knowledge mobilization goals of HEQCO's communications activities.

In 2020, HEQCO launched a new website with improved design, functionality, accessibility and an increased focus at making research products more adaptable to digital delivery. Moving forward this focus will expand to leveraging this new platform to adapt to remote realities from the COVID-19 pandemic and expand the range of ways HEQCO engages with stakeholders including potential virtual gatherings and events

Percentage of subscriber growth - The growth percentage of the collective subscribers to HEQCO's email mailing list, Twitter account, Facebook page, LinkedIn page and any future social media platforms.

Readership per product growth percentage - The average pageview count of research publications, blog posts and research-specific web content based on HEQCO's website analytics.

Target: >7% growth from previous year

Distribution - All research products (as defined in the research performance metrics) will be distributed to identified target audiences through accessible, bilingual products with a focus on digital formats on the HEQCO website.

Target: 18 products based on current FTE and research framework.

## **Financial Requirements**

Approximately 85% of HEQCO's \$4.1M operating budget is allocated to research, the core business of the agency. The remaining funds support council governance, executive services and administration. HEQCO is projecting an underspend of \$1.2 million in 2020/21, as a result of decisions taken in the 2019/20 budget cycle which are laid out below and as a consequence of becoming a fully remote agency in September 2020.

- In the 2019/20 budget cycle MCU reduced HEQCO's operating budget by \$900,000 or 18%.
- HEQCO immediately cancelled all external research contracts and partnerships totalling \$638,515— many of which represented multi-year financial commitments for ongoing research projects. An additional \$399,848 had been committed for 2020/21.
- This triggered an immediate decrease of four staff persons and \$168,310 in salaries, and reductions in project pipeline and research productivity.
- Leadership change at HEQCO took over 12 months to complete during which time the agency operated under interim leadership in the absence of renewal of the research and staffing plans.
- The COVID-19 pandemic led to lockdowns beginning in March 2020 and resulted in the cancellation of all in-person HEQCO conferences and workshops.
- The Treasury Board's decision for HEQCO to decommission its office space by August 30, 2020 resulted in lease-related underspending of \$130,000 in fiscal 2020/21.

A re-engagement strategy with sector stakeholders and partners began with the appointment of the new President and CEO and Vice President, Research and Policy in the second quarter of 2020. Input was sought and received on the new Strategic Research Framework and plans are underway for proof of concept as well as multi-year projects involving sector partners. This work, coupled with the expanding

mandate to undertake program evaluation work on behalf of MCU, requires the expansion of the agency's research capacity. HEQCO will look to expand beyond its current FTE count in 2021/22 cycle.

In light of the circumstances outlined above and as a consequence of the plans now in place for renewal of the agency, HEQCO requests that its current base budget be preserved for the 2021/22 cycle to allow for the full implementation of the strategic research framework, including staffing and partnership renewal. HEQCO will also require resources to fund the full commissioning of a new permanent office location in the 2021/22 cycle.

Appendix 1 provides an estimate of financial resources needed for 2021–2024.

Appendix 2 provides the Risk Assessment Reporting Tool for 2020/21 required by the Agencies and Appointments Directive and approved by HEQCO's Board of Directors.

## **Staff Retention and Development**

HEQCO makes considerable investments in the selection, training and professional development of our contract and permanent staff. Given the multi-year nature of certain projects, staff retention is critical to the continuity and quality of the research products. To support the retention and development of staff, HEQCO works within existing provincial regulations regarding compensation, augmented by best practices in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), talent management, including performance assessments; mentoring; professional development opportunities; media-interview and writing skills; as well as opportunities for project management and leadership skills development.

In 2020 HEQCO welcomed Janice Deakin as the new President and CEO and Julia Colyar as Vice President, Research and Policy. In conjunction with developing a new research agenda, an HR review was conducted to ensure the capacity of the agency to deliver on its mandate and ambitious research plan. HEQCO currently has 20 full-time equivalent staff and is targeting a staff complement of 25. HEQCO developed and launched work integrated learning opportunities for up to four Ontario postsecondary students and recent graduates through its internship program.

HEQCO's lease ended on August 31, 2020. Staff has been working remotely since then. While this may be a suitable arrangement at this time due to the pandemic, HEQCO needs a suitable physical location for the Agency to convene meetings, conferences and workshops and provide the opportunity for an exchange of ideas and staff collaboration. To meet the requirements of research ethics boards that govern HEQCO's activities with research partners, secure locations are required for data storage and analysis.

## **Office Space Requirements**

HEQCO and Infrastructure Ontario (IO) worked together in 2019-20 to find a suitable solution for HEQCO's accommodation. While Infrastructure Ontario found an alternate location for HEQCO the new lease was not approved by Treasury Board, and HEQCO was forced to decommission its office and liquidate its assets within less than two months.



In 2021-22, HEQCO and the Ministry plan to work together to engage IO again in finding a new suitable physical location. Appendix 1: Financial Requirements 2021-2024 includes estimates for a plan to move to a new office in January 2022. In keeping with the Interim Measures for Agencies, the lease term is projected for 2 years. Based on IO recommendations for HEQCO in 2020, calculations reflect 2,800 square feet of space at net \$29/sq.ft., and gross \$57/sq.ft. Annual gross rent is \$160,000. Also, based on IO's analysis, leasehold improvements are estimated at \$350,000 and new furniture purchases at \$150,000. As noted above, these figures affect Appendix 1. depreciation expenses and deferred capital contributions heavily due to the two year lease term rule.

Appendix 1: Financial Outlook

Appendix 2: Risk Assessment Reporting Tool for 2020/21 (Attached)

Appendix 3: Strategic Research Framework (2021–2024)