

Ministry of Colleges and Universities

Office of the Minister

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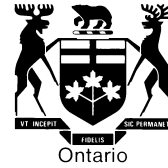
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Ministère des Collèges et Universités

Bureau du ministre

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A. Scott Carson
Acting Chair
Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

Dear Mr. Carson,

I am pleased to write to you in your capacity as Acting Chair of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) to provide you with a letter setting out expectations and direction for HEQCO in the year ahead. Pursuant to the requirements of the Agencies and Appointments Directive, this letter sets out my expectations for HEQCO for the 2021-22 fiscal year.

Ontario's board-governed agencies are vital partners in ensuring the delivery of high-quality services to Ontarians. The work that you and your fellow board members undertake to establish the goals, objectives, and strategic direction for HEQCO ensures that the agency is meeting its mandate. It is important that this direction is consistent with government priorities, your agency mandate, key policies and directives, and my directions, where appropriate. I thank you for your willingness to serve.

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 December 2019, HEQCO's evaluation function was further expanded to include Minister specified evaluations of the ministry's programs and services, or other postsecondary education (PSE) programs and services provided or funded by the Government of Ontario.

PSE Modernization Framework

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 PSE system and support a high quality and sustainable PSE sector.

To ensure that Ontario is building on the talent and skills of our students and graduates to drive Ontario's economic recovery, the ministry's vision for the future includes a focus on community impact, virtual learning, how students learn, accountability and affordability and research and science.

HEQCO is mandated to undertake research, evaluations and recommendations to inform and support the ministry's work. It is important that the Council's research, evaluations and recommendations align with the ministry's priorities including the PSE Modernization Framework. HEQCO's focus on improving the quality/learning outcomes, access and accountability/system design of the postsecondary sector and the agency's key role on free speech, aligns well with ministry priorities. HEQCO will continue to play an important role in 2021-22 in supporting government priorities.

Priorities for Agency Sector

This year, government priorities have been identified for the provincial agency sector. 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:

1. Competitiveness, Sustainability and Expenditure Management

- operating within your agency's allocations
- exploring opportunities for revenue generation
- identifying and pursuing efficiencies and savings
- complying with applicable direction related to supply chain centralization, Realty Interim Measures and Agency Office Location Criteria

2. Transparency and Accountability

- abiding by applicable government directives and policies and ensuring transparency and accountability in reporting
- adhering to requirements of the Agencies and Appointment Directive, and responding to audit findings, where applicable
- identifying appropriate skills, knowledge and experience needed, with a skills matrix, to effectively support the board's role in agency governance and accountability

3. Risk Management

- developing and implementing an effective process for the identification, assessment and mitigation of risks, including planning for and responding to emergency situations such as COVID-19

4. Workforce Management

- optimizing your agency's workforce to enable efficient and effective fulfilment of government priorities, while enhancing customer service standards

- streamlining back office functions to ensure that all available resources are redirected towards the critical front-line services that Ontarians depend upon

5. Data Collection

- improving how the agency uses data in decision-making, information sharing and reporting, including by leveraging available or new data solutions to inform outcome-based reporting and improve service delivery
- supporting transparency and data sharing with the ministry, as appropriate

6. Digital Delivery and Customer Service

- exploring and implementing digitization or digital modernization strategies for the provision of services online and continuing to meet and exceed customer service standards through transition
- using a variety of approaches or tools to ensure service delivery in all situations, including COVID-19

I thank you and your fellow board members for your continued support, and for your valuable contributions. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Paddy Buckley, Director of the Postsecondary Education Policy Branch at Paddy.Buckley@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Ross Romano
Minister of Colleges and Universities

c: Dr. Janice Deakin
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

Shelley Tapp
Deputy Minister,
Ministry of Colleges and Universities