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
2022–2025 Business Plan

Ontario

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

Continuously pursue 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. By remaining attentive to emerging trends, HEQCO has the agility to pursue promising new avenues of research as opportunities arise.

Engage with leaders and practitioners 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. HEQCO's global perspective on higher education research, policy and practice brings the best ideas, findings and insights to Ontario. Many of Ontario's postsecondary education (PSE) challenges are shared by jurisdictions across Canada and worldwide.

Communicate with our audiences in accessible and meaningful ways: HEQCO contributes to the effective movement of evidence-based solutions into policy development and best practice, through understandable and direct communication. To help bridge the gap between complex research knowledge and its active use in the PSE sector, HEQCO's work is written in an accessible style and publicly available.

Advocate for data collection and transparency: HEQCO remains an advocate for a more transparent, open and holistic approach to higher education data, in partnership with educational institutions, organizations and governments. Data is the lifeblood of evidence-based policy decision-making and HEQCO will continue to seek out solutions to the significant and persistent data gaps that exist at both the provincial and national level.

Recognize that accountability is a foundational tool for system improvement: HEQCO explores system design models across the globe to improve postsecondary access and quality in Ontario.

Respond 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.

Be 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 — Message from HEQCO's President and CEO

Since its creation, HEQCO has provided evidence-based solutions to ensure government, students, institutions and the public are getting the full benefit of a high-quality postsecondary education system. Ontario's higher education system provides the building blocks for personal development, social mobility and economic success and during a time of significant change and turmoil; the investment being made in colleges and universities is as essential as ever.

In our most recent mandate letter, the Minister of Colleges and Universities reaffirmed that HEQCO's focus on improving the quality, access and system design of the postsecondary sector, as well as our ongoing role in free speech reporting, was aligned with ministry priorities. We look forward to opportunities to assist the government in improving all aspects of Ontario's postsecondary sector.

The past year has been exciting for HEQCO as we embarked on a new research plan 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. Given the complexity of the issues and our interests, we've taken the following steps:

- Over the past year, we have added new researchers and student interns to expand our capacity. Our team brings a variety of professional experiences and perspectives to inform our projects and approaches. We have designed our team to include members with expertise in research design, qualitative and quantitative data analysis, and data visualization techniques.

- As we developed our new framework, we met with leaders from across the province to discuss shared questions and priorities. Our work depends on the partnerships we foster with institutions, agencies and community organizations. We are pleased to have established new partnerships with institutions, school boards, advisory groups, not-for-profit organizations and research organizations and we look forward to continued conversations.

- Data is at the heart of HEQCO's work to develop evidence-based recommendations and analyses that aim to enhance postsecondary education in Ontario. Accessing data in Ontario is an ongoing challenge. To best serve students, families, employers and government, HEQCO will continue to draw attention to the research opportunities that are possible when data is made accessible. A critical development has been new data sharing agreements with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, The Ontario College Application Service and a number of Ontario school boards. Access to previously unavailable data will strengthen and expand HEQCO's research capacity.

Our discussions on data are already delivering promising results. As part of our role to provide evaluation support at the request of the Minister of Colleges and Universities, HEQCO will conduct an evaluation of the province's Virtual Learning Strategy, including identifying opportunities to improve the data collected in Ontario on virtual learning and related outcomes. As a passionate advocate for high-quality data, this is an important step forward.

I want to thank our Board of Directors for their continued support of our work and their guidance in delivering on our mandate to the government and citizens of Ontario.

Janice M. Deakin, PhD, ICD.D — President and CEO

Environmental Scan

External Factors	Implications for HEQCO
COVID-19 Pandemic	
The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the entire world, including Ontario. 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 with youth and students being disproportionately impacted.	HEQCO's Research Framework includes projects to examine some of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the postsecondary sector. Like many other workplaces, HEQCO pivoted to remote operation due to the pandemic. Some previously available data sources became inaccessible due to this shift, however new data sharing agreements with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, the Ontario College Application Services and some school boards have allowed for new research opportunities and better-quality data for ongoing projects.
Government Priorities for 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. Government expects agencies to focus on: • Competitiveness, sustainability and expenditure management • Transparency and accountability • Risk management • Workforce management • Data collection • Digital delivery and customer service • Diversity and inclusion • COVID-19 recovery	HEQCO established a series of indicators to ensure responsible, sustainable, efficient, transparent and accountable operation. The shift to remote operation increased efforts to deliver services digitally, where possible, and to explore new possibilities for stakeholder engagement, partnerships and data opportunities. New business systems and approaches designed specifically for a remote environment have improved efficiencies. HEQCO research staff continue to embrace opportunities for knowledge mobilization in the virtual space and all public HEQCO material is available digitally. Equity of access has been a pillar of HEQCO's research agenda since the agency was founded and the current Strategic Research Framework extends this work with a focus on equitable access and outcomes for Ontarians. The research framework includes several access and equity topics, including the differential impact of COVID-19 on access and retention for students from traditionally underrepresented groups. HEQCO has incorporated equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training as part of its professional development. Examinations of topics such as transitions to PSE during the pandemic, the quality of work-integrated learning, skills development and Universal Design for Learning can help provide guidance on how the

External Factors	Implications for HEQCO
	postsecondary sector can best contribute to pandemic recovery efforts.
Government Priorities for Higher Education	
Communities across Ontario have been deeply impacted by the global pandemic. As we look to the future, Ontario's PSE 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. Some of these include: - Implementing Ontario's Virtual Learning Strategy which was announced in late 2020 and aims to drive growth and advancement in virtual learning across the provinces' postsecondary institutions. - Providing high-quality postsecondary education that is accountable, accessible and affordable to help Ontarians meet the current and future needs of the labour market. - Protecting free speech on college and university campuses - Exploring the potential for expanding the range of credentials offered through Ontario's colleges.	HEQCO's research priorities are aligned with the province's higher education goals: - At the request of the Minister of Colleges and Universities, HEQCO will undertake a review of Ontario's Virtual Learning Strategy to better understand its impacts on students and the system and to develop best practices for remote learning in the future. - HEQCO continues to pursue research on improving the student experience. This includes work related to retention and graduation of postsecondary students and the supports needed to improve student success. - HEQCO continues to monitor how free speech is addressed by postsecondary institutions and provide reports and recommendations to the minister based on the results of its evaluation. The third *Freedom of Speech on Campus Annual Report* was submitted to the Minister of Colleges and Universities in September 2021 and published in November 2021. - HEQCO is examining whether existing PSE credentials in Ontario are meeting the needs of students, employers, institutions and government. HEQCO has provided recommendations on the potential expansion of degrees in Ontario's colleges as per the request of the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

External Factors	Implications for HEQCO
Stakeholders	
Colleges and universities across the province are sharing their experiences of the hardships the COVID-19 pandemic is creating for students, faculty, administration and support staff. Media coverage is focused on the ongoing pandemic, including its impact on the economy, labour market and broader education sector. There is ongoing discussion of what a quality educational experience means for students, institutions, government and employers, particularly in an increasingly virtual environment.	HEQCO's research plan was developed through consultations with leadership and stakeholders across the Ontario postsecondary sector. It 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 and success in the labour market. HEQCO will continue to develop its digital outreach tools and approaches to share this information with relevant stakeholders and engage with partners in discussions aimed at providing evidence and solutions for improving postsecondary education in Ontario.

Research Framework

To sustain the province's strong postsecondary education system, HEQCO remains committed to investigating critical issues and sector challenges. Our Strategic Research Framework (see Appendices 1 and 2) explores critical issues in each of the core areas of HEQCO's mandate. The framework is a roadmap that builds on our long-standing research into the interconnected priorities of access, quality, and sustainability and system design. This roadmap reflects 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.

Access

Goals

- Expand HEQCO's access research to address equity in participation and outcomes for postsecondary students in Ontario
- Build a data infrastructure to illustrate current access and equity challenges and identify promising solutions
- Extend HEQCO's research on entry points for reskilling and lifelong learning

Projects will examine:

Postsecondary preparation, access, retention and outcomes

- Trends in enrolment, participation and retention
- COVID-19 impact on student outcomes

Equity benchmarking data development

- Equity benchmarking pilot projects
- Equity benchmarking reporting

Historic and ongoing PSE attainment disparities

- Destreaming initiatives
- Apprenticeship pathways in the college system and completion
- Learning requirements and campus infrastructure for student success

Evidence to inform reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning

- Trends in participation and completion of alternative credentials

Quality

Goals

- Expand the impact of HEQCO's work on learning outcomes through engagement with the sector stakeholders in a community of practice
- 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

Projects will examine:

Transformations in digital learning

- Using learning outcomes to inform curriculum program design
- Shifts in curriculum and pedagogy impacted by COVID-19

Skills gap: trends, evidence and impacts

- Work-integrated and experiential learning participation and outcomes
- Performance and cost analysis for Canadian PSE
- Students' skill articulation
- Assessing students' learning and skills outcomes
- Transferable skill development in the digital environment
- COVID-19 impact on skill development

Earnings premiums for PSE graduates

- Value of Ontario credentials for graduates across programs and background characteristics
- Earnings premiums for post-COVID-19 PSE graduates
- Effects of employment disruptions on longer-term PSE graduate outcomes

Sustainability and system design

Goals

- Explore and critically review the PSE policy context in Ontario to chart a path to the future
- Examine the effects of policy decisions on system differentiation and sustainability
- Review Ontario PSE institutions' financial sustainability and cost structure

Projects will examine:

Institutional strategies for financial sustainability

- Internationalization

- Inter-institutional partnerships
- Evolving approaches for institutional stability

Differentiation in Ontario PSE

- Program development as a response to financial challenge
- SMAs and system differentiation

Postsecondary costs and return on investment

- Economic impacts of PSE in Ontario
- Labour market and graduate outcomes associated with shifts in policy directions

Ongoing Projects

Freedom of Speech on Campus [Quality]

The objective of the Ontario Campus Free Speech Policy is to ensure that all colleges and universities have a strong and clear policy that is consistent across the sector. Regulations under the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act, 2005 were amended, requiring HEQCO to monitor and evaluate ongoing implementation of free speech policies by postsecondary institutions and provide reports and recommendations to the minister. Institutions are required to submit to HEQCO annual reports detailing the implementation of their free speech policies. HEQCO reviews and assesses each institution's annual report and produces a report summarizing the findings.

Review of Ontario Credentials [Access, Quality, System Design and Sustainability]

This project will examine the current credential mix in Ontario and how it is meeting the needs of learners and the labour market. As requested by the Minister of Colleges and Universities, HEQCO will also offer recommendations and implementation concerns on the potential expansion of degrees in Ontario's colleges. The project will outline current offerings in the province, examine labour market outcomes by credential type and explore cost implications for potential system-level changes to the mix of credentials.

Women in Academia Series [Access]

While much of HEQCO's access work is focused on access for students, with this project the focus is on access for those working in university faculties, specifically women working in STEM disciplines. Despite advocacy efforts, collective bargaining, targeted funding and legislation, the gaps in both representation and earnings for women academics persist. This project will explore the challenges faced by women academics in STEM including difficulties accessing equal opportunities, wage gaps and the phenomenon known as the "leaky pipeline" which leads to many women to leaving STEM. The project will include the findings from interviews with professors, graduate students and women who left academic STEM.

PSE Transitions During COVID [Access]

This project will explore how students whose final years of high school were disrupted by the pandemic are faring in the transition from high school to postsecondary. In partnership with

Academica, the project surveyed students after their first year of college or university and will shed light on preparedness for PSE, decision-making processes and experiences in first year. The information gathered will help institutions accommodate the needs of incoming students whose learning was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This project will also involve partnerships with Ontario school boards to access data to better understand learning gaps and preferences PSE institutions should be aware of. Through a partnership with the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS) questions were added to their applicant survey about how COVID-19 impacted student applications, including decisions about which programs to apply to.

Work-integrated learning [Access, Quality]

Work-integrated learning (WIL) — which encompasses co-operative education, internships, work placements and apprenticeships — is becoming more widespread in today's colleges and universities with the goals of preparing students for the post-graduate labour market and better integrating learning and work. WIL is an important component of many college and university programs and is seen as a potential means of addressing the perceived skills gap. HEQCO's upcoming work in WIL involves multiple projects. HEQCO is conducting surveys to gauge perception of the experience and impacts of shifting WIL to an online model and asking critical questions on accessibility, equity and inclusion. These projects will combine federal and survey data, in partnership with Academica, to examine the experiences of students, employers and administrators.

Skills Consortium [Quality]

HEQCO established a Skills Consortium to explore effective ways to teach essential skills. Through a request for proposal process, seven institutional projects with a focus on innovations or interventions relating to the acquisition, development and/or articulation of transferable skills were selected. A final report on these projects will focus on recommendations aimed at province-wide improvement of transferable skills.

Social Mobility [Access]

The benefits of postsecondary education for social mobility are well established, but they are not accessed equally. Using a combination of federal data and survey responses, this project will examine who benefits the most from attending college or university and why the benefits are not equal for all graduates. The report will consider labour market performance, inter-generational impacts and unseen barriers for students.

Hamilton Community Research Project [Access]

The Hamilton Community Research Project (CRP) is a coalition of six organizations— Hamilton's public and catholic school boards, McMaster University, Mohawk College, the Hamilton Community Foundation and HEQCO. The CRP was organized to address a gap in available data about educational pathways, while being mindful of stakeholders' privacy concerns. Despite the volume of information they collect, school boards and postsecondary institutions lack information on educational pathways before and after their students' attendance. Together, the CRP created a shared, de-identified data set that provides insight into student pathways to and through secondary and postsecondary education in Hamilton. HEQCO-published reports will address critical questions for student access. Are graduates of Hamilton secondary schools attending postsecondary? How can school boards improve

postsecondary outcomes for underrepresented groups? How are students who attend postsecondary doing once there? And how can colleges and universities better accommodate the needs of incoming students? Future work drawing on the data will focus on numeracy skills and other predictors of postsecondary access and success.

Evaluation of Destreaming in Hamilton [Access]

In light of the Ontario Government announcement that streaming in Grade 9 is coming to an end in all subjects, it is important to evaluate the impact this will have on student outcomes and equity. In partnership with two Ontario school boards, math destreaming interventions such as mentorship programs, courses aimed at learning gaps and additional support resources will be evaluated to determine their impact on student success and performance on tests and assessments. The project will include data on use of supports, surveys of students, interviews with teachers and an analysis of student achievement data such as EQAO scores and course grades.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) [Access, Quality]

Recent HEQCO reports on accessibility and supports for students with disabilities have emphasized the importance of embracing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) across institutions. This project is aimed at facilitating institution-wide uptake of UDL principles and practices at Ontario's colleges and universities by gathering evidence about the best approaches. Through a series of discussion-focused events, the project will examine the barriers and opportunities for engaging institution staff and implications for equity, diversity and inclusion principles when adopting UDL. The project will result in a report of recommendations and the establishment of a community of practice that an Ontario college plans to sustain/lead.

Confederation College's Indigenous Knowledge Implementation Packsack [Quality]

Continuing the work of Confederation College's Learning Outcomes Assessment Consortium project, this initiative is focused on best practices, tools and advice for embedding Indigenous Learning Outcomes throughout the learning process.

Postsecondary and Workplace Skills (PAWS) [Quality]

In the final phase of HEQCO's Postsecondary and Workplace Skills (PAWS) project, Employment and Social Development Canada will examine the labour market outcomes for students who participated in the earlier PAWS assessments to examine how literacy and numeracy are connected to employment and earnings. Tax file information from five years after assessment will be used along with data from Statistics Canada.

Experiences of Refugee Students [Access, Quality]

As part of a partnership with the Newcomer Student Alliance, HEQCO will examine the retention, graduation and labour market outcomes for refugee students using data from Statistics Canada and interviews. Recent global events have led to a possible increase in refugees and while they are counted in the system as domestic students, refugees often face similar barriers and challenges to those of international students.

Upcoming Projects

Evaluation of the Virtual Learning Strategy [Access, Quality, System Design and Sustainability]

In December 2020, the provincial government announced a $50 million investment in a new Virtual Learning Strategy, with an additional $21.4 million committed over two years. At the request of the Minister of Colleges and Universities, HEQCO will conduct an evaluation to ensure the strategy is delivering the desired outcomes. This project will compare outcomes for students learning virtually relative to those in traditional instruction, examine faculty and student engagement, better understand perceptions of quality, and explore equity concerns and potential financial impacts on students and the system. HEQCO will also work closely with the Ministry to identify opportunities to improve data collection specific to online and virtual outcomes.

Impact 2022 [Access, Quality, System Design and Sustainability]

This project is an update to work HEQCO published in the spring of 2015 that offered a comprehensive analysis of postsecondary performance across Canada. Using a wide range of indicators for colleges and universities, each province's postsecondary system will be evaluated based on their operating cost per student to examine the correlation between the performance of a system and the funding it receives. An Ontario focused component of the project will examine institutional performance based on institution type, size, program mix and/or location. A new aspect of this project will be an exploration of the connection between issues of equity and system accountability. This project was planned for the previous business cycle, however access to Research Data Centres was interrupted by pandemic restrictions.

Strategic Mandate Agreement Outcomes [Access, Quality, System Design and Sustainability]

Strategic Mandate Agreements have been in place between the Ontario Government and colleges and universities for close to 10 years. The most recent agreements are aligned to the government's shift to a performance-based funding model, and it is important to provide an outcomes assessment to examine the impact of these changes and to use the data generated to develop system-level insights for the government and institutions to inform future accountability agreements. This project will also consider alternate forms of accountability controls.

Postsecondary Persistence [Access]

Building on the recent data sharing agreement between the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and HEQCO, this project will expand the understanding of factors that affect Ontario students' persistence in postsecondary education. The analysis will focus on persistence outcomes according to student characteristics such as socio-economic status, gender, immigration status, program of study and institution type.

Skilled Trades [Access, Quality, System Design and Sustainability]

Access to the skilled trades remains unequal, with many groups underrepresented. Training for these careers also illustrates low completion rates when compared with college and university education, but that metric does not capture the full story of the experience of these students. As

Ontario’s colleges remain prominent training centres for the skilled trades, HEQCO will explore opportunities for potential research on the barriers to access and the relationship between completion rates and labour market outcomes.

Agency Performance Metrics

HEQCO's performance metrics capture the impact and scope of the research agenda and the responsible, efficient use of public funds. Introduced and refined through the previous two Business Plans, 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. 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/published publications, including research reports, government evaluations and assessment projects (including the freedom of speech annual review) and briefing notes. *Note: this metric previously included blogs and commentary products, which are now captured in the communications section under distribution and outreach.*
Target: 12

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: 12 annually based on current staffing FTE

Administration:

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

Percentage of administrative overhead - Ratio of administrative overhead to actual expenses. This includes the salaries, benefits, IT, office equipment and operations costs of non-research staff.
Target: <10%

Maximizing funding deployment while managing within budget - Deliver HEQCO's mandate within the annual operating budget while maximizing mobilization of funding for research purposes. (Note: as a provincial agency HEQCO is prohibited from operating with costs beyond allocated funding revenues)
Target: >90% of budgeted funds deployed

Communications:

Addressing the challenges facing higher education requires more than government policy. HEQCO's commitment to sharing its work publicly helps inform the Ministry of Colleges and Universities as well as institutional leaders, faculty, students, employers and the general public, and allows them to have informed discussions that 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.

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 and outreach – The number of direct outreaches to stakeholders/target audiences through accessible, bilingual products with a focus on digital formats on the HEQCO website. These include research products, blogs and commentary, marketing materials and communications products.
Target: 20 products based on current FTE and research framework.

Financial Requirements

Approximately 85% of HEQCO's $4.1M operating budget is allocated to research — both internal and external — which is the core business of the agency. The remaining funds support council governance, executive services and administration. HEQCO is projecting an underspend of $400,000 in 2021/22, as a consequence of updated lease expectations and continuing as a fully remote agency for the full 2021/22 fiscal year.

- Renewal of the research and staffing plans continues to build capacity in the project pipeline and research productivity.
- The COVID-19 pandemic easing in 2021 led to a gradual increase in flexibility for gatherings but has not created a consensus that in-person HEQCO conferences and workshops are viable.
- Following HEQCO's decommissioning of its office space on August 30, 2020, the expectation was that an alternate office space would be secured by the end of December 2021. That expectation has been moderated leaving HEQCO continuing in a virtual format much longer than initially thought. This resulted in lease-related underspending of $525,000 versus budget in fiscal 2021/22.
- Through discussions with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, HEQCO understands the timeline for potential occupancy of a new office space is likely 2025 or beyond. The three-year financial forecast has been updated to reflect the capital costs relating to a lease agreement beginning in January 2025.

The renewal of the agency under the new President and CEO and Vice President, Research and Policy continues in 2021/22. HEQCO continues to move forward with the new Strategic Research Framework and supports the undertaking of program evaluation work on behalf of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. HEQCO expanded its current FTE count in the 2021/22 cycle to increase the production of internally based research while continuing to re-engage with sector partners for new multi-year projects through the Skills Consortium. HEQCO requests that

its current base budget be preserved for the 2022/23 cycle to continue the implementation of the Strategic Research Framework. HEQCO will also require resources to fund the full commissioning and operating costs of a new office location now projected in the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Appendix 3 provides an estimate of financial resources needed for 2022–2025.

Appendix 4 provides the Risk Assessment Reporting Tool for 2021/22 required by the Agencies and Appointments Directive and approved by HEQCO's Board of Directors.

Risk Management

HEQCO staff continue to work with the Audit Committee to ensure financial controls and oversight are effective and adequate, including updates to employ best practices wherever possible. HEQCO continues to receive clean audit opinions from external auditors in their annual report, which includes a review of HEQCO's internal processes and financial controls.

As part of the leadership renewal occurring in 2020, HEQCO introduced the use of a Risk Heat Map to monitor on a quarterly basis the key risk factors for HEQCO's operations. The Risk Heat Map is presented to the Audit Committee and the Board each quarter with updated mitigation strategies and actions taken to ensure appropriate risk management.

In 2021, the HEQCO Board has welcomed the appointment of three new members who have received their Order in Council for their first term on the Board. To assist the Minister in the future recruitment of Board Members with knowledge and experience needed to support the Board's oversight role, a Board Member Skills Matrix was developed to identify the current strengths of the existing members. This Skills Matrix identifies the key areas of expertise considered important by the Board to support their work in agency governance and accountability. The Board Member Skills Matrix is provided to the Minister when an upcoming Board vacancy is expected to assist in the selection of the most appropriate candidates.

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. Facilitated training and development has been provided to all HEQCO staff in 2021 to enhance the understanding of how to create an equitable and inclusive environment both within the workplace and within the context of HEQCO's research projects.

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 internal and external research plan. HEQCO has expanded its staff complement in 2021/22 and currently has 21 full-time equivalent staff encompassing research, administration and governance functions. In addition, HEQCO continues to provide work-integrated learning opportunities for up to six Ontario postsecondary students and recent graduates through its internship program.

HEQCO's staff continue to work remotely since August 2020 and have developed processes and embraced new technology to ensure HEQCO is able to operate flexibly and efficiently in this virtual environment. While initially considered a short-term measure due to the pandemic, HEQCO continues to monitor and evaluate our future needs for a physical location. Ideally, that location would provide a space to convene meetings, conferences and workshops, and provide the opportunity for an exchange of ideas as well as staff and sector collaboration.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Mapping the road ahead: HEQCO's research plan

Appendix 2: Strategic research roadmap summary

Appendix 3: Financial Outlook

Appendix 4: Risk Assessment Reporting Tool for 2021/22

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

Vision | Priorities | Purpose | Access | Quality | Sustainability

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 s**ystem 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

An agency of the Government of Ontario

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Strategic research roadmap summary 2021–2024

Access

Quality

Sustainability

Access

Goals

- Expand HEQCO's access research to address equity in participation and outcomes for postsecondary students in Ontario.
- Elevate the impact of HEQCO's work in access and retention.
- Build a data infrastructure to illustrate current access and equity challenges and identify promising solutions.
- Extend HEQCO's research on entry points for reskilling and lifelong learning.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Postsecondary preparation, access, retention and outcomes		Trends in enrolment, participation and retention	COVID-19 impact on student outcomes
Equity benchmarking data development		Equity benchmarking pilot projects	Equity benchmarking reporting
Historic and ongoing PSE attainment disparities		Destreaming initiatives Apprenticeships pathways and completion	Learning requirements and campus infrastructure for student success
Evidence to inform reskilling, upskilling and lifelong learning	Microcredential landscape and definitions	Trends in participation and completion of alternative credentials	

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Access

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	Year 2	Year 3
Transformations in digital learning		Using learning outcomes to inform curriculum program design	Shifts in curriculum and pedagogy impacted by COVID-19
Skills gap: trends, evidence and impacts	Work integrated and experiential learning participation and outcomes Performance and cost analysis for Canadian PSE	Students' skill articulation Assessing students' learning and skills outcomes	Transferable skill development in the digital environment COVID-19 impact on skill development
Earnings premiums for PSE graduates	Value of Ontario credentials for graduates across programs and background characteristics		Earnings premiums for post-COVID-19 PSE graduates Effects of employment disruptions on longer term PSE graduate outcomes

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Quality

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.

Year 1 | **Year 2** | **Year 3**

Institutional strategies for financial sustainability

Internationalization

Interinstitutional partnerships

Evolving approaches for institutional stability

Differentiation in Ontario PSE

Program development as a response to financial challenge

Strategic Mandate Agreements and system differentiation

Postsecondary costs and return on investment

Economic impacts of PSE in Ontario

Labour market and graduate outcomes associated with shifts in policy directions

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Sustainability

Appendix 3: Financial Requirements

		2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
	Account Descriptions	**Actual+Forecast**	**Forecast**		
REVENUE	Transfer Payments	4,100.0	4,100.0	4,100.0	4,100.0
	Less Capital Purchases	18.1	15.0	15.0	515.0
	Deferred revenue	19.3	19.6	19.6	63.3
	Interest	1.8	2.0	2.0	2.0
	Total Revenue	**4,103.0**	**4,106.6**	**4,106.6**	**3,650.3**
EXPENSES	**Council Governance & Executive Services**	**8.8%**	**8.7%**	**9.0%**	**10.5%**
	Board per diem	5.6	6.5	6.6	6.6
	Salaries & benefits	327.1	315.8	322.1	328.6
	Travel & Communications	2.2	3.0	8.5	8.6
	Services, supplies and equipment	26.7	31.9	32.2	35.6
	Depreciation expenses	1.3	1.3	1.3	4.3
	sub total	**362.89**	**358.53**	**370.73**	**383.73**
	Research	**85.3%**	**85.7%**	**85.3%**	**82.9%**
	Research contracts, seminars & workshop, data purchases, translation, communications	1,091.2	931.0	865.8	261.3
	salaries & benefits	2,029.2	2,206.2	2,250.3	2,295.3
	Travel & communications	11.4	12.0	12.5	12.6
	Services, supplies and equipment	350.8	354.3	357.8	400.1
	Depreciation Expenses	17.2	17.2	17.2	55.4
	sub total	**3,499.7**	**3,520.6**	**3,503.6**	**3,024.7**
	Administration	**5.9%**	**5.5%**	**5.7%**	**6.6%**
	salaries and benefits	221.6	208.4	212.6	216.8
	Travel & communications	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.8
	Services, Supplies and equipment	17.5	17.6	17.8	20.6
	Depreciation Expenses	1.1	1.1	1.1	3.6
	sub total	**240.4**	**227.4**	**232.3**	**241.9**
	Total Resource Requirements	**4,103.0**	**4,106.6**	**4,106.6**	**3,650.3**

	NOTES
1	The budget plan for 2022-2025 and beyond is based on an annual allocaion of $4.1 million.
2	Project expenditures are reported on the accrual basis of accounting.
3	Common expenses (rent, IT support, office supplies) are allocated to each department by percentage of headcount.
4	Cost of services, supplies and equipment are assumed to increase by 1% each year for inflation.
5	Salaries are assumed to increase by 2% each year, however, HEQCO will be constrained by the three year moderation period required under the Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act until June 2022.
6	HEQCO budgets an allowance of $1,000 per year on professional development for each board member going forward.
7	HEQCO has been a virtual operation, working from home since Sept. 1, 2020.
8	Expected capital costs relating to lease agreement beginning January 2022 have been reallocated to research contracts, seminars & workshop, data purchases, translation, communications.
9	HEQCO anticipates commencing the process with MGCS to establish a new office location by January 2025 and assumes $425,000 for leasehold improvement, furniture purchase, etc. to occur in fiscal year 2024/2025.
10	As per MGCS guidelines, maximum length of lease is 2 years and leasehold capital costs are depreciated within the term of the lease.
11	HEQCO expects to sign a 2-year lease (interim measures) starting January 2025. Calculations are based on Infrastructure Ontario's recommendations of 2800 square feet of space at net $29/sq.ft or gross $57/sq. ft. which is roughly $13,300 per month.
12	HEQCO expects to spend $300,000 on leasehold improvements with a 2 year amortization schedule. ($150,000 each year)
13	HEQCO expects to spend $125,000 on office furniture with a 5 year amortization schedule ($25,000 each year).
14	HEQCO expects travel expenses to increase in fall of 2023 as in-person meetings and events start to resume and continue though 2024 including travel during the search process to identify a new office location.
15	HEQCO expects to spend an additional $8,500 in services, supplies and equipment for the new office in 2024/2025. Calculations are allocated to each department by percentage of headcount.
16	HEQCO's FTE headcount is expected to be 23.5 in April 2022.

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

Risk Category	Risk Sub-Category	Risk Identification and Description	**Likelihood of Risk** Enter High, Medium, Low or N/A for each row.	**Impact of Risk (non-financial)** Enter High, Medium, Low or N/A for each row	**Financial Impact of Risk** Enter High, Medium, Low or N/A for each row	**Overall Assessment of Residual Risk** Enter High, Medium or Low	**Risk Owner** Agency/ Ministry	**Mitigation Strategy** Describe plans or activities/controls in place to eliminate, minimize or manage each risk	**Target Start and/or End Date of Mitigation**
Strategic	**1. Fulfillment of mission and mandate, and** **2.Strategic Planning:** Identify risk(s) related to developing, revising or implementing a strategic plan that achieves desired results, is aligned with the agency's mandate and which is also aligned with ministry objectives.	1. HEQCO needs opportunity and resources to provide (1) independent, cutting-edge, new idea generating research that leads to new policy directions; and (2) evidence-based assessments and evaluations of existing policies and programs. Constraints on growth of research personnel would put HEQCO's ability to fulfill its original research and its assessment and evaluation mandates at risk. 2.The agency's objectives, as reflected in its business/research plan due December 31st 2020, do not align with Ministry objectives stated in the mandate letter received on January 28th 2021	1.Medium 2.Low	1.High 2.Medium	1.Low 2. Low	1.Medium 2.Medium	1.Ministry and Agency 2.Agency	1. HEQCO Business Plan and Annual Research Plan realistically reflect the resources required for the Agency to continue to meet its overall mandate. Adequate financial resources are required to continue to attract highly respected leadership and skilled and talented researchers to carry out the agency's overall mandate. HEQCO and the Ministry must work together to engage Infrastructure Ontario (IO) to assist in finding 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. 2.HEQCO's strategic direction is informed by the Minister's mandate letter. The deputy is on HEQCO's Board. The Deputy and HEQCO CEO meet regularly. HEQCO staff meet regularly with ministry counterparts. Strategic directions are updated annually in HEQCO's 3 year rolling business/research plan approved by the Minister.	Ongoing

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Strategic	**3. Meeting Public or Stakeholder Expectations:** Identify risk(s) related to meeting publicly announced commitments, maintaining public image, or meeting expectations of stakeholders (e.g. the public, other governments, ministries, employees, suppliers, customers, media).	1. HEQCO research findings or sector evaluation may be rejected by particular stakeholder groups, do not appear to be objective, or may not reflect media assessments. 2. Stakeholders dismiss the relevance and work of HEQCO. 3. Government policy initiatives affect HEQCO plans and stakeholder expectations.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	1.& 2. As an agency, HEQCO is well-positioned to put controversial and difficult discussions into the mix. The commitment to evidence-based research maintains confidence. Reports are external/peer reviewed. The research partnership approach is used with stakeholders/institutions. Findings are disseminated widely (posted on the website). Strategic advice is sought from stakeholders and as appropriate they are invited to sit on expert panels. The CEO/staff meet with stakeholders and participate in conferences, workshops, etc. locally and internationally. The recent mandate review by government confirmed HEQCO's relevance. There is ongoing dialogue with government and the sector. 3. Due to constraints on discretionary spending and COVID-19, HEQCO activities to engage and consult stakeholders, such as the annual conference, were cancelled. With the increase in virtual events and meetings due to COVID-19, HEQCO is remotely connecting with stakeholders and partners in discussions to make sure its research is timely and relevant to the needs of the sector.	Ongoing

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Governance & Accountability	**1. Internal Policies, Procedures and Processes:** Identify risk(s) related to management of the agency's own policies to meet the organization's objectives (including developing, updating, communicating, implementing and monitoring).	Policies or directives are not adhered to within the organization. Outside research partners find it difficult to adhere to government policies and directives (ie. Open Data).	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	All policies are discussed with board/staff at meetings and posted on the SharePoint document management system. Contract/RFP templates reflect directives and must be agreed to by research partners. Ongoing dialogue with research partners ensures they know how policies apply to their work.	Ongoing
Governance & Accountability	**2. Alignment of Agency Policies and Procedures with Same in OPS/Ministry:** Identify risk(s) related to alignment or consistency of agency policy/procedure with OPS or ministry policy/ procedure.	Agency policies do not reflect government policies and directives. Potential risk of a change in government policy or directive that HEQCO is not aware of.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	The MOU lists applicable policies and directives. The ministry regularly informs the agency of new/revised directives and policies. HEQCO consults the AGNES website (for agencies) for information. HEQCO's policies and procedures are subject to internal and external audit.	Ongoing

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

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Governance & Accountability	**3. Agency Compliance with OPS Directives, Policies and Guidelines:** Identify risk(s) related to ensuring compliance with all applicable OPS policies, directives and guidelines.	Requirements of government directives are not met. Fraud or abuse in expense claims.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Policies/directives are incorporated into HECQO processes, the CRM project management system and contract templates. Segregation of duties provides for multi-person oversight of expense claims. HEQCO's DOA framework was reviewed by Internal Audit Division. Ministry staff ensures HEQCO is aware of changes to OPS Directives.	Ongoing
Governance & Accountability	**4. Annual Business Plan:** Identify risks related to the development of a three-year business plan that is approved by the minister (including version to be posted online).	1. HEQCO Business Plan (BP) does not meet Agency & Appointments Accountability Directive (AAD) requirements for approval. HEQCO does not post the Business Plan (BP) as required by the AAD. 2.Delayed ministerial approval of business plans may ultimately prevent long term planning.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency and Ministry	1.There is ongoing dialogue between the board and the deputy. HEQCO/MCU meet regularly re: research priorities. HEQCO schedules its process to meet submission deadlines. BP planning processes strive to meet requirements of the AAD. 2. HEQCO assumes that long term BP initiatives are aligned based on ongoing dialogue with the ministry.	Ongoing

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

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Governance & Accountability	**5. Internal governance and development of board:** Identify risks related to ensuring the roles and responsibilities of the chair, CEO, directors and managers are clearly understood, including conflict of interest, ethics and conduct.	The roles of the chair, CEO, board directors are not clearly understood leading to the board making improper decisions. .	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Agency	Board members receive an orientation binder including foundation documents that define roles/responsibilities and include government policies and directives. CEO and staff roles are defined by job descriptions. CEO and board members attend ethics and governance training. Board members are required to sign a Conflict of Interest statement and to declare conflicts in board meetings.	Ongoing
Governance & Accountability	**6. Risk and Issue Management:** Identify risks related to the day-to-day management of risks and contentious issues, including identifying, monitoring and responding to risks and issues.	Risks are not mitigated and issues are not managed.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Risks are assessed annually. Issues are identified and addressed at weekly senior management meetings. Contentious issues are managed within the context of a Ministry/Agency Communications Protocol.	Ongoing

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

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Governance & Accountability	**7. Performance Measurement:** Identify risks related to developing or monitoring performance indicators and targets, and ensuring they remain relevant.	Agency performance is not measured or measures are not relevant.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Performance goals are set out in the agency's mandate letter, stated and reported in the Business and Research Plan. CEO and staff performance is reviewed against commitments. Management monitors project status reports. The CRM system provides management information reports. KPI's are included in the BP and reported on in the Annual Report.	Ongoing
Governance & Accountability	**8. Legal Costs:** Identify risks related to the potential cost of a contractual agreement or litigation against the agency or government. Legal costs could include lawsuits, settlements, fines, penalties and legal fees.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Agency	There are no known legal costs anticipated in relation to contractual obligations.	Ongoing

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

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Governance & Accountability	**9. Reliability of Financial Systems:** Identify risks related to the quality or reliability of financial reporting and financial controllership. Could include risk related to a change in accounting principles or requirements.	Financial information is not up to date, accurate, or reliable.	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Agency	The Sage 50 accounting system provides financial reports. Ceridian provides payroll services. The financial process requires segregation of duties for reconciliation, journal entry, payroll, payments. Bank statements are reconciled monthly. Accrued liabilities are updated and recorded monthly. All financial transactions are readily available for audit. HEQCO's financials are audited by an external independent auditor.	Ongoing
Governance & Accountability	**10. Financial Management Processes:** Identify risks related to management of financial policies (including development, updating and monitoring), budget controls, and compliance with ministry forecasting requirements.	Internal financial planning processes and controls are not in place.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency and Ministry	Internal process controls are audited annually. Senior management meets bi-monthly to review financial commitments. CRM and the Sage 50 accounting system are integrated. Sage 50 is kept current as transactions occur. CRM provides up-to-date project status, invoicing and payment reports. Quarterly financial reports are provided to the board and minister. Reports are immediately available on request.	Ongoing

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

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Governance & Accountability	**11. Budget Planning Process:** Identify risks related to meeting the requirements of the ministry's budget planning (PRRT) process.	The agency does not meet budget planning requirements or timelines. With no current base funding, the timing of first quarterly instalment of the transfer payment from the ministry can jeopardize the agency's ability to meet first quarter commitments.	Low	Low	High	Low	Agency	HEQCO complies with MOU corporate reporting requirements. If available, a budget surplus from the previous year is used to temporarily ease first quarter pressures. HEQCO plans activities within its budget allocation and submits required reports on time.	Ongoing
Governance & Accountability	**12. Procedures for Financial and Accounting Transactions:** Identify risks related to or ensuring accurate and timely processing of transactions, including development and monitoring of processes carried out by staff.	Transactions are inaccurate or inappropriate, or payments are not made in a timely fashion.	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Agency	Financial staff cross-check each other's work for all transactions. A second level of checking is provided by the Director, Finance and Administration. Segregation of duties and requirements of the Delegation of Authority (DOA) involve multiple persons in the process. There is an annual external audit of all transactions.	Ongoing

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

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Governance & Accountability	**13. Reporting of Financial Information:** Identify risks related to the timing, integrity, and delivery of the information reported.	Timing of financial reporting does not support decision-making.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Financial reports are available on request. Quarterly reports are provided to the board and the minister. The CEO and Director, Finance and Administration sign-off on monthly bank reconciliations. To date, no issues of timing or integrity of financial information have been reported to the Audit Committee or the board by external auditors. HEQCO routinely receives a "clean" audit.	Ongoing
Governance & Accountability	**14. Delegation of Authority Controls:** Identify risks related to ensuring controls in place for appropriate delegation of authority.	Transactions are not properly authorized.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Delegation of authority (DOA) rules are incorporated into agency documents (contracts, purchase orders, etc.), processes and procedures. Segregation of duties requires multiple sign-offs, provides oversight of transactions. Expenditures over $100,000 are reported to the Board.	Ongoing

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

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Operational	**1. Service Demand:** Identify risks that relate to managing or meeting the demand for the agency's goods or services.	1. The year-to-year financial business and funding model is not helpful as HEQCO's work involves multi-year projects. 2. Budget cuts of almost $1M threaten operations and agency doesn't have sufficient financial resources to accommodate increased in-year demand for its services from the ministry.	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Agency and Ministry	1. HEQCO utilizes partnerships to partially mitigate this problem. As well, we attempt to phase projects to try to avoid the issue of uncertainty related to year to year variance in budget allocation. 2.When demands for additional projects at the request of the ministry strain budget capacity, these projects have been supported by additional funds from the ministry through transfer payment agreements. Interim and final reports are provided.	Ongoing

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

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Operational	**2. Service Effectiveness, Supply, Threats:** Identify risks that relate to quality and/or delivery of products or services. Consider external factors that may affect the agency's products/services.	1. Non-completion of projects by research partners, or quality issues affecting external or internal research projects. 2. HEQCO work does not meet high standards. 3. Inability of HEQCO to fulfill its responsibility to examine, understand and recommend improvements to postsecondary access, student mobility, and student success due to lack of access to the Ontario Education Number (OEN) databases held by government. 4.HEQCO research projects are at risk because data sources such as StatsCan and the use of RDCs are unavailable, and partners such as school boards do not have staff available to participate, due to COVID-19.	Medium Low Medium	Low Low Medium (HEQCO relies on other, less robust and complete sources of data for its investigations.)	Low Low Low	Low Low Medium	Agency Agency Agency and Ministry	1. Contracts include interim deliverables, firm deadlines and can be cancelled or not renewed. 2. Reports are subject to external/peer and editorial review. We are invited to participate in national/ international forums, international experts present at our events. Our participation in partnerships is sought by international agencies (e.g. Lumina Foundation) in multi-national projects. 3. HEQCO appreciates collegial efforts by MCU to facilitate limited access to aggregate OEN data compiled within MCU. We continue to participate with MCU on its request to gain secure FIPPA compliant access to OEN databases in order to end reliance on less complete and less robust sources of institutional and government data to do the best possible research for MCU. 4. HEQCO staff are creative in finding data and do their own surveys to support research projects such as the Accessibility of Remote Learning project. Unusual sources of data are sought out through partners such as the Business and Higher Education Roundtable (BHER) which has access to a large database of employers. Staff regularly check in with StatsCan and RDCs to determine their status and contact partners to determine if their participation can resume.	Ongoing

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Operational	**3. Records/File Management:** Identify risks that relate to the administration (i.e. filing and storage) of paper based records so that information is easily retrievable.	1. HEQCO records cannot be readily accessed in the remote working environment. Paper records are not easily retrievable.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	All records are now virtually maintained. All staff have access to the SharePoint document management system which stores documents in a readily accessible, consistent format. Project management records are stored on the CRM system. All publications are published and maintained on the website which is backed-up by HEQCO's IT service providers. Paper records tend to be historical and are stored by Iron Mountain and can be readily retrieved as necessary.	Ongoing
Operational	**4.Records/File Security:** Identify risks that relate to security of non IT records (such as paper records, etc.)	Paper records are not secure.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	All staff are trained on record management functions related to their positions. Confidential records, are only accessible on a need-to-know basis. In the event of a privacy breach the federal and provincial Information and Privacy Commissioners would be immediately notified along with all persons who are affected. The agency has been working paperless and fully remote since 2020 and not creating any additional paper records.	Ongoing

HEQCO 2021-22 Risk Assessment Report

Risk Category	**Risk Sub-Category**	**Risk Identification and Description**	**Likelihood of Risk** Enter High, Medium, Low or N/A for each row	**Impact of Risk (non-financial)** Enter High, Medium, Low or N/A for each row	**Financial Impact of Risk** Enter High, Medium, Low or N/A for each row	**Overall Assessment of Residual Risk** Enter High, Medium or Low	**Risk Owner** Agency/ Ministry	**Mitigation Strategy** Describe plans or activities/controls in place to eliminate, minimize or manage each risk	**Target Start and/or End Date of Mitigation**
Operational	**5. Records/File Security:** Identify risks that relate to security of IT records (such as memory sticks, shared drives ,etc.).	IT records are not secure.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Access to records is limited within HEQCO (no outside users). Access to system drives is limited on a need-to-know/input basis. The agency's bonded IT service provider hosts HEQCO data in a secure location with three server locations to ensure that the file server is always secure and available. Staff is aware of IT policies and processes re: safe storage of data. Multifactor authentication of users now implimented accross HEQCO.	Ongoing
	6. Records Retention: Identify risks that relate to creating , managing or complying with record retention schedules.	The agency does not comply with records retention schedules.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Documents are retained and backed-up electronically. Records retention policies are followed.	Ongoing

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	1. Skill Shortage: Identify risks that relate to availability of a skilled workforce to meet current or future needs; or relate to training existing staff.	1.Skilled employees are not available to meet agency needs. 2. Staff/talent retention becomes an issue because of the transition to a remote workplace.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	1. Staff hiring competitions receive an excellent response. Employees have access to a budget allocation for training which must be work-related. 2. Staff are provided with all the supports necessary to work from home. HEQCO will work with Infrastructure Ontario to ultimately find a permanent location informed by its remote working experience. HEQCO's traditional catchment area for recruiting has been the large pool of researchers and policy analysts in the Toronto area but this pool has been broadened with the current remote work format.	Ongoing
Workforce	**2.Salary/Compensation:** Identify risks related to increased costs from anticipated salary settlements, contracts, organizational growth or other causes.	1. Wage freezes affect the agency's ability to attract and retain staff.	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Agency	1. Position classifications and salaries are regularly reviewed and compared with ministry and similar agency equivalents as appropriate.	Ongoing

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Workforce	**3. Succession Planning:** Identify risks related to managing vacancies.	Unexpected vacancies lead to interrupted service.	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Agency	Attempts have been made to assign overlapping responsibilities to cover for unexpected absences. Vendors of record can quickly provide temp admin staff, expert services. Researchers can be drawn from lists of previous competitions.	Ongoing
Workforce	**4. Ethics:** Identify risks related to compliance with code of ethics and/or conflict of interest policy.	Staff/board members are not versed in public service ethics and conflict of interest rules.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Copies of the COI and Ethics Code are provided to board members/staff when they are appointed. New hires and appointees must sign an attestation to confirm that they have read these policies. Both policies are posted on the widely accessible SharePoint system.	Ongoing

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Information Technology & Infrastructure	**1. IT Strategy:** Identify whether the agency has a strategic or operational plan for managing IT resources (technology, people and processes). Identify any risks related to ensuring IT strategy or plan is current and supports agency's objectives.	1. IT resources do not support business needs. 2. IT supports do not adequately serve the remote workplace. Staff home IT services may be insufficient to meet the needs of remote work.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	1. IT infrastructure has been mapped, upgraded and virtualized to meet business needs. SharePoint and CRM systems assist project and records management. HEQCO website has been completely revamped and updated to accessible WCAG AA standards. 2. IT service level agreements are reviewed and will be revised if necessary to ensure that the remote workplace is fully supported. HEQCO has established policies for addressing staff IT needs for equipment and technical support.	Ongoing.

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Information Technology & Infrastructure	**2. IT Policy and Procedure:** Identify risks related to ensuring IT roles, responsibilities, policies and procedures are in place to maintain confidentiality, integrity and reliability of information.	1. Agency information is not secure. 2. Research partners and their research ethics boards are concerned about data security in HEQCO's new remote working environment.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	1. Access to IT resources is limited within HEQCO (no outside users). Access to system drives is limited on a need-to-know/input basis. The agency's bonded IT service provider hosts HEQCO data in a secure location with three server locations to ensure that the file server is always secure and available. Staff is aware of IT policies and processes re: safe storage of data. 2.Support services have been engaged to maintain data security as required by research partners. This is essential to HEQCO's success as a virtual agency.	Ongoing
Information Technology & Infrastructure	**3. IT Privacy and Security:** Identify risks related to managing sensitive/confidential information and protecting data from compromise, breach or other unauthorized access.	Personal information is inadvertently disclosed.	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Agency	All data for research is scrubbed of personal identifiers. Personal information of staff/board members is kept in HR files in a locked cabinet and secure directory accessible only to the Director, Finance and Administration and two staff persons. Hiring and RFP protocols prescribe that personal information be safeguarded throughout the process. Multifactor authentication is implemented for all HEQCO device users.	Ongoing

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Information Technology & Infrastructure	**4. IT Equipment/Hardware:** Identify risks related to maintaining, upgrading or replacing hardware. Identify risks related to a business continuity plan or disaster recovery plan.	Loss of critical information due to disaster.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Systems are current and kept up to date. IT service provider backs up HEQCO information nightly. If service provider's Toronto facilities are at risk, back up is available in Mississauga and ultimately in the USA.	Ongoing
Information Technology & Infrastructure	**5. Reliability and Integrity of Software:** Identify risks related to software to ensure reliability, availability and integrity of information. Identify risks related to a business continuity plan or disaster recovery plan.	Inconsistent protection or maintenance of data and records.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	CRM tracks, organizes and records project information in a consistent format. A complementary SharePoint system stores documents. Information is accessed by designated staff and is password protected. Data is available to specified licensed users. Data stored on USB devices is encrypted. There is no outside data sharing of HEQCO data.	Ongoing
Information Technology & Infrastructure	**6. IT Procurement:** Identify risks related to adherence to the agency's I&IT procurement policies which should align with OPS policies.	HEQCO procurements can potentially embarrass the government and/or the agency.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	HEQCO IT procurement practices follow government directives. RFP and contract templates reflect government requirements. Access to information is restricted to relevant staff. The IT procurement process must be approved by the CEO and is controlled by the Director, Finance and Administration.	Ongoing

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Information Technology & Infrastructure	**7. Capital Projects:** Identify risks related to scheduling/delays and costs of IT or other agency infrastructure projects.	Capital projects are over budget due to cost escalation and delays.	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Capital projects are relatively small and limited to renovations or computer refresh. The RFP process is used. Contracts are strictly monitored. Cost over-rides must be signed-off by the CEO and Director, Finance and Administration. Projects over $100,000 must be reported to the Board.	Ongoing

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Governance	**Board governance, accountability and oversight**	Slow appointments process creates operational difficulties for the agency.	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Agency	The chair alerts the minister of upcoming board vacancies well in advance of their occurrence. Lists of possible appointees are provided. HEQCO regularly reminds the deputy and ministry liaison staff of potential vacancies.	Ongoing
Governance	**Board governance, accountability and oversight**	Board member comportment (poor judgement, breach of confidentiality, undeclared conflict of interest).	Low	Low	Low	Low	Agency	Board members are provided with internal policies, HEQCO orientation, governance training for new appointees. Conflicts are declared at the commencement of meetings.	Ongoing