

Ministry of Colleges and Universities

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October 04, 2024

Shelley McGill
Acting Chair
Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
2500 – 88 Queens Quay West
Toronto, ON M5J 0B8

Dear Shelley McGill,

I am pleased to share our government's 2025-26 priorities for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

Agencies are a part of government and are expected to act in the best interests of the people of Ontario and ensure that they provide value for money to taxpayers. Agencies are also required to adhere to government policies and directives.

Per the requirements of the Agencies and Appointments Directive, agencies are required to align goals, objectives and strategic direction with our government's priorities and direction. As Acting Chair, you must ensure that HEQCO's business plan demonstrates the agency's plans in fulfilling the expectations and government priorities below and that progress and achievements are reported through your annual report. Compliance with these requirements is reported to Treasury Board/Management Board of Cabinet annually.

As you know, HEQCO's mandate under the *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act, 2005*, 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. HEQCO's functions, as set out in the Act, include conducting research on all aspects of the postsecondary education (PSE) sector, evaluating the PSE sector, including evaluating any programs and services specified by the Minister, and making recommendations to the Minister. HEQCO's functions also include, per O. Reg. 336/06, researching and evaluating how free speech is addressed by each PSE institution and across the PSE sector, and providing reports and recommendations to the Minister on the findings.

Per the requirements of the Agencies and Appointments Directive, this letter sets out my expectations for HEQCO for 2025-26. These priorities include agency sector priorities and postsecondary education priorities.

Agency Sector Priorities for 2025-26

My expectations for 2025-26 are that HEQCO is innovative, sustainable and accountable through the following direction:

Innovative

1. Simplify client/customer interactions
2. Expand and optimize digital service offerings
3. Improve client/customer satisfaction
4. Share data with Supply Ontario, when requested, regarding procurement spending and planning, contract arrangements and vendor relations to support data-driven decision-making

Sustainable

5. Strengthen public service delivery by optimizing organizational capacity and directing existing resources to priority areas
6. Use Public Resources efficiently and
 - a) Operate within agency's financial allocations
 - b) Prudently and responsibly manage workforce size. Where an agency requires a material increase in workforce size, the agency must provide the Minister with an HR plan for approval that provides the rationale based on government priorities and/or agency mandate

Accountable

7. Develop and report on outcome-focused performance measures to effectively monitor and measure performance
8. Protect individual, business or organization data by actively managing data and cybersecurity and reporting Artificial Intelligence uses
9. Report all high risks including effective mitigation plans
10. Align hybrid work policies with the OPS and identify and assess office optimization opportunities to reduce office realty footprint and find cost reductions
 - a) Collaborate with MOI to identify office space opportunities
 - b) Align with the MBC Realty Directive and the OPS Modern Office Space (OMOS) Standards.
11. Develop and encourage diversity and inclusion initiatives by promoting an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace

These are the government-wide commitments for board-governed provincial agencies. Please see the attached guide for further details of each priority and the accompanying performance measures that can be utilised if measurements are not currently in place.

Postsecondary Education Priorities

The [2024 Ontario Budget: Building a Better Ontario](#) highlights the government's commitment to continue to make PSE affordable for students and families through an extended tuition freeze. Ministry priorities also include supporting financial sustainability of Ontario's PSE system and supporting the sector in delivering high-quality educational experiences in an efficient, accountable and transparent manner. To stabilize postsecondary institutions, the Ontario government is investing nearly \$1.3 billion over three years including through the Postsecondary Education Sustainability Fund. To increase transparency on ancillary fees and other student costs, while also supporting student mental health and keeping campuses safe and inclusive, the ministry introduced the [Strengthening Accountability and Student Supports Act, 2024](#) , **which received Royal Assent in May 2024**. Supporting health human resource needs and the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant are also priorities for the ministry. Ensuring that students are getting the education, skills, and experience they need to find good jobs, supporting research and innovation, and promoting long-term economic growth continue to be key drivers for PSE in Ontario.

In 2025-26, I would like HEQCO's work to include the following priorities identified by the ministry:

Post-Graduation Settlement Trends

Using the Education and Labour Market Longitudinal Platform (ELMLP) available through the Statistics Canada Research Data Centres and other data sources as applicable, I request that HEQCO, working with the ministry, complete a study that would provide a snapshot of where recent Ontario PSE graduates (domestic and international) of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and non-STEM programs work/reside after graduation. I ask that this project includes researching:

- The proportion of recent Ontario PSE graduates working in Ontario, leaving for other provinces or leaving the country to work elsewhere.
- Any trends such as the types of programs students complete, or other factors that are revealing trends for those graduates electing to work outside the province.

Efficiency Metrics

I request that HEQCO, working with the ministry, conduct research on approaches that have been used to measure and/or deliver efficiencies in cost structures in postsecondary institutions in Ontario and other jurisdictions (e.g., administrative functions, student services, IT systems, physical facilities, procurement, academic programming, etc.).

Part-Time Demand

I request that HEQCO conduct research on the demand for part-time program offerings at publicly-assisted colleges and universities. This research is to build on HEQCO's existing work on Part-Time College Enrolment and study the demand for part-time PSE programs including why part-time is accessed, who enrolls in part-time studies and the proportion of PSE learners that are part-time.

Campus Free Speech Policy

HEQCO has a role of monitoring and evaluating the ongoing implementation of Ontario's Campus Free Speech Policy. I look forward to receiving HEQCO's annual summary report for 2024 that summarizes and assesses institutions' implementation of the Policy.

At our next meeting, I would be pleased to discuss these priorities, and I look forward to hearing how they will be reflected in the agency's upcoming business plan and in ongoing agency operations.

Thank you and your fellow board members for your continued commitment to HEQCO. Your work and ongoing support is invaluable to our government and the people of Ontario.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Laura Belfie, Director of the Strategic Policy Coordination Branch, at Laura.Belfie@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Nolan Quinn
Minister of Colleges and Universities

Attachment: Government Priorities for the Agency Sector Chart

c: Dr. Janice Deakin, President and Chief Executive Officer, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario
Caitlin Clark, Chief of Staff, Minister's Office
Scott Ramsay, Director of Policy and Issues, Minister's Office
David Wai, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Colleges and Universities
Zoë Kroeker, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Colleges and Universities