

Expression of Interest HEQCO-funded Test Sites for the Teaching of Skills

This Expression of Interest (EOI) solicits applications from colleges and universities that wish to be funded to become a test site for the teaching of skills.

Higher education institutions develop academic programs to give students the knowledge, skills and competencies they believe are important in a field of study. HEQCO has previously suggested a typology of these skills and competencies that includes:

- disciplinary knowledge and content
- basic cognitive skills such as literacy and numeracy
- higher-order cognitive skills such as problem solving and critical thinking
- transferable behavioural and personality skills, psychological capacities and attributes such as communication, persistence and resiliency

HEQCO and many other organizations have sponsored projects that identify the list of these desired skills and attributes, projects often referred to under the umbrella of learning outcomes. HEQCO has gone further and funded a considerable amount of [research](#) with many colleges and universities that attempt to measure these skills and competencies to see how they develop during the course of a postsecondary education. As we have previously [argued](#), these projects have led to the next, and perhaps most exciting, step in our efforts to identify the most effective and efficient ways of teaching skills and competencies.

The purpose of this EOI is to identify and fund higher education institutions, organizations and academic units that will act as test sites and laboratories to evaluate the effectiveness of various pedagogical techniques, program designs, technologies, etc. that attempt to teach skills and competencies considered to be important to those programs and to their students.

HEQCO is prepared to provide substantial funding to those successful in being designated as a test site for the teaching of skills. The parameters are as follows:

1. **We are not seeking applications from individuals or individual departments.** Rather, we are seeking applications from academic units of significant size, such as faculties, schools or entire institutions that are capable of mounting a suite of evaluation experiments. These units must have access to a significant number of students who could participate in evaluation exercises.
2. **It is not our intention to fund projects that examine techniques for better teaching or transmission of disciplinary knowledge or content.** We believe that institutions already do a good job of evaluating the information and content taught in their programs. Rather, a successful test site will focus on assessing the effectiveness of techniques that foster, instill and develop cognitive and/or transferable behavioural skills, as described above — attributes that are not directly or typically measured or credentialed in our institutions.

3. A successful test site will be sufficiently funded so as to allow it to mount a set of rigorously designed experiments that evaluate the skills and competencies that are of most interest to them.

Your EOI should address the following areas and be no longer than five pages:

1. Describe the institution, organization or academic unit you wish to have designated as a test site and describe its capacity to carry out the experiments that would be its core activity. This should include a description of the number of students or courses in your unit that would be potential participants in these experiments, and how you would engage those in your unit to participate in these experiments and trials. Please suggest how many experiments you believe your unit could mount each year.
2. Describe the skills and competencies that are of greatest interest and why these are the ones of most relevance and interest to your unit given its academic mission. In essence, what are the questions about the effective teaching of skills and competencies that are of highest priority for you?
3. How would you measure these skills and competencies?
4. If possible, describe the experimental design you would use to answer one of the most pressing questions you have about effective ways of teaching the skills that are most important to you.

The emerging research on learning outcomes and a continuing emphasis on a possible skills gap between postsecondary graduates and the labour market forces a serious examination of how we can teach skills effectively. Moreover, graduating students with skills and competencies that go beyond the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge and content has always been a goal of higher education. This question is relevant not just to the traditional 18–24 year-old postsecondary student, but also to the myriad of lifelong learners who will need new skills because of a job loss or who have a desire to upgrade their job prospects. Answering the question of which pedagogical techniques and strategies are effective and efficient ways of teaching skills requires rigorous assessment and experiments.

We recognize that evaluating the effectiveness of various pedagogical techniques and strategies that purport to teach skills and competencies is not a trivial or casual exercise. HEQCO is prepared to provide significant incentives, funding and financial support to units that are selected to work on this exciting academic challenge and to serve as test sites.

Interested parties should provide their submission to Alexandra MacFarlane (amacfarlane@heqco.ca) by December 3, 2018. **EOI's will be reviewed and promising institutions will be invited to participate in the second stage of the selection process.**

Feel free to contact Alexandra MacFarlane if you wish to discuss any aspect of this EOI. We would be happy to discuss our motivation in issuing this EOI, what we are looking for, the resources we are prepared to commit and how this process will unfold. We look forward to hearing from you.