



MULTI-YEAR BUSINESS PLAN

2016-17 to 2018-19



Higher Education
Quality Council
of Ontario

INFORMING THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Mandate

“To assist the Ontario Minister of Training, 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, while providing Ontarians with the greatest opportunities for social mobility and economic success.

Values

The primacy of independent, high-quality research.

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

Sustained engagement with leaders worldwide in higher education research, policy and practice.

Through this sustained engagement, HEQCO brings the best ideas, research findings and insights to Ontario. By regularly convening expertise through high-level and informative gatherings on topics relevant to advancing Ontario’s postsecondary education system, we ensure that the very best thinking from around the world is made available to Ontario decision-makers as a catalyst for informed decisions, collaboration and innovation.

Accessible and meaningful communication.

In bridging the gap between research knowledge and its active use in influencing policy and practice, HEQCO creates the context for its reports and advice as an active participant in knowledge mobilization, contributing to the effective movement of evidence-based findings into policy development and best practice.

Supporting productivity, creativity and excellence in HEQCO staff.

Working within a dynamic sector that is facing significant change in design, delivery and demand, HEQCO staff members are creators of evidence-based research and convenors of expertise. HEQCO is committed to the retention and development of its staff complement through best practices in workplace management.

Environmental Scan

External Factors	Implications for HEQCO
Economic/Fiscal Situation	
<p>The 2015 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review projects Ontario’s economy as continuing to grow at a slow to moderate pace. The challenging economic environment is resulting in continued financial restraint in the public sector.</p>	<p>Government agency budgets may be flat-lined or constrained and the current employee wage freeze may be extended, jeopardizing the retention of key HEQCO researchers and support staff.</p>
Government Priorities for Higher Education	
<p>The Ontario government’s priorities for higher education policy focus on ensuring an accessible, high-quality and sustainable postsecondary system. Specific initiatives include a funding formula review and differentiation framework.</p> <p>Government is also initiating a HEQCO mandate review.</p> <p>Private Member’s Bill 127 introduced in Oct. 2015.</p>	<p>HEQCO’s research continues to align with government priorities, with a focus on access, learning outcomes and system design.</p> <p>HEQCO welcomes the mandate review and will cooperate fully. Based on its role, HEQCO is also in the position to propose solutions to some of the Ontario PSE sector’s most vexing challenges.</p> <p>HEQCO has long advocated for improved data collection and disclosure. If the Ontario government decides to augment our mandate with these new responsibilities, we will undertake them on in a professional and comprehensive manner.</p>
Stakeholders	
<p>Media coverage reflects growing public interest in the alignment of PSE to the labour market and the value added of a postsecondary credential, particularly given Ontario’s comparatively higher tuition levels. There are also calls for greater accountability and transparency.</p>	<p>HEQCO’s focus on learning outcomes greatly influences the way Ontario designs, delivers, evaluates, improves and funds academic programs/institutions; credentials student achievement and designs postsecondary systems. A deeper and system-wide commitment to measurement of learning outcomes is an opportunity for the Ontario system to show world-wide leadership.</p>

Research Priorities 2016-2019

Now an established research organization acknowledged for its expertise and authority, HEQCO continues to address its mandated emphasis on access, quality and accountability, with a growing focus on evidence-based solutions to the overarching challenges facing the Ontario's postsecondary system:

- **How can Ontario provide a high quality postsecondary education in a period of continued growth and diminishing resources?**
- **Are Ontario students graduating with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life and work?**
- **How can we improve access to higher education for groups that are underrepresented?**

Captured within these questions are HEQCO's multi-year research priorities: access, learning outcomes and system design.

Access/retention. Achieving high rates of postsecondary access and attainment is particularly critical for non-traditional and under-represented students and remains a key part of HEQCO's mandate. We have contributed significantly to that agenda by making access-related research a primary focus for much of our history and will continue toward the system goal of equitable access and success for all students.

Learning outcomes. There is growing evidence that a focus on learning outcomes has the potential to modernize teaching and learning across the province. HEQCO has identified four classes of learning outcomes: disciplinary content, basic cognitive skills, higher-order cognitive skills and transferable life skills. Our work in this area will continue, with the system goal of continuous improvement, greater value for money and international leadership in quality.

System design. Led by its extensive work in institutional differentiation and funding models, HEQCO continues to examine the design of postsecondary education and strategies for greater sustainability of institutions and the system. Both research areas figure prominently in the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' Strategic Mandate Agreements with Ontario's postsecondary institutions.

Research Plan 2016-17

The Research Plan forms one component of our annual strategic activities. HEQCO provides evidence-based advice to improve Ontario's postsecondary sector and our research is the foundation of this evidence-based advice. We conduct our work on the basis of data and evidence collected by conducting experiments, evaluation of the outcome of projects and interventions, deep analysis of data collected by others or assessment of best practices in higher education in Ontario, the rest of Canada and around the world.

Over its 10-year history, HEQCO has amassed the research expertise and evidence base to effectively help shape policy-making in Ontario postsecondary education. As we enter our second decade, HEQCO will

focus its research projects and expertise on identifying options for solutions to the pressing challenges that face the sector. Our work will be enhanced by our growing expertise in data visualization for maximum knowledge mobilization.

Access

We remain aligned with the provincial government's mandate for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities – to ensure an accessible, high-quality and sustainable postsecondary education system. We continue to address accessibility by examining the state of recruitment and retention of under-represented groups, in partnership with institutions and organizations that are developing best-practice initiatives – among them the University of Toronto, Queen's University, York University, Mohawk College, Centennial College, the University of Ottawa's Education Policy Research Initiative and the Ontario College of Trades. These partnerships are examining and assessing initiatives to engage, attract and retain under-represented students.

Learning outcomes

In alignment with the ministry's mandate to improve the consistency and availability of institution-level and system-level outcome measures, HEQCO continues to engage a growing number of Ontario postsecondary institutions and other organizations in the development and assessment of learning outcomes, which have been the focus of six well-subscribed webinars. In addition, an evolving collaboration initiated by the New Brunswick Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour is enabling HEQCO to apply its leading-edge research on learning outcomes, faculty workload and core skills acquisition, which will be of significant value to Ontario's postsecondary sector as it considers next steps in these key areas. HEQCO's work in piloting an on-line version of PIAAC in partnership with selected Ontario colleges and universities will enable direct measure of value-added learning in key areas of numeracy and literacy.

System design

The development and assessment of learning outcomes at the institutional level also has clear links to outcomes-based funding at the system level. As distinct from the historical focus on enrolment, a funding formula that is outcomes based could reinforce institutional differentiation or any other outcome the provincial government seeks from its postsecondary institutions.

HEQCO's annual Canadian higher education performance indicator reports will continue to provide a critical national lens on the Ontario postsecondary system's comparative position. The report functions as a pathway to building on the Ontario system's strength and addressing its weaknesses. Where possible, and in addition to New Brunswick, we will work with other provinces that are actively exploring similar challenges in the sector and are prepared to pilot projects that would inform Ontario's policy deliberations in system design.

The continued evolution of the performance indicator projects and their value to the ministry depends on the availability of high quality and consistent data. HEQCO will continue to promote the collection,

synthesis and public disclosure of data to create a complete and meaningful picture of system performance, in alignment with the government's Open Data initiatives. For example, we will continue to advocate for linking of OEN data, which would revolutionize our ability to track Ontarians through their education journey and enable the province to better understand its students are, the educational pathways they follow and the barriers they face. We will also continue to expand our data visualization capabilities, to improve understanding and utility of data to enhance the impact of data on decision making, and overall knowledge mobilization.

HEQCO will also continue its examination of institutional differentiation, which offers the prospects of higher quality teaching and research programs, more student choice, a globally competitive system and increased financial sustainability.

Implementation

Early in the new fiscal year, when HEQCO is assured of its budget allocation and is preparing its annual budget for Board approval, Business Plan initiatives are followed up with a detailed research projects plan which is shared with the HEQCO Board and the Ministry. A detailed publications schedule is also developed. Progress on initiatives is monitored at the weekly Senior Operations Group Meeting of senior management and at the weekly Research Team meeting.

HEQCO Performance

HEQCO has developed a variety of metrics on our impact, including web analytics; social media monitoring; and periodic interviews with the sector such as an internal analysis by Academica surveying researchers who authored HEQCO studies. The analysis, conducted for internal quality improvement, found that HEQCO reports have, in effect, a multiplier effect, with the majority of respondents reporting subsequent presentations to research groups or communities of practice, often three or more times. Nearly two-thirds of respondents had shared the research in a presentation to a formal meeting at their organization and half had made an oral presentation at a conference. More than 15% of respondents had shared the research in an academic journal article and 15% had done so in a position or policy paper. An additional one-quarter indicated that they planned to write an academic journal article in the future and 10% planned to write a position or policy paper. Social media knowledge mobilization is increasingly used by HEQCO researchers. Among studies published in the last three years, 24% had been shared via twitter, and 16% via a Facebook or LinkedIn update.

Our web and social media analysis reflects not only sustained growth in dedicated followers here in Ontario, but also an emerging national and international audience, casting an international spotlight on Ontario's commitment to evidence-based policy-making and providing HEQCO with access to best practices in higher education across Canada and around the world. Such access only enhances Ontario's opportunities for leadership in postsecondary education as it benefits from broader awareness of

successful initiatives beyond our provincial borders. More than 10% of HEQCO's web traffic is international, with more than half of that from the United States. National audience continues to expand, with 20% of Canadian traffic coming from outside Ontario, led by British Columbia, Quebec and Alberta. Overall web traffic has increased from 3,000 average visits in 2011 to 6,200 in 2015. Twitter dedicated followers have increased by 32% over 2014 with more than 2,100 followers.

But the core audience for HEQCO is its e-subscribers to our weekly research, news and event updates, now numbering in excess of 3,000. Just over half are associated with the university sector, almost a third with the college sector. The remainder comprise government, industry/business, K-12 and media. The top five areas of interest are PSE alignment with the labour market, pathways, teaching/learning, learning outcomes and performance indicators.

Ahead of the Curve

Since its founding, HEQCO has been identifying and influencing emerging issues and trends in postsecondary education through its research, publications, conferences, workshops, webinars, blogs, commentaries, presentations and digital outreach. The following is a sample of the current issues HEQCO has addressed, examined, assessed and mobilized on the provincial and national agenda over the last 10 years.

- **Access**
- **Apprenticeship**
- **Assessment**
- **Competency-based learning**
- **Data gaps**
- **Differentiation**
- **Entrepreneurial education**
- **Funding formula**
- **Labour market alignment**
- **Learning outcomes**
- **Literacy**
- **Numeracy**
- **Outcomes-based funding**
- **Performance indicators**
- **Quality**
- **Retention**
- **Skills gap**
- **System design**
- **Teaching and learning**
- **Transfer**
- **Work-integrated learning**
- **Workplace skills**

Staff Retention and Development

HEQCO makes considerable investments in the selection, training and professional development of its interns, contract and permanent fulltime staff. Given the multi-year nature of HEQCO's research, staff retention is critical to the continuity and quality of our research products. To support the retention and development of its staff, HEQCO works within existing provincial regulations regarding compensation, augmented by best practices in talent management, including mid- and year-end performance assessment; mentoring; professional development in presentation, media interview and writing skills;

opportunities for project management and leadership skills development; public acknowledgement of exceptional achievement and restructuring of the staff matrix to improve opportunities for promotion.

The current full-time staff complement is 23.6 FTEs (see Appendix 2). HEQCO anticipates the need for increased annual operating funds and growth in our staff complement should Private Members Bill 127 be approved and the Ontario government decides to augment our mandate with these new responsibilities. With respect to human resource risks, the current employee wage freeze, if extended, could jeopardize the retention of key HEQCO researchers and support staff. However, at this time HEQCO enjoys relative stability in its staff complement, largely due to the engaging nature of our work, coupled with a comprehensive and competitive benefits package.

Financial Requirements

HEQCO spent \$4.945 million in 2014-15. It is expected that 2015-16 year end results will show the Council to have spent its entire allocation of \$5.0 million.

Appendix 1 provides an estimate of financial resources needed for 2016-19. Almost 87% of HEQCO's budget is devoted to Research and related activities, 10% is allocated to Council governance and Executive Services, and 3% is spent on Administration.

Appendix 3 provides the Risk Assessment Reporting Tool for 2014-15 required by the Agencies and Appointments Directive and approved by HEQCO's Board of Directors.

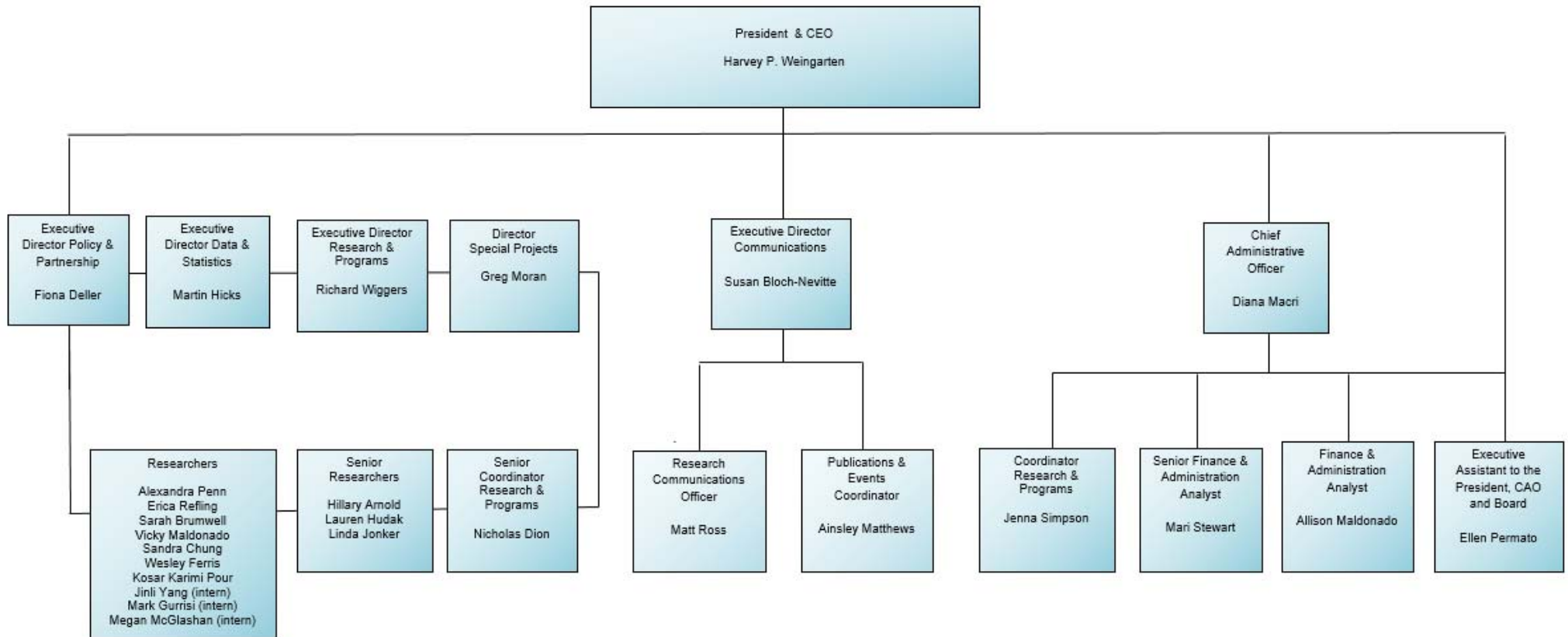
Appendix 1: Financial Requirements

FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS (in dollars)	Staff FTES	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Council Governance and Executive Office				
<i>Board members' retainers/per diems</i>		10.0	10.0	10.0
Executive Office – President, Chief Administration Officer, Executive Director-Policy & Partnership, and Council Support				
<i>Salaries</i>	2.6	344.1	354.4	365.1
<i>Travel and Communications</i>		19.8	20.0	20.2
<i>Services, supplies and equipment</i>		96.6	102.8	104.4
Subtotal Council Governance and Executive Office		470.5	487.2	499.7
Research Program				
<i>Research Contracts, Seminars and Workshops Data purchases, translations, communications, etc.</i>	20.0	1,806.1	1,678.1	1,589.7
<i>Salaries and benefits</i>		1,934.1	1,992.1	2,051.9
<i>Travel and communications</i>		48.5	49.0	49.5
<i>Services, supplies and equipment</i>		586.6	633.0	643.9
Subtotal Research Program		4,375.3	4,352.2	4,335.0
Administration				
Corporate Services – Finance, Contract Management, Administration and Controllershship				
<i>Salaries and benefits</i>	1.00	138.6	142.8	147.0
<i>Travel and communications</i>		1.5	1.5	1.6
<i>Services, Supplies and equipment</i>		14.2	16.3	16.7
Subtotal Administration		154.3	160.6	165.3
Total Resource Requirement	23.6	5,000.0	5,000.0	5,000.0

Notes

1. The Budget plan for 2016-17 and beyond is based on an annual allocation of \$5.0 million. HEQCO expects to spend its entire 2015-16 allocation of \$5 million.
2. Projected expenditures are reported on the accrual basis of accounting.
3. Common expenses such as rent, equipment leases, IT support, and office supplies are allocated to each department by percentage of headcount.
4. Budgets presented are estimates only and do not include projections to accommodate resource needs arising from Bill 127.

Appendix 2: HEQCO Organizational Chart



**Appendix 3: HEQCO Risk Assessment Reporting Tool 2014-15
(See Excel document entitled FINAL_Risk Assessment Report
2015-16 v4)**