

## Stakeholder Summary

### Queen's transition program of significant interest to underrepresented students

First-year undergraduate students can benefit from programs designed to smooth their transition into postsecondary education and such programs are of particular interest to students who are underrepresented in higher education, according to a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO).

Initially piloted in 2013, Q Success is a first-year transition program designed to help incoming direct-entry undergraduate students at Queen's University develop personal and academic skills. A particular focus of the study, conducted in Fall 2015, was on the participation of students from historically underrepresented and marginalized populations (including members of racialized minorities, Indigenous students and students with disabilities).

#### Project description

*Q Success: Supporting underrepresented students in transition*, examined student outcomes and perceptions following a series of seminars focusing on personal and academic goal-setting, self-care and self-management skills, building mental health resilience, academic skills and improving help-seeking behaviour. The program consisted of six 90-minute, in-person seminars, and six live online webinars. The online version of Q Success was developed to investigate whether the online version might be more amenable to students and/or more cost effective and scalable. Measures included retention rates, GPA, a measure of thriving (the [Thriving Quotient](#)), and participants' ratings of the program.

#### Findings

Members of historically underrepresented groups participated in Q Success at levels that were higher than expected, registering for the program at a higher rate than their proportion in the first-year undergraduate cohort. Overall, 514 students registered for the program, and 293 participated. However, 43% of students assigned to a Q Success cohort did not attend any of the sessions either in-person or online, and only 2.5% of registrants attended all of their scheduled sessions. More than a third of respondents said they were unable to attend as a result of scheduling conflicts with their academic or extracurricular obligations.

More students were reached through the two online groups than across the five in-person groups, and costs did not vary greatly from the in-person delivery model. While the online version was able to enroll more students with fewer resources than would have been required to serve the same number of students in person, it was not as positively reviewed by participants. In addition, the attendance rate was lower online than in person. However, students engaged with online mentors and used the online platform to ask questions they would not feel comfortable asking at in-person sessions. While online participants gave the program positive ratings overall, many commented that they wished there had been opportunities to interact in person.

Neither the Thriving Quotient survey nor GPA and retention data were sufficiently sensitive to reflect the impact of this type of programming, according to the authors, who note that further exploration is needed to select or develop measures that will capture the types of changes produced by transition programs such as Q Success.

Overall, participants expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the program and more than three-quarters of respondents indicated that they would recommend Q Success to other first-year students. Among helpful program elements identified by students:

- How to study better, advice about mental health and sleep.
- Hearing people talk about what certain aspects of university was like and what I could expect in the first couple of weeks and months with relation to academics.
- The fact that the program leaders were always willing to help out and really took the time to foster relationships beyond these sessions.
- The instructors were really kind and understanding and gave great advice. As well, the documents each week were useful.

For Fall 2016, the online program was open to all first-year students to retain program reach, and the webinars were posted so that students could access the information at any time; the in-person component was changed from group sessions to a one-on-one peer mentoring program for self-identified members of historically underrepresented and marginalized population groups. This was done in response to the positive feedback to in-person sessions and the reported value of making personal connections, as well as the significant interest and participation in Q Success among these particular student populations.

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*Queen's University is one of six Ontario institutions participating in HEQCO's [Access and Retention Consortium](#). Each is administering and evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention intended to impact access to and persistence in higher education for underrepresented groups.*