

Stakeholder Summary

Postsecondary sustainability demands cooperation, collaboration and alignment

Ensuring that postsecondary institutions are sustainable and capable of providing a high quality academic experience is a fundamental responsibility of government and of institutional leaders, says a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO). *Understanding the Sustainability of the Ontario Postsecondary System and its Institutions: A Framework* finds that cooperation, collaboration and alignment between government and the institutions is critical to solving sustainability challenges.

Project description

The Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development asked HEQCO to initiate an analysis of the sustainability of the Ontario postsecondary system and its institutions. This report offers a conceptual framework for examining the sustainability of Ontario's public postsecondary institutions. It discusses the definition of the term "sustainability," how it can be measured and the various tools and strategies available to both institutions and government to meet sustainability risks when they are identified. Five questions are examined:

- Why is sustainability important?
- What does sustainability mean?
- How can sustainability be measured?
- What are best practices for optimizing sustainability?
- What strategies are available to increase sustainability when an institution is at risk?

The report concludes by offering a set of recommendations for the continued analysis of sustainability in the Ontario postsecondary system.

Findings

Sustainability is about more than just money. At present, it is easier to talk about financial issues and indicators, but equally important are issues relating to the quality of education and the academic experience institutions can offer.

The best sustainability regimes are those that look forward and are designed to predict future challenges. Sustainability analyses based on the current state only, or that look backward in time, are limited beyond serving as indicators of trends over time.

Overcoming sustainability challenges is a responsibility of, and requires collaboration between, the government and institutions. The tools available to solve sustainability challenges are inextricably linked to, and influenced by, other policies and practices in the Ontario postsecondary education sector, such as enrollment planning, tuition policies, funding formulas, differentiation and institutional autonomy.

The next steps are to better document the current sustainability risk faced by Ontario postsecondary institutions and to develop in greater detail a suite of strategies, tools and options to eliminate or mitigate sustainability challenges facing the Ontario system and its institutions.

Authors of Understanding the Sustainability of the Ontario Postsecondary System and its Institutions: A Framework are Harvey P. Weingarten, HEQCO president and CEO; Martin Hicks, executive director of data and statistics; and Greg Moran, director of special projects.