# Transforming Ontario Universities

The Council of Ontario Universities' response to MTCU's discussion paper, Strengthening Ontario's Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge

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COUNCIL OF ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

CONSEIL DES UNIVERSITÉS DE L'ONTARIO

# **Transforming Ontario Universities**

The Council of Ontario Universities' response to MTCU's discussion paper, *Strengthening Ontario's Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge* 

Prepared October 2012 by: Council of Ontario Universities Conseil des universités de l'Ontario 180 Dundas Street West, Suite 1100 Toronto, Ontario M5G 1Z8 www.cou.on.ca

For more information contact: Bonnie M. Patterson President & CEO 416-979-2165 ext. 256 bpatterson@cou.on.ca

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# **Executive Summary**

Universities are transforming their educational, research and operational approaches in many ways, and they are guided in their efforts by a passionate commitment to students.

Transformation is also at the heart of the discussion paper from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities called <u>Strengthening Ontario's Centres of Creativity, Innovation and Knowledge</u>. Minister Glen Murray has called for accelerated change to improve the Ontario postsecondary sector in these challenging times. Universities are delivering this change.

# **Launching an Online Educational Consortium**

The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) will establish a consortium to support online and technology-enabled education, modeled after and building on our successful collaborations in the Ontario Universities' Application Centre and Scholars Portal. This online consortium will provide students with increased access to online courses and programs and improved credit transfer. Students will benefit from the ability to choose courses and programs from institutions across the province, and will have greater flexibility to accelerate their progress and better balance work, study and family obligations. Through the new online consortium, participating universities will provide open access to a range of online courses that will enable students to enroll in courses whether or not they are registered at a university. These credits may then be used for transfer credit when a student is admitted to degree program at a participating university. The online consortium will enable students to complete fully online bachelor's degrees and be awarded those degrees by existing universities. This will provide students with degrees from universities whose brand is known and whose quality is widely recognized, thereby ensuring the value of their degrees for further education or in the marketplace.

#### **Advancing Credit Transfer**

Universities will expand opportunities for student mobility in two different ways: through their continuing commitment to the goals and operations of the <u>Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer</u>, which is expanding opportunities for credit transfer in active and innovative partnerships with Ontario's colleges; and through the establishment of the online consortium. Through this consortium, Ontario universities will facilitate recognition of credits for online courses to support credit transfer and student mobility.

#### **Assessing Learning Outcomes**

Universities will continue to work intensively to expand the use and assessment of learning outcomes. As required by the Quality Assurance Framework for Ontario universities, learning outcomes must be deeply embedded in the development and assessment of all university programs. Assessment of learning outcomes will inform ongoing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Ontario universities are currently working with the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) on several projects that address improvements in the assessment of learning outcomes. We are also sharing knowledge and strategies in this area. A symposium on the assessment of learning outcomes in both colleges and universities was held in April 2012 and a second symposium will be held in spring 2013, with intensive hands-on discipline-specific workshops about implementing the assessment of learning outcomes.

#### **Expanding Opportunities for Experiential Learning**

Universities will continue to expand opportunities to help students take the concepts that they are learning and apply them in workplace contexts. Experiential educational opportunities are

growing, from practicums in health sciences to co-operative and internship programs for students in business and professional programs, and service learning for students in arts and sciences. Students have increasing opportunities to conduct research and access to innovation hubs to expand their understanding through hands-on learning.

# **Sharpening the Productivity Focus**

Universities will continue to seek ways to manage costs in order to make the most effective use of resources to support education and research. Ontario universities have already achieved significant enhancements in productivity compared to other jurisdictions.

Ontario universities will work in partnership with HEQCO and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to improve the availability of data on productivity. It is critically important to develop indicators that allow valid and appropriate comparisons with other jurisdictions over time, and reflect both the teaching and research activities of universities.

# **Accelerating Transformation**

To ensure progress on the transformation agenda, we propose that MTCU and COU establish a joint Working Group on University Transformation. Universities would be represented by the Executive Heads on COU's Executive Committee. The province would be represented by senior officials of MTCU, the Ministry of Finance and HEQCO. The Minister would have a standing invitation to participate in these discussions.

Ontario universities recommend that the proposed Working Group develop a transparent process and clear criteria for the assessment of applications to the Innovation Fund announced by the Minister.

#### **Leveraging Teaching Innovation**

Universities will continue to enhance teaching and learning. In addition to establishing teaching and learning centres, many universities have created mechanisms to recognize faculty who are excellent teachers and to support the dissemination of successful teaching practices. MTCU could consider using new resources to support and expand such approaches.

#### **Credential Options**

Most Ontario universities offer three-year degrees and will continue to do so. All universities will continue to innovate in the development of degree programs that are responsive to students and labour market needs. The Ontario government could assist in responding to these demands by more timely review and approval of programs for funding.

#### **Degree Supplements**

Universities will continue to expand the ways that they help students demonstrate their skills and knowledge through mechanisms like co-curricular records and e-portfolios. Universities will also continue to respond to the needs of mature students aspiring to advance their careers or experience lifelong learning opportunities.

#### **Year-Round Learning**

Universities will continue to expand summer offerings in response to student demand while ensuring the optimal use of resources and facilities. More opportunities for year-round learning will result from the planned online consortium. Universities will also continue to maximize

revenue opportunities through renting facilities in the summer for conferences, sporting events, summer camps, cultural festivals and other collaborations to support their communities.

# **Removing Barriers to Innovation**

Governments can play an important role in setting the right environment for innovation and productivity. Stakeholders were asked at the recent consultations to discuss impediments to innovation. The environment for innovation in postsecondary education could be improved if the government increased certainty and predictability for universities by providing a clearer, more sequenced and coordinated approach to its policy agenda, providing multi-year funding commitments, and reducing the reporting burden in order to free up time and resources for a more sustained focus on innovation.

# Introduction

Ontario universities are transforming their educational, research and operational approaches in response to the changing needs and expectations of students, evolving social and economic needs, labour market demands, enrolment growth, government priorities, the visions of university senates and boards, and the need to maintain a competitive position in a global education and research environment.

The transformative changes underway at our universities are guided by a passionate commitment both to educational quality and to playing a vital role in nurturing and developing the talent that is critical to Ontario's future. Universities also recognize their important social role in contributing not only to the 35 local communities in which they operate, but across the province, Canada and internationally.

Transformation is at the heart of MTCU's consultation paper, <u>Strengthening Ontario's Centres of Creativity, Knowledge and Innovation.</u> Minister Murray has called for accelerated change driven by the need to ensure that we are capitalizing on the potential of higher education to provide the innovation that will help transform Ontario's economy, the demands of students for a more open, flexible and borderless world of education, and the fiscal challenges that necessitate doing more with available resources.

Ontario universities agree. The changing needs and expectations of students, innovations in program delivery in other jurisdictions, and the rapidly accelerating pace of technological development – all in the context of fiscal pressures – create challenges and opportunities for universities.

This submission focuses on the new directions for change proposed by Ontario universities, reflecting both the points raised in the Ministry's discussion paper and the results of the MTCU consultations. It also focuses on how to leverage existing innovations and best practices and on areas of common cause with Ontario's colleges and other stakeholders.

# **New Directions for Change**

## Launching an Online Educational Consortium

Currently, Ontario universities collectively offer 4,700 online credit courses and are continuing to develop a wide range of technology-enabled learning opportunities including hybrid or blended learning courses and fully online courses. In 2008-09, there were over 350,000 registrations for online undergraduate courses – 12.8 per cent of total student registrations in Ontario<sup>1</sup>.

Ontario universities have been national leaders in several successful technology-enabled collaborations, including the <u>Ontario Universities' Application Centre</u> (OUAC) and the <u>Scholars Portal</u>. OUAC is internationally recognized for its achievements in central application processing. The Scholars Portal provides digital resources to all Ontario university students and faculty to support their research and learning. The Portal boasts 10 million searches a year from a repository of over 32 million articles in 13,497 online journals. Over 4.5 million articles are downloaded each year by students and faculty.

It is important to leverage this expertise in technology-enabled collaboration, along with the wide range of existing online courses, as we plan future expansion of online education. To achieve this, COU is establishing a consortium to support online and technology-enabled education.

This new online educational consortium will support greater access to online courses and programs, greater coordination in support of faculty and course development and improved credit transfer. Students will be able to choose courses and programs from institutions across the province and study at their own pace. The consortium will provide greater flexibility to accelerate students' progress and better balance work, study and family obligations. Students will be able to access online library reference services that are tailored to the needs of online learning and support their study and work schedules. Through collaboration, the consortium will increase the efficient and effective use of existing human and capital infrastructure of Ontario universities and avoid duplication and unnecessary costs.

Through the new online consortium, participating universities will provide open access to a range of online courses that will enable students to enroll in courses whether or not they are registered at a given university. These credits may then be used for transfer credit when a student is admitted to degree program at a participating university. The consortium will also provide mechanisms for continuous quality improvement of online courses.

Ontario universities believe that students will be best served if university degrees for online programs are awarded by existing institutions. Throughout MTCU's consultations, participants consistently recommended that a new "online institute" should not award credentials. We heard from many students at the consultations that they want and need the structure and branding associated with Ontario universities when taking online courses and degrees. The online consortium will enable students to complete fully online bachelor's degrees and be awarded those degrees by existing universities. This will provide students with degrees from universities

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Survey of e-learning activity and future plans conducted by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, spring 2010.

whose brand is known and whose quality is widely recognized, thereby ensuring the value of their degrees for further education or in the marketplace.

MTCU's consultation paper seeks advice concerning policy tools that could be implemented by the Ministry. Ontario universities recommend a change to MTCU's current policy concerning ancillary fees. Currently, MTCU's policy restricts the use of digital learning resources through outdated provisions that define learning resources as textbooks that can be retained by the student, and through recent clarifications that prohibit the use of evaluative components of digital learning systems. These restrictions are impeding the use of highly effective, technology-enabled learning resources that improve learning outcomes. To rectify these issues, changes to the ancillary fee policy are needed.

#### Commitment and Recommendation:

- COU will establish an online educational consortium to deliver more online courses, programs and degrees, and to support ongoing improvement in the quality of technology-enabled learning.
- We recommend that MTCU amend its ancillary fee policy to allow universities to assign technology-enabled learning resources and to use the assessment functions of these resources in a limited way that protects students' choices and does not transfer higher costs to them.<sup>2</sup>

# **Advancing Credit Transfer**

Every year, thousands of Ontario students transfer from college to university programs, or between universities, in order to achieve their educational and career goals.

For students transferring between universities, Ontario universities now routinely provide transfer credit for first- and second-year university courses. Universities also have a well-established system that allows students to use "letters of permission" to take courses in other universities.

For students transferring between colleges and universities, there are agreements for over 500 pathways that facilitate transfer of credit between institutions. Thousands of Ontario students also benefit from university policies granting advanced standing to students transferring from specific college programs to specific university programs.

Through active and innovative partnerships with Ontario colleges and participation in the new Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), Ontario universities are working to expand opportunities for credit transfer and to improve student experience.

The establishment of the above-mentioned online educational consortium will also improve student mobility through providing facilitated recognition of credits for online courses to support credit transfer.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> COU is submitting a separate, more detailed submission to MTCU concerning this recommendation.

#### Commitment:

 Universities will continue to expand student mobility and credit transfer opportunities through ONCAT, in partnership with colleges, and through the establishment of the online educational consortium.

# **Assessing Learning Outcomes**

Learning outcomes are now deeply embedded in the development and assessment of the quality of university programs; this is a requirement of Ontario universities' Quality Assurance Framework. Universities are working intensively to expand the use and assessment of learning outcomes that give students and employers an assurance of what knowledge and skills students will demonstrate upon successful completion of courses and programs. This process is accelerating a culture of ongoing improvement in the sector.

Universities have long demonstrated a commitment to learning outcomes and are focusing on expanding the use and assessment of learning outcomes to inform ongoing improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. Ontario universities are currently collaborating with the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) on several projects that address improvements in the assessment of learning outcomes.

We are also sharing knowledge and strategies in this area through symposiums. A symposium on the assessment of learning outcomes in both colleges and universities was held in April 2012. A second symposium, with intensive hands-on workshops focused on implementing discipline-specific assessments of learning outcomes, will be held in the spring of 2013.

While learning outcomes are important in driving innovation, they are only one of many measures that should be used to ensure ongoing improvement of programs. A comprehensive approach to learning outcomes measurement must be taken, rather than the implementation of a single assessment system. We heard strong agreement from stakeholders at the consultations that learning outcomes should not be tied to funding. Universities agree.

#### Commitment:

 Universities will continue to work intensively to expand the use and assessment of learning outcomes, to collaborate on the development of appropriate measurement strategies, and to share best practices in the use of learning outcomes.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Since 2010 publicly assisted universities in Ontario have used a new Quality Assurance process. The new Quality Assurance Framework sets out requirements for the approval of new undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as evaluation of existing programs at Ontario universities. Programs are reviewed by arm's-length external reviewers and universities are audited by the Quality Council. The Framework requires programs to identify learning outcomes and explain how the achievement of learning outcomes is measured. Learning outcomes also are used to align individual courses with Degree Level Expectations, which define the competencies acquired by university graduates at each level of undergraduate and graduate education. For more information about learning outcomes, degree level expectations, and how they are embedded in the new Quality Assurance process, please see the COU report: *Ensuring the Value of University Degrees in Ontario: A Guide to Learning Outcomes, Degree Level Expectations and the Quality Assurance Process in Ontario.* 

# **Expanding Opportunities for Experiential Learning**

Students across the province have access to an expanding range of experiential learning opportunities through co-op programs, innovation hubs, youth entrepreneurship programs, service learning opportunities, internships and practicums in Ontario, across Canada, and abroad, and in fields as varied as public health, the arts, education, forensics, law, science, medicine, health and business. Indeed, we heard from stakeholders at the consultations that experiential learning is much broader than described in MTCU's discussion paper. There are also valuable online services that support experiential learning. Through the Scholars Portal, for example, students can access the digital repository for social science data, <odesi> (Ontario Data Documentation, Extraction Service and Infrastructure Initiative); and datasets on land use, transportation and much more via the GeoPortal. These online services support experiential learning in subjects as varied as environmental restoration, renewable energy studies, watershed studies, history, community development and many other areas. Providing both onthe-ground experience and access to professional networks, experiential learning opportunities have a strong impact on the job readiness of students after graduation.

There are 34,700 full-time students involved in 448 co-op programs at Ontario universities, and many thousands more participating in other forms of experiential learning.

Universities will continue to expand learning opportunities so that students can take the concepts that they are learning and apply them in workplace contexts.

#### Commitment:

 Universities will continue to expand experiential and entrepreneurial learning opportunities for students.

# **Sharpening the Productivity Focus**

Ontario universities have already achieved major improvements in productivity in education and research. Since 2000-01, enrolment of undergraduate students has grown by over 50 per cent and enrolment of graduate students has grown more than 75 per cent, while provincial operating grants per student, measured in MTCU's program-weighted enrolment units (BIUs), have decreased by almost three per cent (in constant dollars). As a result of this demonstrated increase in productivity, thousands more of our graduates have enhanced career benefits that would not be available without a university degree. This has also boosted the provincial economy.

Universities have had modest overall increases in total operating revenue due to the tuition framework. Since 2000-01, total operating revenue from both provincial grants and tuition revenue per student combined (per BIU in constant dollars) has increased by five per cent. In universities, as in other sectors of the economy (including government), highly skilled and well-educated workers have realized compensation gains greater than the rate of general inflation.

University productivity is not just about educating students. The productive "outputs" of universities also include research and knowledge application. While the federal government provides a large proportion of funding to support university research, provincial operating funding also supports some of the costs of research, including faculty salaries. Ontario universities have increased outputs in all aspects of their missions, at a rate far higher than increases in revenue.

Ontario universities operate with significantly less revenue than do other universities in Canada, a clear indication of efficiency. Ontario universities receive the lowest level of provincial funding per student in Canada. When tuition revenue is included in the comparison of total revenue per student, Ontario remains at the bottom in comparison to other Canadian provinces.<sup>4</sup>

Universities accept the challenge of continuing to manage their costs in order to make the most effective use of resources for education and research, while improving quality. Universities have already collaborated on a report on best practices called <u>Innovative Ideas: Improving</u> <u>Efficiency at Ontario Universities.</u>

Ontario universities are working in partnership with HEQCO and MTCU to improve the availability of data on productivity. It is critically important to develop data that allows valid and appropriate comparisons with other jurisdictions and/or over time, and data that reflects the teaching, research and community service activities of faculty.

#### Commitments:

- Universities will continue to seek ways to manage costs in order to make the most effective use of resources to support education and research, building on the significant productivity enhancement that has already been achieved relative to other jurisdictions.
- Universities will continue to partner with HEQCO and MTCU to improve the availability of data on productivity.

# **Accelerating Transformation**

Minister Murray has precipitated a robust dialogue on issues of importance to the university sector and its students through MTCU's discussion paper and the consultations. We want to ensure that this productive and focused dialogue will continue in the fall in order to ensure steady progress on the transformation agenda. To that end, we propose that COU and MTCU establish a joint Working Group on University Transformation. Universities would be represented by the Executive Heads on COU's Executive Committee. The province would be represented by senior officials of MTCU, the Ministry of Finance and HEQCO. The Minister would have a standing invitation to participate in these discussions.

Just as governments support innovation in the private sector through a variety of incentives, we are pleased to hear the Minister talk about an Innovation Fund to provide incentives for innovation in the educational mission of our universities.

Ontario universities recommend that the Working Group on University Transformation develop a transparent process and clear criteria for the assessment of applications to the Innovation Fund and the allocation of resources.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> COU has completed a comprehensive study comparing operating revenue of universities across Canada. The report can be found at <a href="http://cou.on.ca/interprovincialcomparison-2">http://cou.on.ca/interprovincialcomparison-2</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Administrative costs as a percentage of total operating costs are lower now at 4.7 per cent than they were in 2004-05 at 5.2 per cent.

The government's tuition policy also plays a critical role in supporting innovation throughout universities. We look forward to the consultation to be conducted by the government concerning the tuition framework for 2013-14 and future years, and will participate actively in discussion with the government, students and other partners in the sector.

#### Recommendations:

- Ontario universities propose that MTCU and COU establish a Working Group on University Transformation to advance the transformation agenda. COU recommends that the Working Group or a subset also advise government on the criteria, and a transparent process, for the assessment of applications to the Innovation Fund announced by the Minister.
- We recommend that the province's regulated framework for tuition should continue to provide sufficient resources to ensure that the quality of university programs is maintained.

# **Leveraging Innovation and Best Practices**

Universities have transformed their institutions into 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments. They are committed to broadening the use of innovative and effective practices, and to accelerating the pace at which these practices are adopted by faculty across disciplines, programs and institutions. COU and university administrations will continue to focus on expanding adoption of best practices across the sector.

## **Teaching and Learning**

Enhancing teaching and learning is a key priority for Ontario universities. Universities are deeply committed to enhancing teaching and learning by expanding the use of innovative technologies, supporting faculty members and students in the classroom, lab and in experiential learning contexts, and promoting and celebrating the importance of teaching. A recent report, <u>Beyond the Sage on the Stage</u>, provides many examples of effective and innovative teaching and learning practices in Ontario universities. With a demonstrated commitment to the continuous improvement of teaching quality, universities are engaged in a variety of research initiatives designed to improve teaching in collaboration with HEQCO. These include: development and assessment of program-level learning outcomes, skills for student-centred learning, effective use of technology, orienting new faculty and graduate students to best practices in teaching, and restructuring of degree programs.

Ontario universities already provide faculty members with a range of supports to improve teaching quality, including: opportunities to work with educational developers at teaching and learning centres; support for teaching innovations and pilot projects; awards for teaching excellence; teaching-stream positions; and sharing of best practices through provincial, national, and international forums such as the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE). There are 19 Teaching and Learning Centres at universities across Ontario. Educational developers based in these centres work closely with faculty to support curriculum innovation and development, the use of learning outcomes for courses and programs, strategies for using new e-learning and other teaching technologies, and professional development of teaching techniques and strategies. In addition, many universities have created mechanisms to recognize faculty who are excellent teachers and to support the dissemination of the successful practices they use. Universities are also committed to providing the best academic support services to help students achieve success in their academic careers. MTCU could consider using new resources to support and expand such approaches.

Students are benefitting from the adoption of new technology-enabled learning approaches in all disciplines and programs, based on research on effective teaching and learning practices. These innovations include expanded use of wikis, smart classrooms, simulations, personal response systems (clickers) and new technology-enabled spaces to develop and launch business and social innovations. Faculty are deeply engaged in developing technology-enabled improvements to teaching and learning, sharing best practices, and supporting the adoption of new technological innovations that will benefit our students.

As noted earlier in this submission, Ontario's universities collectively offer a large selection of online courses and are continuing to develop a wide range of technology-enabled learning opportunities, including hybrid or blended-learning courses and fully online courses.

#### Commitment and Recommendation:

- Universities will continue to support and encourage innovation in teaching and learning through research initiatives, development of skills for student-centred learning, expanding the use of technology, orientation of faculty and graduate students to best practices in teaching, academic support services for students and restructuring of degree programs.
- The Ontario government could incent initiatives that enhance teaching and learning in universities with funding, so long as it does not compromise funding to other areas.

### **Credential Options**

Ontario universities understand the Ministry's interest in shortened time-to-completion of degrees in order to maximize the effective use of both public funding and students' own resources.

Sixteen Ontario universities offer three-year degrees. These universities graduate between 10 and 40 per cent of their undergraduate students with three-year bachelor's degrees.

Ontario universities believe that there is a high value in the current honours bachelor's degree structure and learning outcomes, particularly in the breadth requirements of an honours baccalaureate degree. It is also important to note that many professional accreditation bodies (including nursing and engineering) and graduate programs require that entering students must have completed four-year degrees. Ontario must ensure that degree structures align with the requirements of professional bodies and graduate schools as well as marketplace expectations. At the same time, for those students who wish to graduate within a three-year timeframe, three-year baccalaureate degrees will continue to be available from those universities that already offer them. It would be appropriate for MTCU to consider funding incentives to support three-year baccalaureate degrees, if new incentives are positive and do not detract from current funding.

More importantly, Ontario universities see the value of a wider range of options for students, including "compressed" honours baccalaureate programs (where students complete an honours program in less than four years), restructured baccalaureate and/or honours baccalaureate programs (where a student completes the required learning outcomes in less than the usual amount of time), and in laddered programs where students are admitted to more integrated undergraduate and graduate programs where total time-to-completion is shortened. Universities are exploring and initiating a variety of credential options where they are appropriate for the discipline and meet students' needs.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> In European jurisdictions, a high proportion of students receiving three-year undergraduate degrees go on to a master's degree program. In countries where three-year degrees are the standard, master's programs are two-year programs. If three-year bachelor's programs are expanded, we need to ensure that Ontario students graduating with three-year degrees have pathways to graduate studies so that they are not disadvantaged.

Ontario universities also recognize that many students take longer than four years to graduate from undergraduate programs for many reasons, including academic and financial reasons. Universities remain committed to supporting students to complete programs in a timely way, and provide extensive reporting to MTCU on time-to-completion of undergraduate programs.

Universities are committed to ensuring that all students have options that will suit their needs. This includes updating and creating new programs to reflect student and labour market demand.

Ontario universities are leaders in curricular development and innovation, and have pioneered revolutions in undergraduate education: for example, problem-based learning at McMaster University, joint diploma-degree programs at York-Seneca and Guelph-Humber, and service and experiential learning for credit in universities across the province. At the same time, there are significant innovations in courses and programs across the province with the integration of information technology and the use of experiential and problem-based learning in many curricula.

Students currently benefit from the availability of an expanding number of degree programs that respond to specific labour market needs. The majority of new programs being approved by the <a href="Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance">Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance</a> (Quality Council) are applied, interdisciplinary programs that are intended to prepare students for careers while also developing their skills and capacity in critical and analytical thinking.

Over the past few years, MTCU has taken more time than in the past to determine whether to fund proposed new programs. The slow pace of approvals impedes universities' ability to respond quickly to labour market needs or implement innovative program options.

#### Commitments and Recommendations:

- If the Ministry sees value in improved reporting on time-to-completion of graduate degrees, Ontario universities will engage with MTCU to determine appropriate reporting.
- Ontario universities will continue to innovate in the development of degree programs in order to respond to the requirements of the labour market, the demands of students, and the need for greater productivity.
- We recommend that MTCU consider innovative degree structures that reduce time-tocompletion as one possible use of the new Innovation Fund.
- To ensure more timely approvals, we recommend that MTCU implement a two-tiered approach to approval of new programs. Expedited approvals would be given where proposed programs are well-aligned with the existing programs, resources and priorities of the university; and more detailed review should be reserved for proposed programs that represent a significant new direction for the university. This two-tiered approach would be coordinated with review of proposed new programs by the Quality Council.

# **Degree Supplements**

In addition to extensive career planning and support services provided to students and alumni both in-person and online, universities are increasing the use of co-curricular records to provide some measure of the value of students' volunteer experiences.

Students also have the opportunity to use technology-enabled electronic portfolios, or "e-portfolios," to showcase their skills, experience, and learning outcomes to employers. Credential supplements in other jurisdictions typically adhere to a standard template that explains in general terms what a university student has learned and is able to do after completing a specific program or degree. In contrast, students in Ontario find that e-portfolios are a better tool for capturing their educational achievements, including experiential and other hands-on learning experiences. An added benefit of e-portfolios is that they can be continually updated after a student graduates and enters the workforce.

#### Commitment:

• Ontario universities will continue to expand the ways that they help students demonstrate their skills through a variety of different services and approaches.

# **Year-Round Learning**

Co-operative programs, and many programs incorporating experiential learning, now run year-round on campuses. As well, students now have access to many other courses during the summer semester on campus, and many online courses can be taken year-round. Some universities have already expanded their summer offerings, where demand has been sufficient.

Studies show that lack of student demand and the higher associated costs of operation remain the biggest hurdles to widespread adoption of year-round learning. Full-time summer employment is crucial in enabling many students to fund their education. This has an impact on the demand for summer enrolment. Moreover, research indicates that a three-semester system drives up instructional costs significantly because universities are required to create additional sections of courses to make them available to all students. A study by the University of Waterloo found that running summer semesters for co-op program students resulted in an increase of about 18 per cent in instructional costs. These observations are consistent with the results of a 2012 study by the Education Advisory Board in the United States. The report, which surveyed American institutions that already implement a three-semester system, recommended implementation of the three-semester system to reduce costs only if there is an expectation that summer enrolments will reach a level of at least 50 per cent of enrolments in other semesters.

The current demand for summer enrolment in Ontario, however, is far from 50 per cent of enrolment in other semesters. For example, the University of Toronto Scarborough campus, which provides full course offerings in the summer, reaches summer enrolment that is about 18 per cent of the fall/winter enrolment. In a 2006 survey of students at the University of Waterloo, only 20 per cent of non-co-op students reported attendance in one full-time summer semester in their four years of study and among these, fewer than three per cent attended two summer semesters full-time. No students attended more than two summer semesters.

Capital costs of a three-semester system include increased maintenance required for expanded use of existing buildings, including increased costs of installing and/or operating cooling

systems (air conditioning). There would also be a loss of opportunities to repair buildings, such as student residences (including major repairs that can only be done in summer). Universities will also experience a loss of revenue if they are not able to rent out facilities for conferences, camps and programs for local youth, and other events in the summer.

Whether universities are able to attract summer students or not, all universities have taken advantage of the revenue opportunities associated with using facilities for conferences, sports competitions and other activities that bring additional people to their campuses. In order to maximize efficiency, universities will continue to make the best possible decisions for their institutions that balance support for student choice, revenue generation opportunities, and required repairs and maintenance.

#### Commitments:

- Where a sufficient level of student demand exists, universities will continue to expand summer course offerings.
- Universities will also continue to utilize their space for conferences, competitions, and
  other events during the summer, and explore further opportunities for better utilization
  of campus space through community partnerships and marketing to outside groups.

# **Reducing Barriers to Innovation**

During the consultations, stakeholders were asked to discuss impediments or barriers to innovation. The environment for innovation in postsecondary education could be improved if the government increased certainty and predictability by providing a clearer, more sequenced and coordinated approach to its policy agenda and reduced the reporting burden in order to free up time to focus on innovation.

There is a lack of clarity both about the funding available for growth in undergraduate spaces and about the process for determining the allocation of graduate spaces. This lack of clarity creates uncertainty about the best strategies universities should use for growth and diverts energy and focus away from innovation.

The burden of reporting requirements has become onerous with the administrative effort out of proportion to the funding provided and/or out of alignment with the operational cycle of universities.

#### Recommendations:

- We recommend that MTCU institute a multi-year approach for planning and funding undergraduate enrolment and for the allocation of graduate spaces.
- We recommend that MTCU support innovation and productivity by developing a clear, more sequenced and coordinated approach to its policy agenda and the resulting requirements for universities.
- We recommend that MTCU work with universities to consolidate reporting for accountability.

# Conclusion

Transformative changes in universities are guided by our principles: protecting and enhancing the high quality of the educational experience; maintaining the competitiveness of student skills and credentials; flexibility for universities to use resources most effectively; respect for the collegial governance structures of universities and, in particular, the role of senates in guiding the academic mission of universities.

Universities understand, appreciate and are well-equipped for change. The need to engage a diverse and rapidly expanding student population over the past decade has driven many innovations in our institutions and triggered collective action across the postsecondary education sector. As a result, Ontario universities are firmly committed to transformative change in their educational mission and will continue to broaden and accelerate the pace of change and innovative initiatives. We look forward to further discussion with the Minister regarding the proposals presented here.