



REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

**Differentiation and transformation
in higher education**

November 2013

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Introduction

“There are jobs without people and people without jobs.”

– Premier Kathleen Wynne
Ontario Today, CBC Radio One
Aug. 20, 2013

The priority for the Ontario government – for its economic ministries, its education ministries, and for the entire government – must be economic growth and helping more people find good jobs.

This is particularly important for the province’s young people. Far too many young people are unemployed or underemployed and are giving up hope of finding rewarding success in meaningful careers.

It will be essential for the government to explore new ways to promote economic growth and create jobs. There must be more opportunities for people to fulfil their potential and utilize their strengths, allowing them to make a significant contribution to the province’s overall growth and prosperity.

At the same time, job growth must be accompanied by substantive reforms that ensure the people seeking work have the right talents and skills to successfully fill the new positions that are created.

The government must address the skills mismatch that employers and many experts say is hurting the economy.

This is a serious challenge. In its June report, *The Cost of Ontario’s Skills Gaps*, the Conference Board of Canada estimated the skills mismatch costs Ontario as much as \$24.3 billion a year in lost economic opportunity. Ontario loses about \$3.7 billion a year in potential tax revenues.

According to the Conference Board, the mismatch will continue to be a problem as new technologies and innovations create increasing demands for more highly skilled people throughout the workforce. Greater numbers of people – particularly young people – must acquire the advanced skills and qualifications to meet the demands of the new economy.

More people must have access to higher education. And greater numbers of students must get access to career-specific programs as part of their education.

As Economic Development, Trade and Employment Minister Eric Hoskins told a Kitchener roundtable in June, “We need to dig deep into our academic institutions, all the way down to the elementary level, to make sure young people are getting the education and the training that is relevant.”

The people of Ontario certainly want to see higher education improved so that graduates are better prepared for the workplace.

In polling research that was conducted by Navigator Ltd. in September, two-thirds of the general public said the main purpose of post-secondary education should be to teach people skills and knowledge that can be used in the workplace. Yet only half of the employers surveyed and less than half of the general public respondents thought the post-secondary education is successfully meeting that goal.

As the province looks to improve its post-secondary education system, a key priority must be establishing a much stronger emphasis on career-focused programs.

Supporting differentiation in higher education

It is certainly important that post-secondary institutions build on their individual strengths and offer students greater choice in areas of specialization.

This principle is already well established in the province's college system. Indeed, it is built into the core mission of Ontario's public colleges.

Colleges were established to respond to the labour-market needs in their communities and regions. Those communities are diverse, ranging from northern cities and towns that depend heavily on forestry and mining, to colleges in urban centres such as the Greater Toronto Area.

The colleges differentiate because of those regional differences. There is a diversity of college programs that reflects the regional diversity within the economy. Centres of excellence already exist within the colleges.

The colleges also serve unique student populations. For example, Ontario's two francophone colleges offer a range of programs to francophone students throughout the province and are constantly working at broadening their delivery offer.

The statistics confirm that colleges are differentiated:

- Seven colleges deliver more than 60 per cent of the apprenticeship training in the system.
- Three colleges deliver about 40 per cent of the post-graduate programs in the system.
- Five colleges deliver 85 per cent of the college degrees (not including joint programs with universities).
- Six colleges serve more than 50 per cent of the aboriginal learners in Ontario colleges.

Looking at student enrolment, there are also clear patterns of differentiation from college to college:

- Four colleges have more than 40 per cent of their enrolment in health science programs, compared with a system-wide average of 15 per cent.

- Three colleges have more than 30 per cent of their enrolment in technology programs, compared with a system-wide average of 12 per cent.
- Four colleges have more than 50 per cent of their enrolment in applied arts programs, compared with a system-wide average of 25 per cent.
- Three colleges have more than 30 per cent of their enrolment in business programs, compared with a system-wide average of 15 per cent.

It's possible that there may be opportunities for further specialization. Ontario's public colleges are prepared to have regional discussions about differentiation.

However, it is equally important that colleges continue to serve local economies. As has been noted throughout this submission, the principle objective must continue to be strengthening the colleges' ability to deliver on their core mission to produce highly skilled and qualified graduates.

In many cases, the need for highly skilled and qualified employees is consistent throughout the province.

A good example is the need for college business graduates. Those graduates are in demand in communities throughout Ontario. It wouldn't make sense to concentrate business programs in a few colleges, as research (such as the reports done by professors Alan King and Wendy Warren of Queen's University) has confirmed that most college students attend the institutions in their home communities. If business programs were to be concentrated in just a few colleges, the result would be fewer business graduates, which would hurt the province's economy.

It must also be recognized that even in core program areas that are offered throughout the colleges, there is differentiation through program specializations. The health sciences programs would be one example. While all colleges have some health science programs, only one college has a full suite of dental programs and the availability of the medical technology programs is limited to a very small number of colleges.

The government must ensure that measures to support specialization in unique areas are accompanied by a representative range of core college programs that are needed in all communities.

Transforming higher education

To effectively fulfil the province's goals for strengthening higher education and producing more highly qualified graduates, Ontario must not only focus on differentiation but on a broader and more ambitious transformation strategy.

All qualified learners must have access to higher education. They must have opportunities to pursue a rich range of programs that prepare them for long-term success, based on their strengths, interests and passions.

Transformation is needed to help more students attain career-focused post-secondary degrees. Barriers must also be broken down to help more students pursue combinations of general arts programs and applied learning. Advancements must be made in technology-enabled learning to help colleges and universities reach greater numbers of students in exciting new ways.

Ontario must build on its successes in making post-secondary education accessible to students in both of the country's official languages. Ontario's French-language colleges are highly differentiated because of their important mandate to provide francophone students with access to high-quality post-secondary programs. Ontario must support and strengthen the ability of the francophone colleges to reach students throughout Ontario.

The flaws in Ontario's apprenticeship system must finally be addressed. It is time to modernize the province's apprenticeship system, expand the role of colleges in the management of the in-school training, and promote a stronger culture of pride in the skilled trades.

Higher education in Ontario must be better aligned with the demands of the new economy. Students, parents, and the public must be assured that graduates have the advanced skills and the qualifications to achieve long-term success and make a meaningful contribution to Ontario's growth and prosperity.

Collaboration and pathways for students

1. Expanding college degree programs

Central to the Ontario government's framework for differentiation is a commitment to reforms that "ensure that post-secondary education in Ontario provides a full continuum of relevant learning opportunities that can respond to the arising needs of students in their academic paths and career destinations."

Greater collaboration among institutions is essential to realizing this vision. At the same time, as growing numbers of employers look for graduates that have degrees and career-specific training, many students are seeking to pursue degree-level, career-focused programs within individual institutions.

It is time to elevate higher education in Ontario to international standards and provide a full range of career-specific degree-program options at the province's colleges.

As the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario said when it released its report on differentiation in the college system, "moving the (differentiation) discussion forward requires the province to set objectives and forge a plan for college degree granting."

A number of Ontario colleges already award degrees to successful graduates of four-year programs, in areas ranging from industrial design and software development to architecture, biotechnology, financial services and much more. And those programs are successful.

A report done for the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities by the firm R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. confirmed that the colleges' four-year degree programs are responding to employers' needs for graduates with degree credentials in specific fields. The graduates had an 80 per cent employment rate and 84 per cent worked in area related to their field of study. Malatest also said employers reported a high level of satisfaction with degree graduates.

Furthermore, there is a definite bias in Ontario – among employers and the general public – favouring degrees over diplomas.

The previously mentioned polling research that was done by Navigator Ltd. in September found employers and the public overwhelmingly believes degrees are a stronger credential than diplomas.

When specifically asked to choose between a three-year college degree and a three-year college diploma, 69 per cent of the general public and 74 per cent of employers said they would prefer a college degree.

The public and employers clearly value degrees, and degrees are the internationally recognized credential for quality post-secondary programs. Firms that compete internationally often want people with degrees working for them, and graduates looking to work outside of Ontario usually need to have a degree.

Ontario's colleges have a proven record of successfully delivering degree-level programming. To help encourage more people to pursue the applied learning that is essential to producing a more qualified workforce, Ontario must build on its achievements and ensure that colleges are able to offer a robust range of degree, diploma and certificate programs, including an expanded range of career-specific degree programs at both the three-year and four-year level.

Three-year college degrees

Ontario is unique in the western world in the way it treats its graduates of three-year post-secondary programs in applied fields.

In most jurisdictions, particularly in the OECD, graduates of such programs earn degrees. However, in Ontario, graduates of the colleges' three-year programs can only be awarded diplomas.

It's unclear why this distinction exists. As far back as 1972, a provincial commission on post-secondary education in Ontario recommended that colleges that wished to offer bachelors' degrees to students in three-year programs should be allowed to do so.

The three-year programs at Ontario's colleges compare favourably with three-year programs in other jurisdictions that award degrees. As well, many of Ontario's three-year college programs are already aligned with the province's learning requirements for baccalaureate education.

Allowing colleges to offer three-year degree programs would help make post-secondary education more attractive to students who have the ability to meet provincial standards for higher learning but were streamed away from a degree pathway in high school.

More than 40 years after it was first recommended, it is time to allow colleges to offer three-year degree programs.

Four-year degree programs

Ontario must also expand the range of four-degree programs available at colleges.

The research conducted for the Ontario government has confirmed those programs are successful. The consultants' report was also clear that degrees are becoming a minimum requirement to enter an increasing number of professions.

Allowing colleges to offer three-year degree programs will help address this challenge. However, a number of specialized fields require graduates of four-year programs. To ensure that more people get access to specialized programs that meet employers' demands, the province should allow colleges to expand the range of four-year degree programs being offered.

Ontario's colleges are committed to continue expanding the range of four-year degrees to meet student and employer demands. With an appropriate provincial policy environment, Ontario's colleges can

establish new programs to increase the number of first-year places from approximately 3,500 in January 2013 to more than 7,000 by fall 2018.

To support this expansion of programs, the ministry needs to raise the current ceilings for college degree programs.

The nomenclature must also be reclassified so that four-year degree programs are properly designated as “honours” programs.

Currently, only four-year degree programs at universities can be designated as “honours” degrees. This creates an artificial distinction between college and university degrees.

PEQAB has tried to argue that the “honours” terminology should be reserved for research-oriented degrees.

But PEQAB’s standards make no distinction between practice-oriented and research-oriented degrees. And the reality is there are many people who have graduated with “honours” degrees from universities who have never done any research as it’s defined by PEQAB.

The prohibition against colleges offering “honours” degrees is based on institutional biases, rather than any academic credentials. The bias should be removed and all institutions meeting the province’s quality standards for four-year degrees should be allowed to award “honours” degrees.

Stand-alone nursing degrees

Maximizing the effectiveness of post-secondary education also requires a re-examination of the province’s nursing degree programs. Ontario has reached the stage where colleges and universities should have the right to offer their own stand-alone nursing degrees.

Under the current structure, which requires colleges and universities to collaborate on nursing degree programs, there are a number of excellent partnerships that have developed. Many colleges are eager to continue those partnerships on a long-term basis.

However, not every nursing degree program needs to be delivered through such partnerships.

Some colleges are ready to offer their own stand-alone nursing degrees. In a number of cases, colleges are providing more than 90 per cent of the actual instruction for nursing degree programs and could effectively deliver the programs on their own.

Allowing colleges to offer stand-alone nursing degrees will help attract more students – particularly from underrepresented groups – in communities where the college is the only post-secondary institution in the community. Stand-alone nursing degrees will help Ontario to produce more health-care providers throughout the province.

Colleges should have the ability to offer their own nursing degree programs in cases where the infrastructure and the expertise exist and the college wishes to offer its own programs.

Approval process for college degrees

The effort to expand the range of career-focused degree programs in Ontario must also include a reorienting of the process for approving post-secondary degrees.

The current structure in Ontario is not designed for applied education. Instead, the approval process is managed by the Post-secondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB). It's a process that is unnecessarily cumbersome and slow at the college level.

A significant part of the problem is that PEQAB uses a university degree model that is not designed for career-specific post-secondary programs. For example, it relies excessively on input measures when evaluating a proposed program, while college programs often focus on end results that include a greater emphasis on skills and abilities.

Too often, there are unreasonable delays from the time an application is submitted to PEQAB to the point when an application is finally approved by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. It's not uncommon for the approval process to take two to three years – much too long in a rapidly changing economy.

It doesn't make sense to have the degree approval process managed by a university-focused organization that relies almost exclusively on university measures.

The university sector controls its own degree assessment process through the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance. In the 21st century, Ontario's college system should also have its own structure for the approval and assessment of college degrees.

The public will want to be assured that the highest standards are maintained throughout any changes to the process. Ontario's colleges agree that upholding quality is essential. A rigorous transition plan will be needed to ensure that high standards are in place as the province moves the approval process for college degrees to the college system.

2. A full continuum of opportunities

Growing numbers of students are accessing career-focused programs by combining a mix of college and university studies in their post-secondary education. In fact, the number of university graduates enrolled in Ontario's colleges has grown more than 40 per cent over the past five years.

Students who are seeking a mix of liberal arts and applied programs should be supported by the province's post-secondary system.

Ontario should also improve the opportunities for apprenticeship students seeking to further their learning, and ensure that at-risk students who enter the post-secondary system can attain the best education possible to improve their employment prospects.

It will be particularly important for the government to introduce reforms that help students pursue different pathways in a timely manner, at less cost to the students and taxpayers.

Ontario must break down the silos and create better pathways for post-secondary students. There are a number of steps government can take that can be implemented quickly without creating new fiscal pressures for government.

Credit transfer

The provincial government is to be applauded for the measures it announced in 2011 to help greater numbers of college and university students pursue transfers to other post-secondary institutions in Ontario.

Ontario is catching up to jurisdictions such as British Columbia and Alberta. More information is being provided to students through the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) website, and ONCAT is encouraging more and better transfer arrangements between post-secondary institutions.

However, there is much more to do. There are still too many students that are discouraged from seeking their desired mix of college and university programs because they can't find the right pathways.

The problem continues to be the policies for recognizing completed credits when a college or university student transfers to another institution. Much of the credit-transfer system is arbitrary and inconsistent. Too often, students who transfer to another post-secondary institution are forced to repeat courses they already completed, creating unnecessary delays in their education and unnecessary expense.

Many students have no idea how many credits will be recognized at the new institution until after they have accepted an offer to attend. Some institutions may offer one semester of credit for three years of study, while another offers two or three years of credit.

Students looking to transfer deserve to have reliable information on how they can complete their post-secondary studies more effectively.

Ontario's colleges, the College Student Alliance, and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance have collectively proposed a number of recommendations to improve the credit-transfer system.

A key recommendation would be for the provincial government to require colleges and universities to be transparent about the credits they will recognize when a student transfers to their institution. Each institution's credit-transfer policies should be publicly available and easily accessible.

Information that helps students navigate through the system more quickly will make career-focused programs more attractive to greater number of students. It will help ensure that more students receive the skills and training they need to find meaningful careers after they graduate.

2+2 programs

Many colleges and universities have established partnerships that allow students to access higher education through a local college and then complete their studies at university.

These arrangements, called 2+2 programs, allow students to study two years at college and then transfer to university for their final two years of study. Students who maintain a certain grade point average are guaranteed admission into university when they complete their college studies.

These arrangements open the door to students seeking affordable access to university education. The arrangements provide greater numbers of access points and allow students to begin their studies with lower tuition fees.

The partnerships are particularly helpful in attracting more students from underrepresented groups, such as students from low-income families.

Colleges and universities are continuing to negotiate 2+2 partnership models. At the same time, the Ontario government should develop a policy framework to make 2+2 partnerships a more integral part of the post-secondary system.

Access for all qualified learners

1. Reforming apprenticeship

As the province works to increase access to higher education, it is important to ensure that all post-secondary pathways are truly valued and promoted. There is a need to modernize the system, develop clearer pathways to apprenticeship training, expand employer support, improve completion rates, and create a culture of pride in the trades. Ontario's economic well-being requires that we have a focus on building a stronger and more effective system.

This will require a profound change in attitude. Ontario must learn from other jurisdictions and create a culture of pride in the skilled trades.

Most immediately, government must work with educators and others to reform the apprenticeship system. Steps must be taken to allow more people to enter apprenticeship training and to help more people successfully graduate as apprentices. It is particularly important to help more people from underrepresented groups get access to apprenticeship training.

There are too many examples in Ontario of people who want to enter apprenticeship training but can't find a way to do it. Too often, they encounter employers who are not willing to take new apprentices.

Those that do find their way into the apprenticeship system can face barriers that prevent them from becoming certified as a journey person.

Much of the problem is with the administration of the system. Currently, it is unclear what steps a person is supposed to take to enter an apprenticeship program. A clear gateway into apprenticeship training would help many people seeking to enter the skilled trades.

Ontario's college system can provide that gateway. The Ontario College Application Service, which already serves people seeking to enter full-time and part-time studies at college, should be expanded to manage applications to apprenticeship training.

Ontario's colleges already deliver 90 per cent of the in-school training for apprentices. If colleges were to assume a greater role in the administration of the system, they could take a lead role in matching prospective apprentices with willing employers. Strengthening the role of colleges in managing the in-school training will result in the development of a more effective and flexible training system.

To help address the shortage of opportunities in the workplace, Ontario should also look to expand the in-school portion of apprenticeship training to include "equivalent-to-work" experiences.

2. Advancing technology-enabled learning

The government is urging colleges and universities to drive creativity, innovation, knowledge and community engagement through teaching and research. To achieve this, post-secondary institutions need financial support from the provinces to accelerate the implementation of technology-enabled learning.

Rapid changes in technology are transforming the scope and delivery of higher education. Multiple technologies help educators reach greater numbers of people, including people seeking to further their education and those seeking new training or retraining opportunities.

Technology-enabled learning helps educators reach more people in the workforce who aren't able to attend in-class instructions. It can also provide new opportunities to support students who aren't successful in traditional classroom settings.

The province's colleges are leaders in technology-enabled learning. In addition to the programs available at individual colleges through hybrid models (combinations of in-class and online learning) and other innovations, college programs are also accessed through OntarioLearn, a consortium of colleges that have approximately 70,000 course registrations annually. OntarioLearn ranks as one of the largest providers of online course delivery in North America.

The government must build on this success and implement a strategy to ensure Ontario is an international leader in technology-enabled learning. The colleges are recommending an expansion of technology-enabled learning, including a significant expansion in the programs and courses available through OntarioLearn.

An expanded OntarioLearn would include student access to 24-hour support, including e-advising, e-tutoring, e-mentoring and other student services. It would also include the creation of a digital liaison space that allows for faculty consultation, and it would improve the availability of resources for students and faculty.

Key features of the proposed model include:

- Expanding programming to include apprenticeship, certificate, diploma, graduate-certificate and degree programs. Blended e-trades models would continue to be used to help apprentices get the theoretical part of their education online.
- Enhancing the bridging programs that are available online, to better support students who are looking to transfer to other post-secondary programs or institutions.
- The use of real-time analytics to identify where students are struggling and the steps needed to support them.
- The strengthening of learning through new techniques such as gamification, which uses games and other simulation tools to motivate students to complete tasks such as taking their college placement testing.

The government must work with colleges to realize this vision of a technology-enabled learning environment that would represent the most robust online environment in the world for career-focused learning. This includes using digitally based learning to strengthen the credit-transfer system in Ontario, and ensuring there is access to French-language online training services.

The strengthening of technology-enabled learning through Ontario's colleges will provide students with greater access to higher education and more choices, and will improve student retention rates and the efficiency of program delivery. There is a tremendous amount of work that must be done to expand the opportunities available through OntarioLearn. Colleges and government must begin this work as soon as possible.

Financial sustainability and accountability

Strengthening post-secondary education in Ontario will not conflict with the government's efforts to return the province to balanced budgets. In fact, many of the policy measures that will best support students will also reduce costs. The following is a list of some of the savings to be achieved through the transformation of higher education.

Proposal	Planning target	Savings at full implementation
Share course development in online learning.	To increase the availability of online courses through OntarioLearn by 50 per cent.	Cost avoidance: \$5 million to \$10 million annually.
Provide greater credit recognition when students transfer from college to university.	Recognize 65 per cent of college credits for transfer (up from 35 per cent to 45 per cent today).	Government savings: \$36 million to \$61 million annually in reduced costs and additional tax revenues at current enrolment levels (\$2,700 to \$4,100 per transfer student in reduced operating grants and lower OSAP costs). Student benefit: \$26,000 to \$51,000 per student in lower costs and additional earnings (up to \$410 million annually at current enrolment levels).
Allow colleges to offer three-year degree programs.	Enrolment of 5,000 students annually who would otherwise take four-year degree programs.	Government savings: \$20 million annually in operating grants. Reduced OSAP demand. Student benefit: Approximately \$20 million annually in savings for all students on tuition fees.
Increase enrolments in four-year degree programs.	Increased total annual enrolment of 10,000 students annually by 2018.	Government savings: \$10 million annually in operating grants.
Expand the 2+2 model, based on current partnerships in Ontario and programs offered in B.C. and elsewhere.	Enrolment of 5,000 students annually in college portion of the 2+2 model.	Government savings: Reduced OSAP demand. Student benefit: Approximately \$15 million annually in savings for all students on tuition fees. In addition, students who remain in their home community for the first two years of the degree program would have significantly lower living costs.

Proposed differentiation metrics

In October, the colleges provided an initial response on how governments and educators can best support the goal of allowing colleges to build on their strengths. The colleges continue to believe it is important to focus on a smaller number of reporting components. Eight components are excessive and some of the components don't really support differentiation.

The colleges have recommended five components that should be the foundation for the differentiation framework:

- Jobs, innovation and economic development.
- Student population.
- Teaching and learning.
- Program offerings, pathways and collaboration.
- Research.

The following are the colleges' proposed metrics for those five components, along with proposed metrics for other components in the event the government decides to implement a broader range of components.

Jobs, innovation and economic development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graduate employment rate (KPI)• Employer satisfaction rate (KPI)• Number of employers engaged/partnering with colleges (such as partnerships, equipment donations or program advisory committees)• Economic impacts (qualitative data)
Student population <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overall graduation rate• Number/share of underrepresented groups as percentage of institutional enrolment (disabled, aboriginal and first generation)• Graduation and employment rate for these groups• Percentage of students who are Indirect entrants (excluding those with some post-secondary education)• Total full-time equivalent enrolments (all activity, funded or not)• Remoteness of catchment area/primary service region
Teaching and learning <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student satisfaction rate based upon teaching and learning capstones (KPI data)• Student engagement

- Graduate satisfaction (KPI data)
- Percentage of programs with an experiential component
- Percentage of total enrolment in a) fully online/distance courses and b) hybrid courses

Program offerings, pathways and collaboration

- Institutional distribution of credentials (certificates, diplomas, degrees and post-graduate credentials)
- Percent of enrolment, by academic division
- Apprenticeship full-time equivalent as percentage of total enrolment
- Access programs enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment
- Number of college graduates enrolled in university programs (KPI data)
- Number of university students and graduates in college programs (KPI data)
- Percentage students enrolled in collaborative partnerships with post-secondary institutions (domestic)
- Credit transfer activity

Research

- Applied research expenditures and as a percentage of total expenditures
- Percentage of students engaged
- Number of industry and community partners served
- Research partner satisfaction rate

Institutional collaboration

(See above in program offerings, pathways and collaboration category)

Sustainability

- Pension solvency
- Compliance with Broader Public Service Accountability Act
- Shared services/delivery with other broader public service organizations
- Space utilization based upon the Colleges Ontario Facilities Standards and Inventory
- Annual cost per credential
- Percent of total college revenues coming from the provincial operating grants

Establishing effective metrics for the components will ultimately mean considerable duplication with the information that is already provided to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities in the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements, the colleges' strategic plans and business plans, and other reporting requirements.

Once the metrics are finalized, the ministry should work with the colleges to remove the duplication in the reporting requirements. The colleges are also recommending that the ministry establish a ministry-

college sector working group to develop operational reporting definitions, to ensure the definitions can be operationalized by colleges.

The government must focus on setting the direction and expectations. The colleges must have sufficient autonomy to address local needs, focus on their core mission, and be nimble enough to respond to changing priorities within their local economies.

Conclusion

“We need to do a better job linking our employers’ needs and challenges for skilled labour to the education and skills training we provide.”

– Hon. Brad Duguid
Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities
Closing the Skills Gap symposium, June 20, 2013

Ontario’s colleges strongly support creating a high-quality, sustainable post-secondary sector. In many cases, the measures needed to improve post-secondary education are long overdue.

Once implemented, the proposals in this submission will make a profound difference in the quality of post-secondary education provided to students throughout the province. More students will gain an opportunity to include career-focused programs in their learning. And greater numbers of graduates will find long-term success in their careers.

Government measures to strengthen college education in Ontario must focus on four areas:

- Expanding college degree programs.
- Improving pathways for students.
- Reforming apprenticeship.
- Advancing technology-enabled learning.

New measures to support the differentiation in college programs can help achieve these objectives, provided that specialization is balanced with the homogeneity of programs that are in demand throughout the province.

Ontario is looking to its post-secondary sector to be better aligned with the needs of the new economy. Young people want to get the best education possible to prepare them for long-term success.

Even in a time of period restraint, the province can – and must – implement policy measures that improve higher learning. Indeed, the most significant reforms can be implemented quickly and will produce savings for students and taxpayers.

The government must not delay. It is time to transform higher education to make Ontario a world leader in the 21st century.