



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

April 26, 2018

Hon. Mitzie Hunter
Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development
3rd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

Dear Hon. Mitzie Hunter,

On behalf of the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) and the 17,000 full-time and contract university professors and academic librarians we represent at 28 member associations across the province of Ontario, I am writing in regards to the March 19, 2018 invitation from the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) to participate in the consultation process for the development of the third round of Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA3).

Ontario's approach to funding its universities shapes the capacity of our postsecondary institutions to ensure high-quality learning experiences for students and an environment that cultivates innovative research. Any change to Ontario's university funding formula deserves careful consideration, and the new funding model being developed by MAESD is no exception.

While we appreciate the publication of the SMA3 discussion paper and the effort to solicit consultation from the community, the timeline and discussion questions proposed by the Ministry are not conducive to a meaningful consultation and engagement process. A consultation period of barely a month, with a provincial election imminent, makes proper discussion and engagement at the institutional level impossible. Further, by taking for granted the adoption of an outcomes-based funding model, the consultation does not make space for important dialogue about the shortcomings of outcomes-based funding – a critical concern for faculty.

The timeline is too short for local consultation

As previously stated by OCUFA, one of the central concerns with MAESD's work towards the implementation of the new funding formula is that Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) negotiations have not included adequate consultation with the university community, including faculty, staff, and students. University faculty, who dedicate themselves daily to teaching and research, are among the best positioned to understand the factors that influence the quality of a student's education and their ability to excel. Moreover, the very nature of the five priority areas within the differentiation corridor are such that anything decided in these agreements will directly impact faculty in every aspect of their work as teachers and researchers.

The SMA3 discussion paper states the Ministry's intention to "engage a wide range of stakeholders throughout [the SMA3 development] process including college and university administration, student associations, faculty groups and employer groups." However, the short timeline offered for submissions almost ensures the impossibility of such broad consultations at the local level.

The discussion paper further states that "it is an expectation of the Ministry that throughout the transition to SMA3 each institution will continue to engage with the students, faculty, staff, and affiliated institutions that make up their campus community." However, the Ministry has not "required" that faculty, or any other members of the university community, be meaningfully consulted in the

development of Strategic Mandate Agreements. Considering that during the SMA2 development process, faculty were not meaningfully consulted at most universities – regardless of the Ministry’s intentions, it is imperative that MAESD require institutions to provide evidence of meaningful consultation with faculty before negotiations between the Ministry and university administrations begin, and again before the final agreements are approved. While it is the responsibility of local university administrations to undertake local consultations, the Ministry must take a leadership role and set enforceable standards for the negotiation process. This will ensure the SMAs reflect the perspectives, experiences, and priorities of the entire campus community – not just administrators.

The failure to consult with faculty and incorporate their input into these agreements raises significant concerns about how decisions regarding the future direction of universities are being made, and the legitimacy and effectiveness of the SMAs themselves. Without a robust consultative process that meaningfully includes faculty perspectives, an informed conversation about quality, data, and metrics is not possible. It is vitally important that future SMAs are negotiated with faculty actively involved in the process. The experience and expertise that faculty possess mean they have an unparalleled understanding of not just those factors that influence educational and research outcomes, but the time and resources required to accurately collect the data needed to track specific areas of performance.

Lastly, the establishment of the university and college technical tables by the Ministry, with a mandate to discuss SMA3 and develop performance metrics and measures, is yet another indication that there is no real appetite for meaningful consultation on the part of the Ministry. It is disappointing and contrary to the principle of community engagement, that the only bodies represented at the university technical table are the Ministry and Council of Ontario Universities. Failing to invite other stakeholders in the sector to directly participate in a discussion through which so many of the most important decisions will be made demonstrates that the Ministry is not interested in a meaningful engagement on vital questions regarding metrics.

OCUFA’s position on performance metrics and outcome-based funding

The SMA3 discussion paper outlines its key objectives as “metric development” and “development of a funding mechanism for SMA performance targets as part of the Differentiation Envelope design”. It is disappointing that serious discussion is not being undertaken on the principles of outcomes-based funding. Rather, the Ministry is taking the implementation of outcomes-based funding for granted and consultation is limited to “how the performance funding mechanism should work” and not whether such a mechanism is necessary or beneficial.

OCUFA has long cautioned against the government’s planned shift towards allocating a portion of university funding based on performance. Such a shift would be counterproductive as it will, by design, create inequities and slowly but certainly undermine the integrity of Ontario’s postsecondary education system. Rather than employing such unnecessarily risky and destabilizing methods, available data should be leveraged to improve policymaking decisions and outcomes.

Performance funding, by design, rewards those institutions that meet specific performance targets with additional resources and penalizes institutions that do not meet those targets of the investments they require for improvement. By withholding funding from institutions that fail to meet prescribed targets, performance funding works against quality improvement rather than supporting it.

Performance funding arrangements also punish students studying at universities unable to meet their targets, since declines in institutional funding hamper the capacity of universities to deliver high-quality education. This approach risks shifting Ontario’s university system away from one that encourages collaboration and towards one that creates competition between institutional winners and losers.

In fact, there is a growing body of research that suggests performance funding models do not help jurisdictions meet the academic goals they set out to achieve. In the United States, performance funding models have typically been designed to address specific policy concerns, such as student

retention and degree completion. Studies have found that performance funding has had no discernible impact on retention or degree completion when compared with jurisdictions that do not have performance funding mechanisms. In fact, performance funding has been shown to have had negative effects in some jurisdictions.

Performance metrics are only able to provide a limited assessment of specific outcomes. They are incapable of credibly reflecting the breadth and depth of a student's education or the contributions of a faculty member. As such, performance funding is an ineffective mechanism for improving educational quality that may actually harm student learning experiences.

Funding allocation mechanisms should not be structured in a way that harms the student learning experience. As the government moves forward with its renewal of the funding formula, it should not link performance metrics to funding. Instead the data at its disposal should be leveraged to identify better ways for universities to improve their educational quality and research outputs.

OCUFA's recommendations

To ensure an effective, fair, and meaningful process, OCUFA recommends the Ministry do the following:

- Require meaningful consultations as part of the SMA3 process;
- Ensure that institutions are given more time to consult with local stakeholders and that these consultations are conducted in a transparent manner with local concerns being communicated to the Ministry;
- Establish a broad consultation process with a proper timeline on SMA3 and use of metrics that allows for meaningful debate about the use of metrics and the outcomes-based funding approach instead of taking such an approach for granted;
- Provide transparency regarding the work of the Ministry's technical tables; and
- Extend invitations to other stakeholders in the sector to join the technical tables.

We sincerely hope that you reflect on the concerns shared in this letter and consider the recommendations of OCUFA. We will be awaiting a response to this letter.

Sincerely,



Gyllian Phillips

President, Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations

CC: MPP Lorne Coe (PC Critic for Post-Secondary Education), MPP Peggy Sattler (NDP Critic for Advanced Education, Skills and Development)