

OCUFA Briefing Note

Issue: Accountability Agreements

Date: July 2011

When the Liberal government introduced *Reaching Higher* (its plan for postsecondary education in Ontario) in the 2005 Budget, it announced a multi-year funding plan that would require Ontario universities to reach Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MYAAs) with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU).

MYAA “action plans” and progress reports outline universities’ plans for and indicators of increasing enrolment by disabled students and students with identified demographic backgrounds, enhancing quality of “the learning environment,” and improving student satisfaction and success. They also reported hiring plans for faculty and other staff. Progress reports for 2009-10 no longer include data on hiring; newly added data include those pertaining to the Ontario government’s priorities for credit transfer, online learning and international students.

The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) was created to play a role in developing a quality framework for postsecondary education in Ontario, including the facilitation of MYAAs and the development of performance indicators. HEQCO’s recommendations include proposals to have both system-wide and institution-specific goals and indicators.

In May this year, the Ontario government announced its new plan for postsecondary education. *Putting Students First* indicates that the next generation of accountability agreements will address issues similar to those in the 2009-10 progress reports. The Minister also announced that the government intends to “negotiate individual mandate and enrolment agreements” with institutions. No other details are available as yet.

OCUFA’s Position

- The government must balance its desire for accountability with the need to respect the dual cornerstones of the university: institutional autonomy and academic freedom.
- The Ontario government must supply the requisite resources for universities to meet their social obligation; universities must demonstrate that they are upholding the goals outlined in their mission.
- Multi-Year Accountability Agreements must be publicly available, and annual reports must be released on a timely basis.
- Any performance indicators adopted must be relevant, measure results that are meaningful, and used for information only, not to penalise institutions for falling short.

Background

On November 9, 2005, the Liberal government announced it would provide more than \$211 million to Ontario colleges and universities through the new Quality Improvement Fund (QIF). Institutions were expected to use this money to improve quality through measures such as: the hiring of more faculty and support staff; expanding library acquisitions; improving student services; encouraging postsecondary institutions to further develop their areas of specialty; and promoting improvements across the postsecondary system.

To receive the initial QIF funds, universities were required to sign a one-year interim accountability agreement, for 2005-06. The funding attached to the interim agreements represented approximately 40% of the 2005-06 operating grant increase committed to universities. In these agreements, universities list their institutional performance/standing on a number of key indicators including average class size and student-faculty ratios.

OCUFA repeatedly called for public disclosure of the interim agreements and eventually launched a freedom of information request and media initiative in March 2006 noting the irony of the government's reluctance to make the agreements public while advocating greater accountability. OCUFA received copies of the agreements the following month.

During the fall and winter of 2005, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) consulted with the university sector to develop new system and institutional performance indicators. In light of the government's desire to build in more performance indicators as a means of measuring quality outcomes flowing from increased funding inputs, OCUFA prepared a policy paper entitled *The Measured Academic - Quality Controls in Ontario Universities*.

The paper examines key issues relating to quality in Ontario universities including the efficacy of quality indicators; efforts to define quality; recommendations on how to preserve quality in Ontario universities; and faculty's impact on institutional quality. It also cautions against implementing accountability measures that will place new burdens on faculty and staff without necessarily improving quality. The paper emphasizes the importance of the provincial government investing more funds to reduce the current student-faculty ratio.

Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MYAA) were expected by summer 2006, but the MYAA template was not released until August 2006, and universities' agreements were not all available until well into fall 2006. The documents outline both government and institutional goals and responsibilities for the postsecondary education system in the three key areas of access, quality, and accountability. The goals and responsibilities

outlined in the template are reproduced below. Each university submitted an “Action Plan” for review and acceptance by MTCU; annual progress reports, or “Report-backs”, are also submitted to MTCU. (Please see the attached list of university web-sites for public access.) The original MYAAs were for a three year period from 2006-07 to 2008-09, but have been extended annually.

In May 2011, the Ontario government announced its latest multi-year plan for postsecondary education in Ontario – *Putting Students First*. In addition to announcing intentions to increase college and university enrolments by 60,000, including 6,000 graduate students, by fall 2015, and plans for an expanded credit transfer system and an online institute, new MYAAs are to be negotiated in 2012. They will cover “credit transfer, e-learning, teaching quality, student satisfaction, employment rates and participation by underrepresented groups.”

Beyond Minister John Milloy’s statement that the government will negotiate “negotiate individual mandate and enrolment agreements” with institutions, little else is known about the next generation of MYAAs. The recommendations of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) may offer some hints. HEQCO conducted a research and consultation program to develop recommendations for the purpose and structure of future MYAAs and presented them to Minister Milloy November 2009. Five goals of the Liberal Government’s for Ontario’s post-secondary system were identified:

1. Ensuring that the province has the human capital required to compete and prosper in a global, knowledge-based economy
2. Ensuring that the knowledge and skills embodied in the human capital are appropriately aligned with the province’s economic and social needs
3. Making PSE accessible to all qualified Ontarians
4. Ensuring that PSE programs are of high quality
5. Enhancing research and innovation capacity

The proposed accountability system features:

- Explicit targets for PSE system goals
- Consultative process to establish system targets (Ministry, institutions, HEQCO)
- HEQCO to report annually on system performance relative to targets
- Distinct two-part reporting framework for institutions
 - Core indicators
 - Mission-specific indicators
- Individual targets for core indicators, to vary with institutional missions
- Consistent definitions and data for core performance indicators
- Explicit attention to “adding up” issue for core indicators
- One-on-one discussions between Ministry and institutions

- Prior to academic year to establish targets for core indicators, and goals and targets for mission specific indicators
 - After academic year to discuss results and plans
- Mission-specific goals and indicators drawn directly from institutions' strategic plans
- Qualitative as well as quantitative evaluation of performance relative to targets
- Institutions to post summary template on mission-specific performance relative to expectations
- Explicit link from accountability components to planning component

Responsibilities of the Ontario Government and Universities under the Multi-year Accountability Agreements (2006-07 to 2009-10)

Access

Government goals and responsibilities include:

- Establishing enrolment targets and policies that ensure the government meets its commitment to increase full-time enrolment and increase graduate and medical school enrolment.
- Developing policies and provide funding to promote access, particularly for key groups.
- Developing, in partnership with institutions, a Student Access Guarantee.
- Continuing enhancements of Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP).
- Working with the Chair of HEQCO to develop a MYAA research agenda, among other items.
- Developing an comprehensive international marketing strategy.

University commitments and results include:

- Participation in development, and implementation of, the Student Access Guarantee.
- Compliance with the new Tuition Fee Framework.
- Cooperation with HEQCO, providing necessary assistance to complete access-related research, and working with the Council and the MTCU to develop a system to measure the participation of under-represented groups in a manner sensitive to privacy concerns.
- Reporting on enrolment growth at undergraduate and graduate levels.
- Providing the MTCU with specific multi-year access strategies, indicators and results.

Quality

Government goals and responsibilities include:

- Providing funding.
- Participating in the Ontario Universities' Key Performance Indicator Initiative.
- Working with Council of Ontario Universities (COU) regarding the use of data from various student and graduate surveys, such as the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE).
- Working with the Chair of HEQCO on various elements of the Council's mandate, including the establishment of a research agenda on quality.

University commitments and results include:

- Participating in the Ontario Universities' Key Performance Indicator Initiative.
- Participating in NSSE and other surveys.
- Providing HEQCO with assistance necessary to complete quality-related research.
- Providing the MTCU with specific multi-year quality strategies, indicators and results.
- Cooperating and working with other postsecondary education institutions to develop strategies and policies that will improve and increase collaboration between institutions and sectors in support of student success and mobility.

Accountability

Government goals and responsibilities include:

- Tracking and reporting on achievement of the Reaching Higher plan.
- Receiving advice from HEQCO on the best way to measure performance and ensure accountability of colleges and universities.
- Continuing ongoing review of institutional reporting requirements to streamline and improve accountability practices.
- Signing and implementing multi-year agreements and review annually.

University commitments and results include:

- Completing multi-year action plans to establish specific strategies and results designed to contribute to the system-wide goals and results for access, quality and accountability, and participate in annual review of the plans.
- Providing HEQCO with assistance necessary to complete accountability-related research.
- Signing and implementing multi-year agreements and reviewing them annually
- Posting the multi-year agreements on the institution's website.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

OCUFA Research Papers

- *Ontario University Interim Accountability Agreements: Where did the money go?* October, 2006
- *Performance indicator use in Canada, the U.S. and abroad*, May, 2006
- *The Measured Academic Quality controls in Ontario universities*, May, 2006

Other Reports

- Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *Advice on the structure of the Multi-Year Accountability Agreements with Ontario postsecondary institutions*, November 3, 2009
- Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *Producing Indicators of Institutional Quality in Ontario Universities and Colleges: Options for Producing, Managing and Displaying Comparative Data* (Educational Policy Institute, July 2008)

Web Links to Multi-Year Accountability Agreements

Institution	MYA agreements and progress reports– web address
Algoma	http://www.algomau.ca/administration/accountability/multi-year-accountability-agreement
Brock	http://www.brocku.ca/vp-academic/academic-reviews-planning/public-accountability
Carleton	http://www2.carleton.ca/about/university-reports/
Guelph	http://www.uoguelph.ca/analysis_planning/accountability/
Hearst	http://www.uhearst.ca/publications/rapports/
Lakehead	http://bolt.lakeheadu.ca/~analysis/AccountabilityMain.html
Laurentian	http://142.51.14.1/Laurentian/Home/Departments/Institutional+Research/MYA.htm?Laurentian_Lang=en-CA
McMaster	http://www.mcmaster.ca/avpira/accountability.html
Nipissing	http://www.nipissingu.ca/accountability/agreement.asp
NOSM	http://www.nosm.ca/about_us/governance/general.aspx?id=774
OCAD	http://www.ocad.ca/about_ocad/accountability.htm
Ottawa	http://www.uottawa.ca/services/irp/fra/recherche/ententes.html http://www.uottawa.ca/services/irp/eng/research/ententesang.html
Queen's	http://www.queensu.ca/irp/accountability/regcompliance.html
Ryerson	http://www.ryerson.ca/about/accountability/

Toronto	http://www.utoronto.ca/about-uoft/measuring-our-performance.htm
Trent	http://www.trentu.ca/oirsp/accountability.php
UOIT	http://www.uoit.ca/EN/main/11259/oira/accountability/multi_year_agreement.html
Waterloo	http://analysis.uwaterloo.ca/pubs/tcu.php
Western Ontario	http://www.uwo.ca/pvp/accountability.html
Wilfrid Laurier	http://www.wlu.ca/page.php?grp_id=169&p=8186
Windsor	http://www.uwindsor.ca/multiyearagreement
York	http://www.yorku.ca/president/news/MYA/index.html