

POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS IN ONTARIO



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
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Pathways to Education and Work

Centre for the Study of Canadian and International Higher Education

Qualifications: The Link Between Educational and Occupational Pathways and Labour Market Outcomes is a project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The four-year project investigates the nature of pathways within postsecondary education, and between postsecondary education and the labour market. As part of this project, the *Provincial Pathways* profile series lays the groundwork for further inquiry contrasting and comparing educational and occupational pathways in Canadian provinces and territories.

Ontario: Overview

Ontario facilitates lifelong learning opportunities and pathways among students and graduates of publicly funded colleges and universities, and is one of four Canadian provinces who have adopted the university-college model (Skolnik, 2011). The Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer [ONCAT] was established in 2011 to enhance academic pathways and reduce barriers for students looking to transfer among Ontario's 44 publicly funded colleges and universities. It was preceded by several years of coordinating work through a series of initiatives and Acts that have significantly enhanced student mobility over the past three decades.

Post-Secondary System Description

Ontario's postsecondary system operates under and is regulated by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development [MAESD] (formerly the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities) and includes:

- 24 Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs). The CAATs' mandate is to provide career-related education and vocational training (Colleges Ontario, n.d.)
- Of the 24 CAATs, five have been designated as Institutes of Technology and Applied Arts. The ITALs can offer more degrees than other colleges (CAATs can offer up to 5% of their provision as degrees, whereas ITALs can offer up to 15%) (Clark, Moran, Skolnik & Trick, 2009);

- 20 Public universities. Universities mandates include undergraduate/graduate education, professional education, and research (CMEC, 2003);
- More than four-hundred registered private career colleges.

Main and satellite campuses operate in every region of the province. Two of the colleges and nine of the universities offer programs in French. Ontario is home to two of the largest universities in North America; York University and the University of Toronto St. George Campus. Ontario's public institutions account for approximately 40 per cent of all higher education enrolments in Canada (Weingarten, Hicks & Moran, 2016). The population size and geographic concentration of the Ontario system have led to increased calls for system-wide analyses and policy development by the Ministry (Weingarten, Hicks & Moran, 2016).

Two bodies significantly shape Ontario's present post-secondary system. The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), was established by an Act of the same name in 2005, and the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer [ONCAT] in 2011. Both bodies are funded by the Government of Ontario. HEQCO conducts research and makes recommendations to the Ministry about ongoing quality improvement, whereas ONCAT works with Ontario's universities and colleges to promote pathways between institutions and student mobility.

Pathways in the Province

An important historical feature of Ontario's system was that it was established without a 'transfer function' from college to university. The system was established to be binary in design; that is, it clearly separated vocationally oriented institutions from universities (Jones, 2004). Thus historically, colleges have not offered courses that could be transferred to a university program of studies. However, as the demand for post-secondary education increased, and wider access to higher education became a policy priority, Ontario's binary system evolved to increase the transferability of courses and prior credentials. However, the original design features of Ontario's PSE system still have an impact on the extent to which pathways can be developed. This is because college programs have a specific vocational purpose and vocational destination, whereas the predominant (but by no means exclusive) model for under-graduate degrees in Ontario's universities is four-year liberal arts programs. Consequently, it can be more difficult to establish equivalencies between college and university programs compared to other jurisdictions where there is greater coherence in the curriculum offered in both types of institutions, such as in British Columbia (Lennon et al., 2016).

While each college and university in Ontario has its own transfer policy, Ontario has an extensive Qualifications Framework that articulates the knowledge and skills associated with each postsecondary credential offered within the province.

Most of this systemic evolution has occurred over the past twenty years. The College-University Consortium Council [CUCC] was established by the Government of Ontario in 1996. The CUCC developed the Ontario College-University Transfer Guide (OCUTG) which included a template for college-university agreements as well as a glossary of terms to help institutions work toward

common frameworks (CMEC, 2003). Most initial agreements pertained to degree-completion arrangements. Subsequently, the Ontario College-University Degree Completion Accord in 1999, formally committed colleges and universities to develop degree completion arrangements.

The (2000) *Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act* [PSECE Act] granted Ontario colleges the authority to award baccalaureate degrees.¹ Under the *PSECE Act*, the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) was created as an arms-length advisory agency to review and assure international standards in new degree programs, and to make related program and policy recommendations to the MAESD (Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment).

Following the creation of the *PSECE Act* (2000), the Ontario Government formally introduced industry-focused Institutes of Technology and Advanced Learning (ITALs) as a diversification strategy, and five colleges of applied arts and technology were designated as ITALs.² A revision of the *Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act* occurred in 2002. The changes granted the college sector the authority to award degrees in applied fields, and carry out applied research.

In early 2011, the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) sought to significantly increase student mobility when it released its [Policy Statement for Ontario's Credit Transfer System](#).³ The policies outlined aimed to:

- Reduce the need for students to repeat coursework
- Develop more transfer opportunities
- Better support students in institutional transfers via on-campus academic advising, counselling, and orientation programs.

¹ This was followed by several other notable pathways initiatives led in part by considerable provincially-funded research into post-secondary education and pathways via HECQO and ONCAT. Regarding data collection, Multi-Year Accountability Agreements (MYAAs), Common University Data Ontario (CUDO), and the arrival of the Ontario Education Number (OEN) have all promoted research on transfer students in recent years.

² Some of the defining characteristics of ITALs involve having 15 per cent of programming in degrees, an increased focus on industry and specialized sectoral support for new programs, and larger involvement in applied research through partnerships (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2003). The five colleges are Humber College, Sheridan College, George Brown College, Seneca College, Conestoga College. However, George Brown and Seneca do not use the appellation of ITAL, but like the other ITALs, they are able to offer up to 15% of their provision as bachelor degrees. See Panacci, Adam G. (2014). Baccalaureate Degrees at Ontario Colleges: Issues and Implications. *College Quarterly*, 17(1). Retrieved January 30, 2017 from <http://collegequarterly.ca/2014-vol17-num01-winter/panacci.html>

³ The policy itself is not dated. Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities [MTCU] (n.d.) Policy statement for Ontario's credit transfer system. Retrieved November 17, 2016 from <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/CreditTransferE.pdf>. Additional information about the policy and ONCAT's inauguration was obtained from a 2012 report by ONCAT to PCCAT: ONCAT (n.d.). 2011/ 2012 Ontario report to the Pan-Canadian Consortium on Admission & Transfer. Retrieved November 17, 2016 from <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/pccat/system/files/Ontario%20Regional%20Report%20for%20PCCAT%20website%20-%20PCCAT%202012%20FINAL.pdf>

At this time, the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) was established to replace the pre-existing entities and policies. ONCAT provides ONTransfer.ca, a web resource detailing credit transfer pathways available within Ontario's post-secondary system. Credit transfer "refers, at the most general level, to the ability of students to move from one institution to another and receive appropriate credit in one institution for learning achieved in another" (ONCAT, 2016).⁴ Detailed information about credit transfer pathways among Ontario colleges and universities are outlined in [The Ontario Postsecondary Transfer Guide](#). In addition to HEQCO, ONCAT has, since its inception, funded research on pathways, much of which is conducted by Ontario colleges.

Trades

In Ontario, skilled trades are regulated by the [Ontario College of Trades](#). This includes how and what students will learn during a trade apprenticeship. To qualify and apply to be an apprentice in a skilled trade in Ontario, individuals may choose from and train as an apprentice in one of more than 150 skilled trades represented by the following four areas of trade:

- construction (e.g. electrician);
- industrial (e.g. welder);
- motive power (e.g. automotive service technician);
- service (e.g. hairstylist).⁵

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development operates related initiatives under [Employment Ontario](#). Employment Ontario delivers employment and training services across the province; develops policy directions for employment and training; sets standards for occupational training (particularly for trades under the *Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act*); supports apprenticeship, career and employment preparation and adult literacy and basic skills; and, undertakes labour market research and planning. Under the direction of MAESD, Employment Ontario also offers hiring incentives for employers such as tax incentives, funding, and programs including for example: the Canada-Ontario Job Grant, Youth Job Connection and Youth Job Link.⁶

Prior Learning Assessment Recognition

The most recent PLAR related policy in Ontario appears to be Policy/Program Memoranda No. 132 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003), which outlines PLAR guidelines for mature students taking high school level courses. At the post-secondary level, Ontario's college admission portal,

⁴ Credit transfer initiatives in Ontario facilitate educational pathways and are outlined in the following program and policy documents: [Postsecondary Education in Ontario](#), [Postsecondary Credentials in Ontario](#), [Credit Transfer in Ontario](#) and the [Ontario Government's Policy Statement for Credit Transfer](#).

⁵ Retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/start-apprenticeship#section-6>

⁶ Retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/hiring-incentives-employers>

ontariocolleges.ca states that there is "no set PLAR standard in Ontario." Individual institutions establish their own standards and protocols for PLAR.⁷

Summary

The credit transfer landscape has shifted greatly in Ontario over the last decade. In addition to increased resources for students, expansion of pathways, and partnerships, there has also been progress made with regards to data collection and research. HEQCO has been undertaking research since 2007, covering teaching enhancement, graduate outcomes, and analyses of affordability and access.⁸ ONCAT funds numerous research projects related to student access and mobility. Many of these projects evaluate and share best practices, especially for non-traditional student groups.⁹ Given the size and complexity of Ontario's post-secondary system, the current influx of funding for research and policy development is helpful. While Canadian provinces have unique approaches and priorities in how they manage their transfer systems, some lack the capacity to develop substantial research on their own, and therefore are likely to be inclined to draw from the large body of research coming out of Ontario.

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⁷Admission requirements for Ontario colleges. Retrieved from <http://www.ontariocolleges.ca/apply/admission-requirements>. We were unable to locate any policy documents at the provincial level related to PLAR aside from the secondary level schooling document cited.

⁸ HEQCO began operating in 2006, and in consultation with provincial social partners, established a long-term research mandate which would include four focus areas: establishing a quality framework, accessibility, accountability, and inter-institutional transfer (HEQCO, 2007). HEQCO (2007). Annual report: 2006/07. Retrieved November 17, 2016 from <http://www.heqco.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/HEQCO%20Annual%20Report%202006-07%20EN.pdf>

⁹ See ONCAT (n.d.). *Research*. Retrieved January 30, 2017 from http://www.oncat.ca/index_en.php?page=research

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