

**10 POSSIBLE LESSONS
FROM ONTARIO
THAT MAY BE
TRANSFERABLE TO
SOUTH AFRICA**

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**VISIT OF THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING,
SOUTH AFRICA**

DR. BONGINKOSI EMMANUEL NZIMANDE

10 LESSONS FROM ONTARIO

Lessons that May Be Transferable to South Africa

1. **Access to higher education is important, but access with a focus on success leads to greater equity.**

Higher education can be a force for change in a society if there are deliberate and focused attempts to reach under-represented groups and if services within the institution are aimed at ensuring maximum opportunities for success for all who enter.

Ontario has pursued the systematic and substantial expansion of its post-secondary system and sees this as a critical infrastructure investment in all of our futures. The province needs more educated people so as to build jurisdictional advantage in the global knowledge economy. But growth of student numbers must also reflect a commitment to equity in outcomes. This means that *not all students are treated equally* – differential supports, including special writing and math supports, are needed to ensure all are able to complete successfully.

Despite the province's commitment, between 30-33% of students who enter colleges or universities fail to complete (it varies by institution¹), which represents a serious challenge in Ontario.

2. **Strategic Differentiation is Key.**

Each college and university is different and leverages its internal expertise and access to external resources differently – and in this lies the strength of the Ontario system. Valuing and leveraging differences in the way in which each institution functions is a key strategy being pursued both by the institutions and by the Ministry.

Indeed, leveraging differences can lead to strong collaboration – maximizing the strengths of each partner within the collaboration can lead to significant success.

It is vital, for the health of the system, and for the choices for students, that each institution identifies its strengths and builds on them to create institutional advantages. All are committed to quality in all they do, but they do not have to all be the same.

3. **How You Fund Shapes What Colleges and Universities Do**

Ontario is in the process of changing its funding model from a 1967 version of the Carnegie Unit (enrolment-driven funding – student numbers over time) to a more comprehensive understanding of the institution.

In future, funding will be guided by student outcomes, differentiation among institutions, and by validated data, which will allow institutions to plan long-term. Details are still being worked on.

4. **Enabling Innovation**

Ontario's colleges and universities offer MOOCs, offer flexible approaches to degrees, and offer a range of college to university programs.

The province provides mechanisms to encourage innovation and change – e.g. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (established in 2005), incentive funds and backbone organizations which support innovation (e.g. Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION), which provides ultra-high-speed broadband connecting the colleges, universities, research institutes, etc., across the province).

5. **Learner Mobility is Vital**

As we need more individuals capable of complex work demanding high level

1 See http://www.collegesontario.org/outcomes/key-performance-indicators/2015KPIreport_Eng_final.pdf

understanding, knowledge and skills in our economy, we need to recognize learning is not a linear process.

Lifelong learning is not only desirable, it is essential for economic development and community resilience. Effective and efficient mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning, work-based learning accreditation, transfer credit and laddering (apprenticeships feed into college diplomas, college diplomas feed into degrees) are vital to encourage and enable program completion.

Ontario has invested in an effective system of transfer credit through the creation and support of **Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT)** and has strongly supported laddering arrangements (e.g. the partnership between the University of Guelph and Humber College).

6. **Quality Matters**

It is not access to programs that matters – it is access to *quality* programs that matters.

Ontario colleges and universities developed separate, distinctive mechanism for ensuring quality and we also have mechanisms for ensuring that private providers and colleges seeking to offer degrees undergo a quality assurance process through the work of the **Post-Secondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PECAB)**².

The province also created the **Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario**, which does not act as a regulator, but engages in focused, systematic research (big data, small data, case data), which provides the evidence base to move the system forward.

All institutions report on Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) to enable benchmarking, progress evaluation and effective monitoring of the impact of changes in operations, resources or market conditions. KPI's are a key component of the management systems in operation in Ontario.

7. **Skills Count**

Ontario is challenged, as are many parts of the world, to match the skills of its graduates with the skills needed to sustain a robust economy.

This is a complex challenge, but Ontario created a College of Trades, which coordinates and regulates the efforts to meet skill requirements, invested heavily in expanding access to apprenticeship and encouraged innovative approaches to apprenticeship, especially in non-compulsory trades.

Additional developments are occurring with respect to skills – strengthening the capacity of colleges to support trades education, expansion of trades education and apprenticeships, new public:private partnerships for trades education and the development of a new strategy for skills.

8. **Student Engagement and Flexibility is Key**

As we begin the process of understanding what quality means, the focus is shifting from looking at course descriptions, admission and process variables to a strong focus on student engagement, student supports for personalized learning and differentiated instruction.

The **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)** (which is in fact an international study) enables Ontario's institutions to benchmark themselves against others and

² Ministerial consent is required by all public or private degree-granting organizations, either for profit or non-profit, based outside the province to offer all or part of a degree program in Ontario. It is also required by all private organizations in Ontario, either for profit or non-profit, and by all Ontario public organizations not empowered to grant degrees by Ontario statute to offer all or part of degree programs. Consent is also required to use the word "university" relating to an educational institution in Ontario.

systematically look at what they can do to improve learning outcomes, given that student engagement is amongst the best predictors of success. [See <http://nsse.indiana.edu/> for information about the NSSE].

9. **Technology is Important, But It is Relationships That Enable Learning Outcomes**

Ontario is a major technology hub, with access to ultra-high-speed broadband at through [ORION](#) and significant infrastructure to support online learning, simulation and gaming.

The [MaRS Centre](#) (a business and innovation incubator) focuses on leveraging technology to support start-up and growing businesses and there are many firms in Ontario (small, medium and large) who seek to leverage technology to support skills training, advanced learning and research. MaRS is one of several such incubators. Amongst the most successful are [Communitech](#), based around the work of the University of Waterloo and Ryerson University's [DMZ](#), recently voted the [best incubator in North America](#).

Our student bodies have made it clear, however, that they see technology not as the driver for learning but as a support to effective relationships between teacher and student. That is, technology does not replace the need for effective teaching and learning, which is why it is key to make investments – as Ontario's colleges and universities are doing – in the professional development of faculty members and instructional designers.

10. **Government Can Enable Innovation, But Innovation Comes from those Closest to the Student**

The Government of Ontario has done much to create a culture of change and development in colleges and universities.

Focused investments in program development; significant expansion, not just of universities, but apprenticeships and colleges; dedicated funds to spur the growth of online and flexible learning; and pursuing a policy of differentiation – all help create a context in which innovation and change are seen as imperatives.

But the work of innovation occurs in faculties, departments and in cross-disciplinary teams. They can share these innovations – and do through Contact North | Contact Nord's Pockets of Innovation Series on [teachonline.ca](#) – but they really are developed by those close to the student. Once we see the effectiveness of these innovations, governments can help move them to scale.