



Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer
180 Dundas Street West, Suite 1902
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1Z8

Tel: (416) 640-6951
Fax: (416) 640-6959

www.oncat.ca

Workshop on Pathways for Small and Northern Institutions February 2016

Background & Context

In February 2016 ONCAT sponsored a Workshop on Pathways for Small and Northern Institutions, hosted in Sault Ste. Marie by Sault College and Algoma University. This event was the first time representatives from all the northern institutions – both colleges and universities – came together as a group. More than 30 academic and non-academic decision-makers attended to discuss the unique contexts of northern institutions and identify concrete plans for enhancing mobility and creating opportunities for students.

The Agenda

The day was structured in two parts – the first part provided information on key projects and activities relating to northern institutions presented by institutional representatives, while the second part allowed for brainstorming and idea generation among the participants.

Through three presentations, participants had the opportunity to identify and discuss themes related to student mobility and northern institutions and to hear about promising practices for institutional collaboration. The presentations included an overview of a research project on the costs of credit transfer for small institutions, a panel on indigeneity in the academy, and a panel on the collaborative project among the northern colleges.

The remainder of the time was structured to allow participants the opportunity to help develop short and long term action items on student pathways in northern Ontario, focusing on questions such as:

- What are the distinctive characteristics of small and northern institutions that differentiate their approach to transfer and collaboration?
- What kind of projects could help foster collaboration among small and northern institutions?
- How can institutions better support Indigenous learners and incorporate Indigenous knowledge within curriculum and academic structures?

Key Themes

Over the course of the day, many topics were addressed and discussed. The following represents a number of the key themes or considerations that would underpin a successful action plan.

- **Putting students first** – There was clear agreement that providing “students of the north” with access to educational opportunities is the top priority, and that student perspectives should be included in the decision-making process.
- **Moving beyond competition to focus on collaboration** – Northern institutions need to work together to create sustainable, long-term solutions. In the context of scarce resources, shifting demographics and widely dispersed populations, competition is not beneficial; instead, institutions need to focus on supporting and learning from each other, and on creating situations where everyone can win.
- **Capitalizing on strengths** – There was a strong sense that the northern institutions have a lot to offer, and that their smaller size also allows them to be more agile, flexible and innovative in their approaches.
- **Prioritizing pathways for Indigenous learners and learning** – Indigenous learners are unique and underserved, and enhancing their access to postsecondary education needs to be a priority. This includes building in more options for students to study in their own communities, potentially through technology.
- **Start with building something new** – It is easier to begin by building something new together rather than by changing current systems or structures. To create a win for everyone, start with building something that everyone can contribute to and benefit from.

Suggested Initiatives

While we are still looking to develop a full scale action plan, five short-term initiatives were discussed at the Forum:

1. **Create a working group of representatives from all northern institutions** – There was strong support for a forum to continue the conversation and work together on an action plan through creating a working group of all the northern institutions that would meet regularly, build institutional support and lead implementation.
2. **Launch a pilot program that provides students access to programming across institutions** – Participants signaled interest in exploring a pilot program that would involve facilitating access to courses across institutions. This could potentially involve key campuses offering programming from other institutions, allowing students greater access to opportunities
3. **Develop a strategy for building current northern transfer agreements to scale** – To build some quick wins and emphasize trust, an inventory of northern pathways should be developed and opportunities for quickly extending such pathways to include as many northern institutions as possible should be targeted.
4. **Develop common terms of reference on collaboration** – The northern institutions should work together to create common terms of reference that promote and encourage collaboration among them.
5. **Hold a more focused conversation on supports for Indigenous learners** – There was strong agreement on developing a strategy for supporting Indigenous learners,

and that a more focused conversation on how to best move ahead with this would be beneficial.

Next Steps

Participants were optimistic and enthusiastic about collaboration as a key strategy for supporting students and differentiating northern institutions. There was a clear commitment to build on this energy and continue the discussion on how to move ahead.

To begin, ONCAT will be following up with institutions to establish the working group as suggested, which will act as a forum for continuing conversations and developing more concrete plans.