

Executive Summary

Ontario colleges predominantly offer programming which leads to specific occupations in the labour market rather than further education. Nevertheless, students and graduates are enrolling in many college programs with the intention to transfer to a university degree. Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a two year diploma program that prepares graduates directly for the labour market but also historically has had a high transfer rate to university. Using the ECE program in Ontario as a case study, the interaction between the labour market and transfer to university was studied. Several changes have occurred in the ECE profession in Ontario that have the potential to alter a student's decision to transfer. These include the establishment of the College of Early Childhood Educators in 2008, the phase-in of full-day kindergarten (FDK) between 2010 and 2014, the reduced demand for certified teachers, and the introduction of ECE-related college degrees (starting in 2008). Therefore, the overarching research question for this study is: How have the recent labour market and policy changes affected transfer to university for ECE graduates? To answer this question analysis was performed on ECE graduates at a province-wide and at a college-level.

Research questions: Provincial-wide (Ontario)

- What are the labour market trends for recent ECE graduates in Ontario?
- What are the trends in transfer rates to university after graduation from college ECE programs?
- Why do ECE graduates transfer to university? Have these reasons changed recently?
- What institutions and programs are ECE transfers choosing? Has the pattern changed?

Research questions: Institutional-level analysis (Seneca)

- What is the profile of ECE entrants who aspire to transfer to university after graduation?
- What is the profile of ECE graduates who transfer to university?
- What are the outcomes after transfer?

Methodology: There were two phases to the study. One was a provincial (Ontario) analysis which included ECE diploma graduates between the years 2007 and 2014. The Graduate Satisfaction Survey, which is mandated and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, was used to measure trends in employment, wages, transfer rates to university, and the transfer experience six months after graduation. The survey response rate was 70%, for a total sample of 18,165 respondents.

The second phase focussed on 1) Seneca's ECE students who entered the program between 2002 and 2014 and 2) Seneca's ECE graduates between 2007 and 2014. For entrants, the academic and sociodemographic profiles of those who aspired to university at entry and those who did not were compared. The entrants' sample size comprised of 5108 students. For graduates, the Graduate Satisfaction Survey responses were linked to Seneca's comprehensive student information system, enabling the tracking of students from high school to college entry, graduation, and transfer to university. The sample size used for analysis contained 1503 ECE graduates. The influence of sociodemographic and academic factors on the likelihood of aspiring to university and eventual transfer six months after graduation were assessed using both descriptive and regression models. Sociodemographic factors included citizenship, age, and first language; academic factors included language proficiency (placement), high school background, previous university attendance and Seneca GPA. In addition, a dataset developed previously containing all Seneca students who had also attended York University was explored specifically for ECE graduates to obtain a measure of outcomes after

transfer and mobility trends over time. This sample contained 472 ECE graduates who had attended York University before or after enrolling in ECE at Seneca College.

Results: In 2014, ECE graduates in Ontario had an unemployment rate of 8%, half of the provincial average. Hourly wages, when adjusted for inflation, have increased by 8% between 2007 and 2014 for ECE graduates, compared to a drop of 6% for non-ECE graduates. Concurrently, the transfer rate to university has dropped from 17% in 2007 to 6% for 2014 graduates.

At Seneca College, ECE entrants' plans for university after graduation have dropped considerably in recent years, from 59% in 2009-10 to 35% in 2014-15, with plans for employment increasing from 26% to 46%. Partially responsible for this result is a change in the composition of the students entering ECE. In recent years ECE students are more likely to be international, to be older and to have previously attended university. Regression analysis showed that, controlling for other characteristics and year of entry, younger students, those who had taken university preparatory courses in high school, and those who obtained lower marks in high school were more likely to aspire to go on to university.

Similar to the trend seen provincially, transfer rates to university for Seneca's ECE graduates dropped dramatically from 31% in 2007 to 6% in 2014. In addition to fewer entering students aspiring to transfer, the transfer rate for those who *did* aspire to go to university has also dropped. Regression analysis showed that, independent of a variety of characteristics, those with aspirations for university, younger students, and those with higher Seneca grades were more likely to transfer, whereas those with previous university, and those who graduated since 2010 were less likely. The independent effect of graduating year shows that the labour market and policy changes have had an effect in reducing transfer to university.

For ECE graduates from Seneca who continued on to York between 2007 and 2012, 94% received at least one year of credit. Between 2007 and 2011, 73% had already graduated or were in progress, with some of those who discontinued at York re-entering Seneca's Bachelor of Child Development degree (BCD). Recently, Seneca's BCD degree surpassed York as a degree destination for ECE graduates, with 14% of Seneca's 2011-12 ECE graduates continuing directly on to BCD, compared with 8% to York University.

On a provincial level, university transfers who graduated from ECE after 2010 were more likely to report that the program they transferred into was "very related" to their previous program, an increase to 54% from 45% in the 2007-2010 period. Similarly, university transfers since 2010 were also more likely to report receiving more than one year of credit. Post 2010, university transfers were less likely to cite "needed for professional designation" (-6.4%), or to pursue a "different field of study" (-3.6%) as reasons for transfer, indicative of both the regulatory changes in the field and an increase in alignment.

Conclusions: This paper demonstrates that a student's decision to progress from a professional program like ECE into university is not made in isolation from external factors. Labour market conditions, the regulatory environment, and competition from related college degree offerings can all influence a student's decision making. The results of this study suggest that, even when controlling for individual student characteristics that may influence transfer, transfer nevertheless declined as a result of, and concurrent with, the combined impact of changes to the ECE profession in Ontario.