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Canadian & International Higher Education

# Student mobility in Ontario: A framework and decision-making tool for building better pathways

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**Research Report 2016.03**

**A report to Ontario Council  
for Articulation and  
Transfer**

*A report by:*



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## Preamble

This student transfer framework and decision-making tool was developed as part of a study supported by the Ontario Council of Articulation and Transfer in 2015.<sup>1</sup> The project:

- reviewed much of the extensive literature on student transfer;
- analyzed the Ontario Council of Articulation and Transfer's comprehensive dataset of all current articulation agreements of Ontario post-secondary institutions;
- analyzed the 2013 Canadian National Graduate Survey;
- analyzed the 2013/2014 Ontario College Graduate Satisfaction Survey;
- constructed a student transfer profile of 22 publicly funded universities and 24 publicly funded colleges in Ontario;
- consulted 14 experts in Ontario student transfer from colleges, universities, policymakers and researchers who were critical friends to the project.

The full results, analysis and argument supporting the student transfer framework and decision-making tool are set out in the team's report.<sup>2</sup> But very briefly, these are the main findings supporting the proposed student transfer framework and decision-making tool.

1. Critical friends in colleges and universities responsible for leading and managing transfer between colleges and universities reported difficulties reconciling different provincial policies that have different effects on student transfer.
2. The national graduate survey finds that only 37% of college graduates in Ontario who complete a university qualification do so in the same field as their college qualification.<sup>3</sup>
3. Universities have an average of 24 pathways agreements but admitted a median ratio of 1.3 students per pathway in 2014.
4. The median percentage of universities' pathway agreements with colleges within commuting distance of the university is 16%, but the median percentage of students who transfer from a college to a university within commuting distance of the college is 64%.

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<sup>1</sup> Lennon, Mary Catharine; Brijmohan, Amanda; Lavigne, Eric; Yang, Jinli; Moodie, Gavin; and, Wheelahan, Leesa; Moodie, (2016) *Ontario Student Mobility: Carving paths of desire*, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, ON.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Wheelahan, Leesa; Moodie, Gavin; Lavigne, Eric; Yang, Jinli; Brijmohan, Amanda; and Childs, Ruth (2015) *Pathways to education and work in Ontario and Canada*, Department of Leadership Higher and Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education: Toronto, p. 23, Table 8.

The project team consulted widely on this student transfer framework and decision-making tool and we held a consultative workshop on the student transfer framework and decision-making tool at OISE on April 5, 2016. Feedback received from the consultative workshop was used to revise the decision-making tool.

Further information about the project is available at:

<http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/pew/>

Please share comments or questions on the framework and decision-making tool with:

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## How to read this document

This document has two versions of the student mobility and credit transfer framework and decision-making tool.

The first version is a summary, while the second version is the elaborated version.

The elaborated version contains more detail about most principles, and provides examples where appropriate.

## 1. Purpose of these principles and decision-making framework

This document presents principles and a decision-making framework for developing new pathways and partnerships in Ontario's post-secondary education system (PSE). The principles and framework contribute to the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities' goals to support lifelong learning, and to increase and broaden access to postsecondary education. The principles and framework build on:

- The Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities' *Policy Statement for Ontario's Credit Transfer System 2011*<sup>4</sup>
- ONCAT's 'Proposed Principles for Credit Transfer Policies and Procedures'<sup>5</sup>

The document first outlines the goals and purposes of qualifications and pathways in supporting lifelong learning policies, then it presents principles that guide transfer of students and transfer of credit, before presenting a framework for decision making.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/CreditTransferE.pdf> viewed 14 May 2016.

<sup>5</sup> [http://oncat.ca/files\\_docs/content/pdf/en/AnnualReport\\_2014-2015\\_ENG.pdf](http://oncat.ca/files_docs/content/pdf/en/AnnualReport_2014-2015_ENG.pdf) viewed 14 May 2016

## 2. Goals and purposes of postsecondary education, qualifications and pathways

### *Postsecondary education systems*

- 2.1 The province aims to support a postsecondary education system that is high quality, fair, efficient, and promotes equity and high levels of educational attainment

### *Qualifications*

- 2.2 Qualifications support: entry to and mobility in the labour market; progression to higher-level studies; and, social inclusion and social mobility.
- 2.3 All qualifications should fulfil all three purposes, but the emphasis on each purpose may vary with each qualification.

### *Pathways*

- 2.4 Pathways should be designed to reflect these three purposes of qualifications to support lifelong learning policies and practices.
- 2.5 Pathways and qualifications can be evaluated by the extent to which they meet these three purposes.
- 2.6 Pathways should maximize student transfer from one qualification to another.
- 2.7 Pathways should maximize the credit students are granted for their prior studies and reduce costs to students, institutions and their funders by saving funds for studies that have already been completed and by reducing the time it takes students to complete their studies.



### 3. Principles

- 3.1 Transfer is more equitable if it is consistent.
- 3.2 Transfer is more consistent if it is guided by agreed rules and processes.
- 3.3 Transfer effort should concentrate on the areas where most benefit can be gained.
- 3.4 Pathways should be developed from the least to most expensive to reflect the strategic priorities of institutions, regions and the province.
- 3.5 Pathways which maximize the transfer of students and the transfer of credit are more likely between institutions that trust each other's curriculum, syllabus, teaching, assessment and the expertise of their teaching staff.
- 3.6 Trust between institutions reduces the transaction costs of developing pathways.
- 3.7 Trust is more likely to develop where there are relationships between teaching staff in partner institutions.
- 3.8 Relations are easier to establish between institutions which are close to each other.
- 3.9 Pathways should ensure coherence and continuity in curriculum and pedagogy. Coherence and continuity in curriculum and pedagogy can support student transition and contribute to retention, completion and positive labour market outcomes.
- 3.10 Student transfer may be maximized by developing several entry mechanisms to suit prospective students from different circumstances.
- 3.11 Students should be admitted to higher level programs based on their achievements in their most recent qualification.

## 4. Guidelines

- 4.1 Students transfer in higher numbers between institutions within commuting distance of each other. Institutions should prioritize building relations with neighbouring partners and develop regional pathways.
- 4.2 Policy makers and institutions should develop explicit regional, provincial, interprovincial and national goals for student transfer to provide frameworks for institutional partnerships.
- 4.3 Institutions should be aware of the political realities of their partners (such as provincial and municipal governments, regulatory and occupational bodies, employers, disciplinary associations etc), as well as the roles of each interested party.
- 4.4 Transfer that provides students with entry to subsequent postsecondary education programs requires different decisions and processes compared to those used for the credit that transfer students may be granted upon gaining entry to those programs.
- 4.5 Credit decisions are based on the syllabus and quality of the prior program, its assessment and its learning outcomes. Decisions about student admission are based on judgements about the extent to which the applicant meets the program's admissions criteria.
- 4.6 Decisions about credit students will be granted should be made as close as possible to the decision to grant students admission.

### *Multiple entry mechanisms*

- 4.7 Increasing the number of students who can transfer from diplomas to degrees requires more emphasis on alternative entry mechanisms that provide students with different ways of entering degree programs.
- 4.8 **Guaranteed transfer pathways** select students to the initial program and guarantee entry to a subsequent program subject to achieving a specified grade point average and meeting any other requirement specified in advance.
- 4.9 **Dual awards** require students to meet the entry requirements for both qualifications.
- 4.10 **Nested awards** are a series of qualifications linked by a guaranteed transfer pathway, which offer students multiple entry and exit points. Nested awards support student equity because students only need to meet the entry requirements for the lower-level qualification and are guaranteed progression to higher-level qualifications provided students meet the GPA or other specified requirements.

*Entry mechanisms and pathways from least to most expensive*

- 4.11 Entry mechanisms and different types of pathways range from the least to more expensive. The province, ONCAT and institutions should develop strategic frameworks that have many arrangements that are relatively cheap; a moderate number of arrangements that are moderately expensive; and a relatively small number of arrangements that are expensive.
- 4.12 **Pathway entry agreements** are agreements between institutions that grant students entry to the receiving institution if they meet requirements certified by the sending institution. They are relatively inexpensive and can be used by many students. Increased emphasis on entry agreements may help to increase the number of transfer students.
- 4.13 A **generic pathway** is a pathway that relates institutions and families of programs to facilitate entry and credit for individual students or groups of students. Generic pathways are supported by institutional policies that specify general requirements for the transfer of students and the transfer of credit. Generic pathways are cost effective and appropriate in the absence of a specific pathway. They support student entry and credit in areas where there is little student traffic.
- 4.14 A **specific pathway** is a pathway that relates existing programs and may involve some curriculum mapping and coordination. Specific pathways need to be renegotiated every time there is a change in one of the programs. They are medium cost and should be moderate in number and developed only for pathways that attract significant numbers of students.
- 4.15 An **enhanced pathway** grants more students entry and/or more credit in the destination program than provided in standard institutional policies. Enhanced pathways are based on varying levels of collaboration on curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment. They require high levels of trust between the partners, and are expensive to develop and maintain and should be limited to areas that reflect strategic priorities in institutional, regional and provincial partnerships.

*Trust and communication*

- 4.16 Trust may be built between institutions and programs by providing opportunities for faculty and staff to get to know each other; by reporting to each other on the outcomes of pathways; by sharing information; and by providing opportunities for collaboration.
- 4.17 **Boundary spanners'** can foster communication and collaboration between partner institutions.

## 5. Framework for decision making

### *Province-wide*

- 5.1 Student transfer would be supported by the province stating explicitly that colleges' roles include preparing students for study at degree level, including study at universities; and by stating explicitly that the role of universities includes accepting and supporting transfer students.
- 5.2 Student transfer would be supported by the province including student transfer in its differentiation framework, which recognizes institutions' different roles in student transfer.
- 5.3 Student transfer agreements would be strengthened if strategic mandate agreements in one institution complemented the strategic mandate agreement of relevant institutions in the other sector, particularly those within the same geographic region
- 5.4 Policies and support mechanisms for student transfer should be based on regions so that most attention and effort is invested in transfer between institutions within commuting distance of each other.
- 5.5 Student transfer would be encouraged by support for system level funding for regional activities to build networks.
- 5.6 Analysis of student transfer policy would be strengthened by collecting and reporting consistently data on the number of transfer students each university admits, the broad fields that transfer students are admitted to and whether the transfer was part of a pathway agreement.

### *ONCAT*

- 5.7 ONCAT has a key role to play in Ontario as a system boundary-spanner because it is the only body other than the MTCU that spans both colleges and universities.
- 5.8 ONCAT may wish to develop a specific role in brokering, supporting and sustaining regional partnerships.
- 5.9 ONCAT may wish to support institutions' deeper commitment to articulation and transfer by emphasising the number and proportion of students transferring between institutions rather than the number of pathways.
- 5.10 ONCAT may wish to consider developing a proposal for a system level fund to support regional student transfer networks and to recognize part of the extra costs that institutions incur in supporting student transfer.

*Institutional-level*

- 5.11 Institutions should state explicitly the priority they give to supporting transfer in relation to other institutional priorities, recognizing the implications this has for neighbouring institutions. Institutions might identify those fields or occupational areas in which they wish to concentrate their support for student transfer, which may be in similar or complementary fields to those identified by their partner institutions.
- 5.12 Institutions should consider establishing a general partnership agreement with each neighbouring institution to provide a governance framework, strategic planning and support for generic pathway agreements and specific pathway agreements between specific qualifications.
- 5.13 Regional coordination offers institutions the potential for convergent or complementary pathways in convergent or complementary fields of study.
- 5.14 Institutions that put a high priority on supporting transfer students should consider nominating a person who has or who develops expertise in their institution's collaborating sector, particularly in their neighbouring institutions in the collaborating sector with which their institutions should have the closest relations.
- 5.15 Institutions that give a high priority to supporting transfer may concentrate their academic efforts in some programs and therefore in some faculties, departments and schools.
- 5.16 Institutions should seek opportunities to streamline transfer processes and decisions.
- 5.17 Institutions need policies to guide entry and credit decisions for transferring students admitted in the absence of a pathway.
- 5.18 Institutions' frameworks should ensure consistency of treatment between domestic and international transfer pathways.
- 5.19 Institutions need policies and practices to ensure that entry and credit decisions are consistent across fields and over time.

*Faculty/program-level*

- 5.20 Most benefit can be gained by embedding transfer in the design and administration of programs.
- 5.21 Consider developing a policy, principles and procedure to guide the entry of students who do not follow a designated pathway.
- 5.22 Consider developing a policy, principles and a procedure to guide the grant of credit to students who do not follow a designated pathway.

- 5.23 Consider admitting transfer students and granting them credit according to the unit's policies, principles and procedure rather than developing a pathway agreement for a small number of students.
- 5.24 Consider developing pathways agreements where numerous students transfer from the sending qualification.
- 5.25 Develop pathways that reflect the way graduates use their qualifications in the labour market. If a qualification's graduates proceed to a diversity of occupations it may be desirable to accept transfer students from a diversity of fields.
- 5.26 Consider different arrangements for qualifications that lead to occupational recognition and those that lead to more general recognition.
- 5.27 Qualifications that lead to general recognition may be able to grant credit from a broader range of courses than qualifications which lead to occupational recognition.
- 5.28 Qualifications that lead to general recognition may be able to assess credit by level and broad field of study rather than by detailed curriculum equivalence.
- 5.29 Consider different arrangements for qualifications that receive most transfer students from one narrow field and qualifications that receive transfer students from several fields.
- 5.30 Consider taking a broader approach to determining equivalent prior study for qualifications that receive transfer students from more than one field.
- 5.31 Consider developing pathways collaboratively and sharing information on each program's syllabus, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the expertise of teaching staff.
- 5.32 Consider establishing with neighbouring institutions an annual cross-institutional faculty consultation, seminar or colloquium addressing issues within the discipline or field.
- 5.33 Consider establishing a procedure for pathway partners to report to each other the outcomes of pathways
- 5.34 Credit transferred should be realizable.

Elaborated version:  
Student mobility in Ontario: A framework and  
decision-making tool for building better  
pathways

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## 6. Elaborated: Purpose of these principles and decision-making framework

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- The Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities' *Policy Statement for Ontario's Credit Transfer System 2011*<sup>6</sup>
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The document first outlines the goals and purposes of qualifications and pathways in supporting lifelong learning policies, then it presents principles that guide transfer of students and transfer of credit, before presenting a framework for decision making.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/CreditTransferE.pdf> viewed 14 May 2016.

<sup>7</sup> [http://oncat.ca/files\\_docs/content/pdf/en/AnnualReport\\_2014-2015\\_ENG.pdf](http://oncat.ca/files_docs/content/pdf/en/AnnualReport_2014-2015_ENG.pdf) viewed 14 May 2016



## 7. Elaborated: Goals and purposes of postsecondary education, qualifications and pathways

This section presents the goals and purposes of postsecondary education systems, qualifications and of pathways.

### *Postsecondary education system*

- 7.1 The province aims to support a postsecondary education system that is high quality, fair, efficient, and promotes equity and high levels of educational attainment to support a tolerant and inclusive society and a competitive and productive workforce.

### *Qualifications*

- 7.2 Qualifications support: entry to and mobility in the labour market; progression to higher-level studies; and, social inclusion and social mobility in the following ways:<sup>8</sup>
- 7.2.1 In the *labour market*, qualifications help guide entry into the workforce and movement to higher occupational levels once employed;
  - 7.2.2 In the *education system*, qualifications help guide progress to higher-level studies. All qualifications should provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to study at a higher level in their field or a closely related field; and
  - 7.2.3 In *society*, qualifications contribute to social inclusion by supporting social mobility in education and the labour market and by contributing to a more tolerant and inclusive society. All qualifications should seek to widen participation in postsecondary education by supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter higher-level studies to support occupational and social mobility. Qualifications also need to ensure that students have access to the knowledge and skills they need to be productive and contributing members in their communities, families and occupations.
- 7.3 All qualifications should fulfil all three purposes, but the emphasis on each purpose may vary with each qualification.

### *Pathways*

- 7.4 Pathways should be designed to reflect these three purposes of qualifications to support lifelong learning policies and practices.
- 7.5 Pathways and qualifications can be evaluated by the extent to which they meet these three purposes.

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<sup>8</sup> See: Gallacher, J., Ingram, R., & Reeve, F. (2012). Are vocational qualifications vocational? In M. Pilz (Ed.), *The Future of Vocational Education and Training in a Changing World* (pp. 381-402). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.  
Wheelahon, L., Buchanan, J., & Yu, S. (2015). *Linking qualifications and the labour market through capabilities and vocational streams*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

- 7.6 Pathways should maximize the credit students are granted for their prior studies and reduce costs to students, institutions and their funders by saving funds for studies that have already been completed and by reducing the time it takes students to complete their studies in the following ways:
  - 7.6.1 Student transfer should be maximized to support student choice and progression, which is an important aspect of universal participation. This includes pathways between qualifications at the same level, from higher to lower level qualifications, and from lower to higher-level qualifications.
  - 7.6.2 Student transfer from lower to higher level qualifications on the Ontario Qualifications Framework should be maximized to support upward social progression and social mobility and economic development.
- 7.7 Pathways should maximize the credit students are granted for their prior studies and reduce costs to students, institutions and their funders by saving funds for studies that have already been completed and by reducing the time it takes students to complete their studies.

## 8 Elaborated: Principles

This section presents general principles, curricular and pedagogic principles, and entry principles.

### *General principles*

- 8.1 Transfer is more equitable if it is consistent.
- 8.2 Transfer is more consistent if it is guided by agreed rules and processes.
- 8.3 Transfer effort should concentrate on the areas where most benefit can be gained.
  - 8.3.1 Most transfer benefit can be gained where the most students are involved.
  - 8.3.2 Most transfer benefit can be gained where least expense is incurred.
  - 8.3.3 Most transfer benefit can be gained where processes are efficient.
- 8.4 Pathways should be developed from the least to most expensive to reflect the strategic priorities of institutions, regions and the province.
- 8.5 Pathways which maximize the transfer of students and the transfer of credit are more likely between institutions that trust each other's curriculum, syllabus, teaching, assessment and the expertise of their teaching staff.
- 8.6 Trust between institutions reduces the transaction costs of developing pathways.
- 8.7 Trust is more likely to develop where there are relationships between teaching staff in partner institutions.
- 8.8 Relations are easier to establish between institutions which are close to each other.

### *Curricular and pedagogic principles*

- 8.9 Pathways should ensure coherence and continuity in curriculum and pedagogy. Coherence and continuity in curriculum and pedagogy can support student transition and contribute to retention, completion and positive labour market outcomes. They can achieve these outcomes in the following ways:
  - 8.9.1 Qualifications should reflect the changing nature of work, which includes the need to use higher level and more abstract knowledge as the basis of educational progression and occupational progression, and they need to help students contribute to their family, community and society.
  - 8.9.2 Pathways should have curriculum coherence and continuity across qualifications.

- 8.9.3 Programs should scaffold learning in the disciplinary field in which students are studying. Programs and pathways should embed transition support to help students' progress to higher level studies and apply their knowledge and skills at work and in the community.
- 8.9.4 Students should gain maximum credit for prior studies, while at the same time ensuring they are not granted inappropriate credit that may jeopardise their success in higher level programs.
- 8.9.5 Credit for prior studies should be granted equitably to all students who undertook the same prior program.
- 8.9.6 Where possible, pathways and new programs should be developed with the involvement of industry and occupational bodies, such as professional bodies and bodies representing technical and skilled occupations, rather than just one or the other to help develop programs that link occupational and educational progression.
- 8.9.7 Pathways and programs should focus on the overall development of the student within the context of their planned occupation.
- (a) Pathways should focus on the knowledge, skills and attributes graduates need in their broad field of practice rather than specific workplace tasks and roles to maximise students' options to progress in their field and move to related fields.
  - (b) Pathways can be based on linear connections between programs within the same field of education, and/or they can link programs in complementary fields that reflect the way graduates use their qualifications to navigate the labour market.
- 8.9.8 Programs and pathways should, where possible, provide students with early certification in their field so they can obtain relevant work and valuable experience while continuing to study in their field. The purpose is to insure students against the risk of not completing the destination program while at the same time leaving their options open for further study.
- 8.9.9 Students should, as a general rule, be required to complete successfully the first qualification in a pathway or a nested program (see 4.13 below) before they are granted admission to the higher level program. Pathways are premised on scaffolding knowledge and skills students need at higher level qualifications; students who do not complete the first award are less likely to be successful.

#### *Entry principles*

- 8.10 Student transfer may be maximized by developing several entry mechanisms to suit prospective students from different circumstances.

- 8.11 Students should be admitted to higher-level programs based on their achievements in their most recent qualification. Students' achievements in their secondary school diplomas are relevant for entry to the first program in the postsecondary education pathway, but are rarely relevant to the second program in the pathway and should not be used to decide access into the second program. If there is not a direct alignment between the lower and higher level programs in the pathway, transition support should be built into the development of the pathway.

## 9 Elaborated: Guidelines

This section presents guidelines on taking geographic proximity into account, distinguishing between transfer of students and transfer of credit, moving from the least to the more expensive forms of pathways, developing multiple entry mechanisms, and building trust and communication.

### *Geography*

- 9.1 Students transfer in higher numbers between institutions within commuting distance of each other. Institutions should prioritize building relations with neighbouring partners and develop regional pathways.
- 9.2 Policy makers and institutions should develop explicit regional, provincial, interprovincial and national goals for student transfer to provide frameworks for institutional partnerships.
  - 9.2.1 Institutions should develop explicit local and regional goals for student transfer to guide the development of their partnerships strategically. Institutions may have strategic reasons for developing partnerships beyond their regions to support student transfer in specific fields, or to serve specific occupations or communities, or to support institutional goals.
- 9.3 Institutions should be aware of the political realities of their partners (such as provincial and municipal governments, regulatory and occupational bodies, employers, disciplinary associations etc), as well as the roles of each interested party.

### *Distinguish between transfer of students and transfer of credit*

- 9.4 Transfer that provides students with entry to subsequent postsecondary education programs requires different decisions and processes compared to those used for the credit that transfer students may be granted upon gaining entry to those programs.
  - 9.4.1 This distinction is important because students benefit from credit only once they have been admitted to the destination program.
- 9.5 Credit decisions are based on the syllabus and quality of the prior program, its assessment and its learning outcomes. Decisions about student admission are based on judgements about the extent to which the applicant meets the program's admissions criteria.
  - 9.5.1 Student entry and credit decisions often take different factors into account. Institutions decide about entry based on the applicant's prior credentialed study and other attributes that enable the institution to determine whether the applicant is likely to succeed in the destination program and whether the applicant meets the program's admission criteria. Credit decisions are based on the syllabus and quality of the prior program, its assessment and its learning outcomes.

9.6 Decisions about credit students will be granted should be made as close as possible to the decision to grant students admission

9.6.1 Student entry and credit decisions are often taken separately at different times. It is preferable for credit decisions to be taken at the same time as entry decisions. This would enable students to plan their program of study, ensure they can study fulltime (should they wish to do so), use the credit they have been awarded in their qualification, and ensure they can receive appropriate funding (OSAP etc) based on credit awarded and subsequent study status (part-time/fulltime).

#### *Multiple entry mechanisms*

9.7 Increasing the number of students who can transfer from diplomas to degrees requires more emphasis on alternative entry mechanisms that provide students with different ways of entering degree programs.

9.8 **Guaranteed transfer pathways** select students to the initial program and guarantee entry to a subsequent program subject to achieving a specified grade point average and meeting any other requirement specified in advance.

9.8.1 There needs to be close communication and collaboration between the partners to a guaranteed access pathway so that the coordinator of the receiving program can anticipate and plan for the number of students who are proceeding through the sending qualification at the specified level.

9.8.2 Guaranteed access pathways increase equity and opportunities for students to progress from diplomas to degrees. Guaranteed access pathways also insure students against the risk of not completing the higher level program since they still have certification in the lower level program. This may encourage students from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in postsecondary education and develop aspirations for undertaking bachelor level studies, gain experience in studying in postsecondary education, and leave their options open for the future.

9.9 **Dual awards** require students to meet the entry requirements for both qualifications.

9.9.1 An example is a diploma and a degree which are linked but in which applicants must meet the diploma's and the degree's entry requirements to enter the linked programs.

9.9.2 Dual awards generally do not provide as much access for disadvantaged students as guaranteed access pathways because students are required to meet the entry requirements of the higher level qualification as a condition of admission.

9.10 **Nested awards** are a series of qualifications linked by a guaranteed transfer pathway, which offer students multiple entry and exit points. Nested awards support student equity because students only need to meet the entry requirements for the lower-level qualification and are

guaranteed progression to higher-level qualifications provided students meet the GPA or other specified requirements.

- 9.10.1 An example is a linked certificate, diploma, bachelor, graduate certificate and masters program in which, for example, a student may start in the diploma, complete the certificate while studying the diploma, and exit after completing the bachelor.
- 9.10.2 Nested awards are usually in the same field of study, or occupational area.
- 9.10.3 There needs to be close communication and collaboration between the partners to nested awards so that the coordinators of each program can anticipate and plan for the number of students who are studying in each program and are eligible for and likely to seek to transfer to another qualification in the nested award, which may be to a shorter qualification, a cognate qualification of similar length or a longer qualification.

*Entry mechanisms and pathways from the least to most expensive*

- 9.11 Entry mechanisms and different types of pathways range from the least to more expensive. The province, ONCAT and institutions should develop strategic frameworks that have many arrangements that are relatively cheap; a moderate number of arrangements that are moderately expensive; and a relatively small number of arrangements that are expensive.
- 9.12 **Pathway entry** are agreements between institutions that grant students entry to the receiving institution if they meet requirements certified by the sending institution. They are relatively inexpensive and can be used by many students. Increased emphasis on entry agreements may help to increase the number of transfer students.
  - 9.12.1 This is an example of a pathway entry agreement: The bachelor of business studies at Maple Leaf University will guarantee to admit graduates of the diploma of business studies at Cedar College who achieve a grade point average of 3.0. 'Pipeline' numbers of articulating students are managed by designating a specific number of places in the diploma of business studies that will be guaranteed places in the bachelor of business studies.
  - 9.12.2 This is another example of a pathway entry agreement:
    - (a) graduates who complete a diploma of early childhood studies at Cedar College with a grade point average of 2.5 are eligible for admission to the bachelor of education at Maple Leaf University and will be admitted if there are enough places available;
    - (b) diploma graduates will be selected according to their grade point average;
    - (c) diploma graduates who achieve a grade point average of 3.5 are guaranteed admission in 2017.



9.12.3 Pathway entry agreements are relatively inexpensive and can be used by many students.

9.12.4 Increased emphasis on entry agreements may help to increase the number of transfer students.

9.13 A **generic pathway** is a pathway that relates institutions and families of programs to facilitate entry and credit for individual students or groups of students. Generic pathways are supported by institutional policies that specify general requirements for the transfer of students and the transfer of credit. Generic pathways are cost effective and appropriate in the absence of a specific pathway. They support student entry and credit in areas where there is little student traffic.

9.13.1 Generic pathways may specify general requirements for the transfer of students and of credit for graduates of diplomas of any Ontario Institution and general requirements for the transfer of students and of credit for graduates of diplomas of the institution's partner institutions.

9.13.2 An example of a generic pathway is where the program coordinator for a bachelor program receives an application for admission from a graduate of a specified diploma of a specified college and after reviewing the university's policy, the diploma syllabus and the applicant's grades offers the applicant a place.

9.13.3 An increase in traffic may signal to the institution that a specific pathway may be needed.

9.14 A **specific pathway** is a pathway that relates existing programs and may involve some curriculum mapping and coordination. Specific pathways need to be renegotiated every time there is a change in one of the programs. They are medium cost and should be moderate in number and developed only for pathways that attract significant numbers of students.

9.14.1 An example of a specific pathway is a specified diploma at a specified college and a specified bachelor that exempts diploma graduates from the degree's general studies requirements. Another example is a specified diploma that exempts diploma graduates from undertaking some core courses in the bachelor.

9.15 An **enhanced pathway** grants more students entry and/or more credit in the destination program than provided in standard institutional policies. Enhanced pathways are based on varying levels of collaboration on curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment. They require high levels of trust between the partners, and are expensive to develop and maintain and should be limited to areas that reflect strategic priorities in institutional, regional and provincial partnerships.

- 9.15.1 An example of an enhanced pathway is the development of diploma and a degree where the curriculum has been developed together to ensure coherence and continuity in syllabus, approach to teaching and learning and assessment. Students are usually granted more credit than they would be otherwise be entitled to in a specific pathway. The development of the diploma and degree may, for example, include collaboration with an occupational body and a professional body, a specific community, or a specific industry partner.
- 9.15.2 Enhanced pathways should be limited to areas which reflect strategic priorities in institutional, regional and provincial partnerships. The types of strategic priorities that may be assisted by the development of an enhanced pathway may include establishing new relationships with industry and occupational bodies, meeting an emerging occupational need, developing a new field of study or establishing relations with and/or supporting particular groups of disadvantaged students to enter and progress in postsecondary education.

#### *Trust and communication*

- 9.16 Trust may be built between institutions and programs by providing opportunities for faculty and staff to get to know each other; by reporting to each other on the outcomes of pathways; by sharing information; and by providing opportunities for collaboration: Examples include:
  - 9.16.1 Faculty and staff communicating frequently and building relations, for example, in an annual cross-institutional faculty consultation, seminar or colloquium addressing issues within their discipline or field;
  - 9.16.2 The partners reporting to each other the outcomes of pathways such as the number of students who gain entry under an agreement and their performance in their subsequent studies;
  - 9.16.3 Partners sharing information on program's syllabus, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the expertise of its teaching staff;
  - 9.16.4 Faculty in collaborating programs comparing curriculum, learning outcomes and assessment to develop a clearer picture of what students have learned.
- 9.17 **Boundary spanners'** can foster communication and collaboration between partner institutions.
  - 9.17.1 Such people should seek to span the boundaries between sectors and institutions by understanding the other sector's and institution's policies and processes. They help translate these to terms best understood by their home institution and sector and in turn explain their home institution and sector to their partner institutions and sector.

## 10 Elaborated: Framework for decision making

This section presents a framework to be considered when developing new pathways and transfer policies and programs. It is presented at four levels: province-wide considerations, ONCAT, the institution, and sub-institutional units such as faculties and departments and administrative support units.

### *Province-wide considerations*

- 10.1 Student transfer would be supported by the province stating explicitly that colleges' roles include preparing students for study at degree level, including study at universities; and by stating explicitly that the role of universities includes accepting and supporting transfer students.
- 10.2 Student transfer would be supported by the province including student transfer in its differentiation framework, which recognizes institutions' different roles in student transfer.
  - 10.2.1 For example, some universities' main role may be accepting transfer students from neighbouring colleges; some universities' main role may be accepting transfer students from specified occupational, linguistic, ethnic or equity groups; and some universities' main role may be developing colleges' faculty and staff to extend their degree programs and applied research.
- 10.3 Student transfer agreements would be strengthened if strategic mandate agreements in one institution complemented the strategic mandate agreement of relevant institutions in the other sector, particularly those within the same geographic region
  - 10.3.1 Strategic mandate agreements are currently negotiated within each sector, rather than between sectors and including the two sectors together, particularly within regions, would enhance the Province's differentiation framework.
- 10.4 Policies and support mechanisms for student transfer should be based on regions so that most attention and effort is invested in transfer between institutions within commuting distance of each other.
  - 10.4.1 Such regional policies should reflect institutions' priorities and areas of strategic investment. Where a university does not prioritize accepting transfer students in a region where there is no other university, the province may wish to consider negotiating with local colleges to develop and expand their provision beyond their current degree provision. This would help to ensure equality of access to degrees throughout the province.
- 10.5 Student transfer would be encouraged by support for system level funding for regional activities to build networks.

- 10.6 Analysis of student transfer policy would be strengthened by collecting and reporting consistently data on the number of transfer students each university admits, the broad fields that transfer students are admitted to and whether the transfer was part of a pathway agreement.

#### *ONCAT*

- 10.7 ONCAT has a key role to play in Ontario as a system boundary-spanner because it is the only body other than the MTCU that spans both colleges and universities.
- 10.8 ONCAT may wish to develop a specific role in brokering, supporting and sustaining regional partnerships.
- 10.8.1 Such a role would build on ONCAT's success in its relatively brief life in stimulating pathways between qualifications and institutions. Consequently ONCAT has build high levels of trust between it and its member institutions and supported the development of greater levels of trust between its member institutions. This is an indispensable requirement for building regional partnerships.
- 10.9 ONCAT may wish to support institutions' deeper commitment to articulation and transfer by emphasising the number and proportion of students transferring between institutions rather than the number of pathways.
- 10.10 ONCAT may wish to consider developing a proposal for a system level fund to support regional student transfer networks and to recognize part of the extra costs that institutions incur in supporting student transfer.

#### *Institutional-level*

- 10.11 Institutions should state explicitly the priority they give to supporting transfer in relation to other institutional priorities, recognizing the implications this has for neighbouring institutions. Institutions might identify those fields or occupational areas in which they wish to concentrate their support for student transfer, which may be in similar or complementary fields to those identified by their partner institutions.
- 10.12 Institutions should consider establishing a general partnership agreement with each neighbouring institution to provide a governance framework, strategic planning and support for generic pathway agreements and specific pathway agreements between specific qualifications.
- 10.13 Regional coordination offers institutions the potential for convergent or complementary pathways in convergent or complementary fields of study.
- 10.13.1 For example, it can support curriculum alignment for laddering within the same field of education, or provide complementary pathways that link qualifications in different fields of education to support labour market needs.

- 10.14 Institutions that put a high priority on supporting transfer students should consider nominating a person who has or who develops expertise in their institution's collaborating sector, particularly in their neighbouring institutions in the collaborating sector with which their institutions should have the closest relations.
- 10.14.1 Such people should seek to span the boundaries between the sectors and institutions by understanding the other sector's and institution's policies and processes, translating these to terms best understood by their home institution and by helping to explain their home institution and sector to their partner institutions.
- 10.14.2 Such 'boundary spanners' should report to a senior person within their home institution to provide them with authority in negotiating within their own institution the types of pathways that meet their institution's strategic priorities, and to ensure they have sufficient seniority in brokering pathways with their collaborating institutions.
- 10.15 Institutions that give a high priority to supporting transfer may concentrate their academic efforts in some programs and therefore in some faculties, departments and schools.
- 10.15.1 Institutions may also nominate a support unit that has special responsibility for supporting student transfer. However, even if such a unit is nominated, most central service and support units are likely to have some involvement in supporting student transfer.
- 10.16 Institutions should seek opportunities to streamline transfer processes and decisions.
- 10.17 Institutions need policies to guide entry and credit decisions for transferring students admitted in the absence of a pathway. These policies may include:
- 10.17.1 Minimum entry requirements for graduates of diplomas of any Ontario college;
- 10.17.2 Minimum entry requirements for graduates of diplomas of the institution's partner colleges;
- 10.17.3 Selection criteria for diploma graduates;
- 10.17.4 The amount and type of course-to-course and block credit that it is appropriate to grant graduates of diplomas of any Ontario college;
- 10.17.5 The amount and type of course-to-course and block credit that it is appropriate to grant diploma graduates of the institution's partner colleges;

10.17.6 Who is authorized to decide specific credit decisions when students are admitted through a generic pathway; and

10.17.7 How specific credit decisions may be reviewed to ensure consistency in these decisions, and to provide insights about where specific pathways should be developed.

10.18 Institutions' frameworks should ensure consistency of treatment between domestic and international transfer pathways.

10.19 Institutions need policies and practices to ensure that entry and credit decisions are consistent across fields and over time.

10.19.1 One mechanism is a procedure for determining, recording, monitoring and evaluating precedents.

*Faculty/program-level*

These principles are for sub-institutional units such as faculties, departments and schools, and administrative support units.

10.20 Most benefit can be gained by embedding transfer in the design and administration of programs.

10.21 Consider developing a policy, principles and procedure to guide the entry of students who do not follow a designated pathway.

10.22 Consider developing a policy, principles and a procedure to guide the grant of credit to students who do not follow a designated pathway.

10.23 Consider admitting transfer students and granting them credit according to the unit's policies, principles and procedure rather than developing a pathway agreement for a small number of students.

10.24 Consider developing pathways agreements where numerous students transfer from the sending qualification.

10.25 Develop pathways that reflect the way graduates use their qualifications in the labour market. If a qualification's graduates proceed to a diversity of occupations it may be desirable to accept transfer students from a diversity of fields.

10.26 Consider different arrangements for qualifications that lead to occupational recognition and those that lead to more general recognition.

- 10.26.1 Qualifications that lead to general recognition may be able to accept transfer students from a broader range of programs than qualifications which lead to occupational recognition.
- 10.27 Qualifications that lead to general recognition may be able to grant credit from a broader range of courses than qualifications which lead to occupational recognition.
- 10.28 Qualifications that lead to general recognition may be able to assess credit by level and broad field of study rather than by detailed curriculum equivalence.
- 10.29 Consider different arrangements for qualifications that receive most transfer students from one narrow field and qualifications that receive transfer students from several fields.
  - 10.29.1 Qualifications that receive transfer students from one narrow field may have opportunities to grant more credit for students who have graduated from the main source qualification.
- 10.30 Consider taking a broader approach to determining equivalent prior study for qualifications that receive transfer students from more than one field.
- 10.31 Consider developing pathways collaboratively and sharing information on each program's syllabus, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the expertise of teaching staff.
- 10.32 Consider establishing with neighbouring institutions an annual cross-institutional faculty consultation, seminar or colloquium addressing issues within the discipline or field.
- 10.33 Consider establishing a procedure for pathway partners to report to each other the outcomes of pathways such as the number of students who gain entry under an agreement and their performance in their subsequent studies;
- 10.34 Credit transferred should be realizable:
  - 10.34.1 Students should be able to use the credit they have been awarded towards completing their credential.
  - 10.34.2 Credit should result in students taking less time to complete the two qualifications than if they had not been granted credit.