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**Research Summary: Carving  
paths of desire; and,  
Student mobility in Ontario  
– a framework and decision-  
making tool for building  
better pathways**

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**CIHE Report 2016.02**

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

A report by:



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## Summary of the research

The Ontario government has prioritised student pathways within education and between education and the labour market. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities 2015-16 strategic plan states that “the system will blend academic with applied learning and ensure that transitions are seamless whether it is from high school, between postsecondary education institutions, or between school and work” (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2015, p. 3).

The government has spent years investing in research and strategy to achieve these ends. In 2011, the Ontario government set out three goals for a province wide credit transfer system to: “expand and improve pathways to respond to student demand; improve transparency and access to information about pathways and credit transfer; [and,] support student success” (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2011). At the same time, the Government established the Ontario Council for Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT), a government agency designed to support credit transfer and mobility of Ontario students. With a five-year mandate to improve student mobility in Ontario’s public institutions (ONCAT, 2013) the agency has supported research, partnerships and projects to further the systematic capacity for student choice and opportunity.

This research was undertaken to support the government’s three goals for pathways in Ontario. Contributing to the four years of substantial research, knowledge building and reflection by ONCAT, this study synthesises current theories and research on student mobility, institutional partnerships and pathways, and presents the current patterns of student flows and institutional agreements in Ontario.

The research has two components: the first component is a research report on pathways between colleges and universities in Ontario.<sup>1</sup> It presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and empirical patterns of student mobility, partnership and pathway agreements in order to uncover what’s working and where there is room for improvement. It examines policy frameworks, institutional partnerships and pathways, and student flows in pathways. The second component is based on the research report, and is a ‘framework and decision making tool’ for building better pathways between colleges and universities in Ontario.<sup>2</sup> It is designed to support policy makers, institutions, departments and programs in developing effective pathways that students use. It comprises principles, guidelines and a framework for decision-making to guide the development of pathways. 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;

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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> Wheelahan, L., Moodie, G., Lennon, M.C., Brijmohan, A. and Lavigne, E. (2016). *Student mobility in Ontario: A framework and decision making tool for building better pathways*. Toronto: Centre for the Study of Canadian and International Higher Education, OISE-University of Toronto

- 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.
- held a consultative workshop with approximately 60 policy-makers, institutional leaders, and pathways practitioners on April 5, 2016 on the student transfer framework and decision-making tool to receive feedback on the tool, which was revised in light of this feedback.

The full results, analysis and argument supporting the student transfer framework and decision-making tool are set out in the team's report.<sup>3</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>4</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%.

The decision-making tool is designed to build a strong pathways framework that is based on the way in which students use pathways to progress in their studies and careers. It recommends a focus on building institutional partnerships between colleges and universities within geographic regions.

The research is divided into the following products:

- A research report entitled: *Ontario Student Mobility: Carving paths of desire*. This includes the list of critical friends who participated in the project (Appendix A), and the project methods (Appendix B).
- An appendix containing institutional profiles of colleges and their pathways and partnerships (Appendix C)
- An appendix containing institutional profiles of universities and their pathways and partnerships (Appendix D)
- The 'decision-making tool' entitled: *Student mobility in Ontario: A framework and decision-making tool for building better pathways*. This has two sections: the first presents a summary of the decision-making tool, while the second is an elaborated version, which contains more detail about most principles, and provides examples where appropriate.

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<sup>3</sup> Lennon et al. Ibid

<sup>4</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.

Further information about the project is available at:

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

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

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## References

The Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities' *Policy Statement for Ontario's Credit Transfer System 2011* <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/CreditTransferE.pdf> viewed 14 May 2016.

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (2015). *Estimates briefing book 2015-2016*. Toronto, Ontario: Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities