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2014 Student Pathways in Higher Education Conference April 28 – 29, 2014

Plenary Session III: Credit Transfer and Postsecondary Education in Ontario

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Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

ADM Fougère focused her plenary remarks on credit transfer and PSE transformation in Ontario. She opened by complimenting ONCAT for the quality and richness of the Conference program and applauded the conference's emphasis on research and its regional, provincial, national and international components. She also extended her thanks to Don Lovisa for his leadership as Co-Chair and emphasized his strong advocacy, contributions and leadership. She welcomed the new Co-Chair to ONCAT.

Her presentation focused on providing an overview of PSE transformation and progress to date; highlighting the importance of credit transfer in PSE transformation and outlining the milestones and next steps for credit transfer. The key initiatives she highlighted included the government's differentiation policy framework, the Ontario Online project, capacity expansion, strategic mandate agreements, and the implementation of the Ontario Education Number (OEN). She then provided details on many of these topics. Highlights include:

1. The government release of the differentiation policy framework

The differentiation policy framework sets out overarching priorities for PSE along with specific goals:

- (a) support student success and access to a high quality Ontario PSE, with a focus on learning outcomes and explicit links to jobs);
- (b) increase the global competitiveness of Ontario's PSE system;
- (c) build on and help focus the well-established strengths of Ontario's colleges and universities; and,
- (d) maintain an efficient and financially sustainable PSE system (fiscally Ontario remains in a tight financial spot – important to make sure the system as a whole is as sustainable as possible).

The framework identifies six components of potential institutional strength:

- (i) jobs innovation and economic development;
- (ii) teaching and learning (code words for quality, continuing the emphasis on learning outcomes);
- (iii) student population (important to serve the student audience);

- (iv) research and graduate education;
- (v) program offerings (focusing on the kinds of programs, and trying to avoid unnecessary duplication in existing and emerging programs); and,
- (vi) institutional collaboration to support student mobility (a component explicitly linked to credit transfer).

2. The government negotiation of Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMAs) with PSE institutions

For the government, SMAs are the mechanism that will allow each institution to articulate their strengths, their identity, and their role in Ontario's differentiated PSE system. SMAs are the tool that will be used to implement the differentiation policy framework. Finalized agreements will highlight institutional strengths in specific component areas, as well as directions for strategic enrolment and financial sustainability. Essentially, the SMAs are the first step to differentiation. The ministry will align its policy, processes and funding levers with both the differentiation policy framework and the SMAs to ensure coherent decision-making. Funding frameworks will be reviewed with an emphasis on the university funding formula. If government were to rethink supports for credit transfer such as institutional grants, it is likely that a more strategic approach would be taken in order to create the right incentives and deal with inactive institutions. At some point, government will likely look at the relationship between this approach and a new Ministry funding approach.

3. Ontario Online

The government's creation of Ontario Online is a core element of its current focus. Ontario Online will be a centre of excellence in technology enabled learning that will be governed and operated by participating colleges and universities. The Centre is intended to leverage existing strengths in the system and allow institutions to share best practices and collaborate on research and topics such as the recognition of online courses. It will be supported by a board of directors as well as an instruction hub and a support hub with college and university implementation committees.

The instruction hub will establish a research agenda, and will coordinate data collection and analysis. It will work to disseminate best practices, particularly in regard to pedagogy/instruction, and to create a level playing field, acknowledging the fact that some schools that can't afford expensive learning management systems.

The support hub will focus on course and instructor development and support, and on creating a shared portal with shared IT hardware, software, and open educational resources. Its mandate will focus on how to facilitate learning and support learners. Currently, there is a steering committee of college and university representatives that is working towards the incorporation of Ontario Online and developing a business plan.

4. Ontario Education Number (OEN)

The OEN will provide a foundation for tracking student pathways and strong improved evidence for policy and program development. It is almost 100% implemented—as of April 2014, PSE institutions have applied the number to close to 500,000 students. This represents 95% implementation for universities, and 90% for colleges). MTCU has

proposed amendments to the MTCU Act which are intended to better address privacy issues that emerge in regard to using the OEN in the PSE system. If passed, these amendments would also help the province better monitor and evaluate the quality of programs delivered by our colleges and universities.

5. Credit transfer

Credit transfer will be central to Ontario Online. The ADM noted ONCAT's successes, such as the Course-to-Course Transfer Guide, development of a credit transfer operational framework, and course and program mapping, and signaled that ONCAT will continue to oversee the Credit Transfer Innovation Fund.

Moving forward, the Ministry will be finalizing the proposed credit transfer indicators for the Credit Transfer Accountability Framework and will work with the sector on implementation so that institutions can track and report on progress against system goals.

Next steps include:

- Finalizing SMAs – The Ministry will be aligning policy processes and funding levers with the differentiation framework and SMAs, and will be engaging the sector to develop more robust metrics.
- Credit transfer – ONCAT is to continue delivering on implementation priorities, and the Ministry will finalize and implement the Credit Transfer Accountability Framework and deliver the 2014-15 institutional grant.