

April 29, 2011

Honourable John Milloy, MPP
Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities
Mowat Block
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Milloy:

Re: Final Report, Engagement Process for an Ontario Online Institute

I am pleased to submit my second and final report to you in my capacity as your Special Advisor for an Ontario Online Institute for the February 28 – May 1, 2011 period.

My final report contains a series of recommendations and next steps for your consideration on moving forward with the implementation of an Ontario Online Institute.

I want to express my appreciation to you, staff in your office and Ministry staff for your guidance, support and encouragement throughout this engagement process.

The past two months have been an energizing and inspiring experience for me as I engaged Ontario's incredibly dynamic and innovative education and training sector. I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important initiative, and I also thank the Contact North Board of Directors for having supported me in undertaking this temporary assignment while continuing to serve as President – Chief Executive Officer.

I look forward to discussing this final report and recommendations with you in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Maxim Jean-Louis

Attachment

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Set of Ten Recommendations to the Minister re an Ontario Online Institute
3. The Ask
4. Road Map and Financial Plan for an Ontario Online Institute
5. Appendix A – Updated What I Heard
6. Appendix B - New Frontiers for Online Learning – Advice from 13 Canadian & World Experts
7. Appendix C - New Frontiers for Online Learning - Advice from Private Sector Providers
8. Appendix D - Policy Framework for Online Learning in Ontario
9. Appendix E – April 1, 2011 First Report to the Minister

Introduction

The engagement process for an Ontario Online Institute is now complete, and I am pleased to submit my second and final report to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities in my capacity as Special Advisor to the Minister for an Ontario Online Institute.

This second report follows on my first report submitted to the Minister on April 1st, 2011, and includes recommendations as requested by the Minister in his letter of appointment.

My final report and recommendations are informed by the engagement process which involved:

1. Review of responses and other documents prepared by stakeholders related to an Ontario Online Institute;
2. Working sessions (in some cases, two working sessions) with 38 stakeholders in Ontario's education and training sector;
3. The advice and guidance of 13 Canadian and world experts in online and distance education; and
4. The advice and guidance of 5 Ontario-based private sector providers of platforms, services and infrastructure for online learning.

I want to express my thanks and appreciation to the stakeholders in Ontario's education and training sector who took the time to prepare responses and meet with me for working sessions, the 13 Canadian and world experts in online and distance education who shared their knowledge and expertise and the 5 private sector providers of platforms, services and infrastructure for online learning who also shared their knowledge and expertise in this area.

This report includes the following sections:

- Recommendations to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

This section contains 10 recommendations to the Minister related to the establishment of an Ontario Online Institute.

- The Ask

This section details the specific financial ask that will be required to implement an Ontario Online Institute.

- Roadmap and Financial Plan

This section contains a roadmap to guide the various initiatives and a detailed financial plan for implementation.

- Appendix A - Updated What I Heard

The appendix contains an updated version of the What I Heard document that summarizes the feedback from stakeholders and was distributed to stakeholders during the week of March 28th and included in my April 1st report to the Minister. The updated version reflects the working sessions held with stakeholders after April 1st.

- Appendix B - New Frontiers for Online Learning – Advice from 13 Canadian & World Experts

This appendix contains a copy of the above noted document that was shared with stakeholders during the week of April 11th.

- Appendix C - New Frontiers for Online Learning - Advice from Private Sector Providers

This appendix contains a copy of the above noted document that was shared with stakeholders during the week of April 18th.

- Appendix D - Policy Framework for Online Learning in Ontario

This appendix contains a copy of the above noted document that was shared with stakeholders during the week of April 25th.

- Appendix E – April 1st, 2011, Report to the Minister

Maxim Jean-Louis

Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

April 29, 2011

Recommendations to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

April 29, 2011

Based on the engagement process with stakeholders I conducted during the February – April 28, 2011 period, I offer the following 10 recommendations to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities with respect to the establishment of an Ontario Online Institute.

1. Vision

Establish the following vision for an Ontario Online Institute:

To help provide Ontario's students with greater access to flexible, quality post-secondary education and training opportunities in English and French through the innovative use of technology.

In implementing this vision, an OOI and the education and training providers must look at the student's online experience "as a whole" from their requirements for information about programs and courses, registration information, financial aid, to library services, local support services and to other supports.

An OOI should always work in collaboration with publicly-assisted education and training providers to help provide the necessary supports and services to students. An OOI should also engage private sector providers of technology platforms, services and infrastructure as there are opportunities for mutual benefit in collaboration and partnership with the education and training sector.

An OOI should put an overriding priority on cross sector initiatives that are collaborative, innovative and forward looking.

2. Organizational Structure

Establish a not-for-profit corporation with a volunteer Board of Directors comprised of Ontarians with senior level knowledge and experience in, and familiarity with, the interests, needs and concerns of students and those who deliver online and distance education (institutions and faculty/instructors). The Minister should appoint an Implementation Steering Committee consisting of up to 7 individuals, including a Ministry observer and an interim Executive Director, with a mandate to immediately proceed with implementing the vision through incorporating a new corporation, hiring staff, implementing the initiatives and determining the appropriate composition of a permanent Board of Directors going forward. The Steering Committee will be in place for one year, at which time the governance of an OOI will transition to the new corporation's Board of Directors.

The Steering Committee will receive funding to establish a small, nimble organization with a maximum of 3 core staff with other staff seconded from the post-secondary sector based on expertise and experience required. The Ministry will need to enlist an existing entity with the legal and financial experience and capacity to temporarily hold the initial funding and hire staff until such time as a new corporation can be incorporated, established, and the funding and staff migrated to the new corporation.

There should be an automatic and transparent review of an OOI in its fourth year of operation conducted by an independent consultant with input from the major stakeholder groups and in consultation with the Ministry.

3. Ontario Online Institute as a Facilitator, Enabler and Funder

An Ontario Online Institute should be constituted as a facilitator, enabler, and funder supporting online learning in Ontario and Ontario's education and training providers rather than a regulator, controller or acquirer of assets.

As such, an Ontario Online Institute should seek to leverage existing assets within the system such as, but not limited to, the Scholars Portal, Ontario Online Learning Portal, the exchange of college courses through OntarioLearn, and Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION), and help enhance these assets to serve the entire system.

An Ontario Online Institute should not be a credential-granting institution and should avoid infringing on contractual arrangements already in place, particularly as they relate to quality assurance, intellectual property, academic freedom, and copyright.

4. Branding

An Ontario Online Institute should focus its branding efforts on promoting online learning from across the post-secondary sector as equal to traditional campus-based learning and equally linked to excellence and innovation rather than an OOI itself.

Consideration should be given to a new name that would not include the use of the word “Institute” as this could incorrectly convey that the new organization is a credential-granting educational institution.

5. Proceed with Five Parallel Initiatives Immediately

An Ontario Online Institute should proceed immediately with five parallel initiatives all aimed at supporting publicly-assisted education and training providers not currently offering services or those wanting to expand or enhance their services:

- a. Online course development fund;
- b. New student support services in collaboration with publicly-assisted education and training providers;
- c. Enhancement of library services targeted at supporting online learning;
- d. Faculty and instructor training program in collaboration with publicly-assisted education and training providers; and
- e. Enhancements to the existing Ontario Online Learning Portal.

6. Trigger for Credit Recognition

An Ontario Online Institute should not be the vehicle or the mechanism for credit recognition or credit transfer amongst education and training providers. However, an OOI could be a trigger for credit recognition in three specific ways:

- a. It should require that all applications for funding to a course development fund by education and training providers must include a commitment to credit recognition policies;
- b. In a next phase of the Ontario Online Learning Portal, a feature should be built in to allow students to select courses and view credit recognition information about the course; and
- c. It could facilitate a sector-wide working group on credit recognition.

7. Francophones

An Ontario Online Institute should focus significant energies and efforts on increasing access to education and training for Francophones and providing a separate funding allocation for the development of French-language programs and courses to meet identified needs and help address the special challenges and conditions in this area.

8. Targeting Underserved Groups While Helping Mainstream Students

If Ontario is to achieve the ambitious target of a 70% post-secondary attainment rate for its workforce, an Ontario Online Institute should target, in collaboration with education and training providers, underserved groups and students who are not currently engaged in Ontario’s education and training sector including:

- Aboriginal students
- First generation learners
- New Canadians

- Persons with disabilities
- Ontarians in small, rural and remote areas of the province

An OOI should concurrently enable and facilitate targeted initiatives aimed at supporting on-campus students seeking greater flexibility through online learning.

9. Funding Investment

The Government of Ontario should invest \$25 million for the period April 1st, 2011, to March 31st, 2014, to implement the recommendations. The following amounts should be allocated annually:

Fiscal Year	Amount (\$m)
2011–2012	\$9.0
2012–2013	\$9.0
2013–2014	\$7.0
Total	\$25 million

This funding should not come from the current college and university operating and capital core or growth funding envelope.

A financial roadmap is included which outlines the more detailed financial requirements.

10. Implementation

The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities should proceed with immediate implementation of the recommendations with the following timelines:

- Late May 2011 – announcement of the funding allocation, implementation of the Steering Committee and interim Executive Director, and timelines.
- September 2011 – Ontario Online Institute launched.

An Ontario Online Institute

New Frontiers for More Access to Flexible, Quality Online Learning Opportunities for Ontario's Students

"In our province, no keen and qualified student will be turned away for lack of space on our part or lack of money on theirs".

Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario

"Ontario has a chance to be a leader. We have the technological know-how. We have outstanding institutions. We have a real interest. And, of course, because it's online, if we can get it right here in Ontario, it also becomes exportable, where students around the world can access what's happening in Ontario. Ontario wants to be at the forefront".

Honourable John Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

Leading in Online Learning

An Ontario Online Institute, a key component of the Open Ontario Plan, will provide new opportunities for Ontarians to pursue their education and training goals and prepare for the jobs of the future in partnership with the province's publicly-assisted colleges, universities, literacy and basic skills providers, and delivery networks.

An Ontario Online Institute will act as an enabler to help leverage existing services and support structures and take the Ontario online learning system to the next level.

Online learning will provide Ontario's students with greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology and will be a key driver to achieve a 70% post-secondary attainment rate for the province's adult population.

To achieve the outcome of 70% of Ontario's working aged residents holding a post-secondary qualification or certification, it is essential that a strong focus of the work of an Ontario Online Institute (OOI) be on those who have not been engaged or successful in post-secondary education. In particular, first generation learners, aboriginal learners, learners in communities distant from a college or university, those seeking essential skills and apprentices will be a major focus for investment in the initial stages of the work of an OOI. The more traditional full-time college and university students will not be neglected as they will benefit from OOI advances, but this focus is necessary to reach the social and economic goal set for the post-secondary system as a whole.

The Opportunities

Ontario leads Canada in the provision of online programs and courses at the college and university level. With over 20,843 courses and 787 programs offered online, Ontario attracted 495,716 registrations in online college and university courses in 2008–2009. Without doubt, this makes Ontario Canada's leader in online learning.

Ontario can't rest on its laurels. We must lead on quality and effectiveness. We must stay ahead of the curve to make sure that we remain number one now and into the future. We won't cede our place at the top to others.

- We can provide Ontario's students with greater access to more flexible, high quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology.
- We can do more and lead North America in the development of quality online programs and courses (from content delivered fully online to hybrid or blended delivery to delivery by videoconferencing or correspondence), thereby increasing access to and success in post-secondary education and enhancing the competitiveness of Ontarians in the knowledge economy. We can establish Ontario as the hub for online learning growth and development in North America.
- We can use these online courses and programs to create an attractive suite of learning opportunities and services which Ontario can "export", either directly or in partnership with others, world-wide.

- We can be a global leader in leveraging the development of mobile learning technologies from Ontario-based technology companies – Research in Motion’s PlayBook and Desire2Learn’s mobile learning platform 2GO – as a basis for building a vibrant and effective mobile learning industry sector with its home in Ontario. More companies will engage in this work as online learning grows in Ontario – focused investments can stimulate the growth of this emerging economic sector.

Leading in Learning

Leading in learning is key to Ontario’s future.

As Ontario’s economy becomes increasingly knowledge-based – using knowledge, innovation, creativity and skill to develop new products and services – learning becomes even more important and more access to flexible education and training opportunities is critical. This is why Ontario is committed to building on the fact that it has one of the highest levels of post-secondary attainment (63%) amongst OECD countries and to ensuring that 70% of its working-aged residents hold a post-secondary qualification.

In addition to 140,000 new college and university spaces created since 2003 and the 2011 Budget commitment for 60,000 additional spaces by 2015–2016, Ontario is also serious about lifelong learning – making sure that highly qualified people can continually update and upgrade their learning throughout their careers. Online learning supports these objectives and does so in a way that increases flexibility in where, how and when people learn. It also encourages the more rapid development of needed programs and courses which can quickly be made available across the Province.

Ontario has long recognized the importance of a well-educated workforce that can compete in the global economy and attract international investment. Ontarians with higher levels of knowledge and skills have better employment prospects, earn higher wages, are more engaged citizens, contribute more in taxes and are less dependent on government supports during their working lives.

Four Actions Required

There are four actions required to translate the concept of an Ontario Online Institute (OOI) into action and results.

Each of these actions, within the framework of the OOI as an enabler, is targeted to:

- Provide Ontario’s students with more access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology.
- Be a key driver to achieve a 70% post-secondary attainment rate for the province’s residents aged 25–64.
- Fully leverage Ontario’s investments in its publicly-assisted education and training sector, especially in the service of those not currently engaged in adult learning.
- Sustain Ontario’s leadership in online learning in Canada and become the leading hub for online learning innovation in North America.

The four actions are:

Action 1: Improve Learning Opportunities for Students

1. **Better access to information for students, parents, guidance counsellors and employers: Enhancement of the Ontario Online Learning Portal** – a one stop, 24x7, multi-dimensional portal with best-in-class functions supporting the following groups:
 - **Students** – searchable information on over 10,000 online courses and 800 online programs from Ontario’s publicly-assisted colleges, universities training, and essential skills providers, access to arrange of support services such as study skills, links to virtual library services
 - **Faculty/instructors** – professional development opportunities, information on trends, communities of practice

- **Administrators** – online access to the program and course database with the ability to update information on their institution's offerings
2. **More choices for students: The Development of New Programs and Courses** – facilitating a gap analysis and market study on program and courses needs to identify gaps in current program offerings. This would be used to initiate a competitive bid process for funding of collaboration and sharing between publicly-assisted education and training providers for the development of programs and courses to fill the gaps and expand online learning opportunities in Ontario, particularly for Francophone, Aboriginal, first generation learners, and apprentices.
 3. **More support services for students: The Development of Online Student Services** – working with publicly-assisted education and training providers to help build on existing support services and offer more services including online career advising, course and program choice, study skills, peer tutoring, and related services through Ontario's publicly-assisted education and training providers with access through the Ontario Online Learning Portal.
 4. **More engagement in learning for students: Improving Teaching in Online Learning** – sharing best practices and training methods for faculty and instructors through the Ontario Online Learning Portal with the intention of a step-change in the quality of online instruction with the aim of significantly improving student learning.
 5. **More access to learning material: Improved Access to Library and Reference Services for all Students** – building on the very successful Scholars Portal¹ and the work of the Ontario College Library Service and expanding capacity to provide support for student projects, assignments, thesis work and learning, there is a need to increase the available resource base and increase the level of support for this service online.

Action 2: Develop Best and Next Practices

Using workshops, communities of practices, and applied research commissioned from leading experts, an OOI will focus on five strategic priorities for the development of world-leading practices. These five areas are:

1. **Improving student engagement in online learning** – through instructional design, improved quality, faculty and instructor training and the smart use of available technology, an OOI will support education and training providers to significantly improve the level of engagement in online learning with the intent of increasing student satisfaction and achievement.
2. **Leading in mobile learning** – using emerging technologies for mobile learning, an OOI will support education and training providers to develop courses and programs which have a high level of student engagement and completion, especially for apprenticeship work-based learning and literacy and essential skills.
3. **Leveraging learning resources across the Province** – through collaboration with education and training providers and specific program development resources, an OOI will help create a learning object and materials repository which can be freely accessed by all publicly-assisted education and training providers in Ontario to speed course development and enable the rapid conversion of courses for online delivery. This curriculum sharing and learning resource library will reduce duplication, speed development, lower costs and enable those developing courses to work in a community of practice second to none. Expand opportunities to market Ontario-based learning materials to other markets worldwide.
4. **Online learning for Aboriginal Students** – in collaboration with education and training providers, an OOI will help develop effective models and practices for working with and engaging Aboriginal students through learning circles, active learning and other frameworks already in use.
5. **Online learning for apprenticeship training** – building on existing work to support apprenticeship training and working in partnership with publicly-assisted colleges, employers, unions and the Ontario College of Trades, an OOI will help develop a strategy for online learning which seeks to improve completion rates for apprentices.
6. **Online learning for essential skills** – building on the existing platforms supporting those engaged in this work, an OOI will help accelerate the speed at which learners achieve Level 3 literacy in high school, post-secondary programs and in work-based learning.

¹ See <http://spotdocs.scholarsportal.info/display/sp/home> (Accessed March 29th, 2011)

Action 3: Anchor Decision about Services on Data and Evidence

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) conducted a baseline survey in 2010–2011 of the state of online learning in Ontario using data from 2008–2009 provided by Ontario’s publicly-assisted colleges and universities – a first of its kind survey in Canada. This work needs to be sustained so we can track developments. It also needs to be extended, so that publicly-assisted education and training providers and MTCU can make better decisions based on evidence and quality data. This requires an OOI to help:

1. **Track Online Learning in Ontario** – conduct an annual survey of online learning by the Ministry of Training, colleges and Universities through surveys of publicly-assisted education and training providers and reporting results for the benefit of the sector.
2. **Identify Gaps in Current Program and Course Provision** – Conduct market surveys and a gap analysis to determine what programs and courses current and potential students are searching for, how this matches availability for current online programs and courses and identify systematic opportunities to “fill the gap”.
3. **Track Trends** – there is a need to track trends in student use of technology, in mobile learning and in the provision of online learning world-wide. An OOI needs to be a “go to” organization for the best knowledge and information about emerging technologies and their uses for online learning.
4. **Develop Metrics** – there is a need for specific metrics for each stage of the process of design, development, deployment and delivery of online learning. These metrics need to be focused on outcomes and enable the benchmarking of this work within Ontario. Using metrics intelligently should lead to better planning, the more efficient use of resources and the sharing of best practices. These metrics will also enable clear accountability for outcomes to be established and to create standards based reporting, possibly through the OOI portal.

Action 4: Initiate and Complete Planning on a Timely Basis

The key strategy for an OOI is to be a nimble, focused organization that works through collaboration, partnership and contracted work to achieve significant impact on the online education and training sector. Driven by a powerful vision to provide Ontario’s students with greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology and by a focused set of actions, just described, an OOI needs to have a small core staff that will undertake focused projects through partnership and contracted work.

An OOI will leverage its relationship with the publicly-assisted colleges and universities, literacy and basic skills providers, OntarioLearn, Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning, TVO/Independent Learning Centre, Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, TFO and ORION in pursuit of its work. It will avoid duplication.

The core staff will be kept to a minimal level. During the period between May 1st, 2011, and March 31st, 2012, there is a need to:

- Create the governance structure for an OOI including incorporation as an Ontario not-for-profit corporation with a volunteer Board of Directors.
- Develop the Business Plan for an OOI that will include the detailed business and operational plan for the five year period 2011–2012 – 2015–2016, based on the broadly define roadmap below.
- Secure collaboration arrangements with organizations that will provide support services (e.g. administrative services, financial services, human resource services, legal services etc.).
- Develop metrics and accountability commitments for the work of an OOI so as to enable informed governance and decision making.
- Enter into a transfer payment agreement with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to outline the expectations for annual deliverables, funding and reporting requirements.

Further details can be found in Year One of the Roadmap below.

Roadmap and Budget

Turning these actions into a detailed action plan requires resources and a roadmap for the development of the “Institute”. What follows is the outline of a roadmap – an outline that now needs to be built into a strategic plan and detailed business and operational plan. This roadmap turns the “adding value” proposition into a broad plan of action.

Roadmap

In **Year One**, the focus will be on:

1. Make appropriate investments in the existing portal developed and maintained by Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca to extend its functionality to meet new and emerging student needs.
2. Initiating a gap analysis and market study on the need for new online learning programs and courses.
3. Overseeing a call for proposals and funding allocations for new online learning program and course development based on the gap analysis, including multi-year funding for program development.
4. Working with publicly-assisted education and training providers on the development and provision of a wider range of student support services for online learning.
5. Encouraging and helping the Ministry to conduct the second annual survey of online learning.
6. Building the governance, legal and operational foundation of an Institute and developing the detailed strategic and business plans. This includes recruiting the Board and Chair and developing service agreements with third parties to support the work of an Institute and entering into a Transfer Payment agreement with MTCU.
7. Recruiting core staff.
8. Helping develop best practices for faculty and instructor development and supporting initiatives with a focus on student engagement in collaboration with publicly-assisted education and training providers.
9. Helping design and begin establishment of the curriculum sharing and learning object resource centre which will enable course developers to access existing material quickly, reduce duplication, speed development of new online learning resources and enable quality assurance. In this development, the intellectual property rights of faculty members and others who developed courses will be fully respected with existing collective agreements.
10. Identify seamless pathways for high school students transitioning to post-secondary programs through online program and career supports and develop the needed services.

During **Year One**, detailed plans for the remaining four years of funding will be developed based on budget allocation and the finalization of the plans outlined here.

In **Year Two**, in addition to building on the work of **Year One**, the focus will be on encouraging and facilitating the development collaborative projects and initiatives by Ontario’s publicly-assisted colleges, universities, training and literacy providers aimed at:

1. Building on the new program and course development work completed in **Year One** and providing new program support funds to education and training providers through a competitive process in areas identified in the gap analysis.
2. Develop supports for literacy and essential skills development, bridging high school and the workplace in collaboration with education and training providers.
3. Significant collaborative online developments with respect to apprenticeship training, francophone and Aboriginal education.
4. Create a simple, but effective, and quality controlled collaborative mechanism to support the sharing of learning resources and objects.

5. Develop a mobile learning strategy in collaboration with education and training providers as a key strategic area for investment and focused work in Ontario. Identify the opportunities and begin work on simulation and serious gaming for student engagement as an area of best practice.
6. Work with the colleges, universities and training providers to position online learning as a core strategic component of their plans for the future, ensuring that all institutions and training providers see the role of online learning as a critical part of their work.

The work for the balance of the five year period will be developed as part of a more detailed business plan during the period December 2011 to March 2012.

In **Year Three**, all students in Ontario will have access to an online library and reference services 24x7, online career information services and study skills supports through their education and training provider. In addition, the "Institute" will:

1. Conduct the third round of program development funding focused on accelerating work on Aboriginal learning and mobile learning as a key platform for a range of learning activities, including diploma and degree programs, apprenticeship and literacy and essential skills.
2. Help undertake a systematic review of both Aboriginal learning and mobile learning in Ontario and develop a best practice framework, partnering with learners, education and training providers and organizations and technology companies to show what is possible.
3. Work with Aboriginal leaders and publicly-assisted educational and training providers, focus resources and supports on Aboriginal education and technology – how online learning and technology can support the learning needs of Aboriginal communities and their social and economic development.
4. Encourage the offering of training workshops on the potential of mobile learning in key areas identified as "gaps" in the annual study of online learning and the annual gap analysis studies.
5. Work with professional bodies and education and training providers to help identify continuing professional development needs that can be met in part or entirely through online learning.
6. Invite an independent panel of leading experts in online learning to undertake a review of the performance of an OOI after three years focused on the question: "Is an OOI adding value to Ontario's learning outcomes and services?"

While these are summary statements of the work of an "Institute" in its first three years, they are sufficient to indicate that a robust plan is needed to turn these roadmap elements into a clear and succinct business plan.

Benefits and Outcomes

These actions and the work of an OOI, in working to ensure that online learning is a component of each publicly-assisted institution's strategic intent, will have significant consequences for the post-secondary system in Ontario and for Ontario's social and economic agenda. These benefits and outcomes can be summarized as follows:

Better coordination and leveraging of existing resources and structures to:

- Enable publicly-assisted education and training providers to offer new programs to all residents of Ontario and selected markets globally.
- Bring learning to those not currently engaged in post-secondary education.
- Commission new programs on the basis of market need and demand.
- Expand the offering of apprenticeship, essential skills training, and learning opportunities for Francophones, Aboriginals and expand support learners with disabilities.
- Enable quality assurance through collaborating with others with respect to the highest standards for online learning.

- Support Ontario's vast network of literacy and basic skills providers to use technology in an innovative way to deliver a critical foundation for learners wishing to complete their secondary school diplomas, for learners to prepare for post-secondary education and for learners wishing to upgrade their skills.
- Support and enable publicly-assisted colleges, universities, literacy and other training providers in their work on the design, development and delivery of flexible learning using online technologies.
- Grow the market for foreign students coming to Ontario by supporting the efforts of Ontario institutions in marketing their programs of study to learners abroad before they arrive as immigrants in Canada.
- Position Ontario as a world leader in applied research and innovation in online learning.

Enhanced ability of education and training providers to design, develop and deliver flexible learning using online technologies:

- Support the design, development and delivery of training and learning to support the work of institutions offering online learning.
- Monitor developments in online learning worldwide so as to continuously improve quality online learning in Ontario.
- Offer workshops, online learning and other resources to support the work of publicly-assisted education and training providers with respect to instructional design and teaching quality.

Improved quality through applying the highest standards for flexible learning:

- Working with the Postsecondary Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB), Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA), Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS) and others, help ensure that quality standards for flexible learning (online learning and blended learning) are informed by best and next practices in the world.
- Continuously monitor standards for flexible learning world-wide and work with PEQAB, OUCQA and others to help them keep such standards current.

Growing the market for foreign students coming to Ontario by helping them secure part of their programs of study before arriving in Canada:

- Work with others to identify areas of skill and workforce demand which will require new workers moving to Ontario.
- Market related programs to areas of demand in selected foreign markets with the intention of attracting foreign students to Canada, but offer part of the program of study through flexible learning abroad so that they can arrive with some credits completed, thus shortening their foreign study time in Canada and accelerating the securing of a Canadian credential.

Leveraging partnerships with the private sector to enable innovation in quality online learning:

- Use its resources to forge relationships with manufacturers, systems developers and digital publishers to support the online learning agenda of Ontario.
- Provide support for specific projects linked to program and course development which showcase emerging technologies.
- Partner with private companies to position Ontario courses and programs as components for the professional and personal learning of employees.

The Ontario Online Institute will add significant value to Ontario's already robust online learning sector by supporting education and training providers to offer Ontario's students greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology.

The Ontario Online Institute will be an enabler and not duplicate the work already being done by Ontario's publicly-assisted colleges, universities, training and essential skills providers.

Budget

The total request for the first three years is for \$25 million to be allocated in support of this roadmap and in response to a need for a basic investment identified during the engagement process with the stakeholder groups as follows:

Year	Budget Ask (\$m)
2011–2012	\$9.0
2012–2013	\$9.0
2013–2014	\$7.0
Total	\$25 million

Budget allocations for 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 will be developed based on actual activities in 2012–2013. The working assumption is that steady state funding should be in the order of \$7 million annually.

Start-Up Phase – May to August 2011

The first phase of the engagement process between February 28th and March 28th clearly indicated that the sector is engaged and prepared to move forward. There is an urgent and critical need to determine how we bridge the period between the announcement of the funding (presumably in early May) and the actual foundation that needs to be in place by the end of August 2011.

Conclusion

This is a basic “ask” intended to identify the scale of resources required against an outline of the basic actions an “Institute” needs to take to be able to add value.

The roadmap is consistent with the vision to provide Ontario’s students greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology. The first phase of the Engagement Process clearly indicates that Ontario’s publicly-assisted education and training providers are ready to act and to engage in this work on the basis that an OOI will add value by enabling and not duplicating nor centralizing the diverse and successful services they already offer and will not act as a regulator.

We need to move quickly to harness this commitment and begin the work that will make a difference.

Maxim Jean-Louis
Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

March 2011

Ontario Online Institute Roadmap and Financial Plan April 2011

Maxim Jean-Louis

Special Advisor to the Minister for Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

April 2011

Preface

On April 1st, 2011, I submitted an "Ask" to the Minister together with an outline of the way in which an Ontario Online Institute (OOI) could add value to our already robust online provision for college, university, essential skills, apprenticeship, and work-based training programs. Ontario already has some 20,843 courses and 787 programs available online and these have led to some 495,716 course registrations in our system. This makes Ontario the Canadian leader in the volume of courses and program options in online learning.

But we cannot stand still. Developments are occurring in mobile learning, in skills-based training using simulations and games, and in apprenticeship education which require us to think differently about the role that technology can play in our emerging provision. If we wish to serve our students and position Ontario as a leader in this field, we must improve in quality, outcomes and coordination.

It is also clear from the conversations in which I have been engaged since my appointment as Special Advisor that helping to achieve the government's target of 70% post-secondary attainment for Ontario's adult population through expanded online learning opportunities requires us to meet the needs of learners who are not currently engaged in the postsecondary education system - geographically disadvantaged learners, Aboriginal learners, first generation learners, Francophones, new Canadians, older workers, person with disabilities, and youth at risk. It also requires us to focus on increasing success rates for learning, especially in terms of essential skills and apprenticeship. Finally, we need to develop greater flexibility and choice for those already in the post-secondary system.

There is a lot an OOI can do. This document seeks to "put flesh" on the Ask submitted to the Minister on April 1st and documents a detailed approach to the work of an OOI, focusing particularly on the first three years of operations.

Maxim Jean-Louis

Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

The Vision

Ontario leads Canada in online learning. It has the opportunity to support more students with a quality learning experience and to play a leadership role in North America as this work develops and becomes an increasingly significant part of adult learning and post-secondary education world-wide.

An Ontario Online Institute could add significant value by leveraging the existing infrastructure and engaging in a focused strategy for the development of online learning in the Province.

The vision suggested for an Ontario Online Institute (OOI) is:

"To provide Ontario's students with greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through effective collaboration and focused coordination and the innovative use of technologies"

The OOI will work collaboratively with all others to engage in online learning in Ontario to help:

- To increase **access** by enabling more students to have more flexible opportunities to learn.
- To improve the **quality** of learning online in Ontario.
- To increase student **engagement** by focusing resources, abilities and skills in a more systematically effective way.

- To improve learning **outcomes** from online learning.
- To focus on **innovative** developments in technology especially with respect to mobile learning.

Strategic Intent – Five Major Strategic Initiatives

Through a focused program of work, investment and collaboration, an OOI will pursue five major strategic initiatives:

- 1. Make Informed Investments in Program Development by Education and Training Providers with the intention of:**
 - a. Increasing enrolment engagement and outcomes from post-secondary education, by first generation learners, Aboriginal learners, learners in communities distant from a college or university campus, and those seeking essential skills and apprenticeship training.
 - b. Filling gaps in the current provision, especially at the degree and diploma program levels.
- 2. Meet the information needs of students in Ontario by:**
 - a. Investing in the development of an information portal, with 24x7 access to a wide range of information about online learning.
 - b. Supporting the provision of library, information and student services online.
- 3. Make investments and engage the post-secondary learning community in a collaborative effort aimed at improving quality and the learning experience associated with online learning:**
 - a. Developing best practices and next practices in the design, development, deployment and delivery of online learning.
 - b. Supporting initiatives to improve faculty/instructor training and development.
 - c. Working with technology developers, seeking to leverage the functionality of learning systems, technologies and platforms.
 - d. Developing collaborative models of sharing quality learning materials, courses, learning objects and technology "solutions".
- 4. Support the work of education and training providers with respect to innovation by:**
 - a. Focusing on mobile learning as an opportunity for Ontario to lead North America in online learning applications.
 - b. Seeking to systematically improve completion rates and mastery of skills amongst those in apprenticeship training and essential skills programs through innovative uses of technology.
 - c. Supporting the efforts of institutions to manage the costs per student of online learning.
- 5. Support the work of education and training providers in building a global market for Ontario's online learning programs, courses and services by:**
 - a. Improving the quality of courses and programs and increasing registrations in Ontario – building the solid home base that is a pre-requisite for a global reputation.
 - b. Supporting the efforts of institutions to reach global markets through partnerships and alliances.

These five initiatives will help take Ontario's online learning system – already robust – to the next level to support more students, sustain Ontario's leadership in Canada in this field and enable Ontario to take a leadership role in North America in online learning, especially with respect to mobile learning, apprenticeship, Aboriginal learning and the use of learning applications to support essential skills.

Four Key Enablers

In pursuing these five strategies, an OOI will leverage these key enablers for its work:

- 1. Encouraging and enabling collaboration** between colleges, between universities, between universities and colleges and between other education and training providers on the design, development, deployment and delivery of courses. Focusing on rapid course development for quality courses which promotes student engagement; effective instruction for the delivery of courses; shared student services (especially library and career services) and supporting the integrated management of technology.

2. **Enabling best and next practice sharing** amongst faculty/instructors, students, technology providers and others so that Ontario develops as a centre of excellence in online learning, and is seen globally as a jurisdiction which is firmly behind the development of this sector as both a public service (access to education and training opportunities) and as an industry.
3. **Developing new designs for learning** built around emerging technologies that develop the new skills and competencies required in knowledge-based economies.
4. **Building on the foundation of private sector technology firms in Ontario** to create new applications, new ways of using technology to support learning and advances in the development of mobile learning. By encouraging a dialogue between students, their faculty/instructors and technology developers, Ontario could lead in the development of new ways of using social media, hand held devices and other technologies for mobile learning.

Three Key Metrics

An OOI should be held accountable for its work. The three key measures, amongst several to be developed, are:

1. **The number of students enrolled in and completing online courses** at the post-secondary level in Ontario. Annual growth should at least match that in the United States (approximately 13% per year) and represent access and success. Sub-sets of this data will need to show whether target groups – geographically disadvantaged learners, Aboriginal learners, first generation learners, Francophones, new Canadians, older workers, person with disabilities, and youth at risk – are registering and completing in growing numbers.
2. **Continuous improvement in student engagement and learning outcomes in online learning courses** as a measure of their involvement, satisfaction and utilization of learning resources.
3. **Enabling the most efficient use of resources** by measuring cost effectiveness and efficiency. An OOI can facilitate the most effective use of scarce resources.

The Board of Directors of an OOI will, in partnership with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, identify additional metrics that matter.

Governance

An OOI shall be a not-for-profit, Ontario corporation with a Board of Directors with a broad mandate to implement the vision outlined in this document and receive funds from the Government of Ontario. It should also have provisions to enable it to raise funds from third parties.

The Board shall take a strategic role, shaping the agenda and overseeing the effective use of resources.

The Board 's composition will reflect the major stakeholder interests and commitment to online learning, including students, faculty/instructors, apprenticeship providers, colleges, universities, literacy and basic skills providers, Francophones, Aboriginals, support networks and a non-voting representative of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (ex-officio).

Leadership and Management

An OOI shall be staffed by an Executive Director and three lead staff. Others will be hired on a contract basis or secured through secondments so as to complete time-limited, focused tasks. Using secondments and short-term contracts permits an OOI to be nimble, but also enables those who have developed best practices or have engaged in innovation to have an impact system-wide on the development of online in Ontario. In the use of secondments and short-term contracts, an OOI can be constantly positioning itself as developments occur to make the best use of available skills in Ontario.

In all of its work, an OOI will leverage its relationship with the publicly-assisted colleges and universities, literacy and basic skills and other training providers, OntarioLearn, Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning (OCULL), TVO/Independent Learning Centre, Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, TFO and ORION in pursuit of its work. It will avoid duplication.

In its actions, an OOI will be nimble, focused and dedicated to supporting the diversity of activity within Ontario. This will be its primary strength. It will also be lean as an organization, itself being a showcase for the effective use of technology to facilitate engagement, cooperation and effective learning and management.

Roadmap for Action

A budget of \$25 million is requested for the period April 1st, 2011, to March 31st, 2014. In this section of the document, the business case and details of expenditure for each of these three years will be outlined and documented. Estimates of expenditure are approximate – a more detailed business plan will be submitted by the Board of Directors to the Minister, once an OOI begins formal operation and key decisions concerning level of funding and status of an OOI have been made.

The key focus is investment will be on: **programs** so that students can have more access and choice; support of faculty/instructor **development**; student **supports and services**; and technology/pedagogical **innovation**.

Task One: Establish and Operating the Organization

There are a variety of tasks required so as to make the organization fully functional. These include¹:

- Establishing the legal entity
- Developing an MOU with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to permit funding against a base business plan
- Selecting a Board Chair
- Following the MOU and a process agreed in principle between the parties appointing the Board
- Recruiting an Executive Director
- Enabling the Executive Director to recruit lead and other staff
- Securing physical premises and appropriate functional work spaces
- Ensuring the integrity of financial systems and transactions
- Entering into agreement with third parties for essential services – e.g. human resources, financial services
- Developing a brand and presence in Ontario's education and training system
- Developing effective communication channels with those with whom an OOI seeks to collaborate and partner

¹ Many of these activities will be undertaken simultaneously.

The estimated costs for these activities, including the hiring of a total of four staff² and the costs of Board³ meetings and legal fees⁴ and office rental⁵, are as follows:

Activity	Year 1 (\$)	Year 2 (\$)	Year 3 (\$)
Legal Fees for Creation and Establishment of an OOI	50,000	30,000	25,000
Board Meetings and Expenses	12,000	15,000	15,000
Salaries and Benefits	390,000	610,800	650,000
Contract Staff and Secondments	250,000	300,000	300,000
Office Rental	43,725	45,000	45,000
Travel, Meetings and Workshops	45,000	50,000	50,000
Technology Leasing or Purchase – Videoconference, Mobile Devices, Desk Top Systems etc. for Innovation Lab and Operations	75,000	15,000	15,000
Marketing & Communications	75,000	75,000	100,000
Contingency	123,275	99,200	
TOTAL COSTS OF ESTABLISHING / OPERATING AN OOI	674,390	1,240,000	1,200,000

Task Two: Develop and Support an Information Portal and Online Student Services

A portal, developed in 2009 by Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca (Ontario Online Learning Portal) exists and has been operational since July of 2010 (see www.click4onlinelearning.ca), but is at an initial stage of its development. The existing portal was built on a flexible, scalable infrastructure that will allow development in the light of user demand by adding, modifying and enhancing services and functionality very quickly and easily. It could be the vehicle for an investment by an OOI in Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca so as to extend its functionality to meet new and emerging student needs. However, as the Advisor to the Minister is the President – Chief Executive Officer of Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, he is in a conflict of interest in making this proposal.

What is needed is an independent review to determine where to locate the portal, the administrative structure to support the portal and a systematic milestone plan for its subsequent development.

In addition, there are library services which need to be enhanced and expanded. Other student services – e.g. online program advising, career supports and study skills resources – are also required. In order to get an OOI moving quickly and show a key deliverable, Contact North /elearnnetwork.ca, subject to the independent review, should be asked to sustain and develop the portal within its own budget resources, but enhancements to knowledge services and student support services will require new funding.

2 Assumed salary is \$120,000 plus 20% benefits for the Executive Director, and \$95,000 + 20% for each of the three each of the three lead staff based on the Workopolis salary calculator data base. In Year One, the assumption is that these would be hired part-way through the year – Executive Director at 70% of costs, the remaining staff at 50%. In Year 2, these salaries would be 100%. There are also assumed to be some support staff – two at \$52,000 plus benefits at 20%. Total salary, in year one, approximately \$390,000. Full year costs are \$610,800.

3 Four face-to-face meetings, including travel and expenses for a Board of eight at \$1,500 each for these meetings.

4 Estimated at \$50,000.

5 Estimated at \$16.50 /square foot per year and a requirement for 1650 square feet: \$43,725 annually.

Activity	Year 1 (\$)	Year 2 (\$)	Year 3 (\$)
Supporting an Independent Review of the Portal	150,000		
Enhancing library and knowledge resource access	750,000	1,000,000	500,000
Building an online student service resource – program advising, careers advising and study skills	300,000	750,000	150,000
TOTAL	1,200,000	1,750,000	650,000

Task Three: Improving Access and Student Choice

There will, in each year of the operation of the OOI, be a call for proposals from education and training providers to expand, on the basis of demonstrable need, preferably through a market driven analysis⁶, their online offerings. There will also be an annual call for proposals for collaborative development of courses and programs to serve in four targeted groups: (a) apprenticeship; (b) essential skills; and (c) Aboriginal learning needs; and (d) Francophone programs and courses.

For each successful proposal an OOI will seek: (a) a clear assessment of needs from a market or student perspective; (b) a 25% matching of resources from the successful institution(s), which can be in-kind, cash or other agreed resource; (c) an agreement that the learning resources developed can be shared either through an OOI's learning resource library or through a Commons License; and (d) a preference for collaborative development. Such proposals will require peer review and support from the operational team at an OOI. Peer review in this process is to facilitate best practice-based decision making, ownership of developments by the system and is in keeping with the models of quality assurance widely accepted within the education and training sector. A lead staff member will be dedicated to expanding offerings and sharing best practices.

In subsequent years, based on a "gap" analysis, there will be a call for collaborative program and course development annually, with some proposals being multi-year.

An OOI will also develop work with best practice providers and successful program and course developers to support workshops, training activities and other services aimed at supporting education and training providers seeking to improve student engagement and learning outcomes. High quality training and development activities are critical to the success of this initiative.

Activity	Year 1 (\$)	Year 2 (\$)	Year 3 (\$)
Call for Proposal for e-Apprenticeship	700,000	700,000	700,000
Call for Proposals for Essential Skills	750,000	750,000	750,000
Call for Proposals for Aboriginal Learning	750,000	750,000	750,000
Call for Proposals for Francophone Programs	575,000	450,000	400,000
Call for Proposals for College and University Programs	1,500,000	1,000,000	750,000
Gap Analysis Study	125,000	50,000	30,000
Support for the Learning Materials and Object Repository	550,610	300,000	300,000
Outreach activities aimed at improving student engagement and outcomes	100,000	100,000	80,000
TOTAL	5,050,610	4,100,000	3,760,000

⁶ After the first year, gap analysis data will be available from an Ontario Online Institute which will facilitate this requirement.

These substantial investment of \$12.9 million over three years, by far the largest in Canada, would likely yield some 450 – 475 new courses – the equivalent of 12 completely new degree programs or 24 college qualifications.

Task Four: Supporting Faculty/Instructor Development

Through collaboration, best practice sharing, the development of the challenge program (see below) and investments in workshops and related activities, an OOI will focus key resources on support for faculty/instructor development and for the development of online instructional skills in training organization staff.

A dedicated fund to support faculty/instructor development – something which is universally seen as a requirement for the successful integration of online components into blended learning and for the sustained growth of online learning in Ontario – will be established. Its primary use will be to support and expand existing institutional initiatives and developing shared practices which will significantly extend faculty/instructor training activities across the education and training system. The ambition is to ensure that all who teach online have been trained to do so within their institution or organization. An OOI's role is to support and enable this ambition. Some of these funds will also be used to develop a Certification for Online Instruction, available across Ontario to all who teach students online.

As with the expansion of course and program offerings, for material development supported by an OOI and investments made, an OOI will seek: (a) a 25% matching of resources from the successful institution(s), which can be in-kind, cash or other agreed resource; (b) an agreement that any faculty/instructor development resources developed can be shared either through an OOI's learning resource library or through a Commons License; and (c) a preference for collaborative development. Such proposals will require peer review and support from the operational team at an OOI. A lead staff member will be dedicated to expanding offerings and sharing best practices.

Activity	Year 1 (\$)	Year 2 (\$)	Year 3 (\$)
Support for Faculty/Instructor Development	850,000	750,000	700,000
TOTAL	850,000	750,000	700,000

Task Five: Supporting Innovation

An OOI will facilitate work across Ontario in all areas of education and training aimed at facilitating innovation. These activities will include, but not be limited to:

- An annual technology showcase for Ontario firms demonstrating to those engaged in the design, development, deployment and delivery of online learning linked to training and development activities.
- An innovation incubator for new approaches to improving student engagement and learning outcomes. With industry partnerships and workshops, the incubator will take student needs and faculty/instructor ideas and convert them into learning resources/ technologies that have value to Ontario, but may also have commercial value.
- A challenge program aimed at seeing innovation in learning in particular disciplines – e.g. medicine, engineering or trades. This will take the form of specific contracted development of needed apps, simulations, serious games or other activities for these fields. Over time, this would be sponsored development through specific grants or industry sponsorship.
- An annual Premier's Award, for the most innovative online development in Ontario.

Over time, co-funding between industry, institutions and an OOI will reduce an OOI's expenditure related to this task and the work of an OOI will be gradually integrated into other opportunities to share best practice and innovation. However, in its initial work, encouraging and enabling innovation needs to clearly be a thrust of the work of the organization.

Activity	Year 1 (\$)	Year 2 (\$)	Year 3 (\$)
Annual Innovation Workshops and Training	200,000	250,000	150,000
Innovation Incubator	325,000	225,000	85,000
Challenge Program	250,000	150,000	75,000
Annual Premier's Award for Excellence	100,000	100,000	100,000
TOTAL	875,000	725,000	410,000

Task Six: Developing Measures of Performance and Outcome

Ontario's education and training system is amongst the best in the world. If we wish to claim a leadership role in online learning, we need to be able to demonstrate our performance through measurement and evidence.

There are three areas in which we need to develop clear metrics and performance measures:

- 1. Student engagement** – the challenge is to increase the degree of student engagement in their online learning. We need to find efficient ways of measuring engagement, starting with baseline data and then benchmarking performance over time.
- 2. Learning outcomes** – we need to be systematic in assessing student learning outcomes so that we can clearly demonstrate the efficacy of online learning.
- 3. Costs for learning** – online learning carries the potential of improved learning experiences for learners while at the same time constraining cost growth for the deployment and delivery of learning. We need to understand the costs of online learning and then seek, over time, to reduce them.

In addition to these specific areas of work, Ontario needs to continue to track online learning activities (building on the work it undertook in 2010/11), identify trends and understand the gaps in provision⁷.

Activity	Year 1 (\$)	Year 2 (\$)	Year 3 (\$)
Developing measures of student engagement	125,000	180,000	75,000
Developing measures of learning outcomes and benchmarking	100,000	150,000	100,000
Understanding the costs of online learning	75,000	75,000	75,000
Tracking online learning trends	50,000	30,000	30,000
TOTAL	350,000	435,000	280,000

⁷ Funded under the task of Improving Access, Quality and Outcomes.

Three Year Financial Plan: Summary

Summarising these developments and activities, an OOI will need \$25m over three years as follows:

Activity	Year 1 (\$)	Year 2 (\$)	Year 3 (\$)
Task One - Creating of the Organization and Core Operations (including Staffing)	674,390	1,240,000	1,200,000
Task Two - Information Portal and Online Student Services	1,200,000	1,750,000	650,000
Task Three - Increasing Access and Student Choice	5,050,610	4,100,000	3,760,000
Task Four - Supporting Faculty/Instructor Development	850,000	750,000	700,000
Task Five - Supporting Innovation	875,000	725,000	410,000
Task Six - Measurement and Assessment	350,000	435,000	280,000
TOTAL ASK	9,000,000	9,000,000	7,000,000

For the sake of clarity, while the generally anticipated sums are as given, the Ask is for \$25 million over three years (\$9m in year one, \$9m in year two and \$7m in year three).

It should be noted that 56% of the funds requested will support increased access and choice and 13% will support the development of student support and information services, including enhanced digital access to library and knowledge resources. Faculty/instructor development, which will directly benefit students, accounts for 9%. The combined direct impact for students and faculty/instructors will be in the order of 74% of these resources. Innovation supports, which will have a medium impact on students and faculty/instructor, account for a further 10%.

As indicated, some 450 – 475 new courses are anticipated to be developed over three years with these investments, many in areas which currently have a low number of online courses or in areas in which demand is high, but the number and “fit” of courses is not.

The Executive Director, once appointed, will finalize a detailed budget for approval by the Board of Directors, but this is the basis for the Ask.

Conclusion

This detailed roadmap outlines the work that is needed to create a value-adding organization which **provides Ontario's students with greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through effective collaboration and focused coordination and the innovative use of technologies.**

An OOI has been in the ‘making’ since the 2010 Throne Speech. It is now time to act. This basic roadmap provides a starting point for the actions needed to turn this “big idea” into a functioning organization which can make a difference.

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Note to Reader

My April 1, 2011, report to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities included the first draft of this document, What I Heard.

Since my first report, I have conducted a further fifteen working sessions with stakeholders and have updated this document based on these additional working sessions. An updated list of the stakeholders engaged can be found on Pages 13 and 14.

The new additions to the document are highlighted in *italic and blue* for ease of review.

Maxim Jean-Louis
Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities
for an Ontario Online Institute

April 29, 2011

What I Heard

Context

Since my appointment as Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute on February 23, 2011, I have held working sessions with thirty-eight stakeholders in Ontario's education and training sector.

All stakeholders provided clear, focused and insightful responses to the questions they were asked and they were clear about what an OOI could be, what it should not be and what it needs to focus upon, particularly in the initial phases of its development. This document briefly outlines what was heard during the first phase of this engagement process. It seeks to highlight key opportunities and challenges which have to be addressed in order to proceed with the implementation of an OOI.

Following the March 2010 announcement of an OOI, the following five stakeholders distributed a written response to the announcement:

- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA)
- Joint submission from the Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario / Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations / Ontario Public Service Employees Union / Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario)
- Colleges Ontario
- Council of Ontario Universities
- Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca

The aim of these face-to-face working sessions was to validate the responses from these five stakeholders and seek new insights since publication. I also wished to gain an understanding of areas of concern and to gauge support for an approach to an OOI which would garner support from Ontario's leaders in the education and training sectors.

In addition to working sessions with these five stakeholders, working sessions were organized with other stakeholders who had not previously prepared a formal or informal response to the announcement of an OOI.

Summary of Key Findings

Four key findings became exceptionally clear during these working sessions:

1. There is a broad, general agreement amongst stakeholders on the six features of an Ontario Online Institute – Planning and Gap Analysis, Single Portal, Shared Resources, Support Services, Research, and Marketing – as outlined in the Ministry's Policy Framework and Engagement Guide circulated in advance of the working sessions. A seventh feature – the need for professional development for faculty/instructors – also has broad agreement.
2. There is a consensus amongst the stakeholders around the key elements of the guiding principles such as wider choice, increased access, and greater flexibility – with quality as an overriding driver.
3. There is general agreement on the need for one or two "quick wins" that can be launched immediately. Potential "quick wins" could include the portal, shared services and the development of support services.
4. *There is also agreement that Ontario's publicly-assisted education and training providers should be the focus for the work of an OOI. While it should not distance itself from private sector providers, the focus needs to be on publicly-assisted providers.*

Overall, an OOI is seen to be "a made in Ontario innovation" that will help the education and training system better position itself for the future.

Seven Key Themes from These Working Sessions

Theme One: It is, First and Foremost, about Students and Learning

It is clear from the engagement process that the focus for the work of an OOI has to be, first and foremost, on students (including current students, potential students and new types of learners) and their learning. An OOI should not be a “technology driven” initiative, should not be preoccupied only with learning platforms, instructional design or course development, but with students: their learning and the degree to which they are engaged in their learning. The fundamental requirement in the design and work of an OOI has to be to improve the ability of students to learn in an engaged way, to engage more students (including students from underserved groups), and to enable different ways of teaching through effective and meaningful instruction.

The goal of enabling more students to be more successful in their studies has implications:

- 1. Online courses and programs need to be designed in keeping with the most rigorous quality assurance processes so that students feel engaged with the course content, their peers and their faculty/instructor.** An OOI could facilitate the exchange of design ideas which enable this to occur and encourage the development of new approaches to learning which lead to higher levels of student engagement, completion and success.
- 2. Faculty and instructors need to have confidence and skills in delivering online learning.** Not all faculty and instructors are skilled and experienced in offering online courses and in supporting online students. There are some examples of best practice in faculty/instructor development which an OOI could help make widely available and develop supports for those seeking help and assistance while teaching or preparing to teach online.
- 3. Students need assurance that the online learning experience is not “second class”.** Some expressed a concern that the demand for online learning is not the most important message they hear from students. There was a concern expressed regarding quality – will my learning be recognized by employers and others, will it be transferable and will it be of quality? Many noted that there are quality issues related to the design, development, deployment and delivery of online courses – not just to content. Online learning should also not be seen solely as an efficiency device, for example, to simply put more students into the same number of courses.
- 4. Growing blended learning.** Most publicly-assisted education and training providers now are engaged in the offering of blended learning, where courses are part classroom-based and part online. Ontario needs to develop a range of approaches to blended learning which support effective and efficient use of both classroom-based and online instruction so as to increase student engagement and promote peer learning. *The value of experiential learning, linked to online learning should not be discounted.*
- 5. Making a Difference for Apprenticeship Training.** Online learning can provide effective and meaningful support to apprenticeship training in terms of the delivery of some of the general courses as well some of the hands on, through state of the art videoconferencing. It provides a basis for supporting those on shift work, as well as apprentices who must travel for work or study.

The Province has adopted a bold strategy to move to 70% of the workforce holding a post-secondary qualification – essential for Ontario to build jurisdictional advantage in a global knowledge economy. To this extent, online learning is also about ensuring that students have access to quality, flexible education and training opportunities in every community in Ontario. Access to learning is thus seen as a strategic investment by Ontario in its socio-economic future.

The Province has also adopted a concerted strategy for literacy including promoting the development of essential skills for adult learners. If an OOI is about students, then it should be about lifelong learners, not just those already in college or university, but also those who are seeking to upgrade their essential skills for work or further studies or seeking to leverage online learning for their workplace learning and development. Students with physical and mental disabilities and Aboriginal learners are also groups in need of additional support for whom online learning can be a major benefit.

There is also a need to understand the different motivations for pursuing online learning for different students. For example, some seek online learning to increase the flexibility of their studies while others are pursuing online learning since it is the only way they can ensure access to the learning they require. Different groups of learners – first generation learners, Aboriginal learners, learners living in remote rural communities, Francophones, and professionals seeking to maintain their continuing education – all have different needs and requirements from the system. An OOI needs to

support publicly-assisted education and training providers to enable diverse responses to these different needs and not “straightjacket” online learning into a particular mould or design.

An OOI can also be a tool to market and promote Ontario’s online learning opportunities from its publicly-assisted colleges, universities, literacy and essential skills and other training providers to Ontario’s students and prospective students. All marketing and promotional efforts must be clear that the student or prospective student is registering with the education and training provider and not an OOI.

A number of stakeholders expressed a clear need to have French-language online learning opportunities at college, university, literacy and essential skills levels. Additionally, we need to ensure bilingual support services are available to French-language students, colleges, bilingual universities and other stakeholders.

In this context, it is important, both in the way an OOI is conceptualized and implemented, that there be a dynamic link between the post-secondary education sector and the secondary sector as a way to build effective pathways for students. An example of this is the dual credits.

But the stakeholders wanted to make clear that access in itself is not a sufficient basis for the work of an OOI: it has to be to **improve access to and success in quality, flexible online learning**. They also spoke loudly of having support services to help students succeed. It is not the intention to create “a revolving door” in which more access is provided, but student completion and satisfaction with that learning is low. Finding a strategic approach to increasing access, engagement, completion and satisfaction should drive the work of an OOI.

Theme Two: Student Affordability

There were two clear messages with respect to student affordability:

1. Students taking online programs and courses should pay no more additional fees than campus-based students. *The philosophic position, articulated by several stakeholders, is that “a course is a course”; students taking courses or programs online should be funded on the same fiscal full-time equivalent basis for operating grants¹. It should not be assumed that the costs of online delivery are lower than in-person for delivery, except for perhaps the capital costs associated with constructing classrooms and the like. Those costs may be offset by technological investments required to support enhanced online capacity, and up-front costs for development of effective courses.*

One stakeholder noted that the government should review the current approach to funding online learning.

2. Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) support should be available for students taking online programs and courses and for part-time students. With respect to part-time students, work needs to be undertaken to have a standard definition of a part-time student at the federal and provincial levels.

Overall, if the strategy is to increase access and flexibility, then these strategies should also involve a commitment to ensuring affordability.

Theme Three: It’s About Leveraging the Existing Infrastructure and Investments

To borrow a phrase used by a major Canadian bank, “We’re richer than we think”, Ontario leads Canada in online learning at the post-secondary level. It already has some 20,843 online courses, 787 online programs (with more being added all the time) and 495,716 student registrations (2008/09). It has achieved this because of the investment decisions made by Ontario’s publicly-assisted colleges, universities and due to ongoing support for key building blocks such as OntarioLearn, Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning, TVO/ Independent Learning Centre, Contact North/ elearnnetwork.ca, TFO and ORION.

Stakeholders were clear that an OOI needs to be a facilitator of the next stage of development of Ontario’s online learning by enabling the work of these building blocks, coordinating some activities (e.g. online student services that can be shared across institutions, multi-dimensional information portal building on the existing Ontario Online Learning Portal, provincial digital resources, library projects, province-wide licenses available for applications to develop online content) without seeking to control the development of online learning. This “loose : tight” kind of knowledge-

¹ If this principle is accepted, for funding reporting purposes, it will be especially important that every registered student be affiliated with an education or training provider.

driven organization – typical of twenty- first century organizations which are collaborative, knowledge rich, networked organizations that leverage existing assets, enhance activity and focus the work of many without seeking to “command and control”² – was what the stakeholders envisioned. It needs to be a nimble, responsive, “hub- like” organization which engages with “the system”, leverages the assets and opportunities and keeps abreast of emerging technologies.

Stakeholders were adamant that leveraging the existing infrastructure and investments should not impact the funding currently available to colleges and universities. Do not fund an OOI by cutting core funding to colleges and universities; incremental funding must be available for an OOI. We have to recognize that many of the costs for online learning (faculty/instructors, course development, IT infrastructure), while different than face-to-face, are still substantial and this has to be reflected in funding.

Additionally, literacy and essential skills providers noted they require funding stability and ongoing core funding in order to support students.

Such an organization could pursue some or all of the following:

- **Support a 24x7 information portal that provides reliable, up-to-date and helpful information** about what is available where, when, at what cost and could enable faster and flexible access to information about courses and programs.
- **Support the Scholars Portal, operated by Ontario Council of University Librarians (OCUL), to enhance the portal and make the Ask Ontario virtual reference services (currently managed by Knowledge Ontario) more widely available within the education and training sector and other sectors such as health care**, supporting more services for students with disabilities (especially visual disability) and enabling a capacity to be scaled-up. There is also a need to work with OCUL and others to ensure that online learners fully understand content rights and use, plagiarism and other issues with respect to academic honesty and intellectual property rights.

College libraries do not have a comparable resource to the Scholars Portal and would require financial support from an OOI to develop a similar resource. One cost effective approach would be to “piggy back” on the basic infrastructure of the Scholars Portal and create a separate, but seamless, section for college students.

The provision and support of access to library resources should not be an afterthought.

- **Expand Online Student Services** – *there are a range of services which could be developed and shared across the system ranging from study skills, through course supports for specific areas of study (e.g. statistical skills) through support for administrative processes (e.g. letters of permission). An OOI could provide a platform and focused investment to develop these services.*
- **Support increased sharing of content and learning objects between institutions** – e.g. academic material, test items and assessment processes, software improvements, strategies for rapid course development. *This should not be a primary focus of an OOI, according to some. Rather, as courses and programs are developed, there should be a commitment to the sharing of content and digital components under a commons license. An OOI may support simple resource sharing mechanisms - possibly investing in Knowledge Ontario - rather than commit significant resources to building a digital repository. Stakeholders clearly indicated that financial support is needed for Knowledge Ontario and supported continued government investment.*
- **Support effective best-practice sharing** on a range of issues from assessment, through course design to online project work and instructional support.
- **Create a co-operative basis for learning platform and application utilization** – ensuring that education and training providers are able to harness the most appropriate technologies (through province-wide licensing via an OOI) for their courses and programs that they wish to offer.

An OOI also needs to be an advocate with government for online learning as a strategic investment and as a focal point for innovation and development.

If an OOI is to leverage the existing infrastructure in an effective and efficient way, it needs to do so by creating a strategic focus for the work of the system which has ownership across the system. This is seen as preferable to an OOI

² See, for example, Don Tapscott's thinking: <http://dontapscott.com/2010/01/08/what-should-be-the-title-to-the-sequel-to-wikinomics/> (Accessed March 19th 2011).

commandeering and taking into its ownership certain provincial functions undertaken by existing organizations. For example, the Scholars Portal is a very efficient and effective means of delivering quality library services to university students across Ontario. It would benefit from investment to expand its services and colleges would benefit from access to these same services. Similarly, the portal developed by Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca would benefit from enhancements and investment. An OOI does not need to “own” or control these services, but may need to connect the development of these services to a clearly articulated strategy for information and knowledge services and student services. Indeed, the general consensus is that an OOI should be a facilitator, enabler, and funder rather than a regulator, controller or acquirer of assets.

On matters related to quality assurance for online learning, an OOI also needs to partner with Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS), Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA) and Postsecondary Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) thus ensuring that quality assurance addresses online delivery issues and keeps up with advances in such areas as mobile learning and learning applications for tablet computers and smart phones. In doing so, the systematic work of the publicly-assisted colleges and universities in maintaining quality assurance processes for curriculum and delivery needs to be both fully supported and acknowledged. *It is noted that as on April 22, 2010, the Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance released a new Quality Assurance Framework which is state of the art and focuses on outcomes.*

One final observation based on the engagement process. Institutions must stop waiting for government to propose all solutions – what an OOI should be is a catalyst that encourages continuous development, innovation and activity aligned with a strategy for online learning for Ontario. A good example of not waiting for government, but making a real difference, is OntarioLearn - an outstanding success with 65,000 registrations.

Theme Four: It's About Growing the Range of Offerings

As has been mentioned, Ontario is already a Canadian leader in online learning. Some stakeholders have identified that there are gaps and there are opportunities to add to the number of fully online programs available to students. Others indicated that current students were not expressing a need for fully online programs.

There is also a need to develop an approach to online learning that has demonstrable success for Aboriginal learners – finding the right balance between different forms of interaction and local support. A need was also identified for French-language online programs and courses at all levels. Recent immigrants, particularly those seeking to upgrade foreign credentials to meet the requirements of Canadian professional bodies, have a need for more online specialized services that could facilitate their transition.

Two suggestions were made repeatedly:

- 1. Gap Analysis** – an OOI could build on the anecdotal evidence that there is a need for more online programs and complete a comprehensive gap analysis and market assessment. There was also a suggestion that the gap analysis look beyond Ontario and internationally.
- 2. Support for Program Development** – the most common proposition is that an OOI would manage a fund to support specific course or program development, based on identified gaps and market research. The work of development and delivery would be undertaken by the education and training providers with the potential to share the courses amongst the providers. The funding for program development should include a specific envelope for the development of French-language programs and courses.

Any effort to increase the range of offerings must recognize and accommodate the different approaches in content development among universities, and also between universities and colleges. What is also clear from the stakeholders is that an OOI should not be developing programs and courses for students or offering credits. *The key to developing new online offerings will be a combination of excellent pedagogical design, committed online facilitators, and champions inside work settings to translate skills learned online into practice.*

While some specific target markets were suggested by some stakeholders (seniors, workplace training and development to enhance essential skills, learners with disabilities), the focus was more on the need for support for the development of a set of offerings from colleges, universities and literacy and essential skills providers in a comprehensive range of programs, i.e. providing similar offerings to online learners as those available for face-to-face learners.

Theme Five: It's About Innovation

Almost all emphasized students and pedagogy – the need to develop online learning that is engaging, enticing and enabling and is of such quality as to satisfy the requirements for credit and its recognition and/or transferability. When technology was a focus of a conversation, *the work of an OOI should focus on pedagogy, not technology*. Two key points were most often made:

- **Technology changes rapidly** – it's not possible to develop a "standard" platform for all online activity and services in Ontario, since the platform would need to change quickly as advances in technology occur. What is more important is the development of courses and programs which are as technology neutral (will work on any platform and on any device) and which anticipate emerging technology.
- **Technology inspires innovation** – when those who develop courses see what the technology is capable of (e.g. machine learning, automated translation of documents, quick integration of audio-video, rapid creation of simulation), then innovation occurs.

While some were reluctant to engage with the private sector, many thought that doing so would help with the task of enabling innovation – something that most thought to be a function of an OOI. Such innovation would focus on the implications of emerging technology for pedagogy and for increasing student engagement and success in online learning.

Innovation occurs everywhere in Ontario's education and training system. An OOI could facilitate and support such innovation through the development of communities of interest and communities of practice, clusters of innovation, workshops, research and activities which showcase innovations from our education and training providers and private sector firms, but also from around the world. The challenge is to stimulate the opportunity to innovate *through focused funding and investment* and not to try and "manage innovation".

Indeed, one suggestion is that an OOI should also "develop an innovation fund as a core investment fund. The fund would provide seed funding for the development of innovative projects either within or among various institutions. It is as important as a fund for course development".

Most of the comments focused on innovation in relation to teaching and learning, but it should not be forgotten that a great deal of education is focused on social innovation. This too could form part of the focus for the work of an OOI.

Theme Six: It's About Overcoming Obstacles

Stakeholders identified several obstacles to growing online learning in Ontario. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Improved support services for students** that complement the existing support services available from education and training providers.
- **Lack of recognition for online learning** in terms of student financial support, credit transfer and some professional bodies.
- **Lack of understanding of the existing opportunities** – the need for a one-stop shop for information and knowledge about available options for online learning as well as confirmation of its quality and credibility.
- **Lack of broadband access across Ontario** – one aspect of the digital divide is the fact that affordable broadband is not available across Ontario and is not equally available to all Ontarians.
- **Resistance to online learning by some in the academic community, by some students and by faculty/instructors** – there is a perceived "underclass" sentiment about online learning amongst some.
- **Lack of evidence of efficacy of online learning** – many are unaware of the substantial body of research on the efficacy of online learning.
- **Absence of an effective credit transfer system in Ontario** – and a reluctance by some to see online learning as equal to classroom work for some programs and courses.

- **Need to address intellectual and copyright issues** – avoid infringing on workload, academic freedom, intellectual property, and do not use online learning to disproportionately increase part-time instructors as opposed to using full-time faculty.

Theme Seven – It is Time to Act!

There was universal agreement that it is time to act on an OOI and take online learning in Ontario to the next level. The government announced an OOI in March 2010 and the sector has been waiting for the government to act. *Some are seeing an OOI as a potentially transformative institution which will lead to online learning being a key pillar of Ontario's post-secondary education strategy.*

While an OOI cannot deal with all of these issues – for example, credit transfer is about more than online learning and is already being addressed through a more substantial system response than an OOI could provide – an OOI is expected to play a meaningful role in these and other issues.

However, in acting as an advocate for online learning to institutions, government, employers and communities, an OOI should be careful not to try and “boil the ocean” as one stakeholder put it. Each of these challenges requires a collaborative, deliberate and systematic approach in the pursuit of its work overall and with respect to innovation, an OOI needs to respect collective agreements, academic freedom and the intellectual property arrangements operating in each institution, organization or sector.

An OOI as an Organization

These nine themes were common across the stakeholders, though many approached these common themes in different ways. What the discussion led to were conversations about an OOI as an organization.

It would be incorrect to say that a consensus emerged about the design of the organization, its scope of work and governance, but clear pointers can be discerned from what was said. These are:

1. It should be a small, nimble, focused and umbrella like organization – a focal point and advocate for online learning in Ontario's education and training system.
2. It should have strong ties to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, but should be independent of it.
3. It should be an enabler, facilitator, funder and engager; not a controller, commander or regulator.
4. It should not offer programs, courses or credentials, but should enable and support those who do offer programs, courses and credentials.
5. It should be a conduit for funding for collaborative program and course development against an analysis of need using new funds over and above those allocated to publicly-assisted colleges, universities and essential skills providers.
6. It should have a mandate that focuses on student learning, quality and innovation.
7. *It should have clearly defined objectives with an identified end point so that both the government and the public will know if an OOI has achieved the outcomes anticipated when the government announced the intention to establish an OOI in the 2010 Throne Speech.*
8. Its governance should reflect its vision, mission, scope and mandate.
9. The primary focus of an OOI must be to meet the needs of Ontarians first before pursuing the world. If an OOI meets the needs of Ontarians then it can be easily adapted to pursue online education for the rest of the world.

Education and training providers have key roles to play in the design, development, deployment and delivery of online learning. They also have other critical roles that include: the specification of admission requirements; the provision of admissions counseling to prospective students and adjudication of applications for admission; where applicable, the assessment of transfer credit and prerequisite courses; academic advising; and the monitoring and enforcement of their own academic standards that govern the eligibility for continuation of study by their students. Moreover, it is the

responsibility of the institutions' academic senates (or equivalent academic governance bodies) to guide the content development and quality assurance of courses and programs leading to the granting of academic credentials. There was a strong feeling that an OOI should not seek to adopt or co-opt these roles, but that it should complement them.

Indeed, one stakeholder went so far as to suggest the potential roles of the institutions and the role of an OOI in the form of a table. The stakeholder's table has been reproduced below for information only.

Roles of Institutions	Potential Roles of an OOI
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission and registration of students. • Provide academic advice to students. • Monitor academic standards and enforce minimum requirements for the continuation of study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate the provision of information to prospective students concerning available on-line courses and programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and maintain a web portal that provides a searchable database of those existing courses and programs (an extension of existing Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca web site). • Assemble information and links regarding course or program registration processes for each participating university. • Direct students to institutions as appropriate for academic advice and for admission/registration.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine course and program needs. • Adapt existing programs and courses to current needs. • Develop new programs and courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct market research and provide market information to support institutions' decisions about course and program development, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect from member institutions course and program registration data, provide aggregation and trend analysis, and disseminate this analysis among member institutions; • Track, analyze and disseminate requests for on-line courses and programs through an OOI; • Monitor existing research and disseminate reports and needs analyses concerning demand for credentials/programs, or desired programs for Ontario to prosper economically. • An OOI supports students' access to online courses and programs.³ (In the other aspects of its mandate, an OOI may have a broader focus; for example, see below concerning supports for pedagogy and professional development.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and deliver courses and programs. • Promote and support innovation in the use of technology to improve learning outcomes in courses and programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate collaboration among participating institutions to catalyze and enable their joint development of courses and programs. • Make recommendations to MTCU for additional resources for member institutions to enable institutions to develop online courses and programs. • If MTCU makes additional funding available for this purpose, funds should be paid directly to institutions directly and/or OOI could administer funds to support collaborative⁴ development of online courses or programs by institutions, allocated through a transparent and credible peer review process. • Leverage the power of consortium buying in collaboration with OCUL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate collaboration among institutions, where practicable, in purchasing and licensing of software and hardware to support online learning. • Facilitate joint licensing of course contents or learning objects. • Facilitate collaboration in advocacy, development and contracting with infrastructure providers (for example, Orion).

³ Participating institutions will determine which of their course or program offerings are included in the facilitative mechanisms of an OOI. Online courses and programs are variously defined and delivered. In many instances, students are able to take them from anywhere without attendance at a campus. In other instances, students may be required (or have a voluntary opportunity) to attend a campus (or some other location) for a small part of the course/program activity. Models of course and program delivery will continue to evolve. An OOI may need to develop a categorization of courses/programs reflecting the extent (if any) of required or possible face-to-face activity.

⁴ Involving more than one institution in the development of courses or programs, and mutual recognition of credit.

Roles of Institutions	Potential Roles of an OOI
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the utility a repository of shared online learning resources and, if appropriate, facilitate collaboration between all participants (potentially in collaboration with OCUL). Identify student support services for online learners that could be efficiently and effectively shared across institutions, and – with the agreement of member institutions – support collaborative delivery of these supports through an OOI. Promote and share best practices for the integration of mobile devices and digital media.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and support innovation in the use of technology to improve learning outcomes in courses and programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create ongoing opportunities for institutions to share effective practices regarding development of on-line courses and programs, on-line pedagogy, and the utilization of technological innovations. Collect and disseminate recommendations for best practices for innovative online pedagogy and delivery mechanisms.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assure quality of curriculum content and program structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create ongoing opportunities for coordination of existing expertise within institutions to share effective practices regarding development of on-line courses and programs, on-line pedagogy, and the utilization of technological innovations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide professional development for faculty and staff who are creating and administering online course and programs. Negotiate with faculty concerning appropriate recognition and supports (e.g. professional development and non-faculty resources) for creation and teaching of online content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect and disseminate best practices for effective online pedagogy and delivery mechanisms. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish pedagogical guidelines concerning methods of delivery to ensure student engagement. Monitor existing research and disseminate reports concerning effective online pedagogy and delivery methods. For clarification: to avoid duplication of institutions' mandates, an OOI will not have a role to set standards or policy for online delivery. If MTCU provides additional funding for this purpose, commission (or facilitate coordination of existing resources and expertise—for example, through partnership with HEQCO to conduct) research concerning effective online delivery practices, comparison of student success/achievement between in person and online delivery, factors identified by students as positive or negative in online delivery, and so forth. Catalyze and facilitate discussions among academic administrators, faculty, educational developers, students and other stakeholders to support development of effective online pedagogy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An OOI might consider establishing a provincial conference on online learning and/or instructional design, and connecting through blogs, newsletters, social media and so forth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine Intellectual Property policies and ownership of course content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate development of agreements among institutions for sharing of course content (potentially in collaboration with OCUL).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Market courses and programs for recruitment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop brand/name for activity, ensuring that the “branding” of an OOI does not obscure the brands of individual participating institutions, similar to the Ontario University Application Centre model. Coordinate market outreach for all participating institutions. Ensure appropriate marketing links to ONCAT (the new credit transfer coordinating body). Establish linkages to information for internationally-trained professionals, for example, linkages to bridging programs and regulatory body entry-to-practice requirements. <p>(Because an OOI will not grant credentials, consideration should be given to not calling it an “Institute”.)</p>

<i>Roles of Institutions</i>	<i>Potential Roles of an OOI</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop, in collaboration with all participating institutions, policies with respect to the limits of open access through an OOI.</i> • <i>Determine admission policies with respect to students who have taken open access courses through an OOI and are seeking admission.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In collaboration with member institutions, explore opportunities to implement open access registration:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Open access in this context means that students could take a course without being admitted to a degree or diploma program by an institution. Students would still be required to pay any established course fee.</i> • <i>Open access will need to be limited to a sub-set of courses.</i> • <i>The open access policy will need to address issues concerning students on academic probation or sanction by institutions.</i> • <i>Provide comprehensive information about open access and refer students to institutions for academic counseling to ensure implications of open access are understood with respect to potential admission.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Implement appropriate procedures and protocols to allow for prior learning assessment and recognition (as appropriate) and credit transfer.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In collaboration with institutions, develop and maintain a database of course equivalencies for online courses among participating institutions, to support letter of permission and credit recognition processes.</i> • <i>Collaborate with institutions to support institutions' establishment of expedited processes for registration in their online courses, potentially facilitated by information exchange through an OOI portal.</i> • <i>Communicate concerning institutions' registration processes to students, and provide relevant information links to institutions' policies and advisors.</i>

In terms of its governance, many thought that it needs to have students and their instructors in governance roles, but that some of the key organizations that deliver online learning should also be at the table, including designated French-language representation on a Board of Directors. There were ambivalent views about the potential role of the private sector (both private education providers and technology companies).

There were *five* cautions:

1. While many recognized that Ontario has many challenges moving to the next stage of development of online learning, there is a need to move in increments and not to try and leapfrog. So as to build ownership and engagement, an OOI needs to focus and develop over time – engaging stakeholders at each stage of its development.
2. Some felt that there was a danger that an OOI could be quickly “seduced” by vendors – which has happened in other contexts. The key here is to be driven by the needs and concerns of students and those who teach them.
3. Some suggested that there was a possibility of an OOI being housed as a branch within the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. While some did not see this as overly problematic, most felt that there was a need for a degree of separation and independence so that online learning could be truly championed within Ontario without concern for “politics”.
4. *If an OOI develops as a not-for-profit organization, then its governance is based on its statutes as agreed by its membership. Some felt strongly that it should be based on voluntary membership and be focused on adding value and leveraging the existing infrastructure rather than supplanting it. It was noted by one organization that membership and association with an OOI is a risk – an OOI could risk market share, autonomy and decision making. It could also pose a reputational risk if an OOI should fail.*
5. There was a general view that the term “Institute” should not be part of the eventual name of the organization as it gives the impression that it could be a degree-granting, stand-alone educational institution.

In general, the view was that an OOI should be launched with a compelling vision, based on a strong future view of where online learning will be at some point in the future, but that the starting points should be specific and focused on “quick wins” that will create confidence in an OOI as a collaborative, networked-based organization. An OOI needs stable, medium-term core funding to ensure that its work is sustained over time.

What Was Not Said

The activities associated with engagement continue, but some things are not being spoken of at this time which may be issues worth looking at in some more depth:

- **Non-Credit Courses and Markets** – the focus of many of the working sessions was on the offering of online learning for credit. This is understandable, since the focus of much of the work of colleges and universities is on credit programs and courses. Those offering essential skills programs online clearly made their interests known *as did those involved with apprenticeship education*, but what about the vast market for non-credit courses online? For example, several suggested that the growing population of seniors in Ontario are likely to want to make some investments in their learning. Does this represent an opportunity for Ontario institutions? If it does, what role (if any) could an OOI play in facilitating the growth of this market?
- **A Common Platform for Online Learning** – Some suggested that Ontario would leverage the opportunity to grow online learning more if it used a common platform for delivery. But this was not a dominant voice. Yet, many were concerned about the rapid “stale-dating” of Learning Management Systems and the costs of “greening” and maintaining an overly complex delivery infrastructure.
- **Maximizing the use of Institutional Budgets for Online Learning** – In several jurisdictions which have developed collaborative hubs for online learning (e.g. Britain, British Columbia) they see the collective buying power of colleges and universities being leveraged to buy software and services at a lower per institution cost and they see integrating services across a jurisdiction (e.g. help desk, student services, financial supports, registration etc.) as a way of stabilising or sharing costs across more institutions. While a few mentioned this, it was not a major theme. What was mentioned several times was the need for students studying part-time and online to receive financial support “as if” they were classroom students. Some do think that there is a need for a common platform for online learning in Ontario and other suggest that there was a need to reduce duplication and “redundancy” in the offering of courses.
- **Research** – while some suggested that an OOI could facilitate innovation, the role of an OOI as an investor or sponsor of needed research (e.g. on the efficiency and efficacy of online learning) was rarely mentioned. When it was, it was generally “and also...” rather than a “should”. Given that acceptance of online learning is seen as a meaningful barrier to the growth of this activity, research could be one of the vehicles to overcome this barrier. An OOI could also play a role in the dissemination of evidence-based best practices in online learning for the benefit of the entire sector.
- **Building an Export Market** – Open Ontario is a major thrust of the Government of Ontario. The idea is to leverage excellence in products and services developed in Ontario so as to grow our ability to export these to others, either through (in the case of online learning) developing an increased number of foreign students registering for Ontario courses, partnering with foreign institutions to support their offering of Ontario developed courses or through other means. *One stakeholder was very clear, however, that an OOI should serve Ontario first and that success in doing so would lead the world to come to us.*
- **Privacy** – As we contemplate a shared, collaborative approach to services and support to students and prospective students, as well as the use of emerging technologies, social media tools, etc., the privacy and confidentiality of student information is an important consideration for an OOI. While it is implicit in our dialogue that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained, going forward, an OOI will need to develop appropriate privacy and confidentiality policies.

I am not suggesting that these items are not of critical importance, but simply observing that they are not “top of mind” to most stakeholders engaged to date.

It is also the case that not much mention has been made of the scale of investment needed for an OOI – its budget. Ball park figures are not being offered by stakeholders to indicate what might be needed to deliver on the expectations that respondents have for its work. While scale of funding was not spoken of, the need for ongoing, reliable and core funding was.

Conclusion

The productive working sessions with these thirty-eight stakeholders show clearly that there is a readiness and commitment to move forward to action. Indeed, it would not be unfair to say that these stakeholders are “poised” for action if the design of an OOI and its scope of work reflect the dialogue from the working sessions summarised here. While there were some key differences between stakeholders, they have much in common.

In closing, I would like to thank all who participated in the working sessions and all who helped the dialogue take place. *My only regret is that due to time constraints, I was not able to meet with a greater number of stakeholders.*

Maxim Jean Louis

Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

Updated: April 29, 2011

Stakeholder Working Sessions with Special Advisor

- Alpha Plus
- Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario
- Centre for e-Learning, University of Ottawa
- College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading
- College Student Alliance (CSA)
- Colleges Ontario
- Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca
- Consortium des universités de la francophonie ontarienne (CUFO)
- Council of Ontario Universities Online Learning Working Group
- Heads of Libraries & Learning Resources (HLLR)
- Le Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien (RÉFO)
- Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM)
- Online IPE: A Virtual Learning Centre
- Online Working Group of Council of Ontario Universities
- Ontario Committee on Student Affairs
- Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)
- Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning (OCULL)
- Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL)
- Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION)
- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance
- Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance
- Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute
- Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB)
- Sioux Hudson Literacy Council (SHLC)
- TFO
- The LearningHub/Avon Maitland School District School Board
- The Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO)
- TVOntario/Independent Learning Centre

Working Sessions with Individuals with Unique Perspectives on Online Learning

- John Baker, President and CEO, Desire2Learn, Incorporated
- Dr. Sara Diamond, President, Ontario College of Art & Design
- Linda Franklin, President & CEO, Colleges Ontario
- Bonnie Patterson, President and CEO, Council of Ontario Universities
- Anne Sado, President, George Brown College
- Dr. Stan Shapson, Vice-President, Research & Innovation, and Karen Kraft Sloan, Senior Advisor on Environmental Research, York University
- Dr. Alastair Somerlee, President, University of Guelph
- Dr. Jeff Zabudsky, President, Sheridan College

Advice from 13 Canadian and World Experts

In early March 2011, as part of the process of engagement in my role as Special Advisor to Ontario's Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute, I invited a number of prominent Canadian and international experts in online and distance education to respond to five key questions:

1. What is the biggest challenge facing online and distance learning in general today?
2. What is the biggest opportunity that online and distance learning in general has today?
3. Keeping in mind the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity for online and distance learning today, what is the one overriding step that Ontario ought to take as it attempts to take its online learning system to the next level?
4. Conversely, what is the one thing it should absolutely avoid?
5. Which current or emerging technology has the potential of radically transforming online and distance learning?

By the end of March, thirteen of twenty experts had responded and provided insightful, thoughtful and often very detailed responses to these questions. More responses are anticipated during the balance of April, and as they are received, this summary and analysis will be updated.

This paper provides a summary of their responses. Quotations are made directly from their responses, but the specific source of each quotation is not named, in keeping with the commitment to confidentiality made at the time of the request to the experts. The respondents are all experienced practitioners, planners and authors with many years of work between them in the field of online and distance learning – in excess of three hundred years experience between them. Their insights are a part of the mosaic of ideas that are helping to inform the work of establishing an Ontario Online Institute (OOI).

All knew that Ontario is a leader in learning in general and in online learning in particular. Ontario has some 20,338 courses, 762 programs and 495,619 online course registrations at the post-secondary level and is widely seen to have been pursuing online learning for a considerable time. Publicly-assisted colleges, universities, literacy and basic skills and other training providers are all directly engaged in the development of a robust range of online learning services and offerings. The respondents are also aware that several leading technology companies – including Research in Motion and Desire2Learn – are based in the province. The challenge I put to them was to think about the future, given this strong history and current basis for Ontario's leadership in online learning in Canada.

It was not intended that the community of world-wide scholars approached would agree or produce consensus. Rather, we wished to challenge them to look critically at what it would take for Ontario to achieve the next level of development in online learning.

These are extracts of the views of the experts who have submitted responses to the questions. They are not the views of their organizations or my own, as Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities or those of the Government of Ontario.

Maxim Jean-Louis
Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities of an Ontario Online Institute

Question 1: What is the biggest challenge facing online and distance learning in general today?

There was a great deal of alignment around the challenge here being quality (theme 1 of this summary), but there was also a focus on access (theme 2). Responses are summarized below.

Theme 1: The Challenge of Mindful, Quality Online Design, Development, Deployment and Delivery of Courses and Programs

"the biggest challenge is how to deliver education in a meaningful and pedagogically appropriate way..."

"Online technologies should be integrated in a continuum of teaching and learning activities"

Several of the respondents, in different ways, focused on the challenge of creating courses for learners which fully leverage the technology and social networks while engaging students in meaningful learning. Some refer to this as "the quality" of online courses and others as "appropriate curriculum and pedagogy" for an online course, but their intent is the same: the mindful design of learning experienced by engaged learners which fully leverages the available technology.

There are many components to this:

(a) Support for Pedagogy and Improved Instruction

Several respondents pointed to the need for faculty and instructional staff to be engaged in the work of design and delivery through a deep understanding of learning, learning processes, student engagement and instructional design. The call was for more and more focused faculty training.

"Lack of pedagogical training for instructors – they have no alternative model of teaching other than the one they were brought up in – i.e. a teacher controlled didactic model. This lack of theory prevents them from redesigning teaching to take advantage of new technologies and also results in their hostility to and fear of technology."

"the question of course / program quality continues to be an issue...measures will need to be in place to satisfy those who continue to believe that "real learning" can only take place in classrooms."

[There is a need for] "a comprehensive, tiered faculty development program (especially for adjunct faculty) at various points in their instructional careers (beginning, experienced and senior levels)..."

Others also noted that the model of the classroom, as a basis for understanding teaching, is not the most appropriate starting point for the design of an online learning experience. While the classroom places the instructor at the centre of the action (in most cases), in the online environment this need not be the case. Instructors can take a different role – coach, mentor, guide, facilitator, and evaluator – and learning can be more "personalized" than in a classroom cohort model. Yet, many courses are simply trying to capture classroom experiences online.

"We could do better" was the underlying theme of these respondents.

(b) Focusing Less On Technology and More On Learning and Teaching

Technology changes all the time and there is a danger of "faddism" – the example used by one is 3D TV and the use of 3D in educational simulation. This requires students and institutions to make technology investments for marginal gains in learning and engagement. What is more important is the design of learning as an experience irrespective of the technology available.

Indeed, several commented on the short shelf life of technology and the need for caution in embracing "next generation" technologies as a platform when those seeking to use it for design, development and delivery have yet to master the pedagogy of learning for blended and online learning.

"The major thing the OOI should avoid is focusing too much on the technology instead of focusing on the pedagogy and continuum of approaches to teaching and learning in both classroom and distance contexts."

(c) Support for a Team Based Approach to Course Creation Based on Principles of Instructional Design

Some respondents pointed to their understanding of the problem, which they saw in terms of trying to take what is done in a classroom and make it available online rather than redesigning the experience from first principles of pedagogy. That is, the task of design isn't one of "conversion" but is one of creation, taking full account of the intended outcomes.

Several suggested that a team approach with a faculty member and other subject matter experts who had received some training in pedagogy, a technology advisor who fully understood the potential of the learning platforms and resources available, and an instructional designer makes the ideal team, though not all institutions have access to the required instructional design capacity.

[What is needed is] "a course development model that includes a team of subject matter experts and a course maintenance model that not only includes content maintenance, but also integrates experience and data gathered from course offerings over time."

(d) Formalizing Quality Assurance

One respondent cautiously noted that Robert Pirsig (author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*) made clear that defining quality is a start of the journey to insanity: "that is why quality cannot be defined. If we do define it we are defining something less than Quality itself". Nonetheless, seeking to better understand quality in online learning emerges as a theme under this heading.

This is what the Gates Foundation, which is developing a framework for analyzing the quality of online learning courses, is seeking to do, according to Bill Gates:

"One step that would help is having course standards that break down all of the various things to be learned into a clear framework and connecting the online material to this framework. Over time I think a large community of contributors and reviewers will develop and allow the online material to be easy to access and a crucial resource for all types of education. There will need to be a number of pilots to see how to take this resource and blend it into the classroom experience. I plan to spend a lot of time on this to see what would help get it to critical mass¹."

Some of the respondents saw formalizing quality, in terms of peer review and external assessment and validation, as a key step in improving overall quality of online learning and blended learning. They said that rigor was the key:

"...there must be attention paid to research based best practices – there are many who are using intuition and personal preferences to make decisions about how to deliver instruction at a distance. This must not happen. Possibly the best way to insure a rigorous curriculum is to demand visibility. Courses and instruction should be open for review, available for critique, and required to be accountable."

"The challenge is to find the balance between high quality online education and the adoption of new technologies."

This suggests a research agenda should be a part of the work of an OOI as it relates to quality around the theme of online learning for exemplary teaching.

Theme 2: Access to Learning

Whilst this was seen by many as a subset, some saw this as the central challenge. One wrote:

"The biggest challenge for online and distance learning is the challenge the field was developed in the first place to address, which is the provision of access to learning opportunities to those who would not otherwise be able to obtain them. It is a fact that even in a country with as many opportunities as Canada, there are many people who would like to be able to obtain a higher education, but who are unable to because of time, resources or distance. Online and distance learning represents our best, and probably only, solution to this demand."

and others suggested that this issue is at the heart of the political rationale for an investment in such an organization as an OOI. They also see the link to the question of costs:

¹ See <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/annual-letter/2010/pages/education-learning-online.aspx> (Accessed April 3rd 2011)

"The great expansion of Canada's educational sector that has enabled a full 65 percent of the population under 44 to obtain a post-secondary diploma² is now under increased stress because of the need to reduce federal and provincial budgetary expenditures. This stress extends across the full educational spectrum, from kindergarten to graduate programs, and in all fields. Though some feel distance and online learning will not reduce costs³, many are looking to new technologies not only to increase access but also to reduce the load borne by government. The alternative, as we have already seen, is increased tuition, reduced access and reduced services.

This creates a central issue revolving around the strategic design of distance and online learning. If these are viewed as simply the replication of existing educational design in an online environment, it is unlikely costs will be decreased, which decreases the likelihood that they will support any great degree of increased access at all. It is therefore only through the creation of new delivery models that e-learning will achieve both the primary and secondary goal. The challenge of defining this new delivery model is the central issue of the field, and most discussion and research revolves around it."

which shows that access and costs are strongly linked to the core issue of mindful design and learning strategy employed.

Put bluntly:

"most analysis of higher education cost projector show that we are not going to be able to afford to educate our citizens if we do not make significant changes. Distance learning can provide a more cost effective way of educating students with better outcomes if designed properly. Doing so could have a major impact on education public policy..."

Others put the problem more directly in terms of enabling those who start their college, university or training at a traditional program, but are unable to complete but yet wish to do so – enabling more in the workforce to secure the qualifications they need to sustain employment and move into higher paying jobs.

This social policy dimension is emphasised by one respondent in particular, who also points to the commercial potential of online learning:

"If we understand the value of online and distance learning in this way – as the creation of the essential service that makes possible a commercial marketplace of enhanced products and services – then it becomes clear that the greatest opportunity for online and distance education today is the possibility of the creation of that marketplace, not only in Canada but globally. There is a clear link between educational attainment and economic activity generally⁴. Increasing our capacity as an education provider increases markets not only nationally but also globally.

Though the provision of accessible online and distance learning is often depicted as though it were a charity⁵ it is in fact an efficient and effective economic development strategy. The development of expertise, the growth of target markets, and the preparation of a recipient population all flow from the provision of basic and fundamental learning services and products. The first jurisdiction that successfully leverages its capacity to deliver an effective and low-cost online learning model to its own population will be in a position to offer a wide range of goods and services globally."

Question 2: What is the biggest opportunity that online and distance learning in general has today?

Respondents saw three major opportunities: (a) personalizing learning; (b) bringing high quality learning and academics into the workplaces and homes of individual learners; and (c) the growth of a global market. Let us look at each of these in turn.

Theme 1: Personalizing Learning

This term means different things to different people. Some use the term "personalization", meaning that each person can find their own routes to achieving desired learning outcomes. Others prefer the term "differentiated instruction", where learners and instructors agree on a preferred route to learning for each learner, given the objectives of the course. This also has some implications:

2 HRSDC. 2011. Educational Attainment. <http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=29>

3 Tony Bates. 2011. Strategic Thinking About E-Learning. <http://www.tonybates.ca/2010/06/11/strategic-thinking-about-e-learning/>

4 Bloom, Channing and Chan. 2005. Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/Resources/278200-1099079877269/547664-1099079956815/HigherEd_Econ_Growth_Africa.pdf

5 OECD. 2007. Giving Knowledge For Free. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/35/7/38654317.pdf>

"...teaching has to be redesigned to achieve these goals..."

and

"there is a wonderful increase in the range of learning activities and pedagogies available to instructors and learners...but learner support will transform the work..."

In other contexts, personalization has been taken to refer to when students take courses – to timetable choice. "Anywhere, anytime" is a mantra of some online learning providers (especially with respect to training and work-based learning). This is not the sense in which any of the respondents referred to this topic: all were focused on what was learned and how rather than when.

Theme 2: Making Quality Learning Widely Available

When the Government of Ontario refers to an OOI the phrase "bringing the best Professor from Ontario's post-secondary institutions into the homes of those who want to pursue higher learning" is often used⁶. This idea is extended significantly by respondents in two distinct ways: (a) by seeking to leverage worldwide expertise, not just local; and (b) by improving quality for all courses, including essential skills and apprenticeship. They say:

"take advantage of the expertise all over the world through video conferencing or curriculum development...students can take courses not offered by their own host institutions, but seen as amongst the best available in the world."

and

"Learner choice is key – the ability to take advantage of the learning option that best suits you at the time. We are learning that one size doesn't fit all, even down to the day of the week. ... over time, with the accumulation of various types of content, with technology that enables participation and collaboration, with efforts at the program (not just course) level, greater flexibility and access is possible."

By being flexible and being able to personalize learning, the suggestion from some is that this would make post-secondary education both attractive and possible to many who currently are not engaged in the system.

Theme 3: Growing a Global Market

Estimates of the size of the global online market vary. One source suggests that the value of the global market in 2009 was \$27.1 billion, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 12.8% to reach \$49.7 billion by 2014. As one respondent noted:

"It is not difficult to reconcile the rapidly expanding commercial e-learning market with the publicly-mandated (and publicly-funded) K-12 and post-secondary system. The former, simply, requires the latter. The existence of a continually expanding global market in online and distance learning products and services depends crucially on a market well-positioned to consume those products, which presupposes a certain level of education to begin with. In essence, education and educational services represent one of the largest examples of the value-add online services distribution model. Just as Skype offers a free basic service to all customers, education providers in general offer a free basic service to all potential learners⁷."

This translates, at the institutional level, to opportunities to:

"...expand a geographic footprint by extending a national and global reach. The subsequent increase in revenue from higher number of students comes with the added bonus of not having to build larger campuses, [which in turn] lead to lower carbon emissions..."

While there are cautions – programs need to be designed with international students in mind and the curriculum has to have "routes" through it which can be adapted by those from different nations, there is an opportunity here.

⁶ See the Ontario Budget 2011 for an example.

⁷ Osterwalder and Pigneur. 2007. Business Model Ontology. <http://www.slideshare.net/stevendiebold/business-model-ontology>.

Question 3: Keeping in mind the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity for online and distance learning today, what is the one overriding step that Ontario ought to take as it attempts to take its online learning system to the next level?

The idea behind this question was to ask respondents to focus their knowledge and understanding on the challenges facing Ontario – a jurisdiction which all have had connections with.

Here we secured a wide range of responses from the respondents – one pointed out that, of the five questions, “this is by far the most difficult one to answer”. In part because it requires a knowledge and understanding of the current state of the online learning developments in Ontario, but also, in part, because the respondents were asked to “land” on one suggestion.

The major theme of the suggestions focused on the need to link developments in Ontario to evidence and data – a call for evidence-based decision making. Here is the range of suggestions made from this evidence standpoint:

1. *“Collecting data on outcomes and costs so that Ontario can answer the fundamental question, “how much learning for how much cost?”. ...In order to improve what we are doing we need data on completion rates and learning outcomes...Are these better, worse or the same as those achieved on a traditional campus? Using data to drive improvements is extremely important.”*
2. *“...designing online instruction that is tied to appropriate evaluation that is driven by informed research, and allows for differentiated learning (e.g. multiple pathways for students to progress through a single course) and multiple evaluation possibilities...”*
3. *“Various learning analytics systems exist worthy of consideration. Using such a system may support evidence based improvements that can lead to substantial gains in student learning, retention and course progression.”*

Others suggested that there should be a strategic vision that is bold, compelling and challenging. For example:

“It should be possible to obtain a university-level education, from kindergarten to graduate degree, and be recognized for that achievement, without once ever having to step into a school or attend an in-person class. That is not to say that every student could, would or should learn in this way. There is no end to the number of studies asserting that students are unable to manage their own learning by themselves⁸. But such a change in the depiction of the default model of learning support constitutes an essential first step. ... Such a change represents a transition in outlook from that of scarcity of educational services and resources to that of abundance. It represents a change of outlook from one where education is an essential service that much be provided to all persons, to one where the role of the public provider is overwhelmingly one of support and recognition for an individual’s own educational attainment. It represents an end to a centrally-defined determination of how an education can be obtained, to one that offers choices, resources and assessment. The Canadian educational system is already moving in this direction⁹. The current proposal represents an alignment of resources around the terminus.”

while another respondent suggested:

“Radical change is needed in all post-secondary education systems, and this change is unlikely to come from the institutions themselves. On the other hand, change has to come from within, rather than be imposed from outside. So whatever the government/OOI does, it needs to be both bold yet at least not be so off-putting that it provokes strong institutional resistance. What I think it needs to do is provide inspiration, a concrete vision for learning in the 21st century built around the intelligent use of technology for teaching and learning, but present this vision as a topic for discussion and development through the key stakeholders. We are talking about a 10 year process here, but real change in higher education will not come quickly without it being disastrous.”

and another:

“As we open up learning, and allow people to grab or view learning objects from Berkeley, UBC, York, the U of T, or MIT, we need to create mechanisms to assess and endorse what they are doing. We need credentialing systems for independent lifelong learners. Increasingly, learning will be self-paced or guided. What Western Governors University (WGU) is doing with competency assessments and mentoring through online contents is one way for this to happen. Ontario might create its own unique model. But we do need more such models as well as more leadership in this space. I think that informal learning is increasingly becoming the norm. Nontraditional is, in a way, becoming traditional.”

8 Guri-Rosenblit and Gros. 2011. E-Learning: Confusing Terminology, Research Gaps and Inherent Challenges. <http://www.jofde.ca/index.php/jde/article/view/729/1206>

9 Downes. 2008. Options and Opportunities. <http://www.downes.ca/post/44259>

Others were less bold, focusing more on the need for decision making to be collaborative:

"All stakeholders in the educational community should be involved in the planning and managing [of] the growth of online learning. Certainly, teachers must be involved, as must administrators, politicians and tax payers. Even vendors should play a minor role."

And there were several comments about the need for adequate resourcing:

"ensure adequate financial and educational support for design of online courses and the professional development of facilitators."

Seeing common themes here is difficult, but a key insight comes from one respondent who thinks that Ontario needs to rethink learning in a radical, collaborative way that changes the nature of teaching and learning along the lines outlined above. The implication, they suggest, of this work is that an OOI should have a "sunset date" which represents a target date for when "distance education and online learning are integrated into teaching and learning, not treated separately – planning to move toward such an integration and phasing out should begin early in the Institute's mandate."

Question 4: Conversely, what is the one thing it [Ontario] should avoid?

In keeping with the comments reviewed to date, the key message here is very direct: "avoid focusing too much on the technology instead of focusing on the pedagogy and continuum of approaches to teaching and learning". While others expressed this sentiment in different ways, it is the dominant response.

A related response concerns an OOI – it should, according to one respondent, not be "a separate, standalone institution" awarding course and program credentials, but instead should "coordinate and manage all Ontario online learning opportunities to be modelled on consortia such as the Open Universities Australia". In this work, another suggested, it needs to be properly funded: "without long-term, multiple year commitments it [is] impossible to plan". It also needs to be nimble and flexible and not tied to a single theory of learning, instructional design or to a single technology. It should also avoid duplication of existing services.

Perhaps one respondent in particular highlights a key message which cuts across all of the responses to the questions. They say:

"One of the great strengths, not only of the Canadian educational system, but also systems that fare equally well in international testing, is the generally decentralized nature of the system. Educators and school boards in places like Canada and Finland have a high degree of latitude in how they manage learning and support¹⁰. Respect for excellence and equity are key to their success¹¹."

Question 5: What current or emerging technology has the potential of radically transforming online and distance learning?

Two themes emerged here.

Theme 1: Don't be preoccupied with the technology

There were some cautions associated with the response to this question, with several respondents repeating the suggestion that Ontario should "avoid focusing too much on the technology instead of focusing on the pedagogy and continuum of approaches to teaching and learning."

Nonetheless, some observations were made:

1. Make use of technologies which reduce the role of the Professor and give more emphasis to the learner. *"Far too few distance programs really take advantage of instructional software by integrating into the design of courses. Social media sites are almost irrelevant...Modern day instructional software allows students to get individualized feedback,*

¹⁰ OECD. 2004. Raising the quality of educational performance at school. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/17/8/29472036.pdf>

¹¹ Pasi Sahlberg. 2009. The Finnish Model: Excellence Through Equity and Autonomy. http://www.strategie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Paris_Presentation_14_Dec_09.pdf

for example, on homework problems and quizzes – this is where we need more emphasis.”

2. “The answer is not a single technology, but rather a set of technologies that (ironically) help us bring back some of the higher quality engagement possibilities than can exist in face to face environments. For instance, some of the low cost, high quality web conferencing options that exist today hold tremendous promise.”

Theme 2: If you want to lead, focus on mobile learning

But the most dominant response was to focus on mobile learning:

“As predicted in the early days of online learning¹², the personal access device, or ‘pad’, is proving to be transformative. Apple’s release of the iPad in 2010, combined with this year’s release of the iPad 2, has resulted in what might be called a tablet boom¹³. In addition to the iPad, Motorola is shipping Xoom and Samsung is producing the GalaxyTab, both run on Google’s Android operating system. Amazon continues to produce the Kindle while Barnes and Noble distributes the Nook. The leading Canadian tablet is RIM’s Playbook. The impact has been immediate, widespread and game-changing. As one small example, the e-textbook market, which was 1.5 percent of the overall market a year ago, has doubled this year and will reach 25 percent of the market within five years¹⁴. Far more than simply an e-book reader, the iPad already supports hundreds of educational applications, ranging from games to communication apps to organizers to math and music¹⁵. It is not possible to measure how much learning is taking place using these new platforms, as the bulk of it is informal. It is however hard to believe it is anything but substantial. The arrival of pad computing is also significant in that it represents the first significant realignment of the technology infrastructure in ten years. Through 1995 to 2010 most computer users lived and worked in an environment dominated by the Mac and the PC, the desktop and the laptop. In this environment operating systems manage system communication and storage, and applications are loaded and installed locally, using (and dependent on) the operating system for most user interface and functionality.”

and:

“It is not only the technology but also the devices that have given new meaning to mobile learning – it is the learner on the move accessing learning wherever they are that has the potential of changing the future of online education. How we incorporate and engage with these new technologies in an educational manner has the potential of changing the future of online education.”

and finally:

“my vote goes to mobile technologies, because they replicate the technologies that people will be using outside education. Thus while any jurisdiction could be involved with OERs, Ontario has significant competitive factors in the mobile learning area, if it can get them all together. However, again on the design side there are a number of challenges, and the OOI could be a very useful organization for bringing together education and the corporate side to make Ontario a world leader in this area.”

but, all of these comments are imbued with caution:

“Emerging technologies should not be expected radically transform education and training. New tools must be incorporated into a plan that is based on the principles of effective teaching and learning. To assume an emerging technology or an existing technology will transform education is to assume that distance education will somehow be better, or more effective, or a replacement – distance education should not be labeled as the force that radically transforms education – to assume this will doom distance education to failure. Certainly, distance education will be a disruptive technology, but as we know, this is not bad. Rather, Christensen’s theory of disruptive technologies provides an explanation of the role distance education is playing in the evolution of teaching and learning.”

I am also reminded of the famous comment by Nils Bohr, physicist, who said “prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.”

12 Downes. 1998. The Future of Online Learning. <http://www.downes.ca/future/>

13 IDC. 2011. Nearly 18 Million Media Tablets Shipped in 2010 with Apple Capturing 83% Share; eReader Shipments Quadrupled to More Than 12 Million, According to IDC. <http://www.idc.com/about/viewpressrelease.jsp?containerId=prUS22737611>

14 Rob Reynolds. 2011. Digital Textbooks Reaching the Tipping Point in the U.S. Higher Education — A Revised Five-Year Projection. <http://blog.xplana.com/reports/digital-textbooks-reach-the-tipping-point-in-the-u-s-higher-education-a-revised-5-year-projection/>

15 Eric Sailors. 2010. iPhone, iPad and iPod touch Apps for (Special) Education. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/24470331/iPhone-iPad-and-iPod-touch-Apps-for-Special-Education>

What this group of experts did not say

What is interesting here is what this group of experts did not say. Three things are striking here.

First, they did not say that Ontario needs to abandon anything. In fact, their encouragement is all to leverage and develop the asset base in which Ontario's publicly-assisted colleges, universities, literacy and basic skills and other training providers have invested over the last three decades. Building on strengths is at the heart of the challenge they identify.

Second, they did not focus on technology in a way that many writers and authorities do. For example, the instructional design discussion groups in LinkedIn are dominated by concerns and issues over technology. While some saw a need to make smarter use of technology, the thrust here is to focus on quality improvements in pedagogy.

Finally, no one suggested that we need a new institution or a new form of institution. While some in the Ontario system do suggest that Ontario needs an Open University, these Canadian and international experts saw the need to leverage existing assets, improve all forms of instruction and use technology wherever it was an appropriate means to enable learning, encourage engagement and achieve learning outcomes required for a course or program.

It was never anticipated that these respondents would provide direction or produce consensus – the purpose was to engage a broad community of scholars and leaders in online learning in the work of engagement so that their perspectives and understanding could be included in the work of design and development for an Ontario Online Institute. As you have seen, they have provided insights, ideas and challenges that will inform the work currently underway. Their contributions are appreciated.

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Appendix One: List of Respondents

(in alphabetical order)

Dr Tony Bates is the author of eleven books, including *Technology, e-Learning and Distance Education*, *Managing Technological Change: Strategies for College and Universities Leaders*, *Effective Teaching with Technology in Higher Education* and *National Strategies for e-Learning*, published by UNESCO. His latest book, *Managing Technology in Higher Education: Strategies for Transforming Teaching and Learning* is due to be published in May, 2011. He is on the editorial board of six journals specializing in distance education and educational technology. He has worked as a consultant in over 40 countries. Clients include the World Bank, OECD, UNESCO, national ministries of education, and several U.S. state higher education commissions.

Dr Curtis Bonk the author of the *Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs* (2006), *Empowering Online Learning: 100+ Activities for Reading, Reflecting, Displaying, and Doing* (2008), and *The World is Open: How Web Technology is Revolutionizing Education* (2009). He is now Professor of Instructional Systems Technology at Indiana University and adjunct in the School of Informatics. Professor Bonk was a Senior Research Fellow with the Advanced Distributed Learning Lab within the Department of Defense.

Dr Tom Carey is a Professor of Management Sciences in the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Waterloo, currently on leave to lead collaborative projects to enhance teaching and learning across higher education institutions and systems in Canada and the U.S. as a Visiting Professor at San Diego State University and Visiting Senior Scholar in the Chancellor's Office of the California State University. He is also Principal Investigator for the FACCTS program for collaborative course transformation teams in the California community colleges, based at San Diego State and funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Dr Diana Oblinger is co-author of *What Business Wants from Higher Education*. She is co-editor of seven books: *The Learning Revolution*, *The Future Compatible Campus*, *Renewing Administration*, *E is for Everything*, *Best Practices in Student Services*, *Educating the Net Generation*, and *Learning Spaces*. She is president and CEO of EDUCAUSE, formerly served as EDUCAUSE vice president responsible for the association's teaching and learning activities and the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative. Dr Oblinger is a former Executive Director of Higher Education for Microsoft and IBM Director of the Institute for Academic Technology.

Stephen Downes works for the National Research Council of Canada, where he has served as a Senior Researcher affiliated with the Learning and Collaborative Technologies Group, Institute for Information Technology. Downes specializes in the fields of online learning, new media, pedagogy and philosophy. Downes is the publisher of the daily newsletter, *OLDaily*, which is distributed by web, email and RSS to thousands of subscribers around the world. He has published numerous articles both online and in print, including *The Future of Online Learning* (1998), *Learning Objects* (2000), *Resource Profiles* (2003), and *E-Learning 2.0* (2005).

Lars Kullerud is the President of the University of the Arctic (UArctic). His academic background is in Precambrian Geology and Isotope Geochemistry, development of geostatistical methods for petroleum resource assessments, as well as assessments of the Arctic environment. Lars has authored or co-authored several publications in environmental sciences and geosciences, on both a regional and international level.

Dan Holland pioneered and is a former Chair of *Ontario Learn*. He is currently the Dean of the Schools of Business and Management Studies, Biosciences and the Centre for Justice Studies at Loyalist College.

Dr Jennifer Jenson is Associate Professor of Pedagogy and Technology in the Faculty of Education at York University. She is currently co-editor of *Loading: The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* and president of the Canadian Game Studies Association. She has published widely on education, technology, gender, design and development of digital games, and technology policy. She is co-editor of *Worlds in Play: International Perspectives on Digital Game Research* with Suzanne de Castell and lead author of *Policy Unplugged* with Chloe Brushwood Rose and Brian Lewis.

Dr Grace Lynch is an international scholar and expert on the application of emerging technologies and applications in education. She is Senior Project Manager at Open Universities Australia.

Dr Stephen Murgatroyd is Chief Innovation Officer at Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca. He was the team leader of the world's first on-line executive MBA in 1993 as the first Executive Director of the Centre for Innovative Management of Athabasca University. He has undertaken evaluations of programs and in 2000, Dr. Murgatroyd was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in e-learning from Athabasca University in recognition of work in this field.

Judy Roberts is an experienced consultant in the field of online learning. She developed the series *Lifelong Learning on the Information Highway/ L'apprentissage à vie sur l'inforoute* and co-edited *Why the Information Highway? Lessons from Open and Distance Education*. Her work has taken her to countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Guyana, Bermuda, the West Indies, Venezuela, Brunei, India, Singapore, Norway, Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom and France. She has acted as the senior staff member of projects such as telemedicine in Newfoundland and Labrador, Telemedicine for Ontario in Toronto and many other leading edge and innovative projects.

Dr Michael Robinson is a professor of Instructional Technology & Distance Education at Nova Southeastern University, editor of the *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* and *Distance Learning Journal*. Dr. Simonson has written/co-written four books in the areas of instructional technology and distance education. He currently also holds the position as the CEO of Technology Research and Evaluation.

Dr Carol A. Twigg is President and CEO of the National Center for Academic Transformation and an international expert in using information technology to transform teaching and learning in higher education. She initiated the IMS Global Learning Consortium, which is establishing interoperable technical standards for online education and training.

Advice from Private Sector Providers of Platforms, Services and Infrastructure for Online Learning in Ontario

Ontario is home to several leading private sector providers of platforms, services and infrastructure to online learning in Ontario. From the makers of mobile devices, such as Research in Motion (RIM), to those who have developed world-class learning management systems, such as Desire2Learn, to small, medium and large companies developing learning applications ("apps"), simulations and serious games, Ontario is a technology hub.

If Ontario intends to take a leadership role in Canada and North America in the development of online learning and supporting students, then it needs to harness the knowledge and experience of these companies and find synergies between their work and the needs of students and the providers of online learning.

Some are already highly engaged in developing these synergies. For example, both IBM and Polycom have developed partnership strategies with Ontario educational institutions aimed at maximizing the value of IT investments so as to produce engaging student learning. EMBANET has been closely involved with OntarioLearn since its inception.

A strategy under consideration for an Ontario Online Institute is to look at the potential of innovation partnerships between corporate organizations and education and training providers. For example, if Ontario wishes to lead North America in the effective utilization of mobile learning, what would occur if the leading developers of the technology platforms worked collaboratively with education and training providers to develop new approaches (and new technologies) for learning? How could companies help the developers of courses and programs better understand their technologies so that more could be achieved with the same level of investment?

To explore these and other matters, I asked several leading companies to respond to a series of questions. These were:

1. Where does investment in the development of online learning technology "fit" in your company strategy?
2. What are the opportunities for your company to use online learning for professional development, training and re-training?
3. What gets in the way, do you think, of more college and university courses being available online?
4. If Ontario wants to be the lead online learning jurisdiction in North America at the post-secondary level, what would your company be able to do to help Ontario get there?
5. What kind of partnership arrangements would you like to see with:
 - a) Government of Ontario
 - b) Colleges
 - c) Universities
 - d) An Ontario Online Institute
6. When it comes to next generation technologies – e.g. mobile learning – what steps should we embark on as an OOI to fully leverage this opportunity?
7. How can your company help Ontario be the world leader in mobile learning?
8. There are emotional and attitudinal barriers to the use of online learning – e.g. certain professions are opposed to its use – do you think an alliance of public and private sector organizations can "shift" these views? If yes – how / if no, why not?
9. What emerging technologies – whether from your own company, your partner's or others – do you think might be "game changers" for online learning?
10. What one thing could an Ontario Online Institute do that would have a real impact on online learning in Ontario and, at the same time, be helpful to you?
11. What's the most important thing an OOI could do to signal that Ontario intends to be a leader in the world in online learning?

While not all respondents answered all of the questions and not all of their responses are reproducible for reasons of competitive disclosure¹, we can offer a summary of the key themes and responses to several of these questions.

All were supportive of the development of an Ontario Online Institute and the thrust to grow online learning as part of the Government of Ontario's Open Ontario Plan. They saw socio-economic development, commercial and learning gains flowing from such a focus and wished to indicate their support. While some were patently pursuing their own commercial interests in some of their responses (indeed, some of the questions suggested that they should), overall there was a commitment to supporting the work of an OOI in constructive and meaningful ways.

Maxim Jean-Louis

Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

April 2011

¹ Some are explicitly confidential

Five Major Themes

When we look overall at the responses to these eleven questions, five major themes emerge. These are:

1. Think K Through Grey;
2. Teaching Online is a Paradigm Shift;
3. Focus on Outcomes and let the Technology Support the Outcomes – Don't Focus on Technology;
4. Think Infrastructure; and
5. Keep an Eye on Trends.

Let us look at the responses in more detail.

1. Think K Through Grey

Online learning and, more particularly, blended learning is a feature of elementary schools, junior and senior high schools, all colleges and universities, literacy and essential skills training and apprenticeship training. It is also a way to increase the number of adults, whether working or retired, who are engaged in learning. Focusing on just one segment of the learner population for example, college and university students, limits thinking and technological opportunities. Imagine a province with a common platform for K through Grey that constantly adapted to emerging technology and learner demand and needs. Or, take mobile learning through the use of smartphones and touch screen "pad" devices, what could Ontario do if it saw the technology as a common platform?

One respondent put this very clearly:

"[Think of a K through Grey Partnership] which would allow all educational and government agencies to benefit from the learning opportunities available within a single environment. This would also facilitate a great deal of intelligence sharing and would allow all parties to benefit from economies of scale."

There are clear commercial benefits from a single platform approach at a jurisdictional level but, as New Mexico has found, there are also substantial cost savings from reduced duplication of licenses and less complexity. What may be lost is the innovative capacity of instructional designers.

2. Teaching Online is a Paradigm Shift

The task of developing a course to be pursued by a learner online or the task of developing components of a classroom course which are online is widely misunderstood. Many see the work as "converting" what is done in a classroom to an online format. The real work is to leverage the power of technology to create powerful, engaging learning experiences which have strong educational outcomes. Several respondents referred to this. For example:

"Teaching online is certainly a paradigm shift and for teachers that cannot realize the changes that are required to not only teach online, but to do so successfully, those teachers will significantly prevent adoption. This will be most apparent in the students, because classes offered online that are not designed for an online forum will result in struggling and frustrated students and likely declined enrolment. Issues resulting from poorly delivered online courses may be prevented by proper teacher training. Prior to migrating teachers to an online space we recommend that you train your teachers to ensure that they understand what it "actually" means to teach online and what makes an online class successful and engaging to the students."

and another wrote:

"There are many common misconceptions about online education and most are based on a lack of understanding or inadequate training. Unfortunately, Higher Education in general, continues to struggle philosophically with the stigma that online learning is somehow inferior to established on ground or campus-based programs. The documented and highly publicized financial aid abuses and lack of course instruction quality within many of the for-profit American universities have further perpetuated this mentality. In contrast, a meta-analysis and review of online learning studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009 showed substantial evidence that online learning was equal to or even better in some cases to campus based learning, helping to challenge or discredit the traditional dogmas and belief systems within Higher Education circles."

and finally:

"It is important to state that online learning is most successful when it is engaging and interactive. Universities have found they have a very low retention rate through course completion if they do not find a way to make the student feel connected and engaged. In order to increase student retention, online programs are blending online tools with HD Video solutions, allowing collaboration with the students."

The importance of pedagogy as the core challenge is recognized by all respondents. They have a different approach to the implications of the "new paradigm", reflecting their own technology preferences. Nonetheless, there is a strong understanding that online isn't just "PowerPoint plus".

Others noted that this paradigm shift has implications for faculty agreements, the organizational design and accountability frameworks for universities and colleges and for our understanding of intellectual property. Clayton Christensen, in his 2008 book *Disrupting Class - How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns*², points to these issues and suggests implications for education and training providers and faculty/instructors. The respondents generally see online learning as disruptive to the current operating paradigms of providers.

3. Focus on Outcomes and let the Technology Support the Outcomes – Don't Focus on the Technology

"Ontario Online Institute needs to increase post-secondary attainment, raise the level of education for prospective students across the board."

This emphasis on using technology to create added value in terms of learning outcomes appears in different ways across all of the responses. The issue is not *"which technology"* but *"what outcomes are you seeking to improve?"* The issues are how value can be added and will an investment in technology be a part of the way to create that value?

Indeed, one respondent is clear that the focus on outcomes needs to be "agnostic" with respect to technology. With the myriad of mobile devices available today, an OOI must create an environment that is inclusive of many vendors both for today, and tomorrow. They note that:

"The rate of change in computing technology and end-user devices is increasing, not slowing down, [so] the government must ensure that online content is 'open' and therefore 'future-proof'."

Key to the outcome focus is quality in terms of the design, development, deployment and delivery of online learning, therefore, proper standards. One noted:

"There are several organizations that are helping to define the interoperability standards required to enable this heterogeneous environment. One of the organizations that we recommend that OOI consider is the IMS Global Learning Consortium which focuses on standards for learning content, curriculum and testing. Secondly, we recommend that OOI participate in one or more cloud computing standards groups that are emerging around internet-delivered services. Two of these are the Open Cloud Consortium and the Open Cloud Manifesto."

4. Think Infrastructure

Costs of online learning and blended learning are not insignificant. There are some developments which could change the way in which infrastructure for learning is understood – cloud computing, mobile learning and hand-held devices such as RIM's PlayBook and Apple's iPad. Any move to see Ontario as a North American leader in mobile learning has to give consideration to the technology backbone (e.g. broadband access) and infrastructure (e.g. the technology platform). While each provider had its own views, there is a strong sense that learners will require access to both synchronous learning (audio and video conferencing and real time activities, such as team simulations) as well as asynchronous learning opportunities.

One strong view from a world-leading player is to ensure that course development and learning design, while taking account of the power of technology, is agnostic about the specific brand of the technology. For example, rather than build a course around a particular learning platform, courses should run on any device, any platform, anywhere, and at any time. This will be critical if courses are intended for a global market, not just a local market.

5. Keep an Eye on Trends

As we have noted technology changes rapidly - the functioning community-wide internet is approximately 6,500 days old. One key task for an OOI is to keep an eye on the trends which could help achieve improved outcomes, as well as higher levels of student engagement. Several helpful suggestions were made. For example:

"The Horizon Project, www.nmc.org/horizon, is in its tenth year and provides an excellent source of the value and impact of new technologies in education. The 2011 report [documents] expected "game changers" for online learning – including mobile devices, electronic books, augmented reality, serious gaming, learning analytics, and gesture-based computing."

and

"One of the best ways to understand next generation technologies is to benchmark how others in higher education are already successfully using mobile learning to enhance their courses and overall accessibility."

It is not just that the technology will change, so will learner expectations:

"the major "game changer" will be the move to mobile learning and the student expectation that everything possible from a computer will be possible from a mobile device. Along with mobile learning, we also believe that students will expect to be able to communicate with their teachers synchronously and asynchronously in different methods. Namely students will expect to be able to connect with their teachers via instant message ... or text message. Otherwise, adaptive/differentiated learning will also be very instrumental in changing learning because students, especially those involved in credit recovery opportunities, will expect to be taught and delivered curriculum based on their learning style, speed, availability, etc. The ability to deliver differentiated learning [will become a critical differentiator]."

Conclusion

Each of the companies who responded had very specific suggestions as to how their own products and services could be used in support of the work of an OOI and the education and training providers in building on and taking Ontario's strong success in online learning to the next level in support of students. These are confidential. What I have included here are the key overall messages which the respondents were willing to share publicly.

This summary represents my reading of the information provided and in no way reflects the explicit opinions of the companies involved. I have looked at their responses and tried to see the "pattern" across all.

Companies Who Provided Responses

Blackboard
EMBANET - COMPASS
IBM Canada
Pearson
Polycom

Additional Responses Anticipated from

Adobe Systems
Bell Canada
CISCO Systems
Desire2Learn
Microsoft Canada
Research in Motion
Telus

**NEW FRONTIERS FOR MORE ACCESS TO
FLEXIBLE, QUALITY ONLINE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR ONTARIO'S STUDENTS**

**FIRST REPORT TO MINISTER OF TRAINING, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
REGARDING AN ONTARIO ONLINE INSTITUTE**

Maxim Jean-Louis
Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities
for an Ontario Online Institute

April 1, 2011

BACKGROUND

On February 23, 2011, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities announced my appointment as Special Advisor to the Minister for an Ontario Online Institute.

My mandate is to undertake a stakeholder engagement process related to the establishment of an Ontario Online Institute and provide advice and recommendations to the Minister on its implementation.

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Since my appointment, I have undertaken the following seven activities:

- 1 – I reviewed the responses shared by five stakeholders following the March 2010 announcement of an Ontario Online Institute including:

- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA)
- Joint submission from the Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario / Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations / Ontario Public Service Employees Union / Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario)
- Colleges Ontario
- Council of Ontario Universities
- Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca

As part of my review, I prepared an analysis of the areas of common ground and the areas where additional work is required to find common ground amongst these five stakeholders.

- 2 – I developed an Engagement Guide (see Appendix A), including an OOI policy framework developed by the Ministry, to provide sufficient background on the engagement process and to guide my working sessions with stakeholders.

- 3 – I organized working sessions with the following twenty-one stakeholders in Ontario's education and training sector:

- Alpha Plus
- Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario
- College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading
- College Student Alliance (CSA)
- Colleges Ontario
- Consortium des universités de la francophonie ontarienne (CUFO)
- Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca
- Online IPE: A Virtual Learning Centre
- Online Working Group of Council of Ontario Universities
- Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)
- Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning (OCULL)
- Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL)
- OntarioLearn
- Ontario Public Sector Employees Union (OPSEU)

- Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION)
- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance
- Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB)
- Le Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien (RÉFO)
- Sioux Hudson Literacy Council (SHLC)
- TFO
- TVOntario/Independent Learning Centre

I further organized working sessions with the following seven individuals who bring a unique personal perspective to online learning in Ontario:

- John Baker, President and CEO, Desire2Learn, Incorporated
- Dr. Sara Diamond, President, Ontario College of Art & Design
- Linda Franklin, President & CEO, Colleges Ontario
- Bonnie Patterson, President and CEO, Council of Ontario Universities
- Anne Sado, President, George Brown College
- Dr. Alastair Somerlee, President, University of Guelph
- Dr. Jeff Zabudsky, President, Sheridan College

On March 28, 2011, I prepared a summary of “What I Heard” (see Appendix B) during the engagement process with these stakeholders and individuals. It was shared with all stakeholders engaged to date.

I have additional working sessions planned with stakeholders and their feedback will be reflected in an updated “What I Heard”.

4 – I posed the following five key questions regarding online learning to a growing list of Canadian and international experts in the field of online learning:

1. What is the biggest challenge facing online and distance learning in general today?
2. What is the biggest opportunity that online and distance learning in general has today?
3. Keeping in mind the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity for online and distance learning today, what is the one overriding step that Ontario ought to take as it attempts to take its online learning system to the next level?
4. Conversely what is the one thing it should absolutely avoid?
5. Which current or emerging technology has the potential of radically transforming online and distance learning?

I am receiving a positive response from the experts and will continue to collect responses to inform my final report.

5 – I posed the following eleven questions to a series of private sector providers of platforms, services and infrastructure for online learning:

1. Where does investment in the development of online learning technology “fit” in your company strategy?
2. What are the opportunities for your company to use online learning for professional development, training and re-training?
3. What gets in the way, do you think, of more college and university courses being available online?
4. If Ontario wants to be the lead online learning jurisdiction in North America at the post-secondary level, what would your company be able to do to help Ontario get there?
5. What kind of partnership arrangements would you like to see with:
 - a. Government of Ontario
 - b. Colleges
 - c. Universities
 - d. An Ontario Online Institute
6. When it comes to next generation technologies – e.g. mobile learning – what steps should we embark on as an OOI to fully leverage this opportunity?
7. How can your company help Ontario be the world leader in mobile learning?
8. There are emotional and attitudinal barriers to the use of online learning – e.g. certain professions are opposed to its use – do you think an alliance of public and private sector organizations can “shift” these views? If yes – how/if no, why not?
9. What emerging technologies – whether from your own company, your partners or others – do you think might be “game changers” for online learning?
10. What one thing could an Ontario Online Institute do that would have a real impact on online learning in Ontario and at the same time be helpful to you?
11. What’s the most important thing an OOI could do to signal that Ontario intends to be a leader in the world in online learning?

I am receiving a positive response from the technology companies and will continue to collect responses to inform my final report.

- 6 – Several of our colleges and universities have recognized the challenge of moving from in-class to online delivery and have developed short courses or learning experiences for instructors new to distance education and online instruction or those who wish to enhance their skills.

I initiated a survey of publicly-assisted colleges and universities to get a better understanding of the existence and number of such courses and programs, focusing on those which are dedicated to the use of technology in the development and adaptation of their courses for distance delivery and the delivery of such courses via online and distance learning.

I am receiving a positive response from the institutions and will continue to collect responses to inform my final report.

- 7 – I organized working sessions with two internal Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities groups:

- Internal Working Group, Ontario Online Institute
- Divisional Executive Committee, Employment and Training Division

The results of these seven initiatives have informed the recommendations contained in this report.

I want to acknowledge the enthusiasm and willingness of all stakeholders who met with me. During this engagement process, I made every effort to meet with stakeholders face-to-face and at their location. Given the fact that our goal is to engage during this process, my view is that it is important for me, as Special Advisor to the Minister, to make the effort to go and meet the stakeholders on “their own turf” as opposed to asking them to come to me or use audio or video conferencing to link up with them. While this does put considerable pressure on my schedule in terms of energy, time and travel, I am confident that this approach is more effective in the long term, and it also gives me an opportunity to interact with a wider range of individuals from each stakeholder at their location.

There is a wealth of experience and knowledge in online learning that I am tapping through this approach.

KEY FINDINGS OF ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

As I note in “What I Heard”, three key findings became exceptionally clear during these working sessions:

1. There is a broad, general agreement amongst stakeholders on the six features of an Ontario Online Institute – Planning and Gap Analysis, Single Portal, Shared Resources, Support Services, Research, and Marketing – as outlined in the Ministry’s Policy Framework and Engagement Guide circulated in advance of the working sessions.

A seventh feature – the need for professional development for faculty/instructors – also has broad agreement.

2. There is a consensus amongst the stakeholders around the key elements of the guiding principles such as wider choice, increased access, and greater flexibility – with quality as an overriding driver. It became clear, very quickly, that all stakeholders are focused on the needs of present and prospective students and that their needs must drive this process.

I summarize this consensus with the following statement that could ultimately be used as a vision for online learning in Ontario and for an Ontario Online Institute.

Our vision for online learning is to provide Ontario’s students with greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology.

3. There is general agreement on the need for one or two “quick wins” that can be launched immediately. Potential “quick wins” could include the portal, shared services and the development of support services.

Seven specific themes emerged from the engagement process:

- Theme One: It is, First and Foremost, about Students and Learning
- Theme Two: Student Affordability
- Theme Three: It’s About Leveraging the Existing Infrastructure and Investments
- Theme Four: It’s About Growing the Range of Offerings
- Theme Five: It’s About Innovation
- Theme Six: It’s About Overcoming Obstacles
- Theme Seven – It Is Time to Act!

I have elaborated in greater detail on each of these themes within the “What I Heard” document.

THE ASK

I have included a detailed ask within this report (see Appendix C) which focuses on four specific actions for an Ontario Online Institute, a three year roadmap and a financial commitment. A common message amongst the stakeholders throughout the engagement process was the need for a specific financial investment to make an OOI a reality.

The four specific actions are:

- Action 1: Improving learning opportunities for students
- Action 2: Developing best and next practices
- Action 3: Evidence-based decision support services
- Action 4: Strategy and planning

Full descriptions of each of these actions are included in the detailed ask.

The total request for the first three years is for \$25 million to be allocated in support of these actions as follows:

YEAR	BUDGET AS (\$M)
2011-2012	\$9.0
2012-2013	\$9.0
2013-2014	\$7.0
TOTAL	\$25 MILLION

ADDING VALUE

An Ontario Online Institute must bring value first and foremost to students and to all stakeholders within Ontario's education and training sector.

Within Appendix D (Adding Value), I have outlined twenty-three different ways that an Ontario Online Institute can bring value to:

- Students
- Faculty and Instructors
- Educational Institutions
- Government of Ontario
- Ontario's economy

An Ontario Online Institute will succeed when it can deliver added value across the sector and in support of Ontario's economy and future prosperity.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ONLINE LEARNING IN ONTARIO

It is clear from the first phase of my work that there is a tremendous potential for online learning to play a key role in the education of Ontarians and support the Government's ambitious target of a 70% post-secondary attainment rate.

In order to ensure that we move forward in the right way with online learning, a detailed overarching policy framework for online learning is required to establish the vision, outline principles and layout a series of strategic directions that will guide the development of online learning and government investments. An OOI will be one component of this framework.

In the next phase of my work, I will be developing a draft framework for the Minister's consideration.

CONCLUSION

The past two months have been an exciting and exhilarating time for me. The goodwill, the enthusiasm, and the enormous amount of work that is taking place throughout the education and training sector tells me that there is a unique opportunity to take online learning to the next level in Ontario.

I am confident that with our collective commitment to students, we can provide Ontario's students with greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology.

Respectfully submitted,

Maxim Jean-Louis
April 1, 2011

ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

Maxim Jean-Louis
Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and
Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

February 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 2

Setting the Stage..... 3

Responses from Stakeholders 6

Agenda for Stakeholder Dialogue 7

Contact Me 8

INTRODUCTION

In the 2010 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Ontario announced its intention to create an Ontario Online Institute (OOI) to support online learning in the province as part of the Open Ontario Plan.

In February 2011, the Honourable John Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, appointed me as a Special Advisor to the Minister to lead an engagement process around key issues and make recommendations to the Minister regarding an Ontario Online Institute.

I have a mandate from the Minister to develop recommendations for the design of an OOI, and an implementation plan to assist publicly-assisted institutions and online learning networks to establish an OOI which will be built on the foundation of existing online delivery in Ontario.

As part of part my work, I will engage with the postsecondary education sector on ideas and options for taking this initiative forward and I will be deliver final recommendations to the Minister in the spring. A copy of the Minister's announcement is included in Appendix A.

Since the announcement in the 2010 Speech from the Throne, five stakeholders have developed responses to the government's announcement including:

- Colleges Ontario, February 2011
- Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, May/June 2010
- Council of Ontario Universities, August 2010
- Joint submission from the Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario / Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations / Ontario Public Service Employees Union / Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario), December 2010
- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, August 2010

As I move forward with this assignment, I will be engaging these stakeholders along with other stakeholders who have not necessarily prepared a response.

I developed this Engagement Guide as a tool to guide my dialogue with the stakeholders to ensure a consistent conversation with each stakeholder and to assist me in preparing my recommendations for the Minister. I am looking forward to our dialogue.

Maxim Jean-Louis

SETTING THE STAGE

Let me start this engagement process by sharing with you the following personal perspective (some might say bias) that I have publicly expressed in various occasions since April 2010:

- Ontario has a vibrant and productive online learning system with at least six building blocks (publicly-assisted colleges and universities, OntarioLearn, OCULL, ILC, Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, ORION);
- In many ways Ontario, yes, leads Canada, if not North America, in terms of online and distance learning;
- An Ontario Online Institute is a call to action from the Premier and the Minister to take the Ontario online learning system to the next level;
- Embedded in the challenge the Premier and the Minister have posed to all of us in the sector is what I would call an “innovation imperative”; and
- Stakeholders are keen to contribute albeit from different perspectives and strongly held views, critical elements for a vigorous and constructive dialogue.

In his announcement of my appointment, the Minister outlined a policy framework for an Ontario Online Institute including Objective, Guiding Principles, Potential Functions, Proposed Structure and What is Out of Scope for an OOI (see Appendix A). The Ministry’s option integrates the key elements of the recommendations outlined in the responses from the stakeholders.

Flowing from the Minister’s outline, there is no question that as a sector we need to focus on a very clear outcome for an OOI.

OUTCOME

Building on the Minister’s Objective, we need to work together towards an outcome where Ontario residents have increased access to a wider choice of high quality flexible learning opportunities in English and French any time and anywhere in Ontario, through collaboration between publicly-assisted colleges, universities, other online learning and training providers and networks.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In my view, an OOI can add value to the Ontario's online learning system by:

- Fostering inter-organizational collaboration and a system-wide approach
- Identifying barriers to online learning and helping to fill gaps
- Providing system-wide services where necessary

THREE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- **Wider Choice** – Increase online course offerings and promote inter-institutional collaboration and improved use of resources by sharing course development and delivery services leading to more choice for students and improved pathways for student mobility.
- **Increased Access** – Advance access for all learners, particularly for learners who are prevented from attending in-class education as a result of barriers (e.g. financial, geographic, physical, work-related) and provide a suite of support services targeted to the needs of online learners.
- **Greater Flexibility** – Offer greater flexibility to learners through alternative modes of delivery, including a blending of online and in-the-classroom delivery.

As a sector, we will drive these three key elements through:

- **Cost effectiveness** – Leveraging existing investments in the system and bringing further economies of scale to online learning in Ontario.
- **Innovation** – Students have driven innovation and an OOI should be a venue to take advantage of student ideas and technology to bring forward innovation in teaching and learning.
- **Coordination** – Enhancing the coordination of the current system around such activities as course and program content development, delivery and sharing of resources.
- **Quality Assurance** – Developing assurance standards and incorporating processes to maintain high quality online education.
- **Partnerships** – Reaching out and partnering with other organizations delivering education and training for programs (e.g. employers, community literacy organizations).

POTENTIAL FUNCTIONS

- Planning and Gap Analysis – Facilitate and support the development of online courses and programs where there are gaps.
- Single Portal – Develop and host a single web portal where students and prospective students can access information on online programs and courses and student support services.
- Shared Resources – Establish a repository of shared online learning resources and facilitate collaboration between all participants.
- Support Services – Ensure the provision of core support services for students and faculty.
- Research – Facilitate research into the best methodology and use of technology for teaching and learning purposes.
- Marketing – Promote the OOI brand provincially, nationally and internationally.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE

A not-for-profit corporation whose members will be publicly-assisted universities, colleges of applied arts and technology and other Ontario online learning networks.

The Board of Directors and Board Chair would be selected by the members of the corporation in accordance with normal corporate legal requirements. The Board would select and employ a Chief Executive Officer.

WHAT IS OUT OF SCOPE FOR AN OOI:

Will not be a degree-granting institution that would compete with the existing institutions.

Will not directly deliver courses, assess students, grant credentials, nor provide instructional guidance on course content for students.

RESPONSES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

As noted earlier, five stakeholders developed responses to the April 2010 announcement of an Ontario Online Institute in the Speech from the Throne.

As I start my work as Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute, my first step has been to review and analyze the responses from these five stakeholders looking for areas of common ground amongst the responses and areas where additional work is required to find common ground.

It is clear from the responses that the stakeholders took considerable time and effort to develop thoughtful, well-informed and forward-thinking documents that will serve as a strong foundation for my work as Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

With the focus placed squarely on the needs of students by all five stakeholders, it is not surprising that the analysis revealed a broad level of common ground across nine areas, and only three areas where additional efforts will be required to find common ground. A copy of my analysis is attached for your review in Appendix B.

As part of the engagement process, I will be validating these responses with the respective stakeholders and taking note of any changes to their views since their original publication.

My analysis does have its limitations in that it represents my interpretation of the responses. If I have misinterpreted some of the points being made in the responses by the stakeholders, I will attempt to correct them in an updated version of the analysis based on my validation with the individual stakeholders.

AGENDA FOR STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

The following agenda will be used for each stakeholder dialogue.

1. Introduction of participants.
2. Maxim Jean-Louis, Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, briefs the stakeholder on the framework for the engagement dialogue.
3. Validation of stakeholder's response (if available), identification of any revisions to the stakeholder's response and opportunity for the stakeholder to highlight key points of its response.
4. Ministry's Option:
 - a. Review the Ministry's outline of the potential functions of the proposed OOI which integrates the key elements outlined in the responses from the stakeholders, and ask any points of clarification.
 - b. What would the stakeholder change/revise in the Ministry's outline?
5. Is there an alternative to the Ministry's outline that the sector should consider?
6. What are the two initiatives that an Ontario Online Institute could undertake in a first phase in 2011 - 2012?
7. How will the stakeholder contribute to an Ontario Online Institute in collaboration with one or more stakeholders?
8. What will online learning in Ontario look like in 20 years if the current trends continue? Imagine the stakeholder has the ultimate ability to change what online learning will look like in 20 years – how would you innovate differently? What would online learning look like in 20 years as a result?
9. Any other information/thoughts/ideas the stakeholder would like to share with the Special Advisor regarding an Ontario Online Institute?

CONTACT ME

Maxim Jean-Louis

Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

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SUBJECT: FW: ONTARIO ONLINE INSTITUTE MESSAGE

Attachments: Fact Sheet - Feb 22 Final.pdf; Fichier de renseignements - Feb 22 Final.pdf; Objective and Guiding Principles - Feb 22 - final (5).pdf; Objectif et principes directeurs - Feb 22 - final.pdf
From: Postsecondary Accountability (TCU) [mailto:PostsecondaryAccountability@ontario.ca]
Sent: Wednesday, February 23, 2011 8:36 AM

To: wlthomas@opseu.org
Cc: Brown, Joanne (TCU); MacPherson, Barbara (TCU)
Subject: Ontario Online Institute Message
Sent on behalf of the Honourable John Milloy, Minister of Training,
Colleges and Universities:

Dear Colleagues,

In the 2010 Speech from the Throne, the Premier announced the government's intention to establish an Ontario Online Institute as part of the Open Ontario Plan to create jobs and strengthen the economy. I believe an online institute will have a pivotal role in our collective effort to provide learners with more flexible, quality postsecondary options beyond time and geographic boundaries. An Ontario Online Institute will be established in a manner that builds on the foundation of existing online activities and initiatives in Ontario. There is recognition that developing this online institute is complex and requires special expertise and experience to ensure success. As a result, I have appointed Mr. Maxim Jean-Louis, Chief Executive Officer of Contact North, as a special advisor to make recommendations on how best to facilitate the establishment and roll-out of an online institute. Mr. Jean-Louis will provide a report making recommendations for the design of an Ontario Online Institute. He will also provide an implementation plan to assist publicly assisted institutions and online learning networks to establish this institute on the foundation of existing online delivery in Ontario. I have asked Mr. Jean-Louis to initiate discussions with stakeholders during this process and develop recommendations based on the outcome of these discussions. Mr. Jean-Louis will act as an independent advisor to the Minister, separate from his role with Contact North. Mr. Jean-Louis can be contacted at:

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Sudbury – Ontario
P3J 1L5
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Email: maxim08@attglobal.net

Further, in spring 2010, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities requested the assistance of all postsecondary education institutions in completing a survey on e-learning activity and future plans. I am pleased to share the results of these surveys in the attached fact sheet. The results are very positive. There is substantial e-learning activity taking place across both college and university sectors, and it is evident that there has been a significant expansion in e-learning over the past five years. In addition, the vast majority of colleges and universities are planning to expand and enhance their elearning offerings and support services over the next several years. A policy framework for an Ontario Online Institute has been developed based on the survey results, submissions from stakeholders and further research completed. This proposed framework includes the objective and guiding principles, as well as the potential functions for an online institute. For more information, please refer to the attached document entitled "Objective and Guiding Principles for the Establishment of an Ontario Online Institute". I have asked Mr. Jean-Louis to use this document as the basis

for discussions and further input from stakeholders.

I look forward to your collaboration as we move forward with this important initiative.

Sincerely,
John Milloy
Attachment

OBJECTIVE AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

For the Establishment of an Ontario Online Institute
Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities

February 22, 2011

CONTENTS

1. Introduction: Online Learning in Ontario3

2. Context.....4

3. MTCU Policy Framework for an Ontario Online Institute5

3.1 Objective and Guiding Principles.....5

3.2 Potential Functions.....6

4. Purpose of Policy Framework and Expected Outcomes7

1. INTRODUCTION: ONLINE LEARNING IN ONTARIO

Ontario has a strong foundation for postsecondary elearning and distance education. Initiatives to encourage and develop online learning have been undertaken since the 1980s, some with government support, others through collaborative partnerships between educational institutions.

Over 10,000 online courses and 800 programs are available through Ontario publicly-assisted universities and colleges, literacy and other training organizations.

Contact North | Contact Nord, a bilingual distance education and training network, supports the delivery of courses and programs to residents in small, rural and remote areas of Northern Ontario since 1986. Since 2007, elearnnetwork.ca has been supporting access to online PSE opportunities to residents in small, rural and remote areas in Ontario.

OntarioLearn, a consortium of Ontario's 22 English colleges, develops and delivers online courses through a shared portal.

Other significant initiatives in the elearning landscape in Ontario include the Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning (OCULL), e-Channel, the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) at the secondary level and the Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION).

An Ontario Online Institute will build on the success of these current initiatives to help expand and enhance online learning in Ontario.

2. CONTEXT

An Ontario Online Institute (OOI) will help increase the range and flexibility of postsecondary education (PSE) opportunities available to students and help reach the target of a 70% postsecondary attainment rate in Ontario.

An OOI will help meet the demand for elearning opportunities and position Ontario as a leader in high quality online learning by building on existing initiatives and strengthening overall coordinating in online learning.

An Ontario Online Institute (OOI) is intended to be an organization of publicly-assisted colleges, universities and training networks whose primary goal is to increase postsecondary online learning opportunities for students.

An OOI will build on Ontario's strong foundation in elearning and distance education and would not involve the creation of a stand-alone degree-granting institution. In preparation for the establishment of an OOI, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) has gathered best practices from Ontario and other jurisdictions and reviewed a range of stakeholder submissions.

Based on this research, a policy framework for the proposed OOI has been developed. This framework includes an objective for an OOI and guiding principles that contribute to achieving that objective (section 3.1), as well as proposals regarding several key components for an OOI (section 3.2).

3. PROPOSED POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR AN ONTARIO ONLINE INSTITUTE

3.1 OBJECTIVE AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The proposed OOI will incorporate the following objective and guiding principles:

Objective:

Ontarians will have access to postsecondary learning in English and French through an Ontario Online Institute, in which postsecondary education providers will work in partnership to deliver high quality, innovative, and engaging learning opportunities beyond time and/or geographic boundaries.

Guiding Principles:

- Choice – Increase online course offerings and promote inter-institutional collaboration and improved use of resources by sharing course development and delivery services leading to more choice for students and improved pathways for student mobility.
- Access – Advance access for all learners, particularly for learners who are prevented from attending in-class education as a result of barriers (e.g. financial, geographic, physical, work-related) and provide a suite of support services targeted to the needs of online learners.
- Flexibility – Offer greater flexibility to learners through alternative modes of delivery, including a blending of online and in-the-classroom delivery.
- Cost effectiveness - Leverage existing investments in the system and bring further economies of scale to online learning in Ontario.
- Innovation – Students have driven innovation and an OOI should be a venue to take advantage of student ideas and technology to bring forward innovation in teaching and learning.
- Coordination – Enhance the coordination of current system around such activities as course and program content development, delivery and sharing of resources.
- Quality Assurance – Develop assurance standards and incorporate processes to maintain high quality online education.
- Partnerships – Reach out and partner with other organizations delivering education and training for programs (e.g. employers, community literacy organizations).

3.2 POTENTIAL FUNCTIONS

The proposed OOI could have the following functions:

Potential Functions:

- Planning and Gap Analysis - Facilitate and support the development of online courses and programs where there are gaps.
- Single Portal - Develop and host a single web portal where students and prospective students can access information on online programs and courses and student support services.
- Shared Resources - Establish a repository of shared online learning resources and facilitate collaboration between all participants.
- Support Services – Ensures the provision of core support services for students and faculty.
- Research - Facilitates research into the best methodology and use of technology for teaching and learning purposes.
- Marketing – Promote the OOI brand provincially, nationally and internationally

3.3. PROPOSED STRUCTURE

- A not-for-profit corporation whose members will be publicly-assisted universities, colleges of applied arts and technology and other Ontario online learning networks.
- The Board of Directors and Board Chair would be selected by the members of the corporation in accordance with normal corporate legal requirements. The board would select and employ a Chief Executive Office

3.4. WHAT IS OUT OF SCOPE FOR AN OOI?

- Will not be a degree-granting institution that would compete with the existing institutions.
- Will not directly deliver courses, assess students, grant credentials nor provide instructional guidance on course content for students.

4. PURPOSE OF POLICY FRAMEWORK AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The policy framework sets out the objective and guiding principles for the proposed OOI. It also identifies the proposed approach regarding the functions and structure of an OOI. The Special Advisor has been appointed to advise the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities on how to best facilitate the establishment of an OOI that will meet the goals of the government.

Through this process, the Special Advisor is expected to:

- Work with publicly assisted Ontario colleges of applied arts and technology, universities, and existing online learning networks, based on the framework identified above.
- Solicit stakeholders' views and expertise regarding a range of critical issues such as the potential functions, governance structure, and design of an OOI.
- Identify, through discussions with the sector and prospective members of an OOI, a potential implementation plan.
- Provide a report to the Minister including advice and recommendations on implementation.

Since the announcement of the establishment of an Ontario Online Institute in the March 2010 Speech from the Throne, five stakeholders have prepared and shared their responses to the Government of Ontario's announcement.

Responses were prepared by the following organizations:

- Colleges Ontario, February 2011 Draft
- Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, May/June 2010
- Council of Ontario Universities, August 2010
- Joint submission from the Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario / Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations / Ontario Public Service Employees Union / Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario), December 2010
- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, August 2010

As I start my work as Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute, my first step has been to review and analyze the responses from these five stakeholders looking for areas of consensus amongst the responses and areas where there is a lack of consensus.

It is clear from the responses that the stakeholders took considerable time and effort to develop thoughtful, well-informed and forward-thinking documents that will serve as a strong foundation for my work as Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

With the focus placed squarely on the needs of students by all five stakeholders, it is not surprising that the analysis revealed a broad level of common ground across nine areas and only three areas where additional efforts will be required to find common ground.

I am pleased to share my analysis with the sector as it will inform my work as Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities and help me to focus on the areas where additional efforts will be required.

As part of the engagement process, I will be validating these responses with the respective stakeholders and taking note of any changes to their views since their original publication. My analysis does have its limitations in that it represents my interpretation of the responses. If I have misinterpreted some of the points being made in the responses by the stakeholders, I will attempt to correct them in a future version of this paper based on my validation with the individual stakeholders.

I start this engagement process with the following personal perspective or bias that I have publicly expressed in various occasions since April 2010:

- Ontario has a vibrant and productive online learning system with at least six building blocks (publicly-assisted colleges and universities, OntarioLearn, OCULL, ILC, Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, ORION);
- In many ways Ontario, yes, leads Canada, if not North America, in terms of online and distance learning;
- An Ontario Online Institute is a call to action from the Premier and the Minister to take the Ontario online learning system to the next level;
- Embedded in the challenge the Premier and the Minister have posed to all of us in the sector is what I would call an “innovation imperative”; and
- Stakeholders are keen to contribute, albeit from different perspectives and strongly held views, critical elements for a vigorous and constructive dialogue.

It is an honour to have been asked by Minister Milloy to undertake this assignment. I am looking forward to initiating discussions with as many stakeholders as possible in the coming weeks as we move forward to put students first (as we always have) and build an Ontario Online Institute that will serve Ontario’s students, our post-secondary institutions and support the needs of the province’s employers.

Please note my coordinates as of Tuesday, February 22, 2011, until the end of this assignment:

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AN ANALYSIS OF 5 RESPONSES FROM STAKEHOLDERS

REGARDING AN ONTARIO ONLINE INSTITUTE: A SOLID BASIS FOR BUILDING COMMON GROUND

Maxim Jean-Louis
Special Advisor to the Ontario Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

February 23, 2011

CONTEXT

In the 2010 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Ontario announced its intention to create an Ontario Online Institute (OOI) to support online learning in the province as part of the Open Ontario Plan.

In February 2011, the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities appointed Maxim Jean-Louis, as a Special Advisor to the Minister, to lead an engagement process around key issues and make recommendations to the Minister regarding an Ontario Online Institute.

The decision to create an OOI is stimulating a great deal of discussion, reflection and activity within Ontario's post-secondary sector. This activity has included five responses with suggestions about an OOI's scope, shape and strategy from the following stakeholders:

- Colleges Ontario, February 2011 Draft (CO)
- Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, May/June 2010 (CN/EL)
- Council of Ontario Universities, August 2010 (COU)
- Joint submission from the Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario / Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations / Ontario Public Service Employees Union / Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario), December 2010 (JOINT)
- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, August 2010 (OUSA)

The first step in the engagement process is to analyze these responses and take stock of areas of common ground and areas where there is a lack of common ground amongst these stakeholders.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS ANALYSIS

At the outset, let me acknowledge that the analysis is a snapshot of the responses that were shared and that the views of the respective stakeholders may have evolved since the initial publication. For example, COU noted in its response that it focused on first steps and its response was designed as a starting point for a detailed dialogue with stakeholders.

As part of the engagement process, I will be validating these responses with the respective stakeholders and taking note of any changes to their views since their original publication.

My analysis does have its limitations in that it represents my interpretation of the responses. If I have misinterpreted some of the points being made in the responses by the stakeholders, I will attempt to correct them in a future version of this paper based on my validation with the individual stakeholders. Notwithstanding, I hope this analysis provides a useful reference and starting point for a constructive dialogue amongst the stakeholders.

ONLINE LEARNING AS AN ENABLER

The stakeholders who shared these responses accept that online learning is part of the mix of services that needs to be provided so as to:

- Increase affordable and flexible access to learning for Ontario adults and to support lifelong learning.
- Enable students to access programs, credentials and pathways with greater flexibility to access the full range of options from publicly-assisted colleges and universities in Ontario.
- Give students a rich, meaningful and quality learning experience with a high level of interactivity with their instructors and peers.
- Leverage available online courses, programs, services and technology resources in support of learning.
- Provide opportunities for students to complete a full diploma or degree online.

Only one of the responses – Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario/Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations/Ontario Public Service Employees Union/ Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario) (JOINT) – suggested that an Ontario Online Institute should not be a part of the post-secondary landscape or that it was not needed, at least as a new, free-standing institute. Indeed, the remaining four responses identified an OOI as a means for taking Ontario, already a leader in online learning, to the next level of performance in this fast growing area of work. Some, however, are cautious about the extent to which online learning can meet quality learning objectives and accessibility goals. None felt that online learning should be used to replace campus-based learning opportunities for those that want and need it.

The JOINT response states that “...the government [should] make targeted investments to improve access to online postsecondary learning and improve Ontario’s capacity to deliver postsecondary education online, rather than spending money on the creation of an entirely new Online Institute.” (page 5). Rather the JOINT submission recommended instead:

- 1) Investment in existing e-learning initiatives.
- 2) Expanding broadband access.
- 3) Affordability for students.

Where possible, the JOINT submission has been referenced within this document.

My short paper here presents an analysis of the five responses and a summary of nine areas where there is a broad level of common ground, as well as three areas where additional efforts will be required to find common ground.

ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES

Each of the five responses by the stakeholders has been analyzed and the respective views organized around the six areas specified by the Deputy Minister in her January 24, 2011, letter outlining the terms of reference for the Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities:

- Design
- Implementation
- Governance
- Operational Model
- Priority Activities
- Funding

A seventh category has been added - Purpose.

PURPOSE

Four stakeholders – CO, COU, CN/EL, OUSA – agreed that one of the key functions of an OOI is to increase access. All agreed that an OOI was a key mechanism for moving to a 70% participation rate more quickly in post-secondary education and also to avoid undue capital infrastructure costs.

Four stakeholders – CO, COU, CN/EL, OUSA – emphasized the need for broadband Internet access in rural areas to increase access to online learning. In addition, OUSA and CN/EL saw supporting underserved groups as another key role for an OOI. CO emphasized that Francophone and Aboriginal needs must be an integral part of an OOI. JOINT also recognized the need to improve services to underserved groups, but did not believe that online delivery removes the essential barriers to access for such groups. Three stakeholders – OUSA, CO, CN/EL – saw an OOI providing a ‘systems’ perspective for online learning within Ontario, with OUSA and CO particularly looking for an OOI to provide pathways and bridges between K-12, colleges, universities and lifelong learning. COU did mention a ‘systems’ approach, but within the confines of the universities.

DESIGN

Four stakeholders – CO, CN/EL, COU, OUSA – supported a consortium model, building on existing online resources, programs, organizations, skills and experience within the province. CO noted that the consortium should provide services in English and French. All five stakeholders agreed on the need to build on existing courses, programs, and organizations, rather than create a new university or college from scratch.

All five stakeholders agreed that an OOI should provide a means for enabling the sharing of courses and the development of joint online programs.

However, the five stakeholders ranged in their views on the functions to be covered within a consortium. For instance, OUSA stressed the need for an operational model that focuses on student support, faculty support and quality assurance, while COU saw a loose confederation of institutions maintaining most, if not all, of

their current functions in supporting online learning. The JOINT submission did not discuss the idea of a consortium. OUSA also referenced the need to recognize that life-long learning should be a priority and open admissions should be available for students not enrolled in degree programs.

IMPLEMENTATION

All stakeholders saw a key role for CN/EL in implementing and supporting online learning, although there was in general little specificity as to what that role might be.

Four stakeholders – CO, CN/EL, COU, OUSA – mentioned the role of CN/EL's 112 local access centres throughout Ontario as being able to provide useful services within an OOI.

GOVERNANCE

This is one area where there was little common ground, other than an OOI should not be a big bureaucratic organization.

COU wanted to have an OOI within its own coordinating council, with a separate arrangement for the colleges. CO suggested a not-for-profit corporation with a Board comprised of representatives from the organizations and institutions comprising an OOI and other key stakeholders. OUSA was close to the CO position, suggesting a Board of 'contributing' institutions, i.e. those institutions willing to share and take programs from other institutions.

All stakeholders did indicate that CN/EL should also contribute, though not in any specific terms regarding governance.

This is clearly an area that needs more work. Four stakeholders – CO, CN/EL, COU, OUSA – agreed that there should be an overall Board made up of 'contributing' organizations, but whether it should be a unicameral structure (all organizations), a bi-cameral structure (universities and colleges in separate sub-categories) or whether the members are selected by the government remains to be decided.

One factor that will have a heavy influence on this will be the implementation of the credit transfer system, and in particular, the articulation between college and university programs and credentials. The more articulation there is, the greater the argument for a unicameral governance structure. It is not clear whether credit transfer, which goes beyond the question of the transfer of credits for online learning, should be within the mandate of an OOI.

OPERATIONAL MODEL

There was considerable agreement between the four stakeholders – CO, CN/EL, COU, OUSA – that an OOI should offer the following services:

- A web portal of all online programs and courses in the province.
- Facilitation and encouragement of collaborative programming, in the form of transfer or licensing of courses between institutions, joint programs (two or more institutions agreeing on a program of courses from different institutions), or even joint course development (e.g. large first and second year undergraduate courses).
- Funding for course development.
- Credentials should be offered by the participating institutions (not an OOI).
- Identification of best practices in online teaching and learning.
- Development of quality assurance standards for online learning.
- In collaboration with the institutions, specific faculty development opportunities around online learning, particularly regarding innovation and evidence-based best practices.
- Research and evaluation of online learning.

PRIORITY ACTIVITIES

There was limited agreement on this, not surprisingly, as the stakeholders have different priorities.

However, since all five stakeholders placed a high emphasis on increasing access and on collaborative programming, it could be deduced that the short-term goals should be to quickly develop new joint programs around existing courses, and fill gaps in online provision that will enable a credential to be completed, thus quickly ramping up enrolments in existing online courses.

An interim governance structure must be established and an administration or secretariat appointed before an OOI can commence any activities.

FUNDING

All stakeholders agreed extra funding would be necessary, but there was no agreement on what the funding would be for. Nor was there agreement on a business model for the Institute, or on how online students should be supported financially.

Three stakeholders – CO, COU, OUSA – suggested initial start-up funding, plus a commitment of ongoing funding from the provincial government.

OUSA and JOINT wanted a policy to prevent higher fees for online courses, and also wanted financial assistance to be extended to part-time students. CO recommends per student

funding for those participating in online learning should mirror per student funding in the current funding structure.

Thus, together with governance, a financial plan is an urgent priority, as there is no clear common ground around this.

SUMMARY

A visual summary of the responses to seven issues has been developed to facilitate review of the various positions.

ISSUE: PURPOSE					
	OUSA	CO	COU	JOINT	CN/EL
Increase access					
Achieving 70% post-secondary attainment					
Enhance broadband internet					
Serve underserved groups					
Francophone and Aboriginal needs an integral part of an OOI					
Providing a 'systems' perspective					
ISSUE: DESIGN					
	OUSA	CO	COU	JOINT	CN/EL
Consortium model					
Offers services in English and French					
No new college or university					
Build on existing courses, programs and organizations					
Sharing of courses and joint development of online programs					
ISSUE: IMPLEMENTATION					
	OUSA	CO	COU	JOINT	CN/EL

Support role for OntarioLearn					
Support role for Contact North /elearnnetwork.ca					
Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca Local Access Centres as useful services					
ISSUE: GOVERNANCE					
	OUSA	CO	COU	JOINT	CN/EL
An OOI should not be a big, bureaucratic organization					
An OOI within COU Coordinating Council					
Board representing “participant” institutions					
OntarioLearn as supporting player					
Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca as supporting player					
ISSUE: OPERATIONAL MODEL					
	OUSA	CO	COU	JOINT	CN/EL
Web portal of all online courses					
Facilitation of collaborative programming					
Funding for course development					
Credentials offered by participating institutions					
Identification of best practices					
Development of quality assurance standards					
Faculty development opportunities					
Research and evaluation					
ISSUE: PRIORITY ACTIVITIES					

	OUSA	CO	COU	JOINT	CN/EL
Interim governance structure					
Create new, joint online programs around existing courses					
Fill gaps in online programs					
Simplified credit transfer					
ISSUE: FUNDING					
	OUSA	CO	COU	JOINT	CN/EL
Extra funding required					
Initial start-up funding and ongoing commitment					
No higher fees for online courses/financial assistance for part-time students					

CONCLUSION

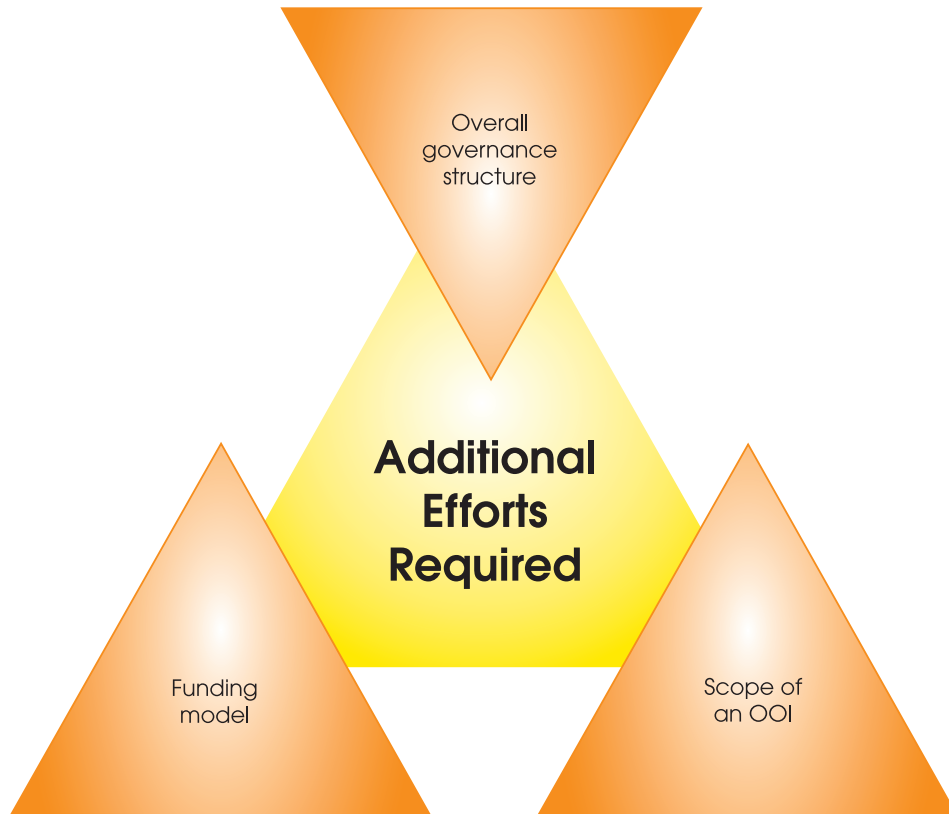
AREAS OF GENERAL COMMON GROUND

The review points to nine areas of general common ground amongst the responses from the stakeholders who expressed support for moving forward with an OOI – Colleges Ontario, Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, Council of Ontario Universities and Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.



ADDITIONAL EFFORT REQUIRED

The review points to three areas where additional efforts will be required to find common ground amongst the responses from the stakeholders who expressed support for moving forward with an OOI - Colleges Ontario, Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, Council of Ontario Universities and Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance.



POTENTIAL OPTIONS FOR AREAS REQUIRING ADDITIONAL EFFORT

1. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OPTIONS

Three emerging models for consideration:

- A Loose Consortium Model – similar to OntarioLearn, but including all levels of courses and programs. An OOI provides the mechanisms by which a student can find a course, complete it and be supported by a combination of shared services (library resources, for example) and unique offerings (courses and programs).
- A New Stand-Alone Institution - modelled on Open Universities Australia which manages course delivery, integrates credits and secures credentials from existing institutions. This is not unlike a consortium model (favoured by CO), but has a more substantive role in the system. What is not favoured is a new degree/diploma granting post-secondary institution.
- A Strategic Hub for Online Learning –brokers developments to address specific system-wide gaps and opportunities through time-limited, project-based activities and investments, enables and encourages collaboration and partnerships between institutions, supports innovation investments and drives learner and technology support. Central coordinated service organization but decentralized delivery.

What is clear from all responses is that more conversations need to be held about the shape of an OOI and its place in the system. No one favours a new credential granting organization. All favour a strategic role, especially in making focused strategic investments to strengthen online learning both in terms of programs, quality and infrastructure. Some favour a transformative role, while others favour a more generalized supportive function. It is clear from the responses that the role of an OOI will evolve – it is not likely to be the same kind of institute in 2020 as it needs to be in 2011.

2. SCOPE OF THE ONTARIO ONLINE INSTITUTE

Different parties see an OOI as having a responsibility for some or all of the following:

- Creating a common information service making sure that all students and prospective students interested in online learning can quickly find reliable and current information about what is available and how to apply.
- Creating a common support service (e.g. knowledge management and library services, access to student financial support) through a portal.
- Creating a best practice framework to support the development of quality courses and programs.
- Funding the development of new online programs and courses.
- Supporting faculty development.

- Dealing with the issue of credit coordination and transfer, which is not an online learning issue per se (though does require technology to support the management of a learner's e-portfolio). While this issue is a system issue, it goes beyond the scope for an OOI as seen by others. The adoption of a system of progressive credentialing (CO) may be a key component of this work.
- Dealing with marketing and promotion of online learning as a means of accessing quality education.
- Promoting Ontario online learning internationally.

COU sees the mandate and scope as evolutionary – it needs to develop in stages, linked to the maturing of the online services and systems in the Province and available resources. The critical question is: what does an OOI need to do in its first three years to become an asset to the system, rather than an encumbrance?

3. FUNDING MODEL

All recognized that an OOI will need focused funding, linked to an agreed mandate and role in the system. The concern – clear across all of the responses and strongly emphasized in some – is that funding be in addition to the existing funding for postsecondary education.

Also, the OUSA and JOINT responses makes clear that students who pursue online learning as part of their programs of study should have equal access to student financial support: equitable access.

WHAT IS NOT SAID?

When reviewing the responses, it is just as interesting to look at what is not said as it is to look at what is said. Here are five additional items that require focused discussion:

- How do we balance the need to leverage online learning to support the access goals of the Province with the need to continuously improve the quality of online learning and enable innovation – what is the relationship between these three domains of work? The CO submission makes direct reference to finding a balance between these three aspects of online learning, but is alone in doing so.
- What is the role of the private sector – both private post-secondary providers and companies offering appropriate technologies – in the work of an OOI? While some are explicitly cautious about the role of the private sector, it needs to be addressed when settling the scope of work and the focus for activity.
- What role, if any, should an OOI play in research and development other than documenting best practices?
- What role, if any, should an OOI play with respect to those professions which are yet to accept online learning as a valid method of obtaining knowledge and skills as part of a credential required for a professional designation or accreditation? Is an OOI to be an advocate as well as a key “utility” for the post-secondary system?
- What role, if any, should an OOI play in ensuring that the sector as a whole has the ability to benefit from economies of scale and make its online programs and courses available to all Ontarians in a cost effective way.

No doubt other issues will occur to others. The purpose of putting forward this paper is to stimulate discussion so we can raise issues and find a consensual approach to online learning.

CONCLUSION

We are starting this process from a basis of broad common ground on some principles. The broad common ground that exists in nine areas across a diversified system bodes well for our discussions.

There is a need for further dialogue and engagement focused on areas where there is not alignment and on the concerns expressed by some (e.g. JOINT) with respect to the strategic intentions which lay behind an OOI. These challenging conversations will take place quickly, so that progress can be made on shaping an OOI that will meet the best interests of Ontario students and the stakeholders in the post-secondary sector.

The challenge for us all is to define the work of an OOI in such a way that it adds value to an already strong system of post-secondary education. We must stay focused on our purpose: to provide outstanding quality learning experiences for Ontario students and to increase the abilities of Ontarians to access such learning.

Maxim Jean-Louis
February 23rd, 2011

WHAT I HEARD...

CONTEXT

Since my appointment as Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute on February 23, 2011, I have held working sessions with twenty-one stakeholders in Ontario's education and training sector.

All stakeholders provided clear, focused and insightful responses to the questions they were asked and they were clear about what an OOI could be, what it should not be and what it needs to focus upon, particularly in the initial phases of its development. This document briefly outlines what was heard during the first phase of this engagement process. It seeks to highlight key opportunities and challenges which have to be addressed in order to proceed with the implementation of an OOI.

Following the March 2010 announcement of an OOI, the following five stakeholders distributed a written response to the announcement:

- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA)
- Joint submission from the Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario / Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations / Ontario Public Service Employees Union / Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario)
- Colleges Ontario
- Council of Ontario Universities
- Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca

The aim of these face-to-face working sessions was to validate the responses from these five stakeholders and seek new insights since publication. I also wished to gain an understanding of areas of concern and to gauge support for an approach to an OOI which would garner support from Ontario's leaders in education and training sector.

In addition to working sessions with these five stakeholders, working sessions were organized with other stakeholders who had not previously prepared a formal or informal response to the announcement of an OOI.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Three key findings became exceptionally clear during these working sessions:

1. There is a broad, general agreement amongst stakeholders on the six features of an Ontario Online Institute – Planning and Gap Analysis, Single Portal, Shared Resources, Support Services, Research, and Marketing – as outlined in the Ministry's Policy Framework and Engagement Guide circulated in advance of the working sessions. A seventh feature – the need for professional development for faculty/instructors – also has broad agreement.

2. There is a consensus amongst the stakeholders around the key elements of the guiding principles such as wider choice, increased access, and greater flexibility – with quality as an overriding driver.
3. There is general agreement on the need for one or two “quick wins” that can be launched immediately. Potential “quick wins” could include the portal, shared services and the development of support services.

SEVEN KEY THEMES FROM THESE WORKING SESSIONS

THEME ONE: IT IS, FIRST AND FOREMOST, ABOUT STUDENTS AND LEARNING

It is clear from the engagement process that the focus for the work of an OOI has to be, first and foremost, on students (including current students, potential students and new types of learners) and their learning. An OOI should not be a “technology driven” initiative, should not be preoccupied only with learning platforms, instructional design or course development, but with students: their learning and the degree to which they are engaged in their learning. The fundamental requirement in the design and work of an OOI has to be to improve the ability of students to learn in an engaged way, to engage more students (including students from underserved groups), and to enable different ways of teaching through effective and meaningful instruction.

The goal of enabling more students to be more successful in their studies has implications:

- 1. Online courses and programs need to be designed in keeping with the most rigorous quality assurance processes so that students feel engaged with the course content, their peers and their faculty/instructor.** An OOI could facilitate the exchange of design ideas which enable this to occur and encourage the development of new approaches to learning which lead to higher levels of student engagement, completion and success.
- 2. Faculty and instructors need to have confidence and skills in delivering online learning.** Not all faculty and instructors are skilled and experienced in offering online courses and in supporting online students. There are some examples of best practice in faculty/instructor development which an OOI could help make widely available and develop supports for those seeking help and assistance while teaching or preparing to teach online.
- 3. Students need assurance that the online learning experience is not “second class”.** Some expressed a concern that the demand for online learning is not the most important message they hear from students. There was a concern expressed regarding quality – will my learning be recognized by employers and others, will it be transferable and will it be of quality? Many noted that there are quality issues related to the design, development, deployment and delivery of online courses – not just to content. Online learning should also not be seen solely as an efficiency device, for example to simply put more students into the same number of courses.
- 4. Growing blended learning.** Most publicly-assisted education and training providers now are engaged in the offering of blended learning, where courses are part classroom-based and part online. Ontario needs to develop a range of approaches to blended learning which support effective and efficient use of both classroom-based and online instruction so as to increase student engagement and promote peer learning.

5. Making a Difference for Apprenticeship Training. Online learning can provide effective and meaningful support to apprenticeship training in terms of the delivery of some of the general courses as well some of the hands on, through state of the art videoconferencing. It provides a basis for supporting those on shift work, as well as apprentices who must travel for work or study.

The Province has adopted a bold strategy to move to 70% of the workforce holding a post-secondary qualification – essential for Ontario to build jurisdictional advantage in a global knowledge economy. To this extent, online learning is also about ensuring that students have access to quality, flexible education and training opportunities in every community in Ontario. Access to learning is thus seen as a strategic investment by Ontario in its socio-economic future.

The Province has also adopted a concerted strategy for literacy including promoting the development of essential skills for adult learners. If an OOI is about students, then it should be about lifelong learners, not just those already in college or university, but also those who are seeking to upgrade their essential skills for work or further studies or seeking to leverage online learning for their workplace learning and development. Students with physical and mental disabilities and Aboriginal learners are also groups in need of additional support for whom online learning can be a major benefit.

An OOI can also be a tool to market and promote Ontario's online learning opportunities from its publicly-assisted colleges, universities, literacy and essential skills and other training providers to Ontario's students and prospective students. All marketing and promotional efforts must be clear that the student or prospective student is registering with the education and training provider and not an OOI.

A number of stakeholders expressed a clear need to have French-language online learning opportunities at college, university, literacy and essential skills levels. Additionally, we need to ensure bilingual support services are available to French-language students, colleges, bilingual universities and other stakeholders.

But the stakeholders wanted to make clear that access in itself is not a sufficient basis for the work of an OOI: it has to be to improve access to and success in quality, flexible online learning. They also spoke loudly of having support services to help students succeed. It is not the intention to create “a revolving door” in which more access is provided, but student completion and satisfaction with that learning is low. Finding a strategic approach to increasing access, engagement, completion and satisfaction should drive the work of an OOI.

THEME TWO: STUDENT AFFORDABILITY

There were two clear messages with respect to student affordability:

1. Students taking online programs and courses should pay no more additional fees than campus-based students.
2. Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) support should be available for students taking online programs and courses and for part-time students. With respect to part-time students, work needs to be undertaken to have a standard definition of a part-time student at the federal and provincial levels.

THEME THREE: IT'S ABOUT LEVERAGING THE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENTS

To borrow a phrase used by a major Canadian bank, “We’re richer than we think”, Ontario leads Canada in online learning at the post-secondary level. It already has some 20,843 online courses, 787 online programs (with more being added all the time) and 495,716 student registrations (2008/09). It has achieved this because of the investment decisions made by Ontario’s publicly-assisted colleges, universities and due to ongoing support for key building blocks such as OntarioLearn, Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning, TVO/ Independent Learning Centre, Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, TFO and ORION.

Stakeholders were clear that an OOI needs to be a facilitator of the next stage of development of Ontario’s online learning by enabling the work of these building blocks, coordinating some activities (e.g. online student services that can be shared across institutions, multi-dimensional information portal building on the existing Ontario Online Learning Portal, provincial digital resources, library projects, province-wide licenses available for applications to develop online content) without seeking to control the development of online learning. This “loose : tight” kind of knowledge-driven organization – typical of twenty-first century organizations which are collaborative, knowledge rich, networked organizations that leverage existing assets, enhance activity and focus the work of many without seeking to “command and control”^[1] – was what the stakeholders envisioned. It needs to be a nimble, responsive, “hub- like” organization which engages with “the system”, leverages the assets and opportunities and keeps abreast of emerging technologies.

Stakeholders were adamant that leveraging the existing infrastructure and investments should not impact the funding currently available to colleges and universities. Do not fund an OOI by cutting core funding to colleges and universities; incremental funding must be available for an OOI. We have to recognize that many of the costs for online learning (faculty/instructors, course development, IT infrastructure), while different than face-to-face, are still substantial and this has to be reflected in funding.

Additionally, literacy and essential skills providers noted they require funding stability and ongoing core funding in order to support students.

Such an organization could pursue some or all of the following:

- **Support a 24x7 information portal that provides reliable, up-to-date and helpful information** about what is available where, when, at what cost and could enable faster and flexible access to information about courses and programs.
- **Support the Scholars Portal, operated by Ontario Council of University Librarians (OCUL)** and help the portal enhance and make its virtual reference services more widely available, supporting more services for students with disabilities (especially visual disability) and enabling a capacity to be scaled-up. There is also a need to work with OCUL and others to ensure that online learners fully understand content rights and use, plagiarism and other issues with respect to academic honesty and intellectual property rights. There could also be support provided to a similar initiative being undertaken by the college sector.
- **Support increased sharing of content and learning objects between institutions** – e.g. academic material, test items and assessment processes, software improvements, strategies for rapid course development.

¹ See, for example, Don Tapscott’s thinking: <http://dontapscott.com/2010/01/08/what-should-be-the-title-to-the-sequel-to-wikinomics/> (Accessed March 19th 2011).

- **Support effective best-practice sharing** on a range of issues from assessment, through course design to online project work and instructional support.
- **Create a co-operative basis for learning platform and application utilization** – ensuring that education and training providers are able to harness the most appropriate technologies (through province-wide licensing via an OOI) for their courses and programs that they wish to offer.

An OOI also needs to be an advocate with government for online learning as a strategic investment and as a focal point for innovation and development.

On matter related to quality assurance for online learning, an OOI also needs to partner with Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS), Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA) and Postsecondary Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB) thus ensuring that quality assurance addresses online delivery issues and keeps up with advances in such areas as mobile learning and learning applications for tablet computers and smart phones. In doing so, the systematic work of the publicly-assisted colleges and universities in maintaining quality assurance processes for curriculum and delivery needs to be both fully supported and acknowledged.

THEME FOUR: IT'S ABOUT GROWING THE RANGE OF OFFERINGS

As has been mentioned, Ontario is already a Canadian leader in online learning. Some stakeholders have identified that there are gaps and there are opportunities to add to the number of fully online programs available to students. Others indicated that current students were not expressing a need for fully online programs.

There is also a need to develop an approach to online learning that has demonstrable success for Aboriginal learners – finding the right balance between different forms of interaction and local support. A need was also identified for French-language online programs and courses at all levels. Recent immigrants, particularly those seeking to upgrade foreign credentials to meet the requirements of Canadian professional bodies, have a need for more online specialized services that could facilitate their transition.

Two suggestions were made repeatedly:

- 1. Gap Analysis** – an OOI could build on the anecdotal evidence that there is a need for more online programs and complete a comprehensive gap analysis and market assessment. There was also a suggestion that the gap analysis look beyond Ontario and internationally.
- 2. Support for Program Development** – the most common proposition is that an OOI would manage a fund to support specific course or program development, based on identified gaps and market research. The work of development and delivery would be undertaken by the education and training providers with the potential to share the courses amongst the providers. The funding for program development should include a specific envelope for the development of French-language programs and courses.

Any effort to increase the range of offerings must recognize and accommodate the different approaches in content development among universities, and also between universities and colleges. What is also clear from the stakeholders is that an OOI should not be developing programs and courses for students or offering credits.

While some specific target markets were suggested by some stakeholders (seniors, workplace training and development to enhance essential skills, learners with disabilities), the focus was more on the need for support for the development of a set of offerings from colleges, universities and literacy and essential skills providers in a comprehensive range of programs, i.e. providing similar offerings to online learners as those available for face-to-face learners.

THEME FIVE: IT'S ABOUT INNOVATION

Almost all emphasized students and pedagogy – the need to develop online learning that is engaging, enticing and enabling and is of such quality as to satisfy the requirements for credit and its recognition and/or transferability. When technology was a focus of a conversation, two key points were most often made:

- **Technology changes rapidly** – it's not possible to develop a “standard” platform for all online activity and services in Ontario, since the platform would need to change quickly as advances in technology occur. What is more important is the development of courses and programs which are as technology neutral (will work on any platform and on any device) and which anticipate emerging technology.
- **Technology inspires innovation** – when those who develop courses see what the technology is capable of (e.g. machine learning, automated translation of documents, quick integration of audio-video, rapid creation of simulation), then innovation occurs.

While some were reluctant to engage with the private sector, many thought that doing so would help with the task of enabling innovation – something that most thought to be a function of an OOI. Such innovation would focus on the implications of emerging technology for pedagogy and for increasing student engagement and success in online learning.

Innovation occurs everywhere in Ontario's education and training system. An OOI could facilitate and support such innovation through the development of communities of interest and communities of practice, clusters of innovation, workshops, research and activities which showcase innovations from our education and training providers and private sector firms, but also from around the world. The challenge is to stimulate the opportunity to innovate, not to try and “manage innovation”.

THEME SIX: IT'S ABOUT OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Stakeholders identified several obstacles to growing online learning in Ontario. These include, but are not limited to:

- **Improved support services for students** that complement the existing support services available from education and training providers.
- **Lack of recognition for online learning** in terms of student financial support, credit transfer and some professional bodies.
- **Lack of understanding of the existing opportunities** – the need for a one-stop shop for information and knowledge about available options for online learning as well as confirmation of its quality and credibility.

- **Lack of broadband access across Ontario** – one aspect of the digital divide is the fact that affordable broadband is not available across Ontario and is not equally available to all Ontarians.
- **Resistance to online learning by some in the academic community, by some students and by faculty/instructors** – there is a perceived “underclass” sentiment about online learning amongst some.
- **Lack of evidence of efficacy of online learning** – many are unaware of the substantial body of research on the efficacy of online learning.
- **Absence of an effective credit transfer system in Ontario** – and a reluctance by some to see online learning as equal to classroom work for some programs and courses.
- **Need to address intellectual and copyright issues** – avoid infringing on workload, academic freedom, intellectual property, and do not use online learning to disproportionately increase part-time instructors as opposed to using full-time faculty.

THEME SEVEN – IT IS TIME TO ACT!

There was universal agreement that it is time to act on an OOI and take online learning in Ontario to the next level. The government announced an OOI in March 2010 and the sector has been waiting for the government to act.

While an OOI cannot deal with all of these issues – for example, credit transfer is about more than online learning and is already being addressed through a more substantial system response than an OOI could provide – an OOI is expected to play a meaningful role in these and other issues.

However, in acting as an advocate for online learning to institutions, government, employers and communities, an OOI should be careful not to try and “boil the ocean” as one stakeholder put it. Each of these challenges requires a collaborative, deliberate and systematic approach in the pursuit of its work overall and with respect to innovation, an OOI needs to respect collective agreements, academic freedom and the intellectual property arrangements operating in each institution, organization or sector.

AN OOI AS AN ORGANIZATION

These seven themes were common across the stakeholders, though many approached these common themes in different ways. What the discussion led to were conversations about an OOI as an organization. It would be incorrect to say that a consensus emerged about the design of the organization, its scope of work and governance, but clear pointers can be discerned from what was said. These are:

1. It should be a small, nimble, focused and umbrella like organization – a focal point and advocate for online learning in Ontario’s education and training system.
2. It should have strong ties to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, but should be independent of it.
3. It should be an enabler, facilitator, funder and engager; not a controller, commander or regulator.
4. It should not offer programs, courses or credentials, but should enable and support those who do offer programs, courses and credentials.
5. It should be a conduit for funding for collaborative program and course development against an analysis of need using new funds over and above those allocated to publicly-assisted colleges, universities and essential skills providers.
6. It should have a mandate that focuses on student learning, quality and innovation.

In terms of its governance, many thought that it needs to have students and their instructors in governance roles, but that some of the key organizations that deliver online learning should also be at the table, including designated French-language representation on a Board of Directors. There were ambivalent views about the potential role of the private sector (both private education providers and technology companies).

There were four cautions:

1. While many recognized that Ontario has many challenges moving to the next stage of development of online learning, there is a need to move in increments and not to try and leapfrog. So as to build ownership and engagement, an OOI needs to focus and develop over time – engaging stakeholders at each stage of its development.
2. Some felt that there was a danger that an OOI could be quickly “seduced” by vendors – which has happened in other contexts. The key here is to be driven by the needs and concerns of students and those who teach them.
3. Some suggested that there was a possibility of an OOI being housed as a branch within the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. While some did not see this as overly problematic, most felt that there was a need for a degree of separation and independence so that online learning could be truly championed within Ontario without concern for “politics”.
4. There was a general view that the term “Institute” should not be part of the eventual name of the organization as it gives the impression that it could be a degree-granting, stand-alone educational institution.

In general, the view was that an OOI should be launched with a compelling vision, based on a strong future view of where online learning will be at some point in the future, but that the starting points should be specific and focused on “quick wins” that will create confidence in an OOI as a collaborative, networked-based organization. An OOI needs stable, medium-term core funding to ensure that its work is sustained over time.

WHAT WAS NOT SAID

The activities associated with engagement continue, but some things are not being spoken of at this time which may be issues worth looking at in some more depth:

- **Non-Credit Courses and Markets** – the focus of almost all of the working sessions was on the offering of online learning for credit. This is understandable, since the focus of much of the work of colleges and universities is on credit programs and courses. Those offering essential skills programs online clearly made their interests known, but what about the vast market for non-credit courses online? For example, several suggested that the growing population of seniors in Ontario are likely to want to make some investments in their learning. Does this represent an opportunity for Ontario institutions? If it does, what role (if any) could an OOI play in facilitating the growth of this market?
- **A Common Platform for Online Learning** – Some suggested that Ontario would leverage the opportunity to grow online learning more if it used a common platform for delivery. But this was not a dominant voice. Yet, many were concerned about the rapid “stale-dating” of Learning Management Systems and the costs of “greening” and maintaining an overly complex delivery infrastructure.
- **Maximizing the use of Institutional Budgets for Online Learning** – In several jurisdictions which have developed collaborative hubs for online learning (e.g. Britain, British Columbia) they see the collective buying power of colleges and universities being leveraged to buy software and services at a lower per institution cost and they see integrating services across a jurisdiction (e.g. help desk, student services, financial supports, registration etc.) as a way of stabilising or sharing costs across more institutions. While a few mentioned this, it was not a major theme. What was mentioned several times was the need for students studying part-time and online to receive financial support “as if” they were classroom students. Some do think that there is a need for a common platform for online learning in Ontario and other suggest that there was a need to reduce duplication and “redundancy” in the offering of courses.
- **Research** – while some suggested that an OOI could facilitate innovation, the role of an OOI as an investor or sponsor of needed research (e.g. on the efficiency and efficacy of online learning) was rarely mentioned. When it was, it was generally “and also...” rather than a “should”. Given that acceptance of online learning is seen as a meaningful barrier to the growth of this activity, research could be one of the vehicles to overcome this barrier. An OOI could also play a role in the dissemination of evidence-based best practices in online learning for the benefit of the entire sector.

- **Building an Export Market** – Open Ontario is a major thrust of the Government of Ontario. The idea is to leverage excellence in products and services developed in Ontario so as to grow our ability to export these to others, either through (in the case of online learning) developing an increased number of foreign students registering for Ontario courses, partnering with foreign institutions to support their offering of Ontario developed courses or through other means.
- **Privacy** – As we contemplate a shared, collaborative approach to services and support to students and prospective students, as well as the use of emerging technologies, social media tools, etc., the privacy and confidentiality of student information is an important consideration for an OOI. While it is implicit in our dialogue that privacy and confidentiality will be maintained, going forward, an OOI will need to develop appropriate privacy and confidentiality policies.

I am not suggesting that these items are not of critical importance, but simply observing that they are not “top of mind” to most stakeholders engaged to date.

It is also the case that not much mention has been made of the scale of investment needed for an OOI – its budget. Ball park figures are not being offered by stakeholders to indicate what might be needed to deliver on the expectations that respondents have for its work. While scale of funding was not spoken of, the need for ongoing, reliable and core funding was.

NEXT PHASE

The engagement process is far from over:

1. Working sessions will continue to be held with stakeholders including Aboriginal groups, literacy and basic skills providers in early April.
2. A group of the leading thinkers and experts in online and distance learning around the world are being asked for their advice and suggestions.
3. Specific themes are being pursued in depth – for example, the training and development of the faculty and instructors in online learning.
4. Engagement is underway with Ontario-based technology private sector providers of platforms, services and infrastructure for online and distance learning.
5. The working sessions in this first phase and the next phase of the engagement process will further inform my report and recommendations to the Minister.

CONCLUSION

The productive working sessions with these nineteen stakeholders show clearly that there is a readiness and commitment to move forward to action. Indeed, it would not be unfair to say that these stakeholders are “poised” for action if the design of an OOI and its scope of work reflect the dialogue from the working sessions summarised here. While there were some key differences between stakeholders, they have much in common.

In the next phase of the engagement process, more opinions and suggestions will be sought, but the thinking captured here and the work in progress are pointing towards a small, independent, focused organization that leverages the existing services and resources and adds focus, alignment and investment.

In closing, I would like to thank all who participated in the working sessions and all who helped the dialogue take place. I am looking forward to updating the sector on the next phase of the engagement process.

Maxim Jean-Louis

Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

March 28, 2011

STAKEHOLDER WORKING SESSIONS WITH SPECIAL ADVISOR

- Alpha Plus
- Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario
- College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading
- College Student Alliance (CSA)
- Colleges Ontario
- Consortium des universités de la francophonie ontarienne (CUFO)
- Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca
- Le Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien (RÉFO)
- Online IPE: A Virtual Learning Centre
- Online Working Group of Council of Ontario Universities
- Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA)
- Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning (OCULL)
- Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL)
- OntarioLearn
- Ontario Public Sector Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION)
- Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance
- Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB)
- Sioux Hudson Literacy Council (SHLC)
- TFO
- TVOntario/Independent Learning Centre

WORKING SESSIONS WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE LEARNING

- John Baker, President and CEO, Desire2Learn, Incorporated
- Dr. Sara Diamond, President, Ontario College of Art & Design
- Linda Franklin, President & CEO, Colleges Ontario
- Bonnie Patterson, President and CEO, Council of Ontario Universities
- Anne Sado, President, George Brown College
- Dr. Alastair Somerlee, President, University of Guelph
- Dr. Jeff Zabudsky, President, Sheridan College

AN ONTARIO ONLINE INSTITUTE

NEW FRONTIERS FOR MORE ACCESS TO FLEXIBLE, QUALITY ONLINE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ONTARIO'S STUDENTS

"In our province, no keen and qualified student will be turned away for lack of space on our part or lack of money on theirs".

– Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario

"Ontario has a chance to be a leader. We have the technological know-how. We have outstanding institutions. We have a real interest. And, of course, because it's online, if we can get it right here in Ontario, it also becomes exportable, where students around the world can access what's happening in Ontario. Ontario wants to be at the forefront".

– Honourable John Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities

LEADING IN ONLINE LEARNING

An Ontario Online Institute, a key component of the Open Ontario Plan, will provide new opportunities for Ontarians to pursue their education and training goals and prepare for the jobs of the future in partnership with the province's publicly-assisted colleges, universities, literacy and basic skills providers, and delivery networks.

An Ontario Online Institute will act as an enabler to help leverage existing services and support structures and take the Ontario online learning system to the next level.

Online learning will provide Ontario's students with greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology and will be a key driver to achieve a 70% post-secondary attainment rate for the province's adult population.

To achieve the outcome of 70% of Ontario's working aged residents holding a post-secondary qualification or certification, it is essential that a strong focus of the work of an Ontario Online Institute (OOI) be on those who have not been engaged or successful in post-secondary education. In particular, first generation learners, aboriginal learners, learners in communities distant from a college or university, those seeking essential skills and apprentices will be a major focus for investment in the initial stages of the work of an OOI. The more traditional full-time college and university students will not be neglected as they will benefit from OOI advances, but this focus is necessary to reach the social and economic goal set for the post-secondary system as a whole.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

Ontario leads Canada in the provision of online programs and courses at the college and university level. With over 20,843 courses and 787 programs offered online, Ontario attracted 495,716 registrations in online college and university courses in 2008-2009. Without doubt, this makes Ontario Canada's leader in online learning.

Ontario can't rest on its laurels. We must lead on quality and effectiveness. We must stay ahead of the curve to make sure that we remain number one now and into the future. We won't cede our place at the top to others.

- We can provide Ontario's students with greater access to more flexible, high quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology.
- We can do more and lead North America in the development of quality online programs and courses (from content delivered fully online to hybrid or blended delivery to delivery by videoconferencing or correspondence), thereby increasing access to and success in post-secondary education and enhancing the competitiveness of Ontarians in the knowledge economy. We can establish Ontario as the hub for online learning growth and development in North America.
- We can use these online courses and programs to create an attractive suite of learning opportunities and services which Ontario can "export", either directly or in partnership with others, world-wide.
- We can be a global leader in leveraging the development of mobile learning technologies from Ontario-based technology companies – Research in Motion's PlayBook and Desire2Learn's mobile learning platform 2GO – as a basis for building a vibrant and effective mobile learning industry sector with its home in Ontario. More companies will engage in this work as online learning grows in Ontario – focused investments can stimulate the growth of this emerging economic sector.

LEADING IN LEARNING

Leading in learning is key to Ontario's future.

As Ontario's economy becomes increasingly knowledge-based – using knowledge, innovation, creativity and skill to develop new products and services – learning becomes even more important and more access to flexible education and training opportunities is critical. This is why Ontario is committed to building on the fact that it has one of the highest levels of post-secondary attainment (63%) amongst OECD countries and to ensuring that 70% of its working-aged residents hold a post-secondary qualification.

In addition to 140,000 new college and university spaces created since 2003 and the 2011 Budget commitment for 60,000 additional spaces by 2015-2016, Ontario is also serious about lifelong learning – making sure that highly qualified people can continually update and upgrade their learning throughout their careers. Online learning supports these objectives and does so in a way that increases flexibility in where, how and when people learn. It also encourages the more rapid development of needed programs and courses which can quickly be made available across the Province.

Ontario has long recognized the importance of a well-educated workforce that can compete in the global economy and attract international investment. Ontarians with higher levels of knowledge and skills have

better employment prospects, earn higher wages, are more engaged citizens, contribute more in taxes and are less dependent on government supports during their working lives.

FOUR ACTIONS REQUIRED

There are four actions required to translate the concept of an Ontario Online Institute (OOI) into action and results.

Each of these actions, within the framework of the OOI as an enabler, is targeted to:

- Provide Ontario's students with more access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology.
- Be a key driver to achieve a 70% post-secondary attainment rate for the province's residents aged 25-64.
- Fully leverage Ontario's investments in its publicly-assisted education and training sector, especially in the service of those not currently engaged in adult learning.
- Sustain Ontario's leadership in online learning in Canada and become the leading hub for online learning innovation in North America.

The four actions are:

ACTION 1: IMPROVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

1. Better access to information for students, parents, guidance counsellors and employers: Enhancement of the Ontario Online Learning Portal – a one stop, 24x7, multi-dimensional portal with best-in-class functions supporting the following groups:
 - Students – searchable information on over 10,000 online courses and 800 online programs from Ontario's publicly-assisted colleges, universities training, and essential skills providers, access to arrange of support services such as study skills, links to virtual library services
 - Faculty/instructors – professional development opportunities, information on trends, communities of practice
 - Administrators – online access to the program and course database with the ability to update information on their institution's offerings
2. More choices for students: The Development of New Programs and Courses – facilitating a gap analysis and market study on program and courses needs to identify gaps in current program offerings. This would be used to initiate a competitive bid process for funding of collaboration and sharing between publicly-assisted education and training providers for the development of programs and courses to fill the gaps and expand online learning opportunities in Ontario, particularly for Francophone, Aboriginal, first generation learners, and apprentices.
3. More support services for students: The Development of Online Student Services – working with

publicly-assisted education and training providers to help build on existing support services and offer more services including online career advising, course and program choice, study skills, peer tutoring, and related services through Ontario's publicly-assisted education and training providers with access through the Ontario Online Learning Portal.

4. More engagement in learning for students: Improving Teaching in Online Learning – sharing best practices and training methods for faculty and instructors through the Ontario Online Learning Portal with the intention of a step-change in the quality of online instruction with the aim of significantly improving student learning.
5. More access to learning material: Improved Access to Library and Reference Services for all Students – building on the very successful Scholars Portal and the work of the Ontario College Library Service and expanding capacity to provide support for student projects, assignments, thesis work and learning, there is a need to increase the available resource base and increase the level of support for this service online.

ACTION 2: DEVELOP BEST AND NEXT PRACTICES

Using workshops, communities of practices, and applied research commissioned from leading experts, an OOI will focus on five strategic priorities for the development of world-leading practices. These five areas are:

1. Improving student engagement in online learning – through instructional design, improved quality, faculty and instructor training and the smart use of available technology, an OOI will support education and training providers to significantly improve the level of engagement in online learning with the intent of increasing student satisfaction and achievement.
2. Leading in mobile learning – using emerging technologies for mobile learning, an OOI will support education and training providers to develop courses and programs which have a high level of student engagement and completion, especially for apprenticeship work-based learning and literacy and essential skills.
3. Leveraging learning resources across the Province – through collaboration with education and training providers and specific program development resources, an OOI will help create a learning object and materials repository which can be freely accessed by all publicly-assisted education and training providers in Ontario to speed course development and enable the rapid conversion of courses for online delivery. This curriculum sharing and learning resource library will reduce duplication, speed development, lower costs and enable those developing courses to work in a community of practice second to none. Expand opportunities to market Ontario-based learning materials to other markets worldwide.
4. Online learning for Aboriginal Students – in collaboration with education and training providers, an OOI will help develop effective models and practices for working with and engaging Aboriginal students through learning circles, active learning and other frameworks already in use.
5. Online learning for apprenticeship training – building on existing work to support apprenticeship training and working in partnership with publicly-assisted colleges, employers, unions and the Ontario College of Trades, an OOI will help develop a strategy for online learning which seeks to

improve completion rates for apprentices.

6. Online learning for essential skills – building on the existing platforms supporting those engaged in this work, an OOI will help accelerate the speed at which learners achieve Level 3 literacy in high school, post-secondary programs and in work-based learning.

ACTION 3: ANCHOR DECISION ABOUT SERVICES ON DATA AND EVIDENCE

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) conducted a baseline survey in 2010-2011 of the state of online learning in Ontario using data from 2008-2009 provided by Ontario's publicly-assisted colleges and universities – a first of its kind survey in Canada. This work needs to be sustained so we can track developments. It also needs to be extended, so that publicly-assisted education and training providers and MTCU can make better decisions based on evidence and quality data. This requires an OOI to help:

1. Track Online Learning in Ontario – conduct an annual survey of online learning by the Ministry of Training, colleges and Universities through surveys of publicly-assisted education and training providers and reporting results for the benefit of the sector.
2. Identify Gaps in Current Program and Course Provision – Conduct market surveys and a gap analysis to determine what programs and courses current and potential students are searching for, how this matches availability for current online programs and courses and identify systematic opportunities to “fill the gap”.
3. Track Trends – there is a need to track trends in student use of technology, in mobile learning and in the provision of online learning world-wide. An OOI needs to be a “go to” organization for the best knowledge and information about emerging technologies and their uses for online learning.
4. Develop Metrics – there is a need for specific metrics for each stage of the process of design, development, deployment and delivery of online learning. These metrics need to be focused on outcomes and enable the benchmarking of this work within Ontario. Using metrics intelligently should lead to better planning, the more efficient use of resources and the sharing of best practices. These metrics will also enable clear accountability for outcomes to be established and to create standards based reporting, possibly through the OOI portal.

ACTION 4: INITIATE AND COMPLETE PLANNING ON A TIMELY BASIS

The key strategy for an OOI is to be a nimble, focused organization that works through collaboration, partnership and contracted work to achieve significant impact on the online education and training sector. Driven by a powerful vision to provide Ontario's students with greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology and by a focused set of actions, just described, an OOI needs to have a small core staff that will undertake focused projects through partnership and contracted work.

An OOI will leverage its relationship with the publicly-assisted colleges and universities, literacy and basic skills providers, OntarioLearn, Ontario Council for University Lifelong Learning, TVO/Independent Learning Centre, Contact North/elearnnetwork.ca, TFO and ORION in pursuit of its work. It will avoid duplication.

The core staff will be kept to a minimal level. During the period between May 1st, 2011, and March 31st, 2012, there is a need to:

- Create the governance structure for an OOI including incorporation as an Ontario not-for-profit corporation with a volunteer Board of Directors.
- Develop the Business Plan for an OOI that will include the detailed business and operational plan for the five year period 2011-2012 – 2015-2016, based on the broadly define roadmap below.
- Secure collaboration arrangements with organizations that will provide support services (e.g. administrative services, financial services, human resource services, legal services etc.).
- Develop metrics and accountability commitments for the work of an OOI so as to enable informed governance and decision making.
- Enter into a transfer payment agreement with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to outline the expectations for annual deliverables, funding and reporting requirements.

Further details can be found in Year One of the Roadmap below.

ROADMAP AND BUDGET

Turning these actions into a detailed action plan requires resources and a roadmap for the development of the “Institute”. What follows is the outline of a roadmap – an outline that now needs to be built into a strategic plan and detailed business and operational plan. This roadmap turns the “adding value” proposition into a broad plan of action.

ROADMAP

In Year One, the focus will be on:

1. Overseeing the enhancement of the multi-dimensional Ontario Online Learning Portal.
2. Initiating a gap analysis and market study on the need for new online learning programs and courses.
3. Overseeing a call for proposals and funding allocations for new online learning program and course development based on the gap analysis, including multi-year funding for program development.
4. Working with publicly-assisted education and training providers on the development and provision of a wider range of student support services for online learning.
5. Encouraging and helping the Ministry to conduct the second annual survey of online learning.
6. Building the governance, legal and operational foundation of an Institute and developing the detailed strategic and business plans. This includes recruiting the Board and Chair and developing service agreements with third parties to support the work of an Institute and entering into a Transfer Payment agreement with MTCU.

7. Recruiting core staff.
8. Helping develop best practices for faculty and instructor development and supporting initiatives with a focus on student engagement in collaboration with publicly-assisted education and training providers.
9. Helping design and begin establishment of the curriculum sharing and learning object resource centre which will enable course developers to access existing material quickly, reduce duplication, speed development of new online learning resources and enable quality assurance. In this development, the intellectual property rights of faculty members and others who developed courses will be fully respected with existing collective agreements.
10. Identify seamless pathways for high school students transitioning to post-secondary programs through online program and career supports and develop the needed services.

During Year One, detailed plans for the remaining four years of funding will be developed based on budget allocation and the finalization of the plans outlined here.

In Year Two, in addition to building on the work of Year One, the focus will be on encouraging and facilitating the development collaborative projects and initiatives by Ontario's publicly-assisted colleges, universities, training and literacy providers aimed at:

1. Building on the new program and course development work completed in Year One and providing new program support funds to education and training providers through a competitive process in areas identified in the gap analysis.
2. Develop supports for literacy and essential skills development, bridging high school and the workplace in collaboration with education and training providers.
3. Significant collaborative online developments with respect to apprenticeship training, francophone and Aboriginal education.
4. Create a simple, but effective, and quality controlled collaborative mechanism to support the sharing of learning resources and objects.
5. Develop a mobile learning strategy in collaboration with education and training providers as a key strategic area for investment and focused work in Ontario. Identify the opportunities and begin work on simulation and serious gaming for student engagement as an area of best practice.
6. Work with the colleges, universities and training providers to position online learning as a core strategic component of their plans for the future, ensuring that all institutions and training providers see the role of online learning as a critical part of their work.

The work for the balance of the five year period will be developed as part of a more detailed business plan during the period December 2011 to March 2012.

In Year Three, all students in Ontario will have access to an online library and reference services 24x7, online career information services and study skills supports through their education and training provider. In addition, the “Institute” will:

1. Conduct the third round of program development funding focused on accelerating work on Aboriginal learning and mobile learning as a key platform for a range of learning activities, including diploma and degree programs, apprenticeship and literacy and essential skills.
2. Help undertake a systematic review of both Aboriginal learning and mobile learning in Ontario and develop a best practice framework, partnering with learners, education and training providers and organizations and technology companies to show what is possible.
3. Work with Aboriginal leaders and publicly-assisted educational and training providers, focus resources and supports on Aboriginal education and technology – how online learning and technology can support the learning needs of Aboriginal communities and their social and economic development.
4. Encourage the offering of training workshops on the potential of mobile learning in key areas identified as “gaps” in the annual study of online learning and the annual gap analysis studies.
5. Work with professional bodies and education and training providers to help identify continuing professional development needs that can be met in part or entirely through online learning.
6. Invite an independent panel of leading experts in online learning to undertake a review of the performance of an OOI after three years focused on the question: “Is an OOI adding value to Ontario’s learning outcomes and services?”

While these are summary statements of the work of an “Institute” in its first three years, they are sufficient to indicate that a robust plan is needed to turn these roadmap elements into a clear and succinct business plan.

BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES

These actions and the work of an OOI, in working to ensure that online learning is a component of each publicly-assisted institution’s strategic intent, will have significant consequences for the post-secondary system in Ontario and for Ontario’s social and economic agenda. These benefits and outcomes can be summarized as follows:

BETTER COORDINATION AND LEVERAGING OF EXISTING RESOURCES AND STRUCTURES TO:

- Enable publicly-assisted education and training providers to offer new programs to all residents of Ontario and selected markets globally
- Bring learning to those not currently engaged in post-secondary education.
- Commission new programs on the basis of market need and demand.

- Expand the offering of apprenticeship, essential skills training, and learning opportunities for Francophones, Aboriginals and expand support learners with disabilities.
- Enable quality assurance through collaborating with others with respect to the highest standards for online learning.
- Support Ontario's vast network of literacy and basic skills providers to use technology in an innovative way to deliver a critical foundation for learners wishing to complete their secondary school diplomas, for learners to prepare for post-secondary education and for learners wishing to upgrade their skills.
- Support and enable publicly-assisted colleges, universities, literacy and other training providers in their work on the design, development and delivery of flexible learning using online technologies.
- Grow the market for foreign students coming to Ontario by supporting the efforts of Ontario institutions in marketing their programs of study to learners abroad before they arrive as immigrants in Canada.
- Position Ontario as a world leader in applied research and innovation in online learning.

ENHANCED ABILITY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS TO DESIGN, DEVELOP AND DELIVER FLEXIBLE LEARNING USING ONLINE TECHNOLOGIES:

- Support the design, development and delivery of training and learning to support the work of institutions offering online learning.
- Monitor developments in online learning worldwide so as to continuously improve quality online learning in Ontario.
- Offer workshops, online learning and other resources to support the work of publicly-assisted education and training providers with respect to instructional design and teaching quality.

IMPROVED QUALITY THROUGH APPLYING THE HIGHEST STANDARDS FOR FLEXIBLE LEARNING:

- Working with the Postsecondary Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB), Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance (OUCQA), Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS) and others, help ensure that quality standards for flexible learning (online learning and blended learning) are informed by best and next practices in the world.
- Continuously monitor standards for flexible learning world-wide and work with PEQAB, OUCQA and others to help them keep such standards current.

GROWING THE MARKET FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS COMING TO ONTARIO BY HELPING THEM SECURE PART OF THEIR PROGRAMS OF STUDY BEFORE ARRIVING IN CANADA:

- Work with others to identify areas of skill and workforce demand which will require new workers moving to Ontario.

- Market related programs to areas of demand in selected foreign markets with the intention of attracting foreign students to Canada, but offer part of the program of study through flexible learning abroad so that they can arrive with some credits completed, thus shortening their foreign study time in Canada and accelerating the securing of a Canadian credential.

LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO ENABLE INNOVATION IN QUALITY ON-LINE LEARNING:

- Use its resources to forge relationships with manufacturers, systems developers and digital publishers to support the online learning agenda of Ontario.
- Provide support for specific projects linked to program and course development which showcase emerging technologies.
- Partner with private companies to position Ontario courses and programs as components for the professional and personal learning of employees.

The Ontario Online Institute will add significant value to Ontario's already robust online learning sector by supporting education and training providers to offer Ontario's students greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology.

The Ontario Online Institute will be an enabler and not duplicate the work already being done by Ontario's publicly-assisted colleges, universities, training and essential skills providers.

BUDGET

The total request for the first three years is for \$25 million to be allocated in support of this roadmap and in response to a need for a basic investment identified during the engagement process with the stakeholder groups as follows:

YEAR	BUDGET AS (\$M)
2011-2012	\$9.0
2012-2013	\$9.0
2013-2014	\$7.0
TOTAL	\$25 MILLION

Budget allocations for 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 will be developed based on actual activities in 2012-2013. The working assumption is that steady state funding should be in the order of \$7 million annually.

START-UP PHASE – MAY TO AUGUST 2011

The first phase of the engagement process between February 28th and March 28th clearly indicated that the sector is engaged and prepared to move forward. There is an urgent and critical need to determine how we bridge the period between the announcement of the funding (presumably in early May) and the actual foundation that needs to be in place by the end of August 2011.

CONCLUSION

This is a basic “ask” intended to identify the scale of resources required against an outline of the basic actions an “Institute” needs to take to be able to add value.

The roadmap is consistent with the vision to provide Ontario’s students greater access to flexible, quality education and training opportunities through the innovative use of technology. The first phase of the Engagement Process clearly indicates that Ontario’s publicly-assisted education and training providers are ready to act and to engage in this work on the basis that an OOI will add value by enabling and not duplicating nor centralizing the diverse and successful services they already offer and will not act as a regulator.

We need to move quickly to harness this commitment and begin the work that will make a difference.

Maxim Jean-Louis

Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

March 2011

HOW AN ONTARIO ONLINE INSTITUTE COULD ADD VALUE

INTRODUCTION

In the 2010 Speech from the Throne, the Premier announced the government's intention to establish an Ontario Online Institute as part of the Open Ontario Plan to create jobs and strengthen the economy. I believe an online institute will have a pivotal role in our collective effort to provide learners with more flexible, quality education and training opportunities beyond time and geographic boundaries.

This is how an OOI was positioned, when announced:

"Your government will work with all its partners in education, training and business to develop a new, five-year plan to improve the quality of Ontario's postsecondary education system. Your government will create the new Ontario Online Institute, bringing the best professors in the top programs at Ontario universities to the homes of those who want to pursue this new option for higher learning. Your government's Open Ontario Plan will also open our colleges and universities to the world."

— Speech from the Throne, March 8th, 2010

An Ontario Online Institute will be established in a manner that builds on the foundation of existing strong and robust online activities and initiatives in Ontario, engages stakeholders in taking online learning to the next level and harnesses the skills and innovative abilities of students, their instructors and our public institutions with support from relevant private sector organizations to sustain Ontario's Canadian leadership in online learning and support the Open Ontario strategy for growth and development.

BUILDING ON ONTARIO'S STRENGTH'S IN ONLINE LEARNING

Ontario starts with a competitive advantage. It currently has some 20,385 online courses offered across Ontario's 24 publicly-assisted colleges and 20 publicly-assisted universities leading to almost a half a million registrations in these courses. The Province has 762 programs offered online – 14% of all of the programs available to post-secondary learners in Ontario. These courses and programs use a variety of delivery methods including audioconferencing, videoconferencing, blended with some classroom activity and fully online. What is more, students taking these online courses are successful – the median course completion rate for online learning is 76.1% for colleges and 89% for universities. These courses and programs include options for college and university students as well as adult learners seeking upgrading. These numbers make Ontario the lead jurisdiction in Canada for online learning and make it a candidate for a lead role worldwide for online learning offerings.

Most publicly-assisted education and training providers also offer many programs which have some online components in addition to classroom components. This is known as "hybrid" or "blended" learning. Online learning is everywhere.

HOW AN ONTARIO ONLINE INSTITUTE COULD ADD VALUE

An OOI can add value to Ontario's publicly-assisted education and training sector in the following twenty-three specific ways. The following table outlines this approach to value creation.

ADDING VALUE FOR	BY HELPING	SO THAT
Students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meet student demand by increasing the range and number of quality courses / programs available online. 2. Secure access to post-secondary education for all qualified Ontario residents no matter where they live. 3. Increase the flexibility and speed at which students can complete programs. 4. Make it easier and simpler to find online programs and courses. 5. Increase and enhance online student services – information, library, study skills, and related help. 6. Make more apprenticeship courses and work-based learning options available online. 7. A growing, province-wide network of literacy and essential skills supports online learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More students can take more courses online as part of their studies or apprenticeship. • Geography and labour mobility are not a barrier to study or program completion. Particularly critical for Aboriginal learners, Francophone learners, first generation learners, new immigrants and apprentices. • Students can maximize their options for study. • Students can use a single portal to gain 24/7 access to information about online learning opportunities. • More students successfully complete their studies in a shorter period. • More students can complete apprenticeships at work and more workers can upgrade their skills without leaving work. • The number of Ontarians with Level 3 literacy can be increased with the support of online services and learning.

<p>Faculty and Instructors</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase support for faculty members seeking to develop courses – sharing learning objects, instructional design expertise, shared applications and best practices. 2. Create collaborative networks for sharing best practices and new developments. 3. Fund new courses and program development. 4. Support faculty development for online instruction through sharing best practices and the development of quality supports promoting a virtual community of practice for online instructors to share best practice and innovative approaches. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More courses can be developed in less time and the quality of online courses can be further enhanced. • Faculty skills in teaching online can be increased. • Institutions can speed the development of new courses and programs that “fill the gaps” in current provision. • Better instructional experiences can be offered for both faculty and students.
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Institutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase registrations through increased number of courses and programs available online. 2. Provide funding to support collaborative program development and learning materials sharing. 3. Maximize the use of budgets for online learning provision by collaboration on learning systems and technology and sharing of resources. 4. Improve instructional quality and student satisfaction. 5. Expand the export market for online learning programs. 6. Reduce duplication and improve system planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training providers can grow their student numbers and meet the target of 70% of Ontarians holding a post-secondary qualification. • Education and training providers can accelerate program and course development, and a growing library of online learning shared resources can be supported. • The cost of technology can be better managed. • Student and faculty retention is increased. • Financial and Open Ontario objectives are better supported. • Time, effort and resources are not wasted.
Government of Ontario	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a coordinated focus for online learning across Government. 2. A coordinated, central analysis of gaps. 3. Fulfill commitments to Open Ontario strategy. 4. Focus investments to support strategic priorities for learning – e.g. apprenticeship, green economy, Aboriginal education, innovation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A one-stop policy and development opportunity for online learning eases decision making. • Funding for program development can be better targeted. • Open Ontario strategy is better supported. • Spending on online learning is prioritized through a single organization rather than on an ad hoc basis by individual education and training providers.

Ontario Economy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reach the 70% attainment rate. 2. Invest in the development of products and services which have export potential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The economy is better equipped with knowledge workers, and Ontario is in a better position to address the coming skills shortage. • Ontario is positioned on the global stage and those looking to move to Ontario to gain an Ontario credential before they arrive are better served.
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SUPPORTING INNOVATION

An Ontario Online Institute would need to support quality course and program development through innovation. It could do this in four direct ways:

1. Encouraging and enabling collaboration between colleges, between universities, between universities and colleges and between other education and training providers on the design, development, deployment and delivery of courses. Focusing on rapid course development for quality courses which promote student engagement; effective instruction for the delivery of courses; shared student services (especially library and career services) and supporting the integrated management of technology.
2. Enabling best and next practice sharing amongst faculty/instructors, students, technology providers and others – so that Ontario develops as a centre of excellence in online learning and is seen globally as a jurisdiction which is firmly behind the development of this sector as both a public service (access to education and training opportunities) and as an industry.
3. Development of new designs for learning built around emerging technologies that develop the new skills and competencies required in knowledge-based economies.
4. Build on the technological strengths of Ontario to create new applications, new ways of using technology to support learning and advances in the development of mobile learning. By encouraging a dialogue between students, their faculty/instructors and technology developers, Ontario could lead in the development of new ways of using social media, hand held devices and other technologies for mobile learning.

An OOI would need to be focused in its pursuit of innovation, but it would also need to see this as a critical part of its mandate from its beginning.

Maxim Jean-Louis

Special Advisor to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities for an Ontario Online Institute

April 1, 2011