



Ministry of Training,  
Colleges and Universities

# Increasing Degree Opportunities for Ontarians

*A Consultation Paper*

April 2000

Ministry of Training,  
Colleges and Universities

Ministère de la Formation  
et des Collèges et Universités



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## Dear Reader:

The government is committed to ensuring that there will be a place at college or university for all willing and motivated Ontario students who wish to attend.

This commitment is made knowing that we face a number of challenges in the next ten years as we make sure that Ontario is ready for the 21st century – especially that Ontarians have the appropriate kind and number of educational choices, including opportunities to earn a degree.

Never before has a good education been as important as it is today. Ontario needs a highly skilled workforce and, with your help, we will ensure our postsecondary education system provides our students with the opportunities they need to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

Despite a drop in federal funding, this Government's support for postsecondary education in Ontario exceeded \$4 billion last year – its highest level ever. That includes \$742 million to fund new buildings and major renovations at our publicly supported universities and colleges. We will continue to rely on our public system to expand the number of postsecondary opportunities for Ontarians.

We have been exploring all possible options to increase choices for getting a degree, including some ground-breaking new approaches. The Government has made a number of decisions about how to increase access to a broader range of degree opportunities that will provide greater educational choices for Ontario students and promote excellence in our postsecondary institutions.

We intend to put in place some new initiatives that will:

- provide more opportunities for Ontarians to seek degrees, with a broader choice of fields of study and locations
- ensure that all degree programs in Ontario offer top-quality education
- protect students at private institutions from the risk of financial loss.

I am conducting this consultation so that you have an opportunity to give me your best advice on how these new initiatives can work to serve Ontario's students. Please contact me at the address above by May 31, 2000. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dianne Cunningham".

Dianne Cunningham  
Minister

## Why we need some new approaches

More Ontarians than ever before are seeking access to a wider range of degree programs. Changing expectations from employers and increasing demand from students for more choices requires the government to expand access to degree programs.

The Government is committed to providing a space in postsecondary education for every qualified and motivated student. The majority of new spaces created over the coming decade will continue to be in publicly supported universities and colleges.

The current legislative and policy approach limits the choices available to Ontarians who are seeking degrees:

- At present, Ontario relies solely on publicly funded universities to provide all but a tiny number of degree opportunities.
- Ontario colleges are not allowed to demonstrate that their programs are of a degree quality, and they are not allowed to grant degrees even in areas where a degree instead of a diploma would be of real benefit to graduates.
- Privately funded degree-granting institutions are not encouraged under current policy even if they are able to provide quality programs at little or no public cost.
- Student demand in areas that are expanding significantly is not always being met. For example, demand for convenient and accessible part-time study, on-line access, and degree completion opportunities continues to grow.
- Some professions are increasing their entry-to-practice qualifications and requiring a degree-level education for new entrants.

In order to address these pressures, the Government has decided to expand access to degree programs and:

- provide more opportunities for Ontarians to seek degrees, with a broader choice of fields of study and locations
- ensure that all degree programs in Ontario offer a high-quality education
- protect students at private institutions from the risk of financial loss.

The Government has made a number of decisions about how to increase access to a broader range of degree opportunities. This document outlines those decisions and a number of areas where we are seeking advice.

All of the Government's decisions in this area will be guided by the principles of creating opportunities and expanding choice, assuring quality, and protecting students from the risk of financial loss.

## Degree-granting in Ontario Today

Each of Ontario's 17 publicly supported universities is authorized to grant degrees by a statute of the Legislature (or, in the case of Queen's University, by a royal charter).

Colleges of applied arts and technology may not grant degrees. Some colleges have made arrangements for graduates from certain programs to complete a degree at a university, in Ontario or elsewhere.

Some private institutions are authorized by the Legislature to grant theological degrees (e.g., Bachelor of Christian Studies, Bachelor of Sacred Music). Only one private institution – Redeemer College, in Ancaster – is authorized by the Legislature to grant secular degrees (e.g., Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science).

Out-of-province institutions wishing to offer degrees in Ontario may seek a “ministerial consent” under the *Degree Granting Act*. In the absence of a made-in-Ontario process for quality assessment, ministers have normally relied on assessments undertaken in the applicant's home jurisdiction to determine whether the proposed program is of acceptable quality. Most ministerial consents have been limited to three years, after which the applicant may seek a renewal.

Organizations within Ontario seeking to establish new degree-granting institutions require statutory authority to do so. These organisations have not been supported or encouraged by governments over the years, as a matter of policy.

Out-of-province organizations offering degrees via the Internet or other forms of distance education are not subject to provincial statutes or regulations, provided that they do not establish a physical presence in Ontario. The U.S. Department of Education has found that, in the United States alone, 1,680 institutions offered a total of 54,000 online education courses in 1998. The number of Ontarians registered in these courses is not known.

Private vocational schools offering diplomas or certificates are privately owned and are operated as commercial enterprises. They must be registered under the *Private Vocational Schools Act*. They do not receive operating grants but their students may be eligible to receive government-subsidized student loans and grants. These schools may not offer degrees in Ontario.

As this description demonstrates, the processes by which an institution may gain degree-granting authority in Ontario today are complex. They vary depending on whether the institution is taxpayer-supported or not, and whether it is based in Ontario or out-of-province. One of the government's objectives is to introduce greater consistency and accountability in decisions about which institutions are permitted to grant degrees in Ontario.

## What's Been Decided: Summary of New Initiatives

The Government of Ontario has approved the establishment of private, degree-granting institutions in Ontario, including for-profit and not-for-profit institutions, and will allow Ontario's colleges of applied arts and technology to offer applied degrees.

The introduction private universities will give students a wider range of degree choices. However, the Government recognizes the importance of ensuring the quality of new programs to be offered by these institutions and protecting the financial investment of students.

Specifically, these new initiatives will:

- provide more opportunities for Ontarians to seek degrees, with a broader choice of fields of study and locations;
- ensure that all degree programs in Ontario offer a high-quality education; and
- protect students at private institutions from the risk of financial loss.

### **Quality**

- There will be a Quality Assessment Board to advise the Minister on whether proposals for new degree programs are of degree-level quality. These proposals may come from institutions in Ontario from institutions outside Ontario that do not have authority from the Legislature to grant degrees. In the case of applied degrees, they may come from colleges of applied arts and technology.
- The Minister will decide whether to approve the programs, taking into account:
  - the advice of the Quality Assessment Board on the quality of the program
  - the institution's compliance with regulations that protect students' financial interests
  - other matters that may affect the public interest, such as any costs to the taxpayer.
- New private degree-granting institutions will not be eligible for capital or operating grants.

### **Protecting Students**

- New degree-granting institutions will be required to offer protection to students from financial loss in the event that the institution closes.
- New degree-granting institutions will be required to guarantee that students will continue to have access to transcripts of their academic records after graduation, even if the institution ceases to operate.
- A new institution wishing to offer OSAP to its students must go through the same process that applies to private vocational schools. In general, this process requires that an institution operate in Ontario for three years and have at least one graduating class before being fully eligible to offer OSAP.

- The maximum tuition fee that will be recognized for purposes of OSAP at new degree-granting institutions will be \$4500 for a normal academic year. This is the same maximum that applies to Additional Cost Recovery programs at publicly-supported institutions.

### **Applied Degrees**

- Pilot projects will be approved to allow colleges of applied arts and technology to grant applied degrees.
- A maximum of eight new pilot projects will be approved per year for three years. Each project will normally consist of one college offering one program in a field where the college demonstrates academic excellence.
- The Quality Assessment Board will assess the quality of proposed pilot projects and advise the Minister.
- The Minister will decide whether to approve each pilot project, taking into account:
  - the advice of the Quality Assessment Board on the quality of the program
  - other matters that may affect the public interest, such as any costs to the taxpayer.
- An applied degree program will be defined to include programs that:
  - offer a high quality of education
  - respond to demonstrated demand from students and employers
  - do not duplicate programs normally offered at universities in Ontario
  - incorporate other features as determined by the Minister following public consultation.
- The success of the pilot projects will be evaluated at the end of three years.
- While the pilot projects will offer additional choices for Ontario's students, it is expected that the primary mission of colleges of applied arts and technology will continue to be to offer high-quality instruction in diploma and certificate programs of one to three years' duration.

# New Framework for Access: Issues and Questions

## I. Quality Assessment Board

Ontario degrees have earned a solid and valuable reputation over the years. The Government wants to make sure that Ontario degrees maintain their reputation.

At present, there is no established and consistent government-led process to assess degree program quality. To remedy this, we will establish a Quality Assessment Board (QAB) as

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A Quality Assessment Board will be set up to ensure that the quality of new degree programs meets current Ontario standards. The Board will assess the academic soundness of program proposals from new degree-granting institutions; institutions outside Ontario that want to offer degree programs in Ontario; and colleges of applied arts and technology that propose degree programs.

|an advisory body to the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The Board will be responsible for assessing applications to offer degree programs in Ontario. The Board will apply standards and use commonly accepted academic review procedures. The Board will advise on whether the name of the institution and the name of the degree accurately reflect the education that is offered. The Board will also call upon the advice of specialized experts in the proposed field of study and other relevant groups. Recommendations from the Board will be submitted to the Minister.

The Board will have the mandate to assess all new degree programs, including those offered by out-of-province institutions, by new free-standing institutions, and Ontario college applied degree programs. It will be expected to provide objective and expert advice to the Minister and act in the best interests of the public and students.

Existing Ontario degree-granting institutions will be exempt from having their programs assessed by the QAB.

The Board will consist of a chair and a part-time board of stakeholder representatives.

Revenues from application fees are expected to fund the operating costs of the board within two to three years.

### QUESTIONS:

- 1. What essential qualities or qualifications should the Board Chair and membership have? How many members would be appropriate? What constituencies should be represented? How can conflict of interest be avoided?**
- 2. Should there be a relationship between the Board's assessment and other accreditation or appraisal processes? If so, what should be the nature of that relationship?**
- 3. What essential academic standards would you recommend for the Board's use?**

4. **What standards are required to ensure that the name of the degree and the name of the academic institution accurately reflect the nature of the education that is being offered?**
5. **What institutional standards are essential in assessing the readiness or capacity of an institution to offer a program leading to a degree?**
6. **Should the Government establish an appeals mechanism to allow for appeals about the Board's process or findings?**
7. **Should the QAB recommendations include a time limit for approvals, requiring follow-up reviews (e.g., every 5 years)?**

## **II. Applied Degree Pilot Project – Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology**

Ontario's colleges of applied arts and technology have an excellent reputation for offering high-quality, vocationally-oriented education and training in applied arts, business, health sciences and technology. This training is recognized through the certificate, diploma and post-diploma credentials. Colleges currently do not have the authority to grant degrees.

Increasingly, employers are demanding a more highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce to keep up with the demands of a fast-paced and changing economy. Colleges are well-positioned to provide the requisite combination of advanced training and education to

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On a pilot project basis, colleges of applied arts and technology will be allowed to offer selected programs leading to an applied degree in key areas of economic need or where current diploma programs are not fully meeting emerging needs.

meet this demand. This type of advanced career training and education would go beyond what is normally provided in a college diploma program and should be appropriately recognized through the applied degree credential.

The government is implementing a pilot project to provide colleges with the opportunity to seek applied degree status for selected college programs. Up to eight projects per year will be introduced over three years. For this purpose, a project will normally be defined as one program offered by one college.

A college seeking applied degree status for a selected college program will be required to make an application to the Quality Assessment Board. The Board will assess the quality of proposed pilot projects and advise the Minister. The Minister will decide whether to approve each pilot project, taking into account:

- the advice of the QAB on the quality of the program; and
- other matters that may affect the public interest, such as any costs to the taxpayer.

College applied degrees will be offered in areas where there is a demonstrated employer demand for degree-level applied education and training, and where current diploma programs are not fully meeting emerging needs. These degrees will combine a solid grounding in theory and analytical skills with career-oriented, practical education and training. To avoid duplication, college applied degrees will not be offered in program areas normally offered at universities in Ontario.

The primary role of Ontario colleges will not be altered by the applied degree pilot project. Colleges of applied arts and technology will continue to focus their efforts on providing high-quality certificate and diploma programming in programs of one to three years' duration. The principal role of college faculty will continue to be to provide excellent instruction. Efforts will continue through the Ontario College-University Degree Completion Accord (Port Hope Accord) and the College-University Consortium Council to facilitate college-university collaboration on degree completion arrangements for college diploma holders.

At the end of three years, each project will be assessed and a decision made whether and how to continue permitting colleges to seek applied degree status for college programs.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

- 1. What academic standards should be used by the Quality Assessment Board to assess applied degree pilot project proposals?**
- 2. What institutional standards should be used by the Quality Assessment Board to assess the readiness or capacity of a college to offer a program leading to an applied degree? Should the standards be the same as those applied to new privately funded organizations?**
- 3. What standards should be used to assess economic need for an applied degree program?**
- 4. How should applied degrees be structured? Should a work component be required? Should there be a diploma exit option?**
- 5. What should the admission standards for college applied degrees be?**
- 6. What should degrees from colleges be called?**

### III. New Ontario-Based Private Institutions

New degree-granting institutions will give Ontario students a wider range of degree choices. Subject to government approval, new Ontario-based institutions will be eligible to offer degree programs in Ontario. These institutions will not be eligible for provincial capital or operating funding.

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Once the Quality Assessment Board is in place, groups wanting to establish new degree-granting institutions in Ontario may apply to do so. The Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities will be prepared to consider approving such applications, if they pass a new quality assessment.

Allowing private universities to offer degree programs in Ontario may create significantly more opportunities for:

- working adults
- mature students who want to upgrade their education and training
- traditional university students who may be attracted to unique programs or delivery models offered by new universities.

These new degree programs and the institutional capacity to offer degrees will be subject to review by the newly established Quality Assessment Board, which will advise the Minister.

In allowing private universities to be established, we have identified two main criteria for any new degree-granting institutions or degree programs:

- demonstrating the quality of the program and the ability of the institution to provide a degree-level education
- ensuring that students will be protected in the event of institutional closure (consumer protection).

#### QUESTIONS:

- 1. Should there be any restrictions on the range of programs that private institutions can offer?**
- 2. What tests of institutional capacity are most important to assess the ability of new degree-granting institutions to offer degree programs, e.g., faculty, library resources?**
- 3. What academic standards should be used by the QAB to assess new degree programs?**

## IV. New Taxpayer and Student Protection Measures

The Government wants to ensure protection is available to students who attend any private postsecondary institution. Students should be protected from the possibility that a private institution would cease operations before they have completed their course of study and received their degrees. Students also need a guarantee that they will continue to have access to transcripts of their academic records after graduation, even if the institution ceases to operate.

Measures to protect students could include establishing a sector-funded compensation pool via mandatory contributions. The pool would be available to compensate students in the event of institutional failure. Institutions could be required to post a bond as is the case with private vocational schools. Such protections could also include mandatory agreements whereby institutions negotiated a “teach-out” provision with other degree-granting institutions in the event they were unable to offer a complete degree program or ceased operations.

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A new consumer protection approach will be put in place.

A new degree-granting institution wishing to offer OSAP to its students will be required to go through the same process that applies to private vocational schools. In general, this process requires that an institution operate in Ontario for 3 years and have at least one graduating class before being fully eligible to offer OSAP.

The maximum tuition fee that will be recognized for purposes of OSAP at new degree-granting institutions will be \$4500 for a normal academic year. This is the same maximum that applies to Additional Cost Recovery programs at publicly-supported institutions.

### QUESTIONS:

- 1. What is the best mechanism for ensuring protection for students in the event that a private institution ceases operations?**
- 2. Should the government establish a sector-funded compensation pool? Should that pool include private vocational schools?**
- 3. Should the government require a teach-out provision for all new degree-granting institutions? Are there measures of operational soundness which the government could apply to distinguish which institutions may require a teach-out provision and which may not?**
- 4. What is the best means of ensuring the protection of student records? Who should be responsible for this?**



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