

**Objective and Guiding Principles
For the Establishment of an Ontario Online Institute**

Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities

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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 Officer

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.