

# 政策概要：オンタリオ州の高等教育セクターにおける戦略執行合意（SMA）に関する評価メカニズム強化の提言

## Policy Brief: Strengthening the Evaluative Mechanism for Ontario's Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) in the Provincial Post-Secondary Education Sector

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### 1. Introduction

Ontario's institutional differentiation policy is one of the most debated policy issues in the provincial post-secondary education sector today. The Government of Ontario has begun negotiating the next Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) with the province's institutional and policy stakeholders as the current agreement is set to expire in 2017 (MAESD, 2016; Milan, Davis, & Zarifa, 2016). Academic experts and evaluation practitioners have argued for the importance of an evaluation role in evidence-based policy decision-making (Owen, 2006; Patton, 2008; Weiss, 1998). The framework could play a role in prioritizing the sector policy issues as the limited provincial resources are available to the sector. The Government of Ontario may wish to integrate a mechanism to manage data collection and analysis for the implementation of the SMA framework. However, while the existing

SMA framework incorporates a set of metrics, the evaluation mechanism remains absent from the policy framework. Strengthening the SMA evaluation mechanism diagnoses, prioritizes, and resolve policy issues regarding access, quality, and funding in Ontario. In what ways could the Government of Ontario, particularly the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD), strategize the existing policy framework?

### 2. What is the Current Institutional Differentiation Status in Ontario's Post-Secondary Education Sector?

Ontario's institutional differentiation discourse is a relatively recent issue although the historical discourse existed in the province as far back as the second quarter of the 19th century (Skolnik, 2013). Even though Ontario's current post-secondary

education sector remains one of the most competitive post-secondary education systems in Canada and globally, the new public demands compel Ontario's stakeholders to critically examine the next set of policy strategies to remain competitive domestically and globally:

- Meeting the increasing demand for access
- Maintaining cost-efficiency expectations
- Staying competitive in the current global economic environment
- Contributing to scientific innovation and social services
- Continuing the internationalization of higher education to recruit talents globally and to become sustainable financially

(Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, 2009; de Wit, Agarwal, Said, Sehoole, & Sirozi, 2008; Lang, 2001; Piché & Jones, 2016).

Diversifying the post-secondary education sector strategizes Ontario's post-secondary education by responding to the existing forces domestically while remaining competitive globally; a common rationale for the differentiation policy is reducing duplication, improving efficiency, and supporting effectiveness institutionally (Milan et al., 2016). However, in order for the institutional and policy leaders to act and make policy decisions strategically, appropriate data needs to be available in order to reform the Ontario post-secondary education system. The question remains: In what ways could the Ontario government implement the proposed data management? A key to answering this question requires examining existing cases as benchmarks.

### **3. What Could Be Expected from the SMA Policy Framework Implementation?**

The performance-based approach to post-secondary

education receives some challenging critiques from academic experts in Canada and the U.S. (Barnetson, 1999; Boberg & Barnetson, 2000; Hillman, 2016). Alberta is an example which implemented a post-secondary education policy focused on the performance-based approach at the Canadian provincial level. Under a theory of change, "a model of organizational functioning" (Boberg & Barnetson, 2000, p. 9), Alberta's provincial government implemented their performance-based funding policy as a two-year pilot project in 1996-1997. The Alberta framework and its primary design focused on "Increasing productivity" and "Increasing government control" (p. 8), and developed a series of quantitative indicators to evaluate the policy framework. However, the evaluation study questioned Alberta's performance-based framework to achieve its original goals suggesting a set of challenges or "deficiencies" (p. 18), and disagreed with the current policy framework because of thorough dependence on the quantitative measures (Barnetson, 1999; Boberg & Barnetson, 2000). What was Alberta's mechanism for the policy framework evaluation? Alberta's policy experiment in 1996-1997 could serve as Ontario's lesson-learned case in terms of developing its mechanism for the SMA policy framework.

### **4. What is the Current Institutional Capacity to Develop an Evaluation Mechanism in Ontario?**

The academic researchers and the evaluation practitioners in Canada and the United States have called for an evidence-based approach to policy evaluation for some time (i.e., Connell, Schorr, & Weiss, 1995; Galley, Gold, & Johal, 2013; Weiss, 1998). However, the current research and evaluation utilization of the public policy decision-making is challenging, including in the post-secondary education sector. In the U.S., the California Master Plan strategically organized California's post-

secondary education system in the 1960s, but what was missing is an integrative evaluation mechanism for the system's continuous adjustment and maintenance (Finney, Riso, Orosz, & Boland, 2014). In the Canadian post-secondary education sector, some experts raised questions about a lack of research-use capacity in the policy formation (Jones, 2014; Ness, 2010), and several institutional capacity challenges became evident (Sá & Hamlin, 2015). Building institutional capacity for developing a mechanism for the SMA would contribute to systematically collecting and analyzing data for evaluation. What could contribute to strengthening the Ontario government's institutional capacity for building the SMA policy framework evaluation mechanism?

## 5. Conclusion

Sound policy decision-making calls for the development of a mechanism to manage monitoring and evaluation (Patton, 2010). Bourgeois, Toews, Whynot, and Lamarche (2013) defined and developed an assessment tool to evaluate the existing capacity at Canadian federal agencies. Bourgeois, Simmons, Hotte, and Osseni (2016) applied the tool to measure organizational evaluation capacity in the Ontario Public Health units, and concluded that the province's public health sector was developing their institutional evaluation capacity but that more areas needed improvement. Although the current SMA identified a set of metrics under the policy framework is in a right step, a systematic mechanism to gather and analyze data is required for evaluative purposes and support policy decision-making (Owen, 2006) should the provincial government improves issues involving quality, access and/or funding. For this reason, the following recommendation serves as a set of action plan for Ontario's stakeholders:

- Identify an evaluation expert within the

responsible unit

- Allocate an appropriate fund for an evaluation engagement
- Develop a data management system within the government
- Organize an evaluation steering committee
- Coordinate the existing evaluation resources within the government
- Develop a logic model to visualize the SMA policy framework evaluation process
- Implement evaluation training workshops among individuals in the leadership positions
- Begin constructing a theory of change in Ontario's post-secondary education system for the SMA policy framework

For the immediate need of the SMA policy evaluation procedure, the above recommendations serve as a guide to establish an evaluation mechanism for the SMA's policy framework. At the same time, assessing the existing institutional capacity for establishing the SMA policy evaluation mechanism could remedy any possible challenges.

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