A Message from the Presidents of Ontario's Universities

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OVER THE LAST YEAR, ONTARIO’S UNIVERSITIES HAVE BEEN TALKING TO ONTARIANS ABOUT THE FUTURE.

Through our survey, a series of roundtables, and at several conferences, many thousands of Ontarians have shared their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for the province, and the hopes and concerns they have as they look to the future.

In all, we reached more than half a million Ontarians through social media, our newsletters, and events like the Ontario Universities’ Fair. More than 30,000 visitors came to the Ontario’s Universities website to join the conversation, and more than 6,390 people took our online survey. We held or attended several dozen roundtables, consultations and conferences, hearing in the process from more than 1,000 business, government, and community leaders. On top of that, we spoke to experts and reviewed the latest research and reports to understand where the world is heading and how Ontarians will be affected.

The insights and perspectives we collected were diverse, thoughtful and incisive. We are pleased to share them with you, and to outline how we plan to work with Ontarians to turn them into action.

More than anything, Ontarians spoke about the need for the province to come together to build a prosperous, sustainable and inclusive future.

Ontario’s universities share the same conviction and are strongly committed to working in partnership with all Ontarians to help bring this vision for a better future to life.

We hope you will join us on the journey – and keep the conversation going for years to come.

— The Presidents of Ontario’s Universities
### A Year of Listening

As part of our listening campaign, #futuring, we asked Ontarians to tell us their hopes, concerns, ideas and aspirations for the province.

We engaged with:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36,000+</td>
<td>Visitors to the Ontario's Universities website: ontariosuniversities.ca</td>
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<td>6,394</td>
<td>People who completed our online survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>130,000+</td>
<td>Students, parents and educators who attended the Ontario Universities' Fair</td>
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<td>13,100+</td>
<td>People who engaged with Ontario's Universities on social media</td>
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<td>1,000+</td>
<td>Business, government and community leaders at round-tables, community breakfasts, consultations, conferences, and meetings</td>
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Visitors to the 2016 Ontario Universities’ Fair take part in the #futuring initiative.
The world is changing at a rapid pace: Our present is constantly evolving, and our future seems both glowing with opportunity and challenged by unpredictable disruptions.

Ontarians see the world transforming around them. They want the knowledge that will allow them to master new technologies, the skills that will help them thrive in the jobs of today and tomorrow, and the modern services that will advance society and improve their lives, their community, and the planet.

Imagine a world where a wrist watch can detect cancer in the body, where cars drive themselves, and where new clean technologies have preserved our natural world while creating jobs and economic prosperity. Ontario’s universities are helping develop such life-changing discoveries – knowing that we must also help reimagine the skills and technologies that citizens will need to thrive in a world being transformed by automation and machine learning.

Over the past year, Ontario’s universities have carried out an extensive listening initiative, #futuring, reaching out and engaging with tens of thousands of Ontarians who told us their hopes for the future, what keeps them up at night, what issues our leaders need to focus on, and how universities can make valuable contributions to a brighter future.

We wanted straight talk from Ontarians on our role in producing graduates who are ready to make immediate and valuable contributions to the province; on our relationship with communities; on our role in research and innovation; and on the wider economic and social challenges that we believe we can help the province meet.

We received these kinds of thought-provoking insights through a far-reaching online survey, via social media conversations, at a series of roundtables with leading thinkers from every sector, and from thousands of students and parents at the Ontario Universities’ Fair.

So what did we learn?

The overriding message is that Ontarians are optimistic about the future. They are excited about the positive changes technology can bring, and about the ability of future generations to contribute to a thriving province. They believe Ontario’s biggest strength is its people and its talent. They love the province’s diversity and inclusiveness and believe it’s an advantage it can build upon.

The overarching message is that Ontarians are optimistic about the future. They are excited about the positive changes technology can bring, and about the ability of future generations to contribute to a thriving province. They believe Ontario’s biggest strength is its people and its talent. They love the province’s diversity and inclusiveness and believe it’s an advantage it can build upon.

At the same time, they are concerned about how the province will tackle the substantial economic and social challenges that lie ahead, including adapting to the technologies that threaten job security, ensuring the health-care system remains robust and ready for an aging population, and confronting the dangers of climate change. They also expect a just society where Aboriginal communities and all low-income or disadvantaged groups have equal access to the same hope and opportunity.
In the face of such challenges, they look for Ontario’s decision-makers to think big on solutions that will help citizens be ready for tomorrow. Above all, Ontarians want policies and decisions to be based on partnerships; they expect institutions such as universities, colleges, and hospitals to work hand in hand with governments, business, planners and other stakeholders to create solutions that benefit everyone.

They want a society of partners, not a society of silos.

As well as secure jobs, Ontarians want to strengthen their communities by building robust and flexible health care, cutting-edge businesses, and enriching cultural experiences that are pivotal to ensuring we can lead fulfilling lives from kindergarten through to our senior years.

We think these opinions and suggestions provide an inspirational blueprint for Ontario’s future. We believe that through our research, our knowledge-sharing and the young minds that pass through our classrooms, we can help every single Ontarian thrive and enjoy a better quality of life.

From the insights gathered over the past year, we have produced this report, Partnering for a Better Future for Ontario, which examines Ontarians’ feedback, using it to shape universities’ own commitments to help forge a prosperous and hopeful province, as well as our recommendations to governments and policy makers.

We believe that Ontario’s brand as an open and cosmopolitan society, with a high quality of life, a large talent pool and an innovative tech and business environment, gives us a global edge at a time when some of Canada’s major competitors are becoming more insular.

This is Ontario’s moment to shine, and our 21 universities will work with our partners across all sectors to drive economic prosperity and improve quality of life in three key ways:

**Helping students thrive.**

We are committed to nurturing successful citizens and strengthening Ontario’s talent pipeline, by preparing every student with the skills they need for the workforce now and in the future, expanding experiential learning in their programs, providing career, social and mental-health support, and ensuring that every young Ontarian who is qualified for a place in university has access.

**Supporting our communities.**

We are committed to helping enhance the quality of life for Ontarians through our research and local partnerships in areas such as health care, the aging population, municipal services, infrastructure, transit and arts and culture.

**Driving a growing, dynamic province.**

We are committed to helping our economy grow by educating the talented graduates that employers need to be competitive here and abroad; supporting entrepreneurship and innovation; attracting the best talent to Ontario from around the world; and contributing to the clean technologies and low-carbon practices to help promote sustainable growth.

This report details how Ontario’s universities are ready to work with partners across the private and public sectors to achieve these three important goals.

Each section includes a summary of:

**What Ontarians Want:**

The important messages we received from Ontarians during our listening initiative.

**Ontario Universities’ Commitments:**

The actions and policies Ontario universities intend to embrace in order to meet these hopes and concerns.

**How Government Can Help:**

Our recommendations to policy makers and the provincial government to help universities and our many partners achieve these goals for a brighter future.

We heard from many thousands of Ontarians as we honed these ideas and prepared these commitments and recommendations. But we know that there are still plenty of ideas to be shared and plenty to discuss as we work together to build a better future for Ontario. It’s only by sharing insights and forming partnerships that we will face the changes taking place in our world and come out stronger than ever before. Ontario’s universities are ready to work with partners across the province to help ensure this happens and to help Ontarians and the province as a whole thrive in tomorrow’s world.
SUMMARY OF OUR COMMITMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WHATONTARIANS WANT, HOW UNIVERSITIES CAN PARTNER FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE, AND WHAT GOVERNMENT CAN DO TO HELP

Partnering to Help Students Thrive

Helping Develop a Strong Talent Pipeline

WHATONTARIANS WANT

• Education that gives students flexible and adaptable skills – such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, teamwork and creativity – to help them thrive throughout their career.

• Co-ops, internships, lab work, research projects and other experiential learning opportunities that prepare students for the workforce.

• Partnerships among employers, universities and colleges to boost experiential learning and ensure Ontario continues to have a strong talent pipeline.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS

• Ensure students graduate with the knowledge, skills and experience needed to thrive in the workplace and be successful global citizens in today’s and tomorrow’s world.

• Establish explicit learning outcomes in every program and department so students graduate with the necessary knowledge and adaptable skills, as well as with the ability to explain them to prospective employers.

• Ensure that all students benefit from experiential learning that exposes them to the demands of workplaces and improves their employability, interpersonal skills, and transition to the workforce.

• Further develop robust partnerships with employers in order to increase the number of experiential learning opportunities.

HOWGOVERNMENT CAN HELP

• Provide financial support for new technology and innovative teaching methods to help ensure all students can continue to enjoy an enriching educational experience while also developing the core skills they need for the future.

• Invest in experiential learning through:
  — Sustained funding for a full range of experiential learning at universities;
  — Incentives to employers, particularly small businesses and not-for-profit organizations, to partner with universities to create more experiential learning opportunities for all students, including Aboriginal students, those with disabilities and other underrepresented students; and
  — Development, in collaboration with university, college and employer partners, of an online province-wide information resource to encourage and support employers to provide experiential learning opportunities for students.

Supporting Ontarians in Accessing a University Education

WHATONTARIANS WANT

• An inclusive society in which all Ontarians can contribute to and benefit from the province’s economic success.

• Stronger relationships with Aboriginal communities and a focus on ensuring they have the tools to thrive, including by increasing their participation rate in postsecondary education.

• Increased access to university for under-represented groups, and more culturally sensitive supports for them on campus.
ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS
• Ensure that any Ontarian who is willing and qualified can gain a university education.
• Ensure prospective students have the support and resources they need to make an informed decision about their postsecondary education.
• Develop and implement plans to support and increase access for Aboriginal peoples, under-represented youth and first-generation university students.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP
• Help high schools prepare students for the transition to university by providing training on managing university workloads, financial literacy and living independently.
• Continue to improve access to data about in-demand jobs and marketable skills, so students and parents can better assess career opportunities.
• Increase investments to attract and support Aboriginal students, including incentives to increase the numbers of Aboriginal faculty.
• Work with universities to attract and support first-generation university students.

Offering Full and Robust Supports to Students Throughout Their Studies

WHAT ONTARIANS WANT
• Campus programs and supports that ensure students are healthy and engaged.
• A comprehensive approach to health that includes robust mental-health supports.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS
• Offer a wide range of extracurricular initiatives, career services and other supports for students to get the most out of their university experience.
• Ensure a safe on-campus experience for all students through strong safety measures and policies.
• Work with Aboriginal communities to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations related to education.
• Ensure students have access to robust mental health supports.
• Partner with colleges, government and communities to ensure a broad mental health strategy is in place that serves students and Ontarians as a whole.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP
• Increase the investment in culturally-sensitive student services and the implementation of cultural awareness and safety training for students, faculty and staff.
• Work with universities, colleges, students and providers to develop a whole-of-community mental health and wellness strategy that:
  — Clearly defines roles and responsibilities for government ministries, postsecondary institutions, student associations, health care and community organizations;
  — Ensures that all postsecondary students, regardless of geographic location, can access gender and culturally-sensitive mental health services and supports that are timely, effective, flexible, and provided in a safe and comfortable environment; and
  — Emphasizes prevention and harm reduction as important elements of mental health priorities.

Partnering to Support our Communities

Building a Better Future Through Research and Innovation

WHAT ONTARIANS WANT
• A breadth of innovation that helps find solutions to our multi-faceted challenges that span from the economy, to the environment, to social policy.
• Collaboration between government, universities, employers and industry to commercialize research.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS
• Produce high-quality research and innovation across all disciplines in STEM, the humanities, arts, and the social sciences, to deliver real, impactful improvements in the province.
• Help commercialize and publicize researchers’ work so that it leads to new products, services and processes that improve health care, productivity, public policy and more in communities across the province.
HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP
• Work with the federal government to improve research funding.
• Increase investments in the Ontario Research Fund and ensure it supports a wide range of research and innovation.
• Support the movement of universities’ ideas and inventions into the marketplace by creating a Research Commercialization Fund.

Ensuring a Healthy Future for All Ontarians
WHAT ONTARIANS WANT
• A comprehensive approach to health that covers prevention and treatment, for both physical and mental health.
• Focus on and funding for scientific research that will lead to new cures and treatments, and provide Ontarians with world-class technology.
• A health-care system that meets the needs of an aging population.
• Community planning and development that takes into account the needs of an aging population.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS
• Support and aid in the commercialization of research on medical technology, treatments, processes and services to save lives and improve health-care delivery.
• Support social innovation that leads to better health services and health outcomes for Ontarians.
• Educate the world-class doctors, nurses, rehab therapists and other practitioners who are at the heart of our health-care system.
• Work with health providers and government in our communities to help increase the level of care for Ontarians, including by supporting preventive approaches to care and the development of age-friendly communities.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP
• Continue working with universities to ensure Ontario has the right number and mix of health care professionals working where they are most needed so that all Ontarians have access to high-quality health care close to home.

Strengthening Communities Across the Province
WHAT ONTARIANS WANT
• Effective local community planning that addresses key issues such as sustainability, health, housing and transit.
• Support for arts and culture that helps create vibrant communities.
• Meaningful partnerships between post-secondary, private and public sectors to improve communities.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS
• Support and publicize research that leads to services and processes to strengthen our local communities.
• Help build strong, vibrant communities by strengthening bonds with a wide range of partners, including businesses, non-profits, local service providers and arts organizations.
• Encourage vibrant community services and programs by partnering with communities to leverage our campus resources.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP
• Work with universities, local governments and communities to encourage a vibrant flow of ideas and research that helps spur new thinking and develop solutions to local issues.
• Ensure communities, both urban and rural, and particularly in Northern and remote regions, have the services and infrastructure, such as quality Internet access and strong transit, that ensure high quality of life and prosperity.
• Develop a Northern Ontario strategy that includes: incentives for students and graduates to study, stay and work in Northern communities; sustained funding for the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, including funding for research facilities and equipment; establishing a Northern Ontario Research Chair to focus research on issues particular to the region.
Partnering to Drive a Growing, Dynamic Province

Driving Economic Development and an Entrepreneurial Culture

**WHAT ONTARIANS WANT**
- Research, partnerships and entrepreneurial initiatives that drive innovation in key industries.
- Support for regional economic development across the province.
- Support to help start-ups and small businesses grow.
- Incentives and policies to keep innovators and inventors in the province and ensure their ideas benefit the lives of Ontarians.

**ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS**
- Strengthen relationships with industry to ensure we are conducting research, fostering talent, and supporting knowledge translation so that new ideas and inventions move from the laboratory to the community and help businesses innovate and grow.
- Recruit talented graduate students and researchers who bring new knowledge, ideas and innovations to various industries.
- Work with our students and our business and community partners to encourage and support entrepreneurs.
- Ensure Ontario benefits from the best international ideas by attracting international talent, supporting students and faculty to study and collaborate abroad, and offering education that prepares students for a globalized world.

**HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP**
- Help attract the best talent through measures that include expanding the number and value of graduate scholarships.
- Provide responsive funding for internationally-matched research projects and support students to take a semester abroad or gain international work experience.

Creating a Sustainable and Prosperous Future

**WHAT ONTARIANS WANT**
- A focus on sustainable job creation and economic development: reducing emissions, preserving our province’s natural beauty and moving toward a low-carbon economy.
- Support for and development of renewable energies and technology.
- A proactive approach to energy efficiency and wildlife conservation.

**ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS**
- Dedicate resources to building sustainable, low-carbon campuses and producing graduates with the broad skills to contribute to a sustainable and prosperous economy.
- Encourage research into the green technology and innovations that will benefit the province.
- Continue research on ecological issues that help preserve our natural environment for future generations.

**HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP**
- Support advancements in clean technology and climate science that will move the results of university research into businesses and communities.
- Encourage conservation and energy efficiency through funding to repair or retrofit aging infrastructure, with dedicated investments to postsecondary institutions.
Over the last year, Ontarians sent us a clear message: We need to prepare for the future by building strong partnerships and encouraging bold, big-picture thinking. Here’s an overview of what we heard and a close look at how Ontario’s universities plan to work with Ontarians to follow through on what they told us and help create a better future for the province.
A YEAR OF LISTENING

For the last year, Ontario’s universities have been reaching out across Ontario and holding conversations with Ontarians about the future of the province.

Through social media, newsletters and events like the Ontario’s Universities’ Fair, we have reached more than 550,000 people. More than 13,000 people engaged with us through @futuringON, and thousands more responded to individual universities.

At a variety of roundtables, conferences, consultations, and meetings, more than 1,000 business, government and community leaders shared their insights about the future of the province. These events were held across the province, in communities from Windsor to Kingston to Thunder Bay.

We gathered further insights by analyzing the latest research and reports on issues that affect Ontarians.

And through an online survey, we heard from students, parents and the public about what they are excited and worried about as they face the future.

Through the survey, 6,394 Ontarians of all ages, from all across the province, shared their hopes and concerns for the future.

What they had on their minds, first and foremost, were jobs. Many shared with us how excited they are to start a career after graduation. Thousands, however, signaled their worries about job security, particularly as Ontario’s economy continues to transform.

Ontarians further told us about their excitement for technology and the advances it might bring to our hospitals and to our homes. They highlighted their worries about our environment, particularly as Ontario’s economy continues to transform.

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In spite of the instability and challenges that lie ahead, Ontarians remain largely upbeat: seven in 10 said they are optimistic about their future.

69% of respondents are optimistic about the future

6,394 Number of Ontarians who responded to our survey

3,068 Number who identified as students

2,290 Number who identified as parents

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Figure 1

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<tr>
<th>HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU CONSIDER EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AS ONTARIO PREPARES FOR THE FUTURE?</th>
<th>BUSINESS COUNCIL OF CANADA SURVEY¹</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to think critically – 9.05</td>
<td>Collaboration/team-work skills – 67%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem-solving skills – 8.96</td>
<td>Communication skills – 59%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skills to communicate clearly – 8.84</td>
<td>Functional knowledge – 53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to take initiative with confidence – 8.44</td>
<td>Problem solving skills – 51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to thrive in environments that change quickly – 8.41</td>
<td>People skills/relationship building – 48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and technological skills needed to adapt to the changing workforce – 8.34</td>
<td>Customer service skills – 39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership skills needed to reach goals – 8.25</td>
<td>Analytical capabilities – 38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work experience – either as an employee or volunteer – 8.18</td>
<td>Creative/innovative thinking – 28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Just-in-time knowledge kept up-to-date through life-long learning – 8.12</td>
<td>Industry-specific knowledge and experience – 26%</td>
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<td>Entrepreneurial spirit – 7.27</td>
<td>Technological literacy – 22%</td>
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<td>Sales skills – 13%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Project management skills – 12%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leadership skills – 6%</td>
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</table>

And they emphasized that, in today's changing times, core skills like critical thinking, problem solving and communication are the most important tools for preparing for the future, something that the Business Council of Canada also heard when it surveyed companies about what skills are most important to them when evaluating entry-level candidates.\(^2\)

As we delved deeper into Ontarians' thoughts about the future, we heard their optimism about the effects of technology and the strength of their communities and arts and culture, and their concern about environmental and equity issues. These same topics came up frequently in the survey's open-ended questions, in which Ontarians wrote about what they are excited and worried about in the next five years, and what the province and universities in particular can do to create a better future.

No matter the issue being discussed, the major theme that carried throughout is that an uncertain future requires creative and bold thinkers who can work in partnership to bring about a better life for all Ontarians.

"We need to make sure that those going through our education system know how to think, how to reason, how to be creative and compassionate, and how to ask questions and challenge assumptions," one student wrote.

We heard a similar message beyond the survey, in the research we conducted over the last year, and in the roundtables we held with employers, government officials and community leaders.

At the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on the Aging Population, Sophia Ikura, Senior Director of Community Engagement and Corporate Affairs at the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network, argued that "we are moving away from a fairly siloed way of thinking and working, where people become very skilled in their specific area of expertise and profession, to a world where really the solutions have to be much more interconnected, much more complex, stretching across multiple disciplines."

The same sentiment was echoed in a recent report from the Business Council of Canada, which noted that today, “businesses are increasingly looking for workers with multi-faceted competencies – not just technical knowledge, but also so-called ‘soft skills’ such as collaboration and teamwork, problem-solving, relationship building and an openness to change.”\(^3\)

Ontario’s universities know that tomorrow’s world will bring both significant challenges and major new possibilities. We take to heart the goal that Senator Ratna Omidvar set for us at our Roundtable on Diversity and Inclusion: “The best thing universities can do is to focus on the successful experience so that students are able to participate culturally, socially and economically, not just in university life, but in post-university life.”

By working with our partners to support our students, communities and province, we are ready to fulfill this mission. We are ready to help Ontarians turn today’s disruptions in tomorrow’s opportunities. We are ready to help them fulfill the dreams they shared with us. And we are ready to work harder than ever to help bring their vision of a better future to life.

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Helping Students Get the Jobs of Tomorrow

Working with communities and businesses, Ryerson University has created an innovative new master’s program in Data Science and Analytics that addresses current skills gaps and the needs of employers. This interdisciplinary program will produce highly trained data scientists using an interdisciplinary approach so that students gain a solid understanding of how data analytics help improve decisions throughout an organization’s value chain. Engaging with industry partners such as IBM, St. Michael’s Hospital, the Hospital for Sick Children, Microsoft Research, the Globe and Mail, and the Toronto Stock Exchange, Ryerson master’s students will access extensive data on health care, software engineering, social media, services and finance to acquire hands-on experience with analytics tools that are widely used in the workplace.

A university education isn’t defined by one single goal or experience. Students come to university to build life-long friendships and explore new ideas, to find their passions and use them to build fulfilling lives and careers. Our campuses bring together students and faculty from across the country and around the world to work on and think about everything from the health of a cell to the fate of the planet.

Students enter postsecondary – whether college or university – with big ideas and dreams of the careers, travels and experiences they will embark upon through their studies. The breadth of opportunity universities offer is what helps our students build on those ideas and live out those experiences.

Ontarians shared these dreams and aspirations with us over the last year. “There are so many opportunities for children – so many different fields of study to find their passion instead of fitting in to a box,” one parent wrote in our survey. “I’m excited to see them both find themselves and find what makes them happy and fulfilled.”

We also heard, however, about the challenges Ontarians face. Many Ontarians come to university and college anxious about what will happen after graduation. They worry about what jobs will exist in the future, and about whether they will be stable enough and pay well enough to let them start a family, buy a home and live the life they always envisioned for themselves. They’re worried about the cost of getting their degree and about whether the right supports will be available when they need them on campus.

As universities and as Ontarians we cannot shy away from these realities. We have to confront these challenges head on and ensure we are preparing our students to thrive in tomorrow’s world. Doing so will require the efforts of the entire education sector – with high schools, colleges and universities all playing their vital parts in educating students who can easily adapt to changes in the workplace and build rich, fulfilling lives in a shifting economy.

Helping Develop a Strong Talent Pipeline

Ensuring an enriching educational experience for all Ontarians is particularly vital today as both existing employers and foreign companies looking to invest in the province are putting a priority on talent.

A recent report from the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity highlighted this fact. In interviews with Ontario CEOs, one major theme that emerged is that “talent is Ontario’s greatest strength. The province is home to a diverse population of skilled workers who contribute across industries, from welders and technicians to data scientists and surgeons.”

As Ontario looks to build up its industries, stay competitive globally and attract foreign investment, talent is our number-one calling card. But maintaining this strength, further developing Ontario’s talent pipeline and ensuring the province has workers who can thrive in a changing economy will require continuous work and investments.

Throughout our conversations over the last year, we heard repeatedly that the shifts in the economy today are leading employers to prioritize a particular kind of talent. They are increasingly looking for workers with the adaptable and flexible skills that a university education provides.

“People that can learn quickly, that can pivot, that can problem solve, to me those are the core skills that our universities and other educational institutions need to be instilling in people,” said Gordon Frost, a Partner at human resources consulting firm Mercer Canada, at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Innovation and the New Economy. “We can’t say, this is the knowledge that you will need for the next 40 years. But here’s the skill set that you will need to continue to be successful in our rapidly changing environment.”

From Campus to Space Station

Lieutenant-Colonel Jeremy Hansen credits the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) – where he obtained a degree in Space Science and a Master of Science in Physics – for preparing him for an out-of-this-world career with the Canadian Astronaut Corps. One of two Canadians who will travel to the International Space Station by 2024, Hansen says his education and experiential learning at the RMC provided him with the industry knowledge, leadership skills and opportunities that prepared him for a career as an astronaut. In addition to Hansen, three other Canadian astronauts have graduated from RMC, including Joshua Kutryk, the newest recruit to the Canadian Space Agency, as well as Chris Hadfield and Marc Garneau.

Operating the World’s Largest Postsecondary Co-op Program

The University of Waterloo operates the largest postsecondary co-op program of its kind in the world, with nearly 20,000 co-op students enrolled over three semesters in more than 120 programs. The William M. Tatham Centre for Co-operative Education and Career Action offers co-op students, non-co-op students, alumni, employers and post-docs guidance through the employment process and in taking next steps in their career. In 2016, more than 6,700 employers from over 60 countries conducted more than 76,900 interviews through teleconference, webcam/Skype or group interviews in one of the 130 interview rooms or 37 phone/webcam stations at the Tatham Centre.

As Ontario’s universities work to adapt to these changing times, our focus remains on nurturing the skilled and successful citizens of tomorrow by giving students the skills, knowledge and experiences that will set them up for fulfilling lives and careers.

Ontario’s universities are proud of how well our students do after graduation. University graduates have a 94 per cent employment rate after two years, and 89 per cent of graduates who are employed full time consider their work either closely or somewhat related to the skills developed at university.5

Our graduates work around the world and in every field – preserving water quality in our lakes, leading impactful not-for-profits and helping Canada explore the far reaches of our universe. As they do so, they see career earnings that rise significantly over time, regardless of what degree they received.6 On average, bachelor degree holders earn more than $75,000, twice as much as high school graduates.7

It’s clear, however, that the future will require even more from educators. If Ontario is going to seize all the opportunities that today’s technology-driven knowledge economy offers, it is going to need colleges and universities to train the full range of workers that Ontario needs to prosper. As Carolyn A. Wilkins, Senior Deputy Governor of the Bank of Canada, noted in a recent speech, this includes “people with highly technical skills to program and repair increasingly complex technology, and also people who can “perform tasks that may never be replicated by a machine because they require creativity, intuitive judgment, inspiration or simply a human touch.”8

A recent U.S. study indicated just how technology is transforming workplaces by tracking job postings in the auto industry. In 2012, it found, there were equal number of jobs postings in the industry for mechanical engineers and software developers/engineers. By 2016, however, postings for software developers and engineers had grown by 207 per cent, while those for mechanical engineers had increased by 39 per cent.3

Across the province, industries are transforming in similar ways as new technologies emerge to radically change the way Ontarians work. Ontario is only just starting to feel the effects of automation, and as employers determine how artificial intelligence might affect tasks or entire positions at their businesses, they are hard-pressed to say what jobs they will be hiring for in five or ten years.

What employers emphasized over the last year at our roundtables and in other conversations is that, as technology continues to transform the workplace, adaptable and flexible core skills – such as creativity, communications, teamwork, problem solving and critical thinking – will become increasingly important for tomorrow’s workforce.

“It is the soft skills that are important... the strategic thinking, the ability to distill and communicate information and, in particular, the learning agility,” Shurjeel Choudhri, Senior Vice-President and Head of Medical and Scientific Affairs at Bayer HealthCare, told us at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Youth Employment.

Recent reports from the Business Council of Canada and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce have highlighted the same needs among large corporations and small businesses alike.10 And we are already seeing this trend emerging as the number of jobs emphasizing creativity, adaptability and flexibility grow at a much faster rate than other occupations.11

Universities are ideally suited to provide the wide-ranging education that strengthens the province’s talent pipeline and prepares students for this new world of changing work. Employers, for instance, have repeatedly noted that interdisciplinary thinking is a pivotal attribute for today’s workforce. The labour market increasingly values software engineers with the business savvy to run a company or English and History majors who can analyze data sets.

Both through interdisciplinary programs and activities and lectures designed to broaden students’ horizons, Ontario’s universities work hard to introduce students to a broad range of ideas spanning the humanities and sciences.

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8 Wilkins, Carolyn A. “Blame it on the Machines.” Remarks to Toronto Region Board of Trade, April 2017.
Offering Experiential Learning Across Disciplines

At Brock University, accounting students from the Goodman School of Business are partnering with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to provide a free tax clinic for the Niagara community. Students get relevant job experience and are fully trained by the CRA as part of the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program, while community members are able to access affordable accounting advice during tax season.

Meanwhile, arts students in Brock’s Department of Communications, Popular Culture and Film are encouraged to take advantage of experiential learning opportunities within the Niagara community, putting in 180 hours of hands-on learning at placements over the course of the year. Many placements are done at small businesses that need support and expertise in the areas of web design, graphic design, communications, social media plans and event planning.

At the same time, educating students who have an expert understanding of their fields of study and the knowledge they need to become engaged and thoughtful citizens will always be a university priority. And by recruiting students and scholars from around the world and creating diverse, multicultural campuses, we are also preparing students for a workforce that is increasingly globally minded.

No matter what program our students choose to enroll in – no matter whether it’s English or Engineering, a BA or PhD – we are committed to ensuring that our students graduate with both the core knowledge required in their field, and the adaptable skills needed in a world where, as a recent Harvard Business Review article argued, what matters is “how you think. Can you ask the right questions? Do you know what problem you’re trying to solve in the first place?”

We know, however, that there is still room to improve as we work to ensure that all students graduate with the right mix of theoretical knowledge, transferable skills and practical experience that will set them up for both their first job and a long, fulfilling career.

Employers and students have both repeatedly emphasized that high-quality experiential learning opportunities, such as co-ops, community-based research or lab work, are pivotal to getting this balance right.

Universities are committed to strengthening our relationships with employers in order to expand experiential learning opportunities and help all students transition smoothly from the classroom to the workplace. We have hundreds of programs across the province that offer co-ops or internships – but that is only the start of our efforts. In many cases, universities work directly with employers to ensure they have the tools to set up and run co-ops, internships or other opportunities. At Ryerson University, for example, the Career Boost program connects students with small and medium-sized businesses and, in acknowledgment of the limited resources at many of these enterprises, provides 40 per cent of the intern’s stipend in addition to pre-screening of applicants and support throughout the placement.

Experiential learning, however, encompasses more than co-ops. Universities provide a wide range of experiential learning for students in all disciplines, using research collaborations, community-based learning, lab work and capstone projects to give all students the practical experience they need to thrive in the workforce. Opportunities also exist to ensure students can access experiential learning opportunities internationally, allowing them to build global networks and be introduced to new ideas and cultures.

From the classroom to the lab to the co-op office, universities are committed to growing with the times and innovating. We are working with partners to continuously find new ways to give students an expansive educational experience that provides the mix of skills, knowledge and real-life experience they need in today’s and tomorrow’s workforce.

Universities cannot do it alone, however. We need to work with government and employers to ensure there are sufficient resources to continue expanding our efforts, whether through increased experiential learning for students, new classroom technologies, or cutting-edge teaching methods.

Employers also play a vital role by offering on-the-job training that teaches graduates relevant technical skills and helps them transition smoothly into a new position. By partnering with employers across the province, we can also ensure that workers who need to update their skills and knowledge have access to the variety of continuing education and online learning that universities offer.

Finally, universities and colleges must continue working together to develop a strong talent pipeline in Ontario. Advances in technology are leaving no sector and no occupation unaffected, and it’s only through the coordinated work of the entire postsecondary sector that Ontario will have a robust workforce that’s ready for tomorrow’s challenges. As U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen has argued, “we don’t know how fast the economy will grow, what new technologies will be developed, or how quickly and consistently employment will expand. What is considerably more certain, however, is that success will continue to be tied to education, in part because a good education enhances one’s ability to adapt to a changing economy.”

To read more about what Ontarians told us about jobs and skills, see Appendix A: Adaptable Skills and Experience.


Commitments and Recommendations

WHAT ONTARIANS WANT
- Education that gives students flexible and adaptable skills – such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication, teamwork and creativity – to help them thrive throughout their career.
- Co-ops, internships, lab work, research projects and other experiential learning opportunities that prepare students for the workforce.
- Partnerships among employers, universities and colleges to boost experiential learning and ensure Ontario continues to have a strong talent pipeline.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS
- Ensure students graduate with the knowledge, skills and experience needed to thrive in the workplace and be successful global citizens in today’s and tomorrow’s world.
- Establish explicit learning outcomes in every program and department so students graduate with the necessary knowledge and adaptable skills, as well as with the ability to explain them to prospective employers.
- Ensure that all students benefit from experiential learning that exposes them to the demands of workplaces and improves their employability, interpersonal skills, and transition to the workforce.
- Further develop robust partnerships with employers in order to increase the number of experiential learning opportunities.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP
- Provide financial support for new technology and innovative teaching methods to help ensure all students can continue to enjoy an enriching educational experience while also developing the core skills they need for the future.
- Invest in experiential learning through:
  - Sustained funding for a full range of experiential learning at universities;
  - Incentives to employers, particularly small businesses and not-for-profit organizations, to partner with universities to create more experiential learning opportunities for all students, including Aboriginal students, those with disabilities and other underrepresented students; and
  - Development, in collaboration with university, college and employer partners, of an online province-wide information resource to encourage and support employers to provide experiential learning opportunities for students.

Educating Work-Ready Business Students

In order to help business students build a strong professional skill set before they launch into a career, Nipissing University encourages them to take part in an experience certificate program called iLEAD (Learn through Experience, Action and Discovery). Business students can use the certificate program to earn credits towards their degree through directed study, honours theses, workplace internships, service work or international placements.
Keeping Students at the Cutting-Edge of Digital Technology

Bringing together some of the world’s top academics, corporations and start-ups, OCAD University’s Digital Futures program is preparing students with the expertise and experience to confidently enter the digital workplace. From data visualization to digital entertainment and wearable technology, the program allows students to explore the future of digital technology through electives, internships, residencies and independent study. The program is overseen by an advisory board that includes Apple, IBM, Microsoft, Ubisoft, City of Toronto, Bell, TSN, TVO broadcasting, Xenophile Media, Idea Couture, RBC Royal Bank, Toronto Arts Foundation, SAP, White Pine Pictures and Stone Canoe. These partners help ensure students are at the cutting edge of digital technologies and have the best possible opportunities to differentiate themselves in this creative workforce.

Supporting Ontarians in Accessing a University Education

As Ontario continues to shift toward a technology-driven knowledge economy, it is not only employers who are recognizing the importance of a postsecondary education. For the last decade, Ontario’s universities have seen an increase in applications and enrolment. In recent years the numbers have continued to climb, even as the number of young adults in the province has begun to decrease. Ontarians are seeing the value of a university education, and both high school and mature students are looking for help and information to decide what institution and program is right for them.

Ontario’s universities have set up numerous resources to help in this effort. Our eINFO website offers comprehensive and easily accessible information about programs, scholarships and the application process, part of our commitment to supporting prospective students in making informed decisions. Universities also work closely with high school counsellors, and we are committed to doing so further so we can continue to improve the delivery of information about options at colleges and universities and how students can best use a postsecondary education to set themselves up for the jobs of the future.

Ontario’s universities are further committed to helping ensure any willing and qualified Ontarian can access a university education, regardless of their income, gender, race, or culture. We are proud of our diverse and multicultural student body. And we know that bringing greater diversity to our campuses and ensuring that students from Aboriginal, immigrant and racialized communities feel safe and welcomed while they’re at university is both vital for the sake of our students today and imperative for the sake of the province tomorrow.

Ontario and Canada’s populations are growing today because of immigration. Statistics Canada estimates that immigrants will account for up to 30 per cent of Canada’s population, and 36 per cent of Ontario’s population, by 2036. Statistics Canada further estimates that up to 36 per cent of Canadians could belong to a visible minority group in 2036, with that number being much higher in cities such as Toronto. The Aboriginal population, meanwhile, is growing at an even faster rate – by 42 per cent between 2006 and 2016, more than four times faster than the non-Aboriginal population. Twenty-seven per cent of that population is 14 and under – compared to 16 per cent for the non-Aboriginal population. But Aboriginal peoples in Ontario and across the country are also less likely to have a postsecondary education than non-Aboriginal people.

Ontarians emphasized over the last year that the empowerment of Aboriginal communities is essential to the province’s future. “My dream for the next 150 years of Canada is that it is for Aboriginal peoples and that reconciliation will be a priority at all levels of government, and that I can be involved in positive action in Ontario to achieve this,” one student wrote in our survey.

Max FineDay, co-executive director of Canadian Roots Exchange, has further argued that “the health of our society, not to mention our national economy, will depend on the path Canada decides to walk, now and in the years to come” when it comes to Aboriginal peoples.

Ontario’s universities are committed to walking on the right path. We are committed to attracting a growing number of Aboriginal students and providing a welcoming environment for them – one with spaces, programs and courses that reflect the culture and contributions of our diverse Aboriginal communities.

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15 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
Across the province, all 21 Ontario universities are creating or redesigning programs to be inclusive of Aboriginal learners. At many universities, for instance, students can now receive Bachelor of Education degrees that put Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives at the forefront of teacher training.

Other universities are actively reaching out to Aboriginal communities to encourage more Aboriginal youth to attend university. The Aboriginal Access to Engineering program at Queen’s University promotes math and science to elementary and high school students and supports teachers in order to increase the number of Aboriginal engineers in Canada.

Meanwhile, the sector in general is committed to increasing access for students from low-income families. Ontario’s universities provide students with more than $900 million in scholarships and bursaries.\(^\text{20}\) We also work with the government, through the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), to remove barriers to a postsecondary education and support all students who need financial assistance. We welcome improvements to OSAP that mean more than 210,000 students annually will in effect pay no tuition fees. In 2010, 47 per cent of our students graduated debt-free.\(^\text{21}\) And since 2001, Ontario has led the country when it comes to increasing the on-campus ratio of students from lower income families to students from higher income families.\(^\text{22}\)

Ontarians are rightly proud of the province’s diverse population. This diversity draws more immigrants, attracts businesses and contributes to the cultural richness of communities across the province.

We heard repeatedly over the last year, however, that diversity does not automatically translate to inclusion. That’s why we work hard to educate global citizens who are comfortable living and working with people of all backgrounds and cultures.

As we prepare students to become the workforce of the future, we must continue acknowledging the importance of diversity and inclusion for our province’s well-being and prosperity. As Margaret Eaton, Executive Director of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, said at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Diversity and Inclusion, “today’s economic prosperity [is about] the fact that diverse teams are teams that prosper and deliver better results for companies. But it is also about that individual prospering, a community prospering, a family prospering, and... that idea that we can’t prosper unless all of us are prospering.”

As we work to help build a better future for Ontario, we must continue ensuring our campuses are models of the diversity and inclusion we wish to see in Ontario and Canada as a whole.

And as our economy continues to transform and the value of a postsecondary education increases, both colleges and universities must work ever harder to make sure that all willing and qualified Ontarians, regardless of their income, gender, race, or culture, have access to the diploma, certificate, apprenticeship or degree that will help them launch a fulfilling career and help develop the talented workforce Ontario needs to succeed in the future.

To read more about what Ontarians told us about diversity, social supports and inclusion, see Appendix D: A Society and Economy That Works for Everyone.

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\(^{20}\) COFO-UO Data

\(^{21}\) National Graduate Survey of 2010 graduates (Statistics Canada, CANSIM Table 477-0068). Data includes debts owed to both government and non-government sources.

Commitments and Recommendations

WHAT ONTARIANS WANT

- An inclusive society in which all Ontarians can contribute to and benefit from the province’s economic success.

- Stronger relationships with Aboriginal communities and a focus on ensuring they have the tools to thrive, including by increasing their participation rate in postsecondary education.

- Increased access to university for underrepresented groups, and more culturally sensitive supports for them on campus.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS

- Ensure that any Ontarian who is willing and qualified can gain a university education.

- Ensure prospective students have the support and resources they need to make an informed decision about their postsecondary education.

- Develop and implement plans to support and increase access for Aboriginal peoples, under-represented youth and first-generation university students.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP ONTARIANS GAIN ACCESS TO A POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

- Help high schools prepare students for the transition to university by providing training on managing university workloads, financial literacy and living independently.

- Continue to improve access to data about in-demand jobs and marketable skills, so students and parents can better assess career opportunities.

- Increase investments to attract and support Aboriginal students, including incentives to increase the numbers of Aboriginal faculty.

- Work with universities to attract and support first-generation university students.
Inspiring the Next Generation of Aboriginal Learners

Rita Corbiere is an Anishinaabe Elder and a remarkable educator whose wisdom has been generously shared with many learners. Rita has spent the last decade collaborating with Laurentian University, where she has made significant contributions to the academic literature in her capacity as Elder, research collaborator and co-author. Her role has been critical in integrating Anishinaabe perspectives in academic research and helping to frame research in ways that acknowledge and contribute to Anishinaabe knowledge.

Offering Full and Robust Supports to Students Throughout Their Studies

Once students choose to attend university, it’s imperative that they feel supported throughout their degree so they can make the most of their studies and meet their full potential.

That works starts in the classroom – but it extends far beyond.

From hackathons to entrepreneurship programs, extracurricular theatre to guest lectures by world-renowned researchers, Ontario’s universities offer a range of ways for students to hone new skills and gain new experiences outside their regular studies. And as students prepare to graduate, we offer career services to help students find job opportunities, prepare their resumes and succeed in job interviews.

Ontario’s universities are also committed to making sure students feel safe on campus. From orientation through to graduation, we make sure that students know the safety measures on campus, and the policies they must follow, so they feel supported in all situations.

We are also working with Aboriginal communities to ensure Aboriginal students encounter a welcoming and supportive environment on campus. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report in 2015 outlined clear recommendations for how educators can help repair the damage caused by residential schools and advance the process of reconciliation. We are committed to working with Aboriginal communities to incorporate Aboriginal histories, culture, traditions, and culturally appropriate supports and meet the specific challenges that are laid out for educators as part of the TRC’s recommendations.

The stories of graduates like Donna Kimmaliardjuk, who credits the Aboriginal students’ centre on her campus for helping her cope with undergraduate pressure, and who is now in residency in Ottawa as the first female Inuit cardiac surgeon, show why these supports and changes are necessary.

And we know that there is more work that can be done on this front alongside Aboriginal communities and government. We recognize that Ontario “can’t achieve a sense of belonging until we recognize and remove the systemic and institutional barriers that have been placed due to historical legacies,” as Sam Erry, the Government of Ontario’s Associate Deputy Minister for Inclusion, Diversity and Anti-Racism, noted at our roundtable on Diversity and Inclusion. This is true not only of Aboriginal but of all minority and disadvantaged groups that have been excluded from social opportunities.

It’s important as well that our student supports continue to evolve, particularly in response to new needs or issues. We know that entering postsecondary education can bring a new set of concerns for some students. University is often where students first notice or confront mental health issues – all at a time when they can be living on their own for the first time, sometimes away from family.23

The transition from high school to university, meanwhile, is not always a smooth one when it comes to mental health services. A similar uncertainty can arise following graduation.

For all universities and on all campuses, mental health supports are a top priority – as they are for Ontarians, who emphasized in our survey the importance of a focus on mental health across our health-care system. Universities are committed to ensuring students have access to robust mental health services. We know that many students already rely on the many services we offer, whether its counsellors on campus, or programs like More Feet on the Ground, which helps educate students about mental health issues and connect them to services in their communities.

Nevertheless, we have to keep improving – and we have to keep working with partners in government and our communities to do so.

Having the right mental health supports requires a community approach, not a campus-centric one. That’s why we have partnered with colleges, students and mental health associations to run the Centre for Innovation on Campus Mental Health – a hub designed to help Ontario’s colleges and universities enhance their capacity to support student mental health and well-being.

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We must keep listening to our students, who point out that “by partnering with traditional providers in their communities, universities can become integral links within Ontario’s broader health-care system.”

Universities are ready to work further with our partners in communities, the health sector and government to ensure Ontarians receive the help they need, no matter if it’s on or off campus, or if it’s before, during, or after their studies.

As Ontarians repeatedly emphasized in our conversation over the last year, creating a better future for the province requires widespread partnership between the public and private sectors, and between educators, health providers and community leaders. It’s only by working together that we can ensure an enriching education for all postsecondary students.

Taking a “Whole-of-Community” Approach to Mental Health

Ontario’s colleges, universities and student groups have come together to propose an integrated approach to student mental health called In It Together that begins in kindergarten and continues through high school, postsecondary life and adulthood. This “whole-of-community” approach by government, health-care providers, community agencies, student associations and PSE institutions includes: mandatory curriculum changes to teach resiliency in young people before they reach PSE campuses, culturally diverse counselling assessments, expanded use of technology, and peer counselling – all at no cost to students, regardless of whether they live on or off campus, in their home communities or away.

The In It Together partnership aims to help Ontario become a leader in mental wellness, for the health and well-being of its students, and also for the future of the province.

To read more about what Ontarians told us about mental health and our health-care system, see Appendix E: A Comprehensive Approach to Care.

Commitments and Recommendations

WHATONTARIANS WANT
• Campus programs and supports that ensure students are healthy and engaged.
• A comprehensive approach to health that includes robust mental health supports.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS
• Offer a wide range of extracurricular initiatives, career services and other supports for students to get the most out of their university experience.
• Ensure a safe on-campus experience for all students through strong safety measures and policies.
• Work with Aboriginal communities to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s recommendations related to education.
• Ensure students have access to robust mental health supports.
• Partner with colleges, government and communities to ensure a broad mental health strategy is in place that serves students and Ontarians as a whole.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP ENSURE STUDENTS RECEIVE ROBUST SUPPORTS
• Increase the investment in culturally-sensitive student services and the implementation of cultural awareness and safety training for students, faculty and staff.
• Work with universities, colleges, students and providers to develop a whole-of-community mental health and wellness strategy that:
  — Clearly defines roles and responsibilities for government ministries, postsecondary institutions, student associations, health care and community organizations;
  — Ensures that all postsecondary students, regardless of geographic location, can access gender and culturally-sensitive mental health services and supports that are timely, effective, flexible, and provided in a safe and comfortable environment; and
  — Emphasizes prevention and harm reduction as important elements of mental health priorities.

Helping Create Age-Friendly Communities

The rising average age of our population requires creative and interdisciplinary solutions that consider the Ontarians most affected by changing demographics.

This is where McMaster University’s Institute for Research on Aging comes in.

The Institute is a cross-faculty research institute dedicated to transforming the experience of aging now and into the future. Cross-faculty teams engage with older Ontarians, their families, health-care providers and other stakeholders in the process from research to evaluation and the implementation of interventions and technologies. The institute also houses the Labarge Centre for Mobility in Aging, which acts as a hub for research, education and community engagement in mobility to help create a future of positive outcomes for the social and economic independence, along with physical and mental health, of older Ontarians.
Ensuring a dynamic and enriching experience for all students – whether that's in the classroom, a lab, a student centre or anywhere else on campus – is a core priority for Ontario’s universities. But our work only begins there. Universities are also always looking outward, making sure that the work we do – the teaching, research, workforce development and volunteering – has a lasting and positive impact off-campus and across Ontario’s communities.

Ontarians spoke often to us over the last year about the importance they place on living in communities that have strong innovation, robust health care, and vibrant arts and culture. Ontario’s universities are committed to working with a wide range of partners, including hospitals, governments, art galleries, cultural institutions and community organizations, to ensure the work we do and the students we educate – whether it’s the engineers or artists of tomorrow – are helping Ontarians bring these communities to life.

Building a Better Future Through Research and Innovation

A large part of our community impact begins in our labs and research facilities, where ideas and discoveries are born that will lead to a more productive, vibrant and healthy province. Over the last year, Ontarians highlighted that forward-thinking research, inventions, technology and science are fundamental to keeping Ontario competitive and creating a better future for the province. We also heard repeatedly that universities need to “lead the way” in these areas.

"When a university can use the tremendous intellectual resources at its disposal to help provide real world, timely solutions to local problems, those solutions can be scaled up and the lessons learned applied to provincial problems," one parent told us through our survey.

Statistics Canada data indicates that the higher education sector is the second largest performer of research and development in Ontario, carrying out an estimated $5.2 billion in work, which translated into 34 per cent of the province’s total research activities.25

University research can take many forms, but it is rarely done in isolation, nor does it achieve results that are felt only on university campuses. Much of it is driven by a desire to enable innovation that results in the more immediate development of new policies, products and services.

25 Statistics Canada. CANSIM Table 358-0001. Data is for 2014.
We heard repeatedly over the last year about the importance of collaborative approaches that can lead to technological, social, business and design innovation. “Innovation by its nature is actually very multi-disciplined,” said Ali Murtaza, Client Innovation Lead at Connected Lab, at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Innovation and the New Economy. “It’s not all about the technology. It’s not all about user experience, the design. It’s a really magical mixture of all of those elements to produce the right solution for the right problem statement using the right technology at the right time.”

Ontarians also highlighted the value of the broad range of research that universities pursue. “Today’s graduates are brighter, more talented and more diverse than ever before,” one Ontarian wrote. “They will carry us forward with new discoveries in medicine, engineering and the humanities to bring us a brighter, more diverse future as a country.”

Whether by helping drive the latest car engine technology or working to study and record the vibrant history of our communities, universities are committed to pursuing this full range of work.

University researchers regularly work with local businesses, not-for-profits and industries to ensure their work directly improves communities across the province, whether it be through increasing food access in Northern communities, reducing the rates of bullying or helping farmers fertilize their crops.

Researchers also work with communities to improve the lives of its residents in a number of ways, from policy development to urban planning. In Ottawa, for instance, the city’s police force turned to researchers from York University to examine the issue of racial profiling. The force is now looking to develop an action plan out of the recommendations that came out of the research.26

University research is also driven by a passion for fundamental research that ultimately pushes the boundaries of our thinking and experience far beyond our world of today. The importance of this basic research was highlighted by the federal government’s Naylor Report, which noted that “when quantum physics and relativity were born in the early 20th century, no one could have predicted the array of innovations that would result many years downstream — innovations as varied as the transistor and semiconductors, solar cells, rechargeable batteries, the laser, the integrated circuit, the personal computer, the internet, medical imaging, flat-panel high-definition televisions, satellites in orbit, and the BlackBerry, to name but a few.”27

Ontario’s universities work closely with all levels of government to ensure the province and country are continually experimenting and pushing the boundaries of science in search of tomorrow’s breakthroughs. Today, artificial intelligence is advancing at a rapid rate and looks set to radically transform the ways that we live and work. But 30 years ago, the research into deep learning that has driven these advances was in its infancy, and its importance was not widely seen. Thanks to the support of the University of Toronto and Canadian research grants, Geoffrey Hinton, one of the foremost researchers into deep learning, was able to continue his work and become the world-recognized “godfather” of one of today’s most transformative technologies.28

The research conducted at Ontario’s universities often leads to a wide community impact, but over the last year, leaders from the technology sector repeatedly emphasized to us that Ontario can still do more in ensuring its inventions and ideas go to market and improve the daily lives of Ontarians. An innovation report card from the Conference Board of Canada gave Ontario good marks overall, but noted that it “might be facing challenges commercializing and reaping the larger benefits of innovation.”29

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Ensuring the mobilization and commercialization of research requires coordinated work. It requires, for instance, “increasing the supply of the scarcest input – business judgment – to our most promising technology-based ventures,” as two deans of business schools argued recently.\(^3\) It requires the combined efforts of government, researchers, and the private sector to ensure that there is support and funding for research not only in the development phase but also in the crucial final steps focused on bringing inventions into Ontarians’ homes or ideas “into the hands of decision-makers, policy-makers, business operators, and practitioners,” as a recent Conference Board of Canada report argued.\(^4\)

In general, Ontarians have emphasized that this kind of collaboration – this bringing together of a diversity of talent – is essential to achieving the full possible impact from the full possible range of innovation. “Innovation is just new thinking translated into the marketplace. So if you have the same people talking about the same issues over and over again, you’re not going to get innovation,” Matthew Fortier, Vice-President of Policy at the Institute of Corporate Directors, told us at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Diversity and Inclusion. At our roundtable on innovation, meanwhile, others commented on gender diversity as a continued problem, and opportunity for growth, in the tech sector.

Ontario’s future depends on research and innovation that will fuel new ideas, new industries and new ways of thinking about our social and economic challenges. But as Rick Huijbregts, then-VP of Digital Transformation and Innovation at Cisco, said at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Innovation and the New Economy, “innovation doesn’t only happen in your or our R&D departments. Innovation happens everywhere. We can make the transformation only work when we collaborate between the private sector, academia and government.” It’s only by building and strengthening partnerships that Ontario will achieve the innovative future it aspires toward.

To read more about what Ontarians told us about research, technology and innovation, see Appendix B: Broad and Impactful Research.

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Commitments and Recommendations

WHATONTARIANS WANT

• A breadth of innovation that helps find solutions to our multi-faceted challenges that span from the economy, to the environment, to social policy.

• Collaboration between government, universities, employers and industry to commercialize research.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS

• Produce high-quality research and innovation across all disciplines in STEM, the humanities, arts, and the social sciences, to deliver real, impactful improvements in the province.

• Help commercialize and publicize researchers’ work so that it leads to new products, services and processes that improve health care, productivity, public policy and more in communities across the province.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP SUPPORT RESEARCH AND CREATE AN INNOVATIVE FUTURE

• Work with the federal government to improve research funding.

• Increase investments in the Ontario Research Fund and ensure it supports a wide range of research and innovation.

• Support the movement of universities’ ideas and inventions into the marketplace by creating a Research Commercialization Fund.
**Ensuring a Healthy Future for all Ontarians**

University research plays an integral part in Ontario’s health-care system. By helping develop the latest medical technology and conducting forward-thinking scientific research, university researchers help bring improved technology, treatments and care to Ontarians across the province.

This contribution was highlighted by Anthony Dale, President and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA), at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on the Aging Population, where he said: “Ontario’s health-care system is facing some remarkable challenges, particularly over the next 20 years, and universities are going to be key partners, not just to hospital but all providers, in coming up with ideas that ultimately address those core challenges.”

In a recent report, the Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity similarly noted that the strength of the life sciences sector in Ontario, particularly around developing drugs and manufacturing medical equipment, is tied to the province’s talent base. “Ontario now supplies world class science training and experiences to students,” the report stated. “These innovative individuals are key to the industry’s continued productivity advancements and positive [research and development] outcomes.”

The report also highlighted the opportunity for Ontario to lead in the creation of the next generation of medical technology: “These new smart products either treat or diagnose completely new diseases or drastically improve the efficiency of older treatment methods. Ontario has the necessary talent to both design the hardware and program the software for these devices. The creation of these devices requires the collaboration of medical professionals, highly trained engineers, and computer scientists.”

Over the last year, Ontarians spoke often about how new technology and medicine have the potential to radically improve health care in the future. “In five years we could be so much further in our scientific advancement,” wrote one graduate in our survey. “We could be on the way to curing cancer, understanding Alzheimer’s disease, or something even bigger.”

Ontario’s universities are working hard to ensure that vision comes to fruition.

In partnership with hospitals across the province, we are ensuring Ontario remains at the forefront of brain and cancer research, and that it continues building innovative technologies such as therapeutic robotics to improve the recovery of stroke patients.

Ontarians also emphasized the importance of a health-care system that pays attention to the province’s full range of health care needs. That’s why our researchers also investigate how to ensure patients move comfortably and efficiently from hospital to home to community and long-term care, and why we are committed to developing new approaches to mental-health care. University researchers are also hard at work finding ways to keep costs down for Ontarians while ensuring the system meets the highest standards. With the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario estimating that health care spending will account for 55 per cent of the province’s program spending in 2050, up from 42 per cent today, paying attention to cost-efficiency is vital.

As universities help educate the talented scientists and researchers who do this work, we are also educating the doctors, nurses and other health practitioners who bring the technology and research to Ontarians and ensure that it ultimately leads to better patient outcomes.

We know that continuing this work is integral to Ontario’s future. Ontario’s population is aging – it is estimated that seniors will account for 25 per cent of Ontario’s population by 2041, up from 16.7 per cent today – and with that comes increasing pressure on the health-care system.

Anthony Dale from the OHA told us that in these circumstances, university research and innovation is vital. “There is considerable research that occurs in universities, and within the province’s hospitals, and across other providers and institutions,” he said. “Investment in this type of research helps to drive innovation and facilitate commercialization, while also acting as a proven economic engine for the province.” Ontarians also emphasized that good health care goes beyond medicine and hospitals and requires high quality community care and preventive approaches.

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33 Ibid.
Helping Support Healthy Communities

Health Ecosphere is a multi-partner collaboration led by York University and Southlake Regional Health Centre that acts as an innovation pipeline for commercial health solutions. Along with University Health Network, the 32 partners involved are working with businesses and other research institutes in development of 37 new personalized health-care technologies and state-of-the-art enterprise solutions for customized health management and care. Technologies include health-care apps, medical devices and big data platforms. These solutions provide connected and coordinated care across the system by integrating previously segregated markets; helping patients with chronic disease change their behaviour; and leveraging big data analytics to develop and commercialize predictive health solutions, leading to improved outcomes for patients and reduced health-care costs.

At the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on the Aging Population, Laurie Johnston, CEO of the Ontario Retirement Communities Association, highlighted the importance of holistic care and challenged universities to ensure they educate students to implement it. “You cannot come out [of a degree program] with a purely clinical approach to everything, because with the older population, so much of it is just how are they doing today. Using a customer service approach to how you provide service and interact with the individual is often more effective than a scripted or clinical approach,” she said.

At the same roundtable, Sophia Ikura of the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network noted that in today’s health sector, “solutions have to be much more interconnected, much more complex, stretching across multiple disciplines. And I think in this space, universities have become very good at training the best in their profession because they are places that tackle complexity and encourage cross-pollination and integrative thinking.”

Ontario’s universities recognize that to create a healthier future for Ontario, we need to continue training the medical researchers, doctors, surgeons, nurses and other practitioners of tomorrow because their services will be increasingly in demand in the coming years. And we are committed to doing so with a focus on the social and interdisciplinary skills necessary to create age-friendly communities and holistic health care.

That’s why our universities are working with their communities, for instance, to increase access to quality primary care. In Hamilton, McMaster University’s Department of Family Medicine has partnered with the city’s Public Health Service to accomplish precisely this goal. Together, they started the David Braley Health Sciences Centre, which offers care to 15,000 Hamiltonians currently without a family doctor.

Ontario’s universities are proud of the medical professionals we educate and the health research we produce – but we know the full impact of our work can only be achieved through partnerships with government and health providers who can help us bring the latest innovations, research and techniques into Ontario’s hospitals, doctors’ offices, long-term care centres and homes.

Commitments and Recommendations

WHAT ONTARIANS WANT

• A comprehensive approach to health that covers prevention and treatment, for both physical and mental health.
• Focus on and funding for scientific research that will lead to new cures and treatments, and provide Ontarians with world-class technology.
• A health-care system that meets the needs of an aging population.
• Community planning and development that takes into account the needs of an aging population.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS

• Support and aid in the commercialization of research on medical technology, treatments, processes and services to save lives and improve health-care delivery.
• Support social innovation that leads to better health services and health outcomes for Ontarians.
• Educate the world-class doctors, nurses, rehab therapists and other practitioners who are at the heart of our health-care system.
• Work with health providers and government in our communities to help increase the level of care for Ontarians, including by supporting preventive approaches to care and the development of age-friendly communities.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP ENSURE A HEALTHY FUTURE FOR ONTARIO

• Continue to invest in a healthy province by financially supporting research in medicine and health care.
• Work with universities, hospitals, start-ups and others to ensure that the best health research and inventions reach Ontarians when they need them.
• Continue working with universities to ensure Ontario has the right number and mix of health care professionals working where they are most needed so that all Ontarians have access to high-quality health care close to home.

To read more about what Ontarians told us about health, aging and wellness, see Appendix E: A Comprehensive Approach to Care.
Supporting a Vibrant Arts and Culture Scene

The Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts is a home for the creative arts at Queen’s University and a hub of vibrant artistic study, creation and exhibition in the Kingston community. The 80,000 square-foot facility brings together music, drama, arts and film students into a combined learning center, bringing students closer to a creative workplace setting and enhancing skills for their work in the arts and beyond. The facility houses a 560-seat performance hall, black box studio theatre, film screening room, laboratories, and a rehearsal hall that exactly mimics the acoustics of the performance hall to allow for a seamless transition from practice to performance. The Centre also houses an Art and Media Lab, a “living gallery” to inspire creative thinking and innovative learning for Queen’s and broader community members, as well as for professional and emerging artists, who can explore where their work may lead.

Strengthening Communities Across the Province

The role Ontario’s universities play in community health is part of our larger commitment to helping create rich and vibrant communities across the province. Ontarians told us repeatedly about the importance they placed on community, and emphasized that the strength of a community comes from the interplay of many different groups and people, including universities.

“Local learning institutions such as universities, colleges, and innovation hubs are vital aspects of building a strong knowledge economy,” wrote Gregory M. Spencer of The Martin Prosperity Institute recently. “However, on their own, they do not automatically create economic prosperity. For this to occur they must have strong ties to local industry and coordinate their offerings with the needs of businesses.”

Each Ontario university is committed to working with local partners to strengthen both the community they are part of and others across the province.

We heard often over the last year about the central role of arts and culture in building a flourishing and vibrant community. “Ontario needs to support new ideas in science and technology, but definitely not forget the arts,” one parent cautioned in our survey. “Art helps us understand our place in this world, it helps us communicate, and it is invaluable to the human experience.”

Ontario’s universities are committed to supporting vibrant arts and culture. Through both our students and our campus facilities, we work to strengthen the arts and culture sector, which adds more than $25 billion to the provincial economy. Universities educate the artists and performers, and support the cultural centres and galleries, that inspire our imaginations. We also foster partnerships that demonstrate the wide-ranging role the arts can play in society.

The broad power of art is evident in the work of Dr. Mark Skinner, Canada Research Chair in Rural Aging, Health and Social Care and director of the Trent Centre for Aging & Society. Canada’s National Ballet School is working with Skinner to use dance to improve the aerobic power, muscle strength, balance and mental health of the local senior population.

Our students and faculty also regularly volunteer in the community, creating new bonds and partnerships with local residents. Faculty members regularly bring their expertise to policy discussions, while universities including Wilfrid Laurier have partnered with local organizations to offer community service learning that allows students to develop core skills by working in their community.

Universities also open up their campuses to offer spaces for people to come together and create the collaborative environments that sustain rich communities. This happens year-round, including in the summer when each university hosts a variety of camps and youth mentorship programs.

Ontario’s universities are proud to be rich resources for our communities, to be gathering places where people can come together for a football game or an enlightening public lecture. Our roots are in our communities and we are committed to being good partners in creating livable cities, faster commutes, affordable housing, thriving arts and sports scenes, customer-friendly public services and beautified streetscapes.

There is, however, more to be done and Ontario’s universities are committed to further fostering and strengthening the relationships that build strong communities. One major insight Ontarians shared is that the particular needs and strengths of individual communities need to be respected as we consider the initiatives that might help Ontario seize new opportunities in the future. That’s why each individual university works with local partners to identify the best partnership opportunities.

We also know that rural and Aboriginal communities rarely benefit from the same level of infrastructure and services as the rest of the province. “I live in Northern Ontario and often it is difficult to dream so big for many of us aspiring professionals. I have been able to experience unique and rewarding opportunities, and I hope that others in the North could receive a greater range of these kinds of opportunities,” one Ontarian wrote in our survey.

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Helping Revitalize Communities

In the late 1990s, Brantford was devastated by the collapse of a once-thriving manufacturing sector. That changed in 1999 when Wilfrid Laurier University embarked on a risky experiment in urban renewal, opening a small satellite campus in Brantford’s downtown. Eighteen years later, Brantford’s downtown core has been reborn as a bustling centre of cultural, academic and social activity. Laurier’s campus is home to more than 3,000 students, and the university has spent an estimated $80 million on building a downtown campus that spreads to more than 17 buildings. The private sector has followed suit, adding new student residences, a public plaza and new businesses to account for the budding student population. Laurier continues to expand into Brantford’s downtown, and is scheduled to open a Laurier Brantford-YMCA athletics facility in summer 2018.

Helping to Build “Teaching Cities”

Looking to find solutions to its urban challenges, the City of Oshawa is partnering with the University of Ontario Institute of Technology and other postsecondary institutions and think tanks to become a teaching city. By becoming a teaching city, Oshawa becomes a living laboratory for students and academics, creating an opportunity for them to work with city staff on solutions to urban issues. Experiential learning and research opportunities could surround issues such as the impact of climate change on watershed management, waste management, transportation, digital connectivity and more.

Bridging these gaps is essential to ensuring the whole province has access to the benefits of new technology and the opportunities of a growing economy. Without the right infrastructure, in particular broadband access, neither rural nor Aboriginal communities will be able to take full advantage of the advances taking place in Ontario’s economy.

Across Ontario, communities are pushing for the investment they need to thrive in today’s changing economy. Ontario’s universities are proud to be partnering with communities to help them grow stronger. Researchers from the University of Windsor, Ryerson University and University of Guelph, in partnership with the SouthWestern Integrated Fibre Technology Network, are looking at the potential economic and social outcomes of broadband infrastructure in southwestern Ontario. Lakehead University’s Achievement Program offers tuition credits to certain First Nations, Inuit and Métis students from Grade 4 onwards.

We look forward to continuing this work as we help create strong communities across the province, ones that Ontarians can contribute to and enjoy, no matter where in the province they reside.

But creating the strong, resilient and rich communities that Ontarians want ultimately takes the coordinated efforts of many groups of people. It takes innovative business leaders and solid health-care providers, imaginative artists and cultural leaders, a robust non-profit sector, responsive government, and engaged colleges and universities.

It’s only by working together that Ontario can strengthen our communities and pave the way to a better future for the whole province.

To read more about what Ontarians told us about the importance of strong communities, see Appendix F: Vibrant Communities and Strong Regional Economies.

Commitments and Recommendations

WHAT ONTARIANS WANT

- Effective local community planning that addresses key issues such as sustainability, health, housing and transit.
- Support for arts and culture that helps create vibrant communities.
- Meaningful partnerships between postsecondary, private and public sectors to improve communities.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS

- Support and publicize research that leads to services and processes to strengthen our local communities.
- Help build strong, vibrant communities by strengthening bonds with a wide range of partners, including businesses, non-profits, local service providers and arts organizations.
- Encourage vibrant community services and programs by partnering with communities to leverage our campus resources.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE PROVINCE

- Work with universities, local governments and communities to encourage a vibrant flow of ideas and research that helps spur new thinking and develop solutions to local issues.
- Ensure communities, both urban and rural, and particularly in Northern and remote regions, have the services and infrastructure, such as quality internet access and strong transit, that ensure high quality of life and prosperity.
- Develop a Northern Ontario strategy that includes: incentives for students and graduates to study, stay and work in Northern communities; sustained funding for the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, including funding for research facilities and equipment; establishing a Northern Ontario Research Chair to focus research on issues particular to the region.
Helping Feed Ontarians from Field to Fork

From field to fork, the new Arrell Food Institute at the University of Guelph connects food research experts on campus with Canadian and global partners to ensure sustainability, economic growth and food security, and to improve life at home and abroad.

The University of Guelph has been closely tied with food since its founding colleges were established more than 150 years ago. Today all seven colleges – spanning engineering, physical sciences, social sciences, humanities, art, biology, veterinary science, business, environment, economics and agricultural studies – support the university’s leadership role in food and agricultural research and teaching.

Among its initiatives, the new Arrell Food Institute supports five inaugural scholars from Canada and abroad whose graduate studies are intended to help transform the global food industry. Along with the University’s Food From Thought project – which connects cross-campus experts with international partners to find ways to sustainably feed a growing world population – the institute raises Canada’s profile in the global food economy and further strengthens the university’s position as “Canada’s food university.”
PARTNERING TO DRIVE A GROWING, DYNAMIC PROVINCE

Supporting the IT Sector in the Ottawa Region

As Kanata emerges as a major tech cluster in Canadian telecommunications, Carleton University researchers like Richard Yu are helping find new technologies to support the thriving information technology (IT) industry. Yu is working on a large three-year project to make 5G communication networks — which are up to 100 times faster than 4G or LTE networks — more efficient. The research will be led by Carleton University in collaboration with the University of Manitoba, Huawei Technologies Canada and Remotronic. Yu’s research is just one part of Carleton’s commitment to supporting the IT sector in the Ottawa region. The university is also a partner in Centre of Excellence for Next Generation Networks, which helps position Ottawa as a global leader in telecommunications innovation.

Driving Economic Development and an Entrepreneurial Culture

At the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Youth Employment, Lekan Olawoye, Executive Lead at MaRS Discovery District, commented that “if our universities are succeeding, our young people are succeeding, our economy is succeeding and we’re doing well.”

Ontario’s universities are proud to be helping Ontario grow, innovate and compete globally, whether through the start-ups our students help build, the fresh thinking our graduates bring to the workforce or the research that helps drive innovation and growth across industries.

It’s through these efforts that Ontario’s universities contribute more than $115 billion annually to the province’s economy, including $42 billion generated through spending, $49 billion in human capital development, and $25 billion resulting from the productivity boost generated by research and development. 38

This impact is felt across the province, and it is part of how universities are helping Ontario maintain a strong and resilient economy.

Ontario’s universities are committed to continuing to help Ontario develop and grow. But bolstering the province’s economy at a time of widespread disruption requires a broad focus. It requires efforts both to strengthen established industries and cultivate growth in new ones.

38 Spending estimate includes spending by universities, students and visitors, as well as the spending of the income premium alumni receive of alumni. The human capital development amount is a partial estimate of the total impact of human capital development on GDP. For more detail, see: Council of Ontario Universities. “Driving a Prosperous Future: Economic Analysis of the Lasting Impact of Ontario Universities.” 2017.
Helping Entrepreneurs Thrive

With a rising interest in entrepreneurship among students and graduates, universities are providing supports and connections to help these businesses thrive. Whether it’s through incubators and accelerators, attracting investors and venture capital, or entrepreneurship-focused programming, students are finding the help they need for their start-ups to succeed right on campus. There are dozens of start-ups housed on Ontario university campuses, which have cumulatively raised billions of dollars in venture capital for hundreds of start-ups. These start-ups are creating thousands of new jobs, growing the provincial economy and establishing Ontario as an innovation leader.

Universities are ready to help achieve both goals. Through our research we help strengthen industries from tourism and agriculture in the southwest, to digital tech and biotechnology in the Golden Horseshoe, to mining and forestry in the North. The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity recently highlighted the role universities play in driving the mining industry, for instance, writing that the human capital and expertise universities provide are “one of the industry’s greatest assets.”

Ontario’s universities are also partnering to make sure that when it comes to emerging technologies, Ontario is not only ready, but taking the lead. Through centres such as the Institute for Quantum Computing, the Vector Institute and Medicine by Design, which bring researchers and students together with private and public sector partners to spur collaboration and innovation, we are helping make Ontario a world leader in computer science, artificial intelligence and life sciences. These kinds of collaborative initiatives, which can be seen at universities across the province, make vital contributions to the clusters of innovation – regional concentrations of companies, non-profits and academic institutions that spur growth and innovation in a common field – that help create strong industries in Ontario.

Over the last year we heard that building such thriving and collaborative clusters is also key to creating an entrepreneurial, risk-taking culture across Ontario. It incentivizes Ontarians to explore and grow new ideas and new industries.

This kind of entrepreneurial activity is already becoming increasingly ingrained in Canadian culture. A 2017 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report found that 16.7 per cent of working-age Canadians are involved in early stage entrepreneurial activity – up from 12.2 per cent in 2013.

Students are key players in this movement. Increasingly they want to participate in entrepreneurial initiatives that provide them “with transferable skills that they do not receive in the classroom and are key components in increasing Ontario’s economic growth, prosperity, and productivity.”

That’s why each university across Ontario is invested in helping students chart their own path and bring their innovative ideas and inventions to fruition.

Entire programs are devoted to teaching students what it takes to produce innovative inventions, attract investors and take their service or product to market. Courses teach students how innovations have emerged in the past and how an outlier’s perspective can contribute to new opportunities. Students learn to model the best approaches to creativity and decision-making, despite uncertainty. They develop business plans and bring forward profitable solutions to real-world problems. They learn how to fail, pivot, try again and become lifelong entrepreneurs.

Ontario’s universities are also home to a number of incubators and accelerators – centres that help everyone from students to more experienced entrepreneurs develop an idea or, in the case of accelerators, take a company to the next level. Both incubators and accelerators offer the mentorship, training and work space that help a new business develop and grow, and facilitate the networks and connections that help spur new thinking and partnerships.

Activities such as competitions, workshops, internships, and mentorships also provide an opportunity to learn entrepreneurial skills. This focus on innovation is reaping rewards, with hundreds of startup companies being created each year. With the help of experts and faculty at entrepreneurship centres, these new companies take advantage of the most up-to-date knowledge and techniques, using design principles, for instance, to improve health services, or renewable technology to innovate auto manufacturing.

These entrepreneurial skills are also valuable to established employers, who want to hire workers with the ability to think creatively and critically – attributes that help companies innovate and stay competitive.

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40 Ibid.
Ontario’s talent attracts businesses from around the world to the province. Along with university research, they help Ontario maintain its global reputation for skilled workers and innovation. That’s why Ontario’s universities are committed to developing and educating world-class graduate students who advance research, share knowledge with undergraduate students, and develop high-level research and leadership skills that allow them to become part of the talent pipeline that is critical for Ontario to flourish in the new economy.

Ontario’s students and faculty also bring their energy, hard work and creativity to the world through study abroad opportunities and international research partnerships that help give Ontario a global reputation for excellence and bring the best ideas, innovations and research back home for the province’s businesses, governments and communities to use.

As the Naylor Report noted, many of the challenges that Ontario faces today, whether in terms of the environment, social policy, or the economy, are also global in nature, and “we must be positioned to access and adapt the best ideas that scientists and scholars in other countries generate, and to do our fair share in addressing global social and health challenges.”

Through research collaborations, Ontario’s universities draw on the knowledge of world experts to help the province. And by welcoming more than 64,000 international students from more than 200 countries, Ontario’s universities further promote the sharing and dissemination of ideas from around the world. Fostering diverse learning environments also helps achieve a central goal of a university education: graduating students who are ready to participate in a globalized world.

New disruptions and a changing economy, however, bring new challenges. In this environment, Ontario’s universities want to work with government and other partners to do even more to help Ontario grow and prosper.

As Ontario’s economy changes, sectors across the province are feeling the effects in different ways. Strengthening Ontario to face these challenges will take the work of many groups and people.

It will take clusters of innovation where academics, industry leaders, governments, communities and entrepreneurs can come together to share knowledge and expertise.

It will take fostering a risk-taking entrepreneurial culture that can give rise to new businesses, ideas and inventions.

And it will take attracting and developing top graduate students and researchers who can help drive innovation and growth.

Ontario’s universities are ready to help Ontario reach these goals, and to work with government, industries and communities to ensure that the province has the strong and resilient regional economies and industries that will help all Ontarians prosper.

Helping Teach Computer Skills around the Globe

When Anna, a University of Ottawa student, headed to Ghana as part of her graduate studies, she discovered that students in the Bobikuma region were required to learn computer skills, yet had no access to computers. Determined to build a financially sustainable computer lab, Anna forged local and international partnerships to bring a lab to the region. She set it up so that outside of school hours, community members could use the facilities for a nominal fee. With the fees, the lab is able to provide more than 400 primary and junior high students with free access to computers. And so many other University of Ottawa students are having a profound global impact through international service projects like this one.

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To read more about what Ontarians told us about building up Ontario’s economy, see Appendix F: Vibrant Communities and Strong Regional Economies.

**Commitments and Recommendations**

**WHATONTARIANS WANT**
- Research, partnerships and entrepreneurial initiatives that drive innovation in key industries.
- Support for regional economic development across the province.
- Support to help start-ups and small businesses grow.
- Incentives and policies to keep innovators and inventors in the province and ensure their ideas benefit the lives of Ontarians.

**ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS**
- Strengthen relationships with industry to ensure we are conducting research, fostering talent, and supporting knowledge translation so that new ideas and inventions move from the laboratory to the community and help businesses innovate and grow.
- Recruit talented graduate students and researchers who bring new knowledge, ideas and innovations to various industries.
- Work with our students and our business and community partners to encourage and support entrepreneurs.
- Ensure Ontario benefits from the best international ideas by attracting international talent, supporting students and faculty to study and collaborate abroad, and offering education that prepares students for a globalized world.

**HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP DRIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**
- Support the development of a “cluster” strategy that will stimulate Ontario’s competitive economic leadership.
- Help bring new companies and entrepreneurial ideas to life through stable funding for university incubators and incentives for graduates to start a business.
- Support a shift from a risk-averse to an entrepreneurial society by providing incentives that attract venture capital, enable business growth, entice innovative companies to Ontario and help start-ups grow and stay in the province.
- Help attract the best talent through measures that include expanding the number and value of graduate scholarships.
- Provide responsive funding for internationally-matched research projects and support students to take a semester abroad or gain international work experience.
Creating a Sustainable and Prosperous Future

By attracting students, faculty and researchers from around the country and world, Ontario’s universities are turning their campuses into the centres of collaboration that are necessary to develop multi-faceted solutions for today’s increasingly complex challenges. Ontario’s universities, for instance, are drawing on the broad strengths and expertise of our students and faculty to help address Ontario’s environmental challenges, one of the top areas of concern that Ontarians highlighted over the last year.

One parent wrote in our survey that as Ontarians, “we have to ensure that we are good environmental stewards of this country and create a green economy to protect it, and through our inventions allow this green economy to flourish across the world, providing security for all Canadians.”

We are starting on our own campuses through retrofit projects and other initiatives that ensure our energy efficiency meets the highest standards – one of the key steps to a sustainable future that Ontarians emphasized over the last year. Students’ passion for environmental change helps drive our initiatives, leading to great ideas that they even help fund – such as a sustainable, green-roofed pavilion and bicycle shelter at the University of Guelph powered by solar panels.

Collaborative work is also underway between universities, local government agencies and other organizations to help communities adapt to a changing climate, including addressing flood risk in homes and how municipalities will need to plan for and address extreme weather events. In this way, universities are helping Ontario avoid the high costs of extreme weather through responsible and proactive planning.

At the same time, businesses, industries and communities across the province are developing innovative processes and technologies to improve sustainability. Universities are helping these efforts by supporting research into how Canadians will best be able to adapt to a changing climate, save energy in their homes, support locally produced food, drive cleaner cars, and produce renewable energy.

By helping this research reach the public, meanwhile, we are also working to develop “new behaviours of solidarity to respect the boundaries of the planet,” as Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, recently called for, and fostering the innovation in “our institutions, our behaviours and our relationships with each other and with our environment” that the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences has argued are equally necessary as technology for addressing climate change.44 45

Seventeen of Ontario’s 21 universities have added new research initiatives or institutes on sustainability since 2013. Research on new biofuels and clean energy sources, electric vehicles and related technology, construction and low carbon homes are ongoing, and are just some of the ways that Ontario’s universities work directly with industry and government to ensure tomorrow’s economy is both sustainable and prosperous. Through the Centre for Hybrid Automotive Research and Green Energy, for example, the University of Windsor is partnering with companies including Ford Canada and D&V Electronics to develop the next-generation battery and motor technology that will push the development of electric vehicles.

As the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Clean Energy Canada both argued in recent reports, the benefits of this research and these innovations ultimately flow through the economy.46 The beneficiaries include the mining industry, where “the clean energy transition will create opportunities for economic development and revitalization. Metals and minerals are essential to increasing the global supply of renewable energy, not to mention smart grids, LED light bulbs and electric cars.”47

Ensuring the environment is preserved and protected is a top priority for Ontarians. We heard that repeatedly throughout the last year. Ontarians value the province’s parks, lakes and rivers. Maintaining this natural beauty, they told us, is fundamental to maintaining what makes Ontario special. “Ultimately, I am worried for my child because of the way we treat the environment,” one parent wrote in our survey.

At the same time, Ontarians emphasized the importance of finding sustainable ways for Ontario to still develop and prosper in the future. “I am really excited to save the environment through business ventures that can also improve the economy,” one student told us through our survey.

This challenge is a central example of why Ontarians emphasized two key principles to us: partnership and bold, big-picture thinking. Achieving a sustainable and prosperous future will take considerable partnership between numerous groups, including engineers, economists, urban planners and environmental experts. And helping Ontarians transition to living and working in new, more sustainable ways will take bold, innovative thinking.

Ontario’s universities are proud to be partners in creating this better future. By working with Ontarians across the province, we are committed to helping keep Ontario’s lakes clean and its parks and nature reserves pristine, all while creating the sustainable economic development that will drive a growing, dynamic province for years to come.

To read more about what Ontarians told us about the environment, see Appendix C: A Sustainable and Prosperous Future.

Commitments and Recommendations

WHATONTARIANS WANT

• A focus on sustainable job creation and economic development: reducing emissions, preserving our province’s natural beauty and moving toward a low-carbon economy.

• Support for and development of renewable energies and technology.

• A proactive approach to energy efficiency and wildlife conservation.

ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES’ COMMITMENTS

• Dedicate resources to building sustainable, low-carbon campuses and producing graduates with the broad skills to contribute to a sustainable and prosperous economy.

• Encourage research into the green technology and innovations that will benefit the province.

• Continue research on ecological issues that help preserve our natural environment for future generations.

HOW GOVERNMENT CAN HELP CREATE A PROSPEROUS AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

• Support advancements in clean technology and climate science that will move the results of university research into businesses and communities.

• Encourage conservation and energy-efficiency through funding to repair or retrofit aging infrastructure, with dedicated investments to postsecondary institutions.
Helping Guide Sustainable Mining in Northern Ontario

With its focus on the environment and Aboriginal communities along with its key location in Ontario’s Ring of Fire, the Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Mining and Exploration at Lakehead University is playing a crucial role in guiding sustainable mineral exploration and extraction in Northern Ontario.

The Centre brings together 16 departments across Lakehead, including geology, law, biology, Aboriginal initiatives, engineering and anthropology, to look into the nature and impacts of resource development in Northwestern Ontario – a major economic driver for this region and the province. Using research, education and outreach activities, the centre focuses on how to ensure mineral resource exploration and extraction is environmentally sound, and done in collaboration and consultation with First Nations and Métis communities.
Over the last year, in conversations held across the province, Ontarians have been clear about the future they want for Ontario.

They want the skills, knowledge and experience to build a better future for themselves, their families, their communities and the province.

They want communities with robust health care, vibrant arts and culture scenes, and vital services.

And they want to see a green and sustainable Ontario with thriving regional economies and strong clusters of innovation.

Ontario’s universities are committed to realizing this vision, but we know we can’t do it alone. To face the challenges and seize the opportunities that the future will bring, Ontario needs to have corporations and small businesses, colleges and universities, and governments at every level working together in partnership.

This report is our first step in pushing toward the better future Ontarians want – in showing how universities are here to help them confront the province’s most pressing challenges.

One respondent to our survey believes strongly that in our role: “Education is the harbinger of positive change, so universities also hold the responsibility of empowering young minds. And I believe that when the dust settles, we will find that Canadian universities rose to the occasion.”

We are dedicated to helping repay this Ontarian’s faith. But we know there’s more to be done, more ideas to be considered, more insights to be shared. We’re looking to you, our partners, to work together with us to face tomorrow’s challenges, seize its opportunities, and ensure a better future for the province and all those who call it home.
Over the course of the last year, we spoke to many thousands of Ontarians from across the province about how to create a better future. Here is what they told us.
A. Adaptable Skills and Experience: What Ontarians Said About Jobs and the Economy

Today in Ontario, you can visit almost any workplace, examine any sector and any industry, and see change in action. Go to a hospital and your doctor may use artificial intelligence to determine a diagnosis. Go to a law office and artificial intelligence may be reviewing documents for relevance in a case. In Ontario’s factories, robots and humans work side-by-side, while teams of software engineers design and manufacture high-tech cars. As digital tools transform whole industries, banks are beginning to look more and more like technology companies, and newspapers and artists are searching for ways to compete in a world where massive amounts of information, images and videos are available in an instant. As these changes take hold, workplaces are also often feeling more unstable than ever, with temporary and precarious employment on the rise, the “gig economy” taking hold and wage growth, in many cases, remaining stubbornly low.

Thinking about the future in this context can seem overwhelming. In our survey, thousands of respondents expressed worries about whether there will be enough jobs in the future, whether these jobs will be well-paying and stable, and whether they will offer the kind of life and standard of living that they have always dreamed of.

“I’m worried that I won’t be able to find a job that not only supports me but can support my family as well,” one student told us in our survey. “I’m worried that I won’t be able to fulfil my dream of travelling and experiencing new cultures.”

These are undoubtedly challenging and uncertain times. But the changes Ontario is going through also offer great opportunities if, as Ontarians, we all work together to seize them.

Today, Ontario has a “critical opportunity… to work with people of all ages, particularly with youth, to shape the way the 21st century is going,” said John Stackhouse, Senior Vice-President at RBC, while hosting the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Youth Employment. That’s one of the reasons why we set out to speak to as many Ontarians as possible over the last year. We wanted to hear how Ontarians envision the future and learn more about their ideas for how universities can help.

We wanted to hear from leaders in the private, public and non-profit sectors about what jobs will look like in five and 10 years, and what kind of skills young Ontarians will need to be ready for them.

The answers we heard indicated that, as Ontario looks to the jobs of the future, change will be widespread. Some of the changes ahead are hard to predict. Estimates about automation vary widely, from studies suggesting that more than 40 per cent of our workers are at risk of being affected by automation, to others putting the number of occupations that are fully automatable at five per cent.


But if the speed and scope of these transformations are up for debate, the fact that they’re taking place is not. Since 1987, the number of non-routine cognitive and non-routine manual jobs, the kind that require more interpersonal skills and flexibility and are therefore less at risk of automation, have increased by 94 and 64 per cent respectively.\(^50\) The number of routine jobs, which are at greater risk of being automated, increased by 13 per cent.\(^51\)

As a result, non-routine cognitive jobs now account for 42 per cent of Ontario’s workforce, compared to 31 per cent in 1987, while routine occupations have decreased from 59 to 47 per cent in that same period.

To prepare for these changes in the workforce, employers across all sectors agree that workers will need well-honed core skills such as communications, problem solving and critical thinking – skills that help workers adapt to any changes that might come to their workplace.

This was the take away from a recent C.D. Howe Institute report, which noted that “the relative decline in routine-intensive jobs signals that adaptive and interpersonal skills are becoming increasingly important aspects of occupations.”\(^52\)

And it was what Ontarians indicated in our survey when asked to state the importance of 10 skills as Ontario prepares for the future. Critical thinking, problem solving and communications skills emerged clearly at the top, as they also did when the Business Council of Canada surveyed companies about what skills are most important to them when evaluating entry-level candidates.\(^53\)


\(^{51}\) Ibid.


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**Figure 3:** Source – Ontario Ministry of Finance
Employers further told us that Ontario requires a broad set of workers to thrive in the future. That means Ontario needs to think about the breadth of skills that organizations need to make the most of, for instance, their massive data collection capabilities, which requires workers with technical skills to design the databases and analysis software, but also people with critical thinking skills to decipher what the data is saying. It means thinking about how to get Ontarians comfortable with digital skills from a young age, so they can be ready for the future. It means recognizing, as a recent U.S. study showed, that today auto manufacturers are looking to hire more software developers and engineers than mechanical engineers.54

Developing this broad group of talent requires investments in postsecondary education across the board – both colleges and universities – so all our workers have the skills and training to work in high-tech environments. As Nobina Robinson, CEO of Polytechnics Canada, and Sarah Watts-Rynard, Executive Director of the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, have written, “the skilled trades of today require a whole new set of skills on top of those passed down from their mentors.”55 With engineers developing increasingly sophisticated cars, Ontario also needs the skilled technicians to repair and care for them.

At the same time, the Business Council of Canada has noted that the skills required for management positions are changing: “Being an effective day-to-day manager is no longer enough. Leaders – from senior executives to managers – are expected to bring forward new and creative ideas, think strategically and globally, optimize operations and motivate employees.”56

Developing such a diversity of talent with this diversity of skills is vital if Ontario wants to build a modern, competitive workforce. This is true across our province’s many sectors.

Tech companies need engineers and programmers to innovate and develop new software and technology – but they also need employees with business skills to sell their products and grow their companies.

Hospitals, long-term care centres and retirement homes need doctors and nurses with both the medical knowledge to treat patients and the people skills to understand their needs beyond medicine.

Peter Wallace, the City Manager for the City of Toronto, told us, “I need engineers who understand public policy and I need social workers who understand budgets and finance.”

And Shurjeel Choudhri, Senior Vice-President and Head of Medical and Scientific Affairs at Bayer HealthCare, noted at our Roundtable on Youth Employment that “essentially everyone in our company works on a cross functional team... You have to be able to work as part of a cross-disciplinary team.”

This broad set of skills is not only tomorrow’s toolkit – there is already a growing demand for it in the workplace. The question, then, is: How can Ontarians best prepare?

Higher education is one key to success in this new economy, Ontarians told us. This is made plain by the fact that jobs that require a university education have increased by 145 per cent over the last 30 years in Ontario. In fact, the value of a postsecondary education in general is on the rise, as jobs that require a college diploma or apprenticeship went up by 45 per cent in the same time period.57


But employers and students alike emphasized that more could be done to ensure that students are prepared to transition into the workplace from university by helping them articulate the skills they learned and, in particular, by continuing to expand the number of experiential opportunities at colleges and universities.

“Expanding work-integrated or experiential learning opportunities are essential to the ongoing skills development of our university graduates,” wrote the Ontario Undergraduate Students Association (OUSA). “This can take the form of internships, co-operative work placements, practicums, capstone projects, and research positions. The personal, professional, and academic growth provided by these forms of learning will help Ontario’s youth engage with the province’s evolving labour market.”

Ontarians further emphasized that helping graduates transition into the workforce requires the equal participation of employers, both to ensure that there are a wide range of high-quality experiential learning opportunities for Ontarians to take part in, and to provide vital employee training.

“Employers are in the best position to provide technical training,” OUSA wrote, a sentiment echoed in a recent Mowat Centre report arguing that employers “are best positioned to anticipate future trends in their own sectors and to understand how to train their own workers.”

Ensuring that employers and educators are equally committed to the continuous training of Ontario’s workforce is particularly important in today’s world, where education can no longer be thought of as a young person’s game. Lifelong learning is essential to developing a competitive and agile workforce.

In today’s world, “you need to be someone who’s constantly learning, who is much more flexible and much higher on the skills of empathy,” said Google Canada’s Fab Dolan.

A report for the Business Council of Canada similarly noted that “life has become a series of transitions, with learning and earning processes that may be simultaneous rather than sequential, and that evolve with ever-changing circumstances.”


This new reality has also elevated the importance of entrepreneurial skills, not because young Ontarians today necessarily need to start their own company (though more and more of them are doing so), but because the ability to be a self-starter, to adapt, and to be resilient are fundamental to thriving in today's economy. At a Queen's University Roundtable on Entrepreneurship, there was consensus among students, faculty and community leaders about the importance of entrepreneurial skills for today's workforce. Certain studies, meanwhile, have shown that, in the U.S., "new and young companies are the primary source of job creation," while in Canada, small businesses, including start-ups, accounted for 87.7 per cent of net new private jobs in Canada from 2005 to 2015.61

More than anything else, however, Ontarians over the last year highlighted the importance of partnerships in ensuring our workforce is prepared for the future.

They emphasized the value of partnerships between educators, employers and government to provide the experiential learning opportunities and the workplace-relevant curriculums that help Ontarians prepare for the workforce. They emphasized partnerships between these sectors to create the training and upskilling opportunities that Ontarians and businesses both need to thrive in the long term. And they emphasized partnerships between these sectors to ensure that colleges and universities across the province provide the breadth of skills required for the jobs of the future.

Thriving in our age of adaptation will not just happen; it will take a coordinated effort. But the message from Ontarians was clear: to help the province thrive, Ontarians need the adaptable skills and knowledge that will make them work-ready and world-ready – prepared to make an impact in their workplaces, their communities, and society at large.

Ontario’s universities are committed to giving students the broad mix of adaptable skills, knowledge and experience that will allow them to build long, fruitful careers. To read more on how we plan to help Ontarians build tomorrow’s workforce, see section 2.1: Partnering to Help Students Thrive.

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B. Broad and Impactful Research: What Ontarians Said About Research and Innovation

In our survey, at our roundtables and in our many other conversations with Ontarians, we heard repeatedly about how uncertain the future feels today. But when talking about research, innovation and technology, Ontarians widely said that they are excited to see what the future might bring and optimistic that tomorrow’s inventions and innovations will help Ontario thrive.

In our survey, for instance, we asked respondents to state their level of optimism about seven key issues facing the province. When asked how much they agreed, from one to ten, that technological advances will be a driving force for positive change, the average response was 6.75, the highest for any of the issues we asked about. When asked about what they were excited about in the next five years, many echoed the idea from one parent that “technological advances can bring an improved quality of life for everyone, more free time, and space for a better use of creativity.”

This optimism around innovation in Ontario was more than matched by the sense Ontarians had of its importance. “No matter who we are, or what industry we are in, we are being disrupted. Digital innovation is the main catalyst for this,” explained Rick Huijbregts, then-VP of Digital Transformation and Innovation at Cisco, at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Innovation and the New Economy. Business and industry leaders from all sectors said that this reality is forcing them to focus heavily on innovation.

Growing worries from economists about slow growth and a shrinking workforce are further pushing this trend. Writing in a report for the federal government, the Advisory Council on Economic Growth stressed how “innovation is the ‘secret sauce’ driving productivity across the economy, and is often the foundation of job-creating clusters and Canadian champions.”

Ontarians expressed confidence that the province has the talent, the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the tools to drive the innovation it needs. But they also highlighted key areas where Ontario must improve.

Various tech leaders and experts spoke out, for instance, about the challenges Ontario start-ups face in scaling up beyond a mid-level size into large companies. “For too long it’s been the goal of Canadian companies to get just big enough to get bought out… and be moved to Silicon Valley or be moved to New York,” Fab Dolan of Google Canada said at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Innovation and the New Economy. “And the challenge from an ecosystem perspective is that when those companies… get rich and then go to start their next companies, they start in the Valley and they start in New York and they start in Israel. And we need those companies to be here.”

The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, meanwhile, has argued that “when firms — especially tech companies within the Communications Equipment & Services cluster — reach a particular threshold, they face a ‘capital cliff’ in which the pool of domestic investors willing to invest more than $10 million becomes very small. This is the amount typically required to jumpstart major growth.”

Helping start-ups scale up is what will help Ontario lead the world when it comes to artificial intelligence, information technology, financial technology, health sciences, and more. It’s what can also drive innovation in established industries such as agriculture and manufacturing. Ontarians emphasized to us that supporting these sectors is vital if Ontario is to remain competitive in today’s technology-driven economy.
They also highlighted the important role that universities play in making this happen. "Universities can lead the way in advances in health care, research and technology," wrote one student in our survey. Others pushed universities to continue conducting the research that ultimately leads to new technologies and innovations. "It is clear that technology plays an important role in shaping the future landscape, and it is critical that we use technology to its full potential to help the province," another student argued.

Concerns arose, however, about narrowing the concept of innovation to only technology. Many Ontarians emphasized that creating a better future for Ontario requires thinking broadly about innovation. Innovation often emerges from basic scientific research that, at the time, seems to have few practical benefits, as the expert panel on Canada’s Fundamental Science Review noted recently.64

And while innovations can refer to groundbreaking technologies that led to the smartphone, they can also help find new ways of delivering health services to those in need. They can make small changes to our daily lives by making lineups at stores more efficient, or increasing the efficiency of vital processes in manufacturing or supply chains. It’s only by thinking broadly about innovation, by taking "advantage of our combined innovation DNA, including social innovation," that Ontario will face the multi-faceted challenges ahead of it, such as climate change.65

Grand Challenges Canada refers to this broad mix of innovation as "integrated innovation," a concept that "recognizes that scientific/technological innovations have a greater chance of going to scale and achieving global impact and sustainability if they are developed from the outset in conjunction with appropriate social and business innovations."66

The concept reflects the overarching message Ontarians expressed over the last year: That an innovative future can only emerge through extensive collaboration.

Writing in Policy Magazine, Iain Klugman, the CEO of Waterloo innovation centre Communitech, argued that "there is no substitute for a strong, homegrown culture of collaboration across all sectors of the local economy. The only reason Communitech exists is that, 20 years ago, a group of tech entrepreneurs set aside competing local agendas and recognized they could all achieve more for themselves, their companies and the region by pulling together."67

Allyson Hewitt, Senior Fellow at the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, put it even more succinctly at a recent Canadian Club panel on social innovation, citing an old proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go with others."

This is especially true if Ontario wants to create an environment where the most groundbreaking research and inventions are able to have an impact on the everyday lives of its citizens, something that Ontarians consistently highlighted as a priority.

Fulfilling Ontario’s innovation potential requires a diversity of talent and experience – and an acknowledgement that new ideas spring from a range of graduates from the humanities, engineering, hard sciences, social sciences, arts and more. As a recent Harvard Business Review article pointed out: “From Silicon Valley to the Pentagon, people are beginning to realize that to effectively tackle today’s biggest social and technological challenges, we need to think critically about their human context – something humanities graduates happen to be well trained to do.”68

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Ontarians want research and inventions that reach them in their homes, hospitals, and offices. They want to see communities that have access to and benefit from the research being conducted by businesses and universities.

Achieving both these goals requires partnerships between researchers, industry, government and business.

It requires businesses with collaborative, interdisciplinary teams that have the combined innovation and business expertise to drive new ventures to success, as a recent opinion piece from the deans of business schools at the University of Toronto and UBC argued.\(^6^9\)

Finally, ensuring university research moves from campus to community requires spaces and opportunities for government, business and the education sectors to work together to confront their shared challenges.

Universities are proud of the wide range of research we conduct, and of how, with the help of partners across various sectors, this work has a significant impact on Ontarians by improving business productivity, health care, public policy, sustainability practices and more.

But we understand that Ontario’s future depends on continuing to build our research capacities and strengthening our partnerships. Ontarians shared a number of ways in which Ontario can boost the breadth and strength of its innovation. These ideas included teaching vital creative and entrepreneurial skills, and creating partnerships across sectors to incentivize the mobilization and commercialization of research and knowledge. Together, they underscored a fundamental reality and call to action: A better future will only happen if we build it together.

Ontario’s universities are committed to producing and supporting the wide range of research – from the arts and humanities to the sciences – that drives innovation, and to ensuring that research reaches Ontarians and improves their lives. To read more about how Ontario’s universities intend to help build an innovative future for Ontario, see section 2.2: Partnering to Support Our Communities.

C. A Sustainable and Prosperous Future: What Ontarians Said About the Environment

In its report to the federal government (the Naylor Report), the expert panel on Canada’s Fundamental Science Review summarized an observation that Ontarians repeated many times over the last year: “The world is confronted with many challenges. What is unsettling is not so much the number of entries that might be registered on the negative side of the ledger, but their complexity, pervasiveness, and potential further scope... Successfully tackling these issues will require efforts that cut across a range of disciplines.”

This idea came up in relation to many issues, but it was most evident when discussing the future of the environment. Ontarians spoke often about the particular complexities of addressing climate change and preserving our environment, and about the range of tactics—from technology to individual conservation—and players—engineers, scientists, economists, lawyers and more—that it will take to create a sustainable future.

As the Naylor Report further noted:

Responding to [climate change and environmental degradation] will clearly call for major contributions from natural scientists, geographers, and engineers—for example, assessing impacts on Canada’s fresh water, atmosphere, and coastal lands, devising alternative energy solutions, and developing clean technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while staying competitive globally. Health researchers will also need to address any health threats arising from climate change, and the ethical, legal, and social issues seem destined to rise steadily given the global scope of the effects now being seen. Moreover, social psychologists may have a unique niche in addressing the cognitive dissonance that polarizes discourse on this topic.

Thinking about the complexities of today’s environmental challenges could make them seem insurmountable, and Ontarians did express concern in our survey about whether the province was doing enough to confront them.

“I am worried for my child’s future in terms of how the world will look in ten years,” one Ontarian wrote. “Will there be plenty of clean water? Will the air be polluted and filled with smog? Will there be forests and beaches that my child can explore?”

For the most part, though, Ontarians expressed the opposite feeling: a passion for facing these challenges and creating a future where preserving the environment went hand-in-hand with innovation and economic development.

In our survey, many Ontarians highlighted the duality of this goal—that pushing toward a low-carbon, green economy is also fundamental to ensuring that the province flourishes long into the future.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) further noted the benefits of a more sustainable economy recently, arguing that it would ultimately help a wide range of sectors and industries: “Many businesses would benefit, not just traditionally ‘green’ businesses... And the benefits would be spread across Canada, in both large and small communities, rather than being isolated in one or a few pockets.”

As many Ontarians noted, achieving increased sustainability and prosperity requires innovative technologies that help with conservation and open up access to renewable energies. As one student wrote in our survey, “Ontario needs to focus on building its environmental economy and reducing its environmental footprint. This requires innovation, and will create jobs.”

We also heard about how building a sustainable and prosperous future also requires “a broad range of innovation in not just our technology, but also our institutions, our behaviours and our relationships with each other and with our environment. The kinds of society-spanning innovations required will not be strictly technological, and they will not be achieved quickly. And yet they are profoundly important.”

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71 Ibid.
Ontario’s universities know that we have a role to play in ensuring Ontario leads the world in the push toward sustainability, which is why we are committed to continuing to drive the impactful innovation and research that Ontarians called for, and to graduating the globally and community-minded citizens who can implement that work across various sectors.

But preserving our environment will not only take bold and innovative thinking. It will require the work of multiple partners. Urban planners, engineers, farmers, economists and plenty of others will all have to be part of the solution.

Ontarians expressed that fundamental message many times over the last year. At a conference on sustainability, Peter Love, Chair of the Ontario Climate Consortium Governing Council, highlighted the importance of energy efficiency and conservation, pointing to data from the Canadian Energy Systems Analysis Research showing that in Canada, “less than 40% of primary energy production typically ends up in the form of useful energy.”

Of course, any effort to increase energy efficiency and conservation will require large-scale work, such as retrofitting buildings. As the FCM has argued, “older buildings, with poor insulation and leaks, require more heating in winter and more cooling in summer. Increasing the energy efficiency of the stock of buildings can reduce emissions and provide a boost to employment and GDP.”

But conservation, Love emphasized, also requires buy-in from individual Ontarians, who can change their individual behaviour in their homes and at their offices. It takes an all-in approach.

And ultimately, that is the message Ontarians repeated most: It’s only by working together that we can make the changes necessary “to ensure that we are good environmental stewards of this country and create a green economy to protect it,” as one parent called for in our survey. It’s only by thinking big picture — by fostering talent “that not only will better the economy but will find sustainable ways to do so,” as another Ontarian wrote — that we will create a sustainable and prosperous future for the province.

Ontario’s universities are committed to helping build a sustainable and prosperous future for Ontario. To read more about how we intend to help achieve this goal, see section 2.3: Partnering to Drive a Growing, Dynamic Province.


WHAT ONTARIANS WANT

- An inclusive society in which all Ontarians can contribute to and benefit from the province’s economic success.
- Stronger relationships with Aboriginal communities and a focus on ensuring they have the tools to thrive, including by increasing their participation rate in postsecondary education.
- Increased access to university for under-represented groups, and more culturally sensitive supports for them on campus.

D. A Society and Economy That Works for All Ontarians: What Ontarians Said About Diversity and Access

The more we talked to Ontarians about the future over the last year, the more we heard about the transformative changes already taking place across the province. The world of work is shifting, new technologies are being developed, and economic opportunities are quickly opening up for those who can seize them.

Yet many Ontarians remain concerned that only a limited few will ultimately benefit from these changes. Without significant efforts, they said, Aboriginal communities will continue to be underserved and left out of economic prosperity. Immigrant, racialized and other minority communities will continue to face barriers to opportunities. And the rise of automation and other technological changes could create prosperity while leaving out a significant proportion of Ontarians.

In the context of these risks, Ontarians delivered a clear message: A better future for Ontario won’t be possible if it does not include all Ontarians.

In our survey and at our roundtables, we heard particular concerns about efforts to ensure that Aboriginal communities are empowered and set up to thrive in the years and decades to come. Aboriginal peoples across the province often live with the consequences of decades of under-investment and discrimination. This historical legacy has led to high levels of poverty and incarceration for Aboriginal peoples across the province. Recent studies have shown it leads to substantial economic losses as well.

A report by the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board found that Canada’s economy is missing out on $27.7 billion a year because of its “under-utilized” Aboriginal workforce. Similarly, the federal government’s Advisory Council on Economic Growth has argued that “bringing the [workforce] participation rates of Indigenous peoples up to those of other Canadians” could add billions to the GDP.

According to many Ontarians, however, change can sometimes seem far away. When asked in our survey how much they agreed that Aboriginal peoples and their communities will be respected and empowered in five years, the average response was 5.4 out of 10, the lowest score for the seven issues we asked about.

Ontarians emphasized that the province’s social and economic future depends on the empowerment of Aboriginal communities. But their concerns about whether Ontario’s future will be truly inclusive extended further as well.

Many noted that Ontario’s diversity has always been one of its finest qualities, but emphasized that barriers remain in place for a number of Ontarians. “You can have a good interpersonal experience, which can make you feel like you belong, but that doesn’t mean the culture that you are working in is actually fair and equitable, or that the institutions and the systems are actually fair and equitable,” said Andrea Nemtin, President and CEO of the Inspirit Foundation, at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Diversity and Inclusion.

Today, Ontario is only growing more diverse as immigrants continue to settle in the province. As Bank of Canada Governor Stephen Poloz pointed out in a recent speech, Canada’s openness to new people and new ideas have long been the source of its success and prosperity. And over the last year, we heard from numerous Ontarians who believe not only that continuing this openness will help create a better future for our province and country, but also that the social and economic well-being of the province depends on its embrace of diversity – its ability to hear from a variety of voices and benefit from the variety of Ontarians’ experiences.

“Diversity is very, very crucial because we need to have every single Canadian part of the journey with us and then we need to be attractive to international talent,” Google Canada’s Fab Dolan said at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Innovation and the New Economy. The argument echoed what another Ontarian wrote in our survey: “Acceptance of cultural diversity and religious tolerance will lead to a stronger nation, which will create a unique competitive advantage that other nations lack.”

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Others, meanwhile, wrote more broadly about the need to fight for “a more compassionate society, one that looks out for the vulnerable and protects the environment.”

These concerns come in the context of rising inequality across the world. In Canada, the gap between the highest and lowest earners has been growing since the 1980s. A report on the issue by the Institute for Research on Public Policy noted that from 1982 to 2010 “the income of the bottom 90 per cent increased by a meagre 2 percentage points. In contrast, the income of the top 10 per cent increased by more than 75 per cent and that of the top 0.01 per cent by 160 percent.”

This increase in inequality has been reduced, but not completely removed, by changes to the tax–and-transfer system over that period.

Ontario has not been immune to this trend. While the province’s per capita GDP grew by 57 per cent from 1976 to 2015, its median after-tax income only increased by 27 per cent in that same period. And while a recent analysis of income data shows much of Ontario still has good economic mobility, there are parts of the province where it remains difficult to move up the economic ladder.

In this context, many Ontarians said that as Ontario’s economy transforms and technology changes the way people live and work, they are particularly worried about whether all Ontarians will be able to share in the benefits and prosperity that new technologies may bring.

“My biggest concern is those being left behind. The ones who are not part of this transition towards the knowledge economy,” one student stated. “As more and more things become automated there will be [fewer] jobs for the unskilled or low skilled workforce.”

These worries reflect why Ontario’s universities have been committed to ensuring all willing and qualified Ontarians can attend university and prepare for changes in the economy.

But the potential consequences of pushing further into a technology-driven economy without ensuring all the proper supports are in place for Ontarians – without considering whether the very way Ontario conceives of social policy today is adequate for the future – could be drastic.

“The impact of technology on jobs represents an unknown,” noted a recent report from the Mowat Centre. “With the right strategies, skills and supports, Canada could position itself at the forefront of a new economy. Without the right approach, Canada could find itself in a long-term period of economic stagnation, with many Canadians on the sidelines of a chaotic, churning labour market.”

To create a better future, Ontario needs the input of all Ontarians, and that means creating a welcoming, supportive environment for new Ontarians and ensuring that those who already live here – and whose ancestors in many cases have lived here for millennia – are supported and ensured the opportunity to thrive.

As we received ideas about how to achieve this dual goal, it became evident that doing so will require imaginative thinking and coordinated work across different sectors.

According to some experts, for instance, the prospect of an increasingly automated future suggests the need for a basic income that guarantees a certain livelihood to all Ontarians. But others see the need for more complex solutions in these complex times.

“These discussions epitomize the bold and broad thinking that Ontarians stressed will be necessary if we are to ensure the transformations occurring in our society will lead to opportunity and a better future for all Ontarians across the province and across different communities.”


80 Ibid.


And universities, Ontarians said, are important partners in ensuring Ontario is pursuing forward-thinking ideas, in opening up economic opportunities for Ontarians, and in helping ensure that a growing and changing economy benefits all Ontarians and that the province’s diversity is matched by its inclusiveness. Universities play a vital role, participants at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on Diversity and Inclusion argued, by increasing access to underserved communities and conducting research on diversity issues.

Universities are working hard to meet these challenges, by giving students the skills they need to thrive in changing times, supporting the diverse, inclusive society we wish to see across Ontario, and conducting research that helps our communities and governments tackle the challenges of our changing economy at a systemic level.

Ontario’s universities are committed to building diverse campuses that welcome students from all countries, cultures and backgrounds and help Ontario to foster an inclusive economy and society.

To read more about how Ontario’s universities are committed to helping create an inclusive Ontario, see section 2.1: Partnering to Help Students Thrive.
E. A Comprehensive Approach to Care: What Ontarians Said About Health Care

Looking five years into Ontario’s future, there are a few things Ontarians were reasonably certain about: The province will be more diverse, with more immigrants choosing to study, live and work in Ontario. It will continue to face both opportunities and challenges because of technological advancements. And its population will be older than it ever has been.

Today, 16.7 per cent of Ontarians are 65 and over, outnumbering Ontarians who are under 15 for the first time. In places like Peterborough, St. Catharines and Belleville, the number of seniors has risen to more than 20 per cent of the population. By 2041, the Ontario Ministry of Finance estimates that seniors will account for 25 per cent of Ontario’s population.

This demographic change will affect the province in a range of ways. Ontario’s working-age population will shrink proportionally, putting more pressure on fewer people to keep the economy growing. Our health-care system will face increasing demand. And our communities will need to ensure that they have the necessary services and infrastructure to allow Ontarians to lead vibrant and fulfilling lives long into their senior years.

Ontarians highlighted these issues throughout our conversations in the last year. In many cases, they expressed great optimism about the future of health care in the province. In our survey, Ontarians consistently voiced their excitement about the improvements that scientific advances would bring over the coming years.

The importance of technology was also a prominent theme at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on the Aging Population, where Anthony Dale, the President and CEO of the Ontario Hospital Association, highlighted that technology is “one of the only ways we will be able to build rapid capacity in a short period of time” and so be able to meet the needs of an aging population.

Ontarians, however, also shared concerns about how prepared Ontario is for the changes ahead, and whether Ontarians will be able to access the type of care they need as they grow older.

“I am nearing 65 and I worry about my medications, health care and being able to afford to stay in my house and look after basic needs,” one Ontarian wrote in our survey. A recent report from the Centre for the Study of Living Standards reinforced this anxiety, noting that there will be multiple pressures on health care costs in the future, including from increased demand from an aging population and the rising costs of achieving the “further improvements in health care demanded by the public.”

Ontarians also repeatedly said that the health-care system today isn’t adequately addressing the needs of the province when it comes to mental health. They expressed some concerns particularly in relation to postsecondary institutions, noting that, because mental health issues often arise for the first time while students are at college or university, there is a particular need to have robust supports on campuses for all who need them. But the comments we received in our survey also extended to the health-care system as a whole, with Ontarians repeatedly expressing the desire for Ontario to “focus on mental health” and provide “better resources for mental health” across the province.

Most of all, Ontarians regularly stressed that ensuring a healthy future for Ontario requires a broad focus and a wide assortment of programs and initiatives – from continued improvements to our hospitals, to greater access to home care and long-term care homes, a renewed focus on mental health, preventive care, and strategies to preserve health.

Achieving this future, they said, requires the coordinated work of many different groups. “It is incumbent upon us to get social services and health care more aligned and work together on strategy,” argued Barbara Steed, Executive Vice President of Patient Services and Chief Practice Officer at Markham Stouffville Hospital, at the Ontario’s Universities Roundtable on the Aging Population. She also challenged others to “take a look ahead of the game” and think about what people in their mid- and late-50s need, “so that we are not always reactive to a current problem.”


87 Ibid.


At a panel on innovation in the health sciences, meanwhile, Rebecca Yu, the head of health sciences incubator JLABS, noted that the major scientific advancements that so many Ontarians are excited about – the cures for major diseases and treatments for chronic diseases – are too big for one researcher, scientist or lab to handle.

Building connections between sectors and service providers is particularly vital if Ontario is to take a preventive approach to health care that will not only keep Ontarians healthier for longer, but also bring down health costs across the system. Ontarians spoke often about how healthy living must be incorporated into all aspects of our social policies and planning, and that one fundamental way to do that is to transform our cities and towns into age-friendly communities.

Building age-friendly communities means creating easy access to necessary services and activities. “When amenities such as grocery stores, medical facilities or community centres are too far away to reach on foot,” Glenn Miller argued in a recent report for the Institute for Research on Public Policy, “older adults who no longer drive become less active and are at risk of becoming isolated.”

Creating age-friendly communities also means ensuring Ontarians enjoy career and volunteer opportunities and an enriching cultural life at every stage of their lives.

The majority of seniors, we heard repeatedly, are most interested in continuing to lead healthy and active lives. “People in their 20s and people in their 60s want the same things,” Mary Lou Tanner, Director of Planning and Building for the City of Burlington, told The Agenda recently. “It’s accessibility to transit, a unit they walk away from, and a place to walk and bike.”

In this respect, Ontarians emphasized that an aging population does pose challenges – but even more so it presents opportunities to create healthier communities across the province.

Ontario’s universities are working hard to help conduct the research, develop the technology, and foster the age-friendly communities that can make this happen.

But responding to the province’s health needs in a comprehensive way that improves the lives of all Ontarians, whether they are young or old, working or retired, requires the partnerships, preparation and big-picture thinking that Ontarians consistently called for throughout all our conversations. It takes “making the connections,” as the Wellesley Institute has argued, between healthy communities and investments in transit, infrastructure, housing and culture.

That’s why it will take working together to create a healthier future for all Ontarians.

Ontario’s universities are committed to conducting groundbreaking medical research and helping build healthy communities across Ontario. To read more about how we plan to partner with Ontarians for a healthier future, see section 2.2: Partnering to Support Our Communities.
WHAT ONTARIANS WANT

• Effective local community planning that addresses key issues such as sustainability, health, housing and transit.

• Support for arts and culture that helps create vibrant communities.

• Meaningful partnerships between postsecondary, private, and public sectors to improve communities.

• Research, partnerships and entrepreneurial initiatives that drive innovation in key industries.

• Support for regional economic development across the province.

F. Vibrant Communities and Strong Regional Economies: What Ontarians Said About Community Development

Over the last year, we heard from Ontarians about a number of challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Ontario and one thing became clear early on: Few of them can be achieved through the work of single individuals, organizations or sectors.

Ensuring that students have the broad set of skills they need to enter the workforce requires coordination between educators and employers.

Fostering entrepreneurship and innovation takes collaboration between researchers and public and private sector partners.

And ensuring that Ontario is ready to meet the needs of its aging population requires considering everything from health care to transit and infrastructure needs.

Creating a better future for Ontario, in other words, takes partnership – and the work of building those partnerships will largely take place in the province's many communities.

Not surprisingly, then, communities were top of mind in many of our conversations with Ontarians. From the start, for instance, young Ontarians delivered a consistent message: as much as they were excited to build careers, they were equally eager to contribute to their communities.

“I am excited to pursue a career doing what I love and to make an impact in my community,” one student wrote. Others emphasized the importance they place on strong communities as they consider where to live and work in the future.

There was no one component, however, that emerged as an overwhelming contributor to a strong community. The strength, Ontarians made clear, comes from multiple pieces.

Arts and culture was one point of emphasis, with Ontarians telling us about the central role it plays in creating communities that are able to think critically and imaginatively about the most important issues in today’s world.

Stephan Jost, Director and CEO of the Art Gallery of Ontario, made this point at a Canadian Club panel on the future of arts institutions. “We do have to have conversations about race and class in Canada,” he said. “We need to engage with these issues through great art.”

As the province faces increasingly rapid transformations across society and its economy, Ontarians also argued that artists play important roles in imagining possible futures and contending critically with current realities. “In a disruptive society, giving people a sense of place, a sense of purpose, a sense of wonder is going to be very important,” said Claire Hopkinson, Director and CEO of the Toronto Arts Council, at OCAD University’s Roundtable on Arts and Culture.

The challenge of coping with today’s disruptions and transformations was a common theme in our conversations with Ontarians, and it underlay Ontarians’ desire for stable, resilient communities. A strong community with affordable housing, vital services and robust partnerships can be essential to facing an uncertain future, they said.

Strong infrastructure and robust services are also pivotal for building strong communities that take care of all its residents, and for helping society “move from the current model of winner–take–all urbanism to a new model of urbanism–for–all,” as Richard Florida argued recently.93

What Ontarians ultimately signaled is that a community draws its strength not just from its parts, but also from its connections. Building rich and resilient communities that will ensure all Ontarians can prosper in tomorrow’s world requires developing links across various sectors.

These links are vital, in part, because they foster innovation and economic development across the province. The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity (ICP) has emphasized the importance of forming clusters by developing relationships between a region's companies, academic institutions, venture capitalists and government. Cross-sector collaboration, it argues, is what allows Ontario to build robust and thriving information technology, health science, finance, tourism, mining, agriculture, and manufacturing industries in different parts of the province. It is what creates the knowledge spillover and support systems that inspire entrepreneurs to develop new projects and enterprises, which in turn help industries innovate and grow.94

“When different actors are situated in close proximity to one another, the transaction costs of interacting decreases, naturally leading to more opportunities to share knowledge, form relationships, and develop partnerships,” notes one of ICP’s recent reports.95 If industry has access to skilled labour from postsecondary institutions and support and funding from both government and private investors, the report further argues, each of these sectors flourishes in turn.

In a report to the federal government, meanwhile, the Advisory Council on Economic Growth similarly recommended the establishment of innovation marketplaces that bring together “researchers and entrepreneurs with public and private customers around a common business challenge.”96

While debate may continue on how to best spur collaboration, all sides stressed that Ontario has to prioritize partnerships in order to guarantee the economic development of its communities and regions.

We further heard that universities have a major role to play in any collaborative ecosystem, but that their work is most useful alongside other sectors. Across the world, the idea of a “learning city” is also taking hold to emphasize the importance of establishing deep and meaningful connections between educational institutions and government, business, non-profit, cultural and community organizations. Establishing these ties means “removing old divisions of town and gown, the ivory tower against the real world, academic and corporate knowledge sharing, and even adult—continuing education versus vocational—technical training” and instead promoting “the development of learning, education, and engagement in its entirety,” according to one expert on the topic.97

In our survey, Ontarians repeatedly called for this kind of meaningful engagement between universities and their communities. “Universities can ensure that they are engaged with communities, beyond what can be seen as solely academic,” one parent wrote. “They can work with others to create real, meaningful solutions to real-life, everyday problems.”

Ontario’s universities are proud of the work we do in their communities, and we are committed to continuing and expanding that work. We also know that while rich, vibrant communities and thriving regional economies are on the rise in Ontario, there is still much work to be done to ensure that this is the case across the province, and particularly in rural and Northern communities.

95 Ibid.
97 Scott, Leodis. “Editor's Notes.” In Learning Cities for Adult Learners, ed. Leodis Scott, Wiley Periodicals, 2015, 1-4
“I live in Northern Ontario and often it is difficult to dream so big for many of us aspiring professionals. I have been able to experience unique and rewarding opportunities, and I hope that others in the North could receive a greater range of these kinds of opportunities,” one Ontarian wrote in our survey. Another emphasized the need for “programs to help people in rural areas. Small businesses are struggling, farmers have it fairly hard where I live, and schools are shutting down, lowering the prospects of a good future for the next generation.”

As the province continues to shift toward a technology-driven knowledge economy, it is imperative that all communities be able to share in the benefits that come with this transformation. In remote communities, however, a lack of dependable broadband internet access often limits economic development. A 2016 survey found that broadband access was the third highest concern for rural Ontario councilors, behind the cost of electricity and supporting growth of new businesses.98 In some Aboriginal communities, meanwhile, limited access to other basic services such as clean water and high schools harms the development and empowerment of their residents.

The more we talked to Ontarians over the last year, the more an emphasis emerged on two key principles: Ontario needs to prepare for the future through partnerships and bold, big-picture thinking.

As Ontario pushes to fulfil these principles, much of the hard work will take place in communities. It’s in communities that Ontarians will plant the seeds for new partnerships. It’s in communities that people from across sectors – from technology to finance, arts to manufacturing – will find spaces to think collaboratively and envision bold new solutions to today’s challenges. It’s in communities that, collectively, we will create a better future for Ontario.

Ontario’s universities are committed to helping build vibrant communities and strong regional economies across the province through impactful research, volunteering, and robust supports for Ontario’s artists. To read more about how we plan to work with Ontarians to achieve these goal, see section 2.2: Partnering to Support Our Communities.
