



# Making connections

Investigating learner-centred approaches  
to higher education in Ontario

Report of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement  
Committee Study Tour to Ontario September 2006



## Acknowledgements

The Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) wishes to thank colleagues whose generosity with their hospitality, ideas and time made the trip fascinating and productive. There is not room to include everyone but in particular, we'd like to acknowledge the help of the following people:

Nicholas Armour, British Consul General, Ontario; Donald N Baker, Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board; Yves Beaudin, Council of Ministers of Education Canada; Andrew M Boggs, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; Ron Bordessa, University of Ontario Institute of Technology; Carolyn Campbell, Durham College/University of Ontario Institute of Technology; Miranda Cheng, University of Toronto; Debra Dawson, University of Western Ontario; Suhair Deeb, Ryerson University; Fiona Deller, Council of Ministers of Education Canada; Dave Farrar, University of Toronto; Jesse Greener, Canadian Federation of Students; Michael Hatton, Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning; Beatriz Hauser, Toronto Public Library; Sheila Lumsden, British Council Scotland; Marsha McEachrane Mikhail, Ryerson University; Jamie Mackay, Council of Ontario Universities; Sarah McKinnon, Ontario College of Art and Design; Kamil Malikov, McMaster University; Bill Muirhead, University of Ontario Institute of Technology; Leah Myers, Durham College; Dawn Palin, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; Michael Skolnik, University of Toronto; Gary Polonsky, University of Ontario Institute of Technology; David Trick, Higher Education Quality Council Ontario; Caroline Warrior, British Council Canada; Elka Walsh, now Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario; John Walsh, University of Guelph-Humber; Rod Webb, York University.

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2007

ISBN 978 1 84482 742 8

All Enhancement Themes publications are also available at  
[www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk)

*Printed copies are available from:*

Linney Direct

Adamsway

Mansfield

NG18 4FN

Tel 01623 450788

Fax 01623 450481

Email [qaa@linneydirect.com](mailto:qaa@linneydirect.com)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

## **Contents**

<b>Chair's foreword</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Part 1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Focus	2
The tour	2
<b>Part 2 Background</b>	<b>3</b>
Higher education in Canada	3
Ontario	4
Higher education in Ontario	4
Current Ministry policy	8
Observations and conclusions	11
<b>Part 3 Institutional processes and practice</b>	<b>14</b>
Structural arrangements	14
Policies and strategies	16
Services	18
Pedagogy	20
Student life	23
Observations and conclusions	26
<b>Part 4 Students</b>	<b>27</b>
Models of involvement	27
Representation	29
Surveys	30
Observations and conclusions	30
<b>Part 5 Quality</b>	<b>32</b>
Agencies	32
Degree-awarding powers	32
Quality assurance	33
Observations and conclusions	34
<b>Part 6 Making connections in Ontario: conclusions and next steps</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Annex A Study tour participants</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Annex B Institutions and organisations visited</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Annex C Toronto study tour overview itinerary</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Annex D References</b>	<b>42</b>

## Chair's foreword

The Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) is at the heart of the Quality Enhancement Framework in Scotland. SHEEC's task is to support Scottish higher education institutions in the challenging task of managing the enhancement of the student learning experience. The membership of SHEEC comprises the vice-principals of the universities and higher education institutions with responsibility for learning and teaching together with student representatives. The focus of SHEEC's work is increasingly on approaches to student-centred learning and researching, developing and disseminating good practice in this area. In all its work, SHEEC maintains a global perspective: learning from good practice round the world, and sharing thinking and practice from Scotland internationally. It was in this context that, following a global scan, we decided to undertake a study tour of aspects of student-centred learning in higher education in Ontario.

During the five days the tour lasted, we visited 11 institutions and met with eight organisations, as well as hosting a working dinner and attending a formal reception. This brief, but comprehensive, immersion in another higher education system provided us with a deep understanding, not just of what is on offer in Ontario but also the context to the system that gave rise to those developments. We witnessed a rich array of inspiring practices - captured in this report - and an impressive level of learner-centredness and customer care, from which we are determined to learn.

We are indebted to our Ontarian hosts for the thought they put into planning the meetings and visits that yielded so much of interest. Their generous hospitality and the warm welcome we received wherever we went made the trip thoroughly enjoyable. We hope that colleagues in Ontario will visit us and allow us to reciprocate.

As well as providing a fascinating contrasting system of higher education, the trip has been invaluable in compelling us to reflect critically on our own ways of doing things in Scotland. In explaining to our hosts our systems and practices, we have had to examine and question the things we take for granted and therefore to understand them better. This filled many conversations in the margins of meetings and late into the evening during the tour and will be incorporated into SHEEC's thinking as our work progresses in future.

We made a wide range of useful contacts in Ontario and are already working to maintain these. Since returning, email and other dialogue has already become well established and over the coming months, several speakers will be invited to Scotland to discuss particular activities and practice with the sector. We are also suggesting several specific actions in this report that we think the sector and individual institutions will wish to consider. We commend our report to the sector and SHEEC looks forward to continuing debate on its contents.

**Professor Kenneth Miller**  
**Chair, Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee**

## Summary

### The tour

In September 2006, a group representing SHEEC and drawn from Scottish higher education institutions, the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Scotland, the National Union of Students (NUS) Scotland and student participation in quality scotland (sparqs) embarked on a study tour to Ontario, Canada.

The main aim of the tour was to investigate, understand and record practice and activity that could be shared with the rest of the Scottish higher education sector in the form of a written report and, potentially, a series of workshops to which practitioners identified as part of the tour might be invited.

The focus of the visit was clearly defined as investigating learner-centred approaches to all aspects of the higher education experience. This definition included programme content and delivery, support services, buildings and facilities, administrative practices, approaches to quality, and local and national policies.

Tour participants met and discussed these aspects with a wide range of stakeholder groups and organisations including managers, academic and support staff and students in universities and colleges, and representatives of appropriate organisations and agencies.

In the week of the tour, the group visited and/or met with eight universities, two colleges, Toronto Public Library and eight organisations and representative bodies, including the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO); the Council of Education Ministers of Canada; the Council of Ontario Universities (COU); and the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). In addition, members met sector representatives at a formal working dinner and at a formal reception, hosted by the British Consul General. Some members also attended side meetings about issues in which they had a personal interest.

### Higher education in Ontario

In Canada, higher education is the devolved responsibility of each of the 13 separate provincial jurisdictions. Ontario is Canada's second largest province with a population of more than 12.5 million. It has 18 'provincially-assisted' degree-granting institutions and 24 colleges of applied arts and technology offering further and higher education and similar to further education colleges as we understand them. These institutions are all directly funded through the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. There is no intermediary body akin to the SFC in Ontario. The sector is collectively known as the 'postsecondary sector'. Around 408,000 students both full and part-time are studying in Ontario's universities, 11 per cent of whom are undertaking graduate studies. There is around 13,300 full-time academic staff.

Ontario is facing many issues that are familiar to Scotland (eg aging workforce, need to secure access for under-represented groups, for upskilling and reskilling, addressing globalisation, growing importance of knowledge transfer etc) and, like Scotland, has identified higher education as having a key role in achieving and maintaining economic success in the province. In some important ways, however, Ontario is operating in completely different circumstances to Scotland, including a growing population, large-scale immigration, focus on inclusion of aboriginal communities in education, absorbing the 'double cohort' caused by the abolition of a year of schooling, and an identified need, in particular for people with postgraduate qualifications. The Ontario Ministry is currently funding a large-scale expansion of the Ontario system and is requiring action by the universities on access, accountability and quality in return.

## Conclusions

The tour group visited Ontario at an interesting time and has concluded the following.

- Ontario's universities are highly autonomous and independent, each with a strong sense of its own self and mission and its role within the sector. Strong institutional leadership was evident almost everywhere we visited. Individual academic staff also enjoy a high degree of autonomy. The corollary of this is, however, that institutions seem quite separate, even isolated, from one another. There is little sense of there being a sector as we understand it.
- There is a direct relationship between the Ministry and the sector. Ministerial wishes seem to have a swift effect in Ontario and the postsecondary system seems to be much more politicised than the Scottish system. Despite this far more direct relationship, the Ministry seems relatively unwilling to exercise power over the universities, in deference to institutional autonomy. The recent injection of funding might begin to redress this.
- The Ontarian postsecondary sector is strongly service-oriented and institutional activities - academic, support and cocurricular - are centred on meeting the needs of the individual student. We found examples of very high quality customer care across the board in Ontarian institutions. There were many examples of innovative student-centred learning and we were impressed overall with the general high quality of provision in the institutions we visited. We saw extensive examples of exceptionally high quality facilities. All of this is stimulating the thinking of SHEEC and there is scope for Scottish institutions to consider how we might further develop and cultivate high quality services in the light of the Ontario experience.
- Students feel they 'belong' to the institution and large numbers become enthusiastically involved in a range of aspects of university life beyond their studies. Institutions offer an impressively wide range of cocurricular opportunities to students. We should consider further how we might encourage our students to become more involved and engaged with institutional activities and for the Scottish sector to replicate aspects of the community involvement demonstrated in Ontario.

- The National Survey of Student Engagement offers possibilities which we should consider in a Scottish context.
- New models of integration and connection between the college and university sectors, demonstrated in Ontario, should be considered in more depth by the Scottish further and higher education sectors.

On the whole the system in Ontario was similar enough to understand but different enough to make us think. It has provided a fascinating perspective and a wealth of material for reflection on the nature of our own structures and models - in particular the benefits (or otherwise) of having the SFC, and the model of quality assurance we are promoting which seems natural to us but was quite alien to the Ontarians. From observing Ontario we have identified a range of practice and activities from which we can undoubtedly learn, while reflecting, often favourably, on many of the arrangements we have in Scotland. It will be interesting to see if the strikingly different Scottish and Ontarian systems converge at all in future.

## Part 1 Introduction

1.1 The idea for the tour arose from the work of SHEEC in considering the Enhancement Themes strand of the Scottish higher education Quality Enhancement Framework. This initiative aims to enhance the student learning experience in Scottish higher education by identifying specific areas (the 'Enhancement Themes') for development. The Themes encourage academic and support staff and students to share current good practice and collectively generate ideas and models for innovation in learning and teaching. SHEEC had observed that several of the Themes to date have included an international dimension and that there are countries and regions where clusters of practice might lend themselves to a short study tour.

1.2 Ontario was chosen because examples of interesting practice in its universities and colleges had arisen in various scoping studies conducted for the Enhancement Themes and contacts had already been well established with several practitioners having been invited to Scotland to discuss their work. This suggested that a more intensive and in-depth study tour would be both interesting and beneficial. Canadian higher education is arguably more homogenous than American higher education but most Canadian provinces have only a small number of universities. The Ontarian sector, however, is a similar size to our own.

1.3 In addition, Toronto is relatively easy to get to, is predominantly English-speaking and is a system which is at least recognisable to Scottish visitors. The Toronto area contains a high concentration of different types of universities and Ontario is a higher education jurisdiction. Most importantly, SHEEC was concerned not just to see interesting practice and processes, but also to develop a proper contextual understanding of the system in which these had arisen, as this would assist thinking on transferability. The week the group spent in Toronto facilitated full immersion in the Ontario postsecondary system.

1.4 The main aim was to investigate, understand and record practice and activity that could be shared with the rest of the Scottish higher education sector in the form of a written report and potentially, a series of workshops, to which practitioners identified as part of the tour might be invited. Clearly, this report can only convey a flavour of the visit and the key themes and issues arising from it, the proposed workshop discussions and guest speakers will be able to fill out the detail.

1.5 In addition, the tour allowed members of SHEEC to spend a concentrated period of time with each other, enabling ongoing and in-depth strategic discussions about quality enhancement and the general work of SHEEC.

1.6 The tour was sponsored by SFC and QAA Scotland. All Scottish higher education institutions were invited to nominate attendees and a total of 16 people, drawn from a cross-section of higher education institutions, the NUS Scotland, sparqs, the Scottish Executive, the SFC and QAA formed the tour group.

## Focus

1.7 One week was allocated to the tour from 24-29 September 2006. SHEEC agreed that this required the focus of the visit to be clearly defined. The tour sought to investigate **learner-centred approaches to all aspects of the higher education experience**. This definition included programme content and delivery, support services, buildings and facilities, administrative practices, approaches to quality, and local and national policies. Tour participants aimed to meet and discuss these aspects with a wide range of stakeholder groups and organisations, including managers, academic and support staff and students in universities, and representatives of appropriate organisations.

## The tour

1.8 In the week of the tour the group visited and/or met with:

- eight universities
- two colleges
- Toronto Public Library
- eight organisations and representative bodies, including the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; the Council of Education Ministers of Canada; the COU, the HEQCO; and the CFS.

1.9 In addition, members met sector representatives at a formal working dinner and at a formal reception, hosted by the British Consul General. Some members also attended side meetings about issues in which they had a personal interest.

1.10 All of the institutions we visited were in the public sector. With hindsight, for contrast, it would have been useful to visit one or two in the private sector.

1.11 An initial orientation briefing meeting was held on the Sunday evening prior to the start of the visits. A debriefing meeting was held at the end of each day to allow participants to share their thoughts on the visits - especially useful when the group had split up to see different things. These meetings also provided a forum to consider emerging findings and allowed a forward look to the next day's activities.

1.12 A representative of the British Council joined the group for one of the days.

1.13 A list of tour participants is at annex A. A list of institutions and organisations visited, including brief institutional profiles, is at annex B. The tour itinerary is at annex C. References to source materials and websites are at annex D.

## Part 2 Background

### Higher education in Canada

2.1 Education, including higher education, in Canada is the devolved responsibility of each of the 13 separate provincial jurisdictions.

2.2 As a country, therefore, Canada does not have an integrated national education system and there is no federal department of education. The federal government provides support for postsecondary education via the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) although there is no specific requirement for the provinces to direct that funding to postsecondary education. The federal government has three main roles: student financial assistance (a programme run jointly with the provinces and territories); research and development (which is primarily about financing university research through a group of granting councils); and the CHST.

2.3 The federal and provincial governments are currently considering roles and responsibilities regarding postsecondary education. Arguably, the greatest conflict is around the fact that constitutionally the provinces and territories have jurisdiction for education, but because of taxing powers the federal government has the majority of the funds. In 1995, the federal government cut the CHST dramatically and since then has been investing directly in targeted programmes in postsecondary education, to the disappointment of the provinces and territories. The current government has signalled that it is open to being more respectful of the respective provincial/territorial role in that area. However, the provinces and territories argue that they will need increased funding to be able to fulfil that responsibility.

2.4 An additional noticeable feature of Canadian higher education is that intermediary bodies between universities and Government 'are rare and the few that do exist have very limited authority'.<sup>1</sup> Although 'most, if not all, formal studies of the matter have recommended that provinces move in this direction'<sup>2</sup> there seems to be a general lack of appetite in Canada and, we perceived, in Ontario (among both universities and government) for a body fulfilling the role of the SFC. Skolnik considers that governments are less likely to intervene in the running of universities or colleges than dedicated intermediary bodies, which in turn means that Canadian institutions 'tend to have more autonomy from external actors'<sup>3</sup> than other places, notably the United States (US).

2.5 The provinces and their education systems are extremely diverse and credit transfer and mobility between institutions in Canada is a major issue, with some institutions and provinces having better arrangements than others. In 2003, the provincial Premiers formed the Council of the Federation with a view to facilitating provinces and territories to 'play a leadership role in revitalising the Canadian federation and building a more constructive and cooperative federal system' as well as 'showing leadership on issues important to all Canadians'.<sup>4</sup> The Council has

---

<sup>1</sup> Skolnik, 2006, page 14

<sup>2</sup> Skolnik, 2006, page 15

<sup>3</sup> Skolnik, 2006, page 15

<sup>4</sup> [www.councilofthefederation.ca/aboutcouncil/aboutcouncil.html](http://www.councilofthefederation.ca/aboutcouncil/aboutcouncil.html)

identified postsecondary education as a priority and in July 2006 issued *Competing for Tomorrow: A Strategy for Postsecondary Education and Skills Training in Canada* with a view to collectively identifying and addressing issues and also to influencing federal government funding. *Competing for Tomorrow* has five key themes:

- improving access - particularly for the workforce to reskilling and upskilling opportunities
- enhancing quality
- increasing participation in the skilled labour force particularly from those who face barriers
- improving skills for the 21st century workplace
- expanding research and innovation.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of the tour, the federal government had yet to make a formal response.

## Ontario

2.6 Ontario is Canada's second largest province, covering more than one million square kilometres (415,000 square miles) - an area as large as France and Spain combined.

2.7 With a population of more than 12.5 million,<sup>6</sup> Ontario is home to more than one in three Canadians or about 40 per cent of Canada's population of approximately 33 million. Eighty per cent live in urban centres, largely in cities on the shores of the Great Lakes. Approximately 2.6 million people live in the City of Toronto, and almost six million in the Greater Toronto Area. In addition, the scale of immigration to Ontario is large - over 133,000 in the year to July 2006.<sup>6</sup> Over 140 different languages are spoken in Toronto's schools.

2.8 Ontario's largest sectors of employment are manufacturing, healthcare and social services, financial services, professional/scientific/technical services and educational services. In 2005, Ontario's gross domestic product grew by 2.8 per cent, its inflation rate was 2.2 per cent and its unemployment rate was 6.6 per cent.

## Higher education in Ontario

### Dimensions

2.9 Ontario has 18 'provincially-assisted' degree-granting institutions comprising 17 universities and the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD). (The Royal Military College, in Kingston Ontario, is a university but is funded by the federal government of Canada.) There are also 24 colleges of applied arts and technology offering further and higher education and similar to further education colleges as we understand them (although there is no equivalent of the Higher National Certificate/Diploma), directly funded through the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. As described earlier, there is no intermediary body akin to the SFC in Ontario. The sector is collectively known as the 'postsecondary sector'.

---

<sup>5</sup> Council of the Federation, 2006, pp 7-10

<sup>6</sup> Ontario Ministry of Finance, 27 September 2006, *Ontario Demographic Quarterly*, Highlights Of Second Quarter 2006 [www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/economy/demographics/quarterly/dhi062.html](http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/english/economy/demographics/quarterly/dhi062.html)

2.10 There are also three agricultural colleges, a college of health sciences, approximately 500 private career colleges offering non-advanced vocational courses and 17 privately funded degree-granting institutions (largely religious colleges). In addition, six private and five public out-of-province institutions have consent to offer degrees within Ontario.

2.11 Ontario's universities are among the oldest in Canada and were described as tending towards being the 'most autonomous and conservative'. There are around 408,000 students both full and part-time studying in Ontario's universities, 11 per cent of whom are undertaking graduate studies. There are around 13,300 full-time academic staff.

### **Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities**

2.12 The Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is responsible for:

- developing policy directions for universities and colleges of applied arts and technology
- contributing to, and administering policies related to, basic and applied research in the postsecondary sector
- distributing funds allocated by the provincial legislature to colleges and universities
- authorising certain institutions to grant degrees
- providing and coordinating financial assistance programmes for postsecondary school students
- registering private career colleges.

### **Funding and tuition fees**

2.13 Total university revenue is in the region of \$9,252,000,000 Canadian dollars (CAD).<sup>7</sup> Operating revenue is in the region of \$4,987,000,000 CAD, which is broken down into:

- Ontario Government: \$2,820,000,000 CAD
- tuition fees: \$2,300,000 CAD
- other sources: \$685,000,000 CAD.

2.14 Tuition fee policies have been constantly changing over the last 25 years or so. Ontario universities have full legal authority to establish their own tuition fee rates, but within government-prescribed standards (if they increase their fees over the standard the government reduces its contribution proportionately). The Ontario Government established a two-year tuition fee freeze in 2004-05 but has since announced that the freeze is over and from 2006-07, universities can increase tuition fees, within programme-based limits (ranging from 4-8 per cent) and an overall institutional limit (of 5 per cent). Some programmes (eg law, medicine, engineering, dentistry and some graduate programmes) have much higher fees than other

---

<sup>7</sup> Exchange rate approximately £1 = \$2 CAD

programmes, as a consequence of having formerly been deregulated, meaning the government had no influence over the range of fees that could be charged (college graduate certificates also have higher fees than other college programmes).

## Qualifications

2.15 Every university offers undergraduate (bachelor) degrees and most offer graduate (master's and doctorate) degrees. Each institution operates independently and determines its own academic and admissions policies, programmes and staff appointments. The Ontario Ministry provides operating funding to the universities and each university's degree-granting authority is based on its Act of the Legislature. There are several privately funded degree-granting institutions in the province (usually religious or specialist institutions - each with an Act of the Legislature) and many degree programmes offered on the basis of a Ministerial consent, some in colleges.

2.16 Although it is known collectively as the 'postsecondary sector', the system is a binary one. It was designed that way and this style persists - colleges tend to offer non-advanced level qualifications and universities offer degree-level and graduate education. There are no sub-degree credentials in Ontario (such as an associate bachelor's degree). The principal degree classifications are bachelor's, master's and doctorate. Since 2000, colleges have been able to offer 'degrees of an applied nature' and several have successfully exploited this opportunity and developed innovative degrees. In addition, some colleges now offer increasingly popular graduate certificate programmes that offer an applied, 'finishing school'-type experience for graduates and diplomats to prepare them for entering the job market. In 2000, 13 per cent of college graduates in Ontario had previously completed a university programme.<sup>8</sup> New universities have also been designated such as the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) which has been created on the campus of Durham College with many shared facilities and articulation arrangements. The University of Guelph-Humber (UGH) offers a unique and truly joint degree/diploma as a result of college/university collaboration. Outwith the 'traditional' university sector, all applications for Ministerial consent are referred to the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB).

## Policy environment

2.17 The Ontario higher education system is experiencing a time of review and change - the Ministry has instituted two major reviews in the past five years.

2.18 The Investing in Students Task Force was a Dearing-style inquiry, initiated by the Ministry in September 2000 to examine the entire post-secondary sector and make recommendations that would ensure accessibility, accountability and affordability of the system in future. A major impetus for this review was the impending 'double cohort' of entrants to postsecondary education that would result when the government (in moving to harmonise Ontario practice with that in other provinces) abolished a year of schooling at Grade 13, in 2003. This led to the creation of 100,000 new student places at universities and colleges to address the double cohort and growing demand for higher education.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Rae Report*, 2005, page 43

2.19 A key stated aim was to consider how investments in the sector 'could best benefit students'. The resulting report *Portals and Pathways*, published in 2001, was an effort to articulate 'what can government do?' regarding meeting the needs of learners and what institutional best practices could be adopted across the university and college sectors. There was an expectation that Government would fund reform but it has remained largely unimplemented, although some of its ethos has found its way into practice in Ontario.

2.20 In Autumn 2003, there was a change of government. The new government initiated another review into postsecondary education, under the chairmanship of former Ontario Premier, Bob Rae, to examine 'the design and funding of postsecondary education' in Ontario. This review concluded with the report *Ontario: A Leader in Learning* in February 2005, which called for a wide range of reforms including increased state investment, a statutory Robbins-type commitment to qualified applicants to university and college, greater financial assistance for students, increased collaboration by institutions and \$700,000,000 CAD to 'pursue quality and innovation to make the student experience rewarding and successful'.<sup>9</sup> The tour group met with representatives of the Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities and with staff from the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada.

2.21 A summary of the allocation of key functions carried out by organisations in the Scottish and Ontarian higher education systems is at Table 1 (see over).

---

<sup>9</sup> *Rae Report*, 2005, page 30

**Table 1 Comparators**

	<b>Country/province</b>	
<b>Function</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>Ontario</b>
Policy direction	Scottish Executive	Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
Funding allocation	Scottish Executive	Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
Policy development	SFC	Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
Funding distribution	SFC	Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
Benchmarking and key performance indicators	SFC	Potentially HEQCO
Quality assurance	Institutions	Institutions
External quality assessment/audit	QAA	PEQAB for some courses/institutions. COU audit for universities
Quality enhancement	Institutions collectively	Institutions individually
Admissions	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service	COU Universities
Student representation	NUS Scotland	CFS - Ontario
		Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA)
Institutional representation	Universities Scotland	COU

### **Current Ministry policy**

2.22 Current higher education policy in Ontario is set out in *Reaching Higher*, the Ontario Government's response to the *Rae Report*. *Reaching Higher* is embedded in the 2005 Budget announcement and declared postsecondary education to be one of the Government's top priorities for the next five years. Its key themes are accessibility, quality and accountability.<sup>10</sup>

2.23 The tour identified a number of policy themes of Ontario postsecondary education. To a large extent, Ontario is facing similar issues to Scotland (eg aging workforce, need to secure access for under-represented groups for upskilling and reskilling, addressing globalisation, growing importance of knowledge transfer etc)

---

<sup>10</sup> 2005 Ontario Budget, 2005, page 11

and, like Scotland, has identified higher education as having a key role in achieving and maintaining economic success in the province. In some important ways, however, Ontario is operating in completely different circumstances to Scotland:

- Ontario's population is growing and this is expected to continue, partly as a result of the 'echo boom' - the children of the 1960s baby boomers - and partly due to the large-scale immigration the province is experiencing
- the postsecondary education system needs to be equipped to offer programmes for bridging, upskilling and reskilling of new immigrants as well as being alert to the needs of existing immigrants and their children
- there is a particular concern (a personal interest of the Minister, we were told) to increase opportunities for students who are the first in their family to attend college or university
- inclusion of aboriginal communities in education needs to be improved
- the 'double cohort' continues to have an effect - it has still to work through the system and did not simply impact a single year - and enrolment demand for undergraduate programmes continues to rise faster than projected pre-2005
- there is an identified need in particular for people with postgraduate qualifications - partly to address an existing perceived shortfall and partly to accommodate the double cohort.

## **Expansion**

2.24 The biggest difference with Scotland, and a consequence of the aforementioned differences, is that the Ontario Government has declared a need to expand student numbers at postsecondary level with a commensurately huge expansion of resources - and with a range of conditions attached (see below).

2.25 Total undergraduate enrolment province-wide was expected to increase by 37 per cent - from 318,000 in 2000, to around 435,000 by 2010. There are signs that this figure has already been exceeded and the Ministry announced in September 2006 that:

According to our projections, more than 480,000 students started classes on Ontario campuses last week - the most ever in our history and an increase of more than 86,000 students since 2002-03. That means we've surpassed our goal...<sup>11</sup>

Graduate enrolment is also expected to grow - Ontario considers that it suffers from a shortfall between supply and demand for advanced degrees and the Ministry also aims to have 14,000 more graduate students by 2009-10, an increase of 55 per cent.

2.26 Understanding participation rates in Ontario, with a view to making comparisons with Scotland, has been difficult, in part because the terms 'higher education' and 'postsecondary education' appear often to be used synonymously. The Ministry does not use an academic performance index indicator as such,

---

<sup>11</sup> Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities website, 8 September 2006: [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/feature/](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/feature/)

although it uses measurements set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Statistics Canada. The Ministry typically defines the Ontario participation rate as a function of the number of 18-24 year olds in some form of postsecondary education at any given point in time - this includes students on non-advanced further education programmes. Based on the Ministry's own measurements, and those of Statistics Canada, Ontario is at a rate of 40 per cent participation (ie 40 per cent of all 18-24 year olds in Ontario are in either a publicly-assisted college or university. This figure does not include private career colleges) as of 2006-07, which is its highest ever. University students comprise 27.9 per cent and college students comprise 12.7 per cent when this 40 per cent figure is broken down. These numbers are based on full-time student headcounts and include graduate students.<sup>12</sup>

2.27 The policy objective is to continue increasing the Ontario participation rate, which in turn requires increasing the number of available spaces and creating opportunities for a greater breadth of students. As a consequence the Ministry has recently undertaken specific initiatives to increase participation among aboriginal, Francophone, disabled and 'first-generation' students (ie the first in their family to attend higher education).

### **Funding**

2.28 The Ontario Government acknowledged in *Reaching Higher* that 'Ontario's colleges and universities are under-resourced - revenues have not kept up with enrolment and the costs associated with a 21st century postsecondary education system'.<sup>13</sup> It has unfrozen tuition fees, committed to increase base operating funding to postsecondary education by 35 per cent (\$1.2 billion CAD) between 2006 and 2009-10 and doubled aid to students. The Ministry has increased funding to universities and colleges as part of an overall \$6.2 billion CAD cumulative investment in postsecondary education by 2009-10. This investment is on top of the investment made to accommodate the double cohort which resulted in a range of Government funded initiatives, including 73 large construction projects.

### **Access**

2.29 The Government also committed to a new student access guarantee. The guarantee means 'no qualified Ontario student will be prevented from attending Ontario's public colleges and universities due to lack of financial support programs'. *Reaching Higher* reintroduced student maintenance grants which had been abolished in 1993. The 2006 Budget included measures to:

- increase access to upfront tuition grants for middle-income families by more than doubling the income threshold for a two-child family from about \$35,000 to \$75,000 CAD
- almost double the number of students receiving upfront grants in 2006-07 to nearly 60,000 students up from 32,000 in 2005-06

---

<sup>12</sup> Figures supplied by Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, November 2006

<sup>13</sup> *Reaching Higher* 2005, page 10

- ease student debt by ensuring it is limited to \$7,000 CAD per completed year
- raise book and supply allowances for the first time since the mid-1980s, benefiting 138,000 students.

2.30 The Ministry is encouraging and expecting a range of initiatives to increase access that involve colleges and universities in collaboration and many of these fall within the remit of the tour. Current examples, some of which we observed as part of the tour, include 2+2 arrangements, shared facilities, shared campuses and, in one case, albeit briefly, a President shared between a college and a university. Collaboration between the college and university sectors has been particularly facilitated by capital funding as part of the preparation for the double cohort and embedding colleges on university campuses has been fairly common.

2.31 A joint body, established in 1996 and funded by the Ministry, the College-University Consortium Council, oversees and encourages greater collaboration between the sectors. In 1999, the Ontario University and College sectors signed an accord to increase academic cooperation with one another, including a process for providing of joint programming and a process of increasing mutual recognition of academic qualifications for advanced standing.

### **Quality and accountability**

2.32 Other initiatives stemming from *Reaching Higher* include the establishment of the HEQCO (see below), to monitor and report on performance in the postsecondary sector and, importantly, develop goals and benchmarks for the sector as a whole. The quid pro quo for increased funding, for the first time on a three-year basis, is that the Ministry intends that quality improvements and access for students will be ensured through a Multi-Year Agreement (MYA). This articulates the government's goals for the system and institutions' roles and responsibilities in meeting those goals. The agreement confirms the commitments expected from each institution and the sector-wide indicators (in terms of quality, access, affordability and the student access guarantee) that will be used to report on results achieved. Every publicly-funded postsecondary institution is being required to sign a MYA and details must be made available on each institution's website.

### **Observations and conclusions**

2.33 Clearly, the tour group visited Ontario at an interesting time. The Ontario system differs markedly from the Scottish system in a number of ways and this has caused us to reflect on the nature of arrangements in Scotland. 'Ontario is sufficiently like us to allow us to comprehend to some degree how their system really works - not just the formal bits but also the informal relationships that actually shape it - and then both to learn from it and to learn about our own system through comparison' (Mark Batho). The tour group has drawn the following conclusions.

- Ontario's universities are highly autonomous and independent. It is significant that they are described as 'provincially assisted', rather than 'publicly funded' as they are in Scotland. This high degree of institutional autonomy was

celebrated by many of those we met as contributing to the diversity of the sector, since each university very determinedly sets its own agenda. Each of the institutions we visited had a strong sense of its own self and mission and its role within the sector. Universities are comfortable with this differentiation. 'Institutions know what they are - their purpose runs through them like the letters in a stick of rock' (Professor Brent MacGregor).

- As a consequence of this, strong institutional leadership was evident almost everywhere we visited - 'senior management own and drive their institutions in imaginative ways' (Professor Kenny Miller). Individual academic staff also enjoy a high degree of autonomy and are clearly empowered to shape, design and deliver curricula to their own specifications, including introducing changes swiftly and with little institutional or external intervention. We conclude that, at its best, this allows staff to be responsive to learners' needs in ways which our more formal requirements and processes in Scotland might preclude, or at least slow down.
- The corollary of this is, however, that institutions seem quite separate, even isolated, from one another. There is little sense of there being a sector as we understand it. 'Sector' is simply a convenient way of referring to a collection of individual institutions - either postsecondary or higher education. Postsecondary institutions separately and determinedly pursue their own missions and market niches. Even among the Ontario universities (whose number is not any larger than the Scottish higher education institutions) there appears to be no forum to discuss undergraduate learning and teaching issues and few formal mechanisms for sharing good practice, although the system appears to be more connected at graduate level. We were fascinated to find that our balance of autonomy with a sector-wide collective approach to a wide range of issues surprised many we met.
- There is a direct relationship between the Ministry and the sector. There is no intermediary buffer body. There is a lot of interchange between staff in the Ministry and staff in institutions, a lot of people we met had worked in both the sector and the Ministry. In Scotland, this interchange is probably more likely to be between institutions and the SFC, rather than the Scottish Executive.
- Ministerial wishes seem to have a swift effect in Ontario and the Ontario postsecondary system seems to be much more politicised than the Scottish system. This is currently to the advantage of the institutions as large tranches of resources are currently flowing into higher education and funding is currently at a 40-year peak. The Ontario system therefore appears to be at least potentially subject to funding swings that would be unlikely to happen in Scotland as the existence, and possibly expectations, of the SFC moderates the process. While close Ministerial interest and commensurate funding is appealing, and all systems will be subject to some extent to the whims of key figures, the tour group has concluded that the existence of an intermediary body, at least potentially, creates a more stable climate in which strategic planning and systemic quality enhancement can take place.

- Despite this far more direct relationship between government and institutions, the Ontario Ministry seems relatively unwilling to exercise power over the universities, in deference to institutional autonomy. The slew of reviews of the postsecondary sector suggests that government would like to have more of an influence but is perhaps not succeeding. Skolnik observed that Ontario governments 'have generally lacked the will to tackle system design'<sup>14</sup> and we perceived a distinct lack of anything more than a very high level vision for the sector - on the part of the Ministry or institutions collectively. There are few system-wide goals or benchmarks - for example there seem to be participation rates but not targets (although the Rae Report since suggested these and HEQCO will be required to research and develop a range of baselines and indicators)
- *Reaching Higher* seems to represent a concerted and coherent attempt on the part of the Ministry to outline a more detailed vision and to be more consciously interventionist in shaping the sector into delivering on certain key priorities, through establishing the HEQCO and insisting upon new MYAs, as a quid pro quo for the investment it is making in the sector. Both the HEQCO and the MYAs have potential, but we discerned attitudes to such interventions on the part of some institutions that they were not intending to pay much attention to these developments. It will be interesting to observe how the Ministry deploys the tools and policy levers at its disposal to effect the change it wants.

---

<sup>14</sup> Skolnik, 2006, page 16

## Part 3 Institutional processes and practice

3.1 We visited a diverse range of institutions in terms of size, student profile, mission and range of provision - eight universities and two colleges in total, as well as the Toronto Reference Library. A short contextual profile of each is at annex B. Rather than consider them here institution by institution, we have used a series of themes as this has enabled us to compare and contrast similar and related processes and practices:

- structural arrangements
- policies and strategies
- services
- pedagogy
- student life.

### Structural arrangements

#### College-university collaboration

3.2 As described above, although the Ontario further and higher education system is described as 'postsecondary', it is a binary system with different arrangements in place for universities and colleges. There has been some realignment of traditional boundaries, however. Skolnik comments that 'by the end of the 20th Century, the binary model was in disarray in many [Canadian] jurisdictions with many second sector institutions offering baccalaureate programmes and getting more involved in research; universities offering more applied type programmes; and the appearance of a variety of new types of postsecondary institutions that didn't fit the existing classifications'.<sup>15</sup> One of the reasons that SHEEC chose to visit Ontario was the various interesting developments which seemed to be taking place, across sectoral boundaries that were specifically in the interests of the learner. We witnessed a number of inspiring collaborations between the college and university sectors. Much of this had been stimulated by Ministry resources, particularly a large capital investment programme, targeted, in part, in anticipation of the double cohort.

3.3 Pathways between college and university programmes, and pathways with advanced standing in particular, were identified by the *Rae Report* as having been developed to a moderate degree and therefore in need of being increased. Colleges reported to us 'ongoing discussions' with universities about admitting holders of vocational qualifications into degree programmes with advanced standing.

3.4 Ministerial funding (assisted by Principals' personalities) has resulted in a number of college and or university sites being **embedded in each other's campuses**, as well as truly **joint campuses**, as a means of facilitating 2+2 qualifications and encouraging progression, as well as realising efficiencies. Examples include, York University and Seneca College, McMaster University and Mohawk College, UGH (see below) and the UOIT and Durham College (see below). In some instances this appears to have worked very well. In others it was harder to tell whether, for example, the embedded college was meaningfully on the university's radar.

---

<sup>15</sup> Skolnik, 2006, page 3

3.5 Durham College (a college) and the UOIT (at the time of the visit, Ontario's newest university), for example, are working towards the aim that every single college graduate can be admitted to Year 3 of an appropriate UOIT degree, following a short bridging course. Clearly the fact that UOIT is a new institution, developing new qualifications, makes this easier, but we were impressed with the way that the principle of ensuring it happens is embedded in the institutional ethos. In addition, so much of the infrastructure and services are shared that the experience is made as seamless as possible for students and, where possible and appropriate, it is deliberately not possible to tell College and University students apart. Staff mentioned challenges but these were considered to be outweighed by the benefits.

3.6 The University of Guelph (a university) and Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, referred to as Humber Institute, (a college) impressed in similar respects including shared joint facilities across sectors, most notably in the form of the collaborative UGH (see below). However, the institutions appeared to us to have become more separate and distinct than the initial collaboration had appeared on paper, or may have been in actuality in the past. During our visit, Humber Institute in particular stressed its separate identity from the University of Guelph. The link was useful but not fundamental, nor unique, as Humber Institute had links with a wide variety of universities in Ontario, the US and further afield.

3.7 Such collaborations make the transition from college-level study to degree-level study in a university culturally easier and can help to ensure that 'a college diploma is the conclusion of a course of study, not the end of the road'.<sup>16</sup> We thought both of these examples provided impressive showcases of articulation and collaboration in action from which Scotland could learn much, even if we did not plan to import the models wholesale.

3.8 In a different model, colleges and universities have collaborated on specially-designed courses **enabling students to obtain diploma and degree credentials simultaneously** - examples include the University of Toronto at Scarborough which has a joint qualification with Centennial College, Durham College and the UOIT (see below) and UGH (see below). These qualifications provide the advanced theoretical education of a university degree, integrated with the applied knowledge of a college diploma, within the four years of study it would take to achieve a university degree. As UGH describes it, the institution therefore offers 'six years of study for the price of four'. This is explicitly and deliberately not a 2+2 arrangement - it is a fully-integrated four-year qualification so that, if the learner leaves before the end, they receive neither the college diploma nor the university degree. To some extent these joint qualifications have been stimulated by university graduate demand for an applied '**finishing school**' type qualification to help them become more work-ready and therefore gain employment quicker - a challenge many colleges have taken up to the extent that, as recorded above, 13 per cent of college graduates had previously completed a university programme.<sup>17</sup> With employability of graduates of great interest in Scotland at the moment, this is an area that the tour group thought might be explored.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Rae Report, 2005, page 14*

<sup>17</sup> *Rae Report, 2005, page 43*

3.9 As described above, the University of Guelph and Humber Institute still exist separately but, since 2002, have collaborated on a new and separate university - **UGH**. UGH combines the academic tradition of the University of Guelph and the professional, job-readiness, and training tradition of Humber Institute by enabling students to earn an honours degree and a college diploma after four years of full-time study. At the time of the tour, UGH had 2,400 students and its first cohort of 154 had just graduated and were now in the job market. UGH is particularly interesting as it has taken collaboration on a truly joint qualification to the next level by creating a university to deliver it. When it was established, the UGH combined degree/diploma was unique although other institutions (see above) have since collaborated to offer something similar. With the introduction of a relatively new power for colleges to award degrees, it may be that the full UGH model is no longer necessary.

## Policies and strategies

### Communication

3.10 In passing, we noted that the President of OCAD has **open door sessions** for two hours twice a week when any student can approach them about any issue.

### Research and teaching

3.11 On the whole, there appears to be less of a dichotomy between focusing on research or teaching in Ontario than in Scotland. The *Rae Report* promoted the idea of teaching excellence which resulted in new funding to universities which McMaster University put into creating a stream of teaching professors - '**career educators**'. We thought it was interesting, and likely to be beneficial to students, that a research intensive university was very comfortable with this position. McMaster University's 'discovery-led' approach to learning links the goals of research and teaching very closely. The University of Western Ontario (UWO) also showed how teaching quality can be emphasised even in an institution which is also research intensive.

### First year experience

3.12 The abolition of Grade 13 in schools presented the postsecondary system with both immediate and systemic challenges. In the first year in particular, around one half of the double cohort were a year older than the rest which presented problems for that year alone as half the cohort had received one year less of education and of life than the other half. Thereafter, all first years were a year younger, having only received 12 years of school and in addition, in academic/Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework terms, a level has been removed. This has presented challenges to the Ontario universities. There has therefore been a concentration on the first year experience and many institutions have allocated resources to student support activities. We noted that the first year experience is being actively considered at the University of Toronto, UGH and Ryerson University, and no doubt among others.

3.13 At the University of Toronto this was part of a wider **student experience strategy** and a \$3,000,000 CAD Student Experience Fund. The University's strategy is to spread the word within the (rather devolved and diverse) institution that student experience is a priority; to attempt to measure progress via the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results and via retention results (which were not seen as a particular challenge); and to set up the First Year Initiative programme, which is a series of workshops, events and online resources operated by Student Services. Around 50 per cent of first years participate in some aspects of the programme which includes writing labs and learning skills seminars. There is also a scheme of 'ambassadors' - second-year students who help out first years and who are trained in the August before the new set of first years arrive. The big issues for first year students are time management, given the newly found independence of first years; anxieties about being away from home; the size of classes; and food and diet. Much of the support for students is delivered through the University of Toronto's college system (there are seven colleges). But this is not jointly coordinated centrally with colleges operating their own independent services. The University indicated that it was consciously trying to prevent government from tying funding to actual outcomes in student experience, preferring funding to be attached solely to inputs rather than outcomes.

3.14 UGH reported consciously putting energy into the first year experience as this had been proven from experience to aid retention throughout the degree/diploma. A **Student Transition and Mentoring Programme** is in place utilising 'students who have managed it themselves' as mentors. All new students are assigned an upper year mentor, before they have even started their course. Contact is made and maintained over the summer before the course starts and continues through the student's first year.

3.15 At Humber Institute, great stress is put on the importance of '**pathways**' as fundamental to how the institution works and their concept of student centredness 'which they argue convincingly is at the heart of everything they do' (Norman Sharp). Humber Institute identifies and facilitates vertical pathways for academic and personal growth and horizontal pathways for specialisation and to facilitate course change. They make extensive use of common courses, flexible course sequencing and the building in of electives in all pathways as this allows students room to manoeuvre - to change pathway and direction. For example there is a common curriculum base for the apprenticeship stream and post-secondary stream that allows learners to move in and out of work and study to meet their changing needs and aspirations. It was argued convincingly that this has had a significant impact on student retention.

### **Space use**

3.16 Many of the institutions we visited were rooted in commercial centres of urban Toronto. With space at a premium there were several examples of creative responses to the need for more space.

3.17 OCAD had **built upwards** - the extraordinary and award-winning Sharp Centre for Design is a box that sits atop the existing buildings. OCAD also **rents space** within a nearby commercial mall - the library, teaching space and student services are

located here and the institution receives a good deal on the rent because the students make use of the mall's services - particularly the food outlets, as OCAD has no catering of its own.

3.18 Ryerson University is in a similar position to OCAD. It is a classic urban campus environment, where it is both physically difficult, if not impossible and economically prohibitive, to expand. It would be possible to get better space but this would be offsite and not as well connected to the rest of the campus. Ryerson University has entered into arrangements with local businesses by convincing them of the economic benefits to the area of the presence of students and their accompanying purchasing power. For example, in one building, the University owns a small piece of land at the entrance, one or more companies own the rest and make use of space there but they give the two upper floors to the University's Management School. **Clever use of architecture and design** have created a very effective learning space in this environment down-town. 'A model of how a tight city centre space can be effectively used' (Professor Mike Smith).

3.19 Both OCAD and the Ryerson University Information and Learning Commons had furnished areas in a 'cheap and cheerful' style, creating attractive, accessible and flexible space for students.

3.20 Despite new facilities, UOIT is also enduring space constraints. Technology, combined with a sophisticated analysis of how students prefer to use it, helps them to use space as efficiently as possible. Students (all supplied with laptops by the University) congregate in groups around electric power points, wherever they are, and therefore broaden the space that is available for study, including corridors and walkways. These groups of students are affectionately referred to as 'plug-huggers'. 'This turns every space into a potential study space and cleverly frees up space elsewhere' (Jane Denholm).

## Services

### Student management system

3.21 Two institutions discussed systems involving '**cradle to grave**' involvement with students. UGH consciously considers the student lifecycle - prospective, new, on-course, graduating and alumnus - to ensure contact with students, even before they have definitely decided to become students. To make this effective the Registry, Student Life, Careers and Alumni services are all co-located and have similar, familiar and recognisable approaches. Students see the administrative face of the institution as a single team in a one-stop shop. UGH uses a 'prospect management system' to communicate in an ongoing and personalised way with enquirers, as soon as they contact the University. As described above, incoming first years are assigned mentors who are in contact with them in the summer preceding the start of the course, as well as throughout their first year at UGH. On-course students can benefit from peer mentoring and support. The university believes that it is 'as important to support students out as in', and graduating students have a great deal of structured contact

with the Careers Service. A 'last lecture' event for graduating students (an initiative of some of the students) also brings closure to the experience. At the time of the tour, events were being planned for alumni - the first alumni were already pressing for this.

3.22 York University works with students and their parents from application through 'initiation'. They run student orientation courses throughout the first year, targeted particularly at first generation students. They also run a parents' programme.

### **Libraries and learning resource centres**

3.23 Unsurprisingly, given the focus of the tour, we saw libraries and learning resource centres on many of the visits. A range of interesting practice was observed.

3.24 Collaboration at Durham College and the UOIT and at Humber Institute and UGH facilitates **students at different institutions in different sectors studying side-by-side** with fully-integrated library services designed to meet their needs.

3.25 Ryerson University's integrated approach - characterised as CASE (**Content, Access, Space, Expertise**) - is to go out to where students are learning, rather than just providing a space for people to come to. Ryerson University also uses a range of interactive methods to help students make use of the library building in a deeper way. We note below the importance to Ryerson University of facilities that allow peer support. All of this complemented a vision to work better with other student service providers such as Student Support Services and Learning and Teaching offices in the University.

3.26 The visit to Toronto Reference Library, the main reference branch of Toronto Public Library, was suggested by a sector representative as providing a slightly different, but related, example of a learner-centred institution due to the considerable work the Library has done in making its resources accessible to users. We were particularly impressed by three aspects of Toronto Public Library. The Toronto Reference Library building, which contains five million volumes and is accessed by over one million people in person annually, was designed in 1977 yet has adapted very well to changes in library use since then. It has a modern feel with a central atrium space filled with public access computer terminals, a café and friendly reception desk. The architects who built the library are retained to carry out subsequent modifications, which are therefore sympathetic to the building. Library staff are clear that space is as important as stocks and this is borne in mind when local libraries are refurbished.

3.27 In addition, there are 17 million in-person visits and 21 million users of the 'virtual reference library' of 3,000 workstations across the 99 branches of Toronto Public Library which holds in total 10.8 million volumes. The library has a policy of **open access to information** and will not operate blocks on any websites or resources. Full cooperation would be given to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police if they needed to conduct a criminal investigation but the library operates on the principle that users should be free to access the information they choose. The Toronto Reference Library has targeted specific **user groups with different needs** and runs

workshops and drop-in sessions to help them make use of its resources. Young people, for example, receive help in job-hunting using the internet and high school students (who use the reference library and the branches to do homework) are shown how to use search engines - to 'get beyond just Googling' - and cite sources accurately. Programmes to induct older people in using the internet are also offered, combined with a social element.

## Pedagogy

### The laptop university

3.28 UOIT was, at the time of the tour, Ontario's newest university, established in 2002. It has a very strong sense of mission and a very clear strategy for learning and teaching - it sees itself as 'the laptop university' but also describes itself as 'hi-tech and high-touch'. All students lease an identical standard laptop, loaded with appropriate software, from the University at a cost of approximately \$1,500 CAD per year plus an information technology (IT) fee for use of the drop-in repair and advice services of another \$160 CAD. Standardisation of equipment leads to economies of scale in purchasing the laptops and software and also in advising on their use and in undertaking repairs. There is a central advice and repair desk which is staffed by both professionals and IT students. Each student's laptop is replaced every two years. The campus is completely wireless.

3.29 The institutional ethos is that technology allows learner-centred approaches like no other model because by providing a mobile learning environment it focuses on the individual learner and their learning needs rather than the teacher and teaching. Technology, they argued, facilitates:

- intrinsic advantage of mobility
- institutional flexibility
- new assessment practices
- institutional web services
- new resources for learning and teaching (including digital resources)
- student self-management
- collaboration and interaction.

3.30 The University argues that technology appeals to, and engages, the 'Millennial Student' who has been brought up with computers and cheap internet access, who is comfortable with technology, expects to access information online and, furthermore, expects to work in groups with others. This phenomenon exposes a gap between traditional teachers and students and UOIT insists that all new staff appointments are, or are prepared to become, fully computer-literate. Technology is explicitly important to promotion and tenure in the institution and use of IT is a mandatory element in staff review. UOIT is taking steps to future-proof its investment and is also researching such behaviour and activities to inform its institutional strategy.

3.31 The tour group was very impressed with a range of aspects at UOIT. While issuing all students with a laptop might potentially engender isolation, it was clearly the case that these laptops are a major means of communication - between the University and its students, among students and as a tool for group learning. Students are clearly at the heart of the institutional mission which itself has a clear sense of direction. The focus on laptops and technology has implications for the way the institution is managed - possibly too instrumental and managerialist for some of our group - and also for staff development, the estates strategy, and the level of IT support for faculty and students. The University is small and new though it plans to grow and we wonder how they will sustain the strong culture of close staff/student collaboration as it gets larger. Requiring students to purchase laptops adds to the expense which fits with a consumer model of higher education but might not transfer readily to Scotland. We also observed a lecture during which many of the attending students were surfing the internet for their own purposes! It may be that some students need to develop the maturity to avoid the distracting uses of IT in favour of its uses for learning. Nonetheless, the work UOIT is doing to develop teaching using this model is very valuable and likely to be worth watching.

### Larger classes

3.32 UWO provided three very interesting examples of how to provide an effective learning environment even for very large student cohorts. **Personal response systems** are small hand-held wireless transmitters, one per student, that enable the lecturer to ask a group of students multiple-choice questions. The students then respond by 'clicking' - choosing an answer on the keypad - and the results are immediately aggregated and shown on a screen. Although we are aware that personal response systems are already used in some parts of Scottish higher education, we were impressed with the way they were in use at UWO - the pedagogy clearly came first. The lecturer has developed the concept of 'broadcastcollecting' (as opposed to 'broadcasting') and finds it a useful way to make lecturers responsive to classes of 60 or so by enabling him to 'shrink the classroom'. At its simplest, it is a quick and easy way to find out who is understanding the lecture and who is not. If used during the lecture, the interactive aspect keeps learners alert and it can be used as a discussion tool - the lecturer often uses the distribution of understanding in the class as a basis for debate which he believes helps learners to engage with the subject and each other.

3.33 Additionally, the lecturer has a record of each student's clicks so can see how they are progressing and this is sent to the student. On some courses, lecturers use this technology to keep track of student attendance and award five per cent of course marks for an 80 per cent click record (which do not all have to be correct). Students pay \$50 CAD per annum for a clicker but they can use it in all classes that make use of the technology. In many cases this is not optional.

3.34 Another, surprising, approach to larger classes at UWO was the building of some massive lecture theatres. This began as a response to huge first year classes in, for example psychology, which number around 2,300. The University has invested in lecture theatres to seat 900 and 1,200 but has harnessed technology to enable '**multimedia lecturing**' in order to make the learning experience more effective for students. The example we saw, on DVD, involved a highly charismatic lecturer lecturing while bringing in music, screen information and video all at a fast, active pace and with a huge element of performance. We were assured that this method could be adapted to suit a range of lecturing styles, including that which is less flamboyant, and it was reported that initially sceptical colleagues in other disciplines had begun to adopt this method. A 'large class group' of lecturers had been formed at UWO to develop and discuss training and techniques.

3.35 It is clear that such approaches engage students and as well as positive feedback, the lecturer reported that students who attend these classes perform better in assessment than those who study in smaller groups. We think that if the lecture remains a cornerstone of higher education teaching, there might be lessons to be learned. However, this method is clearly very resource intensive - the refit of each lecture theatre cost in the region of \$500,000 CAD and the preparatory time for each lecture was estimated to be about 20 hours. Technicians also needed to be on hand to ensure the lecture went smoothly. However, the lecturers using it believe that it ultimately frees up time for doing other things.

3.36 The **Anatorium** at UWO is another enormously impressive way of making high quality, realistic experiences available to the increasing numbers of students who need to take courses in anatomy. Students sit in the small lecture theatre wearing three-dimensional glasses, which allow them to witness a huge, colour, realistic three-dimensional body, apparently floating in mid-air. The tutor controls the image - taking away parts of the body as appropriate to reveal the areas that are the subject of the lecture. This method has an additional advantage over using real bodies, which are in short supply, as it allows a clean removal of specific organs and therefore a clear view of the workings of the parts of the body. The group was additionally impressed that staff and senior computing students working together had developed this technology. 'Putting money into the pockets of students who need experience and income by using their skills to do work that needs doing in the University makes lots of sense' (Dr Judith Vincent).

### **McMaster University model of problem-based-learning**

3.37 McMaster University is acknowledged as a world leader in problem-based learning. This model of learning is deeply embedded in the Faculty of Health Sciences, which we visited, and has been the bedrock of their teaching strategy for over 25 years. Staff have designed the curricula and teaching styles to emphasise this and assessment arrangements also support a problem-based approach. Curricula are developed around the end product - what the graduate will be able to do - and students are involved in defining their own learning objectives. Interprofessionalism is

a key word in Canadian healthcare and problem-based learning allows teams to tackle 'real' health issues. There are interdisciplinary meetings of faculty and students to 'share wisdom' and an Interprofessional Student Council chaired by the head of school. Lecturers reported that this learning style does not suit everyone and there are mechanisms so that students who cannot cope can be transferred to other programmes. It is a condition of all staff appointments in Health Sciences that colleagues accept this approach. Problem-based learning is very much about the individual and the team working together to ensure they are on the right course and working out what it is that they really need to know. In so-doing it engenders a great sense of ownership of learning in the student both individually and collectively as a group, and makes students both more rounded and more used to working together.

3.38 The tour group thought that problem-based learning has much to commend it. It challenges students in different ways than they are likely to have been used to in school. We did not determine the extent to which it is embedded in other faculties at McMaster University though interviewees commented that this approach works best in vocational/professional subjects and conceded that it has had least impact in arts/humanities departments. Problem-based learning can only really flourish if all staff are committed to it and students are properly inducted in its use, which is resource-intensive. To do it properly, the approach also requires direction and support in terms of attractive work spaces, easy to use and in-depth virtual learning environments and the facilitation of discussion and peer support. As such, problem-based learning is relatively expensive and there is some evidence that the costs are too high even for McMaster University to bear. Nonetheless we were impressed with the integrated and connected approach to problem-based learning adopted by McMaster University, which emphasises a linked approach to staff recruitment and development, student induction and counselling, teaching facilities and assessment strategies.

## Student life

### Mentoring

3.39 Examples of mentoring arose at many institutions and it is clearly a well-embedded practice in Ontario. There was a range of different models. OCAD had converted its four-year diploma to a degree in 2002. This in turn had led to an increase in the liberal studies component and therefore emphasis on the 'thinking and writing' aspect of the programme alongside the practical art elements. The Writing and Learning Centre at OCAD is a facility open to staff and students. It had developed its services, particularly in response to the new degree, by making use of **student peer tutors and student study group leaders** so that the entire service is student-led. It is mainly staffed by volunteers although some of the group leaders are paid. The mentors are all offered regular training and meetings to discuss issues. Academic credit is not given for this work. Optional study groups are offered in specific subjects at set times, which are timetabled. In addition, students spontaneously start their own study groups - the Centre offers facilitation if they want it, and a room, 'and the students do the rest'. The service is open to everyone and any student can take advantage of it. Around

10 per cent of students make use of the Centre at some point in their academic career. There have been instances where the Centre has picked up on a theme which is widespread and fed this back to academic staff in a way that has impacted positively in changes to a programme to the benefit of students.

3.40 As described earlier, UGH considers those 'students who have managed' to be 'a great resource' and signs all **incoming students** up with an upper-year mentor, before they have even started their course. The University of Toronto uses second-year students as '**ambassadors**' to help out first years and who are trained in the August before the new set of first years arrive.

3.41 Ryerson University's Information and Learning Commons is explicitly a site for expertise not just a lab - with IT, information literacy and peer support facilities. Ryerson University is very concerned to ensure that the **physical facilities allow peer support** with chairs on wheels so students can configure their own learning spaces and cushions on the floor. Like OCAD (see below), Ryerson University needs to build the student community in a commuter university and therefore wishes its Information and Learning Commons to be seen as a centre.

3.42 As an institution which requires consistent use of technology, UOIT harnesses the interest and **expertise of 'geeks'** to help other students who are less technologically able. The university encourages students to share their knowledge and ways of doing things with their laptops with each other so that the skills and capabilities of all students are improved. UOIT also operates a 'Student-2-Student' mentoring programme between first-year and upper-year students. UWO also made use of student expertise to develop the technical aspects of its three-dimensional anatorium.

3.43 Also at Ryerson University, we saw an interesting scheme aimed at **supporting and mentoring teaching assistants (TAs)**. Ryerson University is explicitly and deliberately attempting to build a community for TAs - engaging them in the needs of the University and addressing the needs of TAs with regard to professional development through 'just in time' workshops along the themes of 'what is a TA? why the University needs TAs, responsibility of TAs, where TAs can get support'. Ryerson University also uses staff members as mentors for TAs.

3.44 OCAD also uses mentoring as a cornerstone of its 'campus life' support activities. As a 'commuter campus' in the heart of Toronto, OCAD's students come from far and wide and can find the experience of being a student quite isolating. They may be the only person from their home cohort who has chosen to study art. The College is very concerned to make this transition easier through creating a community on campus to **make sure new students are connected** to the campus, to each other, and to their studies. New students are matched with knowledgeable upper-year students who provide a positive and constructive source of encouragement, support and guidance. A typical mentor might have as many as 15 mentees. This is a new initiative, which began in 2005-06 when the institution

recruited and trained 35 upper-year students to act as mentors to new students. Thirty per cent of new students actively participated in the first year of the scheme. OCAD plans to grow this to incorporate the majority of new students and is considering whether academic credit should and could be awarded for this activity.

3.45 Student mentoring emerged as a key theme of the tour and we were highly impressed by the ways that institutions harnessed the genuine energy and enthusiasm that the students we met had for helping other students and the sense of pride and achievement they got from this.

### **Cocurriculum**

3.46 The cocurriculum (non-curricular activities, particularly voluntary work) has a big role in some institutions as an important part of the student experience. The University of Toronto is using cocurricula activities to reach into the community through developing a **Centre for Community Partnerships** and using predominantly second-year students as 'ambassadors'. This benefits the University, the community and the student - the aim is to develop the 'whole' student while they are at the University. Those who participate receive an official document, signed off by the University, which reports on their skills, responsibilities and leadership development.

3.47 In response to student demand, York University has begun running **student leadership courses** for students wanting to get involved in the community.

3.48 As UOIT is a very new institution there is no history or established culture of community work but students have come together themselves to make it happen. The desire to do something about the aftermath of the Asian Tsunami in December 2005 was the catalyst and they have formed **SHARE - Students for Humanitarianism, Action and Respect through Education** - which is now the largest club on campus with between 400 and 600 members drawn from UOIT, Durham College and Trent University (which also has a campus on site). SHARE functions as a non-partisan, neutral, community service organisation and is involved with many charitable organisations and participates in many events such as food drives, coin drives, charity walks, leadership seminars, ribbon campaigns etc. The University is highly supportive of this student initiative and planned to recognise cocurricula activities that are based on campus in the form of an official skills record from autumn 2006.

3.49 At UWO these activities are known as '**service-learning**'<sup>18</sup> - getting students involved in volunteering, working for community organisations - and can actually be curriculum-based (part of the programme and therefore attracting credit) as well as cocurriculum-based (not part of the programme but UWO is considering whether they may eventually be validated by the University and included on a cocurriculum transcript). 'It was refreshing to see students actively participating in community projects that did not necessarily lead to academic credit' (Professor David Kirk). There are numerous clubs and charities on campus as well as more formal, university-endorsed activities. Of particular note, UWO has a history of designating different floors in halls of residences with a view to connecting students around their

---

<sup>18</sup> see [www.servicelearning.uwo.ca](http://www.servicelearning.uwo.ca)

subject eg a psychology floor. They had experimented, to much success, with building cohesion in residences around a community project and planned to extend this activity - 'great methodology for engaging students across the campus' (Professor John Palfreyman).

3.50 We were struck by how fundamental cocurricular activities are in some institutions. Although they are generally optional, they are often a strong part of the package that the institution offers to students. They are immensely popular with students.

### Observations and conclusions

3.51 The tour group was highly impressed by many of the examples of practice we witnessed, in particular, we observed the following.

- Ontario's universities are very diverse and we saw a cross-section of small/large, urban/campus, research-oriented/teaching-oriented and traditional, modern and new institutions. They have in common 'a fundamental care and concern for their students at their heart' (Duncan Cockburn). This applied to all aspects of university activity, permeating institutions. We saw examples of good, solid, caring practice and also new and innovative practice.
- Clearly, the North American consumerist model engenders a high level of 'customer' awareness on the part of Ontarian universities which have for years demanded considerable fees from students. Although this is not the Scottish model, this level of care is highly impressive and something our universities could try to capture. There is scope for follow-up work in this regard.
- There is a 'significantly greater involvement of students within university life' (Professor John Harper) in Ontario than in Scotland. Almost all the institutions we visited see students themselves as a valuable resource and have tapped into this in a variety of ways. There are some very good examples of integrated and linked up services within institutions to proactively create and sustain student communities. Mentoring in particular is a common and fundamental activity - it connects students to the institution and each other and they enjoy it and get a lot out of it. This is another area we might investigate.
- We observed a range of students during the trip and were highly impressed by their energy, enthusiasm, commitment to, and pride in, the additional activities they were undertaking - mentoring others or voluntary work in the community and beyond in some cases.
- The adoption of technology, particularly coupled with very specific learning and teaching strategies to maximise its impact, was impressive. 'Their activities are rooted seriously in pedagogy, they aren't playing with toys' (Dr David Bottomley).
- Several examples of innovative and flexible use of learning space - both new and custom-designed - and imaginative adaptations to make older, less appropriate, space more useful.
- College and university collaborations on a single campus can work well although some universities appeared indifferent to this approach.

## Part 4 Students

4.1 The main aim of the tour was to identify and consider learner-centred approaches to higher education, in the context of the Ontario system. The tour group therefore contained three representatives of student interests and met with CFS as part of the trip. More generally, learner-centred approaches were core to the interests of the whole group and formed part of the debate during all visits.

### Models of involvement

4.2 We found that the model for student engagement and involvement in Ontario is typically North American. It is broadly characterised by the following.

- **Individualism** - in matters of learning and teaching, institutions seem to relate to students on an individual, rather than on a collective, basis. They rely heavily on a wide range of surveys of student opinion - both informal and formal, at subject, school, institutional and national level, to inform academic practice. There are several major national surveys and the *Rae Report* recommended that every Ontario institution should implement the NSSE, which from 2006 they are doing.
- **Involvement** - students identify with their institution - 'they see themselves as part of it and have absolute commitment to it' (Lesley Sutherland) to a degree that is not typical in Scotland. Institutions encourage this and seek actively to involve students in a range of aspects of institutional life. They also see students themselves as a resource to be made use of in a range of institutional activities.
- **Consumerism** - institutions are operating in a competitive market and students are paying substantial tuition fees. As such, students are clearly seen as customers of the institution and the Ontario model is very clearly service-oriented.
- **Support** - the fundamental approach is that institutions do support, and provide services, for students. They do this exceptionally well and 'students seem to get what they want and are therefore empowered' (Professor Ron Piper).
- **Boundaries** - although we witnessed a lot of student-led activity this was largely related to cocurricular or support activities. This is not a partnership model and 'it does not seem to recognise legitimacy or afford many opportunities for students to become directly involved in decision-making about core academic activities' (James Alexander).

4.3 Considering the Ontario model has caused us to reflect on the Scottish model for student engagement and involvement. This is relatively new and is still developing under the auspices of the quality enhancement agenda. It is broadly characterised by the following.

- **Collectiveness** - student interests are considered collectively as a group.
- **Representation** - while institutions are individually responsible for their own quality assurance and standards, national policy developments are taken forward by their representative body, Universities Scotland, which is joined by

other stakeholder organisations including NUS Scotland, which directly intervenes and contributes to the policy process on behalf of students. There is a student member of the QAA Scotland Board and NUS Scotland has observer status on the SFC.

- **Partnership** - the national stakeholder organisations aim to work together jointly and constructively to facilitate and promote the Scottish quality enhancement agenda, there is now a student on every quality review team.
- **Empowerment** - the Scottish approach to enhancement is designed around empowering students to advocate and represent their own interests and ensure that student interests are at the heart of the quality enhancement process, through, for example, the sparqs initiative.
- **Inclusiveness** - the Scottish model accepts that students have a legitimate role in commenting on academic core business.

4.4 The Ontario and Scottish approaches are quite different models, and the Ontario model is well-established whereas the Scottish approach is nascent and experimental. Both aim to encourage in students the behaviour that indicates an engaged learner, which is itself an essential aim of taking a student-centred approach to learning.<sup>19</sup> Institutional support for students in Ontarian universities is very proactive and in many 'it was part of the institutional DNA' (Professor Brent MacGregor). We observed that 'students have adopted the university into their lives in a way that does not happen here' (Professor Rao Bhamidimarri). The Ontario model engenders an enormous, and impressive, focus on individual students and their needs - students were undoubtedly at the heart of the learning experience in all of the institutions we visited. 'Caring for the customer' is endemic in what they do and of a different nature and order to similar activities in UK institutions. Staff told us more than once that 'students come first' and that 'we hire people who are focused on learners'. UOIT/Durham College staff described their approach as: 'we always try to say "yes" - our default position might be "yes, but..." or "yes, if..." but we always try to say "yes"'.

4.5 In addition, the sector in Ontario has had to deal with the issue of accommodating undergraduates who are now one calendar year less prepared for higher education than was previously the case. This has obviously created certain challenges which some institutions have met more actively than others. The current period of expansion in higher education in Ontario is again throwing up new issues for the sector. It is clear therefore that the ongoing challenges to institutions in terms of creating a valuable student experience are different from ours. We observed that some institutions were doing particularly well in meeting these, almost solely because of institutional will rather than compliance with external factors. We conclude that there are likely to be discrepancies within the Ontario sector with regard to supporting the student experience because the sector is diverse and because the infrastructure in terms of quality enhancement is almost completely devolved.

---

<sup>19</sup> For example, making informed choices by thinking critically; accepting responsibility for educational progress and their role in the process; demonstrating an understanding of who they are as a learner, together with knowledge of learning techniques that work for them; accepting and accessing resources as necessary; demonstrating an ability to construct knowledge; able to learn from fellow learners; exhibiting confidence as a learner; and appreciating diverse perspectives and recognising the added value of these perspectives. Derived from the eight point statement of 'engaged behaviours' developed by Community College Baltimore County [www.ccbcmd.edu/vanguard/student\\_engagement.html](http://www.ccbcmd.edu/vanguard/student_engagement.html)

4.6 When student involvement with learning and teaching matters is considered, we think that the Ontario model fits better with the 'professional' model of quality assurance identified by Howells and named 'trust us we know best' in which learners are relatively passive and which he describes as 'unlikely to be a complete solution'.<sup>20</sup> In Scotland we are seeking to blend aspects of this approach with Howells' 'capacity' model which recognises learner passivity, imbalanced authority relationships in education and the 'inherently weak voice of learners'. This approach seeks to build in capacity to amplify the voice of the learner through partnership with learner organisations and advocacy, including strengthening the student association-type advocacy role.<sup>21</sup> The Scottish model is still developing and yet to be proven although the recent, largely positive, independent evaluation of the impact of sparqs is encouraging.<sup>22</sup>

## Representation

4.7 In Ontario, although there are representative structures, these seem relatively weak at national level and more focused on social (as opposed to academic) issues at local student association level, compared to Scottish structures. There are two (competing) student representative bodies at national/provincial level in Ontario:

- CFS was formed in 1981 and comprises more than 500,000 students from over 80 university and college students' unions across the country. CFS-Ontario has over 30 member unions representing 300,000 part-time and full-time students
- OUSA formed in 1992 is a coalition of seven university student councils from across Ontario representing 115,000 part-time and full-time university students in Ontario.

4.8 The tour group met formally with the CFS only, although one member also met informally with OUSA. Relations between the two organisations are not good and they take different and contrasting approaches to issues. CFS runs a range of engaging campaigns and looks at issues affecting different types of student minority groups, for example, but is highly, and mainly, focused on tuition fees - its policy is their abolition - and this is an issue which resonates with many individual students. CFS's uncompromising tuition fee policy, and the salience of that policy, sets it at odds with the other main stakeholder groups (all of which support fees) and appears to make it difficult to find common ground or to engage constructively on other issues with government or institutions. OUSA is a newer organisation and more pragmatic about tuition fees, focusing more on building the grass roots, getting representation on the new national bodies and trying to ensure it exists at every level within institutions. The existence of 'two competing student representative bodies means there is no one voice for Ontario's students, and no one organisation with the weight to be automatically included on key bodies' (Tim Cobbett).

---

<sup>20</sup> Howells, 2005, pp 32-33

<sup>21</sup> Howells, 2005, pp 34-39

<sup>22</sup> York Consulting, 2006

## Surveys

4.9 As described above, collective student representation is a less common means of obtaining feedback on the quality of provision in Ontario. Consumer-feedback-type surveys of individual students are the main route and these are carried out routinely at all levels within the institution and nationally. This approach is ingrained and in discussion, there was some incredulity on the part of academic staff and managers that this method is so much less salient in Scotland.

4.10 We witnessed one particularly impressive instance of a fully-integrated survey system which provided input into a well-conceived quality enhancement loop. At Humber Institute, student views and feedback on their experiences is obtained in a variety of ways. A wealth of data is collected and provides continuous feedback eg entry data to each module; mid-term data - are student expectations being met? - identification and solving of problems; end of module data; graduation data; graduate satisfaction; employer satisfaction etc. This is complemented by a powerful structure of programme review including student focus groups, external expert panels and culminating in a report to the Vice-President Academic. This process includes both feeding back to students what has been done with the information collected and demonstrating that it has made a difference. It results in regular, informed, refreshment of programmes to meet student demand and, crucially, employment prospects.

4.11 From October 2006 all Ontario universities are participating in the NSSE. The NSSE is administered by the Indiana University Centre for Post-Secondary Research. From relatively humble beginnings in 1999, it was started with a charitable grant. In 2006 more than one million college and university students at 557 four-year degree-granting institutions in the US and Canada were sent the NSSE survey. The NSSE aims to help 'colleges and universities understand what they need to change in order to improve...Because NSSE provides insight into how students are engaging in learning, it is likely to provide pointers to ways in which the college can enhance student performance'. Although individual institutions receive their own data from the survey privately, the NSSE explicitly 'refuses to cooperate with anyone wanting to rank colleges and universities on a single dimension of quality'.<sup>23</sup> It is therefore a different type of survey from the United Kingdom (UK) National Student Survey.

## Observations and conclusions

4.12 The tour group has drawn the following conclusions.

- The culture of higher education in Ontario is quite different from that in Scotland. It follows that the student experience and the model of student engagement in quality processes is also different. The Ontario model is well-embedded and, where there is institutional will, undoubtedly promotes student engagement with the institution and, crucially, a solid commitment to the university on the part of the student.

---

<sup>23</sup> NSSE, Annual Report, 2006, page 6

- We can learn a lot from the Ontario experience. Although we are pursuing a 'capacity' approach to quality assurance, this is not inconsistent with aspiring to inspire among our students the levels of enthusiasm, commitment and identification with the institution that we witnessed in Ontario. In addition, we cannot ignore the fact that many students in Scottish universities already pay fees (eg overseas, English and postgraduate students) and that students in general are likely to become increasingly instrumental in their choices. The *On Track* study, for example, recorded that career development is one of the two main reasons learners give for studying<sup>24</sup>.
- In Scotland, where we already have well-established infrastructure, such as QAA, Universities Scotland and the SFC, our sector tends to be more uniform. There could, however, be a role for individual institutions to build on this base and cultivate their students more actively.
- We are attracted by the idea of the NSSE and think this could be considered further and possibly adapted for use in Scotland.
- Student representation in Ontario appears to be hampered by the types of issues that student leaders choose to challenge, a general cultural preference for individual rather than collective negotiation and the ability of other stakeholders to divide and rule or simply ignore the two representative bodies where possible. The CFS policy on tuition fees, in particular, appears to mean it cannot engage with the sector or government in serious and balanced negotiation on any issues. OUSA has emerged to try to fill this role but is smaller and seems to be a reaction to CFS. We concluded that the ability of NUS Scotland to take on board a broad range of issues and build alliances according to issue - and the ability of all of our representative organisations to accommodate disagreement - is a strength of our system.
- In particular, this lack of a broad approach to a range of issues and focus on tuition fees has led to student representatives shutting themselves out of discussions on quality. Tuition fees are linked clearly to quality by the Ministry and, along with government funding, are seen as a major route to ensuring high quality in terms of financing high calibre staff and facilities. Where student representative bodies are resolutely opposed to fees and want free tuition, they also find themselves on the opposite side of the table in any debate about quality with no route in to taking part - because seeking better quality has become in Ontario synonymous with seeking higher tuition fees. The student representatives we met could not comprehend how our student representatives were involved in quality debates at all. We see this as a warning to the Scottish system that any changes to the mechanism for funding further and higher education should anticipate and consider carefully the unintended consequences this might have on the work that has been done to develop student involvement in quality matters.

---

<sup>24</sup> SFC, *On Track Class of 2004*, Sweep 1, 2005, page 17

## Part 5 Quality

5.1 The focus of the study tour was learner-centred approaches and practice in higher education. One dimension in which we sought to establish a general understanding was the approach to quality assurance in Ontario.

### Agencies

5.2 A group of tour participants met with the main quality bodies: the PEQAB and its sister organisations the Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS), the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC), and the Credentials Validation Service (CVS). We also met the nascent HEQCO. In addition, the institutional representative body, the COU, plays a key role in facilitating peer-led quality assurance in university education in Ontario.

5.3 The tour group met with the universities' representative body. The COU was formed in 1962 (albeit with a different title) to represent universities and is broadly the equivalent of Universities Scotland in Ontario. Its constitution is slightly different in that it comprises two representatives from each member and associate institution: the executive head (university president, principal or rector) and an academic colleague appointed by each university's senior academic governing body. In addition, as well as research, advocacy, communications and public affairs the COU is also responsible for the central processing of university applications. It has a full-time secretariat of approximately 30 people providing administrative and jointly coordinating support to COU, its committees, affiliates, task forces and working groups.

### Degree-awarding powers

5.4 In Ontario, there are two bases upon which degrees can be offered - one is based on an individual statute of the Ontario legislature enabling an institution to do so, the other is based on a special statute enabling others (including universities based outside the province) to do so on the basis of 'ministerial consent'. Traditional Ontario-based universities therefore have authority to award their own degrees. The PEQAB deals with the other cases. It reviews applications for Ministerial consent and makes recommendations to the Minister on programme quality and organisational soundness. Ministerial consents are normally granted for a limited time (usually five years). At the end of the consent period, the applicant wishing to continue to offer the programme must apply for renewal of consent and undergo a review in accord with PEQAB's guidelines in place at the time of renewal. Skolnik cites boards such as PEQAB as a rare example of some Canadian provinces making use of an intermediate agency but points out that 'however, it appears that these agencies concentrate on degree programmes of other institutions than the provincially chartered universities ie private and out of province degree granting institutions and colleges and institutes'.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Skolnik, 2006, page 17

## Quality assurance

5.5 Public universities share two forms of collaborative quality assurance: the OCGS, and the UPRAC. OCGS is affiliated to the COU and is based in their offices. In a manner that is surprisingly more centralist than in Scotland, it undertakes direct peer reviews of all proposed new graduate programmes and a periodic review (approximately every seven years) of all existing graduate programmes offered by the public universities. UPRAC does not undertake direct reviews but rather audits the processes by which undergraduate programmes are assessed periodically. All three bodies - PEQAB, OCGS and UPRAC - share the same degree-level standards (which were originally based on those of the QAA) and include peer reviews.<sup>26</sup> The CVS assures standards in the college sector, including graduate certificate programmes.

5.6 The HEQCO is a new body, founded by legislation passed in December 2005. At the time of the tour, it had a chair and an acting chief executive but as yet no fully established council. There are to be between five and seven directors drawn from postsecondary sector but excluding those who sit on the Board or hold a senior position in an Ontario postsecondary institution or come from an association, advisory body or council established to promote the interests of such institutions or their employees or students. The background to its establishment is the perception (captured in the *Rae Report*) of a lack, amid highly autonomous institutions, of capacity to see the sector as a whole and to offer advice on the sector on a continuing basis. The report identified a need for a permanent body, appropriately staffed. A major aim is for the HEQCO to replace the whole series of reviews and commissions that, over the last decade, have looked at the future of postsecondary education but which may have led to insufficient change. Despite its title, HEQCO's remit will range across postsecondary education ie it will relate to colleges and universities.

5.7 HEQCO has a big agenda - it will be responsible for monitoring quality in the sector, access to postsecondary education and the accountability of institutions. It will be expected to determine appropriate performance targets and benchmarks for the postsecondary system as a whole and also establishing methods and a timescale for achieving those targets. This is to be done with the agreement of the sector. It will produce evaluation reports on the postsecondary sector (but there is, as yet, no clarity on frequency of reports or who the audience for them should be). The HEQCO is charged with looking at different quality models around the world. It will also conduct research on all aspects of postsecondary education and this will be the Council's main funded item, apart from running costs, with a likely budget of \$3-5,000,000 CAD.

5.8 Our meeting underlined that HEQCO is acutely aware that its success and ultimate effectiveness depend in part on the willingness of interested groups and individuals across the postsecondary sector to participate in its work. At the time of the tour, the Council was consulting all postsecondary stakeholders on its priorities and research agenda for its initial years of operation.<sup>27</sup> Following responses, a series of follow-up meetings were planned, organised around critical issues that warrant further exploration and debate.

---

<sup>26</sup> The degree-level standards are available on the PEQAB website at [www.peqab.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.peqab.edu.gov.on.ca)

<sup>27</sup> HEQCO, 2006

## Observations and conclusions

5.9 The tour group drew the following conclusions.

- The somewhat cluttered quality assurance landscape in Ontario is familiar to us. In the recent past in Scotland and the UK, we have experienced a lack of clarity in the division of responsibilities of different quality bodies with different roles and remits. Indeed, in Scotland there is still some overlap with the Higher Education Academy and QAA. In addition, in Ontario, agencies of this nature seemed to us to be largely irrelevant to the universities, which make their own arrangements for quality assurance for undergraduate programmes.
- At undergraduate level, quality is very much a matter for each individual institution. Related to our perceived lack of a sense of a higher education sector, recorded earlier, we could not discern any effective arrangements for the sharing of good practice. The procedures that are in place appear to be essentially 'tick box' audit requirements and there does not appear to have been any consideration given to enhancement as we would define it. We conclude that the extensive quality and innovation we observed must be achieved by a different route.
- The proposed HEQCO remained an unknown quantity at the time of the visit. A key issue will be whether it will in any way be able/want to/be allowed to shift the balance between deeply ingrained institutional autonomy and some greater element of sector-wide considerations and planning. What will its role be and where will priorities lie? The group thinks that we can now take some comfort from the relative clarity of our own infrastructure, both in the UK and in the Scottish variant.

## Part 6 Making connections in Ontario: conclusions and next steps

6.1 A strong theme that emerged from our trip was that of 'making connections'. Everywhere we went we saw very impressive examples of institutions attempting to connect students to the institution, to each other, to the community and to their eventual professions and careers. Other forms of connection were looser - such as those between institutions at sector level - and have made us reflect on the systems and structures we have in Scotland: why we have them and what we do with them. In particular we found the following.

- In Ontario, we found very high levels of customer care, many excellent examples of innovative student-centred learning and were impressed overall with the general high quality of provision in the institutions we visited. In addition we saw extensive examples of exceptionally high quality facilities. This already strongly service-oriented system has been boosted by government injecting large amounts of funding. We witnessed a wide range of practice and processes that were commendable, often inspiring, and which are stimulating the thinking of SHEEC.
- Institutional activities - academic, support and cocurricular - are centred on meeting the needs of the individual student and the level of support and care across the board is very high. There is scope for Scottish institutions to consider how we might further develop and cultivate high quality services in the light of the Ontario experience.
- Students feel they 'belong' to the institution and large numbers become enthusiastically involved in a range of aspects of university life beyond their studies. Universities view students as a valuable intellectual resource and encourage this activity. The range of impressive examples we witnessed included involvement in learning and teaching activities such as mentoring/advising/tutoring fellow students although we struggled to find examples of students being formally involved in deeper academic territory such as shaping the curriculum. We should consider further how we might encourage our students to become more involved and engaged with institutional activities.
- We observed that institutions offer an impressively wide range of cocurricular opportunities to students. These are popular and serve to connect the student even more to the university, as well as to the communities being served by the specific activities. There is scope in the Scottish sector to replicate aspects of the community involvement demonstrated in Ontario.
- There are possibilities presented by the NSSE that we should consider importing to Scotland, separate from, and in addition to, the decisions individual institutions may wish to take about their involvement with the UK National Student Survey.

- Although in some ways the college and university forms of education are still quite separate, they have given rise to new models of integration and connection between the two sectors. The developments in Ontario should be considered in more depth by the Scottish further and higher education sectors.

6.2 We note that all of this is achieved despite a relative (in Scottish terms) absence of formal sector-level quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms. We witnessed little identifiable connection between the various agencies with quality assurance responsibility and no obvious connection between quality systems, the sharing of good practice and enhancement. We surmise that Ontario universities' emphasis on autonomy makes it more challenging for them to connect with each other or other organisations. Constitutionally most UK institutions are equally independent, but there is a way in which this independence has increasingly become an issue of interdependence and cooperation, which does not seem to be the case in the Ontario higher education sector.

6.3 On the whole the system in Ontario is similar enough to understand but different enough to make us think. It has provided a fascinating perspective and a wealth of material for reflection on the nature of our own structures and models - in particular the benefits (or otherwise) of having the SFC, and the model of quality assurance we are promoting - which seems natural to us but was quite alien to the Ontarians. From observing Ontario we have identified a range of practice and activities from which we can undoubtedly learn, while reflecting, often favourably, on many of the arrangements we have in Scotland. It will be interesting to see if the strikingly different Scottish and Ontarian systems converge at all in future.

## Annex A Study tour participants

Professor Kenny Miller Chair, SHEEC	Vice-Principal	University of Strathclyde
Professor John Palfreyman	Depute Principal (Academic Development)	University of Abertay Dundee
Professor Brent MacGregor	Vice-Principal (Academic)	Edinburgh College of Art
Tim Cobbett	Vice-President, Academic Affairs, Edinburgh University Students' Association, 2005-06  NUS Scotland (Executive Committee member)	University of Edinburgh
Professor Mike Smith	Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic)	Glasgow Caledonian University
Professor Rao Bhamidimarri	Dean, Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Creative Industries	Napier University
Dr Judith Vincent	Vice-Principal	University of Paisley
Professor David Kirk	Vice-Principal (Learning and Teaching)	Queen Margaret University
Professor John Harper	Vice-Principal	The Robert Gordon University
Professor Ron Piper	Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching	University of St Andrews
James Alexander	President	NUS Scotland
Jane Denholm	Director	Critical Thinking
Lesley Sutherland	Assistant Director of Learning Policy & Strategy	SFC
Mark Batho	Head of Group, Lifelong Learning Group	Scottish Executive
Duncan Cockburn	Senior Development Advisor	sparqs
Norman Sharp	Director	QAA Scotland
Dr David Bottomley	Assistant Head	QAA Scotland

## **Annex B Institutions and organisations visited**

Tour members' summaries of each institution visited.

### **Institutions**

#### **McMaster University**

[www.mcmaster.ca](http://www.mcmaster.ca)

The 'problem based learning' university. Aware of its contribution to pedagogy internationally.

#### **York University**

[www.yorku.ca](http://www.yorku.ca)

Huge commuter university. Close ties with Seneca College, vies with University of Toronto to be the largest university in Ontario. Promotes an interdisciplinary approach to learning.

#### **University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT)**

[www.uoit.ca](http://www.uoit.ca)

#### **Durham College**

[www.durhamcollege.ca](http://www.durhamcollege.ca)

At the time of the tour visit, Ontario's newest university, founded in 2002. UOIT is a young, well funded, dynamic, laptop-based university. Great student support systems. Has an aspiration to be Canada's MIT and may well achieve this. Passionate student led community service facility - Students for Humanitarianism, Action and Respect through Education (SHARE). Created on the campus of Durham College with, initially, a shared President, and with shared facilities and ease of transfer for students.

#### **Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD)**

[www.ocad.on.ca](http://www.ocad.on.ca)

Canada's largest art university. Iconic city centre building with a real 'studio' feel interior. Excellent mentoring and student-student support systems being embedded into the learning experience. A college Principal with an open door policy for all.

#### **Toronto Public Library**

[www.torontopubliclibrary.ca](http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca)

Huge public library network with 99 branches including the impressive Toronto Reference Library with five million volumes. User-centred service-oriented culture.

#### **University of Guelph-Humber (UGH)**

[www.guelphhumber.ca](http://www.guelphhumber.ca)

Impressive and inspiring collaboration of the University of Guelph and Humber College Institute of Technology and Applied Learning (Humber Institute). Students earn an honours degree and a college diploma after four years of full-time study - a truly joint qualification. Based on campus of Humber Institute, UGH and Humber Institute share many joint facilities. UGH doing interesting 'cradle to grave' care for learners.

**Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning (Humber Institute)**  
[www.humber.ca](http://www.humber.ca)

Self-assured institution with clear mission and responsive to learners. Sophisticated use of feedback mechanisms which directly inform the curriculum and ensure change is effected swiftly when necessary.

**Ryerson University**

[www.ryerson.ca](http://www.ryerson.ca)

Large, compact city centre university. Proud of its community links and its integrated learning centre - the 'Information and Learning Commons'. Colocation with city businesses. Issues around being a commuter university and keeping students on site, advanced e-learning agenda.

**University of Toronto**

[www.utoronto.ca](http://www.utoronto.ca)

Huge and spacious city centre campus. Confident of its place in the international hierarchy but aware of a need to improve the student experience especially for first year students. Research intensive and with many faculty links to Scotland.

**University of Western Ontario (at London) (UWO)**

[www.uwo.ca](http://www.uwo.ca)

Leafy urban campus complete with its own football stadium. Real pride in its commitment to international cocurricula activities and its novel pedagogical approaches often underpinned by new technologies.

**Organisations and agencies**

**Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities**

[www.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca)

Responsible for postsecondary education including developing policy directions for universities and colleges of applied arts and technology, authorising institutions to grant degrees and distributing funds allocated by the provincial legislature to colleges and universities.

**Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)**

[www.cmec.ca](http://www.cmec.ca)

In Canada, education is the responsibility of each province and territory. The CMEC is an intergovernmental body founded in 1967 by ministers of education to serve as a forum to discuss policy issues, a mechanism through which to undertake activities, projects, and initiatives in areas of mutual interest, a means by which to consult and cooperate with national education organisations and the federal government and an instrument to represent the education interests of the provinces and territories internationally. All 13 provinces and territories are members.

**Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB)**

[www.peqab.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.peqab.edu.gov.on.ca)

### **Ontario Council of Graduate Studies (OCGS)**

<http://ocgs.cou.on.ca>

### **Credentials Validation Service (CVS)**

[www.ocgas.org/cus.html](http://www.ocgas.org/cus.html)

In Ontario, there are two bases on which degrees can be offered - one is based on an individual statute of the Ontario legislature enabling an Institution to do so, the other is based on a special statute enabling others to do on the basis of 'ministerial consent' PEQAB deals with the latter cases. Public universities share two forms of collaborative quality assurance: OCGS and the Undergraduate Program Review Audit Committee (UPRAC). OCGS is affiliated to the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) and is based in their offices. It undertakes direct reviews of all proposed new graduate programmes and a periodic review (approximately every seven years) of all existing graduate programmes offered by the public universities. UPRAC, based in COU, does not undertake direct reviews but rather audits the processes by which undergraduate programmes are assessed periodically. All three bodies - PEQAB, OCGS and UPRAC - share the same degree-level standards (which were originally based on those of QAA) and include peer reviews. The degree-level standards are on the PEQAB website. CVS assures standards in the College sector, including graduate certificate programmes.

### **Canadian Federation of Students (CFS)**

[www.cfsontario.ca](http://www.cfsontario.ca)

CFS was formed in 1981. CFS comprises more than 500,000 students from over 80 university and college students' unions across the country. There are over 30 member locals in Ontario uniting over 300,000 part-time and full-time students.

### **Council of Ontario Universities (COU)**

[www.cou.on.ca](http://www.cou.on.ca)

Broadly equivalent to Universities Scotland carrying out research, advocacy, communications and public affairs on behalf of the university sector but also the central processing of university applications.

### **Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)**

[www.heqco.ca](http://www.heqco.ca)

A new body, founded by legislation passed in December 2005. At the time of the tour, it had a chair and an acting chief executive but as yet no fully established council and this latter unlikely to contain a student. Established to consider the sector as a whole and to offer advice on the sector to the Ministry on a continuing basis. Its remit extends to both colleges and universities.

## Annex C Toronto study tour overview itinerary

	am	lunch	pm	evening
Sunday 24 September 2006			Pre-meeting officers	6-7.30pm: dinner and initial orientation with Elka Walsh
Monday 25 September 2006	10am-1pm: visit to McMaster University Medical School or 10am-12pm: meeting with Ontario Ministry		2.30-5pm: visit to York University 6-7pm: team debrief	Free time
Tuesday 26 September 2006	10am-4pm: visit to Durham College/UOIT		6-7pm: team debrief	Free time
Wednesday 27 September 2006	9-10am: COU  11.30am-1pm: meeting with PEQAB, OCGS, CVS or 10am-1pm: visit to OCAD	2.30-4pm: meeting with CFS or 2-4pm: visit to Toronto Public Library or 2.30-3.30pm: HEQCO	5-6pm: team debrief	7-9.30pm: working dinner - roundtable discussion with key individuals and organisational representatives
Thursday 28 September 2006	8-9am :CMEC 10am-3pm: visit to Humber Institute and UGH or 10am-1pm: visit to Ryerson University and 2-5pm: University of Toronto			6-8pm: reception hosted by British Consulate General
Friday 29 September 2006	10am-2pm: visit to UWO		4-6.30pm: formal final debriefing	Team dinner
Saturday 30 September 2006	Free to depart			

## Annex D References

Available on organisational websites where publication details not given.

Council of the Federation, 2006 *Competing for Tomorrow: A Strategy for Postsecondary Education and Skills Training in Canada*

Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2005 *Education in Canada*

Council of Ontario Universities, 2005 *Briefing Notes 2005-06*

Higher Education Quality Council Ontario, 2006 *Priorities and research agenda for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*

Howells L, 2005 *Learning to Improve: Quality approaches for lifelong learning* Scottish Executive, Edinburgh

Investing in Students Taskforce, 2001 *Portals and Pathways A Review of Postsecondary Education in Ontario*

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) *Annual Report 2006*

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) *A pocket guide to choosing college*

Ontario Government, May 2005 *2005 Ontario Budget (incorporating Reaching Higher)* Queen's Printer for Ontario Toronto

Ontario Ministry of Finance, 27 September 2006, *Ontario Demographic Quarterly*, Highlights of Second Quarter 2006

Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board *2006 Annual Report* Queen's Printer for Ontario Toronto

Rae B, February 2005 *Ontario: A Leader in Learning (the 'Rae Report')* Queen's Printer for Ontario Toronto

Richardson JTE, 2005, Instruments for obtaining student feedback: a review of the literature *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* Vol 30, No 4, pp 387 - 415

Scottish Funding Councils for Further and Higher Education, 2005 *On Track Class of 2004 Sweep 1*, Scottish Funding Council for Further and Higher Education, Edinburgh

Skolnik M, 2006 *Post-Secondary System Design and Governance* (www.campus2020.ca think pieces)

Toronto Public Library, 2004 *Urban Stories: The Next Chapter* Toronto Public Library Strategic Plan 2004-07

University of Toronto *Student Services First Year Experience*

York Consulting, 2006 *Evaluation of SPARQS* Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council, Edinburgh

**QAA Scotland**

183 St Vincent Street

Glasgow

G2 5QD

Tel 0141 572 3420

Fax 0141 572 3421

Email [comms@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:comms@qaa.ac.uk)

Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

QAA 193 10/07