



NAVIGATING CHALLENGES AND EMBRACING INNOVATION:  
**Ensuring Quality in Ontario Universities**

03 A Message from the Chair of  
the Quality Council

08 A Message from the  
Executive Director

09 The Year in Review

20 Appendix 1: Program Data

22 Appendix 2: Membership of  
the Quality Council and its  
Committees in 2023–24





A Message from the Chair  
of the Quality Council

# Glancing Back and

It's an occasion to glance back, when one comes to the end of a term. As I finish almost a decade in Quality Assurance in Ontario (and Alberta), and over five decades of life in the university, my glance has a long way to travel. Perhaps, though, a brief account of the changes I've experienced, with some comments on their implications for quality assurance, may suggest some glimpses ahead.

## What's Changed

Over the last half century, I've witnessed significant changes in the life and work of the university. I'll point to five. →



# Glimpsing Ahead

## 1

**THE FIRST** and most obvious is what's inelegantly called the **massification** of university education. When I began my graduate work there were 14 publicly assisted universities in Ontario; now there are 24. Over that time period, Ontario's population doubled, but the undergraduate student population increased tenfold. The education of so many citizens was bound to change what happens in the university. The second and third developments have occurred gradually, while the fourth has become more prominent recently. I'll leave the most striking and far-reaching change till the end.

## 2

**ALTHOUGH** the motive for a university education has always been connected to vocational aspirations, the last half-century has seen a steadily increasing expectation that degree programs will supply the labour needed for economic growth. Call this second development the **economic imperative** for the university. It's understandable: society needs an educated workforce. With a third of Canadians possessing a bachelor's degree, relevance to the marketplace has to be a major consideration. It seems an era long past when the reason to attend university was for a liberal education with an eye to entering one of the established professions of law, medicine or education. Now governments target particular areas for growth, students choose their programs under the dictates of this economic imperative. That's good for the economy and the market, without a doubt. But when a student arrives at the university with the motto in mind: *Quaerens mihi Bonum Officium*, Seeking a Good Job for Myself, then what are the benefits of this motivation for a robust, informed democratic society?

## 3

**THE THIRD** development since I began my life in the university is related to this increased student interest in their own life prospects. Since the last decades of the 20th century the major attention of universities has shifted away from faculty members and their fields of knowledge towards the experience of students. I've called this elsewhere the **turn to students**, manifested in the mushrooming of student support services and staff. Whereas students of the turbulent 1960's wanted freedom from the parental oversight of the university, today's students look to the institution for all manner of supports. They need accommodations for academic success; they have mental health challenges; in embracing the economic imperative, they want clear career guidance. That enrolments continue to grow has only increased the challenges of creating a supportive environment for students. The social burden this places on the university is weighty, and governments have not always acknowledged the additional resource costs imposed in this obligation. Universities have tried to cope with the turn to students by creating teaching streams, and by hiring contract faculty. But in our major universities, personal interactions with students are more likely to be with student services or graduate students than with regular faculty members. The turn to students, while necessary and positive, has not been an unmitigated good for them.



Massification



Economic imperative



Turn to students

## 4

**MORE RECENTLY**, and often as a result of wider social concerns, there is a discernible shift in expectations about the very mission of the university. In the legendary days of the ‘ivory tower’, the stance of the university was often construed as distanced, holding the world at arm’s length to understand and critique it. That myth, of course, was never the whole story, as professional education illustrates. Today’s reality is different. With heightened consciousness of access inequities, of past injustices, and deafness to the range of human experience, the voices of social critique and change on university campuses have grown louder. For those who welcome and promote this **social justice imperative**, the mission of the university is no longer only about knowledge creation and transmission. Its imperative is not so much to understand the history,

meaning and challenges of social justice, as actually to change the structures of the world. Under this banner, the motto becomes *Quaerens Mutare Mundum*, Seeking to Change the World. The social justice mandate is embraced in some areas of the university, but not in others; it may sit uneasily with the economic mandate. It may not be welcomed politically, as manifested in backlash state legislation south of the border. And it has roiled universities in the turmoil over Israel and Gaza, calling into question the role of university leaders in managing conflict.

## 5

**FINALLY**, if we faced only the massification of higher education with its turn to the student experience, the insistence of social justice demands, and the persistent requirements for economic benefits — if those were our only challenges, that would take more ingenuity and wisdom than most of us are able to summon. But into this perplexing mix we have to stir the strong, sometimes bitter, ingredients of the **digital age** — the internet, social media, and artificial intelligence. The endless information available on the internet challenges the authority and reliability of knowledge claims. Social media have altered not just the experience of our students, but the very foundations of democratic discourse, the very meaning of freedom of expression. Our undergraduates have grown up in the digital world, while our universities are still trying to figure out this strange, brave new world. When I was a student, AI meant artificial insemination. Now AI is itself generative. We all know the benefits of the digital age. We have yet to take the measure of its problems, especially for university education.



Social justice  
imperative



Digital age



## Quality Assurance in the Currents of Change

→ I've neglected to mention another major change over the course of my career. There were no mandated program reviews when I was a student; the introduction and maturation of a quality assurance system in Ontario has taken place since then. As I glance back at the changed context for university education, let me comment on some ways in which these developments have played out in the work of quality assurance.

When I first began to be involved in quality assurance, the large issue taking up much space was Learning Outcomes. That's a clear indication, I think, of the turn to students shift. Instead of focusing on what the faculty expert wants to impart, the question is flipped round to look at the curriculum from the student side. Another manifestation of this turn is the mandated inclusion of students in program development and reviews.

The response to the economic imperative continues to be strong, manifested in the close relationship between job market requirements and what universities have on offer. Enrolments in business and commerce, in engineering and computer science, reflect student concerns about employability. More broadly, the names of some programs coming through for approval at the Quality Council often make the connection explicit: bachelor's degrees in police foundations, in equine management, or sustainable environmental management. So does the increased number of diplomas and certificates in applied areas. But the most striking development in the relation of programs to careers is the remarkable number of professional masters' degrees now offered in Ontario. The Council of Ontario Universities reports that there are "more than 430" masters' programs that are "career-focused or applied".

How is the social justice imperative impacting quality assurance? Education faculties have paid much attention to this issue. It's also at the core of programs in women's and gender studies, and manifested in the evolution of critical theory in literary and cultural studies. What's uppermost in current discourse are the initials DEI, to which must be added Indigeneity in our Canadian context. The Ontario system is

concerned to figure out how these socially significant themes are worked into degree level expectations and learning outcomes. The educational history of Canada has made us often painfully aware of cultural arrogance; there is much important talk of decolonization, though the actual implications of this conversation for particular disciplines and programs have not been settled.

The effects on quality assurance of the fifth shift, the dominance of the digital and AI age? We all saw that during the pandemic, when teaching lurched into the virtual world, when the standard quality assurance practices went remote rather than in person. Many agree that virtual visits for program reviews have significant advantages without serious downsides, at least for programs in relatively good shape. The scope of available information in digital form, and ease of access from wherever your device is located, are staggering. But I don't think that we have yet been able to comprehend the implications for quality assessment in the digital age. An obvious concern is the easy access to generative AI, which can turn inside out the meaning and practice of research and writing. Less obvious, perhaps, are the implications for everything from specific person-centred professions like health and social work to the fundamental nature of the teacher-student relationship.

Enough glancing backwards and around. As programs continue to respond to the complex expectations of students and society, what might lie ahead for quality assurance?

## Glimpsing

→ Given the fog of the future and the unreliability of my predictive powers, I can only catch a glimpse of what might lie ahead.

Our current quality assurance policies and practices look pretty good. As a system, we do an excellent job of developing and vetting new programs. Our program reviews are fundamental to maintaining not just quality, but public trust in that quality. But if reviews become a bureaucratic chore, if good external reviewers are hard to find, if deans don't inspire their chairs, then reviews will not fulfil their purpose. They will be regarded as a bureaucratic necessity, something like undergoing a physical examination so you can get more life insurance. I'm glimpsing continued attempts at strengthening how we encourage and reward the desire for continuous program assessment and improvement.

But perhaps I also see a glimmer of something more fundamental; maybe it's a discussion among our universities about a



**That's a clear indication, I think, of the turn to students shift. Instead of focusing on what the faculty expert wants to impart, the question is flipped round to look at the curriculum from the student side.**

broader imperative as their mission. Is that mission an imperative to educate for a democratic society concerned with societal and environmental as well as economic well-being? A mission that does not ignore the social justice and the economic imperatives, but locates them within a wider appreciation of the conditions for human flourishing? A university system reaffirming its fundamental mandate, with the overarching motto *Quaerens Simul Veritatem Rerum*, Seeking the Truth of Things Together?

How could this come about? We are currently considering the Degree Level Expectations for Ontario university degrees. They don't adequately address the social justice concerns proper to a university education. And DLEs are important in assessing the program outcomes that make up degrees, so we should get them right. But I'm glimpsing something beyond that. As written, our current DLEs are not quite fit for purpose for the university world I've just been describing. This isn't the place to make that case, except for four quick observations. (1) There is no place for the expectations of professional masters' degrees as distinct from research masters. That is more significant than trying to distinguish between bachelor and honours bachelor degrees. (2) The present emphasis of the DLEs is upon acquiring knowledge, with only brief references to critical judgement. However, the digital world makes the acquisition of information almost effortless. One of the greatest features of an educated mind in this world is the ability to assess sources of information and knowledge claims. That mind needs to understand what's fake and what's true — but respect for truth isn't in our DLEs. (3) An educated mind needs to appreciate the role of the imagination in discovering knowledge. It needs an appreciation of historical context and development. When (according to StatsCan in 2021) there are 36 students in Canada in medieval and renaissance studies, and 660 students in computer science at just one university, does that raise any questions — not about disciplinary rivalry, but about the kind of education Ontario graduates are pursuing? (4) Lastly, the more responsive universities are to career-ready educational expectations, the harder it is to differentiate university DLEs from college expectations, especially as colleges move into applied masters' programs.

Perhaps I also see a glimmer of something more fundamental; maybe it's a discussion among our universities about a broader imperative as their mission. Is that mission an imperative to educate for a democratic society concerned with societal and environmental as well as economic well-being?



In two years, the Quality Assurance Framework is up for its scheduled review. Am I glimpsing that a focus of that review is a consideration, with the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV), of the adequacy of our Degree Level Expectations? Perhaps the DLEs can be more clearly linked to program development and review. Since we have many of the nuts and bolts of quality assurance in the right places, perhaps a review team could help us to think more broadly about how quality assurance can build trust at the degree and not just the program level. But I'm only glimpsing, or perhaps dreaming, in the darkness. Fortunately what lies ahead is in very good hands.

It's time to come back to the present, but not leave without expressing gratitude to the many, many colleagues in quality assurance with whom I've been able to work. To name them all isn't possible. But I will single out the new members who have stepped up to fill out our ranks this past year. On the Quality Council itself, a hearty welcome to Brittany Paat of Algoma University, and a fond farewell to Neil Besner, completing his second term as an out-of-province member, and to Patrice Smith who, finishing her term as graduate dean, is stepping down from the Council.

The Appraisal Committee welcomed Dr. Kamran Siddiqui, of Western University, and Dr. Maureen Connolly, of Brock University.

The Audit Committee welcomed one new member: Dr. Catherine Nolan, of Western University.

We are also thankful for the contributions of our current members wrapping up their terms. Dr. Carolyn Eyles concluded her time on the Appraisal Committee and three members of the Audit Committee retired from their roles, Dr. Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale, Dr. Bruce Tucker and Dr. Alan Weedon.

Following on the changes from last year, the Secretariat welcomed Alex Kostin, Senior Quality Assurance Officer (Appraisals) and Brittany McFarlane, Senior Quality Assurance Officer (Audits). The Quality Council also thanks Mario Guerrero and Fatema Hossain for their contributions while with the Secretariat. I cannot end this final message as Chair without thanks to the wonderful people who directed the Council, from Donna Woolcott at the beginning of my first term, through Alan Harrison, Ian Orchard, and now Chris Evans — all supported unfailingly by the indefatigable Cindy Robinson, *sine quo nihil*.

—  
Paul W Gooch  
Chair, Ontario Universities  
Council on Quality Assurance  
2015–2024



A Message from the  
Executive Director

## Continuous Improvement of a Mature Quality Assurance System

The past year has been one of challenges for the university sector in Ontario. Along with changing policies that influenced university obligations and finances, powerful forces such as artificial intelligence have continued to shape society and the universities' role within it. As noted elsewhere in this Annual Report, one constant throughout these times of turbulence has been the strong system we have in place to support university academic programs being created and operating in ways that ensure their high quality. This assurance of quality is of utmost importance to our students and to society at large.

While I firmly believe our quality assurance approach provides a firm foundation for university academic programming in Ontario, it is also important for the system to consciously and continuously reflect on what it does, and to consider whether there is room for improvement. One possible pitfall has been noted by Paul Gooch in his Chair's remarks — the risk of our processes being perceived as, or actually being, bureaucratic chores. The ongoing university audits described in this Annual Report are an opportunity for the system to think collectively about its processes to ensure high quality programs and to adjust, if needed. The 2025–2026 review of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is another opportunity for the system to take a look at what it does and to identify pros and cons of our current approaches. Taken together, the audits and the QAF review provide the university sector with the scope to see to it that our quality assurance work provides meaningful engagement of stakeholders rather than being a source of bureaucratic ennui.

Beyond this more foundational work that will flow from the second cycle of audits and the QAF review, the sector continues to express its creativity in meeting the needs of the Province as the world changes.

New program development continues apace, as noted in this Report, and the universities have focused their new programs on areas central to the concerns of society and the economy — health care, mental health, social justice, the environment and emerging technologies. And institutions have harnessed the quality assurance system to revitalize existing programs as demonstrated by the large number of “major modifications” reported this year and their ongoing work on cyclical program review.

In short, Ontario's universities continue to benefit from a rigorous quality assurance approach which serves them well, even in the face of complexity and adverse conditions. The system itself has a built-in ethos of self-evaluation and continuous improvement. This characteristic ensures Ontario students can be confident their programs are of the highest quality, both now and into the future.

—  
Chris Evans



2023–2024

# The Year in Review

2023–2024 was a tumultuous year for higher education as universities adapted to further financial constraints. What remained evident was the unwavering commitment to quality assurance and continuous improvement of academic programs. Proposed new programs were submitted at rates similar to past years, Cyclical Program Reviews are ongoing, and a wealth of best practices and general adherence to the requirements of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) have been demonstrated through the past year's Cyclical Audits.

## New Program Approvals

**UNIVERSITIES** continue to adapt to emerging fields with new program offerings, approved by the Quality Council. Each institution is responsible for addressing the requirements of the QAF, as well as their own local context, as expressed through the university's Institutional Quality Assurance Processes (IQAP). This approach ensures that each new program proposal undergoes a rigorous development process institutionally, including an external review, followed by an in-depth and critical analysis by the Appraisal Committee. Upon a satisfactory review by the Appraisal Committee, a recommendation to approve the new program is made to the Quality Council.

As with all quality assurance processes, the experience of the student is one of the core principles that guide the requirements of the QAF. This focus on the student experience is demonstrated most clearly through the Appraisal Committee's careful assessment of new program proposals and particularly its detailed review on the proposed program's approaches to the Assessment of teaching and learning (QAF 2.1.2.4). The Assessment of teaching and learning part (a) focuses on the relationship between the assessment methods that will be used in a program and the Program



Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and Degree-Level Expectations (DLEs), and part (b) looks at how the program intends to use the data derived through the ongoing assessment of student achievement of the PLOs to inform whether the program is working in the way it was intended and continuously improve it accordingly. When both of these areas are appropriately addressed, the new program proposal provides a holistic portrait of the student learning experience provided by the academic program.

While each institution may approach this description differently, an example of best practice for the assessment of teaching and learning in a new program proposal from the past year included a 'Snapshot of Demonstrating Student Achievement'. This snapshot included a mapping of the PLOs, DLEs, required courses or program components, examples of teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods to be used. Additionally, a description of how the assessments effectively measure student achievement of the PLOs and DLEs was added. This full cycle mapping clearly demonstrates the relationship from the highest level DLEs to specific course components to illustrate what students are achieving in the program. In the plans for monitoring and assessing the overall quality of the program, the proposal demonstrated approaches at the student, program and curriculum levels to gather information and data that can inform continuous program improvement.

In 2023–24, the Quality Council's Appraisal Committee carefully reviewed and approved 43 proposals for new programs. To support the timely review and approval of new programs to ensure Ontario's students remain at the forefront of emerging disciplines and fields of study, the Quality Council and Appraisal Committee meet frequently (each met 11 times in 2023–24). A full list of the new program approvals can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

**Developing a program from the ground up can be a challenging task. To facilitate this process, Trent provides a detailed template that includes guidance boxes with leading questions, helpful tips, and examples for each section. The section on Assessment of Teaching and Learning is particularly critical as it connects 'what' students are learning with 'how' they are learning. Program developers are reminded to look at the program as a whole — we want to demonstrate to our students that they have acquired the skills, knowledge and practical experience needed, while aligning these required components with overarching POs and PLOs. Through effective evaluation strategies, we can determine if the program is performing as it was designed to.**

**MICHAEL KHAN, PROVOST & VICE PRESIDENT ACADEMIC, TRENT UNIVERSITY**



## 2023–24 New Program Approvals: Continuing to Meet the Ongoing Social and Economic Needs

**ONTARIO** universities continue to develop new programs for the social and economic benefits of the province and the country, and continue to ensure delivery of a high-quality academic experience for their students. In line with the previous years' trends, the universities have addressed the evolving needs and priorities defined by Ontario's healthcare system. For example, this year, the Quality Council approved an Undergraduate Medical Education Program (MD) at Toronto Metropolitan University, a Doctorate in Applied Behavior Analysis (AbaD) program and a Bachelor of Therapeutic Recreation (BTR) program at

Brock University, and two graduate Clinical Sciences and Translational Medicine (MA and PhD) programs at the University of Ottawa.

This year also attests to the increasing interest in various fields across mental health support and the education sector. For instance, the Quality Council approved three new graduate programs with a particular focus in applied and theoretic mental health studies. Among the approved programs were a Master of Relational and Family Therapy (MRFT) program, a Master of Psychotherapy (MP) program, and a Master of Arts in Mental Health (MA) program; all to be offered by the University of Guelph. Additionally, the Council approved an innovative graduate program from the University of Ottawa that explores studies of psychedelics and their use in therapeutic treatments.

Another recurring trend noticeable from this year's approvals is the search for effective answers to critical sustainability-related questions posed by the modern challenges of the post-industrial and globalized world.

Different universities across Ontario are reacting to these questions by introducing new programs within the sustainability sector. This year, the University of Guelph was approved to commence its Master of Sustainable Agriculture (MSAg) program, while Ontario Tech University and Nipissing University were approved to commence a Sustainability (BAS) program and an Environmental Sciences (BSc) program, respectively. Western University is also engaged in bringing academic awareness to the sustainability sector and it is now able to offer a Major and Minor in Animal Ethics and Sustainability Leadership (BA) program.

On a different note, the universities continued previous trends of meeting the high demand for qualified professionals in engineering- and technology-related sectors. For example, this year, the Quality Council approved two graduate programs in Mechatronics Engineering (MAsc and MEng) at Ontario Tech University, as well as a BAsc program in Mechatronics Systems Engineering at the University of Windsor. As a testament to the ever-increasing development of digital- and cyber-focused industries, Trent University is now able to offer a BSc in Software Engineering (Co-Op), whereas the University of Guelph was approved to add a Master of Cybersecurity Leadership and Cyberpreneurship program to its offering list.

Moreover, the universities also recognized and responded to ongoing critical social discourse and the demand of society to engage in deeper research and implementation of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Indigenization principles. To reflect this, McMaster University was approved to commence its Indigenous Studies (MA) program. Additionally, this year, the universities responded to global cultural, socio-economic, and humanitarian trends by adding such programs as a Major in China Studies (BA) program at Western University, a Human Rights and Global Justice (BA Honours) program at Trent University, and a Disaster and Emergency Management (PhD) program at York University.

For details on all the new programs approved by the Quality Council in 2023–24, please visit our website, [here](#), where you will find program descriptions submitted by the universities.





# Balancing Creativity and Resourcefulness with Diligence and Consistency

Message from the Chair of the Appraisal Committee

Having just completed my first year as Chair of the Appraisal Committee, I am pleased to report that our committee continues to effectively and consistently handle new program submissions under the 2021 QAF. It has been a busy year while I have adapted to my new role as Chair, but the Secretariat, as always, provides an important role, particularly during these times of transition. Having been a member of the Appraisal Committee for several years, I can attest that this year our Committee has risen to the challenge of working toward consistency in reviewing new program proposals, asking universities for more information on such proposals, and requiring follow-up reports. I have been continually impressed with the care with which members of the Appraisal Committee undertake this important work.

The members of the Appraisal Committee have varied disciplinary expertise and a wealth of knowledge in program development and quality assurance. The Committee works tirelessly almost all year round to review and assess new program submissions. It's important to note that our role is to not act as disciplinary experts, but rather focus on the sufficiency of the External Reviewers' Report, the recommendations for program improvement, and the adequacy of the required internal responses. The Appraisal Committee also pays careful attention to the proposed methods of assessing teaching and learning within the program's structure, as these play an integral role in facilitating ongoing and continual program improvement.

The Appraisal Committee met virtually for most of its meetings except for one in-person meeting. The goal of this annual retreat meeting in November is to review policies and procedures to orient new members and refresh continuing members. It is also a time for the Appraisal Committee to discuss important trends and topics in new programs and quality assurance. This year, the majority of

new program proposals were submitted using the revised 2021 QAF, with the Quality Council determining that submissions under the 2010 QAF will no longer be accepted in the future. Of note, the number of proposals reviewed this year was down from the previous year (see [Appendix 1, Table 1](#)) with the slight decrease reflecting fewer doctoral and GDip program proposals submitted this past year. The variety of new program submissions (see [Appendix 1, Table 2](#)) continues to highlight the ingenuity of Ontario universities in meeting the demand of students for high-quality programs that will prepare them for future careers. New programs approved in the last year focus on cutting-edge trends in different sectors as well as adding new professional programs. This year, I have been continually impressed by the creativity and resourcefulness of new program development in Ontario universities, despite some of the gloom that occurred across the sector this past year.

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**Pam Bryden,**  
 Wilfrid Laurier University

## Cyclical Program Reviews and Continuous Improvement

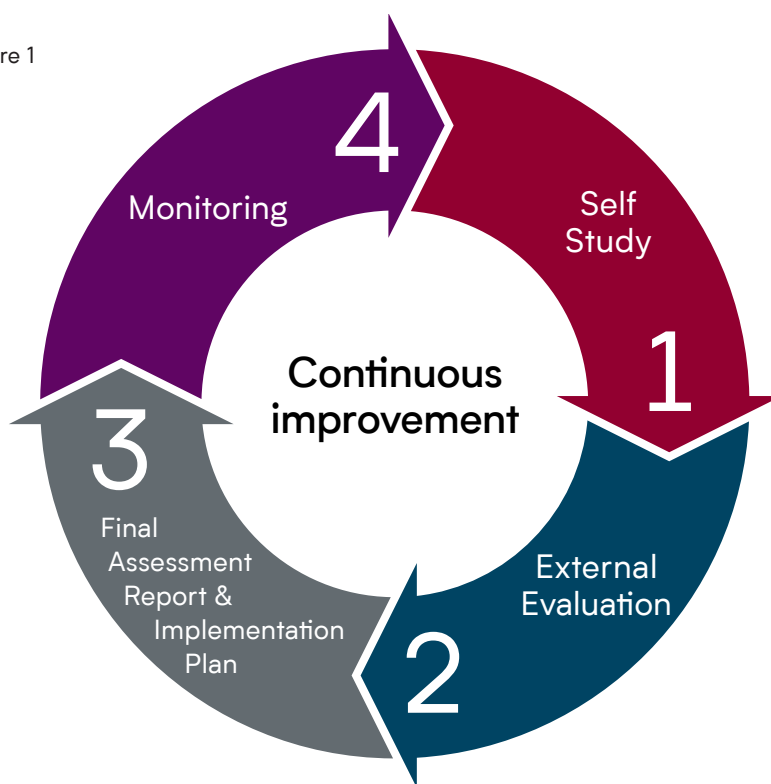
### Cyclical Program Reviews

As the quality assurance systems within our institutions continue to mature, many academic programs have now completed or are undergoing their second cycle of Cyclical Program Review (CPR) under the requirements of the QAF. This second cycle can bring new challenges and questions around the purpose of the CPR and how best to utilize the process for continuous improvement of the program.

In order for the cycle of continuous improvement to work efficiently, its components must be understood and carried out in a collaborative manner across the institution. The key components of the Cyclical Program Review process can be portrayed in a simplified cycle, as seen in Figure 1.

When academic programs enter into the second cycle of CPR, the findings of the first cycle remain relevant. While the self-study needs to address where the program is currently, it also provides an opportunity for a program to reflect on how it has evolved over the preceding eight years, what recommendations were put forward during the previous review of the program and how these recommendations were implemented, or not. This reflection is an essential piece of

Figure 1



**1 SELF-STUDY:** The self-study provides academic units with an opportunity to reflect on the program, its quality and how it is meeting the needs of its students, the goals of the institution and society in general. The self-study provides units with an opportunity to critically evaluate the program's PLOs and how the program is allowing students to achieve those PLOs, or if modifications to the PLOs or the curriculum are needed.

**2 EXTERNAL EVALUATION:** The external evaluation provides the program with an arm's length expert perspective on the institutional goals, program's objectives, PLOs, and graduate outcomes. External reviewers need a deep understanding of program evaluation and academic disciplinary expertise to critically evaluate the quality of the program and identify recommendations that can increase the quality of the program.

**3 FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN:** The institution's internal consideration of, and response to, the externals' report – and specifically, the recommendations made by the external reviewers – identify areas of opportunity to maintain and enhance the quality of the academic programs. These are summarized in the Final Assessment Report and associated Implementation Plan. An understanding of these documents within academic units and senior leadership is fundamental as the required recommended actions identified in the Implementation Plan become the basis of a continuous improvement process for the program.

**4 MONITORING:** While primary responsibility to execute the Implementation Plan lies with the leadership of the program, institutional monitoring allows stakeholders, including students and the public, to be assured that the identified actions are undertaken and in a timely manner, with an appropriate explanation for why any deviations may have occurred. A successful monitoring process therefore ensures academic units are utilizing the Implementation Plan to guide program improvements and provides a measure of accountability.



the program's self-assessment and self-understanding of its development over time. That self-awareness can be harnessed to guide the ongoing evolution of the program and its quality.

When one or more of these main components is delayed, the whole cycle of continuous improvement will suffer. For example, if the development of the self-study takes multiple years to complete, the critical reflection and program-specific data considered in the self-study process may no longer be relevant by the time of the external review. Lastly, without a formal monitoring process, the implementation of actions identified in the Implementation Plan may be forgotten due to the day-to-day business required within the program, and the program quality may suffer as a result. When the cycle is working harmoniously, academic units and their respective programs have the best opportunity to ensure continuous improvement and high academic quality.

## Major Modifications

The Quality Council has an active role in the review of universities' Annual Report on Major Modifications. Through this review, the Council sees firsthand the dynamic nature of programs and curriculum and can identify trends in how programs are continuing to evolve. Major modifications facilitate changes to existing programs and are an important tool to support — and to demonstrate — continuous program improvement.

While many factors may drive major modifications, curriculum-related recommendations that are identified during a CPR are a frequent instigator of modifications. An example can be seen in one institution's description for a major modification, which included "stemming from a program review and based on feedback from faculty and students, the Faculty has increased tutorial hours from 1.0 to 1.5 hours per week and adjusted mode of delivery

for all courses with tutorials to include in-class and hybrid options in addition to pre-existing online options. These changes are being made to allow for greater operational flexibility in offering individual courses with no intent to adjust the mode of delivery of the program as a whole." This modification demonstrates the many considerations, including the recommendations of a CPR, as well as general feedback of faculty and students, that academic units make when determining the need for a program modification.

In 2023–2024, universities reported over 500 major modifications to the Quality Council of which 67% involved changes to undergraduate programs. At the undergraduate level, the majority (114) of the reported changes were to the program objectives / PLOs, admission, course and / or program requirements. A further 54 modifications involved the addition of new specializations (or equivalent) to existing undergraduate programs, and 30 new pathways and 26 new work-integrated learning options were also created over the past year. Modifying the program's objectives / PLOs, admission, course and / or program requirements was also the area of greatest change (57) reported to the universities' graduate programs. Universities also reported 28 changes to their graduate courses and / or exam requirements, and 14 programs underwent name changes. Many of these changes were noted as being in response to external reviewers' recommendations. Finally, including both undergraduate and graduate programs, 16 programs were closed in 2023 – 2024. While a program closure may seem like a negative indication of system health, it is important to recognize that a program's closure may instead reflect an evolution in the discipline or a change in focus due to advancement of knowledge or faculty strengths. The number of program closures per year has ranged from 12 and 37 for the previous five years.

**In 2023–2024, universities submitted over 500 major modifications to the Quality Council**





# Moving Forward with the Second Cycle of Audits

Message from the Chair of the Audit Committee

After the full review of each universities' Institutional Quality Assurance Processes (IQAP) in 2022–2023, the Audit Committee started Cycle 2 of the audits with the review of Brock University and University of Ottawa in 2022–2023. In 2023–2024, five-person Audit Teams consisting of three Audit Committee members and two Secretariat members conducted audits at three universities: Western University, Queen's University and Carleton University. The audit process was thorough and collaborative, with the Audit Teams preparing a detailed report summarizing their findings. Each report included recommendations, suggestions and identified best practices observed during the audits. The universities were engaged in continuous improvement and welcomed the insights and experiences of the Audit Team in the process.

A critical issue that arose during the review of the IQAPs was the need for clear definitions of key terms such as “program” and “significant change” — terms that are key to assist with determining the threshold, the development of new programs and when identifying the unit of review in CPRs. To address this, the Audit Committee dedicated much of a full-day meeting to explore the definitions of program and significant change in the revised IQAPs. The goal was to provide the Quality Council with recommendations that could guide universities and potentially lead to modifications to the Quality Assurance Framework. The Audit Committee successfully formulated a new definition of “program”, which they recommended the Quality Council circulate to the universities.

A complete set and sequence of courses and/or other units of study, research and practice, that achieve the unique set of learning outcomes required for the full or partial fulfillment of the degree, certificate or diploma.

When considering this definition, the Quality Council noted that the definition is considered a best practice, and its inclusion was not made a requirement for universities' IQAPs.

Defining significant change proved to be more difficult due to the complexity and variability in the types of changes programs undergo. The Audit Committee recommended convening a Key Contact Exchange Forum to gather more input. As a result, a working group called the “Thresholds of Change Working Group” was formed consisting of quality assurance Key Contacts, members of the Audit Committee, and a member of the Quality Council, supported by the Quality Assurance Secretariat. The Working Group is to provide guidance that will assist universities to make decisions about the threshold of change to distinguish between changes that are major modifications to an existing program versus those that would constitute the creation of a new program. This group will present its findings in the Fall of 2024.

—

Douglas McDougall,  
University of Toronto

## Maintenance of the Quality Assurance System

### The Second Cycle of Audits

Cyclical Audits are conducted on an eight-year schedule, with the purpose of assessing the degree to which a university's internally-defined quality assurance processes and practices align with the standards set out in the Quality Assurance Framework. Through the Cyclical Audits, the Quality Council also ensures that universities are accountable to students and the broader community and assesses the degree to which a university has developed a culture that supports PLOs and student-centered learning.

From the audits of the first five universities of Cycle 2, trends and themes in the findings are beginning to arise. Similar to Cycle 1 audits, universities have continued to experience delays in Cyclical Program Reviews, both in ensuring that all programs are cyclically reviewed at least once every eight years, and in the timely completion of the CPR steps from development of the self-study, all the way to the creation of the Final Assessment Report and Implementation Plan and subsequent monitoring steps. Universities seem to also be reckoning with the requirement for formal monitoring of new

programs. Finding efficiencies in completing accreditation reviews and Cyclical Program Reviews also seems to be front and centre for many universities as they attempt to navigate any potential alignment of processes and cross-utilization of data and documentation. Lastly, as seen in Cycle 1 audits, the role of Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans and these documents' place in continuous improvement of programs continues to be an element that institutions are working through.

Cyclical Audits also continued to demonstrate the strength of quality assurance processes at Ontario universities with a number of best practices identified as a consequence of the audits conducted this past year. Universities have focused on the involvement of students in quality assurance processes, including at one institution the option for course credit for students who formally engage in the preparation of the self-study. Another institution has formalized an academy for student participation in quality assurance that includes a training program that prepares students to serve as internal reviewers on program review panels. Additionally, one university has developed a Diversity and Equity Assessment Planning Tool (DEAP), which units are required to use as part of the development of a New Program Proposals Major Modification submission, and CPR. The tool assists units in identifying how program objectives, outcomes, and curriculum address equity, diversity and inclusion and how Indigenization, reconciliation, anti-racism, and anti-oppression initiatives are



incorporated into the program. Lastly, in efforts to communicate effectively and raise awareness of quality assurance activities with incoming Chairs, one institution has implemented a welcome letter that outlines all of the upcoming QA responsibilities for the new incumbent. Readers are encouraged to explore the published Audit Reports to better understand the great work occurring at Ontario's institutions and consider how those practices might potentially be adopted across the sector.

As required in the 2021 QAF, the Audit Reports can be found on our website, [here](#).

Overall, the audit served as a great catalyst to renew our institutional “quality culture” by reaffirming the commitment, collegiality and contributions of the many QA partners across the University community. The newly added institutional self-study allowed us to describe progress since the last audit, but was also an opportunity for us to map out strategy and planning for our ongoing QA work. Much like what we ask of our own academic programs during their cyclical reviews, we aimed to emphasize an analytical and forward-looking approach.

JOVAN GROEN, DIRECTOR OF ACADEMIC QUALITY AND ENHANCEMENT,  
WESTERN UNIVERSITY





## Quality Council Pilot Project: Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans

Following the 2023 retreat of the Quality Council, the Council revised its process for review of Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans and initiated a pilot project accordingly. Changes to the process included: reviewing Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans in bundles of at least five, or once per academic year, whichever is sooner, to allow the Quality Council to more readily observe any institution-wide related trends; understanding each institution's process for the development of unit and decanal responses to the external reviewers' report; inclusion of a submission cover sheet that indicates key dates in the cyclical program review and offers universities with the opportunity to explain any anomalies or delays in process; and a more streamlined review process that includes a new template to guide Council members' review of Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans for better consistency in reviews and feedback. Through this pilot project, the Quality Council has an increased emphasis on providing formative feedback, intended to help universities improve their processes and alert Key Contacts to any issues that could lead to a Recommendation, Suggestion, or Cause for Concern at the university's next Cyclical Audit. The pilot project continues to progress and will incorporate an integrative feedback process involving the Key Contacts when considering the success of the pilot project.



The purpose of the Quality Council's review of individual Final Assessment Reports and Implementation Plans is to:

1. Monitor key components to be able to provide formative feedback to universities to help them enhance the quality of their internal QA processes; and
2. To provide accountability within the system.





## Building Community

### Key Contacts

The Quality Council and Key Contacts continue to build the quality assurance community through regular interactions, including institutional orientations to quality assurance, Key Contact Exchange Forums and the Key Contact Annual Meeting.

There were two virtual Key Contact Exchange Forums in 2023 — 2024. These included a consultation with Key Contacts on Thresholds of Change and an in-depth dive into three institutions' approaches to collecting and utilizing data for quality assurance. The Annual Meeting of the Key Contacts was held in June 2024, and brought Key Contacts together for a day-long hybrid meeting. Key Contacts explored continuous improvement within the reality of the financial constraints being experienced by the post-secondary education sector. The findings of the Exchange Forums and Annual Meeting can be found in this year's [Key Contacts' Annual Report](#).

### Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Indigeneity (DEII) and Quality Assurance

In September 2022, the Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents (OCAV) recommended that a working group be struck to develop directions for revising the QAF's Undergraduate and Graduate Degree-Level Expectations ("DLEs"), (Appended to Part 2 of the QAF). In early 2023, a working group was convened with the mandate to develop proposed revisions to the DLEs to include learning expectations supporting equity, diversity, inclusion, Indigenization, and accessibility. The Working Group, in conjunction with the Quality Council, continues its process on drafting the proposed revisions to the DLEs.

### Learning Outcomes Symposium

The Quality Assurance Secretariat continues to play a key role in the planning and realization of the biennial Learning Outcomes Symposium. The Symposium took place on October 30, 2024 and included a fully in-person one-day conference. This event, planned in conjunction with representatives from universities, colleges,

Indigenous Institutes, and partner agencies including e-Campus, the Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer, the Post-Secondary Quality Assurance Board, the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, and the Ontario College Quality Assurance Service, gathers scholars and practitioners from fields focused on the development and assessment of learning outcomes to exchange research, share best practices, and discuss innovative ideas. You can remain up to date on all Symposium details on our website [here](#).



## A Note of Gratitude

The Quality Council takes this last opportunity to extend its thanks to past Chair, Dr. Paul Gooch, for his exceptional tenure as the Chair of the Quality Council. Paul's steady leadership and guidance provided the Quality Council with a pillar of strength through the first review and subsequent revisions to the QAF, a pandemic that upended many of the traditional norms and practices within Ontario universities, and the financial instability that continues to impact universities. Drawing on his deep experience and commitment to the very highest quality for higher education, Paul has also pointed to important themes that the Quality Council and the sector will need to address moving into the future.



Paul has been a deeply committed contributor to higher education, and specifically the Ontario higher education sector, for his entire career. As he has moved through positions in the academy, and most recently as Chair of the Quality Council, Paul has held fast to principles of excellence, deliberative analysis, and thoughtful consideration of academic programs, always grounded in a commitment to student experience and learning. This ethos, which he brought to his time as Chair, has had a profound effect on the quality of education in Ontario. His work has ensured that Ontario remains admired around the world for its stellar university programs.

During his time as Chair, there have been substantial changes in universities as the sector evolved to meet new challenges and new societal and student demands. Paul's steady hand, and principled approach to thinking through these changes allowed for curricular innovation, while ensuring that the student learning experience and program structure remains true to the standards of the Quality Assurance Framework. The COVID-19 pandemic was one such challenge. As programs of study, and the reviews of programs, had to quickly pivot to online, we were incredibly fortunate to have Paul at the helm during this period. His deep experience and calm approach to a chaotic situation allowed the Council to maintain its processes and allowed the universities to do what needed to be done to achieve the best possible outcomes. As we settle into the "new normal" the Quality Council, under Paul's guidance, has continued to provide critical feedback to institutions to encourage universities to use the quality assurance process for its intended purpose: continuous improvement. Paul's thoughtful approach, including his occasional diversions into ancient history which added warm colour to the conversations, will be greatly missed.

**SUSAN MCCAHAN**, VICE-PROVOST, ACADEMIC PROGRAMS AND VICE-PROVOST, INNOVATIONS IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO.

APPENDIX 1:

Program Data

TABLE 1 NEW PROGRAMS APPROVED, BY DEGREE TYPE

	Undergraduate	Master's	Doctoral	Graduate Diplomas (GDip)	Total: New Programs
2018 — 2019	10	22	10	11	53
2019 — 2020	17	15	10	9	51
2020 — 2021	17	9	4	6	36
2021 — 2022	22	27	6	8	63
2022 — 2023	10	20	8	5	43
2023 — 2024	16	19	4	4	43

Brief descriptions of [all approved programs](#) can be found on the Quality Council's [website](#).

TABLE 2 LIST OF NEW PROGRAMS APPROVED, 2023–24, BY UNIVERSITY

University and Program	Degree
<b>ALGOMA UNIVERSITY</b>	
Master of Social Work	MSW
<b>BROCK UNIVERSITY</b>	
Doctorate in Applied Behaviour Analysis	AbaD
Bachelor of Therapeutic Recreation	BTR
Master of Athletic Therapy	MAT
<b>CARLETON UNIVERSITY</b>	
Master of Biotechnology	Mbiotech
<b>LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY</b>	
Graduate Diploma in Management	GDip (Type 3)
Technological Education	BEd
<b>McMASTER UNIVERSITY</b>	
Indigenous Studies	MA
Combined Honours in Leadership and Civic Studies (and another subject)	BA Honours
<b>NIPISSING UNIVERSITY</b>	
Environmental Sciences	BSc
<b>ONTARIO TECH UNIVERSITY</b>	
Mechatronics Engineering	MASc and MEng
Sustainability	BAS
<b>TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY</b>	
Architecture	PhD
Undergraduate Medical Education Program	MD

continued on next page



TABLE 2 LIST OF NEW PROGRAMS APPROVED, 2023–24, BY UNIVERSITY

University and Program	Degree
<b>TRENT UNIVERSITY</b>	
Software Engineering Co-op	BSc (Honours)
Human Rights and Global Justice	BA Honours
<b>UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH</b>	
Master of Plant Agriculture	MPAg
Master of Relational and Family Therapy	MRFT
Master of Psychotherapy	MP
Master of Arts in Mental Health	MA
Master of Real Estate	MRE
Master of Sustainable Agriculture	MSAg
Master of Cybersecurity Leadership and Cyberpreneurship	MCLC
Master of Professional Accounting	MPAcc
Bachelor of Creative Arts, Health and Wellness	BCAHW
<b>UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA</b>	
Clinical Sciences and Translational Medicine	MA and PhD
Psychedelics and Consciousness Studies	MA
Master of Arts in Security and Defence Studies	MA
<b>UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO</b>	
Specialist in Music Industry and Technology (Joint with Centennial College)	HBA
Major in Public Law	HBA
<b>UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO</b>	
Graduate Diploma in Climate Change	GDip (Type 2)
<b>UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR</b>	
Mechatronic Systems Engineering	BASc
<b>WESTERN UNIVERSITY</b>	
Major in China Studies	MA
Major and Minor in Animal Ethics and Sustainability Leadership	BA
Master of Teaching and Learning	MTL
Professional Practice, Clinical Leadership and Education	GDip (Type 3)
<b>WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY</b>	
User Experience Design	MSc
<b>YORK UNIVERSITY</b>	
Sport Management	BSM and BSM Honours
Disaster and Emergency Management	PhD
Advanced Management	GDip (Type 2)

APPENDIX 2:

Membership of the  
Quality Council and  
its Committees in  
2023-24

Members of the Quality Council,  
2023-24

- Dr. Paul Gooch (Chair), President Emeritus,  
Victoria University within the University of  
Toronto
- Dr. Neil Besner, Member / Out-of-Province  
Quality Assurance Expert
- Dr. Alice Hovorka, Undergraduate Dean  
Representative, York University
- Ms. Shirley Hoy, Citizen Member
- Dr. Michael Khan, Member / OCAV  
Representative, Trent University
- Dr. Susan McCahan, Member / OCAV  
Representative, University of Toronto
- Dr. Andrew McWilliams, Member /  
University Representative, Toronto  
Metropolitan University
- Ms. Brittany Paat, Quality Assurance Staff  
Representative, Algoma University
- Dr. Patrice Smith, Member / Graduate Dean  
Representative, Carleton University
- Dr. Christopher Evans, Executive Director  
(ex-officio)

The Quality Council's Appraisal  
and Audit Committees

Members of the Quality Council's Appraisal  
Committee review proposals for new  
undergraduate and graduate programs from  
Ontario's publicly assisted universities, and  
make recommendations regarding their  
approval to the Quality Council.

Members of the Quality Council's Audit  
Committee conduct Cyclical Audits, review  
audit reports prepared by the Audit Teams  
and make recommendations to the Quality  
Council. The Audit Report describes whether  
a university has, since its last review, acted in  
compliance with the provisions of its  
Institutional Quality Assurance Processes  
(IQAP).

Members of the Appraisal  
Committee, 2023-24

- Dr. Pamela Bryden (Chair), Kinesiology and  
Physical Education, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Dr. Maureen Connolly, Faculty of Applied  
Health Sciences, Brock University
- Dr. Carolyn Eyles, School of Interdisciplinary  
Science, McMaster University
- Dr. Brian Frank, Electrical and Computer  
Engineering, Queen's University
- Dr. André Phillion, Materials Science and  
Engineering, McMaster University
- Dr. Ian Roberge, School of Public Policy and  
Administration, York University
- Dr. Mark Schmuckler, Department of  
Psychology, University of Toronto
- Dr. Kamran Siddiqui, Department of  
Mechanical and Materials Engineering,  
Western University
- Dr. Christopher Evans, Executive Director  
(ex-officio)

Members of the Audit Committee,  
2023-24

- Dr. Douglas McDougall** (Chair), Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
- Dr. Johanne B nard**, Department of French Studies, Queen's University
- Dr. Serge Desmarais**, Department of Psychology, University of Guelph
- Dr. Roelof Eikelboom**, Department of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University
- Dr. Michel Laurier** (Vice-Chair), Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
- Dr. Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale**, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminology, University of Windsor
- Dr. Sarah McKinnon**, Department of Art History, Ontario College of Art and Design University
- Dr. Catherine Nolan**, Faculty of Music, Western University
- Dr. Alice Pitt**, Faculty of Education, York University
- Dr. Sharon Regan**, Department of Biology, Queen's University
- Dr. Bruce Tucker**, Faculty of History, University of Windsor
- Dr. Bettina West**, Ted Rogers School of Management, Toronto Metropolitan University
- Dr. Alan Weedon**, Department of Chemistry, Western University
- Dr. Kirsten Woodend**, Fleming School of Nursing, Trent University
- Dr. Christopher Evans**, Executive Director (ex-officio)

Members of the Audit Executive  
Committee, 2023-24

- Dr. Douglas McDougall** (Chair), Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
- Dr. Michel Laurier**, (Vice-Chair) Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
- Dr. Alan Weedon** (Member-at-large), Department of Chemistry, Western University

The Quality Assurance Secretariat

The Quality Assurance Secretariat supports the ongoing business of the Quality Council and its Committees by providing timely information, advice and support. Among other responsibilities, the Secretariat prepares agendas and materials for all meetings and appraisals, takes minutes of meetings, and communicates decisions of the Appraisal Committee and the Quality Council to the appropriate institutions. The Secretariat also supports the Audit process, and provides general quality assurance and appraisal-related advice to Ontario universities.

Members of the Secretariat,  
2023-24

- Dr. Christopher Evans**, Executive Director
- Cindy Robinson**, Director Operations
- Shevanthi Dissanayake**, Coordinator
- Mario Guerrero**, Senior Quality Assurance Officer (Appraisals)
- Alexander Kostin**, Senior Quality Assurance Officer (Appraisals)
- Brittany McFarlane**, Senior Quality Assurance Officer (Audits)



# Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance

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**ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES**  
COUNCIL on QUALITY ASSURANCE