

Ministry of Education

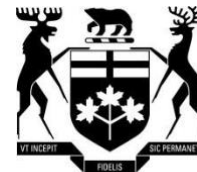
Minister

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Ontario

October 6, 2020

Dr. Cameron Montgomery
Chair
Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)
2 Carlton Street, Suite 1200
Toronto, ON M5B 2M9

Dear Dr. Montgomery,

As you begin planning for 2020-21, I am pleased to write to you in your capacity as Chair of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) to provide you with a letter setting out expectations and direction for EQAO in the year ahead. Pursuant to the requirements of the Agencies and Appointments Directive, this letter sets out my expectations for EQAO for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

Ontario's board-governed agencies are vital partners in ensuring the delivery of high-quality services to Ontarians. The work that you and your fellow board members undertake to establish the goals, objectives, and strategic direction for EQAO ensures that the agency is a leading authority on student assessment. It is important that this direction is consistent with government priorities, your agency mandate, key policies and directives and my directions, where appropriate. I thank you for your willingness to serve.

As part of the government of Ontario, agencies are expected to act in the best interests of Ontarians by being efficient, effective, and providing value for money to taxpayers. This includes:

1. Competitiveness, Sustainability and Expenditure Management

- operating within your agency's allocations
- identifying and pursuing opportunities for innovative practices, and/or improved program sustainability
- identifying and pursuing efficiencies and savings
- complying with applicable direction related to supply chain centralization, Realty Interim Measures and Agency Office Location Criteria

2. Transparency and Accountability

- abiding by applicable government directives and policies and ensuring transparency and accountability in reporting
- adhering to requirements of the Agencies and Appointment Directive, and responding to audit findings, where applicable
- identifying appropriate skills, knowledge and experience needed to effectively support the board's role in agency governance and accountability

3. Risk Management

- developing and implementing an effective process for the identification, assessment and mitigation of risks, including planning for and responding to emergency situations such as COVID-19

4. Workforce Management

- optimizing your agency's workforce to enable efficient and effective fulfilment of government priorities, while enhancing customer service standards
- streamlining back office functions to ensure that all available resources are redirected towards the critical front-line services that Ontarians depend upon

5. Data Collection

- improving how the agency uses data in information sharing and reporting, including by leveraging available or new data solutions to inform outcome-based reporting and improve service delivery
- supporting transparency and data sharing with the ministry, as appropriate

6. Digital Delivery

- exploring and implementing digitization or digital modernization strategies for the provision of services online and continuing to meet and exceed service standards through transition
- using a variety of approaches or tools to ensure service delivery in all situations, including COVID-19

Building on to these government-wide priorities, I expect EQAO to focus on:

1. Online and Adaptive Testing

As our government continues to think about how to best prepare students for their future, it is becoming increasingly clear that students are learning in more technology-driven environments and that we need to modernize the way we assess student learning.

To that end, the Ministry of Education is pleased to work with EQAO to move to online and adaptive testing. As a first step, I would ask that EQAO take all necessary steps to make the following assessments available online to students during the 2020-21 school year:

- Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics; and
- Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

The Agency will also continue to support the implementation and administration of the Math Proficiency Test (MPT). This includes developing and marking the MPT and providing results to individual test takers and reporting successful completions of the MPT to the Ontario College of Teachers. The Agency will also continue to support the administration of national and international assessments.

Given the recent revisions to the elementary math curriculum, there will be no Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessments of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics in the 2020-21 school year. I would ask EQAO to take all necessary steps to prepare to deliver Primary/Junior assessments through online adaptive testing in the 2021-22 school year, including mathematics assessments based on the new elementary math curriculum. This work may require doing field testing during the 2020/21 school year.

2. Procurement to support online and adaptive testing and IT Modernization Plan

I understand that the Agency is conducting an open, competitive procurement to move EQAO's assessments to an online, adaptive testing platform. This will be a critical next step in moving forward with EQAO's mandate in the coming year. To further assist you with this work, please develop a joint IT modernization plan in partnership with the Community Services I&IT Cluster by November 27, 2020. This plan, including timelines, key milestones, and costing will be a roadmap for this important modernization work.

Moving to online and adaptive testing will enable the Agency to deliver a more efficient and accountable large-scale student assessment system that students, parents, and educators can depend on.

3. CEO Recruitment

This work will also require leadership at the agency level, and I am aware that the board has initiated a search for an appropriate CEO candidate. As the CEO would be appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, I would ask you to work closely with my office to develop options for my recommendation to the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

On March 15, 2019, the government committed to working with EQAO to modernize the agency and its processes. I would like to recognize the achievements of EQAO over the course of the past year towards that goal. Notably, EQAO has completed Phase 1 of the migration to the Guelph Data Centre, in partnership with the I&IT Cluster and Infrastructure Technology Services. This is an important step to modernize the Agency's processes and ensure the ongoing security of the Agency's data holdings.

Please include the mandate for the 2020-21 year outlined above in EQAO's business plan for the upcoming fiscal year. Results will be evaluated at year-end in EQAO's annual report. As set out by the Agency Review Task Force, the ministry will work with you on updating the outcomes-based performance measures for the full-time Chair position.

Through these measures, we can continue to ensure that EQAO is continuing to support Ontario students.

I thank you and your fellow board members for your continued support, and for your valuable contributions. Should you have any questions/concerns, please feel free to contact Deputy Minister Nancy Naylor at Nancy.Naylor@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Lecce". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

The Honourable Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education