

Non-traditional students at projects' centre

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A Western project is among nine Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)-backed nationwide studies examining non-traditional learners in the Ontario postsecondary education system. Over the next two years, the projects will provide greater insight into students who use non-traditional pathways and the effectiveness of the programs designed to help them succeed.

Western, in partnership with the University of Ottawa, McMaster University and Academica Group Inc., will study pathways for internationally educated health professionals who have formal educational backgrounds in their professions, but do not have the required educational, professional or language requirements to enter their professions in Canada. Led by Western Psychology professor Victoria Esses, the study will assess the effectiveness of bridging programs in preparing these health professionals for national certification and employment.

HEQCO has allocated more than \$500,000 for the nine projects, which build on a number of previous HEQCO studies and reports, including those on [adult learners](#), [post-high school pathways](#) of immigrant youth, [transfer between colleges](#) and universities and [postsecondary education pathways and employment](#) experiences.

“The Ontario government has set a goal that 70 per cent of the working age population attain a postsecondary education credential,” said Ursula McCloy, HEQCO research director. “To reach this goal, Ontario colleges and universities will need to attract and retain non-traditional learners such as secondary school students who have left before graduation or are lacking basic skills or appropriate prerequisites, adults returning to school after an absence or time in the workforce, displaced workers, or immigrants with foreign credentials. These projects will help us better understand the pathways to postsecondary success.”

In Ontario, only 53 per cent of bachelor graduates and 26 per cent of college graduates followed traditional pathways through postsecondary education, according to the most recent National Graduate Survey, and those percentages have been dropping over the last two decades. While many students go directly to college or university, they stop or switch programs or institutions before they eventually graduate. Others delay entry to pursue employment or other life experiences before going on to postsecondary education.