

PROCESS FOR CONSULTATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

This is an ambitious agenda, but it is not beyond the realm of the possible. We believe that the essential steps could be taken within five years. Ontarians sometimes forget how quickly Ontario's higher education system can change to meet critical needs. The number of publicly supported universities in Ontario doubled in the period from 1960 to 1965. The college system was created in less than three years, from early 1965 to the fall of 1967. College enrolments were expanded by almost 40 percent in less than five years to meet the needs of displaced workers during the recession of the early 1980s and by another 30 percent during the recession of the early 1990s. The university system added room for 90,000 more undergraduate students between 2000 and 2005 to accommodate the double cohort. In every case, the government made decisions about what needed to be done and worked with higher education leaders to get on with the job.

The starting point for addressing our proposed agenda should be a focused consultation process with universities and colleges and with associations representing students, faculty, and staff. These consultations, which might require two to four months, should focus on whether there are better proposals for addressing the issues we have identified. Changes of the magnitude we recommend are bound to be contentious; however, our review of the policy papers published by higher education stakeholders over the past two years suggests that there is broad consensus (though not unanimity) on the problems Ontario faces and widespread recognition that the solutions must go beyond simply spending more of the government's and students' money. We believe that higher education stakeholders are more open to discussions about reasonable solutions than has been the case in several decades.

If the government concludes that our proposals have merit, a plan for carrying them out within five years is shown in Table 10. This plan suggests a way forward that will produce real results.

THE COURAGE TO BEGIN

A famous publicity photo from 1962, taken before the ground had been broken for the first buildings, shows York University's first president, the late Murray Ross, sitting behind a desk in the middle of his new campus, surrounded by nothing but cow pasture.¹⁹³ Already he had a plan for developing the university during its first 20 years. Across town, Ross's friend and rival, Claude Bissell, was carrying out the University of Toronto's expansion west of St. George Street and was overseeing the creation of two new campuses in the then-distant suburbs of Scarborough and Erindale. In Kingston, John Deutsch, the vice-principal for

TABLE 10
(Continued)

	Year 1	Years 2 to 5
Strengthening quality assurance		
Strengthening higher education expertise		

Source: Authors' compilation.

administration at Queen's University, had been given less than a year to prepare the seminal report that would be Ontario's unofficial plan for providing higher education for the baby-boom generation. All were joined in their work by Premier John Robarts and eventually Bill Davis, who became minister of university affairs at age 34, and Davis's even-younger assistant deputy minister, Ed Stewart.¹⁹⁴

Higher education planning is a human task. Bissell, Deutsch, Ross, and their colleagues at other universities are remembered for their wisdom and energy and—perhaps most of all—because they got the job done. Likewise, the roles of Davis and Stewart in the expansion of Ontario's universities and the creation of its colleges are rightly ranked among the proudest moments in their long careers of public service. The majority of young people who found a place in higher education in Ontario in the 1960s and 1970s did so because these leaders identified the need and acted without delay.

As we have made clear in this book (with a half-century of hindsight), we do not think these leaders got everything right. But they had the courage to begin. They gathered facts and made projections, but they

did not succumb to the desire to nail down every last fact before acting. They looked far beyond their own terms of office. They consulted widely and respectfully, without picking unnecessary fights, and then they made decisions. They supported more resources for higher education, but they did not imagine that the demand for more resources could ever be fully satisfied. They monitored their progress, watched for new facts, and made adjustments along the way.

Today, we need to bring a similar frame of mind to meeting Ontario's higher education challenges. We have tried to show in this book that there is much that we can usefully learn from Ontario's own history and from the vast experience of other jurisdictions that have faced similar problems. We have argued in favour of options that we think would be significant improvements to the status quo. Others will, of course, have different options. What is most important is that Ontario should recognize the central role of higher education for individuals and for its economic and social development, make reasoned choices among the options, build on the strengths of the system as it is, and put in place policies to reshape the system in ways that will serve Ontarians for decades to come.