The Impacts of the Virtual Learning Strategy: Investing in Ontario's Virtual Learning Future

The first round of the Virtual Learning Strategy (VLS) invested in the advancement of digital content, capacity, fluency, and delivery for virtual and hybrid learning across the province’s postsecondary institutions.

The Virtual Learning Strategy is built on three key pillars:

- Being the future
- Being a lifelong learner
- Being a global leader

VLS Results at a Glance

100% Ontario postsecondary sector engagement

- ✔ 9 Indigenous Institutes
- ✔ 22 Colleges
- ✔ 24 Universities

Learn more about participating institutions here.

February 2021: 860 applications submitted

March 2022: 389 projects funded and completed

VLS Principles

The VLS prioritizes collaboration for sector transformation that impacts all institutions.

“One of the most significant impacts of this grant was a collaborative team bringing varied knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that built capacity for high quality online teaching and learning.”

- VLS Project Team

The VLS drives virtual learning excellence for all learners in Ontario, now and into the future.

“Working as a collaborator gives me the opportunity to discuss students concerns and learning needs, also contribute our ideas to the development of the hybrid course. [...] The discussion in our team meeting helps me to expand my understanding about instructional design, online course planning and collaborative teamwork in course development from both students and instructor’s perspective.”

- VLS participating Learner

The VLS supports the development of online content that is digital by design.

“The inventory of resources created and shared though out this project will continue to serve the sector year over year. We now have access to materials and tools that our college has not had the capacity to create. Being able to leverage the material created will enable us to continue to support the development of our faculty and our programs into modern, flexible, and attractive, academic programs.”

- VLS Project Team
The following section explores the outcomes of the Virtual Learning Strategy (VLS) through a breakdown of results per tranche. The findings presented were collected from VLS project teams via the fourth quarterly report (Q4) and additional research activities.

**Digital Content**

The Digital Content tranche promoted member institutions’ achievement of excellence in virtual teaching and learning through the development, adaptation and adoption of educational materials for virtual environments. This tranche promoted the design and development of online, innovative content and collaborative practices that fostered understanding of how digital content serves pedagogy for all Ontario learners.

**Items Available in the VLS Collection**

- **Virtual Educational Resources (e.g. textbooks)**
  - Available Globally: 207
  - Available to Ontario Educators and Learners: 101

- **Simulations, Serious Games, XR Experiences**
  - Available Globally: 62
  - Available to Ontario Educators and Learners: 56

- **Online Courses, Programs, Micro-credentials**
  - Available Globally: 124
  - Available to Ontario Educators and Learners: 113

**Digital Delivery**

The Digital Delivery-Demonstration Projects tranche was designed to support member institutions partnering with Ontario educational technology companies to test technologies and provide support for wider market distribution. Technologies were prototypes ready for demonstration (TRL 7 or greater) in an Ontario Indigenous Institute, college, or university.

As reported by project teams, VLS educators and learners said that the technologies were:
- Engaging and immersive
- Unique and customizable
- Easy to use and navigate
- Interactive

…and that they:
- Improved the learning experience
- Saved time
- Enhanced learner engagement
- Enabled different modalities
- Enabled futures thinking

3500+ learners involved in testing and evaluating technology

100+ educators involved in testing and evaluating technology

22 Ontario colleges and universities engaging in VLS Digital Delivery projects as either lead institution or collaborators

100% of Delivery projects collaborated with Ontario EdTech companies

12 industry partners engaging in VLS Digital Delivery projects

- Affinity Learning
- Ametros Learning Inc
- Cya.Live
- D2L
- Kritik
- LightBoard Depot
- ForThinkInc
- MasterpieceVR
- NextTech AR
- Rogers Communications
- Sandbox Inc.
- UP360

Project types

- Virtual Reality / Augmented Reality: 36%
- Simulations: 29%
- Interactivity: 14%
- Assessment: 14%
- Learning Management System: 7%
The Digital Capacity-Targeted Supports tranche was designed to support member institutions to achieve excellence in virtual teaching and learning. A key factor in the Digital Capacity Targeted Supports tranche was to promote equity in the postsecondary sector to deliver high quality online learning by providing funding to institutions with demonstrated need for additional support.

The Digital Capacity-Collaborative tranche that was designed to build collaborative supports, services, and initiatives that drive sector-wide capacity in support of virtual learning. The intent of this tranche was to help Ontario postsecondary institutions work together to co-create a future of learning that enables greater cooperation, collaboration, and equity.

The Digital Fluency tranche was designed to support the design and development of a series of province-wide courses for continued professional learning across Ontario that improved teaching and learning in a virtual environment. The Digital Fluency supported provided key supports to faculty and students to effectively teach and learn online.

Items Available in the VLS Collection

Available to Ontario Educators and Learners

Available Globally
Impacts of the VLS

VLS project teams were asked a series of qualitative questions related to their project and its anticipated impacts across the sector. Open-ended responses were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis. Project elements were also reviewed for their relation or relevance to particular focuses, for example; projects building micro-credentials or projects with a particular subject matter. Major themes and aggregate quantitative findings were triangulated and are presented together in the diagram below to share an evidence-informed narrative about how the VLS has impacted the postsecondary sector.

- Increased sector capacity for high-quality online learning development and delivery
- Developed and implemented alternative, authentic assessments
- Higher-quality online and hybrid learning experiences
- Improved and timely feedback and evaluation for learners

*These projects will improve access to high quality learning assets across the province, especially for smaller schools, or geographically remote schools.* - VLS Project Team

- Increased availability of high-quality open resources to enhance teaching and learning

- Increased awareness and recognition of the value of online and open education
- Expanded teaching horizons and capacity with openness to new practices
- Increased confidence in the implementation of new teaching practices

“In the long run, I feel that this will enable a shift towards integrating non-traditional ‘corporate training’ and ‘professional development’ as credit towards traditional credentials; in addition to serving the rigid programming that supports the traditional PSE student.” - VLS Project Team

- Promoted lifelong learning and supported job readiness through alternative, stackable credentialing and unbundled learning journeys

- 54 projects identified themselves as creating micro-credentials

“54 projects identified themselves as creating micro-credentials” - VLS Project Team

- Supported sector resilience and agility by providing a strong foundation for further innovation

- 104 projects involved an equity, diversity, Decolonization, and inclusion (EDDI) focus

“Ontario’s VLS and the projects developed have injected necessary innovation into the sector to stimulate and introduce new ideas on how learners will choose their post-secondary paths in the future.” - VLS Project Team

- Advanced equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, Decolonization, and Indigenization of postsecondary education

- 47 projects involved Indigenous subject matter, Indigenous communities, Indigenous peoples and/or Indigenous Institutes

“Perhaps one of the most meaningful pieces of this project was the intentional focus on indigenous ways of knowing embedded within the projects – overall a great learning experience for everyone involved.” - VLS Project Team

- Enabled more collaboration and partnerships to innovate in virtual and hybrid learning

- Promoted new ways of learner engagement and instructor-learner relationships

Involving learners as co-creators enhanced the quality of teaching and learning, while providing further opportunities for learning, networking, and professional development

- 241 projects were collaborative
The first round of the VLS was only possible thanks to the outstanding participation and contribution of Ontario’s postsecondary education sector. eCampusOntario extends its gratitude to each Indigenous Institute, college, and university for co-creating our provincial digital-by-design postsecondary education.

Some of the data presented in this infographic has been rounded and represent approximations. If you have questions or would like more information, please contact vls@ecampusontario.ca.

This report is the fifth in a series of five Virtual Learning Strategy (VLS) Focus Reports that tell data-driven stories about the VLS investment. VLS Focus Reports are accompanied by a series of five Foresight Reports. The Foresight Reports expand on the VLS pillar of Being the Future by exploring maturing trends in the Ontario postsecondary sector and situating the VLS in the futures of virtual learning. Visit the Virtual Learning Strategy website to read the reports collection.

2021-22 VLS Reports Outline

- **Focus Report**
- **Foresight Report**

![Report Outline Diagram]