

Developing Strategic Foresight Capacity in Postsecondary Education

Research and Foresight supports the growth, innovation, and transformation of the Ontario postsecondary education sector to further digital-by-design educational futures. In 2021 eCampusOntario launched a Research and Foresight unit to support the postsecondary education sector in this navigation, and build a shared language to explore and co-design the futures of postsecondary education. Through Research and Foresight eCampusOntario helps to strengthen and support the higher education sector's ability to anticipate potential disruptions and prepare for digital-by-design educational futures.



Understanding the landscape for impact and change



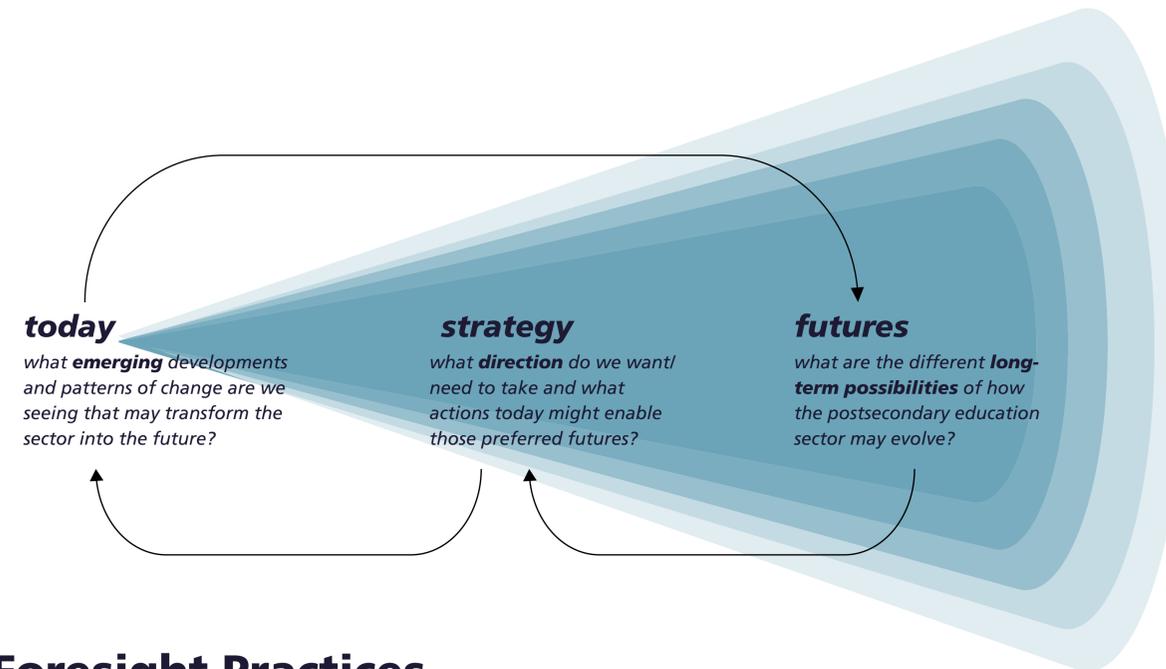
Identifying insights for transformation



Disseminating knowledge for strategic action

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ecampusontario.ca/research-and-foresight

Over the past three years, Research and Foresight at eCampusOntario produced 15 reports using strategic foresight. Strategic foresight, a research-driven and systematic exploration of possible futures, uses evidence of change in the present to extrapolate what is possible in the future. These reports are designed as tools to navigate uncertain and complex futures and inform better-decision making today.



Strategic Foresight Practices



Horizon scanning

Horizon scanning is a method for systematically exploring data available today for clues about what may be different in the future. We saw patterns of change, called trends, which indicated transformation across what, who, how, when and where education is being delivered. In addition to these trends, we also identified larger forces of change, such as demographic shifts, climate change, and technological developments that are likely to affect everything in Canada in the future, including postsecondary education.



Analysis

We took all this evidence of change and considered, based on this information, what are the possible ways the future could play out? What do those multiple possibilities mean for the sector? What actions today emerge as important across the spectrum of possibilities? Through this work, it became clear that today's learners have evolving expectations necessitating more online and digital options, and new approaches to learning. The need for enhanced flexibility in the sector emerged; however, we felt it necessary to supplement our research with first hand accounts or experiences of building flexibility in postsecondary education in Ontario.



Workshops

We held a series of participatory workshops with educators, using strategic foresight methodologies, to explore what a "flexible-by-design" postsecondary education system means, especially for educators as key stakeholders of implementing change. We engaged with 45 educators from Ontario's publicly-supported postsecondary institutions through virtual workshops using strategic foresight methods to frame the conversations with the purpose of uncovering how flexibility relates to their role and the factors driving the need for it. We also wanted to see what patterns of change educators were seeing in their day to day work. Finally, we wanted to see how educators think about flexibility when exploring different ideas of about the future.



Strategy

The findings from our research (and foresight research more generally), can be used to inform current strategy. For example, some educators suggested that addressing the need for flexibility involves reconsidering how to engage in the classroom (practice), the tools and resources educators require (infrastructure) and the rules and agreements supporting the environment (policy). Strategic recommendations can be found in our Flexibility Brief 5: Integrated Insights.

2021 – 2024 Foresight Reports at a Glance

Reports in Collection 1 explore what is shaping new and different possibilities for the futures of postsecondary education:

- [Hybrid-by-design teaching and learning approaches](#)
- [Changing demographics and engagement models of tomorrow's learners](#)
- [Emerging models of lifelong learning](#)
- [Shifting workforce and market needs](#)
- [Sector-wide collaborative structures for leading innovation](#)

Reports in Collection 2 explore how innovation approaches in education are changing:

- [Scaling opportunities to learn from anywhere, anytime](#)
- [Connecting a diverse ecosystem of learning communities](#)
- [Evolving teaching and learning roles](#)
- [Navigating personalized lifelong learning offerings](#)
- [Designing education for the future](#)

The trends included in the first two collections of reports suggest an increased need and desire for flexibility in postsecondary education. For reports in Collection 3, we convened Ontario postsecondary instructors, to understand:

- [Why flexibility is important](#)
- [What educators think about flexibility](#)
- [How educators feel about flexibility](#)
- [What educators want for flexibility](#)
- [Integrated insights and next steps for flexibility](#)