

**Learning Opportunities Task Force
1997 to 2002**

Final Report

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(i) Introduction

On May 6, 1997, the Hon. Ernie Eves, then Treasurer and now Premier of Ontario, made the following statement, as part of his budget speech:

“Too few students with learning disabilities get the help that they need to make the transition to college or university. To help these students realize their potential, we will establish pilot projects at the college and university level, to provide real help to learning disabled students in a meaningful way.”

The **Learning Opportunities Task Force (LOTF)**, under the leadership of Dr. Bette Stephenson, a former Minister of Education, is the mechanism through which these pilot projects have been established with a clear cut mandate:

1. to improve the transition of students with specific learning disabilities from secondary school to post-secondary education, and
2. to enhance the services and supports that students with learning disabilities receive within the post-secondary educational sector, such that they can complete their education successfully.

(ii) The structure of the LOTF report

The LOTF’s final report covers the period from the initial start of the research work in 1997 to the summer of 2002, when six of the seven pilot projects completed their piloting activities and submitted their final summative reports. The report is comprised of the following components:

1. The main report

This includes I. the LOTF approach; II. articulates the LOTF’s key findings and recommendations; III. The LOTF legacy and IV. The next challenge.

2. The appendices

The report also has three appendices. Appendix A and B contain an analysis of data gathered over four years of piloting. These are:

- C Appendix A: **Summative Analysis of the Information Obtained from LOTF Student Questionnaires during the period September 1998 to September 2002**
- C Appendix B: **Review and Analysis of the Data Obtained from Institutional Tracking Reports for Pilot Activity between September 1998 and June 2002**

The third appendix is a compilation of the institutional executive summaries, submitted with the pilots’ final reports in June, 2002.

3. The summaries

There are two summaries accompanying but separate from the main report.

The first one is a brief **Executive Summary** providing an overview of LOTF’s work over the past five years and the key findings together with the supporting data.

The second one, the **Report Summary**, is a document including, in addition to a more detailed overview and the same key findings, the recommendations that have been generated from the key findings and explanatory comments.

4. The technical report

The fourth component is the technical report, a binder of supplementary documentation about LOTF activities. Its focus is on the initial year and then pilot-oriented applied research principles, method, and procedures developed to fulfill the Task Force mandate. Those who wish more extensive technical information including, for example, earlier report summaries, questionnaires, and full lists of pilot project staff, are welcome to consult the binder. The technical report, which follows the same sequence as this main report, is available from the LOTF Office.

It is our intent to create a compilation of student commentary and student work for distribution to Ontario's secondary schools. The purpose of this will be to ensure that students who are still in school and are thinking about post-secondary education should be encouraged by the experiences and recommendations of the pilot students. This material will be available in multiple formats in order to make it fully accessible to all students with learning disabilities.

5. It's About Belonging

LOTF would like to thank Spencer J. Harrison, a successful student with LD from Trent University and the pilot project staff at Trent for allowing us to use Mr. Harrison's painting, which appears on the cover of the report.

In describing his painting, Mr. Harrison wrote the following:

“One of the most important components of any special needs department is the sense of belonging that it creates or restores for the student. Being diagnosed as an LD student isolated me from the greater community of students. Once I got involved with the Special Needs Department and accessed the tools I needed to work with my learning disabilities, I no longer felt isolated. In fact, I was now a member of two communities, the supportive special needs community and the competitive greater student body.”

It's About Belonging is a painting which illustrates these feelings for me. The boat in the extreme foreground of the painting was intended to be a metaphorical rendering of me, or any other LD student, before they join the Special Needs community, represented by the boats in the background. The boat in the foreground could also be read as the LD student, having gained the necessary tools, now a little more enlightened, excelling ahead of the others. In either case, the boat in the foreground is a little different in shape and reflection from the others, but strong, bright and beautiful.”

I. The LOTF Approach

“I am thankful for having the assistance for the first time in my life. It has been acknowledged that I have a problem with learning like other people do. When you are younger you always feel that you are stupid, but you’re really not. You just learn differently.”

Pilot student quote

I.1. A brief overview of methodology

Over the past five years, The Learning Opportunities Task Force successfully collected and analyzed a significant body of findings on effective post-secondary practices to support students with learning disabilities.

As described under the research heading below, in the first year (1997-1998), the LOTF Consulting Team assembled a considerable collection of information, specifically:

- C baseline information from students, staff, faculty and administrators, about relevant policies and practices at Ontario’s colleges and universities;
- C surveys of current practices and claims of best practice from Canada, USA and western Europe;
- C consultations with some educators, policy makers, relevant organizations and adults with LD who were not in - and in some cases had never attended - post-secondary institutions.

Reports with analyses and conclusions for each of the above activities were used to shape the vision statement included in this report about ideal post-secondary practices and outcomes, and for the execution of a request for proposals inviting submissions from any interested college or university in the province, to participate in a time-limited, action-orientated and student-centred pilot venture.

Eight contracts, selected from a total of thirty five proposals and involving thirteen institutions were awarded to begin in the fall of 1998, in most cases for an anticipated four-year time span. Annual renewal, however, depended on the abilities of the pilot projects to meet their goals. At the end of the second piloting year (1999-2000), one contract was terminated, and a more appropriate project initiated with and beyond this particular consortium. Thus our third piloting year (2000-2001) renewed seven contracts, involving ten of the original institutions, whose participation has extended to the end of the fourth piloting year (2001-2002).

LOTF, with the close cooperation of the students and staff at the sustained projects, amassed both objective and subjective information and gathered both quantitative and qualitative data from 1998 to 2002.

The reporting requirements imposed on the pilots were considerable, for two reasons:

1. to ensure that public monies were in fact being spent appropriately, and
2. to permit us to explore whether the impact of diverse provisions was useful for pilot students and, if so, in what contexts and under what circumstances.

An emphasis on action research was essential to fulfill the LOTF mandate for the development and provision of provincial direction. Therefore we avoided sole attention to fiscal accountability, which, in our opinion would have been insufficient to address mandate accountability. At the same time, we avoided both experimental and purely academic models of research, since these would have been insufficient to attend ethically to student needs, while also fulfilling our mandate.

Pilot students proved to be very helpful to the work of the LOTF by conscientiously completing and returning questionnaires. The questionnaires, the process for data collection, including guaranteeing student privacy and data entry are described below. The results of the data collection and analysis are reported in Appendix A, attached to this report, entitled **Summative analysis of the information obtained from LOTF student questionnaires during the period September, 1998 to September, 2002.**

In addition to financial reporting required several times each year, the pilots were also asked to participate in common data collection and program evaluation exercises over the four year period. These are described briefly below. In addition, the results of the pilot institutions' internal data collection activities are contained in Appendix B, **Review and analysis of the data obtained from the institutional tracking questionnaires for pilot activity between September 1998 and June, 2002,** attached to this report.

In the second year of pilot activity, it became necessary to introduce a rigorous and controlled process for determining student eligibility for pilot participation. The validation process is described in this report in the section entitled "Identification Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities"(section I.7.) This process is one of the factors which made the LOTF research project unique in the field of learning disabilities research. At the same time it contributed to the accountability and credibility mandates of the work of the pilots.

Each pilot project was responsible for crafting a unique program evaluation method that met generally accepted standards for evaluation design, and permitted that design to reflect the particularity of each pilot and its institutional and community contexts. Reporting guidelines were provided, and interim reports were required for formative program evaluation several times a year. A final summative report of program evaluation activities was received from each pilot project in June 2002. Each of these reports contained a concise executive summary in which the pilot institutions were asked to describe their summative key findings of their entire pilot experience as well as their observations and recommendations. These executive summaries have been collated and are attached to this report as Appendix C.

Throughout the piloting period, arrangements were made for at least seven site visits to the pilots by each project's primary consultant. At these site visits we always met with pilot students and the pilot's staff and almost always with senior administrators, and teaching faculty. The value of

these site visits was to supplement the essentially quantitative data obtained from the student questionnaires and the institutional tracking data with qualitative information. While the key findings and recommendations arising from the LOTF's research are fully supported by statistical data obtained from students and the pilot institutions, they are also based in part on the experiences and observations of the LOTF consultants as they visited the pilot institutions from time to time.

The consultant to LOTF's Chairman, with comment from the Consulting Team, prepared cross-pilot reports on institutional tracking and student questionnaires, while the four primary consultants prepared site visit reports. Based on all reporting and consolidated financial reports, Task Force activity was also reported annually to an external LOTF advisory body ("Committee of Reference") and to the appropriate Ministry.

There was frequent interaction between the Consulting Team and pilot staff, usually during site visits but also at periodic inter-pilot meetings ("Roundtables"), annual conferences (especially those initiated by two LOTF pilots and continuing on a post-pilot basis, at Cambrian and Georgian Colleges), by e-mail and telephone. In addition, over the four piloting years, forty bulletins ("Communiques") were prepared for and distributed to the pilots, to ensure timely and standardized communication.

The combination of common and unique evaluation features; of data collection and analysis, and experiential information that was content analyzed; and of narrative reporting from each pilot with inter-pilot and consultant interchange, along with periodic special studies, together facilitated quick adjustments if and where problems were occurring. At the same time, LOTF also focussed on the rapid identification and reinforcement of successful pilot elements, with a possible view to dissemination to other post-secondary education institutions for post-pilot activities. Student-centred focus of program evaluation was also sustained in several ways, and further protected by the possibility of direct access to the LOTF office and the consultants, should students express a preference to communicate in that mode as well.

I.2. The preliminary research, 1997-98

In order to achieve the goal of the Learning Opportunities Task Force, i.e. to provide unprecedented 'real help' for Ontario students with learning disabilities, the LOTF Consulting and Research Team began its work by initiating quantitative surveys and qualitative interview-based research to identify existing barriers to successful post-secondary educational experiences for these students.

Although the consultants who embarked on this research were well aware of the significant differences between the university and college systems in terms of structure, governance and funding, they also knew that the needs of students with learning disabilities are essentially the same in both types of institutions. Therefore, a single research summary report was created containing key points from the two separate reports on colleges and universities. The research identified current practices within the post-secondary education sector to serve students with learning disabilities and the barriers that these students identified to the consultants as hampering their educational and personal success.

The research also resulted in recommendations for exemplary practices and outlined a vision for an ideal post-secondary education program designed to meet the identified needs and delivering much needed accommodations and supports to students with specific learning disabilities. The vision statement was adopted by the LOTF.

The research consisted of four interview-based components comprising qualitative research and several quantitative components. Each post-secondary institution received a questionnaire for distribution to all full time faculty. French and English versions were distributed in accordance with the institutions' designations. The distribution and response rate varied from institution to institution, with colleges responding in much higher numbers than universities. In fact, a number of universities chose not to participate in this stage of the process at all.

A second, different questionnaire was distributed to the staffs of the Special Needs Offices. Responses to this were received from almost all institutions. In addition, the two Provincial organisations of special needs personnel, IDIA (Inter-university Disability Issues Association) and CCDI (College Committee on Disability Issues) met several times with Dr. Stephenson, Chairman of the Task Force and the researchers.

The interview-based research, completed at all the colleges and most of the universities, was conducted by site visits and by telephone. The four primary groups who participated in these interviews were (1) students at all site visit locations, (2) senior and academic administrators, (3) teaching faculty, and (4) special needs staff. All participants were asked to identify the barriers that they felt existed for students with learning disabilities at their institution. In addition, many of them offered recommendations for or described current exemplary practices for students with learning disabilities within the post-secondary sector.

I.3. The research findings

This summary of the research findings is based on the information gathered from all participants, including tabulations of the survey data and content analyses of the qualitative data. Particular emphasis was granted to student experience and perspectives.

The following summarises the key points identified through the research:

1. All universities and colleges in Ontario reported that they provided services to students with learning disabilities through their Special Needs Offices. The staff of the Special Needs Offices were variously viewed as knowledgeable, supportive and caring to indifferent to being part of the problem.
2. There has been no formal evaluation of the work of the Special Needs Offices. Other than the statistical information provided to the Ministry of Education and Training at that time and now to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities on the numbers of students served by the special needs offices and a general description of the services provided, the institutions do not report on their work with students with learning disabilities.

3. There was quite limited research-based information available about what accommodations or support services work for whom.
4. All colleges and universities stated that they comply with their obligations under the Human Rights Code. Most have and had at that time a written special needs/accommodation policy, or at least a mission statement of intent. This statement or policy sometimes exists without Senate or Governing Board approval or any intrinsic institutional accountability mechanism. This sometimes means that it is not implemented by staff. The information about this policy was frequently not provided to high schools, to students or to faculty.
5. Based on the feed back provided by students and other information gathered, the institutions at that time could be divided into four categories in relation to their service delivery. These were:
 - a) poor or unacceptable service delivery, which was marked by indifference to student concerns, ineffective or token interventions, assembly line accommodation, inequitable services and a general depersonalisation;
 - b) insufficient service delivery marked by considerable barriers, hit-and-miss, uneven or unpredictable supports, problem-solving and accommodations;
 - c) supportive service delivery characterised by most students reporting solid, caring, effective supports in resolving or reducing barriers and individualised approaches to problem-solving and accommodations;
 - d) fully supportive service delivery pertaining to those situations where, in spite of there still being barriers, the students feel extremely well supported and were able to comment on their positive approaches to learning as well as enhanced self-respect.
6. Faculty responses to the surveys indicated an apparent willingness to learn and an openness to the idea that students with learning disabilities require special help. Some professors openly acknowledged that they are uncomfortable with their level of knowledge of how a learning disability is diagnosed; the reasons behind certain accommodation requests; and their own rights and responsibilities. At many institutions, however, there were a small number of extremely vocal faculty members who adamantly opposed the provision of academic accommodations. At universities, they often cited their right to academic freedom and freedom of speech to question the existence of learning disabilities. A minority of faculty at both types of institutions even questioned the rights of students who are “supposedly learning disabled” to attend university or college. Many of these faculty focussed on their own rights and justified their denial of requested accommodations to these students in the guise of fairness to all.
7. Where the institution reported senior administration support for students with special needs and the work of the Special Needs Office, the attitude of faculty and the services available to students with learning disabilities were significantly better, than at institutions without such support.

8. In focussing on barriers, it was surprising to note that special needs personnel tended to rank student based problems such as the lack of self-advocacy skills, inappropriate study/learning skills, inadequate understanding of and ability to explain their learning disabilities and inappropriate course choices as more significant than any institutional or faculty barriers. Faculty also noted that students with learning disabilities lacked the ability to adequately explain their condition and academic needs, and cited this as being a barrier both to believing that a learning disability exists, and to providing proper academic accommodations.
9. There was universal agreement that inadequate or incomplete documentation of having learning disabilities was a major barrier to student success. Assessments, where available, often failed to identify the student's strengths and weaknesses and how these effect learning. Consequently, assessments often do not provide information about appropriate accommodations. The fact that there are still no established and agreed upon criteria for what must be included in a learning disability assessment within the school system means that many students arrive with abysmal, inadequate, difficult to decipher assessment reports which may or may not actually diagnose a learning disability.
10. The greatest barriers cited by all groups interviewed were the lack of transitional support for students as they move from high school to college and university, coupled with the lack of compliance by school boards with their legislated mandate to identify and meet the needs of students with learning disabilities. Students are frequently unprepared for the more challenging academic environment of post-secondary education. They are often reluctant to disclose their learning disabilities, because of ostracism and negative stereotyping that they had experienced in their secondary schools, even if that meant that they cannot receive much needed accommodations in college or university.
11. The students who were interviewed presented an impassioned view of continuing personal difficulties in having their needs met, in spite of institutional claims of great progress. They sometimes expressed feelings of shame and embarrassment when dealing with faculty who expressed scepticism about their documented accommodation needs.
12. Student access to adequate funding support was frequently identified as another clear barrier within the post-secondary sector. This was and still is sometimes exacerbated by the need to modify course loads. The many changes during the past few years related to student loans and other funding available for post-secondary education and for students with disabilities are not adequately understood by many students or in some cases by the personnel in the institutions, whose job it is to help the students deal with these issues. In some institutions the level and type of service delivery was seen as being driven by the student's ability to pay rather than by his or her learning needs.

There were numerous recommendations received for exemplary practices. Based on these and the above findings, the researchers submitted the following recommendations to the Chairman of the Task Force:

1. That the pilot programmes implemented in September, 1998 be focussed on meeting and accommodating the needs of participating students with learning disabilities.
2. That any future decisions about post-secondary education for students with learning disabilities be based on the results of the LOTF research and the evaluation of the anticipated pilot projects.
3. That in addition to establishing a series of recommendations for exemplary practices, minimum service delivery standards for all post-secondary education institutions be developed, including provisions for monitoring and ensuring compliance.
4. That these standards be based upon a guarantee of adequate, predictable and sustained funding.
5. That these standards include recommendations for the work of the Special Needs Offices, including qualifications of special needs personnel, in order to ensure that students have access to consistent supports and services, should they move from one institution to another.
6. That the Task Force recommend to the (then) Ministry of Education and Training that accountability measures be introduced to ensure compliance by school boards and post-secondary education institutions with their legislated mandates for serving students with learning disabilities.
7. That the Task Force recommend to the (then) Ministry of Education and Training the establishment and implementation of transition planning and programming for all exceptional students and in particular those who have learning disabilities, as part of its current secondary school reform process.
8. That the Task Force recommend to the (then) Ministry of Education and Training that it review the issues raised by this research report, including, but not limited to, staffing and funding of post-secondary educational institutions, best practices within special needs offices and the availability and provision of professional development to staff within the institutions.
9. That the Task Force undertake or promote research into and make recommendations for appropriate action on key issues for students with learning disabilities, including, but not limited to: access to and portability of appropriate diagnostic assessments; funding supports; availability of training in learning and coping strategies, self awareness, self-advocacy skills and related life skills and a framework for determining and delivering needed individualised appropriate accommodations. All of these initiatives should include appropriate evaluation and accountability measures.

It is interesting to review the research findings and recommendations after four years of pilot activity and to compare them to the final key findings of the LOTF.

I.4. The LOTF vision statement

Students with specific learning disabilities are able to succeed in the post-secondary educational sector, provided that they have access to the key components which will allow them to reach their potential and achieve their goal. To determine what these key components are, the research team began by examining the needs of students with learning disabilities. Once these needs were identified, it was then appropriate to determine what supportive institutional and systemic components were required.

Based on the initial research, LOTF determined that indicators of success for students with learning disabilities in the post-secondary education sector are:

- (i) entry into an academic program of the student's choice, provided that the student meets standard entrance requirements;
- (ii) successfully meeting the essential requirements of the program, although the manner in which the student demonstrates mastery may be altered by academic accommodations, program modifications or the use of coping and compensatory strategies, but with no changes to standards or outcomes;
- (iii) graduation from the program of the student's choice;
- (iv) possessing the requisite skills to pass any licensing requirements, with appropriate accommodations, if needed, relating to the field of study or career that he or she has chosen;
- (v) being employment ready;
- (vi) being sufficiently job ready that he or she can advocate for any job accommodations that may be required in order to obtain and maintain employment.

The consultants commented further that some students with learning disabilities will go on to further education, in which case they need to be able to advocate for accommodations needed in an educational setting, instead of focussing on employment and job readiness. Given the level of unemployment among young people, the LOTF chose to state that while gainful employment upon graduation was desirable, it was not included as a realistic success indicator.

To facilitate successful entry into and completion of post-secondary education, students must have the following:

1. An adequate diagnosis of their learning disability, in accordance with the standards recommended by the Ontario Psychological Association, which includes an up-to-date description of functional skills, strengths and difficulties, recommendations for learning strategies and academic accommodations as well as a listing of useful coping and compensatory strategies.
2. It is important that the student understand all of the components mentioned above, such that he or she is "the expert" on his or her learning disabilities and what he or she will need in terms of modifications and accommodations, to be successful at college or university and beyond. This also calls for programming to assist students in learning how best to explain their learning needs.

3. Access to transition planning and programming, which ensures that the student is ready for post-secondary education, including the ability to select appropriate courses to meet his or her goals, in terms of interests, graduation and future employment.
4. Adequate levels of basic knowledge and skills (or suitable coping strategies to compensate for any gaps) to be able to use the resources available in the post-secondary sector, without having to rely on ongoing remediation or 1:1 tutoring throughout the period of post-secondary education.
5. An understanding of his or her learning style, metacognitive strategies and potential.
6. A knowledge and understanding of and access to accommodations, assistive devices and adaptive technology which will enable him or her to achieve. This would include knowing the situations in which they may or may not require the use of certain accommodations or coping strategies.
7. Ongoing monitoring and tailoring of the type and amount of academic accommodations provided, with the intent of teaching each student the limits of his or her disability. At present, many students have not learned to be efficient test takers and so may need to ask for a greater amount of assistance than their learning disabilities would really call for.
8. Access to the necessary support system to deal with non-academic issues, i.e. access to counselling around decision making, problem solving, life skills and training in skills such as disclosure, self-advocacy, reframing, etc. Developing a Learning and Employment Assessment Profile (LEAP) would be a useful step in this regard. (LEAP is a self-help manual written by Eva Nichols for the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario to assist adults with learning disabilities. It is available in both English and French.)
9. Access to a useful academic support system such as mentors, role models and academic advisors as well as the more usual accommodation related support system, such as tutors, note takers, readers and computer support staff.
10. Access to individualized, modified and small group learning opportunities, such as small classes, tutorials, seminars, well staffed reading and writing labs, well staffed math and computer labs, and being taught by faculty, teaching and research assistants who have some knowledge and understanding of learning disabilities and how this particular student with a learning disability learns.
11. Access to a suitable and flexible level of individualized funding support, such that he or she can focus on academic progress, without constantly having to worry about money. Such funding must enable the student to pay for any accommodations and supports which have a cost attached to them as well as being able to carry a manageable course load, without jeopardizing their current or future indebtedness.
12. Access to appropriate co-operative education or workplace experiences, whenever these are part of the usual course of study.

13. Access to appropriate future planning and an exit strategy, based on his or her goals and prospects, rather than a generic system-wide approach.

Although this vision statement was primarily student focussed, it also included, for further discussion, recommendations for institutional components and systemic changes, that would facilitate the necessary changes for students with learning disabilities. However, the primary purpose of the vision statement was to assist the LOTF in selecting the pilot projects for funding.

I.5. Putting the work of LOTF into a legislative context

While the LOTF is an arms' length government funded initiative, with the available funding providing an incentive for participation by colleges and universities, it is still important to examine the legislative context in which these institutions and their faculty and staff were asked to enhance their services and meet the needs of their students with learning disabilities.

For the past twenty years Ontario has had in place two very important, relevant and effective pieces of legislation.

The first of these is the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, which mandates (among other things) the elimination of discrimination and the establishment of appropriate services and accommodations for persons with disabilities including learning disabilities. This *Code* is augmented by the *Policy and Guidelines for Assessing the Accommodation Requirements of Persons with Disabilities*, which includes a requirement that appropriate accommodations must be provided for persons with disabilities in a manner which most respects their dignity and which is based on their stated needs. Individuals and institutions may only deny such accommodations, if the accommodation represents "undue hardship" for the individual or institution. Undue hardship may be claimed on the grounds of excessive costs, as defined in the Guidelines and/or endangering the safety of individuals or groups. In an educational setting, undue hardship may be claimed on the grounds of maintaining the integrity of the programme or the institution. However, it is important to note that the traditionally cited issue of "academic freedom" for faculty is not enough to claim undue hardship and deny accommodations to students with disabilities.

The Ontario Human Rights Code draws its mandate from the Canadian Constitution and the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, where protection from discrimination on the grounds of disability is included with protection for age, gender, language, religion, ethnic origin and sexual orientation. The inclusivity of protection against discrimination on multiple grounds does not permit a negative systemic response to any member of any one of these protected groups. This is the strength of this legislation.

In other jurisdictions where there is disability specific legislation in place, such as the *Americans with Disabilities Act* in the USA, the Disability Discrimination Acts in the UK and in Australia, it is possible to amend the legislation related to persons with disabilities without impacting the lives of other equity seeking groups. This separation can and has occasionally resulted in negative outcomes for persons with all or sometimes one particular disability. For example, the results of the famous class action suit against Boston University created significant problems for students with learning disabilities and established a negative precedent for the accommodation of

students with learning disabilities within the post-secondary sector. In Ontario such a decision is much less likely to arise. In fact, the Supreme Court of Canada in several recent judgements has strengthened the systemic obligation, both Federally and Provincially, to support and accommodate persons with disabilities. These include *Eldridge et al v. the Attorney General of British Columbia*, 1997 and *BCPSERC v. BCGSEU (Meiorin)* 1999.

The second component of the legislative context in which the LOTF embarked on its work is the special education provisions of the Ontario *Education Act*. The *Act* mandates the provision of appropriate special education programmes and services to **all** students with special needs. This legislation has been recognized as one of the most progressive in the English speaking world. On the basis of this legislation, approximately 8% of Ontario's elementary and secondary school students receive special education services and programming. More than 50% of these students are identified as having learning disabilities. However, in spite of the very progressive legislation, many students "fall through the cracks", when it comes to appropriate identification, programming and accommodation.

It has become clear that good legislation does not automatically result in appropriate services, supports or programming. As a result, LOTF has found it necessary to comment to the Ministry of Education on the gaps in implementation of the legislation on a regular and ongoing basis. In addition, LOTF also communicated directly with all school boards and secondary schools in the Province, letting them know about the pilot projects, LOTF's mandate and also the requirements for post-secondary eligibility for students with learning disabilities. Regrettably, there was virtually no acknowledgement or response from the school boards.

All the pilot institutions have included transition support for incoming students in their project offerings. This included communication with school boards and schools within their immediate catchment area. While this has resulted in some improvement in the documentation of learning disabilities for some students in some schools, there has been no noticeable Province-wide systemic gain in this area.

The 1992 *Report of the Ontario Interministerial Working Group on Learning Disabilities* identified that people with learning disabilities faced significant discrimination in terms of their access to certain Government funded and mandated services and supports. The report stated that "inequality was the current reality for people with learning disabilities in Ontario".

That report, based on four year's work between 1988 and 1992, primarily focussed on the status of adults with learning disabilities. This focus included post-secondary education, access to vocational rehabilitation, training and certain employment related funding and support provided by the Government to persons with disabilities. The report noted that the level of discrimination faced by so many people with learning disabilities in Ontario was due to a large extent to the lack of knowledge and understanding of learning disabilities among service providers, including educators. Further, that there was significant skepticism about learning disabilities being a "real disability", in spite of its inclusion in the definition of disabilities within the *Human Rights Code*.

This was (and to some extent still is) of particular concern in the university sector, where many faculty members still believe, erroneously as we know, that learning disabilities must be synonymous with low intelligence.

In response to these findings and the general level of concern related to the post-secondary sector's responsiveness to the needs of students with disabilities, the Government of Ontario established a process for funding the Special Needs Offices of all post-secondary educational institutions. This funding is separate from the funding of colleges and universities in general and must be tracked separately. Regrettably, there are no comprehensive meaningful accountability measures in place to track these services or allocation of funds. All institutions report that between 40 and 50% of their special needs students are students with learning disabilities and that students with learning disabilities are consistently the largest single group of students with disabilities served by their institutions. However, many of the institutions have also claimed that, in spite of their legal obligations under human rights legislation, they have not been able to provide some of their students, especially those with complex and/or severe learning disabilities, with the full range of services, supports and accommodations that they need in order to be successful in their post-secondary educational studies.

The establishment of the Learning Opportunities Task Force together with the work of the pilot institutions has addressed these concerns in a credible and accountable manner. At the same time the two professional student service organizations, CCDI and IDIA, have also advocated for systemic changes, which will allow their institutions to meet their legislated human rights mandates more effectively and serve their student with disabilities more appropriately. The initiation of the Enhanced Services Projects at all publicly funded colleges and universities as of September, 2002, the result of LOTF's interim recommendations to the Government, has extended quality provisions even further.

During the past four years, LOTF has undertaken several systemic advocacy tasks on behalf of students with learning disabilities. These have included responses to the consultations on the education funding formula, education and disability issues initiated by the Human Rights Commission and others.

Throughout its existence, LOTF participated fully in all available discussions and consultations related to the introduction of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA)*. It was LOTF's recommendation and expectation that the Government would introduce meaningful and accountable legislation that would offer protection to all persons with disabilities and which would fully complement and supplement the rights guaranteed to persons with learning disabilities under the *Human Rights Code*.

The current ODA, in our opinion, will not achieve these goals, partly because it appears to focus almost exclusively on physical access in its definition of accessibility, it only applies to the

public sector and because there are too many loopholes in its compliance measures. There are no regulatory directions about the implementation of those components of the ODA that have received proclamation. The recently released guidelines for the ODA Accessibility Plans within the post-secondary education sector do nothing to address LOTF's concerns and in their current state will not achieve what is needed to accommodate students with learning disabilities in the

colleges and universities of Ontario, in spite of the fact that this population makes up close to 50% of the total population of students with disabilities. This is the rationale for the recommendations related to the ODA in the listing of LOTF recommendations, flowing from LOTF's key findings.

I.6. Initiating the pilot projects

After its preliminary research and review period, the LOTF invited proposals from every community college and university in Ontario. The institutions were not given explicit directions for the program and project components that the Task Force was interested in funding. Instead, they were told to propose projects which would contribute towards meeting the LOTF's mandate and meet the needs of their students with specific learning disabilities. All interested parties were informed that to be eligible for participation in the newly created pilot projects, pilot students must satisfy the following diagnostic/definitional criteria for learning disabilities:

- C learning disabilities are neurologically based information processing deficits;
- C they occur in individuals with average to above average intelligence;
- C they typically cause a discrepancy between the individual's potential and achievement, although they should not be diagnosed purely on the basis of such a discrepancy;
- C they are a life-long condition, manageable with appropriate supports and direction;
- C they are to be diagnosed by a registered psychologist or an appropriately qualified professional, using a battery of tests.

The proposals were reviewed by the consultants as well as an external committee of experts in the field, the Task Force's Committee of Reference. (For a list of these individuals, please see the back of this document.) The 35 proposals received from the 47 potentially eligible post-secondary educational institutions were reviewed in a "blind" format, i.e. with all identifying information removed. On the basis of further review, research and clarification, LOTF established 8 pilot projects in 13 post-secondary educational institutions.

These eight pilot projects were as follows:

- C **Expanding Horizons: Transition to College for Students with Learning Disabilities** and a summer orientation program at Cambrian College in Sudbury;
- C **Learning Opportunities Program** at Conestoga College in Kitchener-Waterloo;
- C **Millennium Centre** at Fanshawe College in London;
- C **Centre for Access and Learning Disability Services** at Georgian College in Barrie, Orillia and Owen Sound;
- C **Learning Opportunities Program** at the University of Guelph;
- C **Project ADVANCE** summer orientation program and **mature student PATH** program at York University in Toronto;
- C **Virtual Centre of Excellence for Learning Disability Integration**, English consortium: Trent University in Peterborough, Loyalist College in Belleville, Nipissing University and Canadore College in North Bay;
- C **Reussir ses Etudes Collegial - Troubles D'Apprentissage**, French consortium: College Boreal in Sudbury, La Cite Collegiale in Ottawa, College des Grands Lacs in Toronto and its environs.

Students first entered these pilot projects in September, 1998.

After two years it became clear that the French language project, delivered at three French language community colleges was not meeting its mandate, due primarily to the lack of adequate assessment tools for the diagnosis of specific learning disabilities. As a result this pilot was discontinued. To address the problems demonstrated by the Francophone project, the Task Force has since embarked on the development, standardization and norming of a French language diagnostic battery for the assessment of learning disabilities. This is the French Language Assessment Project.

The remaining seven projects, involving six community colleges and four universities located throughout Ontario, continued their work into 2002. One pilot, the one located at the University of Guelph, is completing its mandate during the current academic year and will report on its final findings in the summer of 2003.

During the past four years 1242 students who met the very rigorous LOTF participation criteria received pilot services and participated in the pilot projects' evaluation. This made the LOTF project the largest applied research project of its kind in the learning disabilities field. The pilot projects selected were diverse in their content, their specific program offerings, locations and languages of instruction. It was felt that such diversity would enable the Task Force, through its ongoing programme evaluation and tracking processes, to determine what works well for post-secondary students with specific learning disabilities. However, in order to achieve some consistency in their evaluation measures, they all utilized the LOTF's guidelines for program evaluation including the student success indicators, contained in the LOTF vision statement.

I.7. Identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities

All pilot institutions determined student eligibility for participation through the rigorous diagnostic validation criteria introduced by the Task Force. This process is described below, while the full validation document is included in the accompanying technical report.

The pilot institutions' reported experience throughout the four years of pilot project implementation confirmed early indicators that many students (over 80% of the pilot students) arrive at college or university with inadequate documentation of their learning disabilities. This is in spite of the mandated identification and special education service provision of Ontario's Education Act.

Others, although they may have some relevant documentation, cannot satisfy the expected eligibility criteria for participation in the pilot project, without undergoing further assessment. The students themselves consistently indicated to the Task Force consultants that in many cases they had only quite limited knowledge and understanding of their learning disabilities or of the impact on various aspects of their lives that those learning disabilities have now and may continue to have in the future.

It was due to these observations and the accountability and credibility mandates that the Task Force and the pilot projects were expected to meet that it became necessary for the Task Force to develop a process, whereby the eligibility of students to participate in the LOTF funded pilot projects could be validated.

It is important to note that the primary purpose of this process related to ensuring that all participating students would meet the Task Force's rigorous eligibility criteria for identifying students with specific learning disabilities. Since this was an applied research project rather than just the review and observation of service delivery initiatives, the criteria for eligibility were more rigorous than is generally the case in the identification and diagnostic process.

The validation process was **not** directed towards the elimination or modification of the "learning disability" label, as it is used and applied by appropriately qualified professionals. We have ample evidence that false delicacy on the part of the school system to avoid labelling has a terrible impact on students with learning disabilities. It is well known that identifying terminology is an essential component of ensuring the provision of ongoing appropriate programming, services and accommodations to students with disabilities. Therefore, the concern is not the "label" itself, but rather whether it is accurate and is accompanied by recommendations for matching appropriate interventions.

Nor was the intent to eliminate or reduce the level of service provision by the Special Needs Offices (or Offices for Students with Disabilities) of all universities and colleges to their SLD students designation. The process was designed solely to ensure the validity and the accountability of the pilot population selection.

In determining the eligibility of a student for the pilot project, pilot institutions were expected from their second year of functioning to ensure that the student's current assessment met the following adequacy criteria.

C A qualified professional has conducted the evaluation.

The only professionals who are permitted bylaw to diagnose a Learning Disability are: Registered Psychologists, Registered Psychological Associates to whom the ability to diagnose has been delegated and Psychological Associates supervised by a Registered Clinical Psychologist. Please note that not all psychologists, even those who have a PhD degree, are registered with the College of Psychologists.

C Testing is current.

For individuals under age 18, this generally means the testing occurred within the past 3 years. Testing performed after age 18 is usually considered adequate in terms of recency, regardless of the current age of the student. However, all testing must meet the criteria outlined here.

C The documentation is comprehensive.

This MUST include all of the following components unless a rationale is provided for why certain components were omitted. For instance, “math was not assessed because this has always been an area of strength”, or “memory does not appear to play a role in his underachievement and was therefore not tested”.

- C **Report includes information about educational history**
- C **Report includes information on medical/developmental history**
- C **Report includes appropriate measures of aptitude/cognitive ability**

This last item called for testing using one or more of the following testing instruments: WAIS-R or WAIS-III, WJPB-R or WJ-III Cognitive, Stanford-Binet (4th ed), Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test. In determining what tests to use, professionals will rely on the technical adequacy, reliability and validity of the tests. The professional judgement of the evaluator is a key component in determining the tests which are used.

- C **Overall intellectual ability falls in the average range or above.**

For the purposes of the LOTF’s research project, average was determined as an obtained Full Scale IQ score of **90** or better. It may be indicated as being at the 25th percentile or higher. If the score was less than 90, but the student is diagnosed with a learning disability, an explanation MUST be included of why the obtained IQ score is not indicative of actual ability. Many psychologists will use the one standard deviation from the mean criterion for defining average I.Q. for the purposes of diagnosing learning disabilities. That means that they will indicate that a Full Scale I.Q. of 85 is the required (low) average score. For the purposes of this project because we were dealing with students who are attending post-secondary education, we chose to use the higher figure of 90. As noted, however, psychologists did find from time to time that certain individuals with learning disabilities fell below this cut off due to severe discrepancies in subtest scores.

- C **Report includes appropriate measures of academic achievement.**

Many achievement tests are available, such as the WIAT or WJPB-R or WJ-III Achievement. In addition, specific tests of academic skills could be used in combination, such as Test of Written Spelling (TOWS), Nelson-Denny Reading Skills Test, Canadian Adult Achievement Test-D, Test of Written Language-2 (TOWL-2) etc. could be employed.

Please note that the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT) is **NOT** a comprehensive measure of achievement and therefore is not useful as the primary measure of achievement.

- C **Report includes appropriate measures of information processing.**

This includes tests such as: Detroit Test of Learning Aptitudes (DTLA-3 or DTLA-A), Wechsler Memory Scale (® or III), WJPB speed of information processing subtests, or tests of executive or motor functioning.

- C **Evidence that a significant discrepancy exists between aptitude and the actual scores obtained on tests measuring achievement *or* information processing.**

The discrepancy may be calculated in a number of ways:

- C A discrepancy of 1.5 standard deviations (SD) or greater between Full Scale IQ and obtained achievement score.
- C A discrepancy of 1.5 SD or greater between one of Verbal Scale IQ, Performance Scale IQ or derived factor scores ONLY if evidence exists to justify the use of these, rather than Full Scale IQ, as the measure of intellectual potential.
- C A discrepancy equal to 1.5 SD or greater using a regression formula for calculating the significance of a difference.

(Whatever the method used, a 1.5 SD must be clearly demonstrated between scores on tests of aptitude and actual achievement **or** information processing measures. Remember, however, that all the other criteria must also be true in order to ascertain eligibility for the pilot projects.)

- C **Evidence that other possible explanations for the noted discrepancy have been ruled out** (such as emotional, psychological, cultural/linguistic, attentional, motivational, lack of appropriate education, health problems, etc.)
- C **An indication of how the observed pattern of abilities and achievement demonstrate the presence of a specific disability.**

For instance, it was not sufficient to say that someone is a very slow reader. Evidence from the report must substantiate the underlying processing difficulty that **causes** the person to read slowly. For example, *“Sue has great difficulty associating symbols with the sounds they make. Visual memory is also substantially below expected levels. As such, automatization of the reading process is not complete, and she has difficulty identifying, recognizing, and sounding out words when reading. This slows down the reading process.”*

- C **Documentation includes a specific diagnosis.**

References to learning styles, learning differences, academic problems, underachievement, learning delays, etc., are **NOT** diagnoses. The evaluator should ideally use direct language for the diagnosis, avoiding indirect terminology such as “suggests” or “is indicative of”. If the data clearly indicate that there is no learning disability present as the primary reason for the student’s learning problems, the conclusion should include such a statement.

Following the submission of the validation information by the pilot institutions, the Learning Opportunities Task Force implemented an external validation process for supporting this initiative. During the fall of 1999, all pilot institutions completed validation checklists for their pilot students, who consented to such disclosure. The checklists did not identify the student by name. The validation results were provided to the LOTF consultants. LOTF hired two external validators, one English speaking and one English/French bilingual, who were legally qualified to diagnose learning disabilities in the Province of Ontario. These two individuals reviewed the validation checklists and the summary sheets for the pilot institutions. Subsequently, they visited all the pilot institutions to carry out a review of an appropriate number of randomly selected student files, again reliant on student consents, to validate the adequacy of the process, providing overview reports to the pilots and the Task Force.

This unique process was time consuming and at times difficult for the pilot institutions who were simultaneously delivering services to their pilot students. However, the overall results have supported the validity of the process and the accuracy of the Task Force data and findings.

I.8. Student numbers

All pilot institutions were asked to provide their primary consultant with annual reports on the validation status of their participating pilot students. The students were categorized as follows:

- C eligible, i.e. fully satisfying the LOTF validation criteria;
- C ineligible, i.e., not meeting the validation criteria;
- C pending, i.e. still awaiting an assessment, re-assessment or evaluation and eligibility determination by the institution's psychologist, psychological associate or other professional staff.

The data received from the ten pilot institutions were added to the existing data base. This enabled the Consulting Team to ensure that the reports that were prepared for the Chairman of the Learning Opportunities Task Force and the Committee of Reference and were submitted to the Ministry were based on data obtained from students who were eligible or were anticipated to become eligible for participation. If a student's eligibility status changed from "pending" to "ineligible", the questionnaires received from that student were removed from the main data base and were retained in a separate file.

In addition to the above three categories, students participating in the short term summer programs offered at Cambrian College and York University were exempted from the validation process.

During the first year of pilot activity, students were not expected to participate in a formal validation process. Once the formal validation process was introduced in the second year of the pilot projects, all students who continued their pilot project participation into the second year participated in the validation process. Also, some of the pilots retroactively pursued the validation determination of their first year students, even if those students did not continue into the second year. As a result, there are only 138 "first year" (i.e., pre-validation) students included in the database.

The number of ineligible students involved for at least some of the time with the pilots, but not meeting the validation criteria, was 302. For students who were listed as "ineligible", there were a number of possible reasons reported for this ineligibility. These included the following:

- C the student did not satisfy the LOTF requirement for average intelligence, (25th percentile)
- C the student did not demonstrate the requisite discrepancy between potential/ability and performance/achievement, (1.5 SD)
- C there was another more appropriately determined reason for the difficulties demonstrated by the student, e.g., another primary disabling condition such as ADHD, cerebral palsy, etc.,
- C the student chose not to proceed with the validation process,

- C the student's academic difficulties were not due to any disability in spite of the fact that many of these students were identified as either LD or as having a communication exceptionality in the secondary school system.

On the basis of the above criteria, questionnaires from the following number of students are included in the database:

C	eligible students	987
C	first year students who did not continue	138
C	summer students exempted from the validation process	117

This means that the database currently contains valid information received from a total of **1242 pilot students**. This number is certainly adequate to enable the LOTF to draw statistically meaningful conclusions and make appropriate recommendations for future action, which may be extrapolated as useful to students with specific learning disabilities throughout post-secondary education.

A note about the demographic data

Although there is no other study available with such a large number of students who have learning disabilities, it is important to note certain limitations related to the representativeness of the pilot student sample. This is due to the fact that most of the pilot institutions primarily serve a non-urban non-immigrant population. Other than York University's PATH project, none of the pilot projects were located in the largest urban centres of Ontario, i.e., the Greater Toronto Area, Ottawa or Hamilton.

Eighty percent of Ontario's population report English as their first language, with 6% reporting French as their mother tongue and the remaining 14% reporting "other" first languages. Of the pilot students at all pilot institutions over the four years of piloting 92% of the students reported that English was their first language. Four percent in total reported French as their first language, but this declined to 1% after the Francophone pilot was discontinued. It is important to note that the York PATH population confirmed the expected linguistic variation, with 16% of the students reporting a first language other than English or French.

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that while the most recent census data states that 2.4% of Ontario's population are Aboriginal, 5.3% of the pilot students self-identified as Aboriginal.

The last demographic statistical variation of note is that the pilot student population was made up of 46.5% females and 53.5% males. This almost evenly balanced gender distribution is substantially different from the incidence rates for learning disabilities reported by the school system, where males vastly outnumber females. However, other post-secondary studies looking at this population also show a much greater gender balance than is the case in the school system.

None of the above negates the value of the LOTF findings. However, it is important that further research be done to address the long term implications of these demographic factors.

I.9. Evaluation process

Programme evaluation was a key part of the Task Force's work. It consisted of gathering and analysing both qualitative and quantitative information, obtained from a number of sources. The purpose of all programme evaluation activities was to determine whether:

- C the pilot institutions had been providing more effective and substantially different, preferably enhanced programs, services and supports to their students with specific learning disabilities than had been the case prior to the establishment of each pilot project at the host institution;
- C the students reported noticeable improvements in their learning environment and identified individual successes over the period of their participation in the pilot project;
- C the students and pilot staff reported individual and institutional progress towards the achievement of both student and institutional success and systemic changes, which were identified by the LOTF in the initial vision statement; and
- C the funds spent resulted in meaningful change, a consistent achievement of the student success indicators and progress towards the mandate of the Task Force.

I.10. Student questionnaires

In order to gather information from pilot students, the Consulting Team developed and was using three different types of student questionnaires. These were:

- C the intake questionnaire, which was distributed to every pilot student within 2 to 4 weeks of becoming part of a pilot project;
- C the progress questionnaire, which each pilot student was invited to complete and return at least once a year and at least three months after completing the intake questionnaire; and
- C the exit questionnaire, which was given to every student once he or she was preparing to leave the pilot project, though not necessarily the pilot institution or post-secondary education.

In addition, where students did not complete an exit questionnaire, the pilot institution's staff were asked to send in a very much briefer proxy exit form about the departing student's involvement with the pilot project.

The information gathered from these questionnaires was supplemented by the anecdotal information provided by students during the focus group meetings, when the consultants visited the pilot institutions at least once a year.

The purpose of these questionnaires was to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data and information about the pilot students, their opinions about their experiences as pilot students and their recommendations collectively. This information was key to the reports and recommendations developed by the consultants and submitted through the Task Force to the Government of Ontario.

The student questionnaires did not carry identifying information. Once distributed and completed, they were returned to the pilot institution in a sealed envelope, which guaranteed the students significant privacy. The sealed questionnaires were sent to the consultants for review

and coding. From them, they were forwarded to the Task Force office for data entry. Data analysis on the basis of the questions asked by the members of the Consulting Team was then done by the consultant who was responsible for developing the database.

The summative analysis of the information obtained from the student questionnaires during the period of September 1998 to September 2002 is attached to this report as Appendix A. That report is based on the following number and types of student questionnaires:

Type of questionnaire	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 (includes year 5 for York's summer program)	Total
Intake	285	263	266	155	969
Summer intake	(included in the above number)	26	31	40 (includes 2001 and 2002)	97
Progress	159	254	331	247	991
Exit	96	81	99	225	501
Summer exit	(included in the above number)	25	29	39 (2001 and 2002)	93
Exit proxy	-	24	129	273	426

This is a total of 3077 student questionnaires obtained from 1242 students. Copies of the questionnaires are included in the LOTF Technical Report.

The topics covered in Appendix A are as follows:

- C An overview of the types and numbers of student questionnaires covered by this report, completed by eligible and exempted-from-validation students
- C Basic demographic data for pilot students who entered the pilot projects during the past four years, met or were exempted from the validation criteria and completed intake questionnaires
- C Student funding issues
- C Information and data about the pilot students' studies at the pilot institutions
- C The value of the pilots to responding students
- C Previous schooling and related special education experiences reported by pilot students

- C Self-awareness and self-advocacy skills as reported by the pilot institutions and by the pilot students
- C Accommodations available and utilized within the post-secondary educational sector
- C Utilization of the pilot project components
- C Pilot students' future goals
- C Leaving the pilots: data from the exit questionnaires and the proxy exit forms
- C Looking at the summer orientation programs at Cambrian College and York University
- C Conclusion

While some of the key information obtained from the analysis of student data is included in this report, readers are urged to read the complete student data report, presented as Appendix A. This will ensure that they will understand the LOTF's decision to place such great importance on student feed back.

I.11. Institutional tracking questionnaires

Twice each year the pilot institutions were asked to fill out an institutional tracking questionnaire. These questionnaires, nine in total, provided the Task Force with both quantitative and qualitative information about the work of the pilot institutions.

A consolidated report containing a review and analysis of the data obtained from the institutional tracking data for pilot activity from September 1998 to June 2002 is attached to this report as Appendix B. It summarizes the data provided by the pilot institutions about their activities, the numbers of students they worked with directly, demographic data about the students, the services the pilot institutions provided and the students' utilization of program components. In some cases, the pilot institutions were asked the same questions as the students. This permitted a

balanced interpretation of responses to several subjective questions and enabled comparisons of student and staff reports about program component utilization rates.

The topics covered in the consolidated institutional tracking report, Appendix B, covering the period of September 1998 to May 31, 2002, are as follows:

- C Student numbers
 - C pilot enrolments
 - C pilot exits
 - C validation status
 - C diagnosis and documentation
 - C student questionnaires - distribution and return data
 - C referrals to the pilots

- C incidence rates
- C Student demographic data
 - C gender distribution
 - C course load
 - C other relevant demographic information
 - C categories of learning disabilities
- C Program components and their utilization
 - C assessments
 - C self-awareness and self-advocacy
 - C accommodations
 - C program component utilization
- C Conclusion

Similarly to the student data, some of the above components are described in this report. For example, the program components that were offered by the pilot institutions are described briefly within this report. However, in order to obtain a complete picture of the work of the LOTF and the pilot institutions, readers are once again urged to read the appended full report, Appendix B. A copy of the institutional tracking questionnaire used by the pilots throughout the piloting period is included in the Technical report.

I.12. Program evaluation

The projects were evaluated on an annual basis. Funding renewal was dependent on a number of factors, including a close review of regular interim progress and program evaluations, financial information and the rate of student satisfaction. In their reports, the pilot institutions described how they provided, tracked and evaluated the services, supports and accommodations to their eligible students in the manner that was approved in their annual business plan. The pilot institutions had to meet the reporting and other accountability related requirements of the Task Force in a timely and appropriate manner.

Each pilot institution designed and implemented its own internal program evaluation, consonant with its unique context, original and evolving institutional culture and pilot goals. LOTF provided a guideline for each evaluation cycle to ensure that each institution reported consistently on certain specified activities and project components. At the end of the fourth year of pilot activities, each institution submitted a summative tracking and evaluation report on its activities throughout the life of the pilot project. Although the University of Guelph is continuing its pilot activities for a fifth year, its primary evaluation of the program components has been completed. However, the institution will continue to track student participation and progress for the fifth year.

The executive summaries of these reports have been collated and are attached to this report as Appendix C. The guideline setting out LOTF's requirements for these reports is included in the technical report.

I.13. Pilot project components

In accordance with their original proposals, the ten pilot institutions delivered diverse services in somewhat differing modes. The purpose of the program evaluation was, at least in part, a determination of whether these different modes essentially led to the same outcomes or not. Two institutions' pilots were best described as **programs**, as they contained core and mandatory features beyond assessment and self-advocacy training, as well as optional elements. The other pilots provided an array of **services**, among which students made a selection in accordance with their specific disability, academic and developmental needs, their personal circumstances, and guidance from pilot staff. Over the four years of piloting, the pilot institutions modified their provisions based on student feedback and both internal and Task Force evaluations.

All of Ontario's publicly funded colleges and universities receive provincial funding dedicated to offsetting some of the institutions' costs for their offices for students with disabilities. The pilot institutions receive additional funds targeted to the Task Force mandate and the specific provision of enhanced or unique services and programs for eligible and interested students whose learning disabilities diagnoses have been validated, as outlined above.

It was therefore crucial to ensure that the pilot components and modes of delivering services by the pilot projects were in fact distinct from those routinely offered by the standard offices for students with disabilities. In the tracking of student usage rates of each pilot's components, it became evident that certain components were used more frequently by pilot students, some of whom rarely used other components. In addition, a small number of pilot students were making little use of any pilot opportunities in several projects.

The Task Force therefore helped the pilots refine their provisions, and all had, by their second year, formulated some mechanism to ensure that students would make sufficient use of the pilot to warrant their continued inclusion as pilot students. Those who were not interested in or unable to make commitments to a minimum participation level could be well served through the institution's generic special needs office, while the more expensive pilot components were streamlined, and better tailored to pilot student need and usage patterns. Other features of formative program evaluation were also helpful in thus refining program components.

The second year was also a period of consolidation and refinement for program modifications leading to greater consistency, which allowed for better tracking of student usage. We have included below a description of the major pilot components, offered by some, many and in some cases all pilot institutions.

There were four components that were common to all the pilots. These were:

- C assessment for learning disabilities, including related student follow-up;
- C self-awareness and self-advocacy training;
- C training in learning and metacognitive strategies, offered by learning strategists with expertise in both learning disabilities and the field of learning strategies, and
- C access to adaptive technology and other similar accommodations, which are selected to match the students' strengths and needs.

Throughout the piloting period it was obvious that the students valued the following program components, more than any others. These were:

- C an appropriate diagnostic assessment of the student's learning disabilities;
- C access to the supports that can be provided by an appropriately qualified and knowledgeable learning strategist, including clarification of the academic implications of the student's diagnostic assessment and the development and implementation of suitable accommodations and learning strategies that enable the students to achieve their goals;
- C access to the services and accommodations made possible through the work of an assistive technologist, who is knowledgeable about learning disabilities and the ways in which the impact of learning disabilities may be ameliorated through the use of assistive technology.

The lack of access to adequate diagnostic assessments by students with learning disabilities is discussed at some lengths in the section of this report identifying the LOTF's key findings, recommendations, ongoing activities and legacies. Therefore, there is no need to cover this again in this section. Suffice it to say that access to diagnostic assessments and an appropriate explanation and utilization of the assessment findings and implications are the most important first step for students with learning disabilities to realize their potential and success within their post-secondary education. All other components depend on this.

The Enhanced Services Fund, announced by the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities in February, 2002 for implementation in September, 2002 was established on the basis of the above findings. For a description of this initiative, please see section III.2. of this report.

In addition to the above components, pilot institutions offered the following to their pilot students:

- C **assistive technology** (AT) support, with particular emphasis on computer support, usually provided in dedicated computer labs. This is augmented by the presence of assistive technologists who are skilled in AT **and** in working with students with specific learning disabilities. This component, the dedicated computer lab and the staffing, had emerged as highly valued by most pilot students. While there was some variation in service delivery of this component, all pilots had enhanced their provisions in this area. Students generally found it more helpful to have access to dedicated space, rather than work stations in a more generic computer lab. All the pilots developed expertise in supporting students in utilizing technology to help them compensate for the impact of their learning disabilities. In addition to in-house activities, all pilots offered community open house events as well as professional development to teachers in their local school boards.
- C **specialized academic credit** courses and **college success** courses were usually available only to pilot students. In some cases these were also accessed by a small number of other students with learning disabilities. These included adapted English college courses, delivered in distinctly different ways, and trans-disciplinary courses, usually credited as part of the colleges' requirements for credits in general education (liberal arts options) or, at the university level typically linked to the Psychology Departments or Faculties of Education. These latter courses generally focussed on knowledge about learning disabilities, including self-knowledge and linkage to self-advocacy and academic skills

supported by AT, accommodations, metacognition and learning strategies. Others focussed more specifically on future planning, e.g. transitions from post-secondary education to employment.

- C **individual counselling**, a program component widely used by students, was usually of a pre-academic, academic or pre-vocational nature and focussed on specific learning disabilities related issues rather than therapeutic or emotional counselling. All pilots had the ability to make referrals to campus counselling offices or to off-campus, community agencies, if their students needed psychotherapeutic resources. Pilot counselling was usually provided by learning disabilities specialists, and positive student feedback was notably high. The students particularly praised opportunities for ready access, staff flexibility and warmth, the availability of moral and practical supports from staff who are clearly knowledgeable about learning disabilities. Staff sometimes built a professional relationship with the student over several years, adjusting the level and type of counselling support in accord with the student's gains in independent functioning and challenges presented by new stages. This component was sometimes linked with others, such as **individual advising, program planning and goal setting; specialized communications supports and social skills training**.

- C **transition supports for entry to post-secondary education** were available at all pilot institutions. These varied quite widely across pilots. Formats ranged from specific summer programs at some pilot institutions to outreach to local schools and school boards to facilitate more effective transition practices. The summer programs included:
 - C an eight day congregated orientation to college, designed to give new arrivals a head-start on adjusting to the new demands of post-secondary life, to promote early and more timely usage of special needs supports, and to diminish early isolation, with early indicators of retention benefits;

 - C an intensive six week summer orientation to post-secondary experience, provided at a single pilot university though students went on to begin their first year at many different universities and colleges. This project had many early indicators of positive academic and retention impact. It included liaison activities with catchment area secondary schools and community referral agencies and an array of social events, publications and outreach communications, "open house" welcoming activities, computer lab community evenings, presentations to high school teachers, to qualifying special ed teachers and student teachers to assist them in enhancing appropriate transition planning for all students with learning disabilities. On the basis of this model, LOTF is funding seven additional diverse summer transition programs for the summer of 2003.

 - C trials with briefer time spans for orientation activities had also been explored.

- C **academic and other accommodations**, which the Task Force tracked from both staff and student perspectives. These went beyond the standard accommodations provided by all post-secondary offices for students with disabilities; for example, the ability to integrate AT into academic testing centres enhances student independence and demonstration of prowess without dependence on staff who read and/or scribe exams.

Specific systemic changes and **service accommodations** provided supports to students with learning disabilities who were particularly vulnerable to bureaucratic hurdles in registrars' and student funding offices. **Specialized peer mentoring and tutoring services** provided more timely and better mentor and tutor matches, often with guidance from learning strategists who were part of pilot staff teams.

- C other components included **transition supports for exit from post-secondary education**, either to the next level of academic or vocational study, or to the work world. This included supported participation in field placements and co-operative education opportunities. This was a program component that was utilized by fewer students than would have been expected and requires further exploration.
- C Some pilots provided **peer and/or self-help support groups**, including one pilot project's intensive development of a peer support group amongst pilot students initiated in the fall term by an overnight retreat, and sustained through weekly evening meetings.
- C There were other **adjunct supports** that benefit students either directly or often indirectly. For example, all pilots offered **professional development for faculty** and staff on campus, and outreach and education programs to serve students, parents, schools and other agencies in their regional communities. Both these initiatives were less effective than the pilot institutions and LOTF had originally hoped, with several notable exceptions.
- C During the second year of pilot activity, the pilot institutions were asked to enhance their focus on developing their pilot students' **self-awareness and understanding of their learning disabilities** and **self-advocacy skills**. Research shows the importance of these dual skills for the academic success and future lifelong independence of persons with learning disabilities. Some of the pilot institutions chose to utilize the ***Learning and Employment Assessment Profile*** (LEAP), available from the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. This is a guided self-help manual, specifically prepared for adults with learning disabilities, using the principles of consumer empowerment, enhancing resilience and learning to reframe the learning disabilities experience into a more positive approach. Others developed their own resources. In some cases, these were formally structured activities, while in other cases, self-advocacy training was embedded in other components.

II. Articulating the LOTF's key findings and recommendations

"I don't want you to shut this program down after it is over because it get the best out of people, both student, teacher and the staff of the center. I do not feel stupid anymore. I feel equal. The pilot project help me receive my diploma and now I am on my way to a post diploma. I like to say thank you to all involved."

Pilot student quote

The accountability measures implemented by the LOTF have already resulted in some notable systemic changes within the post-secondary education sector. Ontario's colleges and universities and the services and supports that they provide to their students with specific learning disabilities will never be the same as they were before the establishment of LOTF. The LOTF is very satisfied to be able to report that some significant systemic changes have begun to be implemented. Much of the credit for these goes to the pilot institutions and their staff, who, in addition to the work that they have been doing at their institutions, have also been sharing exemplary practices, resources and ideas with their colleagues throughout the post-secondary education sector.

The pilot projects succeeded due to a number of noteworthy key factors. They selected their students carefully and nurtured the students' successful participation within the pilot projects. At the same time, our large group of committed and hard working students realized the value of these projects not just for themselves but also for those who will come after them and will be looking for supports for their learning disabilities. Their responses to and participation rate in the LOTF tracking, reporting and evaluation expectations have been unprecedented.

Thirdly, but very importantly, the selection of the pilot institutions reflected the excellence of the initial proposals **and** the willingness of each of the institutions to participate in all aspects of the work. LOTF sought "fertile ground" to establish its pilot projects and found it in the ten pilot institutions. This does not mean that there were no other institutions where similar pilots might not have been successful. But what is important for considering the LOTF's key findings and recommendations is the recognition that initiatives such as these pilots do require institution-wide support and commitment. Yes, the LOTF provided financial and moral incentives, guidance and ongoing support. Nevertheless, this could have proven to be insufficient. The staff of the Special Needs Offices cannot work in isolation. They need to feel that there is systemic support for what they are doing and that their work and the success of all students at the institution, including students with disabilities, is a shared value throughout the institution.

However, in spite of all these new and positive trends within the post-secondary sector, there is still much to be done to improve the transition process for students with specific learning

disabilities as they leave the secondary system for post-secondary education or employment. We also cannot state that everything that is possible has been done within the post-secondary sector or even that we know everything about the needs of students with learning disabilities and how those needs can be met in such a way that every student will realize his or her full potential. This is why the recommendations also suggest ongoing research, exploration and collaborative activities. That will ensure that Ontario will be able to build upon what has been accomplished by the LOTF, the pilots and participating students over the past five years.

Based on the data provided by the students and by the pilot institutions, the qualitative information gathered from all participants and the numerous evaluation reports, the LOTF arrived at its seven key findings. These key findings have led to the development of twenty-four recommendations that the LOTF is offering to the Government of Ontario.

Each of the key findings is supported by relevant data obtained primarily from the student questionnaires and occasionally from the institutional tracking questionnaires as well as the consultants' observations at the site visits. The recommendations generated by the key finding follow, together with some explanatory or clarifying comments. While these are not implementation plans as such, they offer a direction to those who will develop the follow up implementation plans for the recommendations.

II.1. Key finding related to Student Success

Students with learning disabilities (LD) are as able to succeed in post-secondary education as their non-disabled peers, provided that:

A) their academic and social experiences during the elementary and secondary school years appropriately address the individual needs of students with learning disabilities; and,

B) their transition to post-secondary education is appropriately facilitated; and/or

C) the necessary individualized supports, services, programs and/or accommodations are available to them during their post-secondary years and they choose to use them.

Supporting data

- C 95% of responding (those who completed and returned questionnaires to the LOTF) students stated that the pilot project contributed significantly to their academic success*
- C 53% of students have been receiving As and Bs in their courses and only 7% have marks below a C*
- C 18% of students stated that they were doing very well, 26% doing well and 30% doing reasonably well in their studies while only 1% indicated that they were doing so poorly that they were thinking of dropping out of school*
- C 87% of the students stated that they were passing all required courses for their program*
- C 38% of the students who completed exit questionnaires were graduating; 26% had completed their current course but were not yet leaving the institution; 21% planned to stay on and continue their studies in spite of pilot closure; only 5% of exiting students stated that they were actually dropping out of post-secondary education. (This figure is*

much lower than the drop out rate reported for the post-secondary student population in general and for students with learning disabilities in particular.)

C 97% of students stated that they would participate in such a program again.

Therefore, LOTF recommends that:

1. **The results of the work of the LOTF and the pilot institutions be distributed to all secondary schools and post-secondary education institutions throughout Ontario.**

This information package should include the LOTF's key findings and recommendations; the Government's response to these; data demonstrating that students with learning disabilities are as able to succeed in post-secondary education as their non-disabled peers; and identification of successful programs, project components and available resources. LOTF's research results indicate the need for systemic change throughout the education system, including but not limited to full implementation of and compliance with relevant legislation such as the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, the *Education Act* and its regulations and the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (ODA).

2. **School boards consistently be held accountable for compliance with Regulation 181/98 under the *Education Act*, which mandates the development of transition programming and planning for all students with disabilities who are 14 years of age or older.**

Almost none of the pilot students had the benefit of mandated transition planning. Transition plans developed for students with specific learning disabilities must be in accordance with the Ministry of Education's Individual Education Plan Standards document. Schools and school boards must ensure that these students are made aware of the option of proceeding to post-secondary education and are actively helped to pursue such goals.

3. **Proven transition programming should be available to all students with learning disabilities who are going on to post-secondary education and are interested in participating in such opportunities.**

Participants consistently lauded the program offerings of Project ADVANCE, the summer orientation institute offered at York University. These students came from all parts of the Province and proceeded to a wide range of universities and colleges for their post-secondary studies. Many of them commented favourably over the past four years on the ongoing value and academic benefit of Project ADVANCE. Many also expressed the wish that such transition programming had been available to them earlier during the last years of their secondary school experience. In response, LOTF is funding seven additional pilot summer programs for 2003. Evaluation of these initiatives will provide future direction for achieving the recommendation's objective.

4. **All post-secondary educational institutions introduce and implement a full range of LD-specific service and program options appropriate to the needs and identified disabilities of each individual student.**

It is imperative that these programs and services be delivered at all institutions by knowledgeable, caring and supported disability services staff with expertise in learning disabilities. Students should be involved in the development and evaluation of these services, so that the provisions appropriately reflect student voice and experience, as was the case for the LOTF pilots.

5. **Incentives be made available to all post-secondary educational institutions to promote collaboration with secondary schools and other public sector organizations and agencies within their communities to offer intensive outreach and post-secondary orientation to adolescents and adults with identified or suspected learning disabilities.**

Extension to community-based organizations and adults who are no longer in school is particularly important for individuals with learning disabilities who have been barred from college or university entry because of lack of adequate educational supports and transition planning in the past. In many cases, adults have not had access to assessments. As a result, it is often suspected but not yet confirmed that their difficulties are due to specific learning disabilities.

II.2. Key finding related to Access to Diagnostic Assessments

A significant majority of the students arrived at the pilot institutions with no, or at best inadequate, diagnostic information. As a result, students had neither appropriate documentation nor an understanding of their own learning disabilities. A comprehensive, up-to-date diagnostic assessment is essential for the provision of requisite supports, services, programs and accommodations for students with learning disabilities. Almost all (85%) of the pilot students required professional (re-)assessment to enable them to succeed in their post-secondary education. The total process of (re-)assessment encompassed an explanation of individuals' specific learning disabilities, identification of strengths and difficulties, current functional skills, learning styles, potential coping strategies and compensatory skills, and accommodations needed to overcome the negative impacts of their disabilities and to reach their potential.

Supporting data

- C pilot institutions reported that 80 to 85% of pilot students came to post-secondary education with no or inadequate assessment and documentation of their learning disabilities*
- C pilot institutions reported that they had carried out 1395 full and 362 partial assessments in order to determine student eligibility for the pilot and to identify the students' learning and accommodation needs*

- C 99% of students reported that they participated in a psycho-educational assessment of their learning disabilities as a program component*
- C 87% of pilot students identified that their understanding of their learning disabilities had improved during the pilot period, primarily due to the (re-)assessments and the comprehensive explanation of the diagnostic assessment results by pilot staff*
- C only 2% of the pilot students were assessed for learning disabilities before entering school*
- C 24% of pilot students left secondary school without any diagnosis of learning disabilities*

Therefore, LOTF recommends that:

- 6. The Province of Ontario endorse a consistent definition and a comprehensive diagnostic assessment protocol for learning disabilities to be used in all publicly funded programs such as education, social service, health and other service areas.**

The definition should be up-to-date and based on current research. LOTF strongly urges the adoption of the definition developed by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) and supported by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) for use by the Enhanced Services Funding (ESF) projects. The components of such a diagnostic assessment process must include the use of specific standardized measures, operationally defined methods of establishing the presence of a specific LD, a written report, an opportunity for feedback to the individual who has been assessed as well as recommendations for services, supports and accommodations focussed on enabling the individual to overcome the barriers resulting from having a learning disability. The assessment process must be carried out in accordance with the *Regulated Health Professions Act*, 1993 and the guidelines recommended by the Ontario Psychological Association (1998) for the diagnosis of learning disabilities. As with the diagnosis of any other medically related disability, the diagnosis itself is a controlled act and should therefore be closely regulated. For this reason, it would be useful and appropriate if the Ontario College of Psychologists, the Provincial regulatory body for the profession, were to develop and endorse standards for the proper assessment and documentation of learning disabilities.

- 7. The Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process for the identification of a learning disability, in accordance with Regulation 181/98, should always and consistently be based on an appropriate and comprehensive diagnostic assessment.**

This will correct the too frequent occurrence of non-diagnosis and even mis-diagnosis of learning disabilities in elementary and secondary school populations in Ontario. Following an initial accurate diagnosis, there is no need for further regular psycho-educational testing. Learning disabilities are neurologically based and are a life-long condition. However, at major transition periods, such as elementary to secondary and secondary to post-secondary education or work, the validity of the existing recommendations for programming and accommodations must be reviewed. At these transition points, the student may need to have some additional educational or information processing testing to establish current functional levels and accommodation requirements.

8. **The Province adopt and endorse an early screening and intervention program designed to identify and assist all children at risk for school failure.**

Very often young children are identified as being at risk for school failure, but do not receive any help or intervention until they are at least two years behind their peers. Early intervention will enable some of these children to catch up to grade level without necessarily requiring subsequent special education supports. Others who do not make the requisite gains as a result of such early intervention should be referred for a diagnostic assessment to determine whether their difficulties are due to a diagnosable disability. The “Promoting Early Intervention” project delivered under the auspices of the LDAO, as well as some of the other early intervention projects resulting from the Mustard-McCain reports, are examples of such beneficial early programming.

9. **The primary diagnosis of a learning disability should be publicly funded through Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) or some other public or universally accessible funding mechanism, as is the case for all other disabilities.**

Diagnosis is the gateway to identifying appropriate services, supports, accommodations and achieving future success and independence for persons with learning disabilities. Restricting diagnosis to those who are able to pay for it themselves is discriminatory and results in inequity for most people with learning disabilities.

10. **The Province should establish, implement and evaluate the concept of Regional Assessment and Resource Centres.**

Such Regional Assessment and Resource Centres should have a mandate that includes the primary diagnosis of learning disabilities; the provision of access to and training in the use of assistive and adaptive technology, and other accommodation and resource supports to adolescents and adults who need such services.

Until such time as these are fully functional and providing services throughout the Province, the newly established **LOTF Mobile Assessment Team** should continue to provide assessment supports to post-secondary students in the un-serviced and under-serviced areas of the Province.

The Regional Centres could be modelled on similar centres established and widely used in the United Kingdom and Sweden.

II.3. Key finding related to Learning Strategy and Assistive Technology Supports

Pilot students consistently identified that, in addition to an improved understanding of their learning disabilities, they most valued:

A) provision of learning strategy supports by appropriately qualified and engaged staff, and

B) access to and instruction in assistive technology, from staff with expertise in both the technology and learning disabilities.

This was the basis of LOTF's preliminary recommendations to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities leading to the establishment, for September 2002, of Enhanced Services Funding (ESF) projects at all Ontario colleges and universities.

Supporting data

- C pilot institutions reported that 1120 pilot students utilized assistive technology and 1086 pilot students utilized learning strategy and metacognitive training during the pilot period*
- C pilot students cited assistive technology and learning and metacognitive strategies as the most useful program components provided to them by the pilot projects*
- C 86% of pilot students indicated that they had used and/or plan to use assistive technology*
- C 94% of pilot students indicated that they had used and/or plan to use learning strategy and metacognitive training supports*

Therefore, LOTF recommends that:

- 11. The newly established ESF projects be monitored and evaluated. Success in achieving their goals, should ensure that these services be maintained, enabling post-secondary education institutions to continue to provide enhanced programs, services and supports to students with specific LD who need these and commit to their utilization.**

The ESF projects have been approved for a two year period based on the initial findings of the LOTF pilot project evaluations. The impact of these projects should be assessed. Evaluation could include a review of the quality of services, rate of utilization by students, ratio of staff to students, institutional commitment to supporting staff and the ESF projects and to compliance with LOTF's conditions for ongoing funding.

The experience of the pilot projects indicates that student responsibility for participation in and evaluation of program components was a key requirement for success and meaningful accountability.

II.4. Key finding related to Institutional Responsibility

A) Pilot students consistently reported that lack of or limited faculty awareness and understanding of learning disabilities, and faculty attitudes toward requested accommodations presented the greatest external barrier to students' post-secondary educational success.

B) Students, staff, programs and services thrived at institutions where there was demonstrable awareness and support from senior administration.

Supporting data

- C 32% of pilot students identified that in spite of their participation in the pilot project, there were barriers to their academic success at the pilot institution
- C 64% of these students identified faculty awareness and attitudes and related systemic issues as the primary barrier
- C 56% of responding students stated that faculty professional development about learning disabilities would be the most effective way to eliminate the perceived barrier
- C concerns about the reluctance of some faculty to comply with all accommodation requests were raised at all student focus groups at all pilot institutions
- C seven of the ten pilot institutions are engaged in exploring ways in which the principles of Universal Instructional Design (UID) may be most effectively implemented

Therefore, LOTF recommends that:

12. **Incentives be provided to support innovative practices for faculty orientation and training at all colleges and universities. The goal is to ensure that all faculty and staff are made aware of and informed about the needs and entitlements of students with specific learning disabilities and the institutions' obligations to meet the accommodation needs of all such students.**

The pilot projects utilized diverse models for staff development. Although many students still expressed concerns about faculty attitudes, there were others who acknowledged individual faculty or occasionally whole departments as supportive and caring. The effectiveness of faculty training and orientation may be determined through student surveys and other evaluations.

13. **The Ministry of Citizenship amend the recently released guidelines for Accessibility Plans for colleges and universities under the ODA to include the following reporting and accountability requirements:**
 - C **applying a more inclusive definition of access beyond physical access,**
 - C **measurable goals,**
 - C **detailed implementation plans,**
 - C **realistic timelines,**
 - C **inclusion of appropriate learning disabilities provisions (beyond the current appended reference to the largest group of students with disabilities in the post-secondary education sector),**
 - C **the delivery of faculty and staff training and professional development,**
 - C **full compliance with the “undue hardship standard” for the accommodation of students with disabilities as expected under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.**

The *ODA* is allegedly intended to support all individuals with disabilities. The current definition of access within the Act and the limited guidelines for accessibility plans imply that there is no real intent to make this Act meaningful and accountable for persons with learning disabilities.

14. **The principles of UID and its proven benefits for teaching and learning be disseminated throughout the education system.**

UID has dramatically altered the way in which many students and especially non-traditional learners, including but not limited to students with specific learning disabilities, can succeed in their studies. Senior administration and teaching faculty in the post-secondary sector and teachers in the secondary panel need information about UID and access to and training in assistive technology to introduce these principles. Incentives for wider UID application may require future exploration.

Many students with disabilities and in particular learning disabilities benefit from access to audio-taped textbooks, journal articles, etc. Taped materials are frequently not available in a timely fashion or are difficult to use. As one of its past advocacy initiatives, LOTF recommended to the Federal *Task Force on Canadians with Print Disabilities*, that Canada should follow international examples where publishers are expected to release electronic versions of their materials at the same time as the print version. At the same time, LOTF also recommended to the Ontario Government that it endorse and take prompt action upon two of the recommendations that were included in the Federal Task Force's report, regardless of what follow up action we may see from the Federal Government. These recommendations were:

- C That the Government establish and fund a clearinghouse for e-text to which all Canadian publishers must make their works available.

In Ontario, work had begun to establish an electronic virtual library, accessible to all universities. Using this initiative to house an e-text clearing house for Ontario would make very good sense and would be an efficient use of funds. Such a clearing house could be fully funded by participating publishers and software providers. However, this initiative is currently on hold. This is delaying access to electronic and taped materials for a large number of print disabled students (mostly students with learning disabilities) in the post-secondary sector.

- C That publishing subsidies be available only to those publishers who provide and release e-texts simultaneously with their print texts. This should be further extrapolated to ensure that approved texts for elementary, secondary and post-secondary courses be ones published by publishers who comply with this requirement.

Neither of these recommendations has any significant direct cost to the taxpayer. At the same time, the benefits would be really significant for students with specific learning disabilities as well as others who are print-disabled..

II.5. Key finding related to Funding

A) A significant percentage of pilot students expressed ongoing concern about their inability to access the Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD). The BSWD was established to help with disability-related costs in college and university and the listing of eligible expenses specifically mentions LD assessments. Many students cannot afford the costly assessments, assistive technology and other supports that compensate for and accommodate the effects of their learning disabilities, yet cannot access the BSWD, primarily due to ineligibility for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). The continued linkage of the BSWD and OSAP is a significant post-secondary barrier to academic success.

B) Systemic adjustments to MTCU's Accessibility Fund are required because of adverse impact on staffing complements, assistive technology facilities and thereby student success.

Supporting data

- C throughout the four year piloting period, students reported that only 40% of them were eligible for and received funding from OSAP*
- C a slightly lower percentage of students (approximately 36%) received funding through the BSWD*
- C as a result the majority of pilot students had to rely on family support, if available, their own earnings or pilot institutional support to pay for disability-related costs, such as assessments, assistive technology and tutoring*
- C 38% of pilot students held a paid job while studying, not an ideal situation because of the extra study load already carried by most students with learning disabilities*
- C concerns about money and lack of access to the BSWD were raised at every student focus group discussion at every institution throughout the four year piloting period*

Therefore, LOTF recommends that:

A) Re student funding

15. **The Province of Ontario separate eligibility for BSWD from OSAP so that all students with disabilities can access bursary funds equitably.**

The cost of the required assessment or re-assessment for determining BSWD eligibility should not be borne by the student. Nor should eligibility for the Bursary be based on the course load carried by the student. Failure to redress these inequities, including the linkage of the BSWD to OSAP, prohibits academic accomplishment for too many potentially successful students.

There are precedents for what we are proposing.

The Bursary Support for Deaf Students who are studying at out-of-country post-secondary educational institutions is independent of family income and is not fully taxable. The rationale for this is that no family should be penalized for having a deaf son or daughter and deaf students should not be disadvantaged due to the high cost of their education. LOTF believes that other students with disabilities should also be supported appropriately through enhanced access to the BSWD. In particular, they should be able to have access to the Federally funded learning disabilities assessment grant.

It is important to note that the guidelines for the Canada Study Grants for Persons with Permanent Disabilities do not require that students be deemed eligible for provincial student loans or grants. Each province handles the administration of the Canada Study Grant for students with permanent disabilities in its own way and eligibility for this grant is not directly tied to provincial student loan eligibility. LOTF was pleased that, in response to LOTF's advocacy and earlier recommendations, the Government eased the OSAP eligibility guidelines to improve the

access of students with disabilities to OSAP. However, this step is insufficient and Ontario needs to proceed further in this recommended direction.

The *Ontario Student Loan Harmonization Act*, 2001, was introduced to permit the Minister to make direct loans to students of post-secondary education and enter into agreements regarding student loan arrangements. The Minister, when introducing this legislation, stated : “*Our commitment is that every willing and qualified Ontario student will continue to be able to attend college or university.*”

The proposed step of decoupling OSAP eligibility from access to the BSWD would be a very important and beneficial arrangement under this Act.

B) Re systemic funding issues

16. The Province of Ontario review and amend its current legislation and funding policies which result in discrimination against persons with learning disabilities.

This issue was clearly identified in the *Report of the Interministerial Working Group on Learning Disabilities*, 1992. Such previously identified discriminatory practices continue in the Assistive Devices Program of the Ministry of Health, in the lack of public funding for diagnostic assessments of learning disabilities, in the lack of access to OSAP for adult students studying on a part time basis and for students involved in other types of programming such as apprenticeships.

17. The Accessibility Fund allocation from MTCU should reflect the total full time equivalent enrolment of all students at the institution and the number of students with disabilities served by the institution.

Many students with learning disabilities, when they have a choice, prefer to attend smaller post-secondary education institutions. As a result, on a percentage basis, many of the smaller institutions support proportionately larger numbers of students with LD than the larger ones. MTCU data demonstrate that there are significant variations among institutions’ ratios of

students with disabilities to their overall student enrolments. The funding formula needs to recognize this reality.

18. Each post-secondary institution should receive adequate base funding, as part of the distribution of the Accessibility Fund allocation, to ensure that properly trained and qualified staff are available to provide assessments, intervention, training, coaching and support in learning strategies and assistive technologies to students with specific learning disabilities; and properly equipped and staffed computer lab facilities are available to students with specific learning disabilities.

The experience of the pilot institutions, which resulted in the establishment of the ESF projects at all colleges and universities, has demonstrated the importance of adequate funding for staffing

and facilities. However, the ESF is limited to specified staffing costs and does not address the more comprehensive list of needs specified in the above recommendation.

II.6. Key finding related to Access to Post-secondary Education

The majority of pilot students reported that they:

A) had no access to useful supports in secondary school that would enable them to cope with, compensate for, accommodate or overcome the effects of learning disabilities;

B) had no access in secondary school to assistive technology or other accommodations that would enable them to succeed in their studies;

C) received no meaningful individualized transition planning support in secondary school, despite the requirements of Regulation 181/98; and

D) surpassed their own expected performance levels at college or university once appropriate accommodations and supports were made available.

Supporting data

- C 24% of pilot students left secondary school without any diagnosis of learning disabilities and 12% of pilot students reported that they had no re-assessment done after elementary school*
- C 35% of pilot students repeated at least one grade, despite clear evidence from research that such practices are destructive and preventable for students with learning disabilities*
- C 28% of pilot students stated that they had received no special education help of any kind either in elementary or secondary school*
- C only 43% of the pilot students knew that they had been identified as having LD by an Identification Placement Review Committee*
- C 46% of pilot students stated that they had been told that they were “slow learners”*
- C only 16% of the pilot students had access to an LD class placement in secondary school*
- C the most common special education help available to pilot students was doing exams differently from the rest of the students (reported by 57%) and access to a resource room, if they so requested (reported by 47%)*
- C only 8.5% of pilot students had access to assistive technology in secondary school*
- C only 10.7% of the pilot students received any kind of transition help or support to prepare them for post-secondary education*
- C students indicated that their understanding of their LD, their ability to explain it and advocate for accommodations significantly improved during the pilot period:
 - C at the time of intake 47% felt that their understanding of their LD was good or very good; this increased to 75% at the time of exit*
 - C their ability to explain their LD well or very well increased from 37% at the time of intake to 56% at the time of exit*
 - C their ability to advocate for accommodations well or very well increased from 43% at the time of intake to 63% at the time of exit**

- C 95% of participating students stated that the pilot project contributed significantly to their academic success
- C it is important to note that in each focus group at each institution throughout the four years of piloting, students regularly and consistently initiated discussion about the devastating academic and emotional impact of non-identification, school failure, “slow learner” labelling, absence of appropriate educational supports and accommodations and frequent misplacement in classes for those with behavioural and intellectual disabilities.

Therefore, LOTF recommends that:

19. **The Ministry of Education enforce compliance with the *Education Act* and Regulation 181/98 so that students with specific learning disabilities are guaranteed access to appropriate special education programmes and services, diagnostic assessments, learning strategy training, assistive technology use and training, transition planning, a full range of special education placement options and all other entitlements that they have under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Education Act*. Where students are denied *any* of these entitlements, they must be guaranteed the right of appeal.**
20. **The Ministry of Education, the Faculties of Education and the College of Teachers must ensure that all teachers in the Province are taught about learning disabilities, including specific instruction in:**
 - C recognizing the needs and entitlements of students with learning disabilities;
 - C recognizing the fact that students with learning disabilities can achieve the Provincial curriculum benchmarks and outcomes at the same level as their non-disabled peers, provided that they are taught in ways in which they best learn and are guaranteed access to requisite accommodations;
 - C how to adapt and differentiate their teaching methods;
 - C how to utilize the principles of UID;
 - C how to offer appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of students.
21. **The Provincial special education funding formula be amended so that all students with learning disabilities (most of whom are not and should not be Intensive Support Amount / ISA-eligible) receive appropriate special education programs and services in accordance with their identified strengths and needs.**
22. **To facilitate improved transition planning, the Ministry of Education must immediately release the long-awaited transition planning guide for school board implementation and include in it exceptionality-specific components.**
23. **To facilitate successful graduation from secondary school, when taking the Grade 10 literacy test, students must be guaranteed access to the requisite accommodations listed in their IEP. Where students are initially unsuccessful in the test, they must have access to diagnostic assessments to determine whether they have an unidentified learning disability, or to a review of existing special education provisions to determine whether they require some additional or differentiated teaching prior to and accommodations when re-taking the test.**

Recommendations nineteen to twenty-three, as well as some of the earlier ones, relate directly to the work of the Ministry of Education and the school boards. When LOTF was established, the Ministries of Education and Training, Colleges and Universities were a single Ministry within the Government of Ontario. Although they are now two separate ministries with differing mandates, LOTF has kept both ministries informed about its work and provided its reports to both Ministers and staffs. Therefore, none of these recommendations will come as a surprise to the Ministry of Education. LOTF and the successor agency look forward to working with the Ministry of Education to bring these specific recommendations to fruition for the benefit of students with specific learning disabilities.

II.7. Key finding related to the Role of the Learning Opportunities Task Force

The LOTF model for applied research, with incentives for establishing pilot projects, accompanied by rigorous evaluation, meaningful accountability measures, and a major focus on valuing active student involvement, has proven successful for initiating significant systemic change within the post-secondary education sector. Similar changes are needed throughout the entire education system. Such change will build upon the successful results of LOTF's work, with and in support of individuals with learning disabilities, their families, and our communities.

Given that the Government of Ontario has already determined that the LOTF be succeeded by a permanent entity, LOTF recommends that:

- 24. The LOTF successor agency be an independent, accountable, "arms' length" crown agency, with the following mandate:**
 - C the development of detailed implementation and evaluation plans for all LOTF recommendations that are approved by the Government of Ontario,**
 - C the tracking and evaluation of ongoing research and innovative projects and services related to the implementation of the work of LOTF and the pilots,**
 - C establishment of applied research activities related to meeting the employment and other life-long needs of persons with specific learning disabilities,**
 - C exploration related to meeting the needs of individuals who, in addition to having learning disabilities, also face other equity barriers,**
 - C collaboration with appropriate organizations in Ontario, such as the ODA Directorate, the Human Rights Commission, LDAO, etc. and related Government ministries,**
 - C distribution of information and resources to support professional development and training activities related to learning disabilities, and**
 - C a regular five-year review of the relevance and validity of the work of the agency and the education and equity status of persons with learning disabilities in Ontario.**

The LOTF is convinced that implementation of the twenty-four recommendations will lead to the anticipated and desired outcome that students with specific learning disabilities are enabled to make the transition to post-secondary education, should they wish to do so, and receive the

supports, services and accommodations throughout their post-secondary education enabling them to realize their full potential. In particular, implementation of recommendation #24 will ensure that there will be an ongoing process to develop implementation plans for all the recommendations as well as other continuing activities related to enhancing the educational and equity status of persons with learning disabilities in Ontario.

III. The LOTF Legacy

“I am happy, and feel privileged to have participated in the Pilot Project. Since I was little, (and attending school), all I was ever told is what I cannot do, but through this project I feel like I can do anything I put my mind to. Thank you so very much, for giving me the opportunity to give something of myself back to society and the world.”

Pilot student quote

III.1. LOTF’s legacies: innovative and continuing activities

In the third year of pilot activity, 2000/01, all pilot institutions and their staff were invited to participate in a legacy building exercise. There was full collective support for the fact that the LOTF project needed to have a long term legacy at each pilot institution as well as systemically.

We defined legacy as “something resulting from and/or left behind by an action, event or person”. We agreed that the legacies of the LOTF and the pilots should be positive, valued and noteworthy. The legacies should primarily benefit students with learning disabilities. However, in addition, the other beneficiaries of this work must be the entire post-secondary education system, the pilot institutions and other colleges and universities, the elementary and secondary school system and Ontario society as a whole.

Following some in-depth debate, the pilot institutions were invited to identify what legacies they wanted to have in place for their students for the post-piloting period and what were the requirements to develop, deliver and maintain these legacies. The LOTF was pleased that while financial resources were considered important, it was not suggested that money was the sole criterion for maintaining such legacies.

At a subsequent legacy planning meeting, all but one of the pilot institutions’ presidents participated in a discussion of the value of the LOTF’s work and the importance of legacy planning. Such participation demonstrating significant level of interest and commitment were gratifying, but more importantly helped to pave the way for further institutional and systemic change.

Now that the piloting phase of LOTF’s work is finished at all but one of the pilot institutions, it is important to note that there are notable legacies in place. While the specific legacies at pilot institutions vary, there are some consistent components that are continuing.

The establishment of the Enhanced Services Funding projects (for a description, see III.2.) assisted with some of the practical legacy plans of the pilot institutions, especially for small institutions, receiving limited amounts from the Provincial Accessibility Fund. Nevertheless, all pilot institutions have committed to and are maintaining certain institutional and applied

legacies, such as the use of the LOTF mandated definition of learning disabilities and adherence to the recommended assessment protocol. The latter is not as rigorous as the validation criteria for pilot students, but still results in an effective identification and assessment process.

Computer labs constructed with LOTF financial support are being maintained for students with learning disabilities. Pilot institutions are continuing to utilize and promote faculty professional development resources and opportunities. Some of the pilot institutions were able to identify additional internal or external financial and/or human resources to enable them to maintain most if not all of the pilot project components. None of the pilot institutions has returned to its pre-pilot level of services or supports for students with learning disabilities, although it is early to gauge longer term legacy commitments.

At the same time, many other non-pilot institutions are utilizing the results of the piloting work to significant benefit. They are finding that building upon the pilots' successes is enhancing their capacities to serve students with learning disabilities. There is greater awareness of the importance of the work of the Special Needs Offices, of the fact that students with learning disabilities are able to succeed in post-secondary education and of what these students require in terms of services, supports, accommodations and teaching methodologies.

In addition to the expected legacies at the pilot institutions, LOTF and some of the institutions have embarked on a series of innovative and continuing research activities, related to supporting students with learning disabilities in a variety of ways. These are described briefly below. For further information about any one of these projects, readers may consult the Technical Report or the LOTF office or the individual institution(s) involved in the project.

III.2. Enhanced Services Funding projects (ESF)

Based on consistent, cumulative responses from pilot students across the LOTF projects, it was evident even before pilot completion that participating post-secondary students with learning disabilities placed highest value on two types of supports: learning strategies (LS) instruction and supports, and assistive technology (AT) use and instruction. These results, derived from the student questionnaires in LOTF's data base, were consistent over the first three years, and indeed remained so for the fourth pilot year.

In communicating the availability of funding for the establishment of the ESF projects at all colleges and universities, the LOTF described these two positions and the related program components as follows:

Learning Strategists (LS)

The value of **learning strategy** instruction and coaching has been well established within the LOTF pilot projects. The role of learning strategist is pivotal in helping students to understand their learning disabilities, to assess their capacity to use learning strategies and to apply such strategies to better actualize their academic abilities. A learning strategist who works with

students with specific learning disabilities should be able to demonstrate skills and knowledge in the following areas:

- C **Knowledge and understanding** of learning disabilities and their impact on how students can learn to function effectively and efficiently in the post-secondary educational sector.
- C The ability to **interpret** and **explain** LD assessments to the students.
- C **Communication** with students and with a variety of internal contacts including other student services staff and faculty members.
- C **Coaching** and giving feedback: being able to influence students to consider, learn, apply and evaluate learning strategies.
- C **Innovative** thinking: developing specific variations on broad strategies to respond to unique student strengths and needs and varying classroom demands.
- C **Problem-solving**: being able to respond flexibly to difficulties that students encounter in applying learning strategies.
- C The skills of **LD specific counseling** to deal with students' reactions to negative learning experiences, feelings such as helplessness, defensiveness, anxiety, low self-esteem and an initial lack of self advocacy skills.
- C The ability to focus on **results**: keeping the outcome in mind, i.e., increased efficiency in learning for students with learning disabilities.
- C Personal **sensitivity**: recognizing student strengths and limitations and responding to those with empathy and adaptability.

Assistive technologist (AT)

The increasing availability and successful use of **assistive technology** suitable to individuals studying in the post-secondary sector makes this one of the more productive and requested academic accommodations for those with LD. LOTF's research has shown that the benefit of such services without the support of a knowledgeable technologist is minimal.

Such a professional will be able to demonstrate the following skills and knowledge:

- C **Technical expertise** with a variety of software and hardware, competence to demonstrate these to students with LD in user-friendly ways and a commitment to maintaining that expertise as the technology changes.
- C A **network** of contacts within the vendor industry, in order to remain current with trends in the assistive technology field, including new computer applications and new ways to apply assistive technology in educational settings.
- C **Communication**: the ability to convey directions, concepts and applications to students, colleagues and faculty members.
- C **Problem-solving**: being able to adapt to individual student strengths, limitations and aptitude in using assistive technology.
- C **Adaptability**: being able to respond to differing demands in the academic setting and integrating the technology into and with the material taught.
- C **Coaching** and giving feedback: being able to influence and encourage students in learning to use assistive technology with success and to give constructive feedback in the learning process.
- C **Information seeking**: constantly seeking alternatives for students.

- C A thorough **understanding** of learning disabilities and the way in which technology can assist students with LD.

Because the pilot institutions were each funded to provide individualized LS and AT supports, unlike most other colleges and universities, LOTF determined that a delay in acting upon such clear student evaluations would unnecessarily delay extending similar benefits to others. In consequence, LOTF forwarded recommendations in September, 2001, for enhanced funding with suggestions for implementation to the Honourable Diane Cunningham, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, requesting immediate consideration.

In February 2002, the Minister announced the establishment of the Province's Enhanced Services Fund (ESF) for post-secondary students with learning disabilities. Its purpose is to help eligible colleges and universities enhance and strengthen their abilities to meet the academic support needs of post-secondary students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities. The ESF is distinct from the Ministry's Accessibility Fund providing basic support to all post-secondary Offices for Students with Disabilities. Specifically, the ESF offers new opportunity for individualized provision of LS and AT instruction and supports to students with learning disabilities at any eligible Ontario college or university. Administration and evaluation of the ESF was assigned to LOTF.

Following the announcement, the LOTF Consulting Team developed a formal application process, distributed eligibility and application guidelines to all colleges and universities, and accepted an invitation to provide further information at a relevant provincial meeting hosted by the College Committee on Disability Issues (CCDI) and the Inter-University Disability Issues Association (IDIA), the two post-secondary special needs providers' professional organizations. Many additional queries were fielded by the LOTF Office.

LOTF was unsure of how many institutions would actually apply. While the process was not onerous, there were explicit requirements for concrete demonstration of senior administrative and institutional support - some with cost-bearing implications - as a condition for ESF approval. It was also determined that ESF could only cover the staffing elements of LS and AT provision, to the exclusion of any capital or "overhead" costs. LOTF was therefore delighted to receive applications from all of Ontario's public universities and colleges. After a consultation process to support proposal modifications, all were approved. The only exception to this is the pilot continuing into a fifth year, thereby delaying ESF eligibility.

For the remaining 18 universities and 24 colleges, individualized agreements developed by LOTF's Executive Co-ordinator, appending specific commitments for service delivery, participation in program evaluation, and agreed-upon institutional supports, are now signed. Recruitment and hiring for the new positions, supported by an innovative training initiative at Cambrian College (see below), are underway, with enhanced services commencing Fall 2002.

LOTF is providing some consulting services to the ESF institutions, and is co-ordinating institutional tracking and other monitoring procedures, to support Year 2 ESF renewals where warranted. The ESF projects will be evaluated after the first two years. Decisions about the future of these activities will be made after the evaluation of the projects and their benefits to students with learning disabilities.

The application guidelines and further information related to this process are included in the Technical Report.

III.3. Summer transition projects

One of the two key mandates of the Learning Opportunities Task Force was “to improve the transition of students with specific learning disabilities from secondary to post-secondary education.”

Project ADVANCE was funded at York University during LOTF pilot years specifically to address and research the transition issue. The program offered an intensive six-week introduction to the challenges and expectations of Ontario’s post-secondary education system. It was anticipated that students who participated in the York program would be enrolling at any college or university in Ontario. Approximately 20 students participated in each of Project ADVANCE’s four summer sessions. The program has been carefully evaluated and has been proven to be successful, particularly from a student satisfaction and ongoing success perspective. Project ADVANCE graduates have been surveyed in subsequent years. As is reported in the executive summary of Project ADVANCE’s summative report in Appendix C, all participating students have continued to pursue post-secondary education and most have been extremely successful in achieving their goals. They also consistently reported that their Project ADVANCE experience was critical to their successful transition to post-secondary education.

Consequently, LOTF is funding eight Summer Institute programs to be developed during the current academic year, which will be delivered and evaluated during the summer of 2003. While Project ADVANCE is the model, each institution has been given funding to plan a unique program according to their specific interpretation of the transition needs of students with specific learning disabilities. The eight post-secondary institutions have been assigned into partnerships as follows:

- C York University and Georgian College
- C University of Guelph and Conestoga College
- C Carleton University and Algonquin College
- C Queen’s University and Loyalist College

There are several reasons for partnering institutions as outlined. The institutions are in close physical proximity and can easily and efficiently share professional expertise and facilities, and possibly program component delivery. By partnering a college with a university, LOTF is hopeful that the advantages and strengths of each system will result in a better program for students with learning disabilities. Finally, in expanding from one to eight institutions in a single year, there is concern that it may be difficult to attract the appropriate students with learning disabilities who would commit and most benefit from these programs. By partnering,

institutions can consolidate two institutional programs into one, should it prove difficult to achieve targeted numbers.

Though there will be variation with regard to program delivery, generally the Summer Institutes will feature: some immersion in a residential setting; group work, team work and socializing,

with an opportunity for discussion and, to decrease isolation, camaraderie with other students with learning disabilities; orientation to campus life and knowledge of post-secondary academic expectations; knowledge of one's learning disability and self advocacy; an exploration of learning styles, study skills and strategies; a focus on assistive technology with access to an assistive technology lab and the availability of qualified instruction. Summer Institutes will vary in length from two to six weeks. Students will be given an intensive program, positively focusing on educational issues relating to their learning disability, possibly for the first time in their lives.

III.4. Mobile Assessment Team (MAT)

During the course of the LOTF pilot projects, it became clear that there are a number of areas in Ontario where students in the post-secondary sector have limited or no access to psycho-educational assessments performed by qualified individuals. Given that the two most vital pieces of information required for academic accommodation are a proper diagnosis, along with a more detailed understanding of the areas of psychological information processing that continue to be impaired, it seemed necessary to ensure that adequate access to assessments be made available across Ontario. To remedy the current situation, the LOTF is piloting a Mobile Assessment Team (MAT).

Qualified Psychologists from across Ontario were recruited to be members of this team. They agreed to travel to under-serviced areas of Province, to perform comprehensive psycho-educational assessments consistent with the guidelines developed by LOTF regarding adequate assessment of a learning disability.

Eligible post-secondary institutions, i.e., those located in the under-serviced parts of Ontario, have been provided with a process for contacting the MAT and making the necessary referrals for assessment. Evaluation of the process and MAT's effectiveness is planned for the end of the academic year. If evidence indicates that MAT is a cost-effective, efficient and useful way of addressing the issue of limited access, then continuation of the project is expected.

III.5. Regional Assessment and Resource Centre: a pilot project

In order to provide academic accommodations and appropriate services to students with learning disabilities at the post-secondary level, they must have a recent and comprehensive psycho-educational assessment diagnosing a disability and recommending appropriate accommodations.

Research data collected from the LOTF pilot projects suggests that over 80% of students with learning disabilities come to the post-secondary level with inadequate or non-existent documentation of their learning disability. Furthermore, many who have been "identified" in the school system do not, in fact have a diagnosable disability, and therefore do not qualify for accommodations at the post-secondary level.

Private psycho-educational assessments are costly, and are not covered by either OHIP or most extended healthcare programs. Hence, many students with learning disabilities may not have the

money to have their disability appropriately documented. This in turn limits their ability to benefit from post-secondary education, and realize their full potential.

The Learning Opportunities Task Force was established to improve the transition of students with specific learning disabilities from secondary to post-secondary education and to enhance the services and supports available to these students once they arrived at their post-secondary destination, so that they could complete their education successfully. While the Task Force has made great strides in meeting the second part of this mandate, improved transition, specifically access to appropriate and comprehensive assessments necessary for appropriate accommodation, is still lacking.

LOTF has, therefore, recommended the establishment of a pilot Regional Assessment and Resource Centres (RARC) to offer comprehensive psycho-educational assessments to students who either plan to apply to post-secondary or are presently in the post-secondary system, and for whom updated documentation of their disability is required.

This centre would provide comprehensive diagnostic assessments in the area of learning disabilities, and act as a resource for individuals who require learning strategies or adaptive technology assistance. It would also allow for systematic, multi-disciplinary research into the different types of learning disabilities, ways to best assess these conditions, and would evaluate various accommodation and intervention methods. Research into the neuro-behavioural aspects of learning disabilities, to assist with earlier identification and intervention, would also be priority.

A pilot project is planned for implementation at Queen's University to determine if such a regional centre would indeed meet community needs and provide cost-effective and efficient services. The MAT pilot (see III.4.) will be operated from the pilot regional centre, until future determinations of best service options are evaluated.

III. 6. Dyslexia Adult Screening Test (DAST)

At present, there are no commercially available, appropriately validated and psychometrically sound *screening* instruments to assist in identifying adults who may have specific learning disabilities. The diagnosis of learning disabilities currently relies on the administration of a battery of psychological and psycho-educational tests. Such tests must be administered by registered psychologists or psychological associates, take several hours of the client's time and cost an average of \$1,200. As a result, there is significant reluctance both on the part of persons who may have specific learning disabilities and the secondary, post-secondary educational and other service delivery sectors to routinely participate in or offer such diagnostic assessments,

unless there is some significant preliminary evidence that there may be learning disabilities present and that the diagnosis will lead to useful and beneficial interventions.

Recent research, carried out in the UK, suggests that a core group of psychological, physiological, and information processing impairments may consistently discriminate persons with dyslexia (a specific type of reading disability) from non-disabled adults. Using well constructed tests that measure these underlying processing skills, Angela Fawcett and Rod

Nicolson developed an adult screening instrument (the Dyslexia Adult Screening Test or DAST) in 2001. This screening test is currently only available through the Psychological Corporation in the UK.

The same team had previously published a children's version of this screening test, which seems to have excellent discriminative ability, with high rates of accurate prediction as well as low false positive and false negative rates. This latter test is presently already available in North America.

The DAST takes approximately 30 minutes to administer, and assesses 11 core psychological processes (including cerebellar functioning). One current difficulty with this test is that it has not yet been widely normed on persons with well-documented dyslexia. In fact, the normative data currently available compares the performance of only 15 students who have dyslexia with 150 control students. Even with such small numbers, however, the DAST reportedly discriminated well between clearly dyslexic and clearly not dyslexic students, with a 94% “hit rate”, and a 0% false positive rate.

The LOTF pilot projects represented one of largest groups of well documented, psychometrically identified adults with LD ever assembled. While many of the students had additional learning disabilities besides dyslexia, it was felt that it would be worthwhile to look at the efficacy of the DAST with this population. A research project was therefore conducted at six pilot sites to investigate the predictive value of the DAST, not only in accurately identifying those students known to have well documented learning disabilities, but also its ability to discriminate non-learning disabled students from those with such processing impairments.

The preliminary results obtained are encouraging. Analysis of the data collected from this study is currently underway. If successful as a screening tool for adults with learning disabilities, it is LOTF's intent to introduce this test to all post-secondary educational institutions as well as other organizations and institutions where the diagnosis of learning disabilities is an important task.

Further information about the materials used in this research project are included in the Technical Report or may be obtained from the LOTF office.

III.7. French Language Assessment Project (FLAP)

When the LOTF began its work in initiating pilot projects in the post-secondary sector, one of the proposals selected for implementation was one by a consortium of the three French-language community colleges of Ontario to establish pilot programs for French-speaking post-secondary students with learning disabilities.

In the proposal, the consortium identified many components required to achieve the goals of the project. Key among these was the need to ensure that the French-language institutions had appropriate assessment tools and processes to diagnose specific learning disabilities within the French-language student population. In its first year of operation, the project ran into some unexpected difficulties and obstacles. It found that there were few French-speaking psychologists in Ontario who were trained and proficient in the assessment of adult students with learning disabilities. Identifying these psychologists and persuading them to do the requisite assessments in the French-language colleges in addition to participating in the Province-wide identification and evaluation of appropriate assessment tools and processes proved to be a challenge.

In the pilot project's second year of operation, the need for common French-language assessment instruments and processes to assess specific learning disabilities in Ontario's French-language post-secondary student population became increasingly obvious. At the same time, when LOTF undertook an external validation process to ensure that all pilot project students at all pilot institutions met the diagnostic eligibility criteria established by LOTF for a carefully specified definition of specific learning disabilities.

Meeting these established eligibility and diagnostic criteria proved problematic for the French-speaking institutions where more than 50% of the originally identified students did not meet the criteria established by LOTF. It became clear that the French-language psychologists were restricted by a lack of psychological and pedagogical assessment instruments normed for the Franco-Ontarian population.

The implications of this deficiency are significant for all French-language students with specific learning disabilities and for the French-language institutions which they attend. The lack of appropriate diagnostic instruments and processes to identify specific learning disabilities has delayed and unnecessarily complicated the assessment of students with specific learning disabilities. Further, it has made the development and delivery of proper, timely interventions difficult, if not impossible.

To correct this situation, the Learning Opportunities Task Force has embarked on the French Language Assessment Project, including considerable consultation with the Francophone community throughout Ontario. LOTF has entered into an agreement with the Psychological Corporation, the publishers of the Wechsler Tests, which are widely used in English for the diagnosis of diverse learning problems, including learning disabilities. The company has in the past translated and normed its tests to meet the needs of the Hispanic population in the USA.

Three tests, the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children and for Adults and the Wechsler Individual Aptitude Test, have now been translated into French. Currently, these translated tests are being piloted with the Franco-Ontarian population to ensure that the tests are linguistically and culturally appropriate and comprehensible as well as assuring that they measure the same skills and competencies in French as in English. Once the piloting phase is completed, the translated tests will be normed on a Franco-Ontarian population ranging in age from six to thirty years.

Once completed, the primary goal of this project will be achieved. This is *“to enhance equity for the Francophone population of Ontario, equivalent to that already available to the Anglophone population with specific learning disabilities”*. The ability of the educational system to identify the presence of learning disabilities and develop appropriate interventions based on such identification will also benefit students in the elementary and secondary panels as well as post-secondary education. The anticipated project completion date is the summer of 2005.

III.8. Staff Training Initiative for Learning Strategists and Assistive Technologists

To support province-wide ESF implementation, Cambrian College’s pilot initiated a staff training project. Its goal is to ensure a sufficient pool of Learning Strategists (LS) and Assistive Technologists (AT) with requisite expertise in providing these focussed services to post-secondary students with specific learning disabilities. The LS/AT Training Initiative, funded by LOTF and further supported by Cambrian, has three phases.

The first was a needs assessment. To begin, a province-wide survey of special needs/disability offices at post-secondary institutions was conducted. Issues such as interest in LS/AT staff training; the extent of gaps, if any, in expertise; skill development priorities, and course delivery preferences were explored. The 90% of respondents completing the survey, identified clear need. Their collective answers, supplemented by focus group participation, provided direction for course and certification development.

Given the high response rate and the need to provide almost immediate support to new ESF staff, LOTF approved the second phase of the Training Initiative. A coherent certificate program for each of two streams (LS and AT) was developed. The first three supported on-line (WebCT) courses were designed, and began in May 2002. Because of over-subscription, several sections for each were required. In Phase Two, 56 participants from 24 institutions completed a total of 103 courses. Only 7 colleges and 12 universities had no registrants at that time.

Detailed evaluation based on participant feedback showed consistent enthusiasm about course content. Only minor modifications were recommended, mainly to de-compress the time span for course completion. Responsive adjustments have been made to address this concern. Course facilitators observed that the high quality of student interchange is building a professional cohort of skilled LS and AT staff.

Due to the positive assessments, LOTF is now funding Phase Three, the design and delivery of the remaining ten courses. An advisory committee assembled at project’s start to provide

ongoing guidance continues. Due to unanticipated demands for repeated provision of the initial courses, additional cycles of course delivery are being managed at the same time. Students may select a certificate stream in AT, in LS, or dual certification. They may also opt to take individual courses without completing a certificate, which will ultimately require a mentored practicum.

LOTF's funding permits enrolment without tuition payment until the entire project is evaluated. If the totality of the program is successful, Cambrian will apply to MTCU for their formal approval of the LS and AT certificates as post-secondary offerings. Registrants would then pay tuition. The core of Cambrian facilitators would extend to include other qualified instructors as needed, employed through the College's Continuing Education Department. They would be supported by a full series of courseware materials that the Training Initiative is producing, to ensure standardization of content and skill acquisition.

A complete list of the courses for each stream, and Executive Summaries of Cambrian's reports on Phases One and Two, may be found in LOTF's Technical Report. Summative evaluation, including enrolment statistics and participant responses to Phase Three, is anticipated late in 2003.

III.9. Universal Instructional Design

A key component of achieving the LOTF's mandate to "enhance the services and supports that students with learning disabilities receive within the post-secondary educational sector, such that they can complete their education successfully" is that the student's specific strengths and deficits are identified through a psycho-educational assessment in order that the appropriate or specific supports and services can be put in place. The pilot institutions were uniformly successful in offering and shaping specific components to these students. The newly established ESF projects also build on this success.

However, the need to emphasize and enhance the specificity between student need and educational intervention continues as the primary focus for LOTF. The LOTF recognizes the potential to address student needs for accessing course and classroom information with the application of a universal approach to teaching. This is based on the application of the principles of Universal Instructional Design (see below) to the education of all students, with particular benefits to non-traditional learners, such as those who have learning disabilities.

The concept of Universal Design was first introduced in North America for architectural design. The idea was to build homes in response to 'life-span' needs, in a way that both young and old people and those with or without disabilities would find appealing and functional. The concept evolved into an education approach. Instructors came to realize that by posting their notes on web pages, by varying and offering more than one method of information dissemination, by complementing information dissemination with small group work, to list just a few examples, they could be more dynamic teachers, and be more inclusive of all students and their learning styles.

The principles of Universal Instructional Design are as follows:

1. **Determine the essential components of the course:** identify the knowledge and skills students must attain to successfully complete the course.
2. **Provide clear expectations and feedback:** be sure expectations and feedback convey the essential components of the course.
3. **Explore ways to incorporate natural supports for learning:** some disability-related accommodations benefit all students; explore ways to infuse these natural supports in all courses.
4. **Provide multimodal instructional methods:** students learn in a variety of ways, seek opportunities to use all learning styles.
5. **Provide a variety of ways for demonstrating knowledge:** create alternative ways for students to demonstrate knowledge and skills e.g., option of writing a paper or making a presentation.
6. **Use technology to enhance learning opportunities:** put materials on-line, arrange for course specific list-serves, select software that is compatible with screen readers.
7. **Encourage faculty-student contact:** invite students to use e-mail and available office hours to ask questions and solicit feedback.

Compiled from Chickering and Gamson's Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.

Research into the application of these principles has demonstrated that, while they essentially model good pedagogical techniques, they are not as widely used in the post-secondary sector as they should be, but where introduced, most learners benefit. Most of the research into UID has taken place in the USA, with Australia and New Zealand close behind. LOTF has funded two UID projects, in order to introduce the principles into the educational system of Ontario and to refine their applications within the work of the pilot projects. Of particular interest, the project approaches of these two projects are fundamentally different, which will offer a valuable opportunity for evaluation and constructive comparison.

One project involves the direct partnership of two universities and two community colleges, all of which offered a pilot project to students with LD. These are Georgian and Canadore Colleges and Nipissing and Trent Universities. A fifth partner is Camp Borden, where participants take college level courses delivered by the Canadian army. This project primarily focusses on the individual faculty members modifying their course offerings and teaching approaches in accordance with the above seven principles. Each of the four participating institutions have committed to the dissemination of the principles of UID to the rest of their institutions at the end of the pilot project. Also, a manual is in preparation to cover the basic approaches to the introduction and implementation of UID principles. Once completed, this manual will be provided by the LOTF to all post-secondary institutions and will also be offered to secondary schools, where the principles of UID could also make a significant difference.

The second project is located in the Teaching Support Services at the University of Guelph. The focus in this project is on course enhancements, as well as full course redesign. In the first phase, the number of courses targeted for support was five large scale course re-designs and five to ten course enhancements.

In the second phase, Guelph has expanded the UID project to the newly formed University of Guelph-Humber. In this phase, four courses have been selected for large-scale course re-design. The planned expansion presents an exciting opportunity. The new institution has new curricula in which it will be easier to embed the principles of Universal Instructional Design. In this way, the effort and expense of applying UID principles parallels the effort and expense of building physical accessibility into a new building rather than retrofitting existing buildings.

Providing students with academic accommodations for test and exam situations has become common practice at post-secondary institutions, but providing access to information in the classroom has proven to be a greater challenge. At the beginning of LOTF's mandate faculty were surveyed and students were asked to comment on faculty attitudes towards accommodating their needs. Though there has been some enlightened progress among many faculty in recent years, students continue to cite negative faculty attitudes as the number one obstacle to their success in post-secondary education. Universal Instructional Design will not eliminate the need for specific accommodations, but there is no better example of an intervention that can positively engage faculty while contributing to a positive cultural shift towards their students with learning disabilities.

III.10. Thinking and Learning: an innovative transition project

During the last year of pilot activity at Trent University, a successful component available to both pilot and other students was the credit course entitled "*Thinking and Learning*". Faculty and pilot staff who pioneered this course proposed a new initiative, approved by LOTF. The project will adopt the learning explorations of this university level course, as a six week secondary school credit course for students with learning disabilities. The intention is to create a complete course that could be either a locally developed course or be integrated into a senior level learning strategies credit course focussing on transition.

Once the course development is completed, it will be piloted at one or two Peterborough secondary schools. This will be followed with a summer training institute where teachers will be trained, as part of their Professional Learning Program requirement, to implement the new course at their schools. Trent will also pursue approval of the course through the Provincial Curriculum Clearing House as an approved secondary school credit course. Approval would result in its availability in all parts of the Province.

LOTF will, as with all other continuing initiatives, evaluate this project to assess its value and potential for wider application.

III.11. The issue of Intellectual Property

In 1998, the presidents of thirteen colleges and universities signed contracts with the Government of Ontario regarding the LOTF pilot projects. All agreements included the following standard clause on Intellectual Property [IP]:

“All materials including, but not limited to, documents, raw data, research, processes, technology, programs and inventions conceived or produced in the performance of the Agreement shall belong to the Ministry. The intellectual property (including copyrights, patents, trademarks, industrial designs, know-how and trade secrets) in them shall also belong to the Ministry. All of them shall be delivered to LOTF on completion or termination of the services and shall be forwarded to the Ministry by LOTF.

For purposes of the Copyright Act, the Recipient acknowledges that all materials produced by it in connection with this Agreement have been or shall be prepared by or under the direction and control of the Ministry through the LOTF and moral rights are assigned to the Ministry.”

The Consulting Team developed a process to ensure that project managers and relevant staff understood that all forms of Intellectual Property materials originating from any LOTF pilot are owned by the Government of Ontario indefinitely and beyond the lifetime of each pilot project. Further, beginning in the summer of 2001, several host institutions and their pilots commenced additional exploratory projects funded by the LOTF. These too are governed by the same IP principles and procedures.

The intent of IP-related procedures was three-fold, to:

- (1) foster adherence to relevant contractual obligations;
- (2) ensure that materials purchased by public funding through the Government of Ontario would, following review, be made available to all public post-secondary institutions, beyond pilots who most immediately benefited from these funds (i.e., that such materials not be utilized for individual profit, but rather for the public good of present and future post-secondary students with learning disabilities); and,
- (3) maintain a minimum standard of care and review of quality over claims that products, resources and similar materials originated in LOTF funding.

As expected, LOTF’s pilot projects are generating an array of resources, products, “deliverables” and related materials that are legally owned by the Government of Ontario, through LOTF and the Ministry. A formal IP Registry was established by LOTF in July 2001, to assist with compliance. Its maintenance will be transferred to LOTF’s successor agency once LOTF has completed its mandate. A number of the pilots’ products are now registered and available for others to use, and in fact several have already been distributed for the benefit of all Ontario’s colleges and universities. Other items’ IP registrations are pending, either because the authors require more time to refine their products, or because innovations projects funded by LOTF are not yet complete. Specific listings are included in the LOTF Technical Report.

The projects were informed at various times throughout the piloting period about the IP Registry and process, as well as about copyright implications, and issues pertaining to acknowledgement. They have also been informed that some materials (e.g. their final summative reports, certain informal outreach and other communications) are exempted from registration. However, while the pilots are free to share registry-exempted items, this does not imply LOTF approval of or agreement with the contents of non-registered items.

The complete guideline (*LOTF IP Registry: Context, Procedures, Application, 23/07/01*) is included in the Technical Report.

IV. The next challenge: the future of LOTF and services for students with learning disabilities in Ontario

“ ... This Pilot Project is one step/sign of what the government might be doing right for students that have an LD of any sort. It almost seems that things are coming out of the dark ages for students with LD and the Pilot Projects are proof that we, the students with LD, can and will be strong, independent, and decisive. We are just as intelligent as the next person which is important for people to realize. I ask you this, students that are in the public school and high school systems, where will they be if the services are not there? ... ”

Pilot student quote

In 1997, Premier Eves presented a challenge to the education system of Ontario: create change such that students with learning disabilities receive real help to be successful and realize their potential in an equitable and meaningful way. He provided an incentive by establishing the Learning Opportunities Task Force with a budget of thirty million dollars over five years. LOTF, the pilot institutions and many dedicated and talented students collectively rose to the challenge that was presented to us.

Staff at the pilot projects provided outstanding supports, services and programming to the pilot students. The students, in turn, participated in and assisted with the evaluation tasks of the LOTF at an unprecedented rate. There is no doubt that the students felt well supported and expressed their appreciation of the opportunities available to them. They were also generous, lively and forthright in articulating their recommendations for institutional and systemic changes.

LOTF, in turn, greatly valued the formative and concluding recommendations provided by the students and pilot staff. We note that the direct perspectives of the pilot students were granted particular “privilege” as the key findings and recommendations were formulated. We also commend the extent to which the pilot projects and their staffs sustained primary focus on student voice and experience.

As we were approaching the end of the piloting period, there was a concern that, as has happened before with the reports of Task Forces, Royal Commissions and other initiatives, the results of the research, the findings and recommendations were presented, received and then tabled never to see the light of day again. We are hopeful that, given the size of our target population, the depth of enquiry undertaken and the comprehensive and far reaching nature of the findings, this is a most unlikely outcome for our work.

The positive reception accorded to our interim recommendations for the new ESF implementation by all post-secondary institutions this fall indicates that there is a systemic and political will not to let this work disappear. Similarly, the announcement that the LOTF (or more precisely its successor agency) will become an ongoing entity is again an assurance that services to persons with learning disabilities will continue rather than falling by the wayside due to a lack of commitment or interest on the part of decision makers and service deliverers.

Much has been written and said about the negative consequences of unidentified learning disabilities and individuals with this condition who have received no help or guidance or support. For individuals with learning disabilities whose disability is not identified and who have no access to appropriate services, research has identified and experience has confirmed the following potentially negative outcomes:

- C dropping out of school,
- C illiteracy,
- C unemployment,
- C reliance on welfare,
- C mental health problems,
- C suicide,
- C drug addiction,
- C teenage pregnancy,
- C repeated incarceration.

Learning disabilities are not a predisposing condition for any of the above circumstances. These outcomes are not the direct result of having learning disabilities. Nor are they a co-morbid condition routinely accompanying learning disabilities. Rather, individuals with learning disabilities, due to the devastating impacts of continuous poor performance, wasted potential, under- and unemployment and damaged self-esteem, often find themselves in situations where there are limited or only destructive options apparently available to them.

At the same time, the LOTF research has clearly identified routes for students with learning disabilities to access and succeed in post-secondary education, which can substantially reduce harmful options. Individuals, who have an education, are much more likely to lead successful productive lives and become independent contributing citizens, rather than burdening society and themselves with the hallmarks of despair and failure.

As far as students with learning disabilities are concerned, good education is a “bargain” compared with the costs of ignoring such needs.

The Province of Ontario spends a great deal of money on education. Certainly, the funds available to the LOTF and the pilot institutions over the past five years have provided a generous incentive to get our work done. LOTF recognizes the need to be accountable for the expenditure of tax dollars and for ensuring that it results in positive outcomes and enhanced student performance. There is no doubt that the results of the past four years of LOTF piloting have proved the value of the funds spent, both to individual pilot students and to society as a whole.

LOTF is convinced that implementation of the twenty-four recommendations herein will lead to the anticipated and desired outcome that students with specific learning disabilities are enabled to make the transition to post-secondary education, should they wish to do so, and receive the supports, services and accommodations throughout their post-secondary education enabling them to realize their full potential to lead independent productive lives.

Now that we know what students with learning disabilities require to succeed and what is necessary to ensure that their goals are successfully attained at a reasonable cost, can we afford to do anything less?

That is the next challenge!

Key personnel involved in the work of the Learning Opportunities Task Force

Chairman of the Learning Opportunities Task Force:

Dr. Bette M. Stephenson

Consulting and Research Team members:

Eva Nichols, Consultant to the Chairman

Allyson Harrison

Larry McCloskey

Laura Weintraub

Administrative staff:

Bonnie Tiffin, Executive Co-ordinator

Joanna Jannetta, Administrative Assistant to the Co-ordinator

Members of the French Language Assessment Project:

Gerald Blake

Eva Nichols

Berenice Saracoglu

Bonnie Tiffin

Members of the Committee of Reference:

Dr. Bette M. Stephenson, Chairman

Mariette Carrier-Fraser, former Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education

Dr. Richard Cummings, Integra

Joan Green, former CEO, Education Quality Accountability Office

Catherine Henderson, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

Clive Hodder, Provincial Schools Branch, Ministry of Education

Eva Nichols, Consultant to the Chairman, former Executive Director, LDAO

Dr. Wendy Roberts, Hospital for Sick Children

Karen Taylor, Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Douglas Waxman, former President, LDAO

Carol Yaworski, Executive Director, LDAO

Lynn Ziraldo, Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education

List of the ten pilot institutions active for four years of pilot activity (1998 to 2002) with their key contact staff member(s):

C Cambrian College, Sudbury: Susan Alcorn Mackay

C Conestoga College, Kitchener-Waterloo: Marian Mainland

C Fanshawe College, London: Frank Walsh

C Georgian College in Barrie, Orillia and Owen Sound: Kate Beatty and Jim Bryson

C University of Guelph: Bruno Mancini

C York University, Toronto: Cora Dusk and Marc Wilchesky

The English consortium pilot institutions:

- C Canadore College, North Bay: Dawson Pratt
- C Loyalist College, Belleville: Catherine O'Rourke
- C Nipissing University, North Bay: Dan Pletzer
- C Trent University, Peterborough: Eunice Lund-Lucas

The Francophone consortium pilot institutions (1998 to 2000) and their contacts were:

- C College Boreal, Sudbury: Chantal Pollock
- C College des Grands Lacs: no longer exists as a separate institution
- C La Cite Collegiale, Ottawa: Diane Chevalier

A full listing of all pilot staffs at all pilot institutions is included in the technical report.