Improving Flexibility in Postsecondary Education

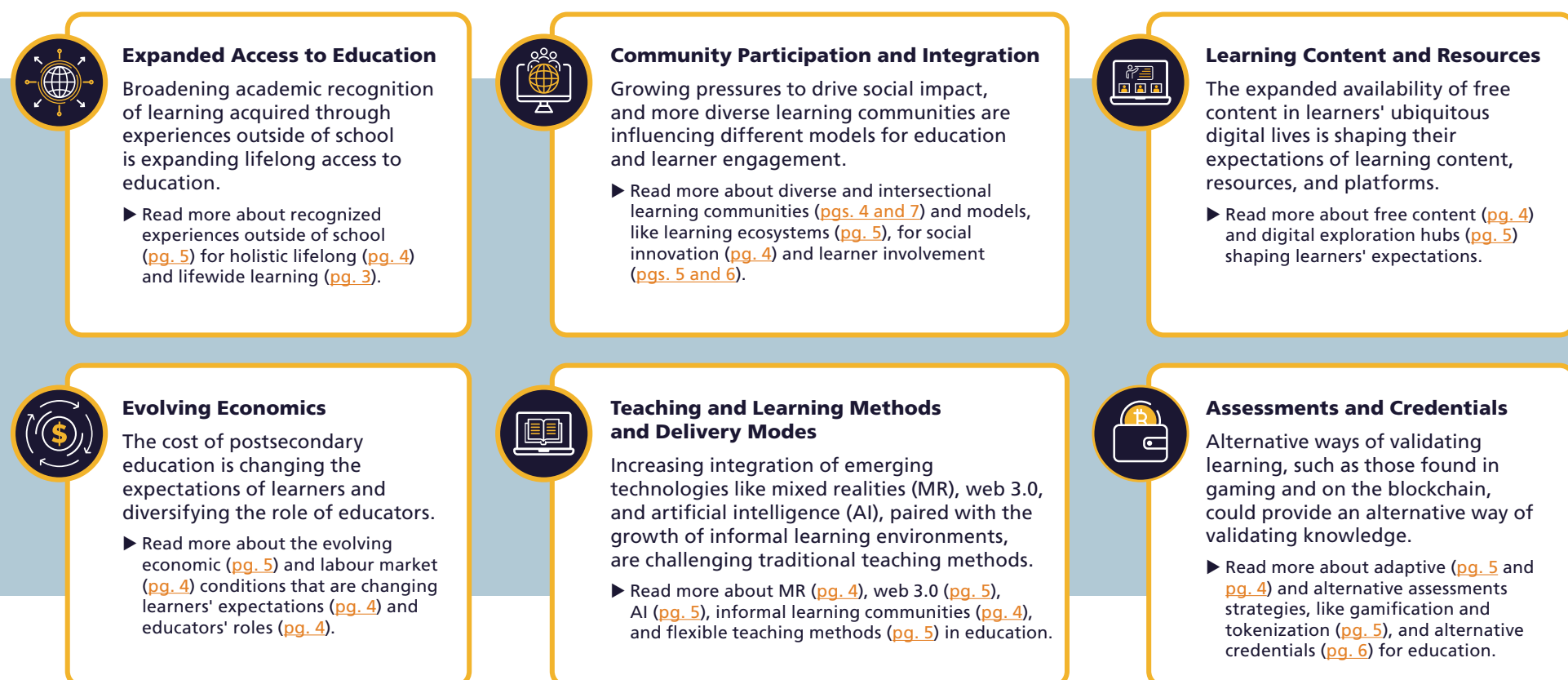# FLEXIBILITY BRIEF 1: Making the Case

In past publications, eCampusOntario explored the rapidly changing landscape of the postsecondary education sector, identified major factors impacting the sector, presented current trends, and proposed questions to examine possible future implications. Through this work, it became clear that today's learners have evolving expectations necessitating more online options and new approaches to learning. How educators and institutes adjust to meet these changing expectations requires increased flexibility in all areas—practice, infrastructure, and policy.

This brief is the first in a set of publications exploring flexibility in postsecondary education. A series of participatory workshops with educators will help uncover how flexibility relates to their role and the factors driving the need for it. This research will deepen our shared understanding of flexibility from an educator's point of view. The insights and recommendations from this work will inform future strategy to create improved and more flexible digital transformation in higher education.
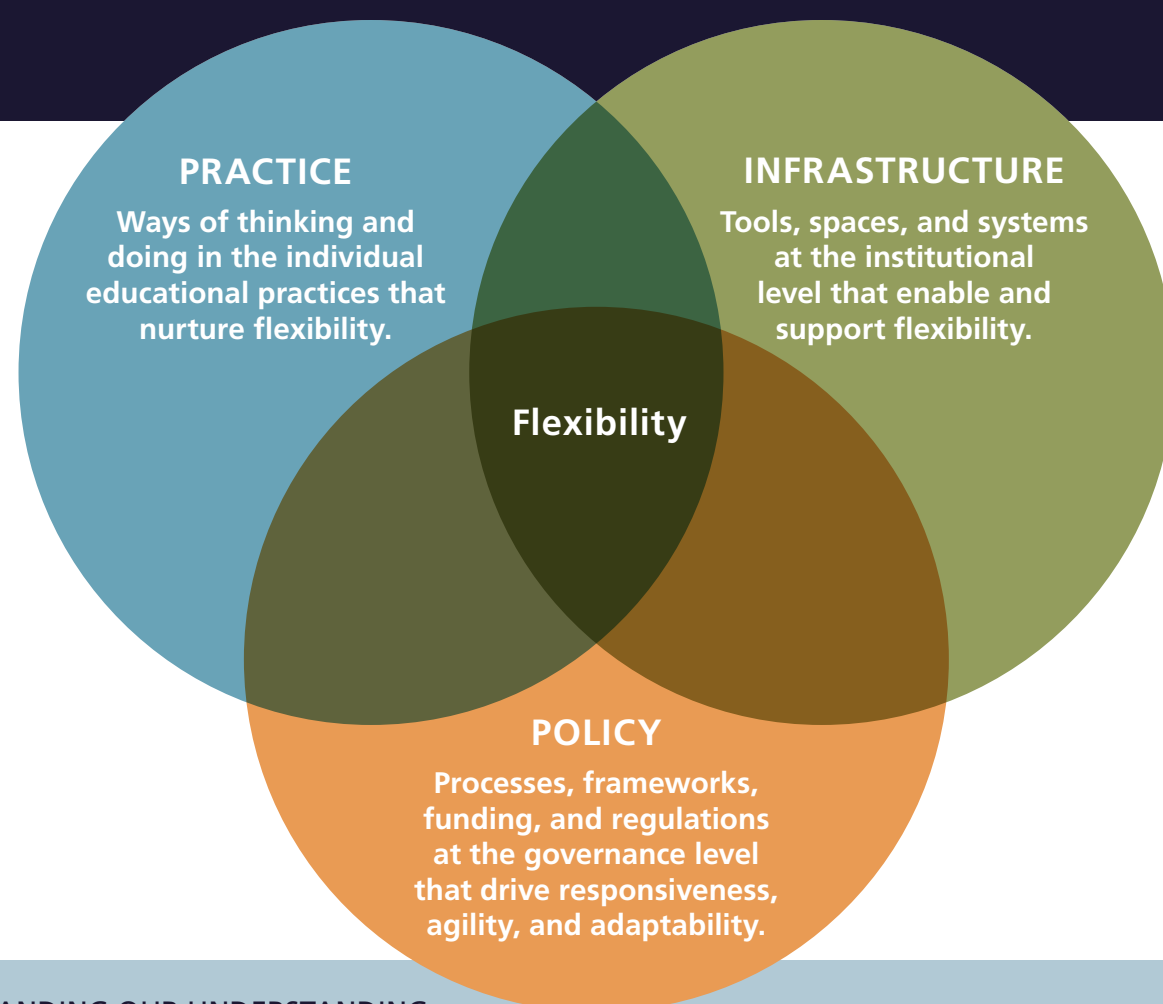
Understanding Flexibility in Postsecondary Education

Our previous research revealed several emerging trends which suggest an increasing need and desire for flexibility in postsecondary education. These trends are adding pressure to explore more in depth what flexibility means for the postsecondary education sector.

Expanded Access to Education
Broadening academic recognition of learning acquired through experiences outside of school is expanding lifelong access to education.
▶ Read more about recognized experiences outside of school (pg. 5) for holistic lifelong (pg. 4) and lifewide learning (pg. 3).

Community Participation and Integration
Growing pressures to drive social impact, and more diverse learning communities are influencing different models for education and learner engagement.
▶ Read more about diverse and intersectional learning communities (pgs. 4 and 7) and models, like learning ecosystems (pg. 5), for social innovation (pg. 4) and learner involvement (pgs. 5 and 6).

Learning Content and Resources
The expanded availability of free content in learners' ubiquitous digital lives is shaping their expectations of learning content, resources, and platforms.
▶ Read more about free content (pg. 4) and digital exploration hubs (pg. 5) shaping learners' expectations.

Evolving Economics
The cost of postsecondary education is changing the expectations of learners and diversifying the role of educators.
▶ Read more about the evolving economic (pg. 5) and labour market (pg. 4) conditions that are changing learners' expectations (pg. 4) and educators' roles (pg. 4).

Teaching and Learning Methods and Delivery Modes
Increasing integration of emerging technologies like mixed realities (MR), web 3.0, and artificial intelligence (AI), paired with the growth of informal learning environments, are challenging traditional teaching methods.
▶ Read more about MR (pg. 4), web 3.0 (pg. 5), AI (pg. 5), informal learning communities (pg. 4), and flexible teaching methods (pg. 5) in education.

Assessments and Credentials
Alternative ways of validating learning, such as those found in gaming and on the blockchain, could provide an alternative way of validating knowledge.
▶ Read more about adaptive (pg. 5 and pg. 4) and alternative assessments strategies, like gamification and tokenization (pg. 5), and alternative credentials (pg. 6) for education.

FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING and DEFINING FLEXIBILITY

In our research, we found themes related to flexibility in education can be categorized into three main areas: practice, infrastructure, and policy.

PRACTICE
Ways of thinking and doing in the individual educational practices that nurture flexibility.

INFRASTRUCTURE
Tools, spaces, and systems at the institutional level that enable and support flexibility.

POLICY
Processes, frameworks, funding, and regulations at the governance level that drive responsiveness, agility, and adaptability.

Flexibility

Questions explored in the upcoming briefs include:
▶ What does flexibility look like today?
▶ What are the current problems and opportunities surrounding flexibility?
▶ What exists today and what needs to be developed to help improve flexibility in the future?

EXPANDING OUR UNDERSTANDING
A series of briefs will further uncover the complexities of flexibility from the perspective of postsecondary educators.

FLEXIBILITY BRIEF 1: Making the Case
FLEXIBILITY BRIEF 2: Framing the Problem
FLEXIBILITY BRIEF 3: Understanding the Problem
FLEXIBILITY BRIEF 4: Exploring the Possibilities
FLEXIBILITY BRIEF 5: Integrated Insights

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