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**OPENING REMARKS AT CONFERENCE BOARD OF CANADA'S 4TH ANNUAL SKILLS &
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SUMMIT: 'WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR
CANADA'S PSE SYSTEM?'**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you, Daniel, and good morning to you all. It is a great pleasure to be with you at this Summit on the future of higher education in Canada, and I'd like to thank the Conference Board for inviting me.

So, why are we all here? As Daniel noted, we are here to explore what is needed to build and maintain a world-class higher education system in Canada, including considerations such as:

- What structural and institutional changes may be needed to strengthen our current system to ensure our graduates are highly skilled and educated?

- What needs to be done to ensure equity and access to post-secondary education and skills development in Canada?

- What can colleges and universities do to engage employers in skills development?

- And what can we learn from regional and international successes in these areas that will enhance our own policies, programs and practices?

These are critical questions in a climate of enrolment challenges, government funding constraints, and challenging public perceptions of the value of post-secondary education.

As I near the end of my second term as a university president, and prior to that served as Vice-President, Research and International Relations at McMaster, I have been thinking about these issues for a long time.

There has been a shift in focus over the last two decades or so, moving away from a concern around 'productivity' to an emphasis on 'innovation', and, as we have seen here in Canada with the federal government's new innovation agenda, towards ensuring that considerations of social inclusion are included in any innovation strategies or frameworks.

There is a lot to talk about, but I thought I would focus my remarks on three areas: how we can challenge perceptions by changing ourselves; what is needed to create a culture of research impact in Canada; and what does success looks like?

Challenging Perceptions by Changing Ourselves

In an Ipsos poll conducted by the COU last year, Ontarians across all ages, regions, education and income levels feel that the value of an education from colleges has grown more than that of universities over the last 20 years.

Three-quarters of Ontarians (76%) identified university as "expensive" and only one-third (33%) as "worth the investment." Among university graduates who think university value is declining, the most commonly cited reason is "impractical skills," reinforcing the belief that universities don't do as good a job at preparing graduates for the real world.

More positively, it appears that Ontarians understand the economic value of universities: 84% agree that universities have contributed to Ontario's economic leadership over the past 50 years, while 76% agree that universities have a strong local economic impact; and 9 in 10 Ontarians want their child to go to PSE, regardless of whether it is university (91%) or college (90%).

Interestingly, 60% of Ontarians believe that teaching has contributed more to the progress and prosperity of Ontario than research.

So, this clearly represents an opportunity. We need to do a better job linking what universities do inside the classroom to how it benefits graduates and society more broadly.

As we have seen, the government has signaled its commitment to a highly skilled workforce, with the Premier releasing the final report of the Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel last June. The Conway report makes recommendations for the development of an integrated strategy that will build on the world-class skills, education and training systems in the province to prepare Ontario's current and future workforce for the technology- and knowledge-based jobs of tomorrow.

But this work must start within our organizations and with our own students by:

- Improving student pathways and mobility to enhance educational choice and opportunity;

- Creating opportunities for undergraduate research, which will help to build pipelines of talent and bigger talent pools, which will generate more innovation and ultimately, more societal benefit;

- Identifying our strengths and focusing on areas where we can produce world-leading research and research that has high value to society;

- and creating opportunities for work-integrated learning and technology-enhanced learning that will allow our students to more easily integrate into the workforce after graduation.

More broadly, and as we have seen in the federal government's new innovation agenda, we also need innovation that is inclusive—that draws on talent across disciplines, across sectors and across borders.

As a university president, I am well-positioned to tell you about the tremendous intellectual capital in this city, which is driving and catalyzing innovation in the region, including at York University, Canada's third largest universities and home to the country's top-ranked business school, the Schulich School of Business; our new Lassonde School of Engineering, which is taking an innovative approach to educating engineers in a cutting-edge learning environment; and education with local and global reach. In addition to a campus in Hyderabad, India, we have also recently launched an eco-campus in Costa Rica and have established a new Institute for Global Health, which will be a hub for international dialogue and collaboration in health innovation research and teaching. We are also preparing to build a new campus in Markham Centre that will benefit from growing presence of economic clusters already present in York Region as well as infrastructure and transit support to the region.

You all have examples at your own institutions or organizations of success and of areas of strength. But what we have been seeing is a call for more robust innovation strategy and the need to support strong, dynamic innovation ecosystems, locally, regionally and nationally.

For innovation to truly have an impact, you need scale, as we have seen in Silicon Valley, in Boston, and in other innovation epicenters. If you look at this region (Waterloo, and across to northern Toronto, down to Hamilton, and across to the Niagara Region), there are innovation hubs of differing degrees of evolution in terms of human capacity, research capacity and infrastructure—those that are thriving and successful (i.e. MaRS) and those that are still evolving (i.e. Markham).

Creating a Culture of Research Impact in Canada

So how do we create a culture of research impact and innovation? First, we need smart cities. We need to harness emerging technologies and support mission-driven research to grow competitiveness and innovation within our urban centers.

Second, we need to create pipelines or pathways to mobilize talent and knowledge, and this is where higher education can play a critical role in innovation ecosystems. Universities help to grow talent pools, supporting big ideas as well as entrepreneurial approaches and opportunities (such as start-ups) for students through experiential learning. They equip graduates with the skills needed in an increasingly globalized environment—this is why both broad-based education as well as professionally relevant programs are important.

Third, we need to create pathways for industry to access the full innovation capacity of our universities, as well as more opportunities (such as internships or work-integrated learning) for university graduates to access industry.

Finally, let's not forget governments' role. To truly support innovation, bold, ambitious government strategies are needed that set priorities and targets, and assign accountabilities. Governments need to support knowledge and innovation hubs in real terms by aligning efforts, incentives, programs, and policies that facilitate rather than deter collaboration. Ideally, governments are not simply funding or facilitating research, but conducting it as well.

You may be aware of the new report out by the Conference Board of Canada on knowledge mobilization, research impact and the changing nature of academic work (*Beyond Citations*, 2016). The report highlights the ResearchImpact network established by York University and the University of Victoria in 2006, and now expanded to include 12 Canadian universities.

As its name suggests, the ResearchImpact network has been working to build and advance Canada's knowledge mobilization and research impact culture across all areas of university research, including humanities, social sciences and the arts, so that we are generating research that is of value to society, and so that our research is getting into the hands of policy-makers, practitioners and decision-makers.

This is a new, people-centred approach to research that also complements research agendas that traditionally have focused exclusively on tech transfer and commercialization.

As the report makes clear, the success of this approach to increase knowledge mobilization and create a culture of research impact in Canada will require the active and sustained support not only of institutions, but also the support of government, industry and community partners.

Tomorrow, the Summit's Closing Reception will be co-hosted by York's Vice-President of Research and Innovation Robert Haché and Daniele Zanotti, the dynamic new President & CEO

of United Way Toronto and York Region, and this will be an opportunity to discuss these issues further.

What Does Success Look Like?

So, what is the best-case scenario for Canadian post-secondary skills and education in the 21st century? If efforts like the ResearchImpact network are successful, what does that look like?

Again, it begins with changing perceptions and ends with value and impact:

- Increased support and understanding of university issues and needs by government;
- Increased government investment in the medium to longer term by reigniting the public support for, and pride in universities in Ontario;
- Shifting the public perception of the value of universities and providing a firmer base to support institutional efforts to market their own unique brands;
- A central role for advanced technology and entrepreneurship in higher education;
- Research with social value or mission-driven research that complements research and development with the work of knowledge mobilization more broadly; and
- More university and college partnerships with governments, not-for-profits and civil society.

Just yesterday Canada's Auditor General criticized the government for being too slow to embrace technology and to take action on recommendations in an age of instant communications, stating that "services need to be built around citizens, not process."

I think the same argument can be made for our post-secondary education sector. We need to be more responsive, more nimble to act, more open to bold ideas and new ways of doing things.

Above all, we need to recognize that we cannot do this alone. It is about pan-university, cross-disciplinary, and mission-driven research.

For our teaching and research to be truly valuable to society, for our graduates to be ready for the workplace, colleges and universities must be integrated into our communities—with government, with industry, with civil society—rather than islands.

The government has traditionally regarded the three areas of: economic growth, social justice and environmental sustainability as separate, but is now recognizing, along with the rest of society, that a more integrated approach is more effective.

This represents a key opportunity and key role for colleges and universities.

Several good examples from York University include research underway in immigration, health, employment, disaster/emergency management and climate change—all areas where we are seeing opportunities to connect research to society and extract value for Canadians.

So, to conclude, I believe we are starting to see a new definition of innovation emerging—one that includes considerations of inclusion and integration, and that seeks to understand how we can break down existing barriers to unleash not only the fullest potential of industry, academia

and government, but the fullest potential of each citizen and group so that all have access to and can contribute to the knowledge economy.

To create truly sustainable and successful innovation ecosystems or innovation regions, we need to do more than embrace disruption, or push the boundaries of discovery. We need to integrate a diversity of voices and perspectives. We need to be open to radically revaluating how we do things and be willing to change.

We need communities that are open to new gateways or pathways to innovation, new ways of doing things, and complex exchanges of ideas. The truly prosperous communities of the future will be inclusive and collaborative communities.