Virtual Delivery in Ontario's College Sector Get SET Programs: Access, Capacity & Sustainability



Get SET Skills, Education and Training

Canada

EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO

Ontario

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Executive Summary

This report examines the scope, scale, and resource requirements of virtual delivery within Get SET funded Academic Upgrading (AU) programs across Ontario's public college system. Data were collected from 20 of 21 eligible colleges (95% response rate) using a mixed-methods approach.

Findings indicate that some degree of virtual delivery is now fully embedded in college Get SET programming and is considered essential to meeting the needs of adult students. Virtual and hybrid delivery modes have expanded access by reducing geographic, financial, and scheduling barriers, particularly for individuals balancing employment and caregiving responsibilities.

Across college Get SET programs, virtual delivery options are integrated into many aspects of the Get SET student lifecycle including (but not limited to) intake, assessment, advising, and course delivery. Hybrid delivery is the most widely used mode, combining the flexibility of online learning with in-person support. Colleges reported consistent infrastructure, including widespread use of learning management systems and internal technical support.

Despite these benefits, several challenges were identified. Students in college Get SET programs face barriers related to accessing reliable devices, maintaining reliable internet connectivity, and using adequate digital skills to engage effectively with virtual learning. Colleges report increased demands on staffing, instructional design, and technology. Maintaining engagement, ensuring academic integrity, and responding to emerging technologies such as generative artificial intelligence (AI) present additional pressures.

A key finding is that virtual delivery expands access while increasing demands on system capacity. Colleges are supporting multiple delivery modes simultaneously within their Get SET funded programs while struggling with constrained resources. Respondents identified a misalignment between current (and historical) funding for Get SET programs and the operational realities of providing virtual delivery options for Get SET services and programming.

Sustaining high-quality, equitable delivery of the Get SET program will require continued government investment in infrastructure, student supports, and system capacity, as well as policy alignment that reflects current delivery modes. As virtual programming continues within the Get SET programs funded for in-person delivery, consideration must also be given to the impact on the five Get SET e-Channel providers who were funded and launched more than 20 years ago to provide exclusively virtual (fully online) service and program delivery.

Background

Ontario's public colleges have been delivering adult upgrading programs since the college system was established in 1967. Adult Upgrading (or Academic Upgrading - AU) was one of

the first system-wide programs approved for delivery across all 24 colleges. Over the years, funding sources for college-based AU programs have shifted and program design has evolved. As of 2026, 21 of 24 public colleges continue to deliver Get SET funded upgrading programs at 80 sites across the province through a combination of in-person and virtual delivery

Since 1967, most of the AU programming in public colleges has been funded through transfer payment agreements with the government of Ontario. Currently, the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development (MLITSD) funds the Get SET (Skills, Education and Training) adult education program through a network of service providers. Get SET providers offer free (no-cost) upskilling programs to eligible Ontario residents (18 years or older) to prepare for their transition to further education, training, employment, and/or increased independence. From 1997 to late 2024, the Get SET program was known by the name Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS).

Get SET providers are funded through one of three delivery sectors (public college, school board, or community based) and designated within one of four cultural/linguistic streams (Anglophone, Francophone, Indigenous, or Deaf). The Get SET program guidelines provide flexibility for service providers to tailor programming to meet the needs and goals of participants within their respective delivery sector and cultural stream.

As of early 2026, the MLITSD provides Get SET funding to almost 200 service provider organizations across approximately 300 in-person sites throughout the province. In addition to the 300 on-site Get SET funded programs, the MLITSD funds Get SET programming and services through five e-Channel (fully online) providers. The e-Channel programs were funded and launched between 2003 and 2007 to intentionally expand the geographic reach of the in-person Get SET programs and to support the unique needs of the four cultural streams noted above.

According to the MLITSD's Employment Ontario Information System (EOIS) data, approximately 46,000 adults each year access Get SET-funded programs and services across Ontario. Within college Get SET programs specifically, 16,000+ students are served each year Of those 16,000+ students, the majority are engaged in academic courses (English, mathematics, sciences, digital skills) to prepare for application to postsecondary education and/or registration as an apprentice. Some college Get SET students participate in short-term programs or courses that provide upskilling for transition to employment.

Across all delivery sectors and cultural streams, Get SET funded programs and services provide eligible adults with valuable, no-cost access to upskilling that allows them to pursue their goals of transitioning to further education, training, employment, and increased independence.

Introduction and Purpose

College delivery of Get SET funded programs and services is typically part of each college's Academic Upgrading (AU) department. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges (and other Get SET providers) offered very little, and more commonly no, internet based virtual delivery options. During the pandemic, the expansion of virtual delivery accelerated when it became essential rather than optional. Post-pandemic, colleges have maintained a range of virtual options, in addition to in-person delivery, to support students' need for flexible scheduling and digital access within the Get SET program.

The *Virtual Delivery in Ontario's College Sector Get SET Programs: Access, Capacity, and Sustainability* study examines the scope and scale of virtual Get SET program delivery in Ontario's public colleges including the types of services and courses offered, the delivery modes and technologies used, the proportion of programming delivered virtually, and the specialized staffing and instructional skills required to support quality, sustainable virtual delivery options. Findings are intended to provide an overview for funders and other interested partners regarding infrastructure, resources, sustainability, and best practices associated with high-quality virtual delivery of Get SET programs and services within the public college sector.

For the purpose of this report, the term "Academic Upgrading" or "AU" is used to reference the range of Get SET funded programs and services delivered by Ontario's public colleges.

Methods

Research Design

This research study utilized a mixed-methods cross-sectional descriptive design to examine the resource requirements associated with delivering virtual (internet-enabled) Academic Upgrading programs and services within Ontario's public colleges. Through survey responses, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently to develop a comprehensive, sector-level understanding of virtual AU program and service delivery. While the analysis focuses on aggregated findings, illustrative, anonymized examples from individual colleges are included where appropriate to provide contextual detail.

Participants and Setting

The study focused on 21 of 24 publicly funded colleges in Ontario offering AU programs and services across 80 sites. Three colleges were excluded from the study due to their recent closure of in-person Get SET funded programs and services.

The technique of purposive sampling was used in deliberately selecting participants based on their knowledge and/or experience of the virtual provision of AU programming to gain in-

depth insights rather than statistical generalizability. Within each participating college, AU program managers were invited to participate through survey completion. Participation was voluntary, and colleges were included based on their willingness to provide detailed resource and operational data. Where applicable, multiple participants such as faculty, administrators, coordinators or technical staff from the same college contributed to different components of the data collection as appropriate. The study setting, therefore, reflects a range of AU programs offering virtual delivery options across the province.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured mixed-methods survey administered using Microsoft Forms. Before distribution, the survey underwent three rounds of field testing with five interest holders. Participating colleges then completed the survey over a two-week period. The survey gathered standardized resource data and contextual insights.

- *Quantitative Data Collection*
    - Likert, multiple-choice, and short answer questions were designed to capture program and resource categories including:
        - Virtual services
            - Service offerings
            - Resource requirements
        - Virtual course delivery
            - Delivery mode
            - Teacher requirements
            - Technology requirements
            - Course development and administration requirements

- *Qualitative Data Collection*
    - Optional comments to quantitative responses plus long answer questions were designed to capture contextual categories including:
        - Challenges of virtual delivery
        - Benefits of virtual delivery

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately and then integrated to support a comprehensive interpretation of findings. Qualitative responses to open-ended survey questions were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis approach to identify recurring patterns. Responses were read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the data, after which descriptive codes were assigned to segments of text representing key ideas. Related codes were grouped into broader themes and organized according to perspective (students, college AU programs, funder) and thematic orientation (benefits vs challenges). The coding framework is provided in Appendix B. Quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive summaries of patterns across questions, including frequencies and proportions. The survey questions were structured to allow key themes to emerge directly from the data.

Results

Overview

Of the 24 public colleges in Ontario, the survey was distributed to the 21 colleges that offer in-person AU programs and services. Of these 21 colleges, responses were received from 20 colleges evenly distributed across the province, providing a 95% response rate.

Analysis of qualitative data through open-ended survey responses identified a consistent set of themes related to the benefits, challenges, and future directions of virtual delivery within AU programs. Analysis of quantitative survey data revealed response patterns that reinforced those themes, providing additional support for the consistency and reliability of the findings across both data sources.

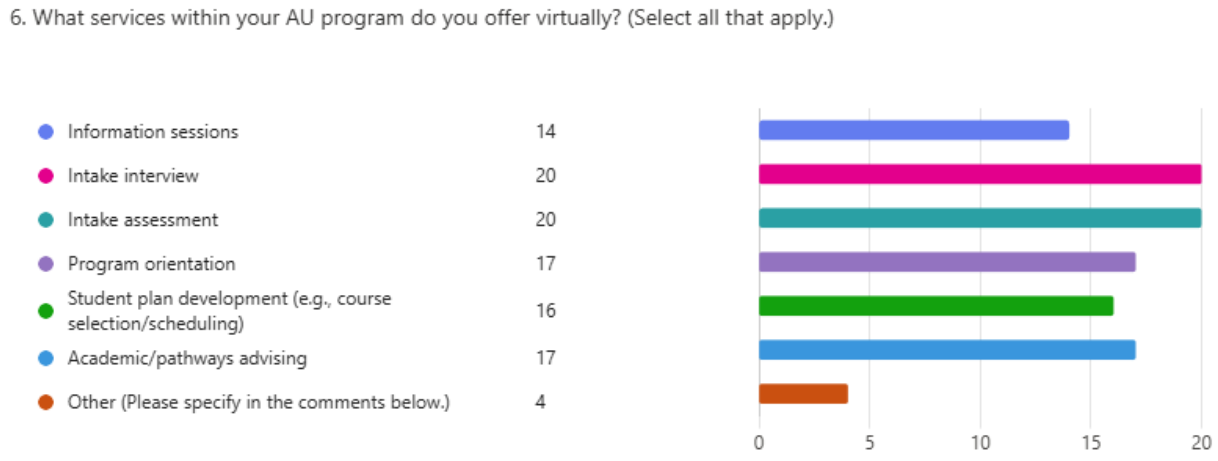
Findings reveal that virtual delivery offers significant benefits related to access and flexibility, while also introducing challenges related to system capacity, engagement, and equity.

Virtual Service Delivery

All respondents indicated that they offer at least some components of their services in a virtual format with Microsoft Teams being the dominant platform and Zoom and Google Meet playing secondary roles.

The chart below illustrates that virtual delivery is not limited to instruction but is integrated across the entire student lifecycle.

Figure 1



Virtual Course Delivery

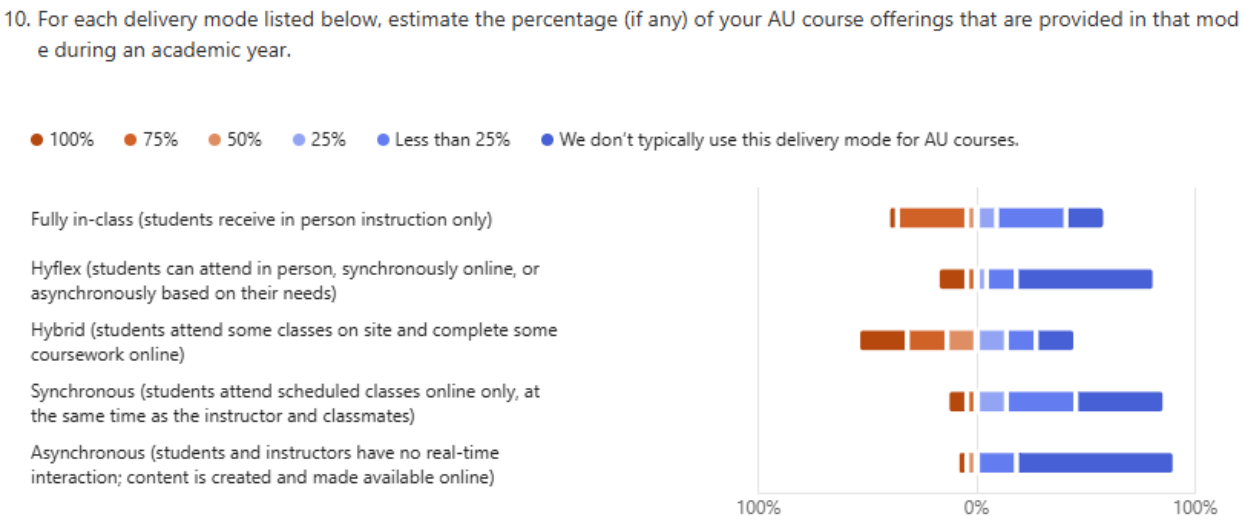
AU programs reported using a mix of course delivery modes:

- Hybrid delivery is the most widely used mode of course delivery.
- Full in-class delivery is still present at varying levels.

- Synchronous and asynchronous online delivery are used less frequently.
- Hyflex modes are less commonly implemented.

Interestingly, one respondent noted that their college AU program offers fully in-class course delivery only, while also indicating that they offer AU services (intake, assessment, etc.) in a virtual format.

Figure 2



Resources for Virtual Course Delivery

Technology Requirements for Students

Effective participation in virtual learning depends heavily on access to appropriate devices such as laptop or desktop computer, along with reliable internet services. Tablets are less compatible and smartphones are not reliable for full engagement. Additionally, virtual learning typically requires a baseline set of digital tools such as a webcam, speakers, microphone, headphones and software (e.g., PDF reader).

Above all, reliable internet access is an overarching requirement without which virtual learning is blocked. These technology requirements highlight the hidden costs of virtual learning for students that can create a barrier. Respondents noted the following:

"*Reliable, current end-user hardware for students…is a critical resource. Faculty observe that outdated student laptops, low-cost Chromebooks that cannot run Microsoft applications, and older personal devices consistently limit what learners can accomplish in virtual and blended delivery.*"

"*A funding or support mechanism that helps learners access devices and connectivity compatible with the college's teaching and assessment platforms would materially improve*

participation and outcomes. Reliable internet access in rural parts of the service area is a related ongoing barrier for AU learners."

Technology Requirements for Service Providers

A learning management system (LMS) is a core infrastructure component required for virtual delivery. A small number of different LMS platforms are used across the college AU programs, with one system (Brightspace/D2L) used predominantly.

Within LMS platforms, respondents rated the following features as operationally essential:

- Assessment features (e.g., quizzes, feedback)
- Communication tools (e.g., messaging, discussion boards)
- Tracking/reporting (e.g., class progress/grading data)

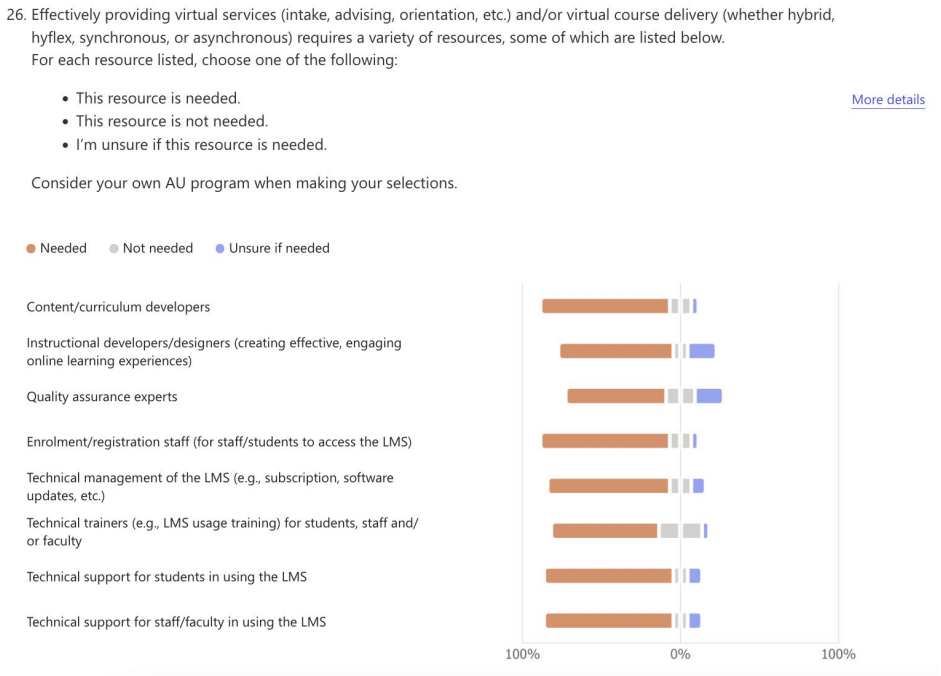
Additionally, it was noted that LMS features that support academic honesty are crucial in an environment where the use and misuse of generative artificial intelligence is increasingly common.

To create some types of lessons and learning content within an LMS, specific content development tools are needed. However, college AU personnel report limited access to these tools and/or limited knowledge of the tools themselves which may contribute to variability in content quality as in this survey comment, "*Not being able to access these items comes down to costs. All have licensing fees and minimal licenses*." In addition, the use of content creation software requires training and expertise.

Staffing

Survey respondents indicated "Needed" at very high rates for multiple staff roles to support virtual learning, extending beyond instructors, specifically noting that, "*transitioning to an online/tech-heavy environment requires expertise and experience*."

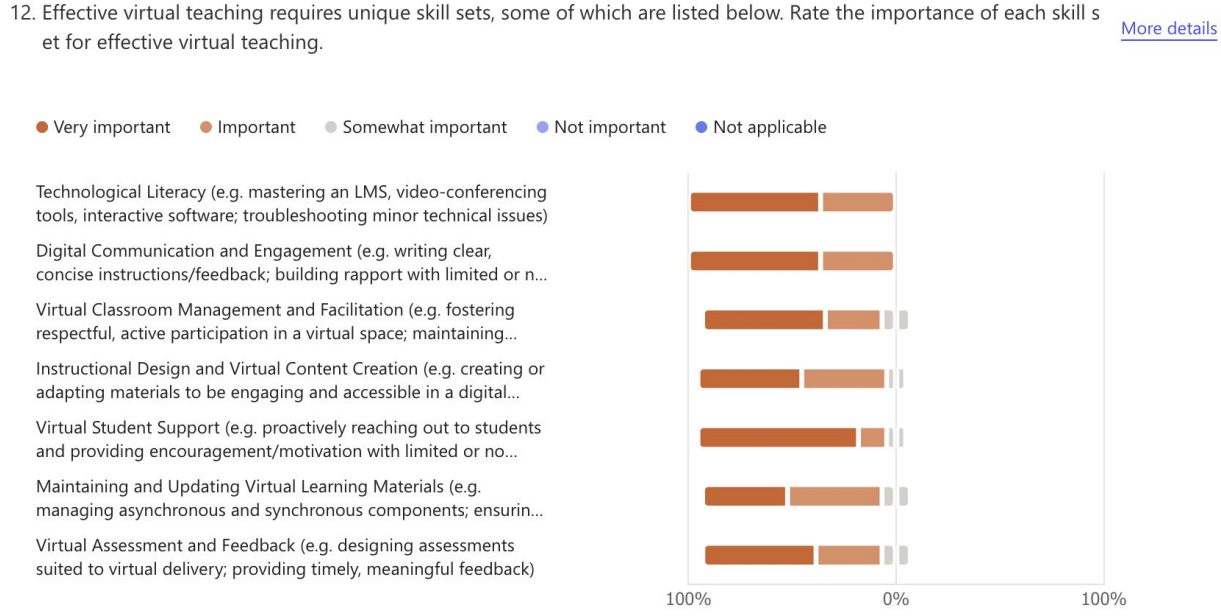
Figure 3



Skill Sets for Virtual Teaching

Virtual teaching is widely recognized as requiring distinct and specialized teaching skills, *beyond those* needed for traditional classroom instruction. The required skills and their relative importance are illustrated in the aggregated responses below.

Figure 4



Overall Benefits and Challenges

Analysis of open-ended survey responses identified a consistent set of benefits and challenges associated with virtual delivery across three relevant groups: students, college AU departments, and the government funder (MLITSD).

While survey respondents have direct insight into the benefits and challenges as they relate to their own AU program delivery and their students, the responses that relate to the MLITSD (funder) reflect the respondents' own perceived insights.

Key Findings

- Benefits
    - Students: Flexibility and access were the most frequently cited benefits for students.
    - College AU departments: Virtual delivery supports increased participation and program reach.
    - Funder (MLITSD): At the system level, virtual delivery aligns with goals related to access, equity, and workforce development.
- Challenges
    - Students: Digital access barriers (internet, devices, etc.) were the most commonly identified student challenges.
    - College AU departments: Respondents consistently identified engagement, motivation, and connection as areas of concern for students in virtual environments.
    - Funder (MLITSD): Perceived challenges at the Ministry (funder) level centred on funding models, system capacity, and digital equity.

Qualitative responses indicate that virtual delivery is widely viewed as a mechanism for expanding access to AU programming, particularly for learners facing geographic, scheduling, and/or caregiving barriers. Respondents also highlighted benefits related to flexibility in program delivery, increased institutional reach, and alignment with broader system-level priorities.

At the same time, responses identified a range of challenges across relevant groups. For students, these challenges are primarily related to digital access and engagement. For AU departments within colleges, they relate to resource requirements, program quality, and delivery complexity. At the system level, challenges focus on funding, capacity, and equitable access to technology and support.

The summary of findings presented above is further synthesized in the following thematic matrix. A full description of the benefits and challenges for all three relevant groups appears below the matrix.

Table 1: Thematic Matrix

Theme	Students (Benefits)	Students (Challenges)	College AU (Benefits)	College AU (Challenges)	Funder (Benefits)	Funder (Challenges)
Access & Equity	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Flexibility	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓
Engagement	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓
Social Connection	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	–	✓
Skills Development	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓	✓
Capacity & Staffing	–	–	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓
Infrastructure	–	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Academic Integrity	–	✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓
Efficiency/ Scale	–	–	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓
Funding/ Policy	–	–	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓

Legend:

✓ = present

✓✓ = strong

✓✓✓ = dominant

Benefits of Virtual Delivery

Benefits for Students

Respondents consistently identified flexibility and accessibility as the primary benefits of providing virtual delivery options for students. It enables students to better balance education with employment and caregiving responsibilities while reducing geographic and transportation barriers.

Students also benefit from flexibly paced learning and the ability to review materials online. In some cases, virtual delivery was noted to reduce anxiety and provide a more comfortable entry point for adults returning to education. As one respondent observed, "*For students who struggle with anxiety, this can be a safe way to start engaging in upgrading*."

In addition, virtual delivery provides opportunities for students to develop digital literacy and digital fluency skills that are increasingly important for education and employment.

Benefits for College Academic Upgrading Programs

Virtual delivery allows college AU programs to expand their reach and increase participation, particularly among adult students who would otherwise be unable to attend in-person classes at the college location(s). As a result, virtual delivery supports access for students (to the extent that capacity and funding allow), as noted in the following quote: "*Virtual delivery extends the [AU] department's reach across sites and across a large, transit-limited geography*."

Institutions also benefit from greater flexibility in program delivery, more efficient use of physical space, and opportunities to scale programming. As noted by one respondent, "*We are able to offer more [course] sections if needed without having to worry about room availability*."

Benefits for the Funder (MLITSD)

From a system perspective, respondents indicated that virtual delivery supports the Ministry's goals related to access, equity, and workforce development. Respondents highlighted the ability to increase participation among underserved populations. "*Supporting virtual delivery allows the Ministry to expand access to programs for a broader range of learners including those in rural or remote communities*."

Virtual delivery was also linked to improved system efficiency and scalability, allowing more students to potentially be served across a community or region. One respondent emphasized that this approach enables, "*efficient use of provincial [college] upgrading infrastructure across regions*."

Additionally, respondents identified strong alignment with workforce development priorities. Virtual delivery options support upskilling, employability, and digital literacy. As one response stated, "*virtual delivery allows more unemployed and underemployed clients to gain the necessary skills to contribute to society*."

Challenges of Virtual Delivery

Challenges for Students

The two most frequently identified challenges for students related to digital access and learning engagement. Many students face barriers related to unreliable internet access, lack of appropriate devices, and limited digital skills. One respondent described this in detail: "*Many AU learners work on outdated laptops…and internet connectivity in rural parts of the service area is inconsistent.*"

In addition, respondents noted that students often struggle with motivation, time management, and self-regulation in virtual environments. Without the structure of in-person learning, some students disengage or fall behind. As one participant observed, "*The temptation to step away from the computer…is higher in a virtual environment*."

Reduced interaction with peers and instructors can also lead to feelings of isolation and decreased engagement. One respondent noted that, "*Students may feel disconnected from the Academic Upgrading community, highlighting the importance of social connection in supporting persistence and confidence*."

Challenges for College Academic Upgrading Programs

At the program level, challenges centre on delivering effective virtual programming while maintaining quality and managing resource constraints. Respondents emphasized that virtual delivery requires significant investment in curriculum development, instructional design, and ongoing technical support, all of which place pressure on existing resources. As one participant noted, "*curriculum development…takes time and requires proper technology,"* underscoring the resource-intensive nature of high-quality delivery.

These capacity constraints are closely linked to increased demands on college AU faculty and staff. Respondents described the need for ongoing training, expanded technical support, and additional time for curriculum and course development. In most cases, colleges AU programs are supporting multiple delivery modes concurrently, further increasing workload and complexity. Managing both in-person and virtual students simultaneously can strain systems and faculty/staff capacity.

Within this context, maintaining consistent program quality presents an ongoing challenge. Respondents highlighted concerns related to academic integrity and assessment in virtual environments, particularly with emerging technologies. For example, one respondent noted, "*the increasing use of generative artificial intelligence to complete assessments*," raising questions about how to ensure authentic learning and fair evaluation.

These resource and quality challenges are compounded by difficulties in engaging and supporting students effectively in virtual environments. Respondents emphasized that it can be more difficult to build relationships, monitor student progress, and intervene early when students are struggling.

Challenges for the Funder (MLITSD)

With respect to the Ministry, funding and policy alignment emerged as the most significant perceived challenges. Respondents consistently noted that current funding models do not fully reflect the costs associated with virtual delivery. As one participant stated, "*There needs to be a funding model that recognizes the differential resource requirements of virtual delivery*."

In addition to funding, respondents highlighted the need for investment in system capacity, including instructional design, staff training, and digital infrastructure. One response emphasized that, "*virtual delivery takes considerable time and expertise to create and maintain*."

Finally, respondents pointed to ongoing equity challenges at the system level, including disparities in digital access and support. As one response noted, there is a need for "*re-thinking student support to allow for access to internet and technology*."

Discussion

Overview

This study provides a system-level view of virtual delivery within Get SET funded Academic Upgrading programs across Ontario's public college sector. With a response rate of approximately 95%, the findings reflect a high level of engagement and participation across college AU programs. In addition to strong completion rates, respondents provided extensive narrative comments, indicating that the college AU programs are actively engaged in virtual delivery and motivated to share their experiences.

Overall, the findings were largely consistent across respondents and colleges, suggesting a high degree of alignment in both practice and experience.

Significance of Findings

The results of this study are significant for several reasons.

1. Virtual delivery is universally embedded within college AU programs and services. All respondents reported that they are providing options for virtual services and/or virtual course delivery. This reflects a permanent system-wide shift.

2. College AU program are operating with relatively consistent infrastructure support. They have access to the internal college LMS to house content, and they can access in-house technical support, both for faculty and students.

3. The student profile across college AU programs is consistent. Respondents described AU students as:
    a. Balancing employment (often multiple jobs)
    b. Managing caregiving responsibilities (child and/or elder care)

c. Requiring and expecting flexible scheduling options
d. Depending on the time/money saved by less frequent commuting to college sites

4. There is a significant misalignment between delivery demands and government funding structures. Respondents repeatedly identified that virtual AU delivery requires additional resources not reflected in current funding models, as well as resources that differ from, and often exceed, those associated with in-person delivery.

What the Data Show

Virtual delivery within AU programs reflects an expansion of the system underload, increasing access while placing additional demands on existing structures and resources. The data also demonstrate the benefits and challenges associated with virtual delivery of AU programs and services across the college sector.

Flexibility as a Core Requirement

Virtual delivery enables students to participate by reducing commuting time and costs, allowing them to better manage work and caregiving responsibilities. This flexibility is widely viewed by respondents as essential to meeting the needs of adult students.

Hybrid Delivery as Common Practice

Fully virtual delivery alone is not sufficient. Most respondents identified the need for a combination of virtual and in-person learning and service delivery.

Digital Access and Skills as Key Barriers

Access to reliable devices, software, and internet connectivity remains inequitable. Many students lack the digital literacy skills required for success in virtual environments. This demonstrates that the digital divide still exists.

Increased Resource Demands

Virtual delivery introduces additional requirements (and associated costs) that apply to both service delivery (intake, assessment, etc.) and to course/training delivery. Because of the significance and extent of the fiscal and human resource demands related to virtual delivery, some of the requirements identified by survey respondents are described in more detail below.

a) Specialized Teaching Skills

As noted in the earlier "Skill Sets for Virtual Teaching" section of this report, effective virtual delivery in any mode (synchronous, asynchronous, hybrid, hyflex) requires skills beyond those typically needed for in-person delivery. Hiring instructors and facilitators with additional qualifications and experience related to virtual delivery is often more costly. It may also be more difficult to find personnel with the specialized skills needed for effective virtual delivery.

b) Ongoing instructional design and course development

This area is another that requires specialized skills and training. Designing and developing high-quality, virtual content, lessons, activities, assessments, etc. requires personnel with expertise not only in online design and development elements but also in curriculum development specific to virtual delivery. Often, instructional developers work hand in hand with subject matter experts (usually instructors) to develop online content and materials. There are costs associated with finding and hiring qualified instructional designers and developers, and/or in training existing staff in this line of work.

In addition, there are costs associated with instructional design software that may be needed to create engaging and high-quality content that is suitable for virtual delivery. Most such software needs up-to-date laptops or PCs on which to run the software. Ensuring that reliable software and hardware are available for instructional design is another associated cost.

c) Learning Management Systems (LMS) for Virtual Delivery

Virtual delivery requires the use of an LMS (online platform) on which to develop, host, and deliver courses, training, and sometimes services (such as initial assessment). Below is a **very brief** comparison of resources/costs associated with the use of both open source (free) and licensed (fee-based) learning management systems.

Using an **open source** LMS eliminates software licensing fees, but it shifts the operational and technical support (and associated costs) entirely onto the organization delivering the courses and services. For example, dedicated IT staff (or external consultants) are needed to administer the LMS including security, patching and updating the software. In-house technical support is also needed for all users (staff, instructors, students).

Using a **fee-based** LMS requires the organization to pay a subscription fee, which involves both one-time costs (set-up, customization, etc.) and ongoing costs (licensing, maintenance, training, technical support). Fees are based on criteria such as the LMS features selected, the number of users, and the technical support plan provided.

Whether using open source or licensed LMS software, organizations must also ensure that they are complying with associated privacy, security, and data storage requirements. This type of expertise is another human resource required to support safe and compliant virtual delivery.

Colleges typically use fee-based learning management systems. Students, staff, and faculty in college AU programs have access to the LMS used in their college since the AU program is considered part of ongoing program delivery.

d) 24/7/365 Technical Support

Technical support ("Help Desk") services are required to support not only the use of an LMS for virtual delivery but also for the use of related software to support virtual access and engagement such as institutional email services and Microsoft 365 applications.

e) Digital Devices, Software and Internet Access

While college AU programs provide on-site hardware, software and internet access for AU students and personnel, Get SET program funding constraints make it difficult to absorb the costs of upgrading and/or sustaining on-site devices and software. Several survey respondents identified the 'digital divide' whereby some AU students have much more off-site access to hardware and software, and to reliable internet services, than others. This is particularly true for students in rural locations and/or those who rely on social assistance or other limited income supports. Access to virtual program delivery requires funding that enables equitable access to devices, software, and the internet.

f) Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

As identified by many survey respondents, virtual delivery must address both the use and misuse of generative AI by students. The costs associated with mitigating the misuse of generative AI are significant and often involve extensive faculty time in investigating incidents, gathering and articulating evidence of suspected offenses, and communicating with students and administrators about such incidents.

Administrators must also devote time to developing policies related to academic honesty and the use of generative AI, in addition to reviewing and adjudicating suspected AI offenses among students.

If online proctoring software is used for assessment activities within virtual delivery, more costs are involved for software subscriptions and support, along with training and technical support for users (faculty and students).

In summary, there are many cost considerations related to virtual delivery that are separate from, and in addition to, the costs associated with in-person delivery. Although college AU programs can access many institutional resources and supports for virtual delivery, survey respondents repeatedly noted that historic, status quo funding for Get SET providers does not support the real costs of high-quality, sustainable virtual delivery.

System-Level Interpretation

The findings suggest that college AU programs are responding effectively to changing student needs to expand flexible delivery options. At the same time, this adaptation is occurring within highly constrained resource environments and stagnant government funding.

Limitations

The survey data were self-reported and may vary in accuracy or consistency depending on internal reporting or tracking practices. While the response rate is high, it is not comprehensive. Additionally, participation was voluntary which can introduce potential for selection bias. The findings of the research reflect only the perspectives of participating college AU programs. Student and funder (Ministry) perspectives were not directly captured.

Future Directions

The findings of this study confirm that virtual delivery options will remain a permanent and essential component of AU program delivery within Ontario's public college system. Demand for flexible learning options by adult students balancing employment and caregiving responsibilities is expected to continue. As such, college AU programs will likely continue to refine and expand hybrid modes (as funding and capacity allow) that combine virtual and in-person delivery, building on approaches that are already well established across the sector.

However, the refinement and sustainability of these delivery modes will depend on greater alignment between delivery expectations and system-level supports. Future funding frameworks will need to reflect the dual requirements of in-person and virtual delivery to ensure college AU programs are able to provide high-quality, equitable programming for adults seeking to upskill in preparation for transition to further education and employment.

At a system level, there is a need for policy development and coordination to support evolving delivery modes. This includes ensuring that policies remain responsive to technological change while maintaining equitable access for students.

Emerging technologies, particularly generative artificial intelligence, will continue to impact the field of education, especially in virtual learning. These technologies present both opportunities and challenges, requiring ongoing attention to instructional design, assessment practices, and academic integrity. College AU programs will need to consider how best to support ethical use of generative artificial intelligence while also mitigating its misuse.

As delivery modes evolve, maintaining rigorous, credible, and consistent learning experiences will be critical to promoting the success of adults who access AU programs.

Impact on e-Channel Get SET Providers

Future directions and related policy development also require intentional and thorough consideration of the five existing e-Channel Get SET programs and their mandate to provide fully virtual programs and services to adults across the province.

The five e-Channel programs were developed and funded (from 2003 onward) specifically to expand the reach of Get SET programs and services to students in rural and remote areas,

and to those who have personal and/or employment related barriers to attending in-person programs. The impact on e-Channel providers of ongoing virtual delivery options offered by in-class Get SET programs must be carefully considered in terms of sustainability, performance metrics and program guidelines. Consideration must also be given to historic and current funding levels for the five Get SET e-Channel programs, to ensure that the actual costs of fully online program and service delivery are recognized and funded accordingly.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that virtual delivery is no longer an emergency response or temporary adaptation within Ontario's college sector Get SET funded programs and services. It has become an established and necessary component of program and service delivery, shaped by the realities of adults who require flexible, accessible pathways to postsecondary education, apprenticeship training, and employment.

The findings show that virtual and hybrid delivery modes can expand access, reduce geographic and scheduling barriers, support digital skill development, and increase program reach across the province. At the same time, they also make visible the resource requirements and equity challenges associated with high-quality virtual learning. Reliable technology, appropriate devices, instructional design capacity, specialized teaching skills, technical support, and strategies to maintain engagement and academic integrity are essential conditions for success.

A central conclusion of this report is that flexible delivery cannot be sustained through existing, outdated in-person funding assumptions alone. College Get SET programs are now supporting multiple delivery modes simultaneously to meet the needs of adult students, and this requires funding models, policies, and system-level supports that recognize the distinct costs and operational demands of virtual delivery. Without this alignment, the benefits of expanded access may be limited by uneven student access to technology, inconsistent institutional capacity, and increasing demands on faculty, staff and administrators.

Going forward, the sustainability of virtual Get SET delivery options within the college sector will depend on the funder's coordinated investment to support digital infrastructure, equitable access, professional development, curriculum design, and responsive policy. This includes continued attention to the role of e-Channel providers and the relationship between fully online, hybrid, and in-person delivery.

Ultimately, virtual delivery should be understood as one part of a flexible, student-centred system. When adequately resourced and intentionally designed, virtual delivery options within Get SET funded programs can strengthen access, equity, student achievement, and successful transitions to further education, training, and sustainable employment.

Appendix A: Survey Form

Survey Title
Virtual Program Delivery Within College Get SET/Academic Upgrading (AU) Programs

Section 1: Introduction and Background

What is this survey about?
The Ministry has asked the CSC to collect some general, aggregate information about the ways in which college Get SET/AU programs are using virtual delivery and the resources required to do so. This is an opportunity to highlight the great work that colleges are doing in their virtual delivery of Get SET/AU.

What do you mean by "virtual" delivery?
For the purpose of this survey, virtual delivery refers to providing Get SET/AU services and/or programs through digital platforms, limiting the amount of in-person interaction required. Virtual delivery includes synchronous online classes, asynchronous online learning, and hybrid delivery that combines on-site and online components.

Why is the Ministry asking for this information?
The Ministry recognizes that colleges have significant infrastructure and expertise to support virtual delivery. They are interested in learning more about the good work that is happening through virtual delivery of Get SET/AU, and what is involved in providing quality virtual delivery.

What are the implications of providing this information?
The Ministry may use this information in the coming years to

- Inform their development of guidelines for virtual delivery in Get SET programs across all sectors (college, school board, community-based)
- Consider the infrastructure required for effective virtual delivery
- Consider the types of resources (human and fiscal) required for effective virtual delivery
- Inform the development of a funding model that takes both F2F and virtual delivery into consideration
- Identify key challenges and benefits (with respect to virtual delivery) for students, programs, and the Ministry
- Consider the role of the 5 e-Channel (fully online) Get SET programs

Will college-specific data be shared with the Ministry?
No. All data from this survey will be aggregated. Some regional trends may be identified, if applicable.

Section 2: Instructions for completing the survey – please read carefully

1. If you have multiple Get SET/AU sites at your college, you can either

a. Submit one survey that covers all sites, **or**
b. Submit more than one survey if you would like to distinguish between sites in your responses

2. Answer the questions to the best of your ability.
    - Remember that we are not looking for granular data but for general information and trends.
3. Most questions are multiple choice/rating scale.
    - Optional comment boxes are provided in case you want to add additional details.
4. It will take about 15-20 minutes to complete the survey, depending on the extent to which you provide optional comments for some of the questions.
5. **Begin the survey when you have time to fully complete it. There is no option to partially complete the survey and return to it later**.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this important survey!

Questions? Please contact Barb Glass: executivedirector@cscau.com

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Section 3: General Information

1. Enter your name and email address. This is only in case we need to clarify any information with you; all responses will be anonymized and aggregated in the final report.
2. Select your college.
3. Identify the region where the main campus of your college is located.
4. If you are responding on behalf of more than one Get SET/AU site within your college, indicate the site names below.

Section 4: Virtual Service Delivery

5. Do you offer virtual services within your AU program? (e.g., information sessions, intake interview/assessment, orientation, etc.)
6. What services within your AU program do you offer virtually? (Select all that apply.)
    1. Information session
    2. Intake interview
    3. Intake assessment
    4. Program orientation
    5. Student plan development (e.g., course selection/scheduling)
    6. Academic/pathways advising
    7. Other (Please specify in the comments below.)

7. Optional Comments

8. What tools do you use to offer some or all of the virtual services you selected above? (Select all that apply.)
    1. Zoom
    2. Teams
    3. Google Meet
    4. Other (Please specify in the comments below.)

9. Optional Comments

Section 5: Virtual Course Delivery

Note:

- The questions in this section ask you to think about *course* delivery in your Get SET/AU program.
- "AU course" refers to any type of programming you offer using Get SET (free) seats, e.g., foundations/pre-ACE courses, college prep/ACE courses, employment prep, targeted/short-term training, etc.
- We are looking for general information about your delivery, recognizing that it may differ across courses and sites.

10. For each delivery mode listed below, estimate the percentage (if any) of your AU course offerings that are provided in that mode during an academic year.

    Response Choices: 100%; 75%; 50%; 25%; Less than 25%; We don't typically use this delivery mode for AU courses

    1. Fully in-class (students receive in person instruction only)
    2. Hyflex (students can attend in person, synchronously online, or asynchronously based on their needs)
    3. Hybrid (students attend some classes on site and complete some coursework online)
    4. Synchronous (students attend scheduled classes online only, at the same time as the instructor and classmates)
    5. Asynchronous (students and instructors have no real-time interaction; content is created and made available online)

11. Optional Comments

12. Effective virtual teaching requires unique skill sets, some of which are listed below. Rate the importance of each skill set for effective virtual teaching.

    Response Choices: Very important; Important; Somewhat important; Not important; Not applicable

    1. Technological Literacy (e.g., mastering an LMS, video-conferencing tools, interactive software; troubleshooting minor technical issues)
    2. Digital Communication and Engagement (e.g., writing clear, concise instructions/feedback; building rapport with limited or no physical presence)
    3. Virtual Classroom Management and Facilitation (e.g., fostering respectful, active participation in a virtual space; maintaining "presence" to keep virtual students engaged)
    4. Instructional Design and Virtual Content Creation (e.g., creating or adapting materials to be engaging and accessible in a digital format)
    5. Virtual Student Support (e.g., proactively reaching out to students and providing encouragement/motivation with limited or no physical presence)
    6. Maintaining and Updating Virtual Learning Materials (e.g., managing asynchronous and synchronous components; ensuring digital materials are accessible and current)

7. Virtual Assessment and Feedback (e.g., designing assessments suited to virtual delivery; providing timely, meaningful feedback)

13. List additional skill sets, if any, and rate the importance for effective virtual teaching.

Section 6: LMS Usage

14. Do you use your college's Learning Management System (LMS) to support the virtual delivery of one or more AU courses?

15. If no, explain briefly why you do not use an LMS.
16. Which LMS do you use? (Select all that apply.)
    1. Moodle
    2. Blackboard
    3. D2L/Brightspace
    4. Instructure/Canvas
    5. In-house product
    6. Other (Please specify in the comments below.)

17. Optional Comments

18. For each type of device listed below, indicate how compatible it is for students accessing your LMS for virtual course delivery.

    Response Choices: Compatible with our LMS and recommended; Compatible with our LMS but not recommended; Unsure

    1. Laptop/desktop computers
    2. Chromebooks
    3. Tablets
    4. Smartphones

19. Optional Comments

20. Select the software/hardware accessories that students may need to access and engage with features and/or course content within your LMS (recognizing that needs vary by course and student). (Select all that apply.)
    1. Camera
    2. Speakers
    3. Microphone
    4. Headphones/headset
    5. Screen reader
    6. PDF Reader
    7. Other (Please specify in the comments below.)

21. Optional Comments

22. To the best of your ability, rate each of the following features of an LMS whether or not you use an LMS for virtual AU course delivery. If you are not familiar with a feature, select "Unsure."

Response Choices: Required for successful course delivery; Nice to have but not essential; Not required; Unsure

1. Templates for content development
2. Gamification (e.g., leader boards, point systems, badges)
3. Assessment Features (e.g., drop box, quizzes, feedback, auto grading)
4. Communication tools (e.g., messaging, discussion boards)
5. Personalized learning paths (e.g., tailored learning experiences)
6. Social learning tools (e.g., communication spaces for collaboration)
7. Tracking/reporting (e.g., log-in records, class progress data)
8. Certification (e.g., creation of completion certificates)
9. Mobile accessibility (e.g., responsive design on smartphones, tablets)
10. Customization (e.g., branding, logos, colours)
11. Management of user types (e.g., assign different roles, permissions)
12. Intuitive user interface (e.g., easy navigation)
13. Automation (e.g., automated tasks, notifications)
14. Integrations (e.g., with external software, registration platform, student records system)

23. Optional Comments

24. Select the online content creation/course authoring tools that your AU program has access to through your college.

    Note: This is an optional question. If you can readily answer, please do. If not, proceed to the next question.

    Response Choices: Access is available through the college, and we often use it; Access is available through the college, but we don't (or seldom) use it; Access is not available through the college; Unsure

    1. Articulate 360 (Storyline/Rise)
    2. Adobe Captivate
    3. Camtasia
    4. iSpring Suite
    5. Vyond
    6. Lectora
    7. Elucidat
    8. Genially
    9. Other (Please specify in the comments below.)

25. Optional Comments

Section 7: Resources Needed Related to Virtual Services and Course Delivery

26. Effectively providing virtual services (intake, advising, orientation, etc.) and/or virtual course delivery (whether hybrid, hyflex, synchronous, or asynchronous) requires a variety of resources, some of which are listed below.

    For each resource listed, choose one of the following:
    - This resource is needed.

- This resource is not needed.
- I'm unsure if this resource is needed.

Consider your own AU program when making your selections.

Response Choices: Needed; Not needed; Unsure if needed

1. Content/curriculum developers
2. Instructional developers/designers (creating effective, engaging online learning experiences)
3. Quality assurance experts
4. Enrolment/registration staff (for staff/students to access the LMS)
5. Technical management of the LMS (e.g., subscription, software updates, etc.)
6. Technical trainers (e.g., LMS usage training) for students, staff and/or faculty
7. Technical support for students in using the LMS
8. Technical support for staff/faculty in using the LMS
9. Other (Please specify in the comments below.)

27. List additional resources, if any, and describe the necessity of the resource(s).

Section 8: Challenges and Benefits of Virtual Delivery

Note: The questions in this section are optional. If you choose to respond, please think broadly about AU program delivery, i.e., for services like intake, assessment, orientation, etc. **and** for course delivery.

28. Briefly describe the key challenges that students face when engaging with virtual delivery.

29. Briefly describe the key challenges to your AU department (and/or to the college more broadly) in offering virtual delivery.

30. Briefly describe the key challenges to the Ministry (the funder) related to supporting virtual delivery.

31. Briefly describe the key benefits that students experience when engaging with virtual delivery.

32. Briefly describe the key benefits to your AU department (and/or to the college more broadly) in offering virtual delivery.

33. Briefly describe the key benefits to the Ministry (the funder) related to supporting virtual delivery.

Section 9: Final Thoughts

34. Is there anything else you wish to tell us related to virtual delivery in your AU program?

Thank you for taking the time to provide your responses and comments. Your feedback is important and valued!

Appendix B: Coding Framework

Access, Equity, and Participation • Digital access (devices and internet) • Geographic access (rural/remote) • Caregiving and employment barriers • Expanded participation	Flexibility and Convenience • Flexible scheduling • Location-independent learning • Reduced commuting costs • Flexible intake
Engagement and Learning Experience • Motivation and persistence • Time management • Self-paced learning • Personalized learning	Social Connection and Wellbeing • Isolation and loneliness • Peer interaction • Instructor connection • Comfort and reduced anxiety
Skills Development • Digital literacy • Academic readiness • Workforce skills	Staffing and System Capacity • Faculty workload • Training needs • Instructional design • Technical support
Infrastructure and Technology • LMS/platform limitations • IT support • Infrastructure investment	Academic Integrity and Quality • Academic misconduct/AI use • Assessment challenges • Quality assurance
Operational Complexity • Multi-modal delivery (hyflex) • Scheduling/logistics • Onboarding	Funding and Policy • Funding model alignment • Resource constraints • Policy clarity
Strategic/System Outcomes • Workforce development • System efficiency • Scalability • Resilience	