

Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Final Assessment Report & Implementation Plan
February 2026

Faculty / Affiliated University College	Faculty of Health Sciences	
Degrees Offered	Doctor of Health Sciences (DHSc) in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences	
Date of Introduction	September 1, 2026	
External Reviewers	Dr. Steven Hanna Vice-Dean, Health Sciences and Assoc Dean, Graduate Studies, McMaster University	Dr. Andrea MacLeod Vice-Dean and Assoc Dean Research, Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine - Communication Sciences & Disorders University of Alberta
Internal Reviewers	Dr. Immaculate Namukasa Associate Dean, Faculty of Education	Anthony Cruz PhD Student, Member of SUPR-G
Date of Site Visit	Virtual: December 2, 2025	
Date Review Report Received	December 22, 2025	
Date Program/Faculty Response Received	Program – January 20, 2026 Faculty – January 28, 2026	
Evaluation	Approved to Commence	
Approval Dates	SUPR-G: February 23, 2026 ACA: March 3, 2026 Senate: March 13, 2026	
Year of Next Review	2033-2034	
Progress Report	June 2029	

Overview of Western's Cyclical Review Assessment Reporting Process

In accordance with Western's Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Final Assessment Report (FAR) provides a summary of the new program proposal, report prepared by external reviewers, internal responses and assessment and evaluation of the Doctor of Health Science in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences (DHSc) to be delivered by the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS).

This FAR considers the following documents:

- the program's proposal brief;
- the external reviewers' report;
- the response(s) from the academic unit; and
- the response from the Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences

This FAR identifies the strengths of the proposed program and opportunities for program enhancement and improvement, and details the recommendations of the external reviewers – noting those recommendations to be prioritized for implementation.

The Implementation Plan details the recommendations from the FAR that have been selected for implementation, identifies who is responsible for approving and acting on the recommendations, specifies any action or follow-up that is required, and defines the timeline for completion.

The FAR (including Implementation Plan) is sent for approval through the Senate Graduate Program Review Committee (SUPR-G), ACA and Senate. Following institutional approval, it is then submitted for approval to the Ontario Universities' Council on Quality Assurance.

Executive Summary

The proposed professional Doctoral Program (Doctor of Health Sciences (DHSc) in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences) provides a response to the national need for doctoral-level training that prepares professionals to navigate and influence an increasingly complex health care landscape. Designed to meet the growing demand for advanced, career-oriented education among health professionals (e.g., audiologists, nurse practitioners, public health administrators, occupational therapists, etc.) who are leading or aspiring to lead change across Canada's health systems and organizations.

The DHSc takes a practice-oriented approach. Focusing on leadership development, critical analysis of real-world challenges, and the application of knowledge to improve health services, workforce performance, and policy implementation. The flexible, fully online format allows learners to remain active in their current roles while applying their learning in real time to professional contexts.

The proposed program can be completed over nine consecutive terms of full-time study. The program integrates coursework, milestone activities, and a Dissertation in Practice (DiP) that is scaffolded across all three years. Full-time intake is expected to be twelve students for 2026-2027. Working up to twenty-five students by 2031-2032.

Strengths and Innovative Features Identified by the Program

- The DHSc Builds on the success of the Faculty's existing graduate programs, including the Applied Health Sciences Graduate Diploma and the fully online Master of Health Science degree in the Advanced Health Care Practice Program.
- Fully online practice-based Doctoral program with synchronous components, ensures national accessibility without compromising leadership development and peer engagement.
 - No periodic in-person requirements, preventing travel-related costs and time away from work – supporting greater affordability and accessibility for mid-career professionals.
- Streamlined, focused course structure enabling completion within three years.
- Required DiP is a comprehensive, evidence-based project embedded in the learner's workplace or professional field designed to address a meaningful and applied challenge.
- Students can tailor their learning by selecting elective courses aligned with their areas of professional interest and practice.
- Curriculum incorporates reconciliation, decolonization, and equity-driven content, including courses such as Equity and Health Systems, Indigenous Health, and Trauma-Informed Mental Health.
- Integration of Knowledge Translation strategies, equipping graduates to drive evidence-informed action in organizational and system contexts.

Proposal Preparation and Review Process

To inform the development of the proposed program, an extensive consultation and research process was undertaken from March 2023 to March 2025. This process engaged potential students, alumni, industry leaders, faculty, institutional leaders and community partners. These consultations played a central role in shaping program goals, course content, delivery format, and expectations for learner outcomes. Proposal development activities included:

- Environmental Scan
- Labour Market Analysis
- Needs Assessment Survey
- Prospective Student Focus Group
- Industry Focus Groups and Interviews

A working group, termed the FHS Professional Doctorate Committee, met monthly starting in May 2024 to guide the development of the program. This committee comprised of faculty members representing the five departments within the Faculty of Health Sciences and six different health professionals. The meetings of this committee involved the development of program goals, learning outcomes, course offerings, and program structure.

Following approval to proceed with an external review, a review committee was struck comprising two external reviewers, one internal reviewer and one student reviewer. Reviewers were provided with the program proposal brief in advance of the scheduled review and then met virtually over one day with the:

- Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- Associate Vice-Provost, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- Vice-Provost, Academic Planning, Policy & Faculty
- Director of Academic Quality and Enhancement
- Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences
- Associate Dean, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies Faculty of Health Sciences
- Graduate Chair
- Interim Associate Chief Librarian
- Faculty members
- Graduate Program and Departmental Staff Members

Following the site visit, the external reviewers produced a comprehensive external reviewer report, with recommendations, which was sent to the academic unit and to the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Health Sciences for review and response. These formative documents, including the program proposal document, the external reviewer report, and the Program and Faculty responses, have formed the basis of this assessment report of the proposed DHSc in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences.

Summative Assessment – External Reviewers’ Report

External reviewers shared that “[The DHSc program] aligns well the priorities, strengths, and existing suite of graduate programming of the Faculty of Health Sciences. It offers an innovative pathway to the development of career-ready and career advancing leadership skills in healthcare.”

Strengths and/or Unique Aspects of the Program

- Clear and coherent objectives that align with Western University’s mission and the FHS’ commitment to advancing evidence-informed leadership, equity, and system transformation.
- Curriculum is coherently designed, with core courses supporting leadership, systems transformation, health equity, and applied inquiry, while electives allow for focused specialization.
- Incorporates interdisciplinary courses that are already developed and offered, contributing to the feasibility and sustainability of the program as it reduces the need to develop a wide range of new courses and incorporates institutional expertise.
- Asynchronous delivery with periodic synchronous touchpoints ensures flexibility for working professionals, and milestone sequencing supports timely progression.
- The DiP anchors students’ applied learning, requiring the design, implementation, and evaluation of an initiative embedded in their professional context.

Opportunities for Program Improvement

- While the outcomes are clear, there are specific program learning outcomes that seem difficult to achieve and evaluate given the current program structure.
- Consider being more explicit about how students will develop and demonstrate the program learning outcome’s during the DiP, given that they may not be embedded in their own workplaces, are working with mentors assigned to them, and do not implement their proposals.
- Further detail would be helpful about how non-course milestones will be monitored.
- Greater transparency regarding the inclusion of equity and reconciliation learning goals in required coursework would be helpful.
- Consider formalizing the proposed advisory consultations with external stakeholders as an Advisory Board, which could include alumni.
- The discretionary use of interviews may introduce a risk of bias. If the program does not require interviews of all applicants, it is advisable to be explicit about when an applicant must be interviewed.

Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations and Program/Faculty Responses

The following are the reviewers' recommendations in the order listed by the external reviewers.

Reviewers' Recommendation	Program/Faculty Response
Recommendation #1: Clarity around DiP Project Outcomes. We recommend that the program team: - review and reconsider the option where students don't work on DiP projects in their own workplaces or professional settings; - clarify how the PLO's can be developed and demonstrated within the current design; - ensure that the DiP is an experiential assignment at the doctoral level and that the credit weight and objectives are appropriate for a major, multi-year implementation project.	Program: The Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) have been closely reviewed and edited to assure that they can be demonstrated through the completion of coursework and/or milestones, including the Dissertation in Practice (DiP). The design of the DHSc program will allow observing/evaluating the feasibility of organizational change/practice solutions as well as the development of skills needed to lead implementation of solutions. In alignment with practice at Western University, the DiP is recognized as a required program "milestone," and milestones are not assigned credit weight. The three DiP courses (one course per year; 0.5 credit weight each) focus on content and skill development that will support students' progression in designing, writing, and presenting their DiP. Faculty: The Dean's Office agrees that the program's revisions to the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and edits to the program brief clarify and assure that each PLO can be fostered by and demonstrated through completion of the DHSc program (coursework and milestones). The program team has the expertise to assure that the Dissertation in Practice aligns with doctoral degree expectations. Additionally, the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) has committed additional faculty resources to support a new Teaching Scholar appointment that will align with the DHSc and our suite of professional graduate programs.
Recommendation 2: Admissions Requirements - Ensure that admissions requirements are clearly aligned with the DiP to support it, given any changes made in response to Recommendation 1; - Be explicit about the criteria used to determine whether an interview is required, or alternatively require interviews for all applicants or none.	Program: As recommended, the admissions procedure has been revised to make explicit that an interview is required for all applicants. Given that in many disciplines interviews of applicants to PhD programs are completed to ensure a fit of the applicant's research interests with the supervisory capacity of the program, we will use interviews for the DHSc program in a similar manner – to clarify any uncertainty regarding the fit of the interests that an applicant indicated in their Statement of Interest with the ability of the program to support the applicant. We will note on the DHSc application the need for an interview. We have removed any reference to out-of-province applicants. That is, all applicants will be asked to indicate on the application that they have support for their DiP (i.e., to develop a proposed solution to a problem of practice) within their current organization or if their DiP is appropriate for remote placement. We have further incorporated the reviewers' recommendation of the potential for a transfer from the FHS Applied Health Sciences graduate diploma or master's program as an alternative to direct entry for applicants who do not have a graduate degree.

- Clarify the requirements for out-of-province students. Consider a transfer or advanced-credit process from graduate diploma or master's programs, particularly to offer an alternative to direct entry for students without graduate degrees.	Faculty: The Dean's Office supports the program's revised admissions requirements and procedures. The admissions requirements and processes will be helpful in determining the fit of the applicants' interests with the program's ability to support such interests and appreciate the incorporation of an inclusive, alternative entry pathway for applicants who do not have a graduate degree.
Recommendation #3: Part-Time Enrolment - Consider the addition of a part-time option in the program to support recruitment among working professionals and to align with any changes you make to the DiP.	Program: A part-time option will be considered after the DHSc program has been established and if there is interest. Further, a part-time option will require developing a framework (different from full-time) to support cohort building, an important component of the DHSc. Faculty: The Dean's Office concurs with the program's rationale for and plan to examine the feasibility of a part-time option once the DHSc program has been established.
Recommendation #4: DiP Supervision - Clarify the dual-supervision model of the DiP and how students will receive appropriate academic mentorship in the chosen model.	Program: Further specification of the dual-supervision model has been added to the program brief. We have clarified that each DiP is supervised by a core academic faculty member and a field mentor/content expert. This dual-supervision model of the DiP is not unlike the requirement for supervisor/advisory committees in PhD programs or co-supervisory models in PhD programs. That is, the dual-supervision will combine supervisory support for research methods and project management (from the core academic faculty member) with context-specific mentorship from content experts. Additionally, this dual-supervision model is utilized with students within the FHS Advanced Health Care Practice (AHCP) MCISc and MHSc programs when completing their capstone projects. Given the revisions to admission process (i.e., requirement for interviews) detailed in the response to Recommendation #2, which are designed to assure a fit between an applicant's DiP interests and the program's ability to support the applicant, in concert with the dual-supervision model, we anticipate the program will be able to provide students with appropriate mentorship Faculty: As the program has indicated, existing FHS graduate online programs have been utilizing the dual-supervision model to support students' successful completion of evidence-based experiential projects. The Dean's Office confirms that the program will be able to apply and/or build from these existing programs' administrative and organization resources and processes to support and coordinate DiPs, including the support of administrative staff with experience relevant to DiP-related logistics. Further, as noted in the response to Recommendation #1, the Faculty is budgeting for an additional tenure-track, Teaching Scholar position; this faculty member will expand the pool of academic faculty mentors supporting DiP projects.

Recommendation #5: Student Engagement & Professional Development - Clarify strategies and opportunities for student engagement, networking, and peer-engagement, given the asynchronous online delivery of curriculum, and the geographic distribution of students.	Program: Further specification of the strategies and opportunities that will be incorporated into the program has been added to the proposal brief. These include virtual activities such as faculty-student meet-and-greets during synchronous program orientation activities, a program-specific virtual bulletin board for students, academic faculty, and field mentors, milestone speaker series, virtual group learning sessions, an annual virtual, synchronous “town hall” session for students to share feedback about the program and their experiences, and optional group writing sessions coordinated by the Graduate Chair. Although online coursework is asynchronous, we have further clarified that there are opportunities for engagement embedded within these courses through activities such as group assignments, group discussion forums, and optional interactive synchronous sessions to engage with the course content and with the instructor. Also, it is important to note that the Professional Development Seminar Series and Knowledge Translation Seminar Series, both of which are required milestones, involve synchronous and interactive activities. Faculty: The program has specified the many student engagement and networking strategies and activities built into the DHSc program. The Dean’s Office confirms that the program will also have the support of the FHS DesignEd team who have expertise in on-line learning and creative instructional design.
Recommendation 6: Student Progression - Consider mechanisms for remediation of failure that will not hold a student back from progressing or require that they be withdrawn after a single instance of failure. - Make clear how progress in the non-course milestones is monitored and the impact of missing a milestone.	Program: Across graduate programs within FHS and across Western, it is the norm that failure of any program component in the absence of valid extenuating circumstances results in withdrawal of the student from the program. Whereas the appeal process was mentioned with respect to the final evaluation of the DiP, we have added further information regarding progression in both courses and milestones and specifying how students may seek academic relief and/or appeal and also how to access other student supports. Students will be informed of the process via a number of venues including in program orientation materials, within the program’s virtual bulletin board, course syllabi, and if progression issues arise. Upon admission, students will also be provided with information regarding the services and supports available at Western to enable their success (e.g., Writing Support Centre, Accessible Education); this information is also regularly included in course syllabi. Further details regarding how student progress is monitored, including milestone completion, have been added. For monitoring DiP progression, we have specified that there will be regular supervisory team meetings, an annual spring progress review meeting, and use of Western’s Pathfinder platform to track progress. Faculty: The program has provided further specification of how student progression in both coursework and milestones will be monitored. Importantly, these progression and academic relief/appeals policies and procedures align with Western-wide policies and procedures.

Recommendation 7: Ensure PLOs are covered in required coursework in addition to electives. - Ensure that key program learning outcomes or skills are covered in required coursework, and not only in electives. - Consider whether course requirements can be individualized based on a student's previous training at admission.	Program: We have reformatted the information which linked program learning outcomes with courses and milestones. This reformatting makes clear that the DHSc PLOs are being covered in required coursework and milestones. With respect to balancing foundational learning with individualized learning, the DHSc program offers students options within both foundational courses as well as electives; the DiP is also individualized. Students could take additional courses (in consultation with their mentors) to further individualize their program. Faculty: The program has provided additional tables in the proposal brief that clearly illustrate that PLOs are covered by required coursework and milestones. The Dean's Office agrees with the program that individualized learning has been built into multiple components of the DHSc (e.g., elective coursework, DiP).
Recommendation #8 Community Engagement - Formalize the proposed consultation with regional healthcare organizations and leaders with the creation of an advisory board that includes alumni.	Program: The program will work on formalizing the creation of an advisory board with the aim to have the advisory board in place upon completion of the first cohort so that alumni can be included. Faculty: The Dean's Office agrees with the program's plan and timeline for establishing a DHSc advisory board. The Faculty has long-standing ties with regional healthcare organizations and their leaders which will facilitate identification and recruitment of key interest holders to the advisory board. As the reviewers indicate, FHS alumni are counted among leaders in these regional healthcare organizations, facilitating their inclusion on the advisory board.
Recommendation #9 Alumni Engagement - Formalize engagement of alumni before students graduate, to focus not only on feedback but also on recruiting their ongoing participation in the program.	Program: Ideas for encouraging the ongoing participation of alumni in the program include creating a LinkedIn group for the DHSc program when it begins (also a method to engage community partners and field mentors). Another approach that will be implemented is to make explicit during their time in the program not only what types of ongoing participation in the program following graduation are encouraged, but also how such ongoing participation can be a means to further advance their leadership competencies, practice-based knowledge and inquiry skills, and network building and/or strengthening. Faculty: The Dean's Office supports the program's strategies for encouraging students to become engaged alumni upon their completion of the DHSc. Further ideas for fostering alumni engagement may come from connecting with existing FHS Schools/programs with strong alumni networks; such across-FHS program communication and collaboration is supported by FHS graduate program committees, on which the DHSc Graduate Program Chair and administrative staff will serve.

Implementation Plan

The Implementation Plan provides a summary of the recommendations that require action and/or follow-up. In each case, the Program Chair (or equivalent), and the Dean of the Faculty are responsible for enacting and monitoring the actions noted in Implementation Plan.

Recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 consisted of areas in need of clarification in the proposal brief. These have all been addressed, as articulated in the Program responses above. Therefore, these recommendations are not prioritized for follow-up in the Implementation Plan below.

Recommendation	Proposed Action and Follow-up	Responsibility	Timeline
Recommendation #3: Part-Time Enrolment Consider the addition of a part-time option in the program to support recruitment among working professionals and to align with any changes you make to the DiP.	- Consider a part-time option after the DHSc program has been established. Solicit interest from prospective and enrolled students. - If actioned, develop a framework (different from full-time) to support cohort building.	Graduate Program Committee	By December 2028
Recommendation #8: Community Engagement Formalize the proposed consultation with regional healthcare organizations and leaders with the creation of an advisory board that includes alumni.	Create an advisory board upon completion of the first cohort so that alumni can be included.	Graduate program committee	Initiate formalizing during 2028-2029 academic year
Recommendation #9: Alumni Engagement Formalize engagement of alumni before students graduate, to focus not only on feedback but also on recruiting their ongoing participation in the program.	- Create a LinkedIn group for the DHSc program when it begins. - Make explicit to students what types of ongoing participation in the program following graduation are encouraged and how such ongoing participation can be a means to further advance their leadership competencies, practice-based knowledge and inquiry skills, and network building and/or strengthening. - Connect with existing FHS Schools/programs with strong alumni networks for additional ideas.	Graduate Program Chair and core faculty members	By September 2026 and ongoing