

POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS IN QUEBEC



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
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Qualifications: The Link Between Educational and Occupational Pathways and Labour Market Outcomes is a project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The four-year project investigates the nature of pathways within postsecondary education, and between postsecondary education and the labour market. As part of this project, the *Provincial Pathways* profile series lays the groundwork for further inquiry contrasting and comparing educational and occupational pathways in Canadian provinces and territories.

Quebec: Overview

Pathways in Quebec are facilitated by the structures and policies of Quebec's educational system. Core to this system are the CÉGEPs (Collèges d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel - General and Vocational Colleges), which provide students a link between high school and university or the workplace. Pathways for student transfer in Quebec include credit transfer, course exemption and substitution, and equivalency for employment experience (CICIC, 2013; CMEC 2012). Formal agreements between academic stream and vocational stream CÉGEP programs and between CÉGEPs and universities offer official pathways for students, and prior learning assessment recognition processes aid students in their individual pathways.

Post-Secondary System Description

Post-secondary education in Quebec is delivered through:

Universities

- 7 universities (4 French, 3 English), comprising 18 institutions

Colleges:

- 48 CEGEPS (43 French, 5 English)
- 11 government colleges (affiliated with government ministries other than education),
- 48 private colleges (in the same school system as the CEGEPs - 25 accredited for government funding and 23 with no government funding). (Fisher, Robinson, Shanahan, & Trottier, 2014).

Students in Quebec study for 6 years in elementary school and 5 years in high school, finishing high school at age 17. Those who do not wish to continue their studies after high school may choose after three years of high school to take the high school vocational training path and receive a Diploma of Vocational Studies (diplôme d'études professionnelles - DEP) when they graduate (Fisher et al., 2014). They may also choose to pursue the DEP certification after completing high school. After high school, students pursuing further education must study for at least two years in the General and Vocational Colleges known as CÉGEPs. CÉGEPs provide students a bridge between secondary school and either university or technical employment (CUCC, 2001). In CÉGEPs, students are awarded a Diploma of College Studies (diplôme d'études collégiales - DEC) in either the two-year university preparatory stream or the three-year technical stream (Fisher et al., 2014). In the pre-university stream, "the training is focused on the acquisition of broad, basic, multifaceted skills needed to pursue university studies" (Fédération des cégeps, 2002, p.11). The technical stream provides training orientated toward the acquisition of "high level skills and a body of general knowledge" needed for specific occupations (Fédération des cégeps, 2002, p.11).

CÉGEPs were introduced in the 1960s in response to clergyman Alphonse-Marie Parent's report to the Royal Commission on Education in Quebec. Parent advocated for schools to be regionalized and democratized and for a new network of government-funded colleges and universities to be created (Bilan du Siècle, 2017). In 1993 the Quebec government passed a law that entitled CÉGEPs to also carry out activities in applied research, technical assistance to enterprises, technological innovation, regional development and collaboration, and international cooperation (Fédération des cégeps, 2002; Québec, 2017a).

University programs are typically 3 years in length, so after 11 years of school, 2 years of college and three years of university, students complete a bachelor's degree in a length of time similar to that of other provinces of Canada. To enter a university undergraduate program, students must have completed a CÉGEP Diploma of College Studies (DEC) or received recognition for equivalent study and experience.

Universities in Quebec include Bishop's University; Concordia University; Université Laval; McGill University; Université de Montréal, which includes École Polytechnique and HEC-Montréal; Université de Sherbrooke; and Université du Québec which includes Université du Québec's network of universities and institutions. The network includes:

- one associated university with its own degree-granting authority (the *Université du Québec à Montréal - UQAM*),
- five other constituent universities (*Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, Université du Québec à Rimouski, Université du Québec à Hull, and Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue*),
- one research institute (*Institut national de la recherche scientifique*),
- two specialized degree-granting schools (*École nationale d'administration publique* and *École de technologie supérieure*) and one distance education university, *Télé-université*, which is now part of UQAM (CICIC, n.d.)

Like the CÉGEPs, the *Université du Québec* network was initiated to provide accessible education to people throughout the province, similar to some state universities in the United States (CICIC, n.d.; CUCC, 2001).

Pathways in the Province

Formal pathways in Quebec take place largely through memoranda of understanding between college programs and between colleges and universities. Transfers from high school technical programs to CÉGEPs are governed by “DEP-DEC” (vocational diploma to college diploma) agreements (CICIC, 2013; Métiers-Québec, n.d). The most common DEP-DEC agreement is for nursing, in which vocational diploma graduates students instead of completing two to three years of study after their two-year high school vocational diploma can complete their studies in the two programs in three to three and a half years (Métiers-Québec, n.d.).

Transfers from college to university are determined on the basis of “DEC-BAC” (college diploma to bachelor’s degree) agreements. These agreements connect several CÉGEPs with a university and allow for those who have completed a 3-year college technical diploma to complete a 3-year Bachelor’s degree in the same field in 5 years instead of 6 (CMEC, 2003). As in DEP-DEC, Nursing is also a prominent field in DEC-BAC transfers. Other programs with five-year DEC-BAC agreements are Business Administration, Computer Science, Electronics and Industrial Electronics (Fédération des cégeps, 2002).

According to the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, “In 2007, 14 universities had agreements with between one and 42 colleges for the transfer of between three and 36 credits. Since then, the number of agreements between universities and colleges has continued to rise — one university now has approximately 100 DEC-BAC agreements.” (CMEC 2012, p. 35)

Transfers between similar college programs are relatively seamless because CÉGEP programs are centrally authorized by the Ministry of Higher Education and transfer requests are processed in regional centres (CICIC, 2013). The Fédération des cégeps (2002) argues that there is need, however, for further flexibility and bridge-building between various levels of education.

Trades

In Quebec, trades are governed under Articles 448 and 467 of the Education Act (Loi sur l’instruction public). These Articles state that the government draws a list of trades and provides funding to school districts to administer trades programs (Québec, 2015).

“Semiskilled trades” training is offered by high schools in partnership with local industries, based on the labour market needs (Québec, 2017c). Students can access trades and apprenticeships as early as grade 9. “Skilled trades” training is typically offered in CÉGEPs.

Prior Learning Assessment Recognition

Prior Learning Assessment Recognition (PLAR) in Quebec is governed differently at various institutional levels. Universities have full authority to assess and recognize students' prior learning. They autonomously follow the Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credits and receive some oversight from the postsecondary-education liaison committee, which includes representatives from CÉGEPs, universities, and the Ministry of Higher Education (CMEC 2012).

In CÉGEPs, PLAR is governed by section 22 of the College Education Regulations, with quality control provided by the College Education Evaluation Committee (CMEC 2012). For CÉGEP students who seek recognition for their prior learning, the Federation of CÉGEPs provides a roadmap to guide their understanding (Fédération des cégeps, 2015).

In the International sphere, the Quebec Ministry of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion offers academic equivalency assessments, but individual Quebec institutions determine specific decisions (CICIC, 2013). The Ministry of Higher Education also seeks to promote increasing partnerships between Quebec and international universities. For example, doctoral agreements that provide joint degrees have been established with France and are being established in other countries such as Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland (CMEC, 2012). Labour agreements between Quebec and other Canadian provinces as well as France assist in setting standards for PLAR in institutions (CMEC 2012).

Summary

Similar to other Canadian provinces, Quebec's higher education is segmented into a college and a university sector. Unlike other provinces, there is a clear path from college to the university sector, not least because of the requirement for university-bound students to complete a two-year pre-university program in a CÉGEP. Thus, in addition to their mandate of providing vocational education, colleges in Quebec provide a general education in preparation for undergraduate studies.

There are a number of pathways for students interested in pursuing vocational education. School districts across the province have a mandate to provide semi-skilled trades in collaboration with local industries. At a more advanced level, a number of universities have established agreements with CÉGEPs, allowing college students to apply credits earned toward a bachelor degree.

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