



The Conference Board  
of Canada

Le Conference Board  
du Canada

Centre for Skills and  
Post-Secondary Education

# The Role and Value of Private Career Colleges in Canada.



REPORT JUNE 2016

## **The Role and Value of Private Career Colleges in Canada**

Elizabeth Martin and Cameron MacLaine

### **Preface**

Canada's post-secondary education (PSE) system includes roughly 1,300 regulated and privately operated career colleges that offer vocationally focused training. These institutions train over 170,000 learners annually for careers in health care, information technology, business, community services, and many other occupations.

*The Role and Value of Private Career Colleges in Canada* examines Canada's private career colleges and discusses their role in Canada's PSE system. It describes the value of private career colleges in making PSE accessible to learners who wish to quickly gain skills for employment in a particular field. These institutions also serve as a pipeline for employers seeking skilled workers. There are a number of challenges that stifle this sector's performance. This report offers recommendations for improving the performance of the private career college sector in Canada's PSE system.

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## About the Centre for Skills and Post-Secondary Education

The Conference Board of Canada's Centre for Skills and Post-Secondary Education (SPSE) is a major five-year initiative that examines the advanced skills and education challenges facing Canada today. While education is a provincial/territorial government responsibility, improving the skills and post-secondary education system is a national priority. The Centre involves a broad collaboration of public and private sector stakeholders working together to think through the development of a national strategy. It addresses Canada's advanced skills needs by helping to renew the roles, structure, activities, and impact of post-secondary education, while ensuring Canada's skills development and sustainability, competitiveness, and quality.

For more information about the Centre for Skills and Post-Secondary Education, visit [www.conferenceboard.ca/spse](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/spse).



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# The Role and Value of Private Career Colleges in Canada

### At a Glance

- Post-secondary education in Canada includes over 1,300 privately owned and operated career colleges and training institutes that annually train over 170,000 learners.
- This report examines the role and value of private career college (PCC) training, with an emphasis on who seeks out training from PCCs and why.
- The PCC sector faces pressures that affect its reputation and role in Canadian post-secondary education (PSE). This report discusses which actions the PCC sector, government regulators, employers, learners, and other PSE stakeholders should take in response to these pressures.

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The PCC sector has an extensive footprint that reaches across all provinces and two territories.

**This report examines Canada’s private career college sector. It discusses the role of PCCs in PSE and training, and describes the value of PCCs to learners and employers. The report also examines key issues that permeate the sector and provides recommendations for improving Canada’s PSE system by addressing these issues.**

## **The Role of PCCs**

Canada’s PSE system includes both public and private institutions. Most Canadians are familiar with the country’s public colleges, institutes, polytechnics, and universities. Canada also has a large sector of privately run PSE institutions offering career-focused training. These institutions, known as private career colleges, award certificates and diplomas in fields such as trades, health care, information technology, applied arts and design, transportation, personal services, and law enforcement.

PCCs are an alternative training option for adults who seek to gain new skills, upskill to meet the demands of their current discipline or job, or retrain for a new career. Although the PCC sector is just one-fifth the size of Canada’s public colleges in terms of annual enrolments, it has an extensive footprint that reaches across all provinces and two territories. The sector trains over 170,000 learners annually at more than 1,300 different institutions.

PCCs have a role in Canada’s PSE system largely because of the convenience and flexibility they offer learners and their ability to train learners in a short period of time. On the other hand, tuition at PCCs is often more expensive to the student than at public colleges.



## The Value of PCCs

The PCC sector often attracts underskilled learners with no prior PSE, upskilling workers who need to add to their skill set, and reskilling workers making a career change. Learners are compelled to enroll in PCCs for a number of reasons. Most often, it is because they seek a particular learning program not usually provided by public PSE institutions (e.g., cosmetology, commercial transport); a short duration program; or a more flexible, convenient, or intimate learning environment. Most students choose to attend a PCC to train for a particular occupation and have strong intentions of seeking employment after graduating. On average, students attending Canadian PCCs are older, predominantly female, and socio-economically more vulnerable than public college students.

Most PCC graduates find employment after obtaining their credential, and post-graduation earnings are in line with those of their public college counterparts. Full-time employment, however, is lower compared to public college graduates. While satisfaction scores are strong among current students, these drop after graduation. This likely stems from the challenges some graduates face in gaining employment, and also from their discontent with the cost of their training relative to their employment outcome. Demographic differences between PCC students and public college students may partially account for differences in graduate outcomes. Other factors that likely affect employment outcomes for PCC graduates include misalignment between training output and industry demand, and employer perceptions and preferences for public college graduates.

Employers also benefit from the PCC sector. Through their engagement with PCCs, they have access to a talent pool that meets some of their labour needs. Relationships with employers ensure that students have access to hands-on training opportunities, curriculum that is relevant to industry requirements, and post-graduation job opportunities.

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The PCC sector encounters numerous pressures.

## The Challenges for PCCs

The PCC sector is fragile and is especially weakened by reputational issues and limited public awareness of its value. The sector encounters numerous pressures that challenge its future role in Canadian PSE.

These pressures include:

- Concerns about regulation of the sector, including the volume of regulations; disparity in federal rules between public PSE institutions and PCCs; jurisdictional differences in regulations; and inadequate regulatory power to curtail the negative impact that illegal, rogue operators have on the legitimate, regulated PCC sector.
- Quality concerns and the absence of a cohesive quality assurance mechanism to guarantee that programs and institutions satisfy rigorous standards.
- A learner base that faces noteworthy disadvantages relative to learners in public PSE. Students are financially vulnerable and have weaker economic outcomes than their public college counterparts. As well, they encounter difficulty accessing objective information about their training, and they lack an effective voice to advocate for their interests.
- Lack of integration with Canada's broader PSE system. For example, PCCs are not usually included in provincial student mobility initiatives and initiatives that market education.
- Weak connections to employers in some industries resulting in limited employer awareness or negative perceptions of the value of PCCs and their graduates.
- Financial precariousness. As private sector entities, PCCs are vulnerable to markets: This is a particular concern for the numerous, very small, PCCs in the sector.

Whether the PCC sector continues to have a role to play in Canadian PSE depends on how the PCC sector, government regulators, employers, learners, and other PSE stakeholders respond to these pressures.

## Recommendations for Action

Five groups are in a position to take action to elevate the performance of PCCs within the broader PSE sector: government regulators, the PCC sector and its institutions, other PSE stakeholders, learners, and employers.

### Actions for Government Regulators

- Clarify the role of PCCs.
- Consolidate clear, objective information about PCCs.
- Benchmark quality standards and track performance in the PCC sector.
- Strengthen linkages between labour market needs and PCC offerings.
- Harmonize provincial/territorial regulations.
- Enhance student protection measures.

### Actions for the PCC Sector

- Improve data collection on the PCC sector.
- Expand quality assurance initiatives.
- Increase representation of PCCs.
- Strengthen connections to employers.
- Establish meaningful relationships with other educational institutions.
- Stake out opportunities for PCCs in broader PSE initiatives.

### Actions for Other PSE Institutions

- Facilitate learner mobility through private and public PSE.
- Incorporate the PCC sector in system-wide initiatives.

### Actions for Learners

- Be conscientious consumers and advocates.

## **Actions for Employers**

- Connect more with PCCs.

This report was prepared with financial support from the Centre for Skills and Post-Secondary Education, The Conference Board of Canada.

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

### Chapter Summary

- This report examines the role, value, and impact of the regulated private career college (PCC) sector on post-secondary education (PSE) in Canada.
- PCCs are privately run, for-profit or not-for-profit organizations that are registered in their province or territory to deliver vocational/occupational training leading to a certificate or diploma.
- PCCs, often disregarded in discussions of Canadian PSE institutions, should be included in broader policy discussions.

**In the summer of 2015, Sandy,<sup>1</sup> a woman in her mid-40s living in Ontario, was nearing completion of a diploma program in medical office administration at a regulated private career college. She was looking forward to soon adding a post-secondary education credential to her name that would help her make a career switch.**

Sandy's journey to PSE was indirect. Having left school while in grade 9, she worked a string of entry-level office and retail jobs for more than 20 years while raising a daughter on her own. In the mid-1990s, she enrolled in a private college that offered computer training. "It wasn't a good experience," she said. "The equipment was not what you would expect for the money you paid. I finished my course and got out as soon as I could."

Years later, a move across Canada and a medical condition put a limitation on the type of work she could do. Sandy considered her options for going back to school to get the training required for a more stable income and to balance her health needs. Her earlier negative experience with a private college hung in the back of her mind as she researched various training, career, and financial aid options.

The local public college offered the program she wanted, but the class times were inconvenient for Sandy. The course requirements also included general education and basic training she felt she did not need, given her life and work experience. She desired a focused and intensive program that would help her develop the skills she lacked. And she worried about being older than her peers, as she expected she would be at the public college.

Sandy expanded her search to regulated private career colleges in the community. Ultimately, she found a local PCC with a good reputation that offered a program she wanted, as well as:

1 Names of students mentioned in this report have been changed.

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PCCs offer an alternative education and training pathway outside of Canada's public sector colleges and universities.

- classroom instruction times that suited her schedule;
- flexibility to work on modules at her own pace;
- credit for prior work experience in office administration (letting her focus only on those areas where she lacked skills or knowledge);
- a small and diverse student body and staff that made her feel welcome.

Sandy is one of more than 170,000 learners annually who choose to access training from one of Canada's over 1,300 private career colleges. Private career colleges and private vocational training providers (discussed throughout as PCCs) offer an alternative education and training pathway outside of Canada's public sector colleges and universities.

PCCs have existed in Canada since the 19th century: the 1970s and 1980s saw a great expansion in their numbers. Despite the long history and considerable size of the sector, relatively little is understood about their role, how they operate, their challenges, and the impact they have on education and training in Canada.

This report summarizes the findings of research The Conference Board of Canada conducted to better understand the PCC sector, including why learners like Sandy choose this PSE pathway.

## The Purpose of This Report

The research questions we sought to answer are:

- What are the defining features of PCCs in Canada?
- What is the role of PCCs in Canada's PSE system and what value do they contribute?
- What are the challenges the PCC sector faces?
- What lessons does the PCC sector present for skills and PSE in Canada?

This report has been prepared by the Centre for Skills and Post-Secondary Education (a multi-year initiative of The Conference Board of Canada). The report's findings will inform the development of a national strategy for skills and PSE in Canada.

## What Are PCCs?

PCCs offer vocational training at the post-secondary level. They are regulated within their province or territory of service delivery and are legally authorized to deliver training. Typically, the programs offered by PCCs lead to a diploma or certificate.<sup>2</sup>

With a focus on developing skills needed for entry-level employment in specific occupations, PCCs are clearly differentiated from public and private universities.<sup>3</sup> In most jurisdictions, PCCs are also distinct from other private training and academic PSE options such as:

- single-skill training providers (e.g., non-occupational driving schools, language training schools, and safety-training providers);
- theological schools;
- private international training institutions;
- organizations specializing in professional development.

Where there is sometimes confusion, however, is in how private career colleges are distinct from public colleges and institutes. This is a matter we discuss in Chapter 2.

Throughout this report, we use the term “private career colleges” (or PCCs) to refer to privately owned and operated institutions that are legally authorized and regulated by a province or territory to deliver career-focused training leading to a credential. PCCs are categorized under slightly different terminology in each of the provinces and territories. (See “Lexicon of Registered Private Career Colleges.”)

2 There are a few exceptions of degree-granting PCCs, and some offer general interest or non-credit courses.

3 Li and Jones, “The ‘Invisible’ Sector: Private Higher Education in Canada.”



It is important to recognize that some provinces categorize PCCs under the same broad grouping as other private institutions, such as language schools, while others differentiate them.

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## Lexicon of Registered Private Career Colleges

Provincial and territorial regulators use slightly different terminology for PCCs in Canada:

- Private career colleges (Ontario, Nova Scotia)
- Private (career) training institutions (British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Northwest Territories, Quebec)
- Private vocational institutions (Manitoba)
- Private vocational schools (Saskatchewan)
- Providers of private career or vocational training (Alberta)
- Private occupational training organizations (New Brunswick)
- Private training schools and career colleges (Prince Edward Island)
- Private trade schools (Yukon)

Internationally, there are different terms to represent this sector. For example, private sector colleges (U.S.) and private providers of vocational education and training (Australia) function similarly to Canada's PCCs, albeit in different regulatory, social, and economic environments.

Source: Provincial and territorial ministries for advanced education.

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Table 1 summarizes some general characteristics of PCCs. Chapter 2 discusses the characteristics of PCCs in greater detail.

**Table 1**  
**Characteristics of Canadian PCCs**

Characteristic	Details
Ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established or acquired by individuals, shareholders, and incorporated organizations</li> </ul>
Operational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent</li> <li>Franchise</li> <li>Branch campus</li> <li>Subsidiary</li> </ul>
Operating activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For-profit</li> <li>Not-for-profit</li> </ul>
Primary purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide vocational/occupational training</li> </ul>
Licensing/registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regulated under a provincial/territorial Act governing private career colleges</li> <li>Must seek registration/licensure for authority to operate vocational training programs</li> </ul>
Credentials offered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diplomas and certificates</li> </ul>
Program fields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training in disciplines similar to those covered at public colleges and in applied fields not covered by public colleges and universities</li> </ul>
Student body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small; annual enrolments &lt;1,000 per campus</li> <li>Variety of demographics, tending to be older on average and predominantly female compared with public system</li> </ul>
Instructors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practise the vocation in which they teach</li> <li>Often required to have some pedagogical training or experience, with some exceptions</li> </ul>

Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; Orton, *A New Understanding of Postsecondary Education in Canada*.

## Why Study PCCs?

PCCs are a distinct and significant provider of post-secondary training in Canada. Yet, the sector is often disregarded in discussions of Canadian PSE institutions, where Canada's public universities and colleges tend

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Annual enrolment in PCCs is one-tenth the number enrolled in public colleges and universities.

to be the focal points<sup>4</sup>. There are several compelling arguments for investigating PCCs further and bringing them into broader PSE policy discussions. As Milian and Hicks<sup>5</sup> and Jones<sup>6</sup> note:

- PCCs train a significant segment of students enrolled in training and PSE in Canada. Annual enrolment in PCCs is over 170,000—approximately one-tenth the number of students enrolled in public colleges and universities.<sup>7</sup>
- PCCs are an intersection between learners and employers, serving as a source of trained workers for industry.
- Some PCCs rely heavily on students who receive government student financial aid and government initiatives to train workers, tying them to government policy and taxpayer dollars.<sup>8</sup>
- Some PCCs recruit international students. The practices and performance of these PCCs reflect on Canada’s international brand as a desired destination for students and immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

## Methodology

This report is based on the collection and analysis of information from four sources:

1. An examination of existing literature and data on PCCs.
2. A survey of PCC students and graduates, fielded between July and November 2015. (See “Survey of Students and Graduates of Private Career Colleges” and Appendix A for additional tables.)

4 Jones, *The Invisible Private Sector*.

5 Milian and Hicks, *Ontario Private Career Colleges*.

6 Jones, *The Invisible Private Sector*.

7 Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 477-0019.

8 Milian and Hicks, *Ontario Private Career Colleges*.

9 Jones, *The Invisible Private Sector*.

3. Interviews (in-person and telephone) and e-mail correspondence with more than 45 individuals representing a variety of interests. The interviewees include PCC operators and associations, academics and observers of the PCC sector, government, students and graduates of PCCs, industry and employers, and accrediting and regulatory bodies.<sup>10</sup>
4. Feedback collected during a workshop presentation of preliminary research findings at the Conference Board's Skills and Post-Secondary Education Summit in Edmonton, Alberta, in November 2015.

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## Survey of Students and Graduates of Private Career Colleges

The Conference Board of Canada fielded an online survey of PCC students and graduates between July and November 2015.<sup>11</sup> Participants were invited to participate in the survey using a variety of outreach activities—particularly outreach by PCCs and their associations. Given that respondents self-selected to participate, there is some level of self-selection bias inherent in the survey results.

A total of 535 valid survey responses were collected, representing students and graduates since 2004 from more than 40 PCCs across Canada. Respondents from Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Ontario were the most numerous. Responses show that:

- 47 per cent of respondents were graduates of PCCs;
- 48 per cent were current students at the time of the survey (including 4 per cent who had previously graduated from a PCC);
- 5 per cent had attended a PCC in the past but did not complete their program.

- 10 These interviews and additional documentation were used to develop the vignette text boxes interspersed throughout this report. Note that the names of students and graduates have been changed.
- 11 Questions were designed based on a sample of questions from R.A. Malatest & Associates publications: *Survey of Canadian Career College Students—Phase II: In-School Student Survey*; and *Phase III: Graduate Outcomes Survey*—along with some new questions.

While ours is not a representative survey, we make comparisons throughout this report, wherever possible, to data gathered from a representative sample of PCC students and graduates enrolled at PCCs in 2005–06.<sup>12</sup>

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

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## Structure of the Report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2—describes the current PCC sector in Canada.
- Chapter 3—examines the role and value of PCCs as a pathway between education, training, and employment.
- Chapter 4—describes the learners who attend PCCs and their outcomes.
- Chapter 5—examines contemporary issues facing the PCC sector.
- Chapter 6—offers action items for PSE and PCC stakeholders.

<sup>12</sup> See R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., *Survey of Canadian Career College Students—Phase II and Phase III*.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Private Career College Landscape in Canada

### Chapter Summary

- Canada's PSE system includes over 1,300 privately owned and operated career colleges and training institutes. Collectively, these institutions train over 170,000 learners annually.
- The majority of PCCs are small institutions, and many are highly specialized. The largest PCCs offer training in multiple disciplines to hundreds of learners annually.
- Closures, openings, mergers, and consolidations are frequent in the PCC sector.
- PCCs earn their revenues through tuition charged to students and are not directly subsidized by government, though some are authorized to enrol students receiving government loans.

## PCCs in Context

Private career colleges have existed for more than a century in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Some contemporary PCCs trace their roots to the late 1890s and early 20th century, such as Maritime Business College in Nova Scotia, Willis College in Ontario, and M.C. College Group in Western Canada. Growth in the number of PCCs was stimulated in the 1940s, 1960s, and the 1980s with the federal government’s funding initiatives for more skilled workers (e.g., the *Vocational Training Coordination Act* of 1942, the *Adult Occupational Training Act* of 1967, and the *Canadian Jobs Strategy* of 1985).<sup>2</sup>

Legislation and regulations concerning PCCs began to emerge in some jurisdictions in the 1930s. Among the earliest legislation dealing with this sector were Alberta’s (1931) and B.C.’s (1936) Trades School Regulation acts.<sup>3</sup> Legislators were compelled to offer protection to students of the career colleges, business schools, and correspondence schools of the era. Throughout the sector’s history, highly publicized instances of poorly performing schools, unethical or illegal business practices, and sudden or catastrophic school closures—such as the case of the recent closure of Everest College in Canada—have heightened scrutiny of this sector. (See “The Closure of Everest College” in Chapter 5.) In the 1980s and 1990s, several interrelated factors further stimulated growth in the sector, including moves to deregulate and allow more privatization in PSE. Furthermore, changes to the provincial student loans system made it

1 Auld, *Selling Postsecondary Education*, 1.

2 Li and Jones, “The ‘Invisible’ Sector,” 9.

3 *Trade Schools Regulation Act*, 1931; *Trade-Schools Regulation Act*, 1936.

PCCs are privately owned and are relatively small operations.

easier for students to borrow money to attend private career colleges.<sup>4</sup> Rising demand for training in computer technologies and more women entering the workforce were also growth factors. Some PCCs positioned themselves as offering expedited training in computer applications needed for business, and their flexible hours, start dates, and locations appealed to women and other learners eager to enter the workforce.<sup>5</sup>

## Characteristics of the Sector

PCCs are similar to Canada's public colleges in some respects. Both provide training in occupational fields that offer direct entry into the job market. Colleges and PCCs that offer apprenticeship and trades training programs and customized training for employers share some similar characteristics in terms of their relationships with employers, unions, and professional associations.<sup>6</sup>

But there are a number of important differences between PCCs and public colleges. PCCs are privately owned and receive no government transfer payments or subsidies to cover their operating costs. As well, PCCs in Canada are relatively small operations. Even the largest PCCs, enrolling several hundred students per campus, are still much smaller than most Canadian public colleges, and might be more aptly compared with a single department within a public college.<sup>7</sup> The privately directed operations of PCCs and their smaller size are the foundation for some of the other characteristics that set this sector apart from the public sector. The following are further characteristics of the PCC sector.

- 4 McBride and Kealey, *The Impact of Privatization on Newfoundland College Students*, 15. According to Auld, this expansion of the student loans system resulted in an increase of older workers enrolling in PCCs, offsetting the proportion of younger learners entering directly from high school. Auld, *Selling Postsecondary Education*, 4.
- 5 Interview findings.
- 6 Skolnik, "The Relationship of the Community College to Other Providers," 48.
- 7 Sweet, "A Profile of Private Vocational Training Schools," 42.



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The size of the sector has remained relatively stable Canada-wide since 1989.

## **PCCs Are Found Across Canada**

There are over 1,300 registered private career colleges (including for-profit and not-for-profit) operating across all provinces and in two territories—seven times the number of public colleges in Canada. (See charts 1 and 2.) The size of the sector has remained relatively stable Canada-wide since 1989, when Sweet documented roughly 900 proprietary schools (excluding not-for-profit organizations offering vocational training).<sup>8</sup>

The majority of Canada’s PCCs are located in Ontario (600) and British Columbia (325). The three Prairie provinces are home to over 200 PCCs, and about 140 PCCs are found in Atlantic Canada. The territories, which have no public university and one public college each, are served by eight PCCs.<sup>9</sup>

In total, career colleges enrol more than 170,000 students annually—about one-fifth of the number of students enrolled in the public college sector. (See charts 3 and 4.) British Columbia and Ontario account for more than 80 per cent of these enrolments. Alberta PCCs enrol more than 16,000 students annually, while other provinces each enrol 5,000 or fewer PCC students annually. There are few PCC students in Quebec relative to the province’s population. This is partly because there are few PCCs in Quebec—only 25 for the entire province.<sup>10</sup>

8 Ibid., 40.

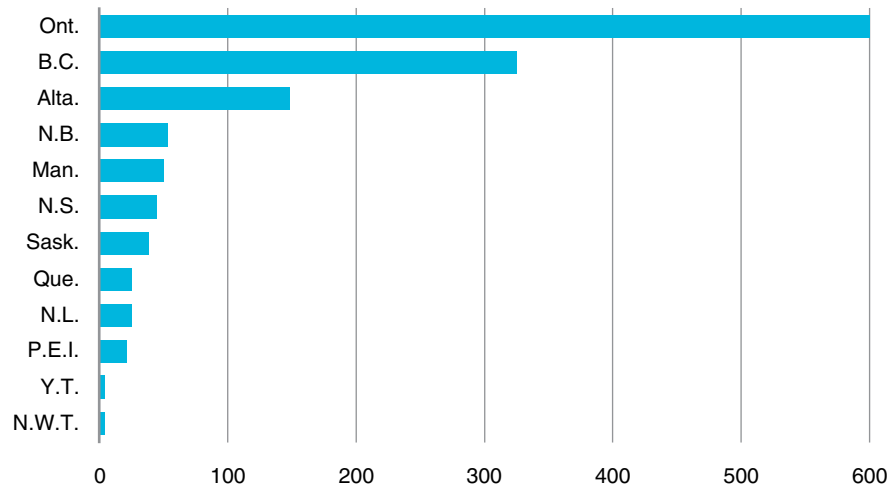
9 The precise number of PCCs in a given province frequently fluctuates. Figures presented are based on those most recently available.

10 This is, in part, a factor of Quebec’s system of publicly funded CEGEPs that provide vocational education, supplemented by a system of quasi-public institutions that operate privately but are publicly subsidized.

Chart 1

**Distribution of PCCs Across Canada, 2015**

(number of institutions)

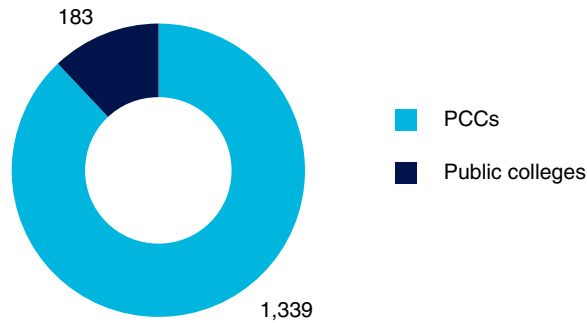


Sources: Provincial/territorial ministries responsible for advanced education and private career colleges.

Chart 2

**PCCs Versus Public Colleges: PCCs Outnumber Public Colleges in Canada**

(total number of institutions)

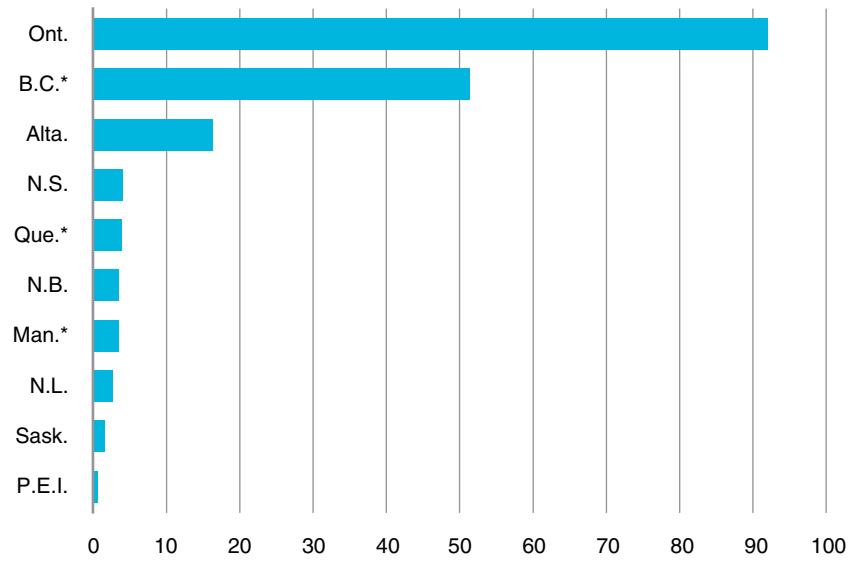


Sources: Provincial/territorial ministries responsible for advanced education and private career colleges; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

**Chart 3**

**Enrolment Across Canadian PCCs, 2015**

(number of students, 000s)



\*2013—2014

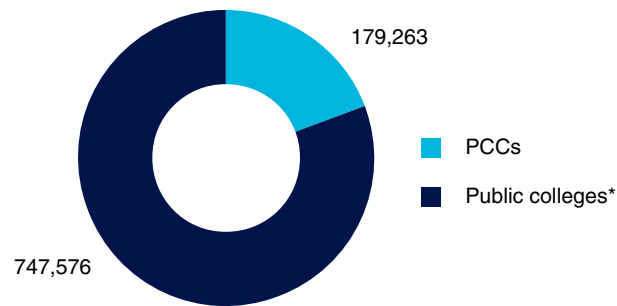
Note: No data available for the territories.

Source: National Association of Career Colleges.

**Chart 4**

**Comparison of Total Enrolments at Canadian PCCs and Public Colleges, 2015**

(number of students)



\* 2013—14

Sources: National Association of Career Colleges; Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 477-0019.

Small, usually single-campus PCCs make up the majority of PCCs.

Enrolment figures and average enrolment are declining in several provinces.<sup>11</sup> Interviewees in Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador indicated that demographic and economic factors are the likely cause of declining enrolment in their provinces. This is not the case in Alberta, where interviewees indicated strong and growing enrolments. Some speculate that the 2015 downturn in Alberta's oil and gas sector may bolster PCC enrolments as many Albertans seek training for work in other industries.<sup>12</sup>

Canada's PCC sector is dwarfed by Australia's sector of privately operated training organizations. Though Australia has roughly two-thirds of the Canadian population, there were over 3,000 privately operated registered training organizations in 2015.<sup>13</sup> A single Australian state, Victoria, had more enrolments (200,000) in for-profit training institutions in 2013 than is estimated for all of Canada's PCCs.<sup>14</sup> The U.S. also has a large private sector of colleges and universities. The Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU) represents primarily for-profit schools, including a portion of the career colleges operating in the United States. In 2015, APSCU had 1,400 voluntary member schools that trained roughly 3.5 million students.<sup>15</sup>

## The Two Tiers of PCCs

The PCC sector is characterized by a chasm between relatively large, multi-campus PCCs and small, usually single-campus PCCs. The latter make up the majority of PCCs and are among the seven in 10 PCCs with annual revenues under \$1 million.<sup>16</sup> But the larger commercial PCCs—such as Academy of Learning College, Herzing College, and

11 Government of Saskatchewan, *Ministry of Education Annual Report for 2014–15*, 10; interview findings.

12 Interview findings.

13 Australian Government Department of Education and Training, *Training Provider Search*.

14 National Centre for Vocational Education Research, *Students and Courses Data Collection*; Yu and Oliver, *The Capture of Public Wealth*, 21.

15 Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities, *About APSCU*.

16 Milian and Hicks, *Ontario Private Career Colleges*, 13.

CDI College—tend to dominate the popular consciousness of career colleges. Financial data indicate there are few of these larger PCCs: in Ontario, just five PCCs had revenues over \$25 million in 2012.<sup>17</sup>

PCCs with more than one campus are typically structured in one of three ways:<sup>18</sup>

1. **Centrally administered PCCs with branch campuses.**

Examples of branch PCCs include Ontario's triOS College, with its nine campuses; and M.C. College Group, with eight campuses across B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

2. **Franchises.**

Franchises permit individual ownership of campuses under the brand, while providing a standardized curriculum and operating procedures to franchisees. These include Academy of Learning College, with franchises across Canada; and Keyin College in Newfoundland and Labrador, which has one main campus and franchises in approximately a dozen other locations.<sup>19</sup>

3. **Subsidiaries.**

Examples of subsidiary PCCs (usually U.S.-owned) include The Art Institute of Vancouver, a subsidiary of The Art Institutes in the U.S.; and Trillium College, whose six campuses in Ontario are owned by the U.S. investment firm Quad Partners. Despite the presence of a few U.S. interests in Canada's PCC sector, U.S. involvement in this sector is not large.<sup>20</sup>

PCCs earn their revenues mainly through tuition charged to students. Although PCCs generally do not receive public funds directly, some PCCs (including those with large student enrolments) are authorized to enrol students receiving government student loans and funding through

17 Ibid.

18 Sweet, "A Profile of Private Vocational Training Schools," 43.

19 Interview findings.

20 Interview findings.

other government programs. There are also instances where PCCs may contract with a government department/agency or an Indigenous band council to provide certain types of training.

While the PCC sector is mostly for-profit, there are numerous exceptions. In nearly every province there are not-for-profit entities registered to offer vocational training programs. These PCCs are often run by unions, special interest clubs, community development organizations, Aboriginal organizations, arts centres, and professional associations.<sup>21</sup>

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## PCC Spotlight: Académie des Pompiers

First opened in 1979, the Académie des Pompiers is a PCC that provides professional firefighter training in Mirabel, Quebec. The Académie is one of the few private, French-language firefighter training institutions in Canada. As such, most of its students come from Quebec, but other students come from New Brunswick and France. Students complete classroom and hands-on training in fighting fires in small and large buildings, life-saving, workplace health and safety, and operating water cannons, among others. At the end of their program, students complete an internship of approximately one month with a firefighting service of their choice.<sup>22</sup>

Source: Académie des Pompiers; (interview with C. MacLaine, July 16, 2015).

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21 McBride and Kealey have documented some of Newfoundland and Labrador's union-owned and -operated private vocational providers. See *The Impact of Privatization on Newfoundland College Students*.

22 Interview findings.

## PCC Program Offerings

The most common training programs offered by PCCs include business, legal services, health services, information technology, and community services (e.g., early childhood education, addictions workers, and policing and security). Chart 5 shows the types of programs in which students and graduates are enrolled.

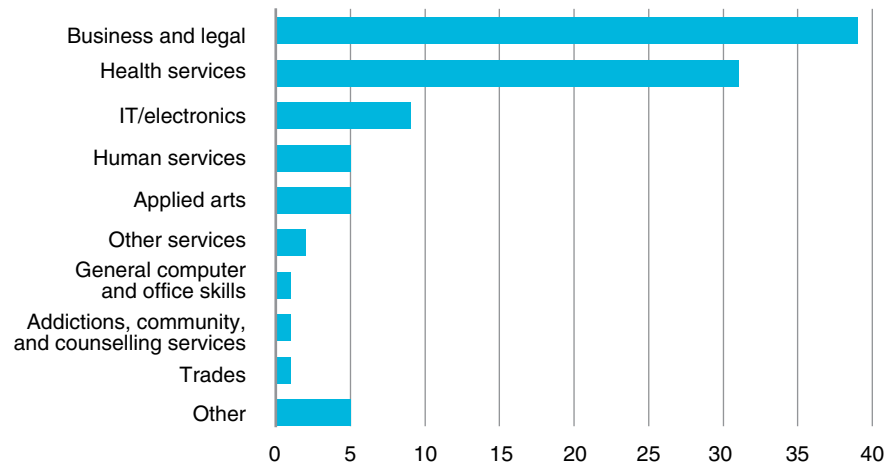
Many of the smaller PCCs in Canada focus on particular sectors or trades. Examples of specialized programs include:

- commercial transportation and flight;
- cosmetology;
- culinary arts;
- emergency services;
- performing arts;
- trades.

Chart 5

### Enrolment Across Fields of Study at Canadian PCCs, 2015

(per cent of students; n = 533)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

The PCC sector consists of many young institutions.

(See “Académie des Pompiers,” “The Glenn Gould School,” “Imperial Hotel Management College,” and “Wellington College of Remedial Massage Therapy,” for examples of PCCs offering specialized programming.)

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

## PCCs Are Relatively Young Institutions

While PCCs have been part of the Canadian PSE landscape for at least 150 years, closures, openings, mergers, and consolidations are frequent in the PCC sector. Changing market and regulatory conditions affect the overall movement in the sector. In some cases, the conditions allow new PCCs to flourish, force others to close, or cause relocation to other jurisdictions. For example, B.C. saw a 31 per cent decline in registered institutions from 2008–09 to 2013–14.<sup>23</sup> The B.C. Ministry of Advanced Education attributes this decline to consolidation within the sector and tightening of regulations that have reduced the existence of lower-quality institutions.<sup>24</sup> But others argue that the change is a reflection of an increased administrative burden imposed by regulations, which some PCCs in that province were unable to shoulder.<sup>25</sup>

The PCC sector consists of many young institutions. In Ontario, for example, over 60 per cent of PCCs are less than 10 years old.<sup>26</sup> National data from 2007 show that 42 per cent of PCCs across Canada were 10 years old or younger.<sup>27</sup>

23 F. R. (Rick) Kleiman, consultant working with the PCC sector, e-mail correspondence with author, July 2015. Based on data from B.C.’s Private Career Training Institutions Agency.

24 Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA), *2012–13 Enrolment Report*, 1; PCTIA, *Enrolment Report 2010*, 1.

25 Interview findings.

26 Milian and Hicks, *Ontario Private Career Colleges*.

27 R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., *Survey of Canadian Career College Students—Phase 1: Survey of Institutions*.



## PCCs Are Predominantly Urban

Nine out of 10 PCCs in Canada are located in urban areas with more than 10,000 residents.<sup>28</sup> Urban locations are key to ensuring a sustainable customer base and for connections to employers who provide access to the jobs to which PCCs aim to connect their students.<sup>29</sup> Urban PCCs are often located in commercial districts alongside other local businesses and community services. Rural PCCs are relatively numerous in Atlantic Canada and other areas where there is a large rural population.

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## PCC Spotlight: The Glenn Gould School

Located in Toronto, the Glenn Gould School is an elite training centre for aspiring professional musicians. The school offers two programs registered with Ontario's Superintendent of Private Career Colleges:

1. A four-year performance diploma providing students with practical, theoretical, and academic instruction. Graduates may have their credits recognized toward a Bachelor of Music offered at Thomson Rivers University.
2. A two-year, post-graduate artist diploma for students on the cusp of professional careers. The focus is on private lessons, master classes with visiting performers, and frequent performance opportunities.

The school's faculty include senior musicians with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, as well as successful soloists and chamber musicians. Student enrolment is capped at 130 per year.<sup>30</sup>

Source: Glenn Gould School/The Royal Conservatory of Music.

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28 Ibid.

29 Sweet, "A Profile of Private Vocational Training Schools," 39.

30 The Royal Conservatory of Music, *Glenn Gould School*; The Royal Conservatory of Music, *Programs for Performers*; The Royal Conservatory of Music, *Faculty*; The Royal Conservatory of Music, *The Glenn Gould School Difference*.

The provinces and territories establish regulations for the credentials required of instructors at PCCs.

## The PCC Sector Is a Big Employer

More than 35,000 people work at PCCs across Canada, including 22,000 instructors.<sup>31</sup> A large multidisciplinary campus may employ upwards of 40 instructors. In contrast, some smaller PCCs have only one or two individuals who fulfill the various tasks of instruction, recruitment, registration, and general administration. Franchises and multi-campus PCCs have a number of support staff, such as admissions and enrolment officers, academic success officers, recruitment and marketing officers, technology advisers, and financial aid officers.<sup>32</sup>

The provinces and territories establish regulations for the credentials required of instructors at PCCs. Government regulations require that instructors employed by PCCs must normally have a minimum duration of work experience in their field of instruction.<sup>33</sup> Generally, PSE and pedagogical training is not a requirement for instructors who can demonstrate a minimum level of occupational experience in their vocation. Instructors can include retired industry professionals who are looking to stay active in their field; seasonal and self-employed workers looking to offset a decline in work in the off-season; and part-time instructors who also teach at public colleges.<sup>34</sup>

## PCC Spotlight: Imperial Hotel Management College

The Imperial Hotel Management College prepares students for careers in the luxury hospitality industry. Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, with a second location in Toronto, Ontario, the College provides students with

31 Buy, "Making Education Work."

32 Interview findings.

33 For example, Ontario regulations require instructors with no teaching experience and no post-secondary education to have a minimum of 48 months of occupational experience in the vocation in which they will teach. This required duration is shorter for those who have teaching experience and/or post-secondary education. See Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, *Operating a Private Career College in Ontario*.

34 Interview findings.

practical experience. Students take daily on-the-job training in areas such as hotel administration, food and beverages, sales and marketing, accounting and finance, and guest services. The college's practicum partners include hotels throughout Vancouver, Victoria, and Toronto, and elsewhere in North America. The college also has articulation agreements with universities and colleges in the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the United States, and Australia, among others.<sup>35</sup>

Source: Imperial Hotel Management College.

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## The PCC Sector Is Loosely Organized

Provincial career college associations are members of a Canada-wide organization—the National Association of Career Colleges. However, member coverage is not comprehensive: only a fraction of PCCs (approximately 30 per cent) are members. Provincial associations indicate that their members include the PCCs with the largest enrolments, reflecting about 80 per cent of the students enrolled in the PCC sector.<sup>36</sup>

There is also some formal and informal organization of PCCs according to industry and vocation. Councils and working groups—representing PCCs that offer courses and programs in hair design and esthetics, commercial truck driving, and massage therapy—are active in some provinces. Given the tremendous variety among PCCs, these industry-specific groups sometimes provide a better venue for discussions of issues regarding students, curricula, and occupational standards than do the broader sector associations.<sup>37</sup>

35 Imperial Hotel Management College, *Well-Rounded Work Experience*.

36 Interview findings.

37 Interview findings.

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## PCC Spotlight: Wellington College of Remedial Massage Therapy

Since 1988, the Wellington College of Remedial Massage Therapy has trained students for careers as massage therapists. Located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Wellington College offers a two-year, full-time program, and a three-year distance education program. Students can specialize in spa massage (including therapeutic, relaxation, and hot stone massage, as well as aromatherapy), sports massage, and rehabilitation. Students also gain practical experience at student clinics located at various health care facilities and seniors' residences across the city.<sup>38</sup> Wellington College is affiliated with the Western College of Remedial Massage Therapy in Regina, Saskatchewan, which first opened in 1978.<sup>39</sup>

Source: Wellington College.

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## Summary

Although the PCC sector is just one-fifth the size of Canada's public colleges in terms of annual enrolments, the sector has a geographic footprint that reaches across all provinces and two territories. It trains over 170,000 learners annually at more than 1,300 different institutions. PCCs are found throughout urban Canada as well as in some rural areas. Collectively, these entities—mostly small, loosely organized for-profit enterprises—employ 35,000 Canadians. The particular role that PCCs fill for providing access to training, education, and employment is the subject of the following chapter.

38 Wellington College, *Our History*; Wellington College, *Programs*.

39 Western College, *About*.

## CHAPTER 3

# The Role and Value of PCCs

### Chapter Summary

- PCCs satisfy demand for training from learners who are looking for convenience, flexibility, and intensive, short-duration programs.
- PCCs also satisfy employers' needs for job-ready workers. The short duration programs of PCCs offer shorter lag times between program start-up and job-ready recruits, relative to the public college programs.
- To fortify their value to learners and employers, PCCs seek out and maintain relationships with employers, industry, and other education and training providers.

## The PCC Value Proposition

**PCCs have a significant niche role in Canada's PSE system largely because of the convenience and flexibility they offer learners. They also supply employers with trained workers to fill demand in a shorter period of time than is possible through the public college system. The flip side is that, for learners, PCC programs are often more expensive than similar programs available at public colleges. But learners are attracted to the promise of short, intensive study that will have them entering the workforce more quickly than other training options.**

To fortify their value to learners and employers, PCCs forge relationships with employers, industry, and other education and training providers. This chapter discusses the PCC sector's niche role in providing training at the post-secondary level in Canada and examines how PCCs make relevant connections within Canada's PSE, training, and employment realm.

## **PCCs Offer Competitive Advantages Over Public Colleges**

When asked their reasons for choosing to attend a PCC rather than a public college or university, learners stated that PCCs have some clear competitive advantages. (See Chart 6.) Learners' reasons for choosing a PCC instead of a public college include:

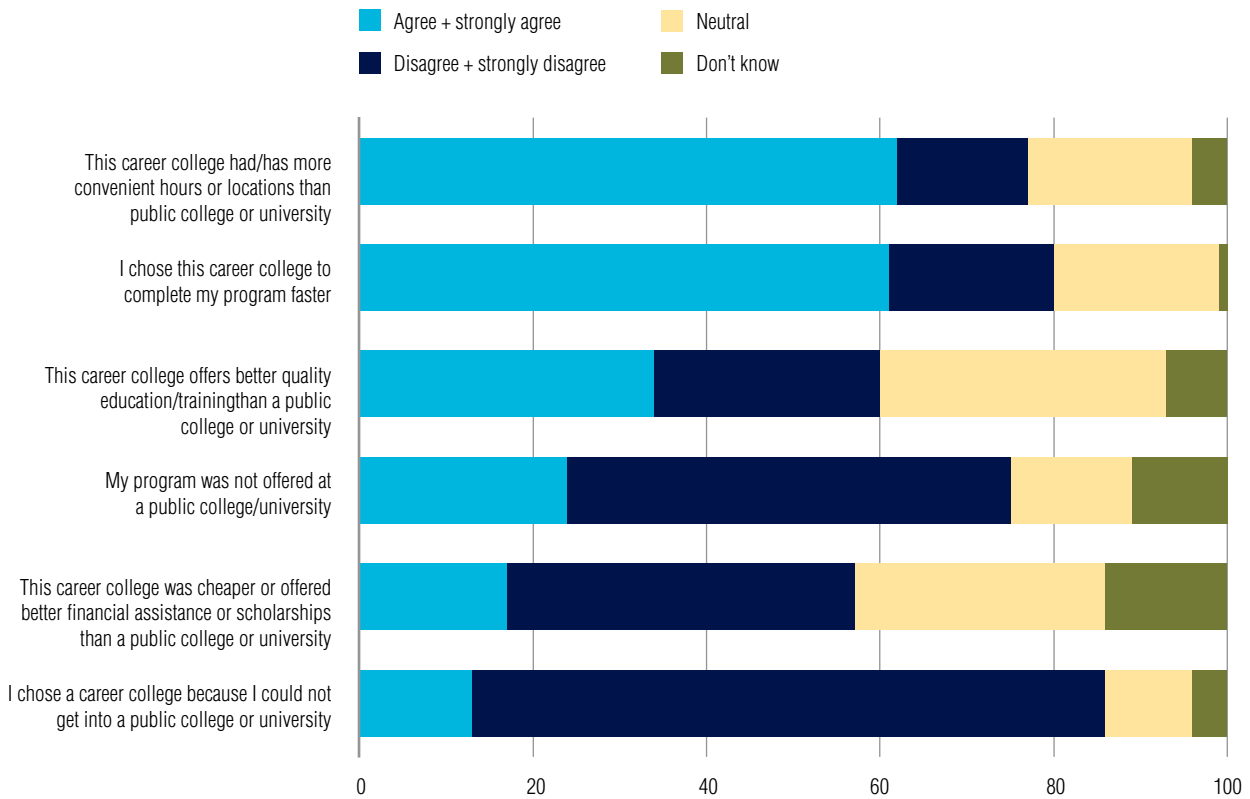
- more convenient hours and locations (62 per cent);
- shorter program durations (61 per cent);
- better-quality training than offered by public colleges or universities (34 per cent);

- program offerings (24 per cent);
- more affordable programs or better financial assistance available (17 per cent).

Chart 6

**Reasons for Enrolling in a PCC Rather Than a Public PSE Institution**

(per cent of students and graduates; n = 529)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

However, some learners based their choice of PCC on not being able to gain admission to a public institution (13 per cent).

Some interviewees also identified other advantages of PCCs, such as:

- ongoing enrolment and instruction throughout the year, allowing PCC students to enter a program immediately rather than waiting for a September or January start date;
- the option for students to complete lessons or modules at their own pace;
- a personal or intimate learning environment with small class sizes that permit interaction between individual students and instructors;
- lower or more flexible entrance requirements.

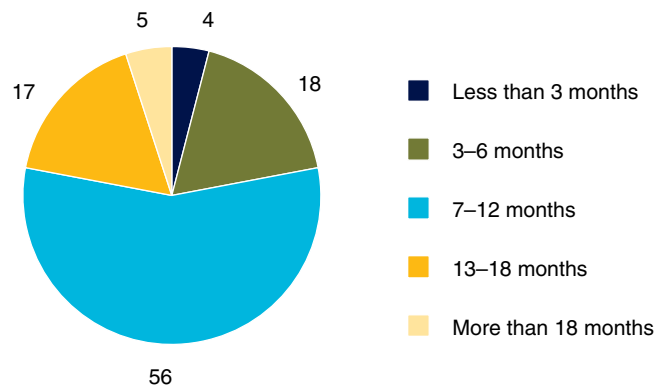
### PCCs Offer Compressed Programs

Many PCCs offer accelerated or compressed programs, which can be completed in less time than a similar program at a public college. As noted, this is a common reason for choosing a PCC over a public college. In fact, most PCC students—78 per cent—enrol in programs of 12 months or less. (See Chart 7.) Just 22 per cent of PCC students are enrolled in programs that take longer than a year to complete.

Chart 7

#### PCC Students by Program Duration, 2015

(per cent of students and graduates; n = 533)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.



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Compressed instruction remains a popular learning option for the type of students who choose PCCs.

In accelerated or compressed programs, duration and contact hours are reduced, and components such as general education, theoretical foundations, and extended academic breaks may be omitted.<sup>1</sup> These types of programs are attractive to adult learners who can complete their program in a shorter period of time and move faster toward their career and education goals.<sup>2</sup>

Research has found that compressed instruction leads to efficiencies (e.g., reduced time spent on administration, building rapport, and reviewing prior lessons). It has also found compressed learning to be as effective at yielding learning gains as traditionally taught courses. However, compressed instruction has not been well-studied in the specific context of adult vocational training and in PCC versus public college settings.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it remains a popular learning option for students who choose PCCs.

### **The Flip Side: The Cost of PCC Programs**

In the absence of government transfer payments or subsidies, PCCs generally charge higher tuition relative to public, taxpayer-subsidized institutions to cover all of the direct costs of a program. The majority of students and graduates we surveyed in 2015 (88 per cent) were enrolled in programs with a total cost of up to \$20,000, with the median tuition being \$13,001. (See Chart 8.)

Generally, PCCs assume that their higher tuition relative to similar programs at public colleges is offset by their compressed-duration programs (which lowers the opportunity cost of pursuing a credential) combined with the promise of higher earning potential of graduates.<sup>4</sup> This defence of the cost of PCC tuition requires further research to verify.

1 Interview findings; Jobs for the Future, *The Breaking Through Practice Guide*, 26.

2 Ibid., 27.

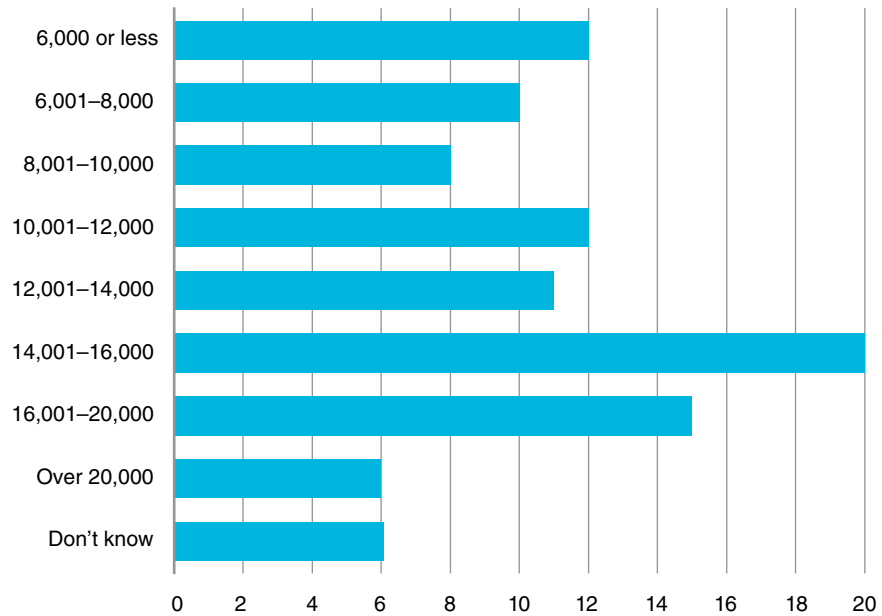
3 Ibid.

4 Interview findings.

Chart 8

**PCC Students by Total Cost of Program, 2015**

(per cent of students and graduates; n = 533)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

**PCCs and Their Partners**

PCCs consult with and engage employers to bring relevance to their programs and to connect students to employment. Many PCCs also collaborate with other education providers to increase their value to learners. The following section discusses these partnerships.

**Employer and Industry Engagement**

Some of PCCs’ most important relationships are with employers and industry stakeholders who hire the colleges’ graduates. Employers and industry invest their resources and time in PCCs in a number of ways, including:

- serving on PCC advisory boards;
- creating or co-creating curricula;
- supplying PCCs with equipment for use in training;
- sponsoring students or contracting employee training;
- providing co-op placements, internships, mentorships, and practicums;
- providing third-party assessments of programs for use in program proposals and reviews;
- hiring graduates upon program completion.

Examples of employers and industry partnering with PCCs are numerous. Two examples are profiled in “The Role of Employers at Willis College” and “Professionalizing the Horticultural Trades.”

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## The Role of Employers at Willis College

Willis College, a PCC with campuses in Eastern Ontario, has relied on close partnerships with employers and industry to shape its program offerings and curriculum throughout its 100-plus-year history. Willis College trains students for careers in business, health care, and technology. Its technology programs target graduates of public university and college programs looking for technical training that will lead to employment.

Employers who are actively consulted on the content of Willis’s technology programs include Michael Anderson, a Senior Vice-President with the U.K.-based software firm Sophos. Anderson’s relationship with Willis developed out of a need to recruit talent into entry-level technical support positions. He soon found a further need for advanced personnel. Anderson collaborated with Willis to develop the Advanced Network Security Professional program, customized to reflect his workplace’s needs.

Anderson said Willis serves as a “one-stop shop” for training and recruitment for his company. Over four years, said Anderson, he has hired several dozen Willis graduates. According to Anderson, the relationship with the college and the guarantee of a reliably well-trained talent pool were critical reasons why Sophos recently opened its second Canadian office in Ottawa. Another of Willis’s industry collaborators, Ritch Dusome of the Centre of Excellence in Next

Generation Networks (CENGN), noted that employers appreciate Willis College for its flexibility, sensitivity to industry needs, and consistent delivery of job-ready graduates.

Sources: Willis College; Rima Aristocrat (interview with E. Martin, August 20, 2015); Michael Anderson and Ritch Dusome (interviews with E. Martin, September 23, 2015).

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## Professionalizing the Horticultural Trades

The Landscape New Brunswick Horticultural Trades Association (LNBHTA) operates the Landscape Horticulture Training Institute (LHTI)—a registered, private, occupational training organization and a member of New Brunswick’s Association of Career Colleges. Located in Sussex, New Brunswick, LHTI was founded in 2010 through a contract with the province to provide the classroom-based component of apprenticeship training in landscape horticulture.

LHTI is presently the only institution in New Brunswick supplying classroom instruction in landscape horticulture that leads directly to Red Seal certification in the trade. Even so, recruitment remains LHTI’s main challenge. Building engagement with employers has been a key activity for the school, as it relies largely on employers to refer their employees for training.

According to Jim Landry (LHTI’s Executive Director) and Kevin Nauss (President of Price Landscaping Services, which has had three employees enrolled in LHTI), a growing number of employers are championing the school. Employers are motivated to engage with LHTI because of their interests in raising professionalism in the horticulture sector and ensuring they have well-trained workers for the future. “A big issue for our industry is keeping qualified people. There are few people in the industry to begin with, and we need to keep the good ones. Training helps to do that,” said Landry.

Sources: New Brunswick Horticultural Trades Association; Kevin Nauss (interview with E. Martin, September 2, 2015); Jim Landry (interview with E. Martin, August 25, 2015).

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Relationships with public education providers tend to be narrowly focused.

## Connections With Other Post-Secondary Education Institutions

Relationships between PCCs and other PSE institutions—including colleges, polytechnics, institutes, and universities—are limited (for a variety of reasons discussed in Chapter 5). However, there are numerous examples of small, formal arrangements. Typically, these arrangements include articulation agreements that allow students of one or both institutions' programs to move to the other and have their previous training recognized. Private flight training schools (which are registered as PCCs in several provinces) are among those that have established relationships with public colleges. Other examples include:

- Keyin College in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Cape Breton University have, over many years, established transfer agreements between four programs.
- Westervelt College, a PCC registered in Ontario, and Yorkville University—a private university designated in New Brunswick to grant degrees—hold an articulation agreement that gives graduates of Westervelt's Executive Administration credit toward a Yorkville University Bachelor of Business Administration.

Overall, relationships with public education providers tend to be narrowly focused, individually developed, and largely dependent on strong relationships between a few individuals spearheading the partnership. (See “triOS College and the Military Employment Transition Program.”)

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## triOS College and the Military Employment Transition Program

An initiative launched by the Canada Company has several public colleges, institutes, and polytechnics—as well as Ontario’s largest PCC—collaborating to develop special training opportunities. These opportunities will help build connections between the skills of military service people and the needs of Canadian business. On May 30, 2014, triOS College, along with Fanshawe College, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), the Marine Institute at Memorial University, and Vanier CEGEP/College, signed a memorandum of understanding to create the Military Employment Transition Program National Education Consortium.<sup>5</sup> Since then the consortium has grown to include other public and private institutions. The consortium aims to position military service people for prosperous civilian careers when they exit the armed forces.

According to Frank Gerencser, Chairman and CEO of triOS and Eastern College, “The military teach a lot of real skills; they train you the entire time you’re there.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, often the credentials awarded are difficult for non-military employers to understand. The consortium aims to alleviate this misunderstanding by translating military training and credentials to existing programs offered at Canadian colleges.

Consortium members have committed to developing a credit-sharing network that will recognize the military-based learning and work experience of veterans and reservists. It will allow veterans and reservists to transfer credit between the PSE institutions in the consortium. The partners are also developing resources that will help employers understand credential equivalencies, thereby expediting the hiring of ex-military to civilian careers.

Sources: triOS College; Frank Gerencser (phone interview with E. Martin, September 11, 2015); Canada Company Military Employment Transition Program.

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5 triOS College, *trIOS Joins Education Consortium*.

6 Interview with Frank Gerencser by The Conference Board of Canada, September 11, 2015.

## Partnerships With Other Organizations

PCCs' relationships are not limited to other PSE providers and employers. Some PCCs have long-standing partnerships, both formal and informal, with:

- Indigenous organizations and band councils (e.g., to deliver training to Indigenous Canadians);
- high schools, to recognize relevant credits earned and to recruit students (see “M.C. College and Secondary School Credit Transfer”);
- non-profit and community-based organizations, such as museums and cultural centres, to offer experiential learning opportunities for students.<sup>7</sup>

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### M.C. College Group and Secondary School Credit Transfer

M.C. College Group's three Alberta campuses (in Edmonton, Red Deer, and Calgary) dominate the cosmetology training field in the province. There are few PSE training options in Alberta for learners wishing to specialize in occupations such as hairstyling and esthetics, and the largest programs in Alberta (and in neighbouring Saskatchewan) are offered by PCCs.

M.C. College Group is unlike many PCCs, yet characteristic of many cosmetology schools, in having a student body that is predominantly high school direct entrants. In light of this, M.C. College's relationships with secondary schools are important. M.C. College recognizes the high school credits earned in cosmetology courses and counts these toward advanced standing in an M.C. College hairstyling or esthetics program. This allows students to complete their credential with M.C. College more quickly, builds awareness of M.C. College as a PSE option, and serves as a recruitment tool for the college. Since 2010, over 500 high school students have received advanced standing in an M.C. College program.

Sources: Cheryl Harrison, Vice-President of Operations at M.C. College Group (interview with E. Martin, September 3, 2015); Joe Cairo, President of M.C. College Group (presentation, *3rd Skills and Post-Secondary Education Summit*, Edmonton, November 4, 2015).

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7 Interview findings.

## Summary

PCCs offer learners convenience, flexibility, small class sizes, and the ability to enter the labour market with a credential in less time than it would often take at a public PSE institution. Strong relationships with employers and industry are important in this sector, and PCCs often provide value to employers by quickly incorporating employer input into curriculum design and producing job-ready graduates. Linkages to other education providers are more limited, but there are notable examples to be found where PCCs have established partnerships. These relationships add value for learners by helping them move more quickly and easily between education, training, and employment.



## CHAPTER 4

# Experiences and Outcomes of PCC Students

### Chapter Summary

- The PCC sector attracts underskilled learners with no prior PSE, upskilling workers who need to add to their skill set, and reskilling workers making a career change.
- Students attending Canadian PCCs are older, predominantly female, and socio-economically more vulnerable than public college students.
- Eighty-two per cent of PCC graduates who are participating in the labour force are employed. Earnings for employed PCC graduates are comparable to their public college counterparts but full-time employment levels are lower.
- Demographic differences between PCC students and college students, employer perceptions, and the nature of the work PCCs students pursue likely account for weaker full-time employment outcomes for PCC students.

Students attending PCCs are a more economically vulnerable population than their public college counterparts.

In this chapter, we look at the types of learners accessing PCCs; their outcomes in terms of graduation rates, employment, and income; and how satisfied they are with their training and learning. We draw extensively from our survey of more than 500 PCC students and graduates.

## Types of Learners

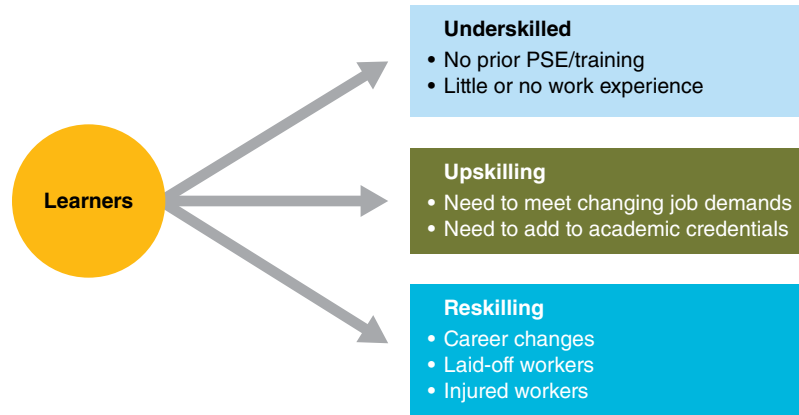
In general, the PCC sector attracts three types of learners. (See Exhibit 1.)

1. **Underskilled learners:** Those with little work experience or education, including the individuals coming directly from high school.
2. **Upskilling learners:** Those with some career experience and/or education looking to augment their knowledge and skill sets with more advanced learning or training in new technologies and practices.
3. **Reskilling learners:** Those with career experience and education who are interested in pursuing an alternate vocation. These learners include Canadian Armed Forces members transitioning to civilian life, supported through programs such as the Military Employment Transition Program,<sup>1</sup> or newcomers to Canada whose qualifications are not recognized and are seeking training for a related career in their field.

This section provides details on the types of students who attend PCCs and their reasons for doing so. It also profiles individual students and graduates of PCCs. (See “A PCC Graduate: Marianne” and “Students at PCCs: Maleka and Rishaan.”)

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, trIOs College, *trIOs Joins Education Consortium*.

### Exhibit 1 Students at Canadian PCCs



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

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## A PCC Graduate

### Marianne

Marianne was a 31-year-old living in rural Manitoba with her husband (a cattle farmer) and her young daughter when she enrolled in a two-year diploma program at a PCC offering distance education. The opportunity to upgrade her skills came through the Canadian Agricultural Skills Services initiative, a federal program that provided grants to farmers and their spouses to enrol in learning programs. The programs were aimed at improving the profitability of Canadian farms or opening up new income-earning opportunities for farming families.

After high school, Marianne completed a year of university and a year of public college, but ultimately left those programs uncompleted and turned to focus on her family. Years later, their farm was struggling, and Marianne was eager to increase her family's income. But without any specific vocational skills, her work opportunities were limited to low-paying retail jobs around their hometown. She craved a position working with computer software, and sought out a program in graphic design that complemented her previous work experience in writing and publishing.

Six years since completing her graphic design diploma, Marianne's family no longer farms. Shortly after she completed her diploma, they sold the family farm and relocated to Edmonton, Alberta. Marianne is now the primary income earner for her family, working a full-time position as an office administrator and editor of a monthly periodical, and is an active member of a national association of editors. She said her diploma helped her get her present job because it showed that she had experience and confidence working with various software applications relevant to the position.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

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## Who Attends PCCs and Why?

### **Student Demographics Skew Toward Lower-Income Women**

Students attending PCCs differ in several ways from students attending public colleges. Notably, they are a more economically vulnerable population than their public college counterparts. Table 2 summarizes some key demographics of PCC students relative to students of public colleges.

Overall, students at PCCs tend to be older (average age 36, with 70 per cent over age 25) than public college students (20 per cent of Ontario public college students were over age 25 in 2013–14).<sup>2</sup> More PCC students are women (75 per cent versus 51 per cent at public colleges), and more come from households with under \$20,000 in annual income (41 per cent versus 33 per cent at public colleges). Twenty-two per cent of PCC students were born outside of Canada (compared with 16 per cent of Ontario public college applicants), and 11 per cent speak a language other than English or French at home (compared with 20 per cent of Ontario public college students whose first language is neither English nor French). Four per cent of PCC students surveyed identified as being

<sup>2</sup> Except where noted, public college data in this section come from Colleges Ontario, *Student and Graduate Profiles*.

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The proportion of students at PCCs with some prior PSE is considerable, at 43 per cent.

Indigenous (compared with 2 per cent of Ontario public college students). Twelve per cent identified as being a visible minority (similar to public colleges, at 13 per cent). In 2005–06, more PCC students had dependent children, lived with family, and had accumulated debt of more than \$10,000 than did public college students.<sup>3</sup>

Although the majority of PCC students (56 per cent) have a high school education or less, the proportion of students at PCCs with some prior PSE is considerable, at 43 per cent. This corroborates interviewee observations that PCC students often arrive after one or more “misstarts” at other PSE institutions, or to supplement the education they received elsewhere with more hands-on training.<sup>4</sup> The proportion of PCC students with prior PSE is similar to public college students in Ontario (41 per cent).

Some stakeholders assert that Indigenous students, newcomers to PSE, internationally trained professionals, and learners with disabilities are well-suited to the PCC environment, arguing that PCCs provide personal, one-on-one support to address these learners’ unique needs. Through one national initiative called Alternative Career Pathways, PCCs are helping internationally trained professionals train for new careers in their fields of study during the time they must wait to have their foreign credentials full recognized.<sup>5</sup> Which strategies PCCs employ to support various high-needs student groups, and the outcomes of these initiatives, have not yet been studied.

3 R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., *Survey of Canadian Career College Students—Phase II*, vii.

4 Interview findings.

5 National Association of Career Colleges, *NACC’s Alternative Career Pathways Initiative*.

**Table 2**  
**Comparison of Students in PCCs Versus Public Colleges**  
(per cent)

	PCCs	Public Colleges
Female	75	51***
Over 25	70	20***
Dependent children	33*	17**
Gross household income <\$20K	41	33**
Debt >\$10K	31*	15**
Living with parents or family	59*	42**
Born outside of Canada	22	16****
Allophone	11	20***
Prior PSE	43	43***
Indigenous	4	2***
Visible minority	12	13**

Notes: Data for PCCs from The Conference Board of Canada, 2015, except as noted.

\* 2005–06 data, Canadian PCCs (R.A. Malatest and Associates)

\*\* 2005 data, Canadian public colleges (Prairie Research Associates)

\*\*\* 2013–14 data, Ontario colleges only (Colleges Ontario)

\*\*\*\* 2013–14 data, applicants of Ontario colleges only (Colleges Ontario)

Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; R.A. Malatest and Associates; Prairie Research Associates; Colleges Ontario.

## A Majority of PCC Students Access Government Funding

A sizable proportion of Canadian PCC students and graduates received loans to finance their training. In 2015, 56 per cent of the learners we surveyed accessed government loans. (See Table 3.)

Table 3

**PCC Students' Funding Sources, 2015**

(per cent, government and college sources only, n = 533)

Student loan(s) from provincial, territorial, or federal government	56
Government assistance or grant (other than student loans)	17
Scholarship or bursary from the career college	3
A discount, rebate, or lower negotiated price on one's tuition, provided by the career college	3

Notes: Data do not total 100 due to other sources, and "none of the above" not shown. Includes students and graduates.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Seventeen per cent of PCC students and graduates accessed other government funding sources, including:

- employment insurance payments for training unemployed or underemployed workers;
- workers' compensation benefits for retraining injured workers;
- provincial retraining initiatives (e.g., Ontario Second Career—a cost-sharing grant for laid-off workers to seek retraining in Ontario).<sup>6</sup>

This reliance on loans is driven by the fact that PCC students have little personal savings, employment income, or family income to cover the costs of their training. Only one in five PCC students in 2005–06 used personal savings to pay for school, versus nearly half of public college students. (See Table 4.)<sup>7</sup> Only 8 per cent used employment income, compared with 70 per cent of college students, who typically work in the summers between semesters and often hold part-time work during the school year.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, fewer PCC students (37 per cent) work while completing their program.<sup>9</sup> Some 26 per cent of PCC students in

6 Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, *Second Career: Where Will It Take You?*

7 R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., *Survey of Canadian Career College Students—Phase II*, vii.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

2005–06 reported receiving financial assistance from parents, family, or a spouse. This was much lower than for public college students (59 per cent).

**Table 4**

**Funding Sources Used to Pay for PSE by PCC Students and Public College Students**

	<b>PCC (percentage in 2005–06, n = 13,721)</b>	<b>Public College (percentage in 2005, n = 9,400)</b>
Family income	26	59
Personal savings	19	47
Employment income	8	70

Sources: R.A. Malatest and Associates; Prairie Research Associates.

## **Students Are Motivated to Pursue Training for Employment**

Interviewees describe the average PCC student as highly motivated to train for a career and for whom training in the public sector is not a realistic option for any number of reasons. These reasons include preferences for a particular program, a shorter program, smaller class sizes, or to be among older learners. Results from our 2015 survey of PCC students and graduates corroborate this impression. The majority of PCC students and graduates (58 per cent) chose to enrol in studies at a PCC in order to change a career or pursue a job. Other motivators included general interest or personal development, to study at an advanced level, and to gain practical skills. (See Table 5.)



Table 5

**Main Reason for Enrolling in Studies at a Private Career College, 2015**

(per cent)

Change career or pursue a job	58
General interest or personal development	10
Study at an advanced level or gain further skills in student's same field	9
Gain practical skills in addition to academic qualifications	8
Increase earning potential or compensation	7
Gain recognition of foreign education/training or experience	3
Other	6

Notes: Numbers do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding. Sample includes students and graduates.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

When asked about choosing their specific PCC, two in five learners say at least one of the reasons is to attend a specific program (40 per cent). Convenience and flexibility make up some of students' other top reasons for choosing a PCC—including hours that fit their needs (36 per cent), program length (34 per cent), and a location close to their home (28 per cent). Some were attracted by small class sizes (22 per cent), the college's reputation or quality (20 per cent), a recommendation (18 per cent), or the frequent start dates of courses/programs (15 per cent). Program cost, the availability of financial aid, entrance requirements, and special services were less often among learners' top reasons for choosing their PCC. (See Table 6.)

The importance of PCCs in preparing learners for careers is also evident in students' post-training intentions. Seventy-six per cent of PCC students surveyed in 2015 were planning to look for employment in a related field immediately after completing their studies. (See Chart 9.) Some evidence suggests that roughly one in 10 plans to complete a bachelor's degree or

higher, or a professional designation.<sup>10</sup> (See “Students at PCCs,” which profiles the reasons why two students decided to enrol at a PCC and their post-graduation intentions.)

**Table 6**

**Top Reasons Students Chose to Attend a Specific Private Career College, 2015**

(per cent; n = 530)

To attend a specific program	40
Hours or classes of instruction fit their needs	36
Program length	34
Institution is located close to home	28
Small class sizes	22
Institution’s reputation or quality	20
It was recommended	18
Frequent start dates or a start date that fits their schedule	15
The employment rate for graduates of the institution	13
Program or courses were not available elsewhere	12
Entrance requirements	7
Financial assistance or scholarships available	6
Cost of the program	5
Special services offered by the institution	2
Other	5

Note: Numbers do not add to 100 due to multiple selections. Sample includes students and graduates.

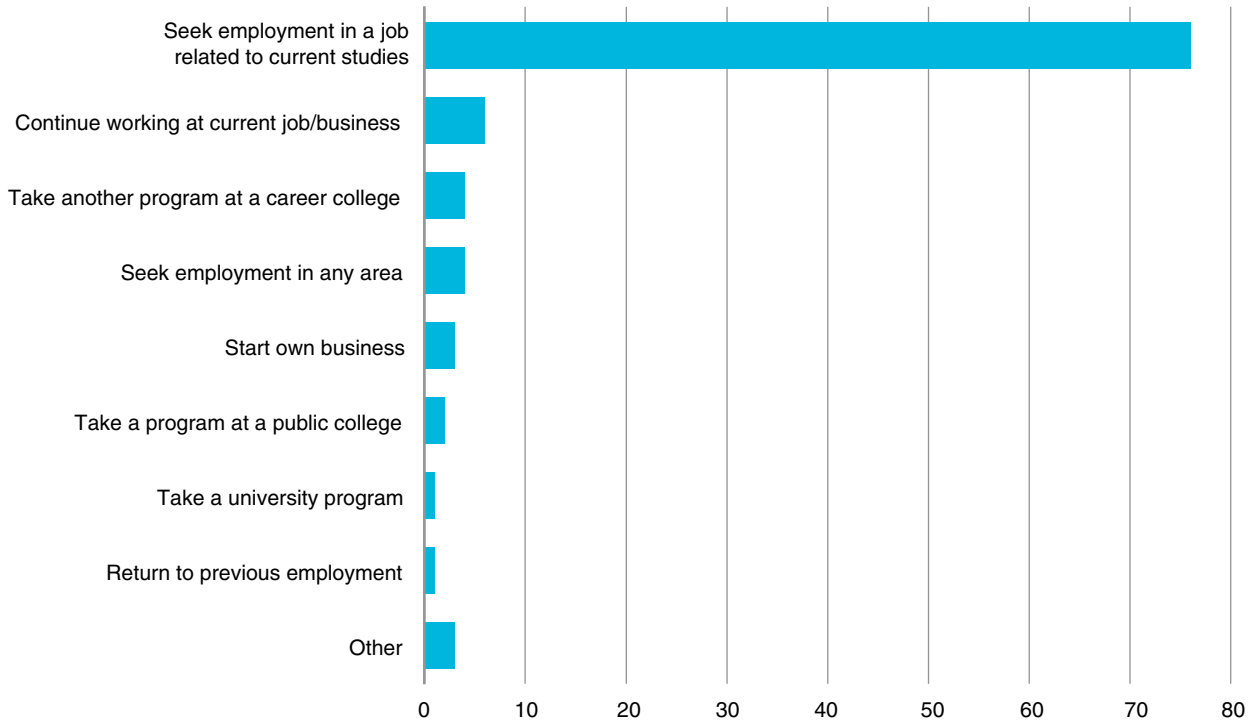
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

10 Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Beyond High School*, 42.

Chart 9

**Post-Graduation Intentions of PCC Students**

(per cent; n = 250; current students)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

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## Students at PCCs

### Maleka

In the summer of 2015, Maleka was nearing completion of her personal support worker (PSW) certificate at a PCC in Atlantic Canada. A landed immigrant from Ghana, Maleka had been a teacher for 10 years in her home country and for two years in the Caribbean, before moving to Canada. Maleka is planning eventually to move back to Ghana after her training, to be able to work in her field and care for her aging parents.

One reason Maleka enrolled in her chosen PCC was the opportunity it presented for advanced learning in the future. The PCC's articulation agreements with a local public college and a public university make it possible for graduates of the PSW program to receive direct entry into the second year of the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program at the college. They can then proceed into the last two years of the Registered Nurse (RN) program at the partnering university. Maleka is interested in pursuing this option in the future. In the meantime, she and her husband expect to open a personal health support business in Ghana.

### **Rishaan**

Rishaan came to Canada from Lebanon as a young man 25 years ago. Though he had a degree in psychology, he struggled to find satisfying work. He enrolled in a software program at an urban PCC in Ontario and for 15 years had a fulfilling career as an IT contractor. But with the rapid speed of changing technology, Rishaan could see that his skills were falling out-of-date. "In this field, you have to be always upgrading your skills. [But] the work environment doesn't give you the chance to upgrade your skills and to advance with the changing technology."

Rishaan looked into programs offered at several PCCs, and ultimately enrolled in the same one he trained at earlier because he was familiar and comfortable with the PCC. A few weeks into his program, Rishaan had some job prospects. He plans to remain an IT contractor and feels confident that his employment after graduation will be steady.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

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## Learner Outcomes

### Graduation Rates Are Strong

Graduation rates from PCCs are healthy.<sup>11</sup> Surveys of PCC graduates in Ontario and Alberta indicate graduation rates of 77 to 82 per cent in recent years.<sup>12</sup> These high rates may reflect the significant financial investment that students see associated with a PCC program,<sup>13</sup> the age of students, and small class sizes.<sup>14</sup>

### Employment Rates Are Good

It is not difficult to find PCCs that claim good employment rates, but it can be difficult to verify these data. Although some provinces require PCCs to measure employment rates for graduates of their programs, these data are not always formally collected and published. Some provinces are now requiring PCCs to collect this information for use as key performance indicators. Ontario and Alberta data show employment rates of 71 per cent (among Ontario PCC graduates, 6 months after graduating) to 92 per cent (in Alberta, 2 years after graduating).<sup>15</sup> Our survey found that 87 per cent of PCC graduates were participating in the workforce six months or more after graduating.<sup>16</sup> This includes:

- 58 per cent who were employed full-time (30 hours or more per week);

11 Comparing graduation rates between PCCs and public colleges is difficult given the differences in program lengths and longer average time-to-completion rates for public colleges. For further analysis of this issue, see Higher Education Strategy Associates, *The Impact of Ontario Career Colleges*, 4. In Ontario, the graduation rate for public colleges was 66.7 per cent. See Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, *College Key Performance Indicators*.

12 Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, *2013 Key Performance Indicators for Private Career Colleges*, 10; Alberta Association of Career Colleges, *Student Services*; Higher Education Strategy Associates, *The Impact of Ontario Career Colleges*, 1.

13 R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., *Survey of Canadian Career College Students—Phase III*, vii.

14 Interview findings.

15 Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, *2013 Key Performance Indicators for Private Career Colleges*, 10; R.A. Malatest & Associates, *Graduate Outcomes Survey*, 38.

16 Not included in this 87 per cent are those not in the workforce and not looking for work (for various reasons, including disability, retirement, and returning to school/training).

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Full-time employment is lower than for public college graduates.

- 14 per cent who were working part-time (less than 30 hours per week);
- 7 per cent who were self-employed;
- 8 per cent who were unemployed and looking for work.

These figures indicate that 91 per cent of PCC graduates in the workforce were employed six months or more after graduating.<sup>17</sup> In comparison, employment rates for graduates of public colleges participating in the workforce range from 83 per cent to 90 per cent six months or more after graduating.<sup>18</sup>

Full-time employment—which our survey found to be 58 per cent for PCC graduates six months or more after graduating—is lower than for public college graduates, which ranges from 72 to 81 per cent.<sup>19</sup> Our survey and interview findings indicate several possible reasons for this lower rate:

- PCC programs may disproportionately prepare graduates for occupations where full-time work is less common. Interviewees provided examples, such as workers in film and other applied arts where work is often on a contract basis, and personal support worker and similar occupations where part-time arrangements are common.
- PCC graduates may encounter difficulty being hired into full-time positions, based on employers' preferences or unfamiliarity with PCC credentials and programs.
- PCC graduates may be more likely to pursue non-full-time work arrangements due to factors such as family responsibilities or health.

17 This calculation is based on only those participating in the workforce, whether employed or unemployed/seeking employment, and excludes those who are continuing their education or otherwise not working or looking for work. This calculation has been used to allow comparisons with the employment rate of public college graduates. See Ferguson and Wang, *Graduating in Canada*.

18 Ibid.; Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, *College Key Performance Indicators*.

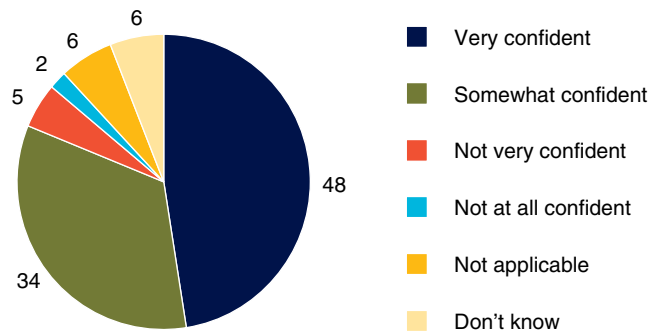
19 Colleges Ontario, *Student and Graduate Profiles 2014*, 30; Ferguson and Wang, *Graduating in Canada*. Note that caution should be used in comparing our survey of PCC graduates to Statistics Canada data, which measured graduate outcomes three years after the completion of their program.

PCC students are optimistic about their job prospects. Eighty-two per cent of students surveyed in 2015 were somewhat or very confident about their ability to obtain a job related to their field of study after graduation. (See Chart 10.) The students who expressed low confidence in their ability to find a job had doubts on account of their age, a poor job market, competition for jobs that were available, and feelings they lacked in-depth knowledge required by employers.

**Chart 10**

**PCC Students' Confidence in Being Able to Obtain a Job in Their Field of Study After Graduating, 2015**

(per cent; n = 250)



Note: Total does not add to 100 due to rounding.  
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Twenty-two per cent of current students provided suggestions for changes or improvement to their program or school in order to boost their confidence about their job prospects. Students suggested improvements such as:

- more hands-on and practical training;
- more up-to-date textbooks, information technology, and other resources;
- improvements to facilities, such as more computers or areas to study;
- more career preparation.

The median income of PCC graduates working full-time is modest.

## Graduates Are Employed in Occupations Related to Their Field of Study

Our survey found that 80 per cent of employed PCC graduates are in an occupation that closely (58 per cent) matches or somewhat (22 per cent) matches their field of study. This compares favourably to a 2013 survey of public college graduates, which found that 81 per cent of employed public college graduates are in jobs closely (64 per cent) or somewhat (17 per cent) related to their studies.<sup>20</sup> However, just over half of PCC graduates—53 per cent—agree or strongly agree that their career college training has adequately prepared them for their current position or for the employment they wish to obtain. This suggests a disconnect between the training many PCC students receive and the realities of the labour market.

## Post-Graduation Earnings Are Modest

The median income of PCC graduates working full-time is modest, at \$35,001 based on our 2015 survey. This is comparable to the incomes of public college graduates of certificate, diploma, and advanced diploma programs in Ontario who graduated in 2011–12 (\$31,660–\$38,854). College graduates of degree and graduate certificate programs garner higher average earnings than other public college graduates and PCC graduates.<sup>21</sup>

## Satisfaction With Training Declines After Graduation

Student satisfaction was generally high among students surveyed in 2015 (75 per cent or more were satisfied or very satisfied), but satisfaction typically declines by 5 percentage points or more following graduation. (See Table 7.) Satisfaction is strongest when it comes to the relationships learners have with faculty and staff, their instructors'

20 Ferguson and Wang, *Graduating in Canada*.

21 Figures are for the class of 2011–12, six months after graduating. Colleges Ontario, *Student and Graduate Profiles 2014*, 35. Statistics Canada's National Graduate Survey found median salaries of \$41,600 for graduates of public college programs working full-time two years after graduation. See Ferguson and Wang, *Graduating in Canada*.



knowledge and qualifications, the course/program content, and the institution in general. Overall satisfaction is lower relative to comparators in public PSE: for example, satisfaction with their education was 93 per cent among B.C. public college students in 2014<sup>22</sup> and 80 per cent among Ontario public college graduates in 2013–14.<sup>23</sup>

An area of consistent dissatisfaction among learners at PCCs is the cost of programs. Survey respondents who commented on the reasons for their dissatisfaction overwhelmingly remarked on the cost of their training. One respondent said, “The cost is almost triple the price than public college. Being a single parent will make paying it back challenging.” Some remarked that they expected to get high-quality text books, facilities, equipment, and instruction to justify the high price tag of their education. Graduates conveyed a higher degree of dissatisfaction, relative to students, on all other elements of their training.<sup>24</sup>

Table 7

**PCC Student and Graduate Satisfaction on Various Aspects of Training**

(per cent; n = 254 current students, 241 graduates)

	Satisfied/ Very Satisfied		Dissatisfied/ Very Dissatisfied	
	Current Students	Graduates	Current Students	Graduates
Relationships with faculty and staff	85	71	4	17
Knowledge, expertise, training, and/or credentials of instructors	83	70	7	20
Course/program content	81	76	10	20
The institution, overall	80	63	11	28
Quality of available tools, equipment, products, and/or technology	79	61	11	25
Overall quality of instruction	77	69	10	23
	Current Students	Graduates	Current Students	Graduates

(continued ...)

22 B.C. Student Outcomes, *B.C. Student Outcomes: The 2014 Highlights*, 2.

23 Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, *College Key Performance Indicators*.

24 Note that self-selection bias may be a factor in these responses.

Table 7 (cont'd)

**PCC Student and Graduate Satisfaction on Various Aspects of Training**

(per cent; n = 254 current students, 241 graduates)

	Satisfied/ Very Satisfied		Dissatisfied/ Very Dissatisfied	
How well students' programs helped their skill development	76	71	6	20
Student life/relationships with fellow students	74	65	4	11
Opportunities to provide input/feedback to one's college	69	57	9	24
How well students' institutions prepared them for the job market	53	59	7	29
The total cost of one's program	45	42	26	36

Note: Excludes "don't know/no response" and neutral responses.  
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

## Summary

Students attending Canadian PCCs differ demographically from their counterparts in public colleges. PCC students are older, predominantly female, and tend to be economically more vulnerable (higher debt levels, and lower pre- and post-training incomes). Most students choose to attend a PCC to train for a particular job and have strong intentions of seeking employment after graduating.

Graduates of PCC programs generally find employment after graduating, and for the vast majority, this employment is related to their program of study. This is a good sign given the highly specific focus of PCC programs. But the lower incidence of full-time employment among PCC graduates relative to public college graduates, the lack of preparation many feel in their current or desired employment, and the low returns relative to their considerable personal financial investment are concerning. While direct individual economic costs and gains do not reveal everything about the value of a PCC credential, students' strong dissatisfaction with program costs signal that this is a significant issue for the PCC sector.

## CHAPTER 5

# Issues Facing the PCC Sector

### Chapter Summary

- The PCC sector faces numerous pressures that challenge its reputation and role in Canada's PSE system.
- Concerns about quality and the lack of a cohesive quality assurance framework are ongoing. The PCC sector also faces a vulnerable learner base, marginalization from broader PSE initiatives, weak connections with employers in some industries, and financial fragility.
- Legislating and regulating the sector is not enough to completely curtail illegal training providers that can be confused with PCCs. This makes it a challenge to protect consumer interests, ensure educational quality, and bolster the PCC sector's reputation.

**What is the future for PCCs in Canada? Global changes suggest that despite its hundred-year plus history, the PCC sector is under threat. It is noteworthy that the expansion and contraction in private, for-profit education around the world has been closely tied to political prerogatives and ideals (e.g., reduced or stagnated government spending on public institutions,<sup>1</sup> or the pursuit of mass access to higher education<sup>2</sup>). In the U.S. and Australia, for example, governments are struggling with the repercussions of an over-extension of private, for-profit PSE encouraged by weak investment in public higher education and regulatory conditions supporting a market for private PSE.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that Canada's PCC sector faces an uncertain future.**

Public perception is a fundamental challenge for the Canadian PCC sector. Popular notions of the sector (often uncomplimentary) can be difficult to alter after highly publicized incidents of misdealing with students and infrequent, but catastrophic, failures. (See “The Closure of Everest College.”) While these incidents are not reflective of the above-board, day-to-day operations of most PCCs, they highlight the sector's overall fragility. As this chapter reveals, many pressures affect the role and reputation of PCCs in Canadian PSE. The chapter examines regulatory concerns in the PCC sector, quality assurance challenges, and concerns about financial stability, student protection, lack of integration in the broader PSE sector, and relationships with employers.

1 Usher, *Why Don't We Have More Private Higher Education?*

2 Altbach and Levy, *Private Higher Education*.

3 See, for example, Harkin, *For-Profit Higher Education*; Wheelahan, *The Race to the Bottom*; Mackenzie and Coulson, *Vocational Education and Training Funding Review*.

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## The Closure of Everest College

In February 2015, the Ontario Superintendent for Private Career Colleges suspended Everest College's operating licence over concerns that the multi-campus career college could no longer "be expected to be financially responsible in its operation."<sup>4</sup> This forced closure came as Everest's parent company, U.S.-based Corinthian Colleges Inc., was selling or closing several of its U.S.-based schools after allegations of falsified job placement rates and student grades.<sup>5</sup> The suspension of Everest's operating licence in Ontario resulted in the closure of its 14 Ontario locations and affected more than 2,400 students.<sup>6</sup>

With assistance from Ontario's Training Completion Assurance Fund (TCAF) and additional funds from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, some students transferred into programs at other approved post-secondary institutions to complete their training.<sup>7</sup> Other students received tuition refunds.<sup>8</sup> The closure had other impacts on students aside from the interruption of their studies. Some encountered difficulty obtaining their diplomas,<sup>9</sup> and some encountered difficulty obtaining employment, citing negative perceptions from prospective employers about the quality and value of the training they received.<sup>10</sup>

Sources: The Conference Board of Canada; CBC News; Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

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## Regulation

The major role that governments take with respect to PCCs is to protect learners and the public interest. Each of Canada's provincial governments has its own apparatus for monitoring, regulating, and

4 Evans, *Everest College Shut Down In Ontario*.

5 Ibid.

6 Harris, *Everest College Closure No Surprise*.

7 Government of Ontario, *Everest Colleges of Canada, Inc.*

8 de Montigny, *Former Everest College Students Want Diplomas*.

9 Ibid.

10 Interview findings.

Government regulators are tasked with pursuing action against rogue operators.

licensing/registering PCCs.<sup>11</sup> Legislation and regulation has evolved over the decades, most swiftly in response to reputational challenges to the PCC sector (e.g., Manitoba and Ontario in the early 2000s; B.C. and Nova Scotia in more recent years). Regulations are most robust in Ontario and B.C., the two provinces with the most registered operators and the greatest likelihood of issues with PCC operators. Provincial/territorial legislation and regulations concerning PCCs give governments the broad authority to set requirements for PCCs in various areas, including:

- registration of vocational training institutions and/or programs;
- putting forward a government-held surety bond and making contributions to a collective student training completion fund (or “train-out” fund) in the event of school closure;
- minimum qualifications for instructors;
- regular program approval and review;
- contractual obligations to students;
- rules and eligibility for accepting students receiving government student loans;
- eligibility for receiving international students on study permits;
- rules for marketing and advertising;
- provisions for ongoing monitoring and routine inspections.

Each province/territory exercises control over which vocational training providers are registered and therefore part of the “legitimate” PCC sector. Provinces/territories have the authority to revoke this registration when certain conditions are not met. Government regulators are tasked not only with overseeing the day-to-day regulation of registered PCCs and their programs, but also with pursuing action against rogue operators. In several jurisdictions, regulators acknowledge that the

11 For a good summary of legislation in each of the provinces, see Auld, *Selling Postsecondary Education*. Though dated, this gives a sense of variability between provinces, which persists despite updates to their legislation.

The majority of PCC operators comply with provincial/territorial regulations.

resources dedicated to enforcing provincial legislation and taking action against illegal operators are insufficient.<sup>12</sup> Some interviewees view this as the fault of weak legislation.

The majority of PCC operators comply with provincial/territorial regulations, according to the regulators we interviewed. However, incidents of misdeeds by poor performers or rogue operators garner significant media attention and muddy public perception of all private PSE operators. Lack of public understanding of the distinction between legal and illegal operators makes it difficult to undo this perception. But recent collective efforts by the PCC sector have sought to do this, as seen with the National Association of Career College's recent adoption of the preferred term "regulated career colleges" to denote the legitimacy of its members.<sup>13</sup>

Although regulation of the sector is almost wholly viewed as necessary and positive for the sector, stakeholders acknowledge some areas where regulation has negative effects on the performance of legitimate PCCs:

- **Concerns about the level of balance between over- and under-regulation.** There is concern from within the sector that some new waves of regulatory requirements (while intended to improve quality of legitimate PCCs and curtail rogue operators) stifle existing PCCs, such as in the aforementioned case of British Columbia. The effect of "over-regulation" is felt to be particularly burdensome for the smallest PCCs.<sup>14</sup> In his 2005 examination of the PCC regulations, Auld remarked that the "PCC sector is one of the most highly regulated across Canada; in some cases, the provinces' influence amounts almost to micromanagement."<sup>15</sup> He argued that the high level of regulation in this sector serves as a distinguishing feature between PCCs and public PSE institutions.<sup>16</sup>

12 Interview findings.

13 National Association of Career Colleges, *Regulated Career Colleges*.

14 Interview findings.

15 Auld, *Selling Postsecondary Education*, 9.

16 Ibid., 1.

The absence of a recognized mechanism for assuring quality makes the sector vulnerable to criticism.

- **The impact of federal rules on PCC international student operations.** There are federal policies pertaining to immigration and international students that bear on PCCs' operations. Presently, these rules permit most public PSE institutions—but only a small fraction of PCCs—to receive international students for programs longer than six months. The rules prohibit international students at PCCs from obtaining a post-graduation work permit.<sup>17</sup>
- **Differences in regulation across jurisdictions.** There is no Canadian standard when it comes to regulating PCCs, so interprovincially operating PCCs are subject to different requirements in each province of operation. This also means that the government, public, and students have different expectations for the performance of PCCs relative to the jurisdiction and the rules governing that sector.<sup>18</sup>

## Quality

The absence of a standardized and recognized mechanism for assuring quality across PCCs makes the sector vulnerable to criticism. The provinces and territories tend to distance themselves from assessing or guaranteeing the quality of training offered by PCCs. While regulators provide a certain amount of publicly accessible administrative information on regulated PCCs (including sanctions and penalties issued), they provide little information about what learners, employers, and the public can expect from a PCC in terms of quality and outcomes.

Accreditation offers some quality assurance in the sector. At the institutional level, PCCs can seek accreditation from the industry-led Career College Accreditation Program (CCAP).<sup>19</sup> As of autumn 2015, fewer than 20 career colleges were accredited with CCAP.<sup>20</sup> Interviewees explained that this low participation level is due to perceptions that the

17 Government of Canada. *Notice—New Regulations for International Students Finalized*.

18 Interview findings.

19 CCAP replaced the Canadian Education and Training Accreditation Commission (CETAC) in 2014.

20 National Association of Career Colleges, *Colleges Accredited by CCAP*.



There remains confusion about what constitutes accreditation and formal recognition in the PCC sector.

designation lacks value relative to the effort involved because of its low profile, especially with governments. Stakeholders also speculate that the program is little-known among prospective students and employers, giving scant marketing advantage to institutions holding accreditation.

PCCs can also seek accreditation of their programs. Accreditation exists for many programs that train students for health care vocations, as entry into these occupations is often regulated (e.g., pharmacy assistant, dental hygienist, dental assistant, paramedic, and medical technologist). But there remains confusion about what constitutes accreditation and formal recognition in the PCC sector. Some regulators said they are aware of confusion among the public, students, and PCC operators alike about the difference between a PCC program or institution being registered—i.e., authorized by their province/territory to provide training—and one that is accredited or recognized—i.e., meeting certain standards that have been verified by a third party.<sup>21</sup>

There are signs that governments are willing to taking on a more active role in assessing the quality of PCCs. One province, British Columbia, has begun to award an endorsement of quality to PCCs. British Columbia's Education Quality Assurance program is the only provincial government program in Canada that offers a standardized designation of institutional quality. The purpose of this “recognizable trademark” is to:

- reduce confusion caused by multiple quality assurance processes;
- help students and parents make informed choices;
- protect B.C.'s reputation for quality post-secondary education;
- promote B.C. internationally as a preferred place to live, work, and invest.<sup>22</sup>

Other provinces are placing increasing emphasis on the outcomes of PCCs as a measure of their quality and value.<sup>23</sup> Institutions within the PCC sector, too, are developing accreditation initiatives. The Truck

21 Interview findings.

22 Government of British Columbia, *Education Quality Assurance—EQA*.

23 Interview findings.

Training Schools Association of Ontario and the Canadian Massage Therapy Council for Accreditation, for example, are developing minimum standards for program curriculum and quality across training providers in these fields.<sup>24</sup>

## Students

The generally weaker socio-economic situation of learners in the PCC sector (relative to public college students), coupled with lower post-graduation employment earnings, suggests that PCC students tend to be drawn from an economically vulnerable group for whom a large investment in training is financially risky. Further, many PCC learners report that they are graduating with levels of debt they are unable to pay off, indicating this is a risk that has significant ramifications for their future well-being. (See “Student Loan Repayment.”) This situation is not unique to Canadian PCC graduates: a recent analysis of graduates of for-profit colleges in the U.S. concluded the net benefit of their education, once the cost was factored in, was negligible.<sup>25</sup>

Our interviews indicate that PCCs attract students with other characteristics that frequently interconnect with marginalization, such as immigrant status or disability. Training programs that burden students with high tuition without government or employer sponsorship are a risky option for such a group.

24 National Accreditation Planning Committee, Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada, *A Plan to Establish a Canadian Accreditation Process*; Truck Training Schools Association of Ontario, *About Us*.

25 Cellini, *Does a For-Profit College Education Pay Off?*

## Student Loan Repayment

Student loan repayment default rates are a perennial issue for the PCC sector and its students. Borrowers attending private institutions receive, on average, “more in loans per academic year (\$7,502 in 2012–13) than their university and college counterparts (\$5,497 and \$4,686, respectively).”<sup>26</sup> They accumulate less overall debt due to the shorter program length, but they are more likely to default on their student loans.<sup>27</sup> (See Table 8.)

**Table 8**  
**Default Rates for Students at a University, College, and Private Institution**  
(per cent)

Institution Type	2007–08	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11
University	10	10	10	10
College	17	17	18	17
Private institution	29	27	29	26

Source: Employment and Social Development Canada.

Although the rate of default for students of PCCs has declined in recent years, it is still high compared to public college and university graduates.<sup>28</sup> It is not fully understood why the student loan default rate is higher for students of private institutions, but many individuals we interviewed were not surprised by the figures. They attributed this rate to a student profile that is economically worse off than students of public colleges and universities.

Source: Employment and Social Development Canada.

- 26 Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), *Canada Student Loans Program: 2012–13 Statistical Review*. The aggregate data for private institutions include students of PCCs and other private institutions.
- 27 Ibid. According to ESDC, “‘Loans in default’ represent the outstanding amount of federal student loans owed by borrowers per institution who are behind in payments for at least nine months and collection activities are required.” See Employment and Social Development Canada, *Canada Student Loan Repayment Rates*.
- 28 Employment and Social Development Canada, *Canada Student Loans Program Annual Report 2012–13*. Student loan borrowers have access to ESDC’s Repayment Assistance Plan (RAP). Under RAP, borrowers can apply for accommodations to their repayment schedule depending on their economic situation. Use of RAP by students of private institutions grew over four years (from more than 160,000 users to more than 208,000 users), which may account somewhat for a decline in the default rate.

Not only does their socio-economic profile render them vulnerable, but learners in this sector are at a disadvantage due to two further factors:<sup>29</sup>

1. The absence of balanced, unbiased, and comprehensive information about PCCs (including the quality and reputation of their programs and their graduates' outcomes), so that learners can assess the validity of claims made by legitimate PCCs and rogue operators.
2. Little to no active, organized representation of their interests in front of government regulators and institutions. The gap in an effective student voice for this sector will likely persist given the splintered backgrounds of students and the fact that individual learners move through the PCC sector in a relatively brief period of time.

Nevertheless, in the face of the challenges that confront this group, our survey findings indicate PCC students are tenacious and highly motivated to persist through their PCC to obtain a credential and enter employment. The value of the PCC sector hinges on providing access to higher education and training for motivated and persistent learners who, for one reason or another, are unable or unsuited to access it through Canada's public PSE institutions.

If access, accountability, and protection of the public interest are to remain virtues of Canadian higher education, then regulators should be concerned with maintaining access for PCC learners while protecting their vulnerabilities from exploitation. Indeed, observers continue to call for expansion of government roles with respect to student protection. These include reforming the Canada Student Loan Program to increase PCC students' access to grants and repayment forgiveness,<sup>30</sup> and allowing governments a wider range of administrative actions they can take to protect students from misdealings with legitimate PCCs and rogue operators.<sup>31</sup>

29 Interview findings.

30 Interview findings.

31 See British Columbia Office of the Ombudsperson, *In the Public Interest*; Marin, *Too Cool for School*.

PCCs struggle to be recognized by public PSE institutions.

## Recognition

PCCs tend not to be involved in initiatives spearheaded by the public post-secondary sector. In interviews, this was a source of ire for many PCC operators and representatives, who struggle to be recognized by public PSE institutions and wish to be “allowed in” to collaborate on sector-wide issues. Interviewees note that PCCs and public PSE institutions do not generally collaborate on provincial transfer agreement initiatives, education marketing initiatives, and third-party accreditation. Some interviewees describe these initiatives, particularly accreditation, as deliberately designed to reflect public PSE values and to differentiate public from private PSE institutions.<sup>32</sup>

This lack of connection presents a less-than-ideal situation for learners navigating Canada’s PSE system. For example, in the absence of formal transfer agreements between PCCs and other educational institutions, students who wish to pursue further education must normally apply on an individual basis to have their PCC credentials recognized by their next educational institution of choice. Our survey of students and graduates found that 9 per cent of PCC graduates encountered difficulty with another educational institution (such as a career college, public college, or public or private university) not recognizing the education they obtained from their PCC. Of these graduates, most said it was a public PSE institution where they encountered difficulty (university, 70 per cent; college, 65 per cent).<sup>33</sup> (See Chart 11.)

Some evidence indicates public PSE institutions may not have confidence in the credentials awarded by PCCs. In a recent survey, Canadian PSE institutions were less confident in their ability to assess and recognize learning from private PSE institutions (including PCCs as well as private degree-granting institutions), relative to credentials from public institutions.<sup>34</sup>

32 Interview findings.

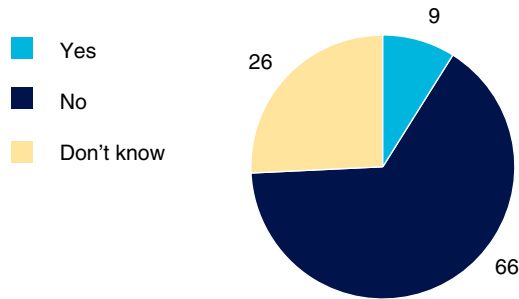
33 Some respondents encountered difficulties with more than one institution.

34 Grant, *Brain Gain 2015*, 29.

Chart 11

**PCC Graduates' Incidence of Difficulty in Having Their Education Recognized by a PSE Institution**

(per cent of graduates; n = 233)



Note: Total does not add to 100 due to rounding.  
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Overall, establishing transfer agreements with other institutions, most notably with public PSE institutions, is difficult. There are multiple reasons why transfer agreements between PCCs and public institutions are not more common:

- Differences in program content, and difficulty validating and assessing equivalencies.
- Perceptions that the quality of program content, instructors, facilities, or equipment of PCCs is not on par with public PSE providers.
- A culture of competition between institutions.
- Lengthy or difficult institutional approval processes.
- Lack of a champion at each institution to develop and maintain an arrangement.
- Perceived lack of value of an arrangement with other institutions (e.g., few students likely to participate).
- Exclusion of PCCs from provincial transfer agreement consortia.
- Differences in the field of study. Some fields of study covered by PCCs lack a complementary program in the public system that would be probable for students to move into or from.<sup>35</sup>

35 Cowin, *Private Career Colleges*, 32.

Some of the above issues are exacerbated for smaller and younger PCCs that lack the resources, financial stability, and reputation that would encourage external partnerships.

As discussed in Chapter 3, there is evidence of collaboration and connection occurring between individual PCCs and public PSE, and these efforts appear promising. But piecemeal initiatives are unlikely to have a wide effect. Overall, the sector lacks integration with the broader Canadian PSE community, which can undermine the investment that learners make in this sector and limit future efficient pathways through higher education, training, and employment.

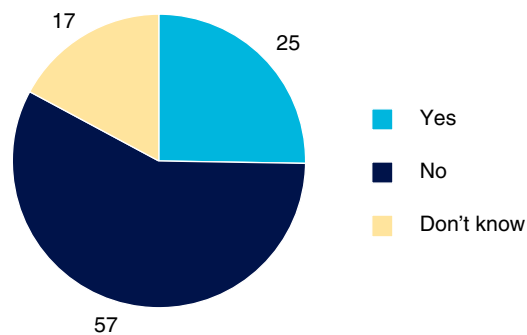
## Employers

While PCCs place a high premium on their connections to employers, this does not translate into universally successful employment transitions for PCC learners. Our survey found that 25 per cent of PCC graduates encountered difficulties with having their PCC education recognized in their pursuit of employment. (See Chart 12.)

Chart 12

### Incidence of PCC Graduates Who Have Encountered Difficulty Having Their PCC Education Recognized by an Employer

(per cent of graduates; n = 233)



Note: Total does not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Attracting graduates from other PSE institutions is likely to be a growing opportunity for PCCs.

Interviews with PCC operators confirm that some of their graduates encounter problems with certain employers not recognizing or valuing their training. These findings suggest that various PCCs, or at least some of their program offerings, may lack close connections or do not have a strong reputation with employers. Interviewees also suggest this issue is felt more by graduates in particular fields (including regulated fields, such as health care), where awareness of PCC training is thought to be lower and public PSE graduates preferred.

## Finances

The PCC sector is vulnerable to the immediate effects of an aging population and the economic shifts that alter demand for trained workers in certain occupations. Declining enrolments due to an aging population appear to be taking hold in some places. In Ontario and the Atlantic provinces, PCCs have noted sliding or stagnating enrolment from high school applicants.<sup>36</sup> This also coincides with a decline in direct entrants to public colleges and universities from high school.<sup>37</sup> For some PCCs, where high school entrants are not their major target, the effect is minimal, while for others this is a growing concern. Major declines in demand for workers in certain occupations are a potentially catastrophic issue for the hundreds of very small institutions in the sector. Conversely, larger PCCs have, to some degree, a larger and diversified market to help weather these trends.

To address shifting demographics, PCCs are looking to grow the recruitment of learners from a variety of backgrounds, including:

- those with previous PSE credentials;
- international students;
- individuals in the workforce looking to upgrade their skills and credentials;
- laid-off workers or career changers;

<sup>36</sup> Interview findings.

<sup>37</sup> Ontario Universities Application Centre, *Undergraduate Confirmation Statistics*; CBC News, *Atlantic Canada University Enrolment Falls 1.9%*.



- employees participating in corporate-sponsored training;
- learners seeking general interest courses or continuing education.

Attracting graduates from other PSE institutions is likely to be a growing opportunity for PCCs, given the rising proportion of Canadians who have attained a PSE credential.<sup>38</sup> This trend, coined “reverse transfer,”<sup>39</sup> is growing in the public college sector.<sup>40</sup>

International student enrolment is also rising in public institutions, and conceivably PCCs could benefit from heightened international interest in a Canadian-brand PSE.<sup>41</sup> But although international student enrolment numbers are substantial at B.C. private institutions (21 per cent of students are international<sup>42</sup>), PCCs elsewhere note this is an area where growth has so far been stifled. Many PCC operators we spoke with expressed a desire to recruit more international students. But they noted that, for the time being, federal rules established by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada place considerable limitations on their ability to grow this market.<sup>43</sup>

In growing any of these markets, there are implications on PCCs’ quality, reputation, and accessibility. In making program or recruitment decisions that aim to attract more students with prior PSE or from outside of Canada, PCCs and regulators should be concerned about what this means for mounting debt levels. Another concern is the ability of PCCs to provide a valuable investment to students that can yield a positive

38 Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 477-0019.

39 Birchard, “Canadian University Graduates Are Going Back”; Cheung, Guillemette, and Mobasher-Fard, *Tertiary Education*.

40 Algonquin College, *College After University*.

41 Enrolment of international students at public colleges climbed 70 per cent between 2007–08 and 2012–13, despite an overall enrolment increase of just 15 per cent. International students make up 9 per cent of public college enrolments. Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 477-0019.

42 British Columbia Office of the Ombudsperson, *In the Public Interest*, 16.

43 Interview findings.

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The PCC sector is more fragile than its long history may suggest.

economic return. Furthermore, consideration will need to be given to how the influx of some student groups could affect access to education and training for others.

## Summary

The PCC sector is more fragile than its long history may suggest. It is vulnerable to the influence exerted on it by regulations, markets, its own performance—and, most importantly, public perception. Whether the PCC sector can sustain its role in Canadian PSE hinges heavily on how the PCC sector, regulators, employers, learners, and other PSE stakeholders respond to these pressures. The next and final chapter looks at possibilities for action to integrate a high-performing private vocational training sector into Canadian PSE.

## CHAPTER 6

# Toward a Better Training and Post-Secondary Education System in Canada

### Chapter Summary

- This chapter proposes actions that government regulators, PCCs, other PSE stakeholders, learners, and employers could take to improve the performance of Canada's PCC sector.
- PCCs and government regulators have the biggest roles to play in achieving positive change in the sector. An important starting point is for provinces and territories to clarify the expectations of the PCC sector in relation to the broader PSE system.
- PCCs, government regulators, employers, and public PSE institutions need to cooperate to take action on many of these recommendations.

**Each year, approximately 170,000 learners choose to access PSE at one of Canada's over 1,300 regulated private career colleges. These learners are motivated to pursue training by their ambition to begin, re-start, or change a career. Most PCC learners graduate and obtain employment, and earn a living working as health care workers, office administrators, IT consultants, cosmetologists, and other occupations.**

The institutions that train them offer flexibility, convenience, a quick path to employment, and a focused and intensive learning environment. For many learners, the PCC alternative presents a valuable pathway to employment. To employers, these institutions serve as a valued talent supply channel.

However, the sector is fragile and is especially weakened by reputational issues and limited public awareness of its value. The following 16 recommendations address these weaknesses and challenges and propose actions that government regulators, PCCs, other PSE stakeholders, students, and employers could take to integrate a high-performing, valued, and legitimate PCC sector into Canadian PSE.

## **Actions for Government Regulators**

### **1. Clarify the Role of PCCs**

To avoid unnecessary duplication of training and to overcome training gaps, regulators could clarify the ideal roles that PCCs, public colleges and institutes, and public and private universities should fill in a cohesive PSE system. Attention should also be given to where PCCs fit alongside other private providers of education and training that fall outside the scope of PCCs and private degree-granting institutions. With a clear role

in relation to other PSE providers, PCCs and Canada's PSE system will be better positioned to address present and future training and education needs.

## **2. Consolidate Clear, Objective Information About PCCs**

Regulators could provide comprehensive, objective information about training offered by PCCs. This would include easy-to-understand information about various training options, tips for learners on how to distinguish a legitimate and high-quality training institution, and information on students' rights. Regulators could work with the PCC sector on a public education campaign that directs the public to more detailed information about PCCs.

## **3. Benchmark Quality Standards and Track Performance in the PCC Sector**

In the interest of protecting learners and the Canadian PSE brand, regulators need to adopt an active role in distinguishing quality in the PCC sector. Regulators could require the collection and sharing of comprehensive information on the performance of PCCs. Regulators could use this information to make determinations about quality and to set minimum quality standards.

## **4. Strengthen Linkages Between Labour Market Needs and PCC Offerings**

PCCs are positioned to respond to employer demand in short order. But evidence suggests there is sometimes misalignment between the skills and knowledge of PCC graduates and employer demand. Regulators could use routine program reviews and up-to-date labour market information to ensure that PCC programs align with labour force demand.

## **5. Harmonize Provincial and Territorial Regulations**

Differences in provincial and territorial regulations result in an unnecessary burden for interprovincially operating PCCs. This is also an area of potential confusion for provincially mobile learners. Regulators could work to achieve greater synchronicity between regulations.

## **6. Enhance Student Protection Measures**

The vulnerability of learners in this sector warrants continued government involvement in protecting learners' interests and enforcing regulations. Regulators could look for opportunities to strengthen and enforce regulations that protect learners. Regulators could also look for potential actions to improve outcomes for graduates, including their student loan repayment rates.

## **Actions for the PCC Sector**

### **7. Improve Data Collection on the PCC Sector**

Ongoing data collection on the inputs and outcomes of the PCC sector would offer a better understanding of this sector's contribution to Canada's economy and labour market. The PCC sector could assemble comprehensive information on the performance of institutions, and work with regulators, other PSE stakeholders, and accrediting bodies to disseminate this information.

### **8. Expand Quality Assurance Initiatives**

After PCC students graduate, satisfaction with their PCC training falls. Some graduates attribute this to the cost of their program relative to the quality of training they received. Further, quality assurance remains a gap for many institutions in the PCC sector, particularly for the PCCs that provide training in unregulated occupations. The PCC sector could expand its own quality assurance initiatives to improve professionalism, quality, and student outcomes. PCC institutions should strive to ensure their programs, instructors, facilities, equipment, and employer connections meet expectations for quality, and should continually seek

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PCCs could seek out more connections with educational institutions that can offer greater value to learners.

feedback in order to inform improvements. The PCC sector could also work with other PSE stakeholders to develop accreditation schemes for non-accredited vocations.

### **9. Increase Representation of PCCs**

The PCC sector is loosely organized and could benefit from more comprehensive inclusion of institutions in the provincial and national sector associations. The sector's associations could expand their reach to all regulated career colleges—particularly smaller, specialized PCCs. The sector could do this, in part, by formally convening specialized PCCs that provide training in the same industries (as is already happening informally in some industries). The sector could also establish provincial/territorial associations where none exist.

### **10. Strengthen Connections to Employers**

PCCs should continue to engage employers to ensure PCCs' curriculum and supply of graduates are tightly linked to employer needs. PCCs should strive to obtain regular and meaningful contributions from employers, such as input on PCC curriculum and the provision of work-integrated learning opportunities.

### **11. Establish Meaningful Relationships With Other Educational Institutions**

PCCs could seek out more connections with educational institutions that can offer greater value to learners and improve the efficiency with which students move through education, training, and employment. PCCs could consider connections to secondary and other PSE institutions, including public sector colleges and universities, through, for example, official transfer agreements or joint programs.

## **12. Stake Out Opportunities for PCCs in Broader PSE Initiatives**

PCCs should continue to raise awareness of their role in the Canadian PSE sector. The PCC sector could pursue opportunities to engage in initiatives that affect Canadian PSE institutions broadly (such as marketing a Canadian or local brand for PSE; learner access and mobility; and learning outcomes), as well as niche areas that unite public and private PSE institutions.

### **Actions for Other PSE Stakeholders**

## **13. Facilitate Learner Mobility Through Private and Public PSEs Institutions**

Formal connections between PCCs and other PSE institutions are piecemeal, and learners encounter challenges in bridging their PCC training to public PSE institutions. As a consortium, PSE stakeholders could develop mechanisms that would allow institutions to efficiently recognize learning offered at PCCs.

## **14. Incorporate the PCC Sector in System-Wide Initiatives**

To elevate Canadian-brand PSEs to a level that is recognized domestically and internationally as high-quality, public PSE stakeholders and PCCs need to work together on common issues. Consortia of public PSE stakeholders could engage the PCC sector on matters involving marketing and quality assurance.

### **Actions for Learners**

## **15. Be Conscientious Consumers and Advocates**

Learners considering training in the PCC sector should seek out information from a variety of objective third-party sources before investing in training. Learners should consider information about career



and job market prospects, financial aid, and the quality and legitimacy of training providers before making a decision about a program and institution. Students should know their contractual rights and obligations with respect to their training. They should also advocate for their collective interests through available venues, such as government regulators and offering feedback to their institutions.

## Actions for Employers

### 16. Connect More With PCCs

Employer contributions help ensure the continued relevance of PCC programs and positive outcomes for graduates. These relationships also benefit employers. Employers could seek out opportunities to have their labour needs met through PCCs, and could accept active, meaningful roles to contribute to PCC curriculum and hands-on training.

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## APPENDIX A

# Additional Tables

Table 1

## Survey Respondents by Student Status

(per cent; n = 533)

Graduate of a private career college	47
Currently enrolled as a student at a private career college	44
Attended a private career college but did not finish program	5
Graduate of a private career college AND currently a student at a private career college	4

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Table 2

## Survey Respondents by Province/Territory

(per cent; n = 533)

Alberta	35
Nova Scotia	24
Ontario	20
British Columbia	13
New Brunswick	4
Manitoba	2
Saskatchewan	1
Prince Edward Island	1
Quebec	0
Newfoundland and Labrador	0

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

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