

## **Canadian Private Higher Education at a Glance**

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## Abstract

This paper aims to comprehensively describe and analyse private higher education in Canada with the primary objective of presenting a comprehensive description of private higher education in the provinces and territories in Canada. It offers the structure of Canadian education systems, distinguishes between public and private higher education institutions within the Canadian context, provides an overview of the evolution of private higher education in recent decades, assesses its recent growth, prospects and explains some of the challenges within the Canadian education system. The article is a valuable resource for policymakers, educators, and researchers interested in understanding the landscape of private higher education in Canada.

**Keywords:** Structure, Growth, Prospects, Challenges, Private Higher Education, Canada

## Introduction

The demand for Higher Education (HE) worldwide is proliferating (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021). Consequently, HE expanded exponentially (Komljenovic and Robertson, 2017). In 2000, the number of enrolled students was 97 million, predicted to reach over 262 million students by 2025 (Bjarnason, 2009) and 377 million by 2030 (Calderon, 2018). As the demand for higher education has grown, what has become even more apparent is the public sector's lack of financial resources and inability to rapidly expand its provision to meet demand (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021). Consequently, the growth of private HE is the logical outcome of high demand and limited government funding (Altbach and Levy, 2005; Bjarnason et al., 2009; Kinser et al., 2010; Khawaja and Javed, 2023). As a result of the increasing demand for HE, the Private Higher Education (PrHE) sector has grown in popularity and, in many countries, the sector has been expanding faster than its public sector counterpart in the last couple of decades; as a result, the number of private HEIs in the world today now exceeds the number of public HEIs (Buckner, 2017). The more astonishing fact is that private HE has suddenly become the fastest-growing segment of higher education worldwide (Altbach and Levy 2005; Levy 2012 and 2018).

## Canadian Education Systems

The world's second-largest country by surface but relatively small in terms of population. Canada is a country of ten provinces and three territories, which includes the French-speaking province of Quebec on the east coast of the Atlantic Ocean and British Columbia on the west coast of the Pacific Ocean. Both English and French enjoy official status, and the mainly French-speaking province is Quebec.

### Facts

- **Capital:** Ottawa
- **Area:** 9,984,670 sq km
- **Population:** 39.2 million
- **Languages:** English, French
- **Life expectancy:** 79 years (men) 83 years (women)

### Leaders

**Head of state:** King Charles III, represented by a governor general

**Prime minister:** Justin Trudeau

Source: BBC (2023)

Canada's higher education system comprises both public and private universities. There are two main categories of universities: U15 universities and Universities Canada. The U15, on the other hand, is a collection of 15 research universities from across Canada, including some of Canada's oldest and most prestigious institutions, including McGill University, the University of Alberta and McMaster University. Universities Canada represents a wide range of universities and post-secondary colleges, which offer a variety of professional, vocational and training programmes in areas such as culinary arts and business analysis (Times Higher Education, 2022). The University of Toronto and University of British Columbia, two of the country's leading universities, score especially high for research impact. This means they're world-renowned for producing research of the highest quality (Times Higher Education, 2022).

Under the Canadian Constitution, provincial governments have exclusive responsibility for all levels of education (Lessard & Brassard, 2004; Wells, 2005; Morgan, 2011; Garcea, 2014). As a result, Canada does not have a federal or national education system. Therefore, provincial and territorial governments in Canada are responsible for education (EduCanada, 2023). This means the country has a decentralised education system (Waddington, 2018) in each province, and the territory is responsible for its own education system.

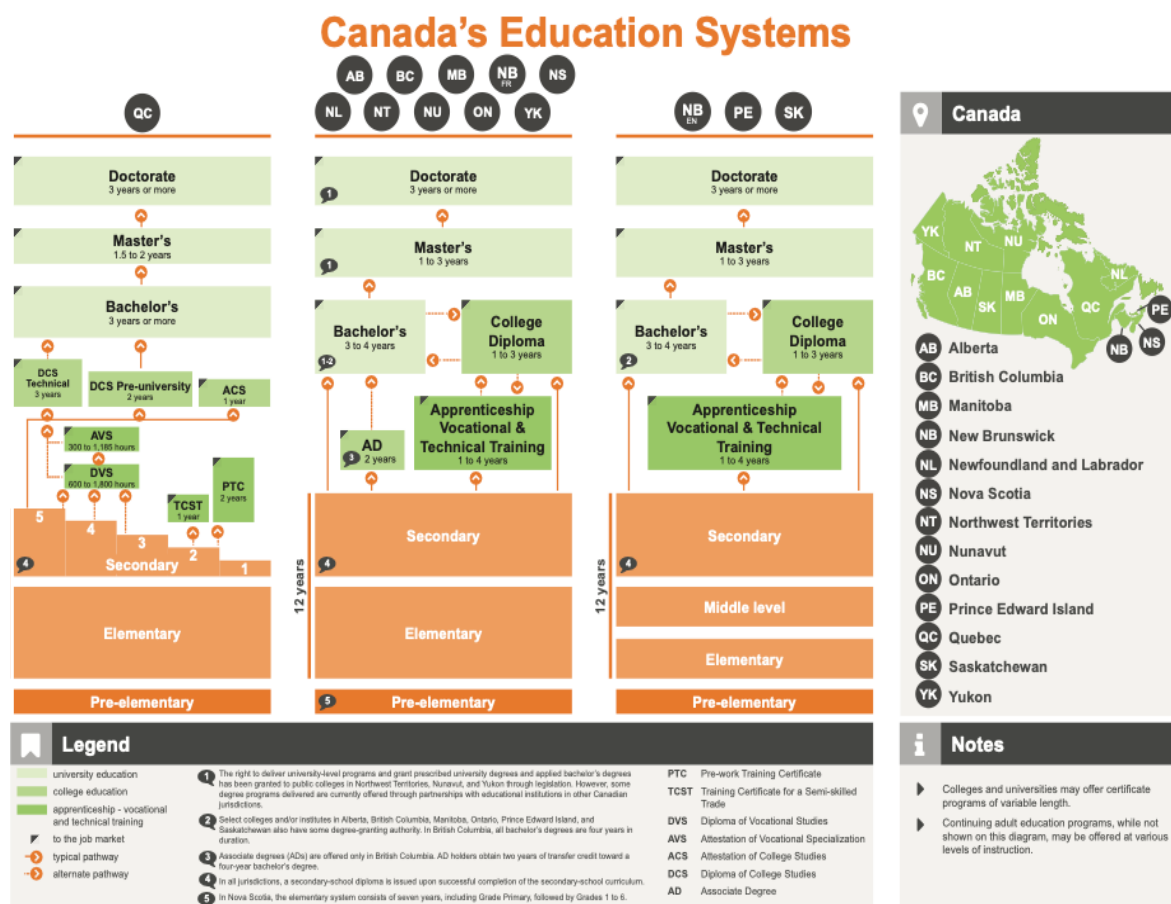
Each province and territory have a Ministry or department of education (Waddington, 2018). These groups are responsible for planning, finance, curriculum development, and assessment of learned knowledge (Morgan, 2011). In addition to these responsibilities, the education ministers also serve on the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). CMEC "provides leadership in education at the pan-Canadian and international levels and contributes to the exercise of the exclusive jurisdiction of provinces and territories over education" (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada 2017). The Canadian Education system is divided into elementary, including pre-elementary, secondary and post-secondary (Figure:01). However, there are some key characteristics and commonalities across the Canadian education systems.

**Pre-elementary and elementary:** Canada recognises the significance of early childhood education and offers various programmes and services to support the development of juveniles. The pre-elementary includes preschool and kindergarten programmes focusing on play-based learning and socialisation. The elementary education system in Canada provides foundational education for children, typically ranging from grades 1 to 8, depending on the province or territory.

Elementary education is compulsory for children, implying that parents or guardians are mandated by law to ensure their children receive an education.

**Secondary Education:** Secondary education is the stage of education that follows elementary education and prepares students for post-secondary (higher education) whether it's a college, university, or vocational programme or the workforce. Secondary education generally includes grades 9 to 12, although the specific grade range may vary slightly by province or territory. The structure of secondary education can also vary, with some provinces having a single-track system and others offering different paths, such as academic, applied, or vocational streams. Canadian high school graduation diplomas are internationally recognised (EduCanada, 2023).

Figure: 01 Canada's Education Systems



**Post-secondary Education:** Canada is known for its high-quality post-secondary (higher) education institutions, including universities, colleges, and vocational schools. The universities are characterised by degree-granting authority and high levels of institutional autonomy, while the colleges are more tightly regulated by

provincial governments and provide technical and career-oriented education (Li and Jones, 2015). These institutions offer various programmes and degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The University of Toronto is in the top twenty, and seven Canadian universities are ranked among the top 200 in the World University Rankings (Times Higher Education, 2023). Canada's higher education system was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> globally (Universitas, 2020).

**Bilingual Education:** Canada is a bilingual country, with English and French recognised as official languages. As a result, French immersion programmes are offered in many educational institutions nationwide, allowing students to learn and develop proficiency in both languages. Quebec is the only province whose sole official language is French.

**Funding:** Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2023) has reported that postsecondary institution revenue in 2018–19 increased to \$41.5 billion. Government funding is the largest revenue source for postsecondary education institutions. 45.8 per cent of postsecondary funding comes from the government. Student fees accounted for 29.4 per cent of total postsecondary education revenue. Bequests, donations, nongovernmental grants, sales of products and services, and investments brought in another 25 per cent.

**Public and Private Higher Education Institutions:** Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are classified as either public or private (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021), and this binary category is quite challenging to define and distinguish each (Levin, 2005) because of a lack of conceptual clarity (Marginson, 2007). According to UNESCO (2014), a higher education institution is considered public if it is directly governed and managed by a public education authority, government agency, or a governing body appointed by a public authority or elected by a public franchise. On the contrary, if an HEI is governed, managed and run by a non-governmental entity (such as a church, trade union labour, or business enterprise), it is categorised as private. Most of its governing board members were not chosen by a public body. The ability to choose an institution's general activity and designate the managing officers typically confers the institution's final management controls (UNESCO, 2014).

Public and private HEIs can be distinguished based on at least three factors, including legal ownership (state or nonstate ownership), funding (such as government subsidies or student tuition), and societal impact (i.e., public benefit vs personal returns) (Buckner, 2017). The criteria to distinguish public and private HEIs become more complex, and this is particularly true in the Canadian context since almost all universities have been created as distinct, private, not-for-profit corporations.

Public universities are frequently private corporations that receive funding from the government, while public colleges are more frequently established as crown corporations or agencies of government and are, therefore, more likely to be “public” regarding their legal foundation (Li and Jones, 2015).

The general criterion of whether an institution receives public funding is also problematic in the Canadian case. However, a substantial portion of public HEIs’ revenue is from government funding, and private contributions (such as student tuition fees, private endowments or sponsored research contracts with industry) are increasingly significant (Li and Jones, 2015). In 2011, student tuition accounted for 37 per cent of total university operating revenue, an increase from 13 per cent in 1981, whereas the share of government funding dropped from 84 per cent to 55 per cent (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2014). Public universities in some provinces receive significantly more revenue from tuition fees than government grants. Governments have also done this to promote particular programmes at private universities. Additionally, some private HEIs get government funding as a source of operating income, such as those in Quebec and other provinces (Li and Jones, 2015).

Levy (2012) describes private higher education institutes (PrHEIs) as those defined by national authorities. In defining private HEIs, Altbach (1999) suggests that those who operate for profit do not receive any grant from the Government and are “responsible for their own funding” (p.2). The most straightforward understanding of a private higher education institution is that of an organisation with private ownership and funding, while a public higher education Institution is an organisation with state ownership and funding (Qureshi and Khawaja, 2021). Regarding functionality, both public and private HEIs are equivalent, differing only in ownership or funding (Duczmal, 2006).

Statistics Canada (2009) uses “constituting authority or ownership” as the primary distinction between the two sectors, which “indicates to whom the assets would revert in the event of liquidation and is usually associated with the constituting authority, or the name on the legal deed to the property” (p. 13). According to Statistics Canada (2009), a private institution in Canada is usually created or endorsed by “a societies act or the act that is used to create churches (sometimes called the Religious Societies Lands Act), or a private act of a legislature or the National Assembly” (pp. 14-15). Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) gives a simplified definition for private versus public in terms of

the institution's administrative status, i.e., whether or not the institution is "controlled or managed by a body most of whose members are elected or appointed by or under the scrutiny of a public authority" (Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, n.d.).

Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS) is a national annual administrative database that enables Statistics Canada to provide detailed information on enrolments and graduates of Canadian public postsecondary educational institutions to meet policy and planning needs in postsecondary education. PSIS collects information about the programmes and courses offered at an institution, as well as information regarding the students themselves and the programme(s) and course(s) in which they were registered, or from which they have graduated. Public institutions for PSIS are defined as "public universities and colleges that are partially or totally funded by a ministry of education (including private, not-for-profit institutions)". Some provincially and federally funded institutions may not be considered "public" by this definition if a ministry of education does not fund them (Fecteau and Bussel, 2023).

To finish the discussion on the distinction between public and private HEI, within the Canadian HE, distinguishing between public and private HEI is comparatively easy; if the government recognises the HEI, it is a public HEI, and if the government authorises it, then it is a private HEI.

**Table 01: Public HEI (Recognised) Private HEI (Authorised)**

Algoma University	Sault Ste. Marie	Ontario	Public	university	Recognized
Ambrose University	Calgary	Alberta	Non-profit	university	Authorized
University of Windsor Assumption University	Windsor	Ontario	Public	theological school	Recognized
Athabasca University	Athabasca	Alberta	Public	university	Recognized
Athabasca University (British Columbia)	Athabasca	Alberta	Public	university	Authorized

Source: CICIC, (2023)

## Canadian Private HE Sector

Private higher education in Canada has existed since the country's founding, but the characteristics of these private sectors have evolved. The majority of colleges and universities that were founded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were private institutions that were either directly or indirectly affiliated with the Church of England (King's Colleges, for example), the Roman Catholic Church, or other



protestant denominations (such as the Presbyterian Queen's University or the Baptist McMaster) (Li and Jones, 2015). McGill became the first private Canadian university without a direct denominational affiliation (Jones, 1996a). Public universities have dominated the degree-granting authority and held a monopoly till 1980. In the end, this resulted in the extension of degree-granting authority to a number of private HEIs, including Trinity Western University in British Columbia in the 1980s and Redeemer University College in Ontario in the 1990s. However, these institutions were primarily seen as operating outside of provincial systems. Public universities made up Canada's "real" universities (Li and Jones, 2015). Provincial governments often permitted a free market to develop in the area of vocational and career-training programmes while treating the awarding of degrees as a governmental monopoly.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is the era of liberalisation, privatisation and marketisation. 'Liberalisation' refers to 'the opening up of any industry to competitive pressures (Starr, 1987, p. 125). It aims to create competitive market structures where many providers can compete in an integrated and easily accessible market (Hermann et al., 2007). Not only did the elimination of this public university monopoly blur the boundaries between these two sectors, but it also opened the door to authorising private HEIs in some provinces. For example, the Ontario government established an agency to assess college applications for the province's new applied degree programme. However, it also authorised the agency to review and provide the government with advice on applications from new private universities: the government would permit the establishment of private, not-for-profit universities in the province in an endeavour to address issues of accessibility and choice (Fisher, Rubenson, Jones & Shanahan, 2009).

**Table 02: Comparison of Public and Private HE in 2020**

Public		Private	
Number of HEIs	210	Number of HEIs	1,150
Students on average HEI	13,180	Students on average HEI	300
Number of students	2,768,770	Number of students	340,820
Students' percentage	89%	Students' percentage	11%

Source: Statistics Canada 2023

Some other provinces also made similar decisions to permit the emergence of private HEIs. Some primarily undergraduate private HEIs have adopted the name "university college", such as Concordia University College of Alberta (in 1995), Redeemer University College of Ontario (in 2000), and Booth University College of Manitoba (Li and Jones, 2015).

Canadian higher education is currently dominated by public higher education institutions, especially in terms of the number of students. (Table 02).

According to Statistics Canada (2023), 2,768,770 students were attending a public postsecondary institution (89.0%), and 340,820 unique students were attending a private postsecondary institution (11.0%) in the 2020 calendar year.

**Alberta:** In Alberta, private higher education is more dominant than public higher education. The province has only four public universities and nine private Universities. In Alberta, private HEIs are 283, while public HEIs are 24 (CICIC, 2023). The Private Career Colleges Branch of Alberta Advanced Education must accredit all private HEIs to offer post-secondary programmes. The Alberta Ministry of Advanced Education must also authorize private institutions that offer degree programmes.

### **Sample Profile (Concordia University of Edmonton)**

Concordia University of Edmonton (CUE) is a member of Universities Canada (UC) and the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS). Consistent with provincial legislation, Concordia University of Edmonton guarantees that the principles of institutional quality assurance in Canadian higher education are maintained.

Concordia University of Edmonton is also a member of AACSB International—The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business.

Source : <https://concordia.ab.ca/about/who-we-are/accreditation/>

**British Columbia:** Private higher education is more dominant in British Columbia than public higher education. The province has twelve public universities and eleven private Universities (CICIC, 2023). Private HEIs are 372 in the province, while public HEIs are 26 (CICIC, 2023). Private HEIs must be accredited by the Private Training Institutions Branch (PTIB) of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training to offer post-secondary programmes in British Columbia (CICIC, 2023). The PTIB is responsible for ensuring that private institutions meet the standards for education quality, financial stability, and ethical business practices.

### **Sample Profile (Quest University)**

Quest University was given the authority to grant degrees from the Province of British Columbia by the Sea to Sky University Act passed in 2002.

Quest University was accredited by the Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB) under the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education in 2006, a status renewed in 2011 and 2016 following rigorous reviews of policies and programs.

Quest is registered as a British Columbia Education Quality Assurance (EQA) approved post-secondary institution. The EQA is a quality assurance designation that identifies BC public and private post-secondary institutions that have met or exceeded provincial government-recognized quality assurance standards and offer consumer protection.

Source : <https://questu.ca/about/accreditation/>

**Manitoba:** Private higher education is more dominant in Manitoba than public higher education. The province has twelve public HEIs, including five universities (Brandon University, The University of Winnipeg, Université de Saint-Boniface, University College of the North and University of Manitoba) and seven colleges. There are private HEIs is 81, including five private universities (CICIC, 2023). In Manitoba, private higher education institutions must be registered and accredited by the Private Vocational Institutions (PVI) Branch of the Manitoba government's Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration to offer post-secondary programmes. The PVI Branch is responsible for ensuring that private institutions meet the standards for education quality, financial stability, and ethical business practices.

**Sample Profile (Canadian Mennonite University-CMU)**

- **Founded:** 2000
- **Location:** Winnipeg, Manitoba (estimated 2022 population of 783,600)
- **Type:** Comprehensive, liberal arts university programming offering accredited 3- and 4-year bachelor and graduate degrees. See details below.
- **President:** Dr Cheryl Pauls, appointed in 2012
- **Accreditation:** In 1998, CMU was chartered with university degree-granting status by the province of Manitoba. In 2008 CMU was accepted into Universities Canada, assuring students of degree recognition by other universities and colleges and facilitating ease of credit transfer.
- **Religious Affiliation:** CMU is formally supported by the Mennonite Church of Canada and the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba.

Source : [https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ald/private\\_voc.html](https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ald/private_voc.html)

**Table 03: Number of private post-secondary institutions as of 2023**

Province/Territory	Universities	Colleges	Career colleges	Language schools	Theological schools	International institutions	Total
Alberta	9	14	221	17	16	6	283
British Columbia	11	11	299	36	15	0	372
Manitoba	5	9	61	4	2	0	81
New Brunswick	4	5	45	1	2	0	57
Newfoundland and Labrador	0	0	21	0	1	0	22
Northwest Territories	0	2	1	0	1	0	4
Nova Scotia	0	0	39	7	0	0	46
Nunavut	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ontario	6	19	688	44	22	4	783
Prince Edward Island	0	0	17	1	0	0	18
Quebec	1	78	0	21	7	0	107
Saskatchewan	0	4	30	0	4	0	38
Yukon	0	0	4	0	0	0	4

Source: Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC,2023).

**New Brunswick:** Private higher education is more dominant in New Brunswick than public higher education. The province has nine public HEIs, including four public universities (Mount Allison University, St. Thomas University, Université de Moncton and the University of New Brunswick) and 57 private HEIs (CICIC, 2023). In New Brunswick, private higher education institutions must be registered with the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour to offer post-secondary programmes.

Private institutions in New Brunswick are required to meet the same standards for education quality, financial stability, and ethical business practices as public universities and colleges.

### **Sample Profile (University of Fredericton)**

The University of Fredericton is governed by the Board of Directors, the University's Academic Board, the governance of the New Brunswick Ministry and Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour in accordance with provisions established under the New Brunswick Degree Granting Act, and compliance to institutional and academic program standards as administered by the Maritime's Post-Secondary Higher Education Commission.

The University of Fredericton is a degree-granting university offering online MBA and EMBA Programs under Section 3 of the Degree Granting Act of the Province of New Brunswick in Canada.

The University of Fredericton's business programs offered through the Sandermoen School of Business are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). The business programs at the University of Fredericton have been fully accredited by the Province of New Brunswick since 2007. The ACBSP accreditation stands in addition to the provincial accreditation.

Source : <https://ufred.ca/academics/#accreditation>

**Newfoundland and Labrador:** Private higher education is more dominant in Newfoundland and Labrador than public higher education. The province has six public HEIs, including one public university (Memorial University of Newfoundland) and 22 private HEIs (CICIC, 2023). In Newfoundland and Labrador, private HEIs must be registered with the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour to offer post-secondary programmes.

### **Sample Profile (Academy Canada)**

Academy Canada is a leading Newfoundland and Labrador Career College that was established in 1985 with a unique vision that still guides us today.

Academy Canada is proud to be the largest independent career college in NL and one of the most diverse in the entire country. We have helped more than 35,000 students build awesome careers by delivering hands-on and relevant diploma programs in the top 35 employment fields related to Construction Trades, Justice, Business, Health & Personal Care, Creative Studies and Animal Care/Nature.

Source : <https://www.academycanada.com/about-us/our-story/>

**Northwest Territories:** Private higher education is more dominant in Northwest Territories than public higher education. There is only one public HEI (Aurora College) and four private HEIs (CICIC, 2023).

### **Sample Profile (Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning)**

The Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning is an Indigenous land-based initiative delivering accredited post-secondary educational and research experiences in the North. Led by northern experts, Elders, knowledge holders, academics and community members, Dechinta aims to engage students, researchers and community in transformative academic and research programs based on the unique needs of Dene and Inuvialuit communities.

Dechinta was created thirteen years ago out of a research project that identified the barriers Northern Indigenous communities were facing when trying to access post-secondary education. In response, Dechinta's programming was designed with the goal of offering accessible, holistic, and family-centered education rooted in Indigenous knowledge.

Source : <https://www.dechinta.ca/about>

**Nova Scotia:** Private higher education is more dominant in Nova Scotia than public higher education. There are 17 public HEIs, including nine public universities (Acadia University, Cape Breton University, Dalhousie University, Mount Saint Vincent University, NSCAD University, Saint Mary's University, St. Francis Xavier University, Université Sainte-Anne and University of King's College) and 46 private HEIs (CICIC, 2023). In Nova Scotia, private HEIs must be registered with the Department of Labour and Advanced Education to offer post-secondary programmes.

### **Sample Profile (Building Trades Advancement College of Nova Scotia)**

The Building Trades Advancement College of Nova Scotia (BTAC) is For Tradespeople, By Tradespeople.

BTAC Nova Scotia provides unparalleled industry-led training for Nova Scotia's Industrial-Commercial-Institutional (ICI) building and construction industry.

Source : <https://www.btacns.com/about>

**Nunavut:** Private higher education is not present in Nunavut. Nunavut Arctic College is the main institution of higher education in the territory. It offers a range of programmes and courses, including certificates, diplomas, and applied degrees. The college focuses on providing education and training relevant to the needs of the local communities.

**Ontario:** Private higher education is more dominant in Ontario than public higher education. The province has 91 public HEIs and 783 private HEIs (CICIC, 2023). The region is dominated by public universities as compared to private universities.

The province has only six private universities (table 03) while 34 public universities excluding theological institutions:

1. Algoma University
2. Brock University
3. Lakehead University
4. Laurentian University
5. McMaster University
6. Nipissing University
7. OCAD University
8. Ontario Tech University
9. Queen's University
10. Thorneloe University
11. Toronto Metropolitan University
12. Trent University
13. University of Guelph
14. University of Ottawa
15. University of Sudbury
16. University of Toronto
17. University of Waterloo
18. University of Windsor
19. Western University
20. York University

Source: Author's selection of twenty public universities in Ontario

Ontario's private postsecondary institutions offer undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, co-op programmes and professional programmes. Private HEIs, whether in Ontario or outside the province, can offer degrees if they have the consent of the Minister of Colleges and Universities or have degree-granting authority through an Act of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

Private higher education institutions in Ontario must be registered with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities to offer post-secondary programmes.

The Ontario agency, the Postsecondary Education Quality Assessment Board (PEQAB), makes recommendations to the Minister of Colleges and Universities about the program quality of applications for the Minister's consent as required under the Postsecondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000 (see Ontario.ca).

### Sample Profile (University Niagara Falls)

The University of Niagara Falls, Canada (UNF) will be ready to welcome new students in 2024. UNF will be offering a host of distinctive undergraduate and graduate programs to meet the needs of today's employers, including emerging technology, data analytics, business and digital media. Informed by labour market needs of the region and local employers, UNF received consent to offer five programs:

- Honours Bachelor of Science – Biomedical Sciences.
- Honours Bachelor of Business Administration – Majors in Digital Economy and Digital Marketing.
- Master of Data Analytics – Specializations in Marketing Analytics and Operations Analytics.
- Master of Management – Specializations in Emerging Technology and Entrepreneurship.
- Master of Arts in Digital Media and Global Communications.

Source : <https://guscanada.com/our-brands/university-of-niagara-falls-canada/>

**Prince Edward Island:** Private higher education is more dominant in **Prince Edward Island** than public higher education. The province has four public HEIs, including one public university (University of Prince Edward Island) and 18 private HEIs (CICIC, 2023). In Prince Edward Island (PEI), private higher education institutions must be registered with the PEI Department of Education and Lifelong Learning to offer post-secondary programmes.

### Sample Profile (Red Cliff College of Applied Technology and Management)

Red Cliff College of Applied Technology and Management, a premier cybersecurity institution in Prince Edward Island, is registered under the Private Training Schools Act. As the first cybersecurity institution in PEI, Red Cliff College occupies a distinguished position in cybersecurity education. Our steadfast dedication to delivering an industry-relevant curriculum while emphasizing affordability sets us apart.

Source : <https://www.rccollege.ca>

**Quebec:** Public higher education is more dominant in **Quebec** than private higher education. The province has 134 public HEIs, including twenty public universities and 107 private HEIs, including one private university (CICIC, 2023).

Quebec has a different higher education system than the other Canadian provinces. Students in Quebec leave secondary school after Grade 11 (or Secondary V) and enrol in post-secondary studies at the college level as a prerequisite to university, as opposed to entering university or college straight out of high school. The first level of higher education in the Quebec educational system is the Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEP). Private colleges and public colleges (CEGEPs) exist, but both are commonly called CEGEPs.

A CEGEP is a publicly funded college that offers unique technical, academic, vocational, or a combination of these programmes to the educational system of the province of Quebec (See <https://www.quebec.ca/en/education>).

### **Sample Profile (Thomas More Institute)**

The Thomas More Institute fosters the Socratic Method that promotes shared inquiry in small group settings of students of different ages and backgrounds and facilitates open-ended discussions. In our approach, learning is cooperative rather than competitive. It requires active participation and respectful listening. You can take individual courses that interest you, or work toward a structured bachelor of arts degree or comprehensive certificate that involve additional coursework.

Source : <https://thomasmore.qc.ca/about/>

**Saskatchewan:** In Saskatchewan, private higher education is more dominant than public higher education. The province has 23 public HEIs and 38 private HEIs. There is no private university in the region, while five public universities (Cape Breton University, First Nations University of Canada, University of Regina, La Cité universitaire francophone, and University of Saskatchewan) excluding theological CICIC, 2023). In Saskatchewan, private higher education institutions must be registered with the Ministry of Advanced Education to offer post-secondary programmes.

### **Sample Profile (Saskatoon Business College (SBC))**

In June 1907 Saskatoon Business College (SBC) was founded by Mr. E. A. Marshall. For many decades the college served as a major source of post-secondary business education for Saskatchewan students; its two primary subject areas were secretarial arts and accounting.

Saskatoon Business College is registered with the Ministry of Advanced Education and as such has approval to offer diploma programs. Our mission is to provide the highest quality education and training that is current, challenging, and relevant to the global marketplace.

SBC provides short (9-12 month) diploma programs for students seeking professional training to work in a variety of business or administrative environments. For more information, here is a list of SBC Diploma Programs.

Source : <https://www.sbcollege.ca/about-us/>

**Yukon:** Private higher education is more dominant in Yukon than public higher education. There is only one public university (Yukon University) and four private HEIs (CICIC, 2023).

### **Sample Profile (Yukon Tourism Education Council)**

The Yukon Tourism Education Council facilitates and co-ordinates development initiatives and activities in order to support the Northern labour force. These activities include administering *emerit* - National Professional Certification and the delivery of settlement, integration, language, and foreign qualification recognition services.

Source : <https://yukontec.com>



## Discussion

In Canada, like in most countries in the world, the higher education system is composed of public and private HEIs.

### Growth

Private HEIs have evolved more rapidly than public HEIs and may be considered to supplement and complement the public higher education system. As the demand for higher education has been increasing and the inability of the public HEIs to absorb the rapidly growing market, the public sector's cut in funding made the way forward for the private higher education sector to meet the rising demand of the HE (Khawaja and Javed, 2023). The global trend of cutting funds for public HE is also seen in Canada. The federal government's role in higher education shifted in the new millennium. The federal government brought significant actions to reduce its annual deficits during the mid-1990s, including enormous cuts in transfers to the provinces designed to support postsecondary education (Li and Jones, 2015). Most provinces pushed to cut funding to the postsecondary sector, often as part of broader austerity programmes (Jones, 2014); the austerity move and cuts in funding impetus private higher education in Canada.

Another factor driving the growth of private higher education in Canada is the increasing globalisation of higher education, as more students worldwide seek to study in Canada. Private universities in Canada have attracted international students by offering high-quality education and innovative programmes tailored to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Canada is now the world's third-leading destination, behind the United States of America and Australia, for international students to get a higher education degree. The number of international students in Canada has tripled in the last ten years alone, reaching **642,000** in 2019, an increase of 13%. In addition, Canada is now placed ahead of China and the United Kingdom, which hosts an average of 500,000 international students (True Education, 2020).

The total number of international students in all education levels in Canada was **807,750** (study permit holders), including higher education, by 2022. However, **373,599** international students are enrolled only in tertiary education in Canada. Of the total **807,750** study permit holders, **551,405** received a study permit in 2022 in Canada (Erudera, 2023).

The Canadian education system has been demonstrated to be of the highest quality. The advantages of studying in Canada as an international student include the affordability of tuition fees, living costs, and the popularity of Canadian universities worldwide; last but not least, the opportunity to settle down permanently in Canada. A research study conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) found that 60 per cent of international students are interested in becoming permanent residents of Canada after they complete their studies. Hence, the Canadian government have estimated that international students have injected **\$22 billion annually** into the country's economy (True Education,2020).

In Canada, the province of Ontario benefits the most from having international students. In 2019, it had nearly **307,000** international students or about 48% of all students in Canada (True Education,2020).

Private universities are becoming a significant part of higher education in almost every country, particularly in English-speaking countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Canada is one of the best countries for private universities for international students worldwide.

Here is the list of the top 10 universities for international students.

1. Canadian Mennonite University
2. Concordia University of Edmonton
3. Fairleigh Dickinson University
4. Quest University
5. St. Mary's University
6. The King's University
7. Trinity Western University
8. University Canada West
9. University of Fredericton
10. Yorkville University

Source: Selection of author (Ascending order, not in the top ten order)

## **Prospects**

Private HEIs in Canada have several growth and development prospects in the coming years. Some of these prospects are the following.

### **Increasing demand**

Private HEIs are growing in popularity worldwide, and one-third of higher education students worldwide attend private HEIs (Levy, 2018). Therefore, more than 30% of the global population of higher education students is enrolled in private higher education (Altbach et al., 2009; Levy, 2018).

As the demand for higher education continues to increase in Canada, private universities are well-positioned to meet this demand by offering alternative educational opportunities for students who are unable to access public universities or who prefer a different educational model. Currently in Canada total number of HEIs are 1150 (See Table 02) and most of these institutions are in Toronto and British Columbia.

### **Purpose-driven design and Flexible**

Private HEIs in Canada are often more nimble and innovative than public universities, allowing them to respond more quickly to economic and job market changes. Private universities may also be more flexible in their programme offerings and delivery methods, allowing them to meet the needs of a diverse range of students. Elsewhere in this document, many private HEIs in Canada have multiple intakes and time-saving degrees, such as completing within three years instead of four years in public universities.

#### **Example (University of Yorkville)**

“Private institutions help learners take the lead in designing an education path that works best for them. Choose from year-round study options, multiple start dates and optimum credit transfers that offer flexibility in meeting students’ goals. Yorkville’s programs are also designed to help graduates make a positive difference in society. Our graduate degrees are purpose-driven, empowering learners to create the changes they want to see in this world,”

Source : <https://education.macleans.ca/sponsored/yorkville-private-higher-education/>

### **Non-traditional Teaching**

Public universities in Canada have adopted the traditional pattern in HE. For example, the duration of the degree is four years. Private companies, especially digital savvy, cannot wait four years for graduates; by that time, the graduates who learned four years ago in their first year of study become obsolete in the digital field as technology is rapidly changing. Private universities have started to offer three years degrees

instead of four years. For example, published in Financial Post (2021) "Bye-bye four-year degree. Canadian companies want workers faster" (Bharti, 2021).

For example, International Business University (IBU) offers bachelor's degrees in under three years. (See <https://ibu.ca/programs/>)

### **Innovative Online Programmes**

Communities cannot survive or prosper without education as a social institution serving the needs of students, employers, and local communities. It ought to be comprehensive, innovative, modern, and sustainable. However, it must constantly change to meet the demands of a world that is undergoing rapid change. Many educationists and employers agree that it requires immediate renewal. "Higher education has to change. It needs more innovation" (Wildavsky et al., 2012, p. 1). Canadian private universities are adopting innovative approaches which meet the demands of the changing world.

#### **Example 1 (University of Fredericton)**

The University of Fredericton (UFred) is an online university offering online certificate, diploma, and degree programs. Programs are designed for working professionals aspiring to advance their career and upgrade their education with minimal disruption to their work and personal life.

Source : <https://ufred.ca>

#### **Example 2 (University of Yorkville)**

Innovative online programs developed at private institutions meet the changing needs of students and society. Take Yorkville University's Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology (MACP) program, for example. "Our MACP program is Canada's first, largest and leading online graduate degree offered in the field of counselling psychology," says Christensen Hughes. "With over 2,400 approved practicum sites, over 285 faculty with both academic and professional qualifications, and 52 weeks of skills-based practice learning activities, we have scaled our program to meet burgeoning demand. We are training the next generation of mental health professionals."

Source : <https://education.macleans.ca/sponsored/yorkville-private-higher-education/>

### **Internationalisation**

Private HEIs in Canada are well-positioned to attract international students, who are increasingly seeking high-quality educational opportunities outside their home countries. Private universities can offer innovative programmes and personalised support to attract and retain international students.

### **Challenges**

Private HEIs in Canada face several challenges, and some of them are the following.

#### **Quality Issues**

There is a difference between public and private HEIs that sometimes have similar characteristics with variations and different attributes. Variations in quality and

standards in higher education exist globally, and these variations can be attributed to various factors, including educational systems, type of HE, regulatory frameworks, resource availability, and cultural contexts (Zia, 2023).

Most private universities in Canada are well-known in the country but not necessarily elsewhere in the world because most are also not present in any international league table and university rankings of the top 100 universities, such as the Time Higher Education Ranking, the Guardian University Guide and QS. These private universities in Canada are not in the top ten ranking list of Canadian Universities (see Table 03).

The ten characteristics of a world-class university as outlined by Niland (2000) are (1) quality of faculty, (2) research reputation, (3) talented undergraduate, (4) international presence, (5) proper usage of resources, (6) alliances and networks, (7) embrace many disciplines, (8) technologically smart, (9) practice the art of good management, and (10) Internationalism in all aspects of the university. Many authors included more factors and the list has been updated but these are considered fundamental factors.

The main reasons may be the quality of education and lack of resources and research.

**Table 04: Top ten Canadian Public Universities in 2023**

Canada Rank 2023	World University Rank 2023	University	Province	City
1	18	University of Toronto	Ontario	Toronto
2	40	University of British Columbia	British Columbia	Vancouver
3	46	McGill University	Quebec	Montreal
4	85	McMaster University	Ontario	Hamilton
5	111	University of Montreal	Quebec	Montreal
6	118	University of Alberta	Alberta	Edmonton
7	=137	University of Ottawa	Ontario	Ottawa
=8	201–250	University of Calgary	Alberta	Calgary
=8	201–250	University of Waterloo	Ontario	Waterloo
=8	201–250	Western University	Ontario	London

Source: *Times Higher Education's World University Rankings 2023*

Private universities in Canada must meet the same quality assurance standards as public universities, but there is concern that some private universities may not have the same level of quality as their public counterparts. This can lead to problems with the value of degrees earned at private universities.

### **Weak Financial Position and Bankruptcy**

If the regulator is not convinced that a private career college is financially strong in its operations, it may revoke its registration and become bankrupt. In that circumstances, international students may have to spend more time and money searching for new designated learning institutions (DLIs) to attend and, possibly, find new accommodation.

Attending a small private HEI can be risky because tuition fees may be lower, and admission is much easier than for public HEIs. The primary source of revenue is tuition fees. As the competition is becoming challenging among small private HEIs, therefore, to attract students, they lower their tuition fees while unable to reduce their operating costs. Consequently, they become financially weak, and the risk increases for bankruptcy. If the regulator is not convinced that a private career college is financially strong in its operations, it may revoke its registration and become bankrupt. In that circumstances, international students may have to spend more time and money searching for new designated learning institutions (DLIs) to attend and, possibly, find new accommodation.

For example, three private colleges in Quebec filed for creditor protection last year. The three colleges -- M College in Montreal, CDE College in Sherbrooke, and CCSQ College in Longueuil filed for bankruptcy (Jamaica Observer,2023).

The financial difficulties may public HEIs can experience as well. For example, a publicly funded HEI, Laurentian University, sought creditor protection (not bankruptcy) in Canada in 2021 (Jamaica Observer,2023). However, publicly funded universities can request an emergency loan if an independent third-party review of the university's finances is complete, so there are less chances of bankruptcy with creditor protection.

### **Limited Funding**

Private universities in Canada rely on tuition fees and donations to fund their operations, making it challenging for them to compete with well-funded public universities. Private universities in Canada rely heavily on philanthropic support from alumni, foundations, and other donors. As more Canadians become wealthy and philanthropically minded, private universities may be able to tap into this support to fund new programs and facilities. Private universities may have limited resources for research, student support services, and infrastructure improvements.

### **Tough Competition**

Higher Education is a competitive and fast-changing market, with fierce competition between private and public HEIs and within public and private HE sectors. Private universities in Canada face stiff competition from public universities, which often have better funding and more established reputations. In addition, the Canadian government heavily subsidises public universities, making it difficult for private universities to compete on price.

### **Limited Research**

Limited research in private universities is a common challenge in the world that they often face. Usually, research fundings and grants are available for public universities. While private universities may excel in student enrollment, infrastructure, and industry connections, they sometimes struggle to establish vital research programmes. In Canada, only a few private universities offer doctoral programmes. Research requires a supportive academic culture that encourages and values research contributions from faculty and students. Private universities may need to invest in developing a research-oriented culture through incentives, mentorship programmes, and research support services.

### **Conclusion**

Public and private institutions that grant students certificates, associate, baccalaureate, and graduate degrees make up Canada's higher education sector. Regarding the number of HEIs, career colleges represent by far the largest sector of private HEIs in Canada (See table 03).

In the five years leading up to 2022, the industry has expanded due to rising student enrollment and higher tuition costs, which have primarily offset falling government funding. The literature review above reveals that the number of new private HEIs founded in the country is associated with increasing demand for HE.

In Canada, the regulation of private higher education is primarily the responsibility of the provincial and territorial governments rather than the federal government. Each province and territory have its own policies and regulations regarding private higher education, and the policies can vary widely between jurisdictions.

Generally, private HEIs in Canada must meet the same accreditation and quality assurance standards as public HEIs to offer recognised degrees. The accreditation and

quality assurance processes are typically overseen by provincial or territorial bodies responsible for regulating higher education.

The road to permanency through studying at a Canadian HEI has attracted a large number of international students, especially from China and India. The internal (home) and external (international) demand is one of the factors in the growth of private HE in Canada.

Private higher education in Canada has several prospects for growth and development in the coming years. These include increasing demand for higher education, innovation and flexibility, internationalisation, specialised programmes, and public-private partnerships. Private universities that can navigate the sector's challenges and capitalise on these prospects will likely play an essential role in the Canadian higher education system.



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