



Perceptions of trades training gaining traction over university

Canadians twice as likely to advise a young person to take trades or apprenticeship training than they are to recommend a general university program.

Canada faces [a shortage of workers](#) in [the skilled trades](#), resulting in part from persistent labour-market demand driven by activity in construction, manufacturing, transportation and related industries, combined with the aging population. An estimated [700,000 retirements](#) will occur by 2028, and industry projections call for 167,000 new apprentices to be trained over the next five years.

The skilled-trades system covers a diverse range of occupations that are essential to the national economy, infrastructure development and growth. Canada formally recognizes more than 300 designated trades, which employ approximately one in five Canadian workers. Skilled-trade activity is concentrated in a handful of industries—manufacturing, construction, transportation, information and cultural industries, accommodation

and food services, and other service sectors—which together contributed roughly 29 percent of national gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021.

Research has indicated that recruitment of young people into the skilled trades is hampered in part by the stigma and stereotypes that suggest that jobs in the trades are low-skill and low-paid, with few opportunities for advancement. These roles are also highly gendered with women being significantly under-represented. People working in the trades sector in Canada, have [reported feeling](#) that they are devalued and looked down upon. Many Canadians are ill-informed about the trades sector and are unaware, for example, that in many cases skilled tradespeople earn more than professionals, and that they can also [earn while they learn](#) (i.e. start earning while still being trained). In recent years, governments at all levels have worked with industry, unions and educators to raise the profile of the skilled trades. New research suggests that these efforts may be gaining ground.

Job-oriented trade program over general university program

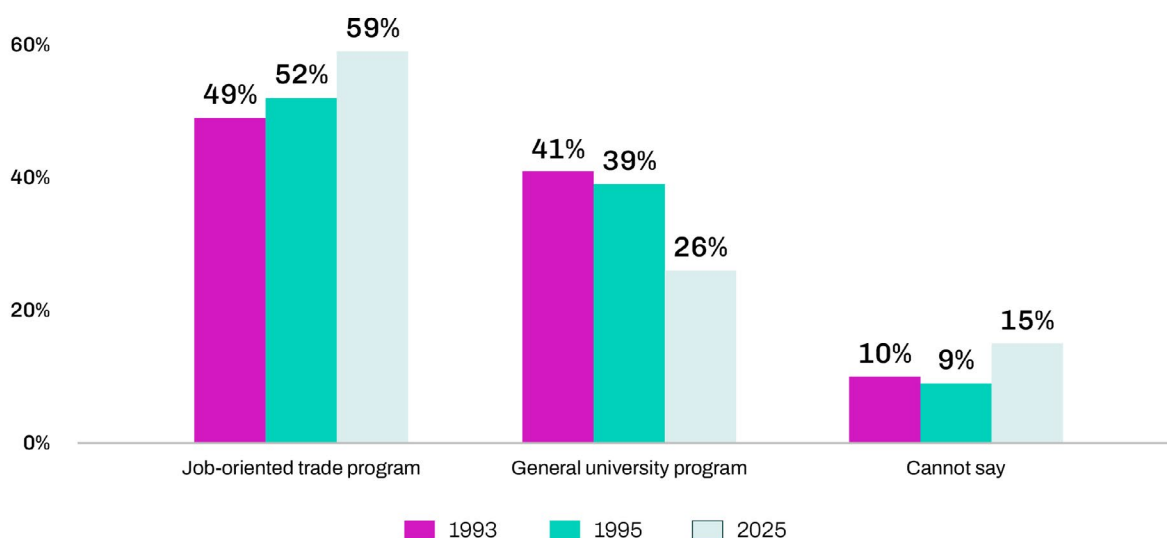
The latest wave of the Survey on Employment and Skills asked Canadians to think about what advice they would give to a young person regarding their career path. Specifically, they were asked whether they would encourage a child to enroll in a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program, or a general university program. Three in five (59%) said they would encourage the child to opt for a job-oriented trade school, twice as many as the proportion that would recommend a general university program (26%). An additional 15 percent did not express an opinion either way.

The charts in the main report present streamlined versions of the survey data. More detailed versions of charts 2, 4, 5, 6 can be found in the Appendix.



CHART 1

A growing proportion of Canadians would recommend trades training over a university program



If a child asked you to help them choose between a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program and a general university program, which course would you encourage them to take (assuming that the student had the ability to do both)?

Source for 1993 & 1995: Environics Focus Canada

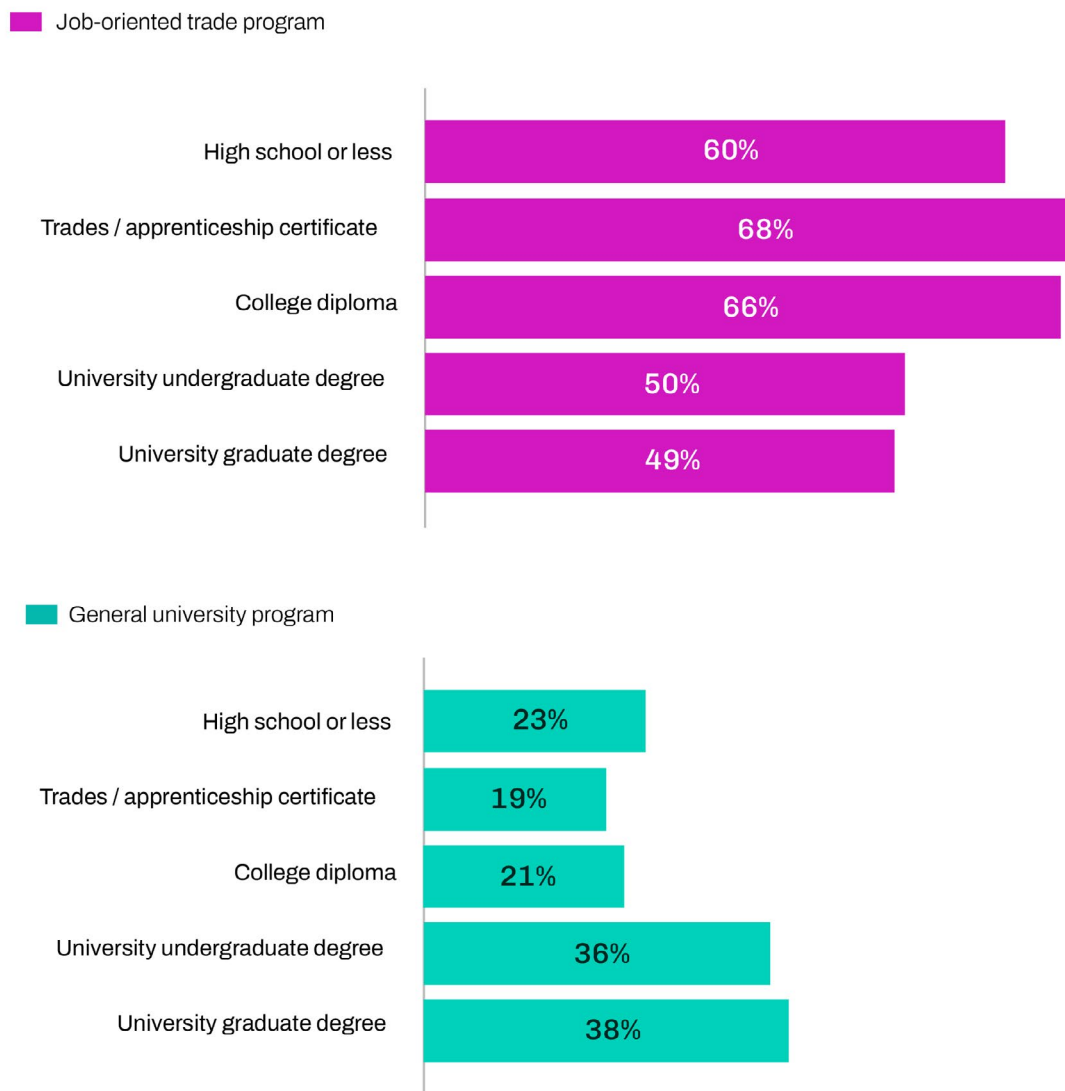
This question was asked 30 years ago, in two Environics Focus Canada surveys. At that time, job-oriented trades or apprenticeship training was also favoured over a general university program. Since 1995, however, the proportion favouring trades training has increased by seven percentage points (from 52% to 59%) while the proportion favouring a general university program has dropped by 13 points (from 39% to 26%). The proportion expressing no opinion has increased (from 9% to 15%).

As might be expected, the proportion favouring job-oriented trades or apprenticeship training in 2025 is

higher among those who themselves do not have a university degree. For instance, 68 percent of those who pursued trades or apprenticeship training would advise a child to choose that type of training rather than a general university program. However, university graduates are also more likely to recommend trades training than a general university degree; this preference is held by 50 percent of those with an undergraduate degree and 49 percent of those with a graduate degree. By comparison, 36 percent and 38 percent respectively would recommend a general university degree – a net preference of +14 and +11 percentage points respectively in favour of trades.



CHART 2
More favour trades training over a university
program regardless of educational background
 2025, by educational attainment



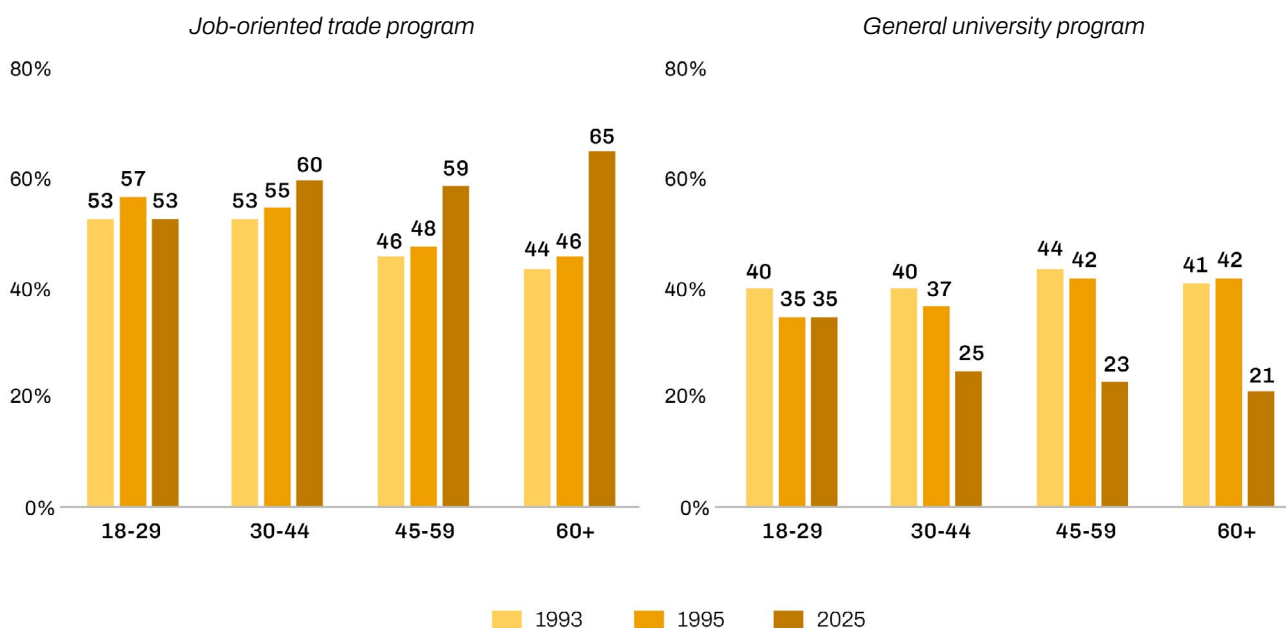
If a child asked you to help them choose between a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program and a general university program, which course would you encourage them to take (assuming that the student had the ability to do both)?

Canadians in all age groups would recommend a job-oriented trades or apprenticeship program over a general university program to a young person. However, those in the youngest age group (age 18 to 29) are more likely than those in the older age groups to favour the university program (35%). This represents a change from the situation 30 years ago. The preferences of those in

the youngest age groups have not changed significantly since then; however, those in the older age groups have become more likely to prefer a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program. Among those aged 60 and older, the proportion that would recommend the trade or apprenticeship program has increased from 46 percent in 1995 to 65 percent in 2025.

CHART 3
Older Canadians increasingly favour trades
trades training over a university program

By age group



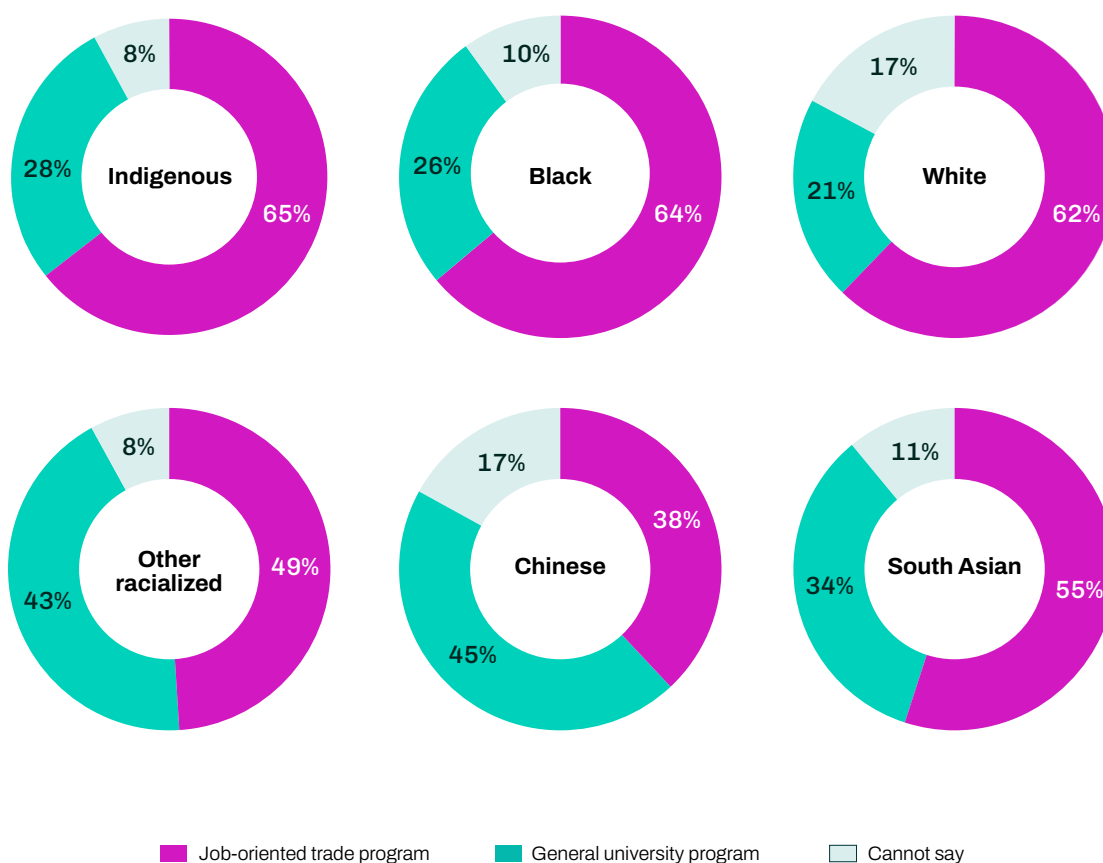
If a child asked you to help them choose between a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program and a general university program, which course would you encourage them to take (assuming that the student had the ability to do both)?

Source for 1993 & 1995: Environics Focus Canada

Preferences also vary by Indigenous and racial identity. Statistics Canada reports that Indigenous Peoples currently are slightly over-represented in the trades, with their participation doubling between 2016 and 2021 to 5.8 percent, while they comprise 4.2 percent of the overall workforce. Among Red Seal trades, racialized persons account for 18.2 percent of workers in the skilled trades, persons with disabilities 13.8 percent, and immigrants are 19.2 percent.

Those more likely to recommend a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program over a general university program to a young person include Indigenous Peoples (65%), those who identify as Black (64%), and those who are not racialized (62%). The likelihood of recommending a trades program is slightly lower than average among people identifying as South Asian (55%), and much lower among those who identify as Chinese (38%). Chinese Canadians are the only identity group more likely to recommend university (45%) over a trades program.

CHART 4
Chinese Canadians are the only identity group more likely to recommend university over a trades program
 2025, by racial or Indigenous identity



If a child asked you to help them choose between a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program and a general university program, which course would you encourage them to take (assuming that the student had the ability to do both)?

People who are third generation (or more) Canadian (62%) are more likely than second- (58%) or first- (53%) generation immigrants to recommend that a young person pursue a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program. Conversely, first- (33%) and second- (30%) generation Canadians are more likely than third (or more) generation Canadians (22%) to recommend a general university program.

Residents of the Prairie provinces (65%) and of the Maritime provinces (65%) are a little more likely than the national average to recommend a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program. The proportion holding this view is below average in Newfoundland and Labrador (50%) and in Quebec (55%).

Good jobs in the skilled trades

One reason why many Canadians favour the job-oriented trades program is likely the expectation that this type of training can lead to a good job. The survey finds that a large majority of Canadians (77%) agree that “a young person who learns a skilled trade is certain to find a good job that pays well.”

Agreement is high among all age groups, but increases somewhat as age rises, from 70 percent among those aged 18 to 29, to 84 percent among those aged 60 and older.

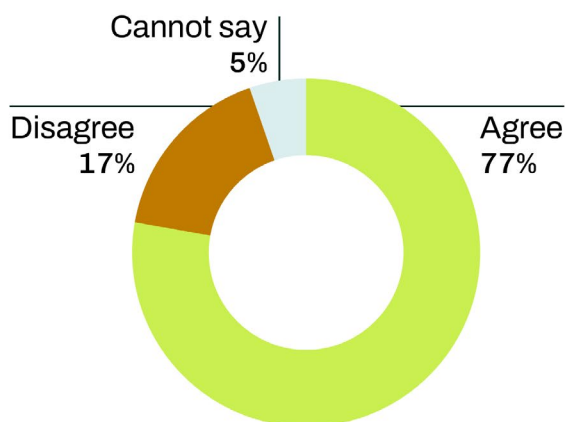
A majority of those from all educational backgrounds also agree with the statement. Agreement is a little higher among those with a university degree (82%) or a college diploma (82%) compared to those who have a trades or apprenticeship training credential (73%).



CHART 5

Most Canadians expect trades training will lead to a good job

“A young person who learns a skilled trade is certain to find a good job that pays well”



Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements:

Residents in the territories (91%) are most likely to agree that a person who learns a skilled trade is certain to find a job that pays well.¹ Agreement is lowest in Newfoundland and Labrador (61%) and New Brunswick (70%) – though even in these provinces there is widespread agreement that the trades can provide a path to well-paying jobs.

Men (77%) and women (78%) are equally likely to agree that a person who learns a skilled trade is certain to find a job that pays well.

First-generation immigrants (82%) are slightly more likely than second-generation immigrants (75%) or third generation plus Canadians (77%) to agree with the statement.

The importance of a college or university education

The fact that Canadians tend to have positive opinions about training in the skilled trades does not necessarily mean that they have negative opinions about the value of other post-secondary education pathways, such as a university education. Despite the fact that the majority of survey respondents indicated they would advise a young person to pursue a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program, a majority (60%) also agrees that “these days, a young person in Canada can’t expect to get a good job without a college diploma or university degree.” Far fewer disagree (34%), while six percent express no opinion either way.

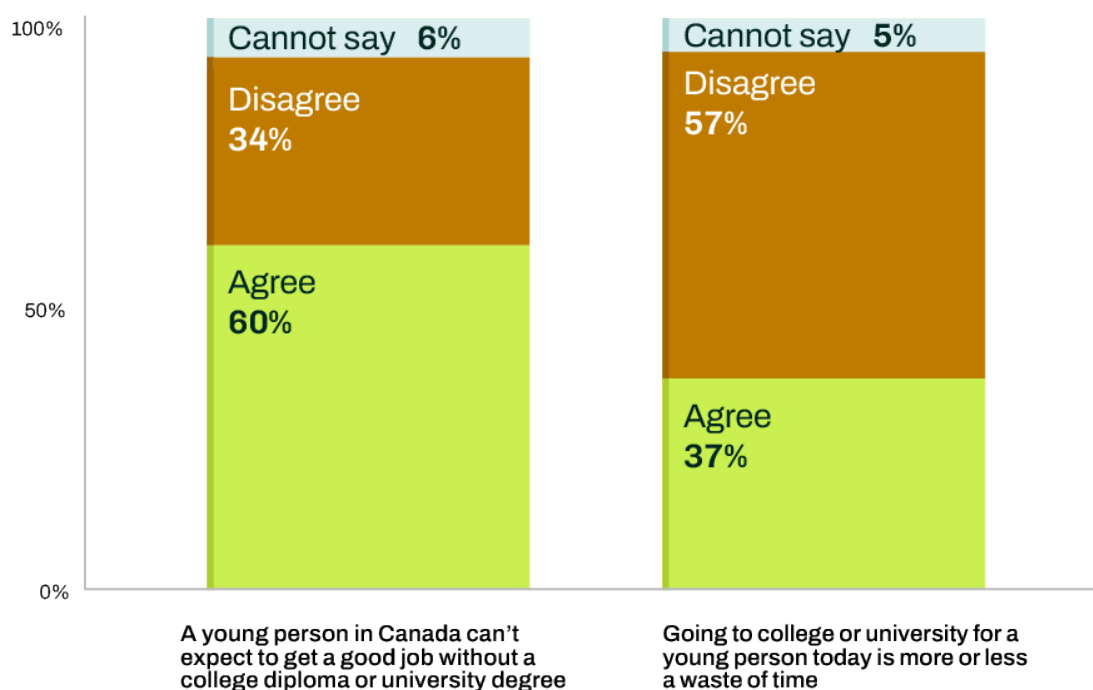
¹ Results in the territories, when reported separately, are unweighted.

The proportion that agrees is similar among those with different education backgrounds, including 58 percent of those who did not attain a post-secondary education, 60 percent of those with a trades training or apprenticeship credential, 64 percent of those with a college diploma, and 61 percent of those with a university degree.

Similarly, a majority of Canadians (57%) disagrees with the statement that “for a young person today, going to

college or university is more or less a waste of time” – though in this case a noticeable minority (37%) agrees. An additional six percent express no opinion either way. Disagreement is highest among those who themselves have attained a university degree (66%). However, majorities of those who did not attain a post-secondary education (52%), of those with a trades training or apprenticeship credential (52%), and of those with a college degree (58%) also disagree.

CHART 6
Most see the benefits of a college diploma or university degree



Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements:

The proportion agreeing that a young person needs a college diploma or university degree to get a good job is unchanged (at 60%) since the question was first asked in 2023. However, the proportion agreeing that college or university is more or less a waste of time has increased slightly, from 32 percent in 2023 to 37 percent in 2025.

Women are five percentage points more likely than men to agree that a young person needs a diploma or a degree to get a good job (63% compared to 58%), and eight percentage points less likely to agree that going to college or university is more or less a waste of time (33% compared to 41%).

A majority of Canadians in every province agrees that a young person can't get a good job without a college diploma or university degree, ranging from a low of 54 percent in B.C. and Saskatchewan, to a high of 65 percent in Ontario. However, opinions are more evenly divided in the North, where 47 percent and 50 percent disagree.²

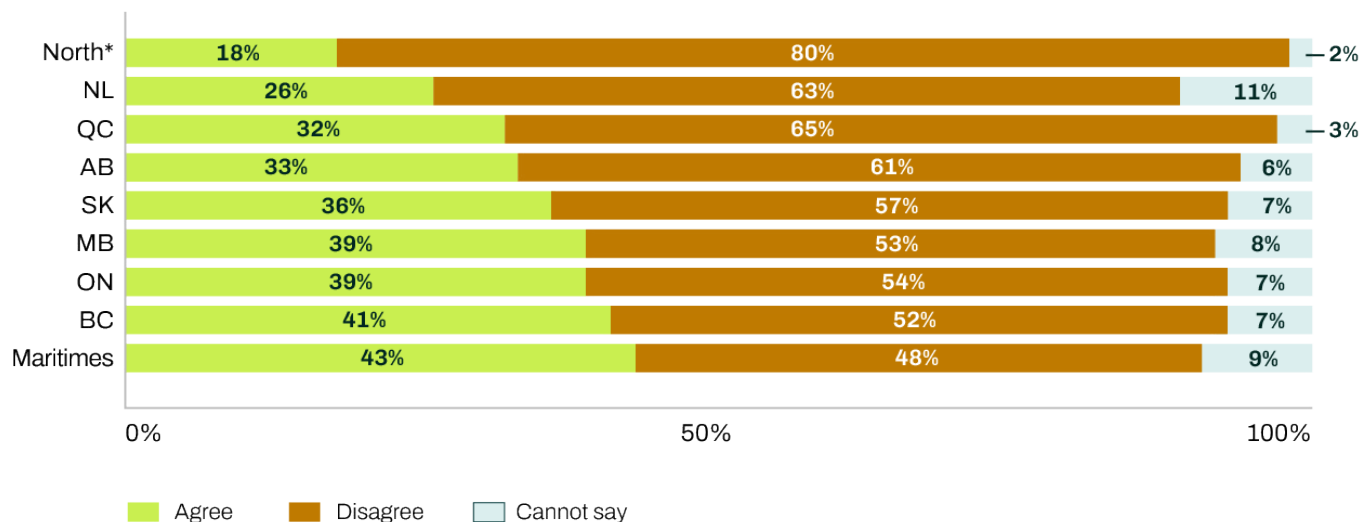
There is more variation across provinces when it comes to opinions on whether going to college or university is more or less a waste of time. Disagreement that it is a waste of time is highest in Quebec (65%), Newfoundland and Labrador (63%) and Alberta (61%). Agreement with the statement is highest in the Maritimes (43%) and in B.C. (41%). Once again, the North appears distinct: 80 percent in the region disagree, and only 18 percent agree.³



² Results in the territories, when reported separately, are unweighted.

³ Results in the territories, when reported separately, are unweighted.

CHART 7
Is college or university a waste of time? Views vary by region
 By region



Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements: For a young person today, going to college or university is more or less a waste of time

** Results in the territories, when reported separately, are unweighted.*

Those who would advise a young person to pursue a general university program rather than a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program are, not surprisingly, more likely than average to agree that a young person can't expect to get a good job without a college diploma or university degree (70%, compared to the average of 60%). But it is notable that 30% of those favouring a university program for a young person nonetheless agree that "for a young person today, going to college or university is more or less a waste of time." This apparent contradiction may reflect assumptions about what employers currently demand in terms of credentials, rather than the value of what is learned in the classroom. Further research can continue to explore these attitudes to skilled trades training and other forms of post-secondary education in order to better align the supply of graduates with labour market demand.

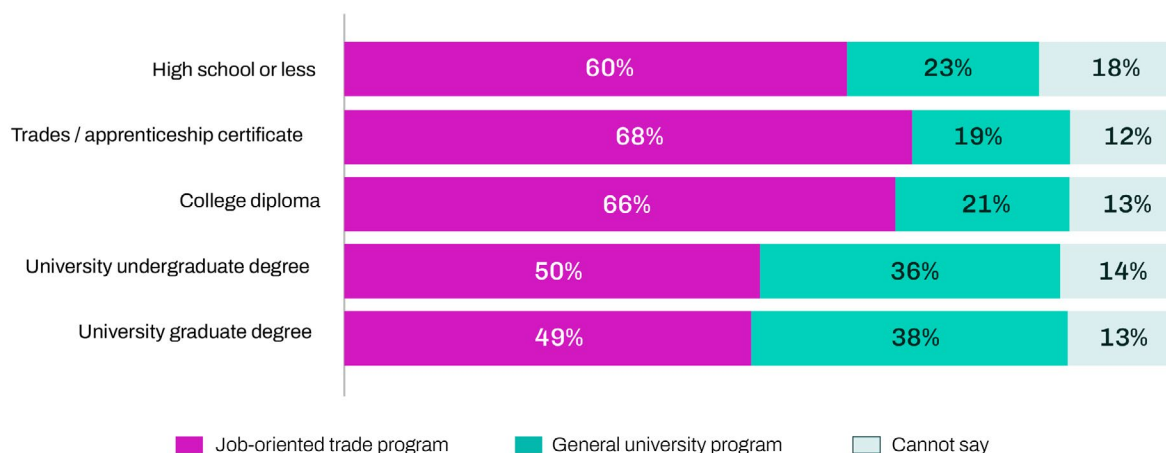


Appendix

CHART 2A

Job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program vs. a general university program: which one to recommend?

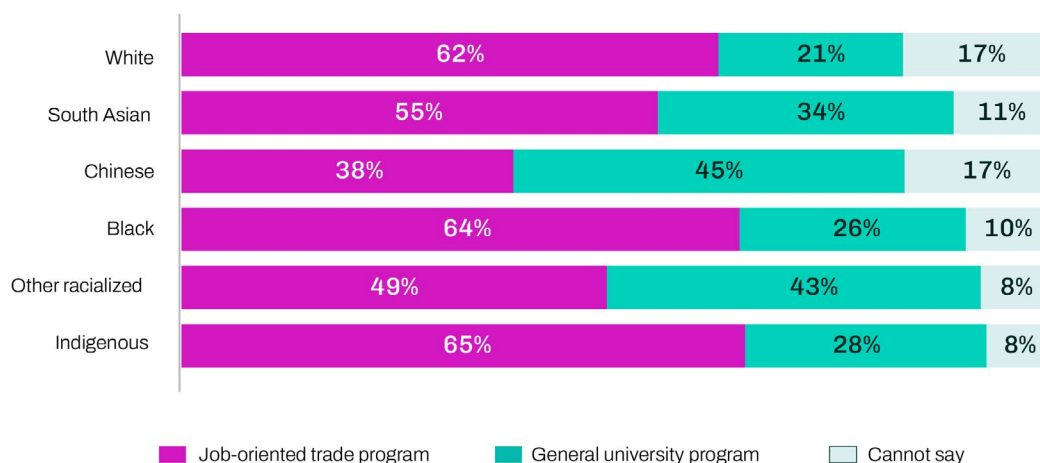
2025, by educational attainment



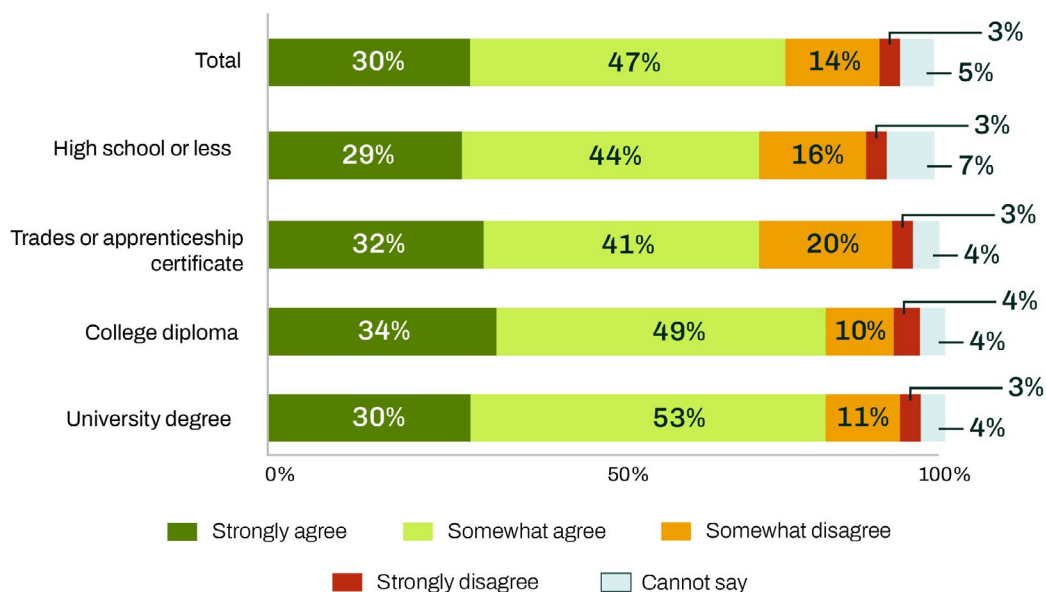
If a child asked you to help them choose between a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program and a general university program, which course would you encourage them to take (assuming that the student had the ability to do both)?

CHART 4A**Job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program vs. a general university program: which one to recommend?**

2025, by racial or Indigenous identity



If a child asked you to help them choose between a job-oriented trade school or apprenticeship program and a general university program, which course would you encourage them to take (assuming that the student had the ability to do both)?

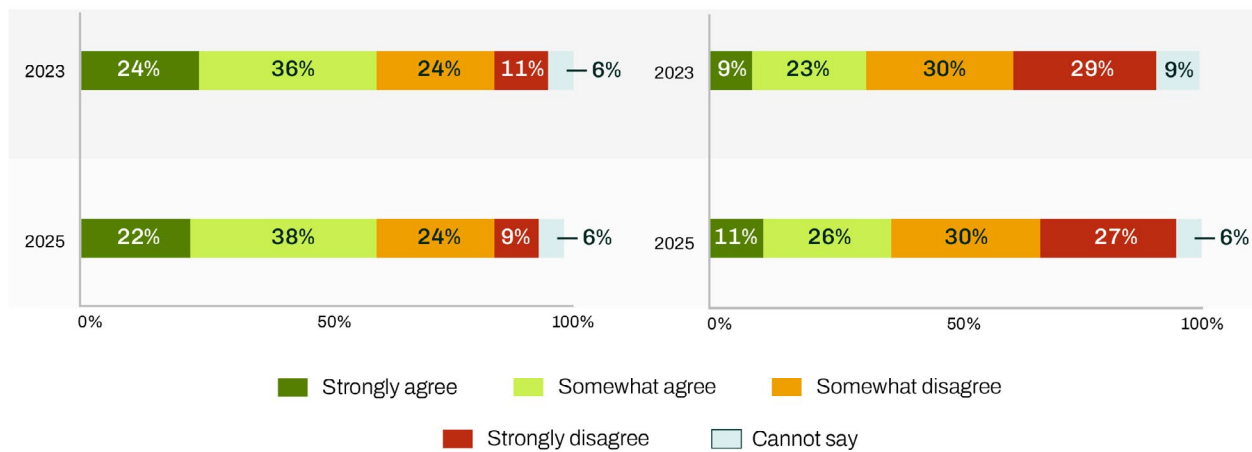
CHART 5A**Job prospects in the skilled trades****“A young person who learns a skilled trade is certain to find a good job that pays well”**

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements:

CHART 6A
Benefits of a college diploma or university degree

“These days, a young person in Canada can’t expect to get a good job without a college diploma or university degree”

“For a young person today, going to college or university is more or less a waste of time”



Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements:



About the Survey on Employment & Skills

The [Survey on Employment and Skills](#) is conducted by the [Environics Institute for Survey Research](#), in partnership with the [Diversity Institute at Toronto Metropolitan University and the Future Skills Centre](#). Wave 8 of the recurring survey of 5,603 adult Canadians was conducted online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories) between March 12 and April 15, 2025.

For more details on the survey methodology as well as detailed results, visit the website of the Environics Institute at <https://www.environicsinstitute.org/projects/listing/-in-tags/type/survey-on-employment-and-skills>.

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**Future Skills
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The [Future Skills Centre \(FSC\)](#) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the [Government of Canada's Future Skills Program](#).

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[The Diversity Institute](#) conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for the Future Skills Centre.

Canada

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The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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