

An overview of the Québec school system

This document provides a general description of the Québec school system and the main diplomas that the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (MICC) uses in order to compare education received abroad or in another Canadian province with that received in Québec.

In Québec, it is compulsory to attend school between the ages of 6 and 16. Preschool education is optional and available to children of 4 and 5 years of age through kindergarten classes.

Secondary Education

After six years at the elementary level, students begin their secondary studies. The duration of these studies is five years for general education and varies for students enrolled in vocational training programs.

The **Secondary School Vocational Diploma (SSVD)** is awarded for study programs lasting an average of 1,350 hours (a year and a half). Training leading towards a SSVD starts after the third, fourth or fifth year of secondary studies, depending on the particular requirements of the program of study.

The **Attestation of Vocational Specialization (AVS)** is issued after a training period of six or twelve months. Holders of a SSVD can choose from some 50 programs leading to this diploma.

The **Attestation of Vocational Education (AVE)** is issued after a training period that lasts a maximum of 900 hours. Undertaken after the second year of secondary studies by a student at least 15 years of age, this training program takes place in a company setting and prepares students for semi-skilled occupations.

The **Secondary School Diploma (SSD)** marks the successful completion of five years of general studies. It also provides access to higher education.

Higher education

In Québec, higher education includes college- and university-level education.

Collegial education

College is the first stage of higher education. Offered mainly in the public network through general and vocational colleges (known as CÉGEPs for the French designation *collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*), academic instruction is also available at other institutions such as private colleges.

CÉGEPs and colleges deliver two-year pre-university programs leading to university studies and three-year technical programs that prepare students for the job market while, in some cases, leaving them the option of continuing their studies at the university level.

The **Diploma of College Studies (DCS)** is issued for training acquired in pre-university programs and technical programs. It is also possible to obtain an **Attestation of College Studies (ACS)** through technical training that lasts anywhere from 330 to 1,350 hours and leads to the job market.

University education

University education is divided into three levels of study.

The first level of university study (undergraduate level) generally leads to a bachelor's degree. This degree is made up of at least 90 credits,¹ usually completed over three years on a full-time basis. Some programs, most notably education, engineering and medicine, require more credits and take from four to five years. After completing bachelor-level studies, students may enter the job market or continue their studies at the second or third level.

There are different types of bachelor's degrees: a specialized bachelor's degree, a bachelor's degree with a major and minor, and a general bachelor's degree. With a **specialized bachelor's degree**, each and every course taken focuses on a single discipline or field of study, or on related disciplines or fields of study. A specialized bachelor's degree is made up of 90 credits or more, depending on the program.

A **bachelor's degree with a major and minor** combines two disciplines. It is made up of:

- a **major** as its main component. A major is a 60-credit program generally completed over two years on a full-time basis, with most courses focused on a single discipline or a single field of study;
- a **minor** as a complementary component. A minor is a 30-credit program generally completed over one year on a full-time basis, with most courses focused on a single discipline or a single field of study.

A student may register at the university to obtain either a diploma or a certificate. A diploma marks the successful completion of a 60-credit program, while a certificate marks the successful completion of a 30-credit program.

A **general bachelor's degree** combines three 30-credit certificates.

There are two types of second, or graduate, level university programs. A **master's degree** is issued following completion of a professional master's program referred to as the *master's without a thesis* or a master's research program referred to as the *master's with a thesis*. These programs involve specialization in a program of study or an introduction to research in one or several disciplines. A master's program is generally made up of 45 credits and usually takes two years to complete.

The second kind of graduate studies leads to a diploma or certificate. In this case, the program of study is generally made up of 30 credits and takes one year to complete.

The third level of university study introduces students to scientific research and prepares them for a career in research. Students can obtain a **doctorate** (Ph.D.) after earning at least 90 credits over a minimum of three years of full-time study. They must write and defend a thesis as part of their doctoral studies.

¹ A credit (or unit) corresponds to 45 hours of course time or time devoted to practical work.