



Provincial Employment Roundtable

# English-Language Vocational and Technical Training in Québec

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The views expressed herein are those of the Provincial Employment Roundtable. They do not purport to reflect the views of the SRQEA.

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# Executive summary

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the role of vocational and technical training in meeting urgent labour market needs, as well as the broader economic and social benefits it provides to individuals and societies. Vocational and technical training (VTT), which aims to equip students with hands-on skills for direct entry into the labour market, is offered at the secondary and college level in Québec. The majority of Québec's VTT programs are offered in French and primarily serve the French-speaking majority in Québec, who represent 85.3% of the province's population. There is a smaller ecosystem of English-language VTT programs, which are offered primarily to Québec's English speakers, who account for 13.8% of the population.

English speakers in Québec have historically had low rates of participation in vocational training programs and occupations. Available data indicates that roughly 6.2% of English speakers in Québec have a vocational education diploma, compared to 13.2% of French speakers.<sup>1</sup> In addition, English speakers face an unemployment rate of 8.9%, which is two percentage points higher than the unemployment rate of French speakers (6.9%). English-language VTT programs can therefore be leveraged to increase the level of vocational and technical competencies that English speakers have, particularly to enter in-demand sectors such as healthcare, construction, and informational technology.

However, findability, awareness, and uptake of English-language VTT programs are a challenge. This report aims to address some of these challenges by mapping the existing offer of English-language VTT programs in Québec, as well as surveying the current issues in the VTT system.

For over three decades, the English-language VTT system has enabled English speakers in Québec to acquire the skills necessary for long-term success in the labour market. Lower participation in VTT among English speakers highlights the need to better understand how English speakers access VTT. This report seeks to contribute to this goal, as well as empower individuals, educational institutions, and policymakers to develop better solutions that increase English speakers' access to VTT careers in Québec.

## Key findings:

- **There are at least 670 English-language VTT programs in Québec, which are offered by a total of 87 institutions including CEGEPS, colleges, and vocational centres.**
- **Of the 670 VTT programs, 344 are technical programs and 326 are vocational training programs, representing 51% and 49%, respectively.**
- **Montréal has the highest number of English-language VTT programs in Québec: the majority of English-language technical programs (76.7%) and the largest concentration of vocational programs (29.4%) are situated in Montréal.**
- **There are regional disparities in access to English-language VTT programs; the regions of Bas-Saint-Laurent, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Mauricie, Lanaudière, and Centre-du-Québec do not have English-language vocational centres and no vocational training programs were found.**
- **The regions of Bas-Saint-Laurent, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Mauricie Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Côte-Nord, Chaudière-Appalaches, Lanaudière, and the Laurentides do not have English-language technical programs.**
- **Recruitment and increasing awareness of programs is a challenge for many programs and institutions, particularly smaller institutions located outside urban areas with larger English-speaking populations. In some cases, low student enrollment results in the postponement or cancellation of programs.**
- **More linguistic-based data is needed in order to better evaluate the labour market outcomes of graduates of the English-language VTT system, as well as determine the demand for English-language VTT programs. This data would benefit educational institutions in their applications to offer new programs.**
- **Flexibility to respond to labour market demands is essential in order to develop functional and effective VTT programming. As such, vocational centres and CEGEPS/colleges need to be empowered to respond more efficiently and organically to fluctuations in the labour market.**
- **COVID-19 has posed challenges and opportunities for the VTT system; it has accelerated the transition to remote learning, which has benefited students who previously faced distance barriers to accessing programs. Yet other issues such as students' mental health and access to the internet must be addressed.**

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to diplomas obtained from vocational centres, institutes of technology, community colleges, and similar. According to the Census of Canada Dictionary, "Persons who obtained trades qualifications from secondary-level vocational training programs in the province of Quebec, such as the 'Diplôme d'études professionnelles'/Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP/DVS), are included in this category." Individuals with technical diplomas from CEGEPS are not included in this category.

# Definitions

## Language

In this report, English speakers and French speakers are classified according to their First Official Language Spoken (FOLS) (Statistics Canada, 2021). FOLS designation refers to which of Canada's two official languages an individual speaks and communicates in, taking into account the language one speaks, their mother tongue, and the language they speak at home. On this basis, individuals may be classified as English FOLS or French FOLS. Individuals who speak both English *and* French as their first official language are evenly divided among English and French speakers.

There are many ways to define the English-speaking community in Québec. It is important to acknowledge that the English-speaking community has porous boundaries and can include individuals who are plurilingual, as well as those who are not highly proficient in either official language but consider themselves more proximate to English, especially in terms of accessing education services and training.

## Vocational and Technical Training

Vocational and technical training (VTT) aims to equip students with the skills and competencies necessary for direct entry into a particular industry, trade, or occupation. In Québec, VTT has two distinct educational pathways: vocational training and technical training.

## Vocational Training

Vocational training programs provide hands-on training in an occupation or trade, as well as direct entry into the job market. They are regulated by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ) and offered at the secondary level in vocational centres.

## Vocational Centre

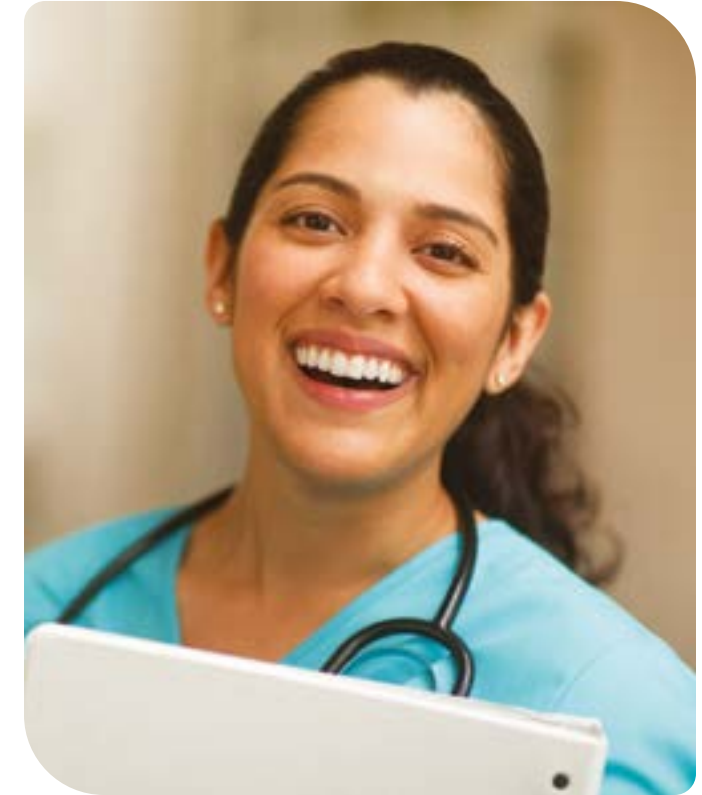
A vocational centre is an educational institution, public or private, that typically offers vocational training. Vocational centres, as well as the programs they offer, operate within the secondary school system and are regulated by the MEQ. Public English-language vocational centres are operated by Québec's English school boards, while public French-language vocational centres are operated by French school service centres.

## Technical Training

Technical training programs (also known as career programs) provide training that allows graduates to work directly in the job market upon completion. They are generally offered at the college level and regulated by the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (MES).

## CEGEPs and Colleges

CEGEPs and colleges are post-secondary institutions offering education at the college level. CEGEPs are public institutions, whereas college is a general term that may include private colleges as well as CEGEPs. CEGEPs and colleges, as well as the programs they offer, are regulated by the MES.



# Introduction

Vocational and technical training (VTT) aims to equip students with the hands-on skills for direct entry into a particular trade or occupation. Popular industries for VTT graduates include computer technology, accounting, nursing, early childhood education, and food services, with graduates pursuing careers ranging from 3D animators to retail butchers. The form that VTT takes varies according to national or regional educational standards; it may be offered at the secondary level, the college level, or in the workplace in collaboration with industry. In Québec, VTT is generally offered by vocational centres and CEGEPs/colleges. Vocational centres offer vocational training as a part of the secondary school system, while CEGEPs/colleges offer technical training at the college level. Vocational training and technical training represent two distinct educational pathways, with specific competencies and diplomas associated with each type of training.

This report is in line with a renewed interest in VTT within Canada (Taylor, 2019) due to the economic and social benefits it provides to individuals and societies. Interest in skills training often peaks in times of heightened economic uncertainty. The COVID-19 pandemic and long-term labour shortages in Québec have highlighted the need for better skills training programs and strategies to improve the labour market integration of Quebecers. VTT is an important strategy to increase labour market integration by developing a skilled workforce. This type of training can increase graduates' employability, productivity and improve their standards of living and social inclusion.

VTT programs are also part of a flexible and comprehensive approach to lifelong learning for individuals, particularly workers looking to acquire new competencies in response to labour market demands and opportunities (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2010; Ministère de l'Éducation, 2002). This flexibility is reflected in the various pathways into VTT programs in Québec. Individuals can enroll in programs while in secondary school, after completion of a secondary school diploma, or after spending time in the workforce. Programs range from several months to three years and typically involve both in-class learning and work placements. Work placements play an important role in providing students with a point of entry into the workforce following the completion of their training. The bridging of in-class learning and on-the-job training is one of the key functions and benefits of the VTT system.

## VTT is uniquely placed to

- a. **mitigate unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, by providing an efficient entry into the workforce (Taylor, 2019; Hoeve et al., 2019);**
- b. **organically respond to labour shortages and disruptions through flexible program offerings and collaboration with industry;**
- c. **train professionals who perform essential labour, such as healthcare providers, daycare educators, plumbers, and mechanics;**
- d. **enhance economic vitality and support innovation in industry (Oviawe., et al., 2017, Puckett et. al., 2012). VTT programs can be rapidly developed to support government priorities and industry shifts towards new sectors such as green technology, information and communication technology;**
- e. **offer an affordable educational pathway for Quebecers; most programs are significantly subsidized by the Québec government and are free for students;**
- f. **challenge and overcome social inequalities across race, gender, class, (Evans, 2019) and language, by serving as an accessible educational pathway into skilled professions. Programs can support the mitigation of unemployment for historically marginalized and low-income communities.**

English-language VTT programs are an important part of Québec's education and skills-training ecosystem. They can help address the employment and employability challenges in English-speaking communities. English speakers, who represent 13.8% of Québec's population, experience high unemployment rates in Québec. English speakers have an unemployment rate of 8.9%, which is two percentage points higher than the unemployment rate of French speakers, at 6.9%. In 14 out of the 17 administrative regions of Québec, English speakers earn lower median after-tax incomes compared to French speakers (Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016).

English speakers have historically had low rates of participation in vocational training programs and occupations. Educational attainment data indicates that roughly 6.2% of English speakers in Québec have a vocational training diploma, compared to 13.2% of French speakers (Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016).<sup>2</sup> English-language VTT programs can, therefore, be leveraged to address high unemployment and low labour market integration by increasing the level of vocational and technical competencies among Québec's English speakers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also added greater urgency to the need to strengthen education systems to address social, health, and economic challenges. While there is little data available on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 on English speakers in Québec, research shows that the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and labour market detachment in communities that were already facing these issues (see Galabuzi, 2021; Yalnizyan, 2021).

The pandemic has additionally led to considerable shifts in the labour force as workers have been motivated or pushed to pursue VTT in response to changing labour market and economic trends. Finally, the past two years have seen an increase in the availability of financial assistance and government-developed skills-training programs as part of Québec's economic response to the pandemic.

This report aims to contribute to a discussion on the role of VTT in Québec's English-speaking communities by examining the programs available to them. It surveys the available data on English-language VTT programs that were offered across Québec in the 2020-2021 academic year. This information is supplemented by the insights of VTT administrators and program providers who shared their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities facing institutions that offer English-language VTT programs in Québec.



<sup>2</sup> This refers to diplomas obtained from vocational centres, institutes of technology, community colleges, and similar. According to the Census of Canada Dictionary, "Persons who obtained trades qualifications from secondary-level vocational training programs in the province of Quebec, such as the 'Diplôme d'études professionnelles'/Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP/DVS), are included in this category." Individuals with technical diplomas from CEGEPs are not included in this category.

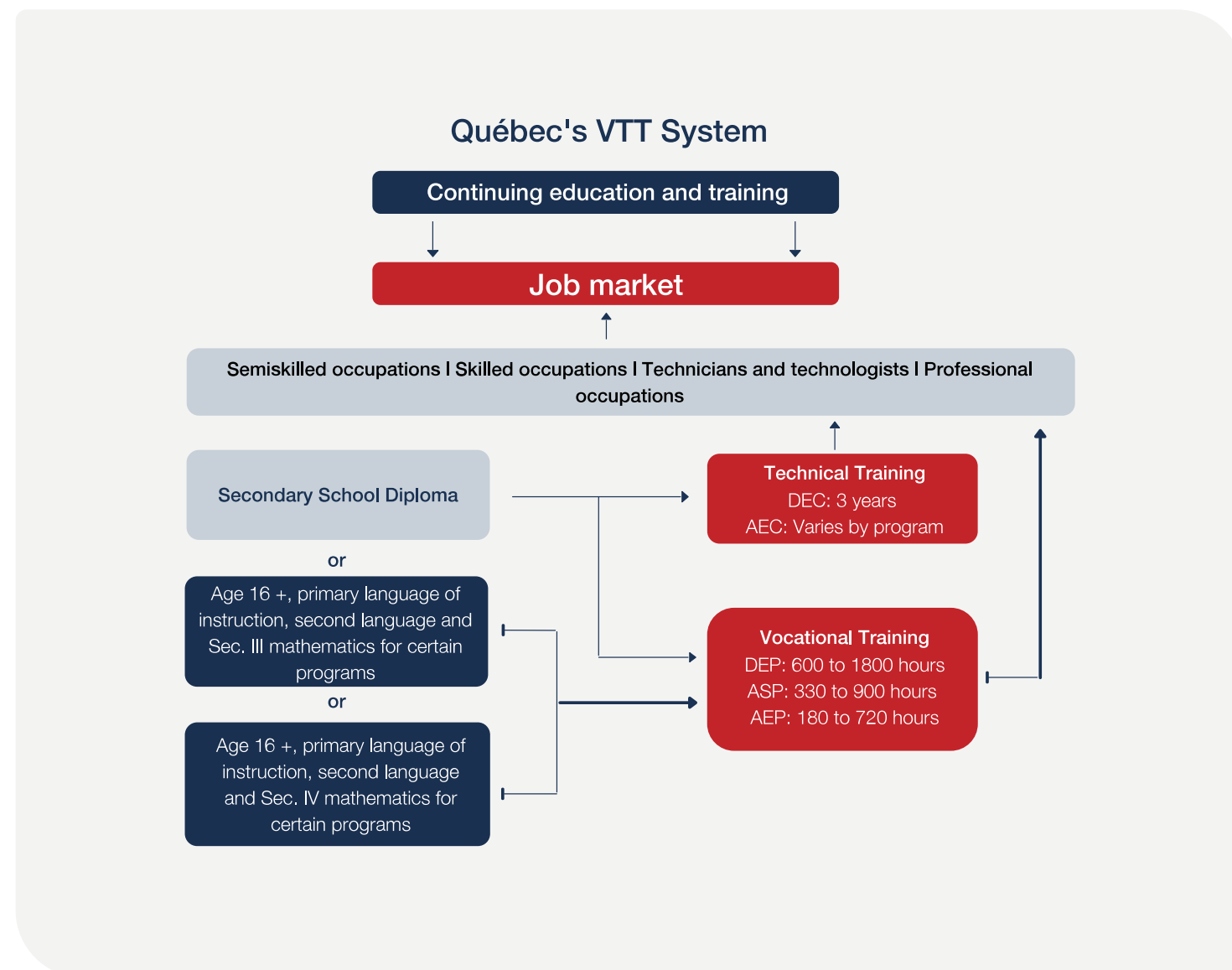
# Vocational and technical training ecosystem

## Vocational and technical training in Québec

In Québec, vocational training and technical training are two distinct educational pathways. Vocational training is offered at the secondary level, meaning that it is available not only to adult learners but also to youth in their third, fourth, or fifth years of secondary school. Vocational training is regulated by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ) and offered by 183 vocational centres across Québec (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2021), with 48 of those vocational centres offering English-language programs.

Technical training is offered at the college level in Québec and is regulated by the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (MES). In most cases, students entering technical training must earn a Secondary School Diploma (SSD) before they can enroll in a technical training program. Of the over 130 CEGEPs and colleges in Québec (Government of Québec, 2022), 38 offered English-language VTT programs in the 2020-2021 academic year.

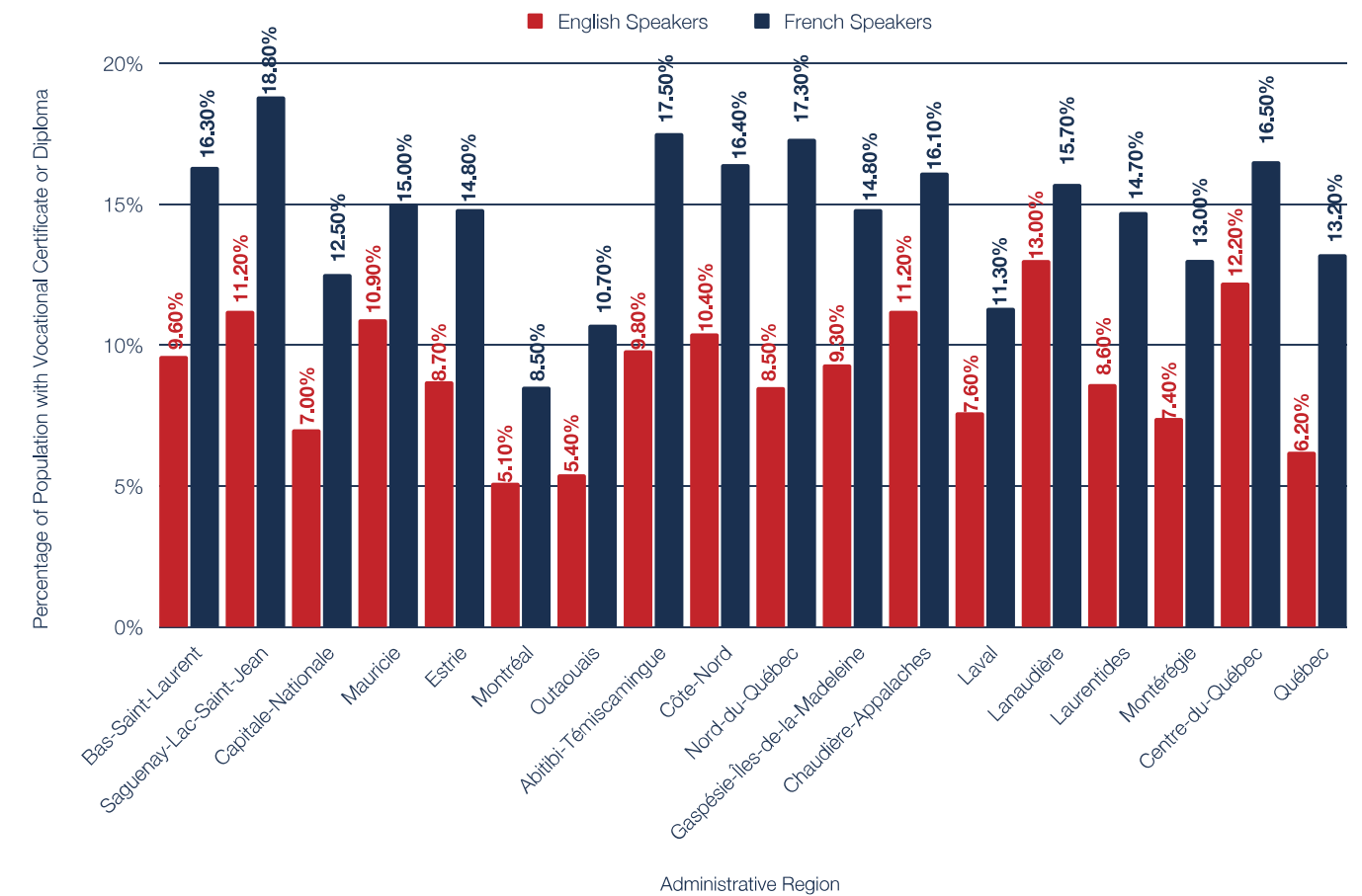
Figure 1: VTT system in Québec



## Vocational training among English speakers

English speakers in Québec have high levels of secondary and post-secondary educational attainment. Their attainment of vocational diplomas and certificates, however, is relatively low in comparison to the French-speaking majority in Québec (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Vocational training attainment by language and administrative region<sup>3</sup>



In every region of the province, French speakers have higher rates of vocational education attainment than English speakers. Notably, both linguistic communities have significantly lower rates of vocational attainment in the urban regions of Capitale-Nationale, Montréal, Outaouais, and Laval.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to diplomas obtained from vocational centres, institutes of technology, community colleges, and similar. According to the Statistics Canada, "Persons who obtained trades qualifications from secondary-level vocational training programs in the province of Québec, such as the 'Diplôme d'études professionnelles'/Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP/DVS), are included in this category." Notably, individuals with technical diplomas from CEGEPs are not included in this category. This indicates a data gap regarding the total number of individuals with technical training in Québec.

## Program classifications

VTT programs lead to five main types of certification:

**Figure 3: Types of VTT programs in Québec<sup>4,5</sup>**

Certification	Program Type	Approximate Program Length	Primary Institution Offering Program - Vocational Centre	Primary Institution Offering Program - CEGEP/College
DEC/DCS (Diploma of College Studies/diplôme d'études collégiales)	Technical	3 years		✓
AEC/ACS (Attestation of College Studies/attestation d'études collégiales)	Technical	varies by program		✓
DEP/DVS (Diploma of Vocational Studies/diplôme d'études professionnelles)	Vocational	600 to 1800 hours	✓	
ASP/AVS (Attestation of Vocational Specialization/attestation de spécialisation professionnelle)	Vocational	330 to 900 hours	✓	
AEP/STC (Skills Training Certificate/attestation d'études professionnelles)	Vocational	180 to 720 hours	✓	

Generally, technical programs, also known as career programs, lead to a Diploma of College Studies (DEC) or to an Attestation of College Studies (AEC). DEC programs usually contain a general education component as well as a work placement component, and require the mastery of different competencies. The Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (MES) determines the competencies that are taught in the program and institutions can determine program details such as the order and length of courses. Often, AEC programs utilize the competencies taught in existing DEC programs, but are designed to be shorter in length and do not have a general education component. CEGEPs may offer AECs that do not draw upon an existing DEC program if the labour market requires it.

Vocational training programs typically lead to a Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP), an Attestation of Vocational Studies (ASP), or a Skills Training Certificate (AEP). Similar to technical programs, vocational programs have a number of competencies that must be mastered by students and involve a work placement. A DEP program is generally broad and foundational, offering a pathway for learners looking to enter a field (e.g. professional cooking). An ASP offers the opportunity to specialize in a particular area within a field (e.g. contemporary professional pastry-making). For this reason, enrolment in an ASP program typically requires the completion of a DEP.

AEP programs, lastly, are designed to be relatively short, both in the time it takes to create and implement them, and in the time it takes to complete them. Individuals who graduate from an AEP program can, furthermore, return to school later and apply their AEP towards the completion of a DEP.

<sup>4</sup> DEC programs are divided into two tracks: pre-university programs and technical programs. The former are typically two years in length and contain more traditional academic components, while the latter are typically three years in length and contain a work placement. This report is predominantly concerned with technical programs, and utilizes the term DEC in reference to technical DEC programs.

<sup>5</sup> 1800 hours is approximately 1.5 years of full-time study

## Program authorization

To offer a new DEP or ASP program, vocational centres must apply for a temporary or permanent authorization issued by MEQ. The application must demonstrate the need for this type of program in terms of the regional labour market and regional labour demands. There is no application process to offer AEP programs; these are simply authorized by MEQ on a year-to-year basis according to available funding and ministry priorities.

In order to offer a new program, CEGEPs and colleges must demonstrate to MES that there is a demand for skilled workers in that industry. Educational institutions have more flexibility and face fewer barriers when developing AEC programs that build upon a pre-existing DEC.

### Innovations in programming

The Québec government supports the recognition of prior skills and professional competencies that individuals acquire directly in the labour market or through life experience.

For this reason, some vocational centres, CEGEPs, and colleges offer Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC) programs.

These allow individuals to apply their pre-existing professional experience and skills towards the completion of a certification, and thereby bridge into a particular program. RAC programs are a significant step towards increasing the accessibility of VTT programs, as they recognize the value of non-formal educational experiences, accelerate the timeline for program completion, and are essential for those who cannot afford significant time away from the workforce.

Lastly, "Springboard to DCS" programs are offered at some CEGEPs in Québec. These programs allow individuals with a Diploma of Secondary Studies (or equivalent) to explore CEGEP-level courses while working to meet the requirements for entry into a technical DEC program. In other cases, springboard programs can lead into pre-university DEC programs.

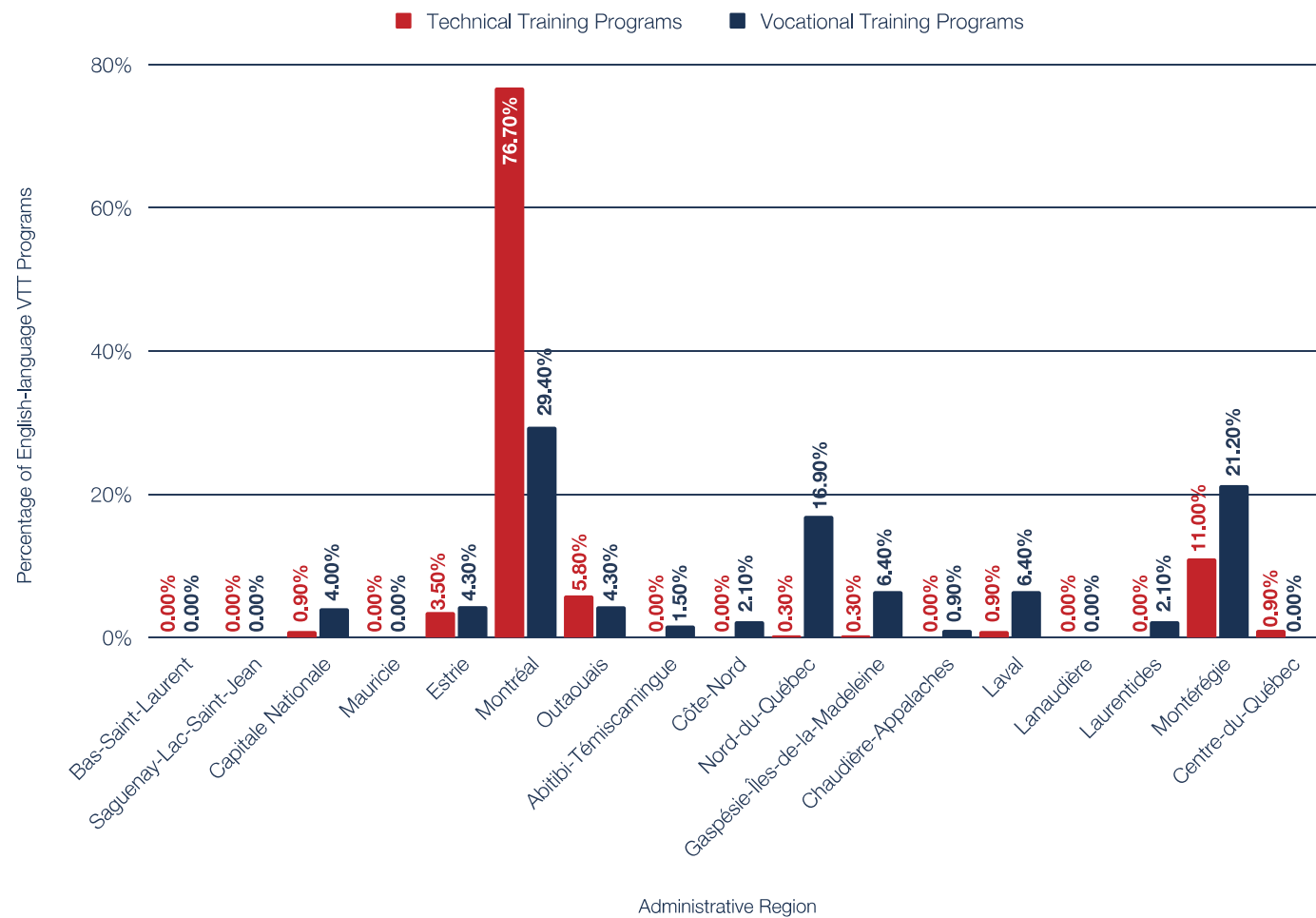


# English-language vocational and technical training

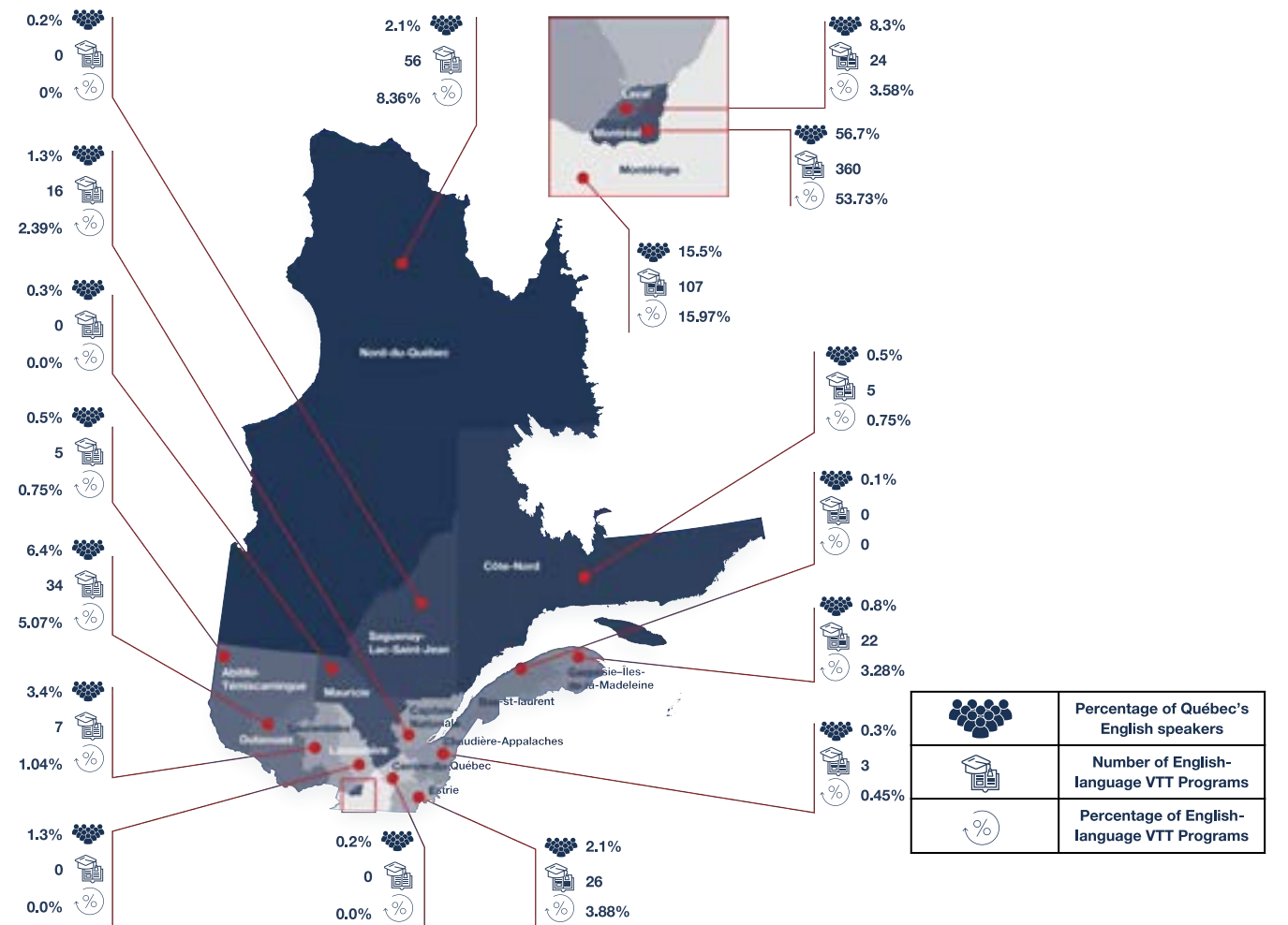
## Mapping of programs

In our survey of existing English-language vocational and technical training programs, we found 670 English-language VTT programs across Québec. Of these programs, 344 are technical training programs and 326 are vocational training programs.

**Figure 4a: Availability of English-language VTT programs by administrative region**



**Figure 4b: Availability of English-language VTT programs by administrative region**



Montréal has the highest concentration of English-language VTT programs in Québec, offering 76.7% of technical programs and 29.4% of vocational programs. There is, notably, a concentration of English-language VTT programs in other regions of the province with large English-speaking populations, such as Estrie, Outaouais, Nord-du-Québec, and Montréal.

Regional disparities in English-language VTT programs are a significant issue. Of the 17 administrative regions of Québec, only 13 have English-language VTT programs. In the regions of Bas-Saint-Laurent, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Mauricie, Lanaudière, and Centre-du-Québec, there

are no English-language vocational training programs. The regions of Bas-Saint-Laurent, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Mauricie, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Côte-Nord, Chaudière-Appalaches, Lanaudière, and the Laurentides do not have English-language technical programs. English speakers who live in these regions are not the only ones who face difficulty accessing English-language VTT programs; many English speakers who do not live in close proximity to an urban centre or educational institution may have to travel several hours within their region in order to attend the nearest English-language VTT program. Depending on their program of choice, they may have to move to another region in order to access the appropriate training.



## Regional coverage

Although there are more English-language technical programs (compared to vocational programs) on offer in Québec, the majority of English-language VTT programs (51.5%) are offered through vocational centres. The wider coverage of vocational centres is related to the mandate of English-language school boards, which must

provide English-language educational services in all 17 administrative regions in the province. There are nine English school boards, two Indigenous school boards, and one French school service centre that provide English-language VTT programs in Québec.

**Figure 5: Regional coverage of vocational training programs by school board**

School board	Regions covered
Central Québec School Board	Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Capitale-Nationale, Mauricie, Côte-Nord, Nord-du-Québec, Chaudière-Appalaches
Eastern Townships School Board	Estrie, Montérégie, Centre-du-Québec
Lester B. Pearson School Board	Montréal, Montérégie
Riverside School Board	Montérégie
Western Québec School Board	Outaouais, Abitibi-Témiscamingue
Eastern Shores School Board	Bas-Saint-Laurent, Côte-Nord, Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine
English Montréal School Board	Montréal
New Frontiers School Board	Montérégie
Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board	Laval, Lanaudière, Laurentides
Cree School Board (education in English, Cree, and French)	Eeyou-Istchee
Kativik School Board (education in English, French, and Inuktitut)	Nunavik
Centre de services scolaire du Littoral (education in English and French)	Côte-Nord

Despite the English school boards' mandated coverage of Québec, many areas remain inadequately serviced, particularly in regard to VTT. This is in part because several school boards serve more than one region, but only have the population or resources to support a single vocational centre. Individuals in the other regions served by that board may have to travel to that region to pursue VTT education or may opt to travel to a different region that has the programming they are interested in. In these cases, individuals living in rural and remote regions are at a particular disadvantage.

Technical programs in Québec have less regional coverage than vocational training programs. Of the 17 administrative regions, only 9 house English-language technical programs. Technical programs are primarily offered by CEGEPs and colleges, which tend to be concentrated in high-population and urban areas.

## Frequency of certifications

The most frequently offered types of English-language VTT certifications are DEPs and AECs from vocational training programs. It is worth noting that many of the vocational centres that offer DEP programs also offer students the opportunity to complete their secondary school diplomas if they have not already done so. This option, known as

co-committance, mitigates the barriers associated with secondary school completion, making vocational centres an accessible option for learners. AEC programs at the college level are generally shorter (in comparison to both DEPs and DEC), which may also make them an accessible option.

**Figure 6: Frequency of English-language VTT certifications<sup>6</sup>**

Type of Certification	Number of Programs
DEC (Diploma of College Studies/Diplôme d'études collégiales)	101
DEP (Diploma of Vocational Studies/Diplôme d'études professionnelles)	262
ASP (Attestation of Vocational Specialization/Attestation de spécialisation professionnelle)	37
AEC (Attestation of College Studies/Attestation d'études collégiales)	243
AEP (Skills Training Certificate/Attestation d'études professionnelles)	22
Other	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>670</b>

<sup>6</sup> The "Other" category includes certificates, Secondary School Vocational Diplomas (SSVDs), and licenses.

## Labour market and industry

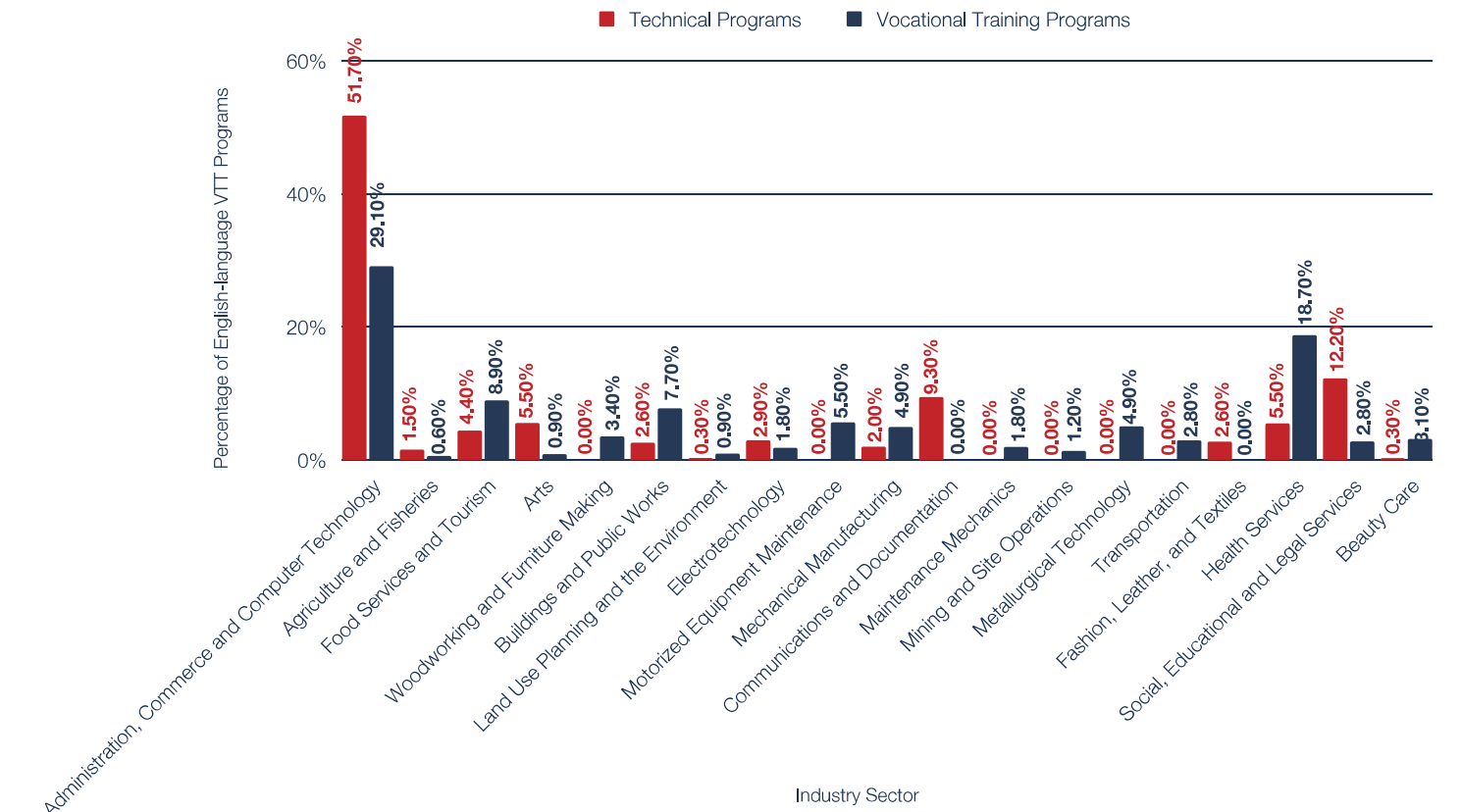
Québec's VTT sphere is organized according to 21 different industry sectors, ranging from Health Services to Mechanical Manufacturing (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, 2010). Of these, the Administration, Commerce, and Computer Technology sector houses the largest number of English-language VTT programs (273 out of 670, or 41%). There is a high demand for workers in this sector, which reflects the close relationship between labour market demands and the VTT system.

Demand for and the offer of VTT programs also corresponds to regional needs. For example, Tourism Technology in Capitale-Nationale and Building and Public Works programs in the Laurentides match the leading industries for employment and the types of in-demand jobs in those regions.

**Figure 7: Most common VTT programs and program sectors by administrative region**

Region	Most Common Technical Training Program	Most Common Technical Training Program Sector	Most Common Vocational Training Program	Most Common Vocational Training Program Sector
Bas-Saint-Laurent				
Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean				
Capitale-Nationale	Tourism Technology	Food Services and Tourism	No single most common program	Health Services
Mauricie				
Estrie	Accounting and Management	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology	Secretarial Studies	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology
Montréal	Early Childhood Education	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology	Accounting/Secretarial Studies	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology
Outaouais	Accounting	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology	Accounting	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology
Abitibi-Témiscamingue			No single most common program	Mining and Site Operations
Côte-Nord			No single most common program	Health Services
Nord-du-Québec	Natural Environment Technology	Agriculture and Fisheries	Secretarial Studies	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology
Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine	Adventure Tourism	Food Services and Tourism	Accounting	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology/Health Services
Chaudière-Appalaches			No single most common program	No single most common program sector
Laval	No single most common program	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology	Health Care Facility Patient Service Support Skills Training Certificate	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology/Health Services
Lanaudière				
Laurentides			No single most common program	Buildings and Public Works
Montérégie	Business Management/Early Childhood Education/Special Care Counselling/Specialist in Applied Information Technology	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology	Accounting/Institutional and Home Care Assistance/Starting a Business	Administration, Commerce and Computer Technology
Centre-du-Québec	No single most common program	Social, Educational and Legal Services		

**Figure 8: Frequency of English-language VTT programs by industry sector<sup>7</sup>**



Several of the top industry sectors and programs for which English-language VTT is available correspond to the priorities outlined by the Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale's 2021 Opération main d'œuvre. This plan advances priorities to address widespread labour shortages in several essential sectors, and to facilitate economic growth in Québec. The main industries targeted in this plan are health and social services, education, childcare, information technology, engineering, and construction (Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, 2021 a).

There is significant English-language VTT programming available in the industries of information technology, specialized health and social services, and childcare, but a lack of English-language VTT programming related to engineering and construction. Despite the presence of English-language programs that correspond to provincial economic priorities, distance and regional disparities remain a barrier for many students seeking out these English-language VTT programs. For this reason, additional programs are needed to improve regional coverage, particularly in rural and remote regions.

<sup>7</sup> Industry sectors Chemistry and Biology (06) and Forestry and Pulp (12) are not represented in this graph because there are no English-language VTT programs in these sectors on offer in the 2020-2021 school year.

## Language in VTT programs

The provision of skills training in one's primary language has the benefit of enabling individuals to engage directly and easily with course content and their peers (Kubayi, 2020), which correlates with increased educational success (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2016). The majority of the programs surveyed in this report are located in English-language educational institutions. However, many programs offered by English-language institutions involve some level of French immersion or require a high level of French proficiency. While the primary language of instruction is English, many students complete their work placements in a French-language workplace and/or write their competency exams in French. Institutions surveyed indicated that they aim to support English-speaking students with their French-language learning by connecting them to additional language training such as French-language courses or individualized tutoring.

### Bilingual programs

French-English bilingual programs are also offered within the English-language VTT system. There are a total of 50 bilingual programs at 11 institutions. These consist of 43 technical programs and 7 vocational training programs. Most of these bilingual programs are located in and around Montréal (30 out of 50), or in regions with large English-speaking communities: Outaouais (6 out of 50), Laurentides (6 out of 50), and Montérégie (6 out of 50).

Some bilingual programs are offered through bilingual educational institutions or at French-language educational institutions. The French-language educational institutions offering bilingual programs are:

- **Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue**
- **Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles de la Madeleine**
- **Cégep Limoilou**
- **Cégep Marie-Victorin**
- **École nationale d'aérotechnique (Cégep Édouard-Montpetit)**
- **L'École de sténographie judiciaire du Québec**

TAV college is a small post-secondary institution that offers over 15 English-language technical/career programs with a bilingual English-French study option. TAV College was originally established with the goal of providing the Hasidic Montreal-Jewish community with secular education and training, which would lead to more job opportunities in Québec society. Since 2010, the college has operated as a semi-private institution which is accredited for subsidies from the MEQ and offers programs to a multicultural body of students.



## VTT programs for Indigenous students

Indigenous education in Québec has a long and terrible history. The legacy and impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities continues to generate ongoing trauma and mistrust. There have been some advances in Indigenous education and Indigenous autonomy over education in the wake of the James Bay and Northern Agreements (JBNA). The original James Bay Agreement (1975) and the subsequent modifications made during the Northeastern Québec Agreement in 1978 enshrine legal rights to access to education in English, French, and Indigenous languages for the Indigenous nations that signed the agreement. This was enacted through the creation of Indigenous special-status school boards, including the Cree School Board for the Cree Nation and the Kativik School Board for the Inuit of Nunavik.<sup>8</sup> These school boards are committed to supporting and empowering their communities through access to education using Indigenous pedagogies. As a part of this, they offer vocational programming in English, French, and their respective Indigenous language (Cree and Inuktitut).

These are not, however, the only vocational and technical programs oriented towards Indigenous communities in the province. Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation, located in the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine region of Québec, is home to the Listuguj Adult and Vocational Education Centre. Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, located in Outaouais, is home to the Maniwaki Adult Education and Vocational Training Centre. Both offer English-language vocational training programs in an Indigenous cultural setting. There is also at least one Indigenous college in Québec: Kiuna (Centres d'études collégiales des Premières Nations), which offers technical programs in both English and French to all Indigenous peoples in Québec.

Additionally, Cégep Marie-Victorin offers English-language Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC) programs for Indigenous retail managers and community workers.



<sup>8</sup> The third Indigenous nation covered in the JBNA, the Naskapi, have not as of yet established any vocational centres, though they hope to do so in the future. For further information, see: <https://naskapi-education.org/services/vocational-training>

# Issues and challenges

## Perceptions of VTT

There are a number of issues and opportunities facing the English-language VTT system. VTT has a well-documented global history of being perceived as a lesser form of education (Billet, 2014), or as the educational option for poor academic achievers (Evans, 2019; López & Saurin, 2019; Taylor, 2019). This reputation is also strongly rooted in Québec's English-language education landscape, where the myth that VTT is for school dropouts persists, and university education is viewed as the most reliable pathway to a career (Burke, 1994).

These perceptions date back to at least 1995, when they were the subject of academic discussion and debunking (see Burke, 1994, and Caron, 1994). While the belief that VTT is for poor academic achievers is false, it is true that students who do not flourish in traditional academic tracks are often nudged towards VTT programs. In many cases, these individuals are not skilled in the particular areas tested by traditional academic tracks, or face additional challenges such as unaccommodated learning disabilities, difficult life situations, or language barriers. In our interviews with vocational centre directors, directors indicated that students entering vocational training programs directly from secondary school tend to be proactive learners who are dissatisfied with the rigid approach of secondary schools and are shopping for an educational experience that holistically meets their needs and can bridge them directly into a trade or other occupation.

Negative perceptions of VTT also permeate the VTT system itself. Technical programs are sometimes understood as the more prestigious educational option compared to vocational training because they are offered at the college-level by CEGEPS/colleges, and provide pathways to university programs. This attitude is not necessarily held by CEGEP/college administrators or educators; rather, it can be adopted by parents, secondary school teachers and support staff, employers and the broader society. This may impact students' decisions to pursue vocational versus technical training, as well as impact students' sense of self-worth.

## Recruitment

Enrollment thresholds pose a particular challenge for vocational centres. Usually, vocational centres must meet a certain enrollment threshold for a given program, ranging from 10 to 22 students, in order to receive the funding necessary to offer the program. In regions with smaller populations of English speakers, however, vocational centres may only have a small number of students who are interested in the program at a time. This lack of critical mass often results in the cancellation of programs, an issue that disproportionately affects rural and remote communities because they typically have smaller English-speaking communities.

The resulting regional disparities in access to English-language VTT programs in Québec can prompt prospective students to move away from their communities, often towards urban centres where there are more English-language educational options available. This phenomenon is known as brain drain, and is pervasive among Québec's English speakers and English-speaking youth (Official Languages Support Programs Branch, 2011).

Brain drain of English-speaking students also takes place at the inter-provincial level. In the Outaouais region in particular, prospective students have access to a wider range of both English- and French-language educational options in the neighbouring city of Ottawa, Ontario, at both the college and university level. VTT institutions in Outaouais require additional government support to obtain new authorizations and funding to offer competitive programming that will attract and retain students within Québec.

Communities and VTT institutions would benefit from additional support that would help them attract and retain students who can graduate and work within the community, especially in programs that lead to careers in high-demand industries such as childcare, nursing and home support, and mechanics.

## Linguistic data collection

Many English-language VTT institutions face challenges regarding data collection. There are significant data gaps when it comes to the data available on English speakers in Québec's labour market. When applying to MEQ for authorization to offer a new program, vocational centres often rely on labour force data collected by government departments such as Services Québec in order to demonstrate the demand for workers in that industry and region. MEQ then considers this as well as the existing VTT programs available in the region to make a decision. However, linguistic data is generally not factored into these considerations. One vocational program provider reported that while there was a sufficient number of French-language options for a specific program in the region, the closest English-language option for the same program was two hours away, despite urgent local demand for English-speaking workers. In this way, the lack of linguistic data available contributes to disparities in the programming available for linguistic minorities and limits the ability of English-language VTT schools to justify programming needs.

In order to demonstrate the need for new programs, some VTT institutions and industry partners have developed creative approaches to data collection, which involve collecting and gathering their own linguistic data at the local level. These independent data collection methods extend the length of time it takes for schools to apply and implement new programs, and delays their response time to labour market needs.

Some vocational program providers also reported that linguistic data would better enable their centres to advertise career paths to potential English-speaking students, thereby increasing awareness of the available VTT options in their region.

Technical program providers indicate that data on English speakers would better enable them to anticipate the demand for English-language supplemental programs and certifications.

Data on the number of English-speaking workers in certain industries would help schools to assess the gaps in or demand for English speakers' participation in certain fields, and justify the development of programs where needed.

## French-as-a-second-language learning

Many English-language VTT programs integrate French-language learning components into their curricula, as this is often a competency within the program as well as an essential requisite for entry into the labour market. Programs may require French-language proficiency as a prerequisite to enrolment, or alternatively recommend additional French-language training for students who have graduated and plan to enter the workforce.

Unilingual English speakers may struggle with the French-language elements of their VTT programs, requiring educators to continuously innovate to ensure that students are able to increase their level of French-language proficiency. Given that a high level of proficiency of a second language takes years of study, the timeline of VTT programs (particularly multi-year programs) can be suitable to accommodate robust French second-language learning. Consideration must be given to the most efficient means of language training integration, however, as excessive lengthening of programs to incorporate language training could negatively impact student enrollment and graduation rates. Program providers indicated that French-language learning would be most effective when integrated directly into VTT courses and modules because additional language courses may create unintended barriers for learners.

## Educational resources

Vocational centres experience challenges regarding accessing educational materials for their students in English. Some vocational centre directors indicated that they experience significant delays in receiving English-language translations of textbooks and learning resources. Vocational centres may wait a number of years for these translations to be made available by MEQ. In some cases, translations for important program materials are never provided. In response, vocational centres have developed collaborative methods to adapt French-language materials for their English-speaking learners, which often involves translating materials themselves and sharing them out.

At the college level, program providers indicate there can be translation delays of a year or more to receive official MES versions of DEC programs. These translation delays impact English-language CEGEPs and colleges' efforts to efficiently implement program updates and new programs.

## Labour market dynamics

The VTT system has the capacity to organically respond to the demands of the labour market, ranging from labour shortages to the creation of new industries (Harris et al., 2007). Research indicates that the VTT system is most effective when institutions and program providers are given autonomy and flexibility to collaborate with industry leaders (Guile & Unwin, 2019; Puckett et al., 2012). In order to keep up with labour market changes, the VTT system must be empowered to be agile and responsive to the creation of new industries and technologies. Most importantly, the VTT system must be allowed to fail as it tests out new educational approaches.

Education ministries have an important role to play in this process. The application process for the authorization to offer new VTT programs must be streamlined to shorten application time. Additionally, new government measures are needed to support the creation and implementation of pilot programs that are proposed by VTT institutions and industry actors. These measures are particularly important for rural and remote areas, where local actors are best-positioned to determine the types of new programs that are needed by the community.

Increasing the number of permanent authorizations granted to vocational centres would enable them to offer permanent employment opportunities to temporary teaching staff, an issue commonly cited by centre directors. Permanent authorizations also enhance vocational centres' ability to consistently offer a program, increasing their visibility and local awareness of programs. This is particularly important for vocational centres that face recruitment challenges.

English speakers in rural and remote areas are more likely to be served by vocational centres than CEGEPs/colleges, as the latter primarily serve larger English-speaking populations which tend to be in urban areas. However, vocational centres experience lower flexibility in terms of designing and offering programs, particularly in comparison to larger, urban CEGEPs/colleges. For these reasons, English-language VTT programming in rural and remote areas is limited in terms of offerings and less able to quickly respond to labour market demands.

## Wrap-around supports for learners

Students who pursue English-language VTT programs have diverse profiles, including parents, those in precarious economic positions and mature workers. External factors such as availability of child care, mental health support, and transportation impact students' abilities to pursue and complete their education.

Program providers indicate that the primary support required by their students, especially young women, is childcare. Those that have access to childcare, particularly onsite childcare, are more consistently able to attend and participate in programs. Aspirations to close the gender gap in certain industries or to address the "she-cession" prompted by COVID-19 must be preceded by concrete investments in the mechanisms that enable women and childbearing people to enter the workforce. Investment in childcare programs at VTT institutions is also necessary to increase the number of trained childcare providers in Québec, given the current labour shortage in this sector.

Mental health is a significant concern among program providers. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health issues and crises in communities, which has negatively impacted students' abilities to engage with and succeed in school. VTT program providers indicate that vocational centres are often their students' primary source of socialization and community. The shift to online learning in some programs during the pandemic has functionally removed students from one of the main environments in which they experienced a sense of belonging, increasing their risks of experiencing isolation and poor mental health.

Transportation is another important issue facing students in the VTT system, particularly those in areas that lack efficient public transportation and road infrastructure to attend school and work placements. Individuals in rural and remote areas may not have reliable or convenient access to transportation. Given the regional disparities in access to English-language VTT programming, some students have to travel great distances and abandon their community support networks in order to access education.

Finally, access to other basic resources is a significant consideration for some students and program providers, particularly those who work in underserved communities. Access to housing and food impact students' enrollment and success in VTT. Some vocational centres aim to support students where they can and reported offering free breakfast programs or housing boards to ensure that students' basic needs are met.

## COVID-19

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been several changes to existing VTT programs in Québec. The Québec government has invested in new programs such as home care assistance as well as technology infrastructure to support remote learning. One example is the Health Care Facility Patient Service Support Skills Training Certificate program, which MEQ mandated vocational centres across the province to offer. This program, and others like it, were designed to make up the shortfall of 10,000 orderlies needed in long-term care facilities. These are offered as Skills Training Certificates (STCs/AEPs), which can be rapidly developed, implemented, and completed by students. While this has been welcomed by many vocational centres, the agility with which the government has created and funded these programs has demonstrated the need for the government to extend the same institutional will to address labour shortages in other fields.

While enrollment initially spiked in healthcare programs, the prolonged nature of the pandemic and lack of government support for healthcare professionals has deterred some individuals from applying to these programs, which are now experiencing lower enrollment rates. There are also teacher shortages, as teachers are often practicing healthcare professionals who likely do not have the work release they need in order to teach. English-language VTT programs are especially hard hit, as they have a smaller pool from which to draw candidates (both students and teachers).

Remote learning also rapidly developed during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant number of programs were moved online or adapted into a hybrid or blended model. While online education has had negative impacts on some learners, these online adaptations have been successful for many teachers and learners in the English-language VTT system. Online adaptations were best suited to programs that did not require a high degree of hands-on or simulated work, such as tech-based programs. In contrast, more hands-on programs such as nursing and mechanics aimed to resume in-person lessons as soon as it was safe to do so.

A number of VTT programs may remain online or be offered in hybrid format permanently, which increases the accessibility of these programs for some students. However, online learning poses its own set of risks including social and mental health impacts related to students' isolation. Another consideration is the requirement that vocational training students complete in-person exams every few weeks, because MEQ exams cannot be written online. For this reason, the shift to remote learning may still require students who live far from schools to arrange transportation and overcome distance barriers. Additionally, those without access to the internet may be overlooked during this shift, and experience barriers to accessing VTT programming as a result.



# Recommendations

We offer the following recommendations to stakeholders in the English-language VTT system:

## Changing perceptions of VTT

- Education ministries (the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec and the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur Education), educational institutions, career guidance professionals and employment service organizations should work to increase awareness of and participation in the English-language VTT system by highlighting its flexibility, particularly the existing pathways between general education and VTT programs.
- Education ministries and educational institutions develop more innovative bridging programs to increase students' ability to transition between general education and VTT education tracks.
- Education ministries and educational institutions should improve career counselling for VTT programs by providing additional training for school guidance counsellors on VTT educational options. In schools where there are no designated guidance counsellors, awareness of VTT programs should be integrated into students' coursework.
- Education ministries and educational institutions improve the perception of VTT, as well as the labour market integration of English-speaking VTT graduates by sensitizing employers and industry to the qualifications and labour-market readiness of graduates.

## Recruitment

- Education ministries reduce the threshold for the minimum number of students required to offer an English-language VTT program, particularly in areas outside of Montréal, and in rural and remote areas.
- Education ministries allocate special funding envelopes and program authorizations for VTT institutions in rural and remote areas, as well as institutions in competitive regions that disproportionately face brain drain from English speakers leaving the region.
- Education ministries enable English school boards and consultative bodies to share and redistribute resources in ways that enable them to collectively better serve the English-speaking community.

## Linguistic data collection

- Various Québec government bodies, including Services Québec, work to improve their collection of data to assess the participation of and demand for linguistic minorities in the labour market.

## French-as-a-second-language learning

- Education ministries fund education institutions to explore opportunities to integrate French-language training into courses and programs. Program providers and students must be empowered to guide the development of integrated French-language training to determine what format(s) are most accessible and effective.

## Educational resources

- Education ministries expedite the translation of ministry-produced and ministry-approved education materials in order to shorten translation wait times.
- Education ministries allocate a discretionary fund to English-language education consultative bodies and roundtables to meet immediate translation needs of VTT providers, especially in cases where translation delays would hinder the start or delivery of a VTT program.

## Labour market dynamics

- Education ministries relax the requirements for provisional and permanent program authorizations.
- Education ministries work collaboratively with English-language VTT providers to establish more permanent infrastructure and funding for programs in high-demand by industry.
- Education ministries develop new measures to fast track the conversion of in-demand vocational training programs from provisional authorization to permanent authorization.
- Education ministries allocate resources, including new funding and specialized application processes, for the introduction of VTT pilot programs, especially in regions which currently have limited availability of VTT programs.

## Wrap-around supports for learners

- The Québec government increases investment in and expansion of local childcare options; targeted programs are needed to support parents who are pursuing skills training and educational opportunities.
- The Québec government increases investments in support services at educational institutions, such as school psychologists, free breakfast programs, and financial counselling.
- The Québec government increases investments in public transportation and road infrastructure, particularly in communities facing isolation.
- Education ministries fund transportation strategies, such as school-operated shuttle buses, when public transportation is unavailable or otherwise infeasible.
- Education ministries expand Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC) programs to recognize a broader range of life experiences and skills that students, such as mature workers and newcomers, may have.

## COVID-19

- Education ministries expand the authorizations for certain Ministry-regulated exams and tests to be taken online.
- The Québec government increases investments to expand internet infrastructure, particularly in areas with low internet connectivity.
- Education ministries collaborate with English-language VTT institutions to develop policies and measures that support the creation and implementation of online VTT programs, and ensure a fair and sustainable distribution of students among different programs and institutions.

## Conclusion

For over three decades, the English-language VTT system has supported English speakers in Québec with acquiring the skills necessary to prepare them for long-term success in the labour market. However, English speakers' participation in VTT in Québec remains relatively low, despite the high demand for vocational and technical occupations in key sectors. The higher rates of unemployment and lower median after-tax incomes faced by English speakers (Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016) demonstrate the need for new strategies that can increase their labour market integration and participation.

In order to increase English speakers' labour market integration, key investments and multi-stakeholder collaboration are needed to improve the availability,

awareness, and perception of English-language VTT programs in Québec. This is particularly important in regions outside of Montréal, where English-speaking communities face greater disparities in educational opportunities.

This report aims to address some of these issues by facilitating a broader discourse on the role of not only vocational and technical training in English-speaking communities, but its current and future role in Québec's economy. Furthermore, we hope this report provides new insights that empower policymakers and educational institutions to develop solutions to increase English speakers' participation in the VTT system.



## Methodology

### Data collection:

#### Stage One

In the first stage, an initial list was created through searches for the websites of educational institutions offering English-language VTT programs (as part of either the day school and continuing education programs) in the province of Québec.

An [existing list of vocational training programs](#) created in partnership with the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur was cross-referenced with educational institutions' websites. In cases where there was a conflict in the listings, the listings from educational institutions' websites prevailed.

Only programs that lead to certificates recognized by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ) or the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur (MES) and/or programs from institutions currently recognized by MEQ or MES were considered.

#### Stage Two

Two additional data sources were used to cross-reference program listings: a [Statistics Canada list of post-secondary institutions](#), and a [list of all vocational centres within English school boards across the province](#).

Excluded from the final list of programs are springboard and upgrading programs, as well as specialty schools such as beauty schools or only online schools.

#### Stage Three

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 VTT program providers representing five vocational centres, six school boards, and three CEGEPs offering technical programs, from a total of six administrative regions.

#### Limitations:

This inventory of existing programs is limited by the availability and findability of information on the internet. It is likely that there are additional vocational centres offering programs that could not be identified for this research project. It is possible that programs catering to local and/or small populations, or those with unique offerings, have less of an incentive to advertise or develop an online presence, rendering it more difficult to find these programs online. This may also be the case in Indigenous communities.

It is also important to note that many post-secondary institutions in Québec offer students the option to submit coursework in either English or French, suggesting that English speakers can complete some French-language VTT programs in English. Since language use in school varies across institutions and individual cases, these variations were not accounted for in this report.

The programs listed in this report were on offer for the 2020-2021 school year, and may not accurately reflect which programs are currently open to students at the date of reading.

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