

Canada's Black Box of Higher Education Outcomes



André Côté, Graham Dobbs | December 2023

About this Report

This report investigates the topic of outcomes tracking in Canadian higher education and related notions of quality and value assessment, with the aim of informing better post-secondary policy, education and labour market planning, and learner career pathway navigation.

In today's rapidly changing Canadian post-secondary marketplace, there are three compelling reasons why data availability on outcomes in higher education systems should be more robust: **transparency** for learners, **improvement** for education providers, and **accountability** to governments and oversight bodies.

Why it Matters

Post-secondary education (PSE) is recognized as essential to Canada's prosperity and labour force development, creating economic opportunity, social mobility, newcomer integration, and civic engagement for learners. Yet, there is alarmingly little understanding of the outcomes Canada's higher education system produces—whether to inform public policy, align skills development, or ensure learners (and funders) are getting good value.

Graduation rates. Student debt levels. Job and career transitions. Average earnings after degree completion. These are just some of the Canadian

education outcomes that are not readily available nor comparable across universities, colleges and their specific programs of study.

This report investigates outcomes tracking in Canadian higher education and related notions of quality and value assessment to inform better post-secondary policy, education and labour market planning, and learner career pathway navigation.







What We Found

A review of the current state of higher education data reporting and outcomes tracking in Canada reveals a number of limitations:

- Provincial outcomes data are inconsistent and not easily accessible, navigable, or standardized.
- Data are generally not comparable by institution type across universities and colleges nor with apprenticeships.
- Data are unavailable at a granularity that allows assessment and comparison at the institution- and program-level.
- A key gap across Canada is the absence of graduate skills information that can align post-secondary data with labour market information (LMI).

- There are no reliable information sources for new alternative credentials such as microcredentials, online certificates, or digital badges.
- Compared to three peer jurisdictions - the United States, Australia, and United Kingdom - Canada's post-secondary data and outcomes tracking systems lags (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5: Learning Data Summary Table

Categories	CAN*	US	AUS	UK
 Availability (annual reporting, research report)	X	X	X	X
 Completeness (i.e., three outcome types: institutional, student, graduate)		X	X	X
 Comparability (across institution types)		X	X	
 Granularity (institution and program specific)		X	X	X
 Accessibility (open, downloadable, machine-readable)		X	X	X
 Navigability (data visualization or dashboard tool)		X	X	X

*Note: National assessment for Canada, recognizing that some provinces meet these criteria.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Based on the findings, the report identifies a set of five actions for Canadians policymakers and other stakeholders that could improve Canada's post-secondary data and information systems:

1. Mobilize pan-Canadian stakeholder coordination and leadership on higher education outcomes, with mandates and resources for key federal/provincial/territorial bodies.
2. Create national, open access learning data infrastructure - a pan-Canadian institution to act as a public utility for education data, responsible for the collection, curation, and sharing of raw data for the collective benefit.

3. Use funding levers to compel comparable, granular outcomes reporting, with Canada's joint federal/provincial/territorial student financial aid programs as a potential lever.
4. Link post-secondary outcomes data with LMI for jobs and skills demand to allow mapping PSE programs and credentials to jobs and skills in the labour market — and provide that essential connection for both graduates and employers.
5. Build PSE transparency and navigation tools coupled with learning-to-career guidance, developed with key user groups (e.g., students, parents, K-12 and PSE guidance professionals) and integrated into high school guidance and workforce services.

[Read more at dais.ca](https://dais.ca)