



Public perceptions and attitudes toward Canadian higher education

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Myths... perceptions...



Too many kids in university?

“If Dan asked me for advice, I’d tell him to run, run, run away and get a job in the oil sands.”

Margaret Wentz

The Globe and Mail

May 12, 2007

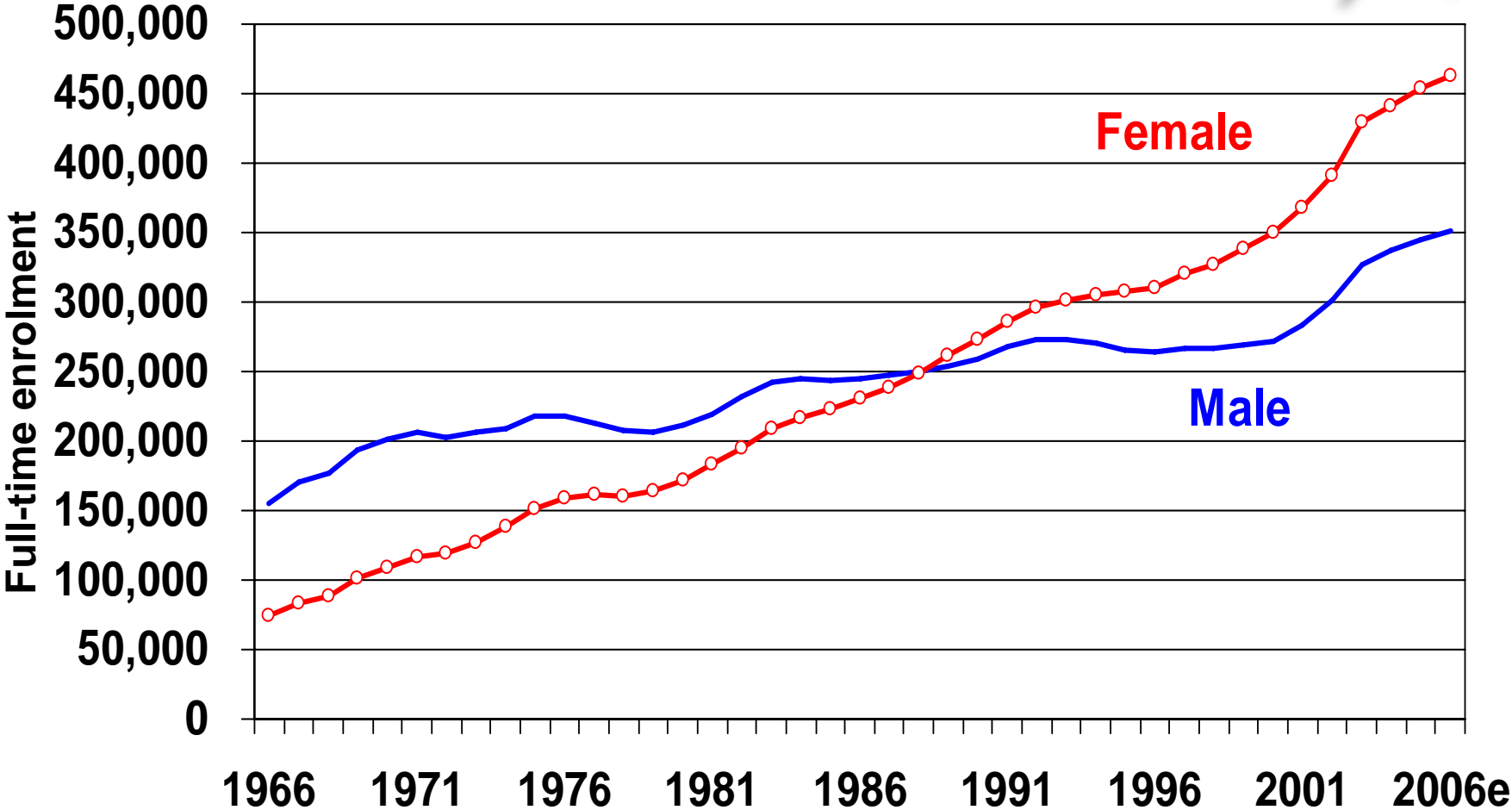


Realities...

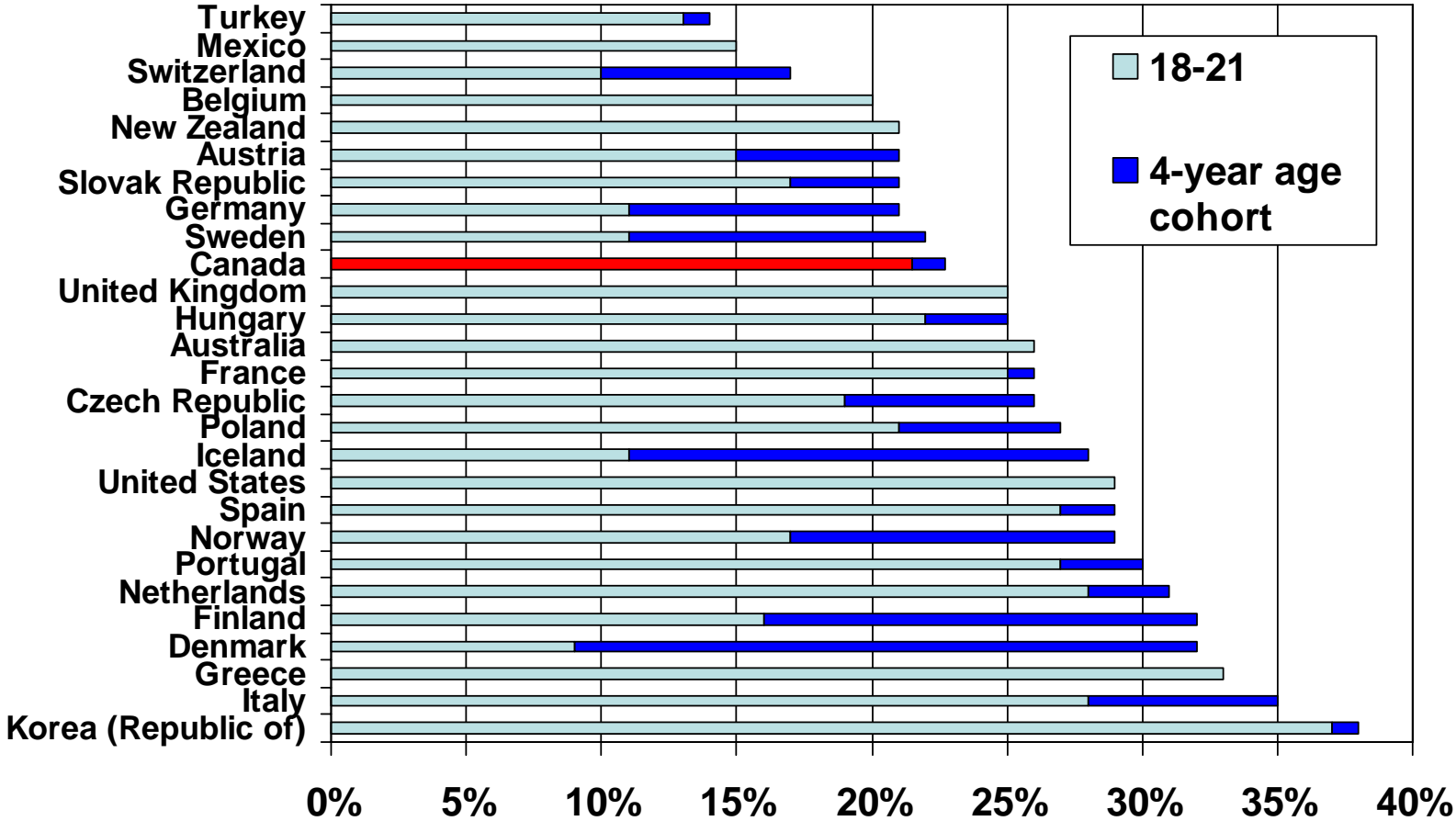


- Six out of 10 Canadians *overestimate* the number of high school graduates who go on to university
- 20 percent believe the figure to be almost double what it really is
- Only about 23 percent – less than one-quarter – of our young people aged 19 to 22 are enrolled in universities today
- This places Canada in the *bottom half* of OECD countries when it comes to university enrolment

Enrolment for men and women has reached record levels



In 2003, Canada placed 18th among OECD countries



Two themes



- Public perceptions/awareness of higher education
- Realities



Why assess public opinion?



- To better understand public perceptions, such as those perpetuated by Wente's column, AUCC conducted public opinion research
- Project comprised:
 - Eleven two-hour focus groups, in English and French
 - National telephone survey
 - 25 in-depth interviews with opinion leaders

Findings



- Universities: Vital asset for society
 - Higher education necessary for prosperity and quality of life
 - Public supports greater government investment in higher education, more funding for student access, more funding for research
 - University research supported and valued
 - University important from a career perspective
 - Graduates should have strong communication skills, ability to problem solve and think strategically
 - Many business leaders stressed importance of fields that lead to specific professions, e.g., law, engineering, medicine, etc.
 - Building and retaining support for international dimension of higher education remains a challenge

Reflections



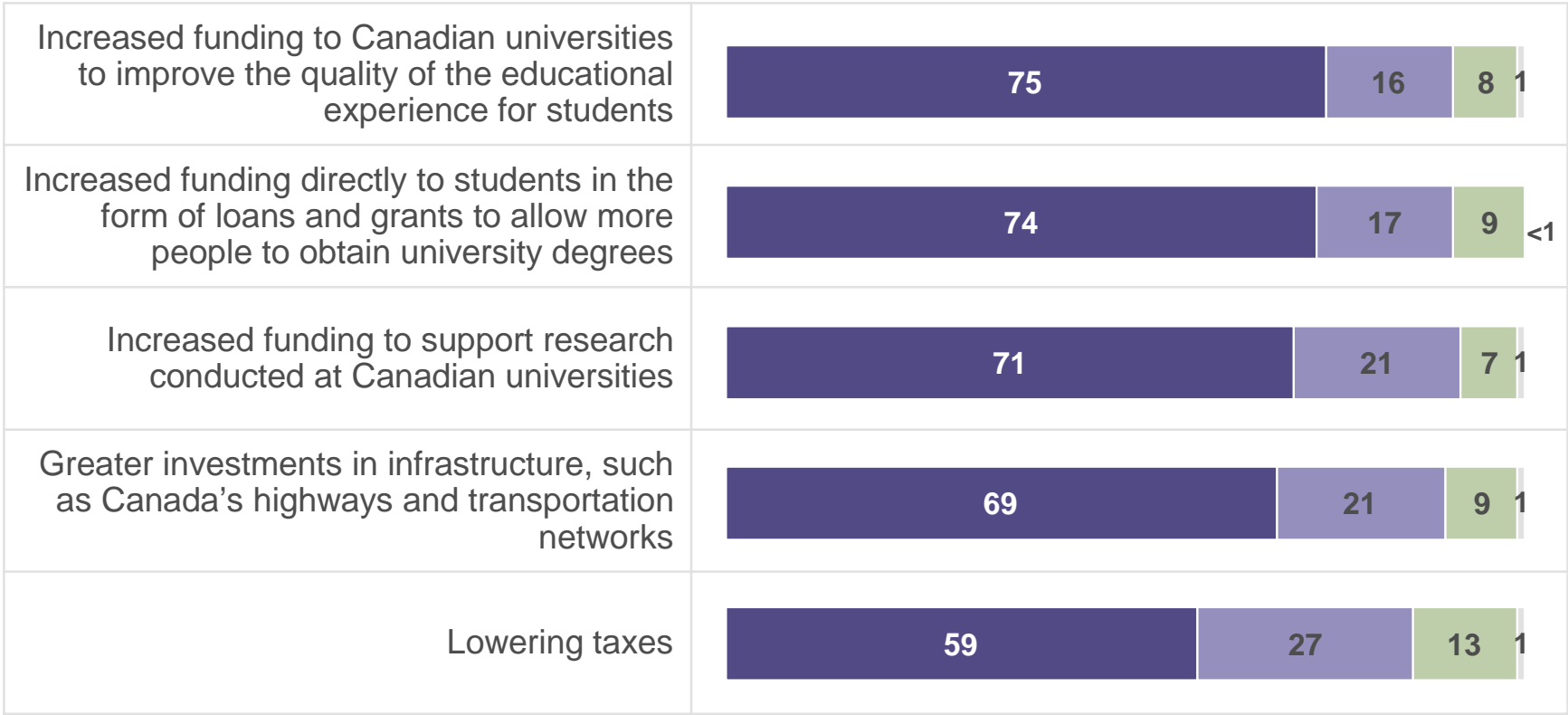
“I wish to God I had gotten a university education. It makes a difference when you go for a job, and for how you live your life. I believe in higher education for all my kids. The world is global now. India and China are the powerhouses, and we have to be ready. I’m going to do whatever it takes to make sure my kids get a university education.”

Focus group participant

“Postsecondary education has a lot to do with future leaders and providing knowledge to be globally competitive.”

Opinion leader

Education and research key to prosperity



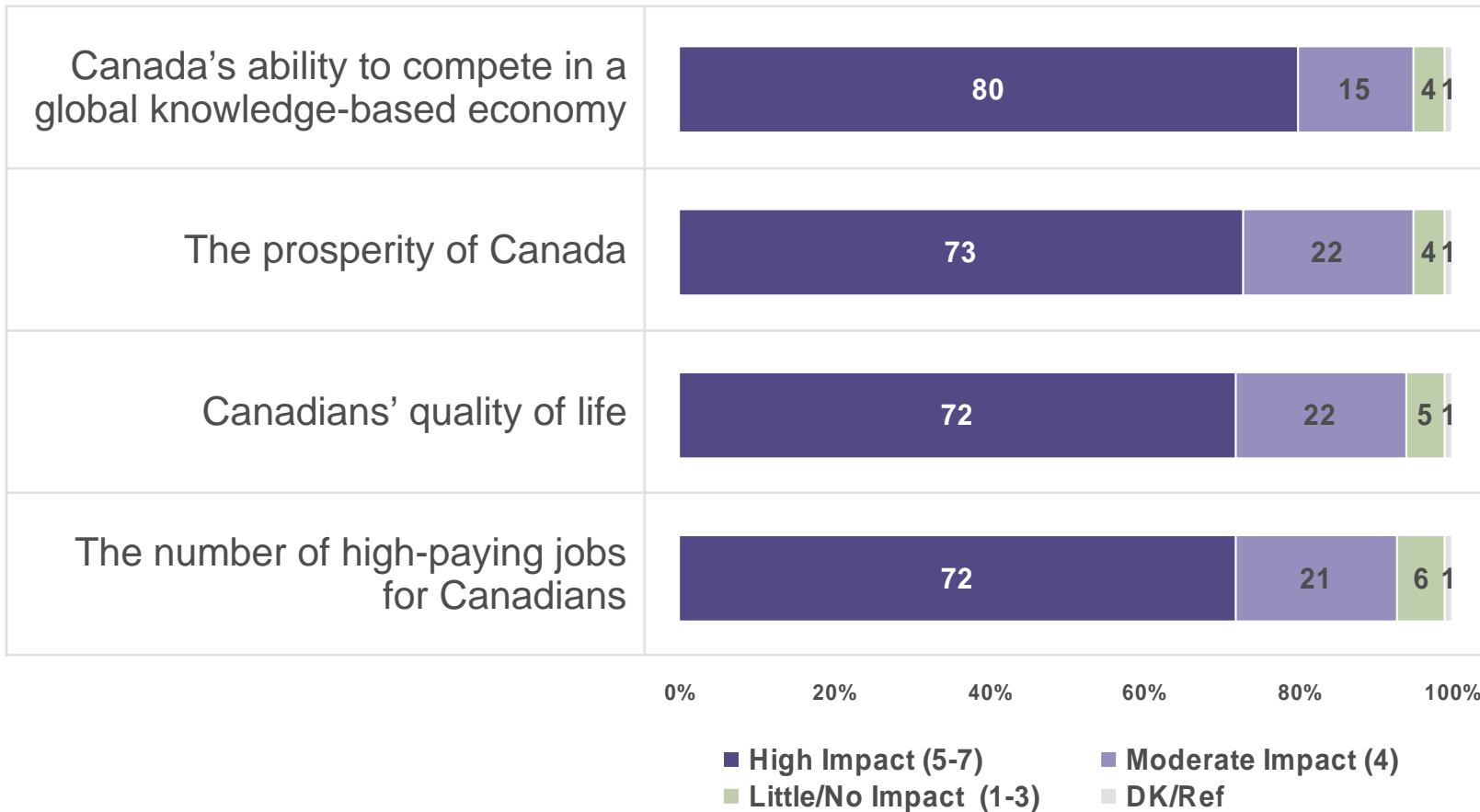
0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ High Impact (5-7)
 ■ Moderate Impact (4)
 ■ Little/No Impact (1-3)
 ■ DK/Ref

Q6a-e. Governments could take a number of actions to encourage productivity growth and improve Canadian competitiveness. Using a 7-point scale where 1 is no impact at all, 4 is a moderate impact and 7 is an extremely high impact, please tell me what impact you think each of the following will have on encouraging productivity growth and improving Canadian competitiveness. How about ...?

Base: All respondents (n=1018)

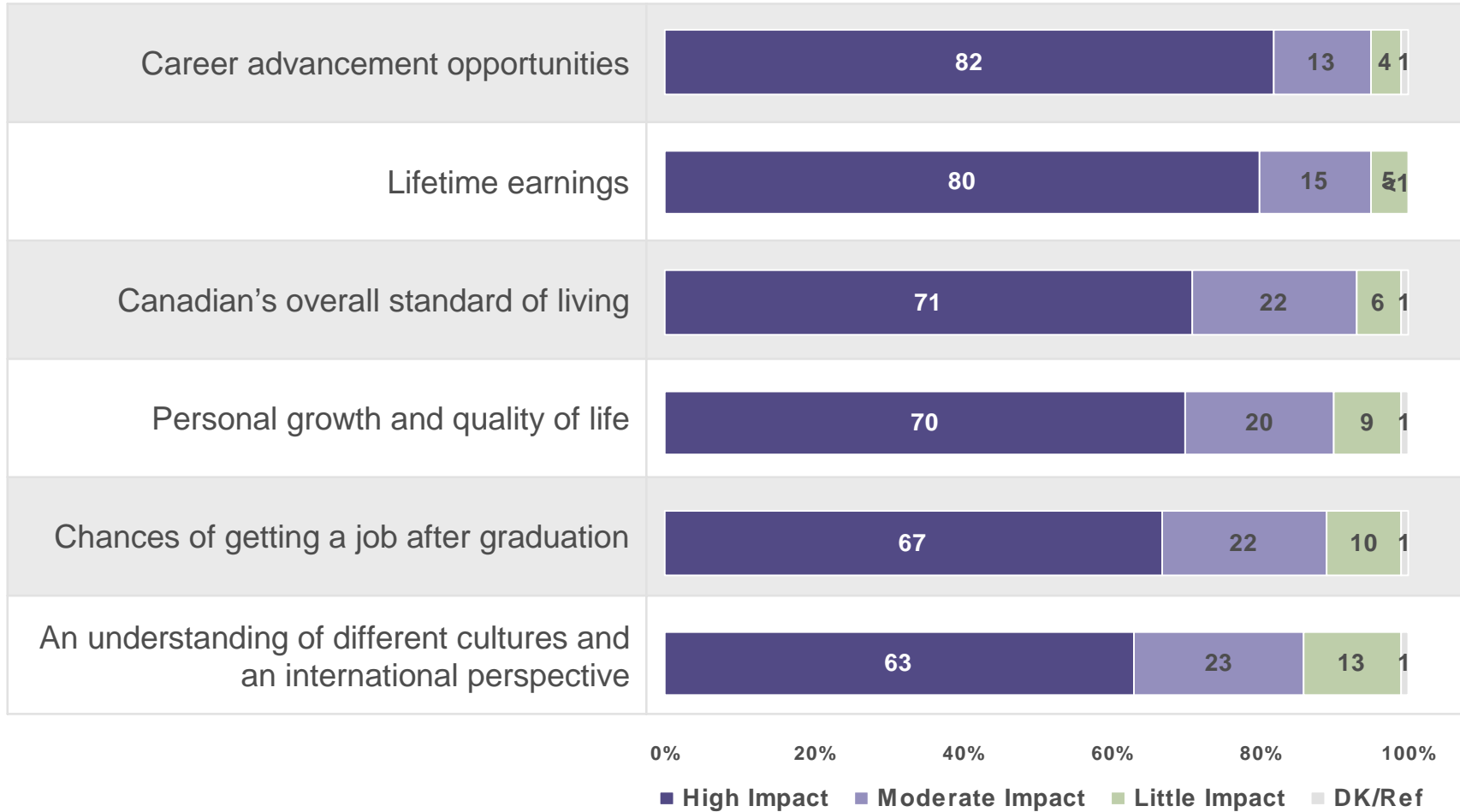
Impact of universities via their education and research functions is positive



Q9. What impact would you say Canada's universities, through their research and education functions, have on IMPROVING each of the following areas? Please use a 7-point scale where 1 is no impact at all, 4 is a moderate impact and 7 is an extremely high impact.

Base: All respondents (n=1018)

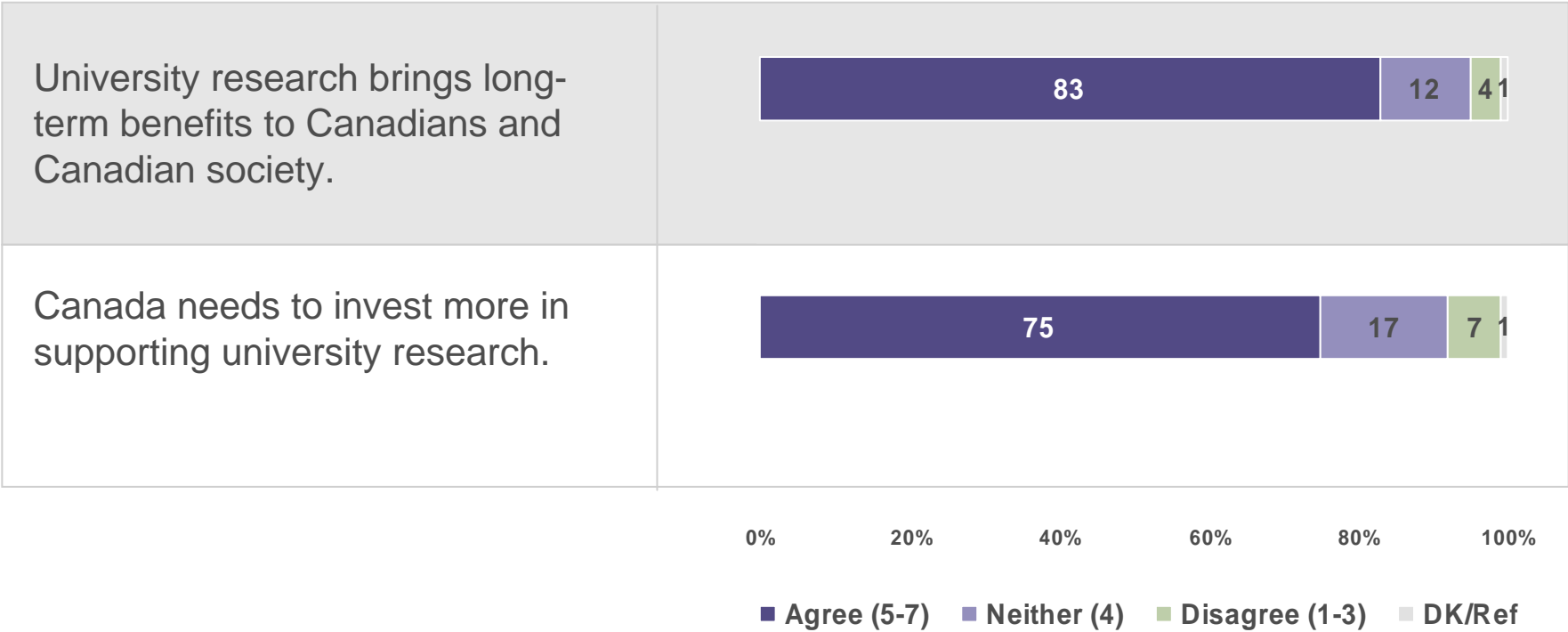
Perceived long-term benefits of a university education



Q1. What impact would you say a university degree has on IMPROVING each of the following areas? Please use a 7-point scale where 1 is no impact at all, 4 is a moderate impact and 7 is an extremely high impact.

Base: All respondents (n=1018)

Public supports university research



Q4d, e. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, using a 7-point scale where 1 means you strongly disagree, 7 means you strongly agree and the mid-point 4 means you neither agree nor disagree.

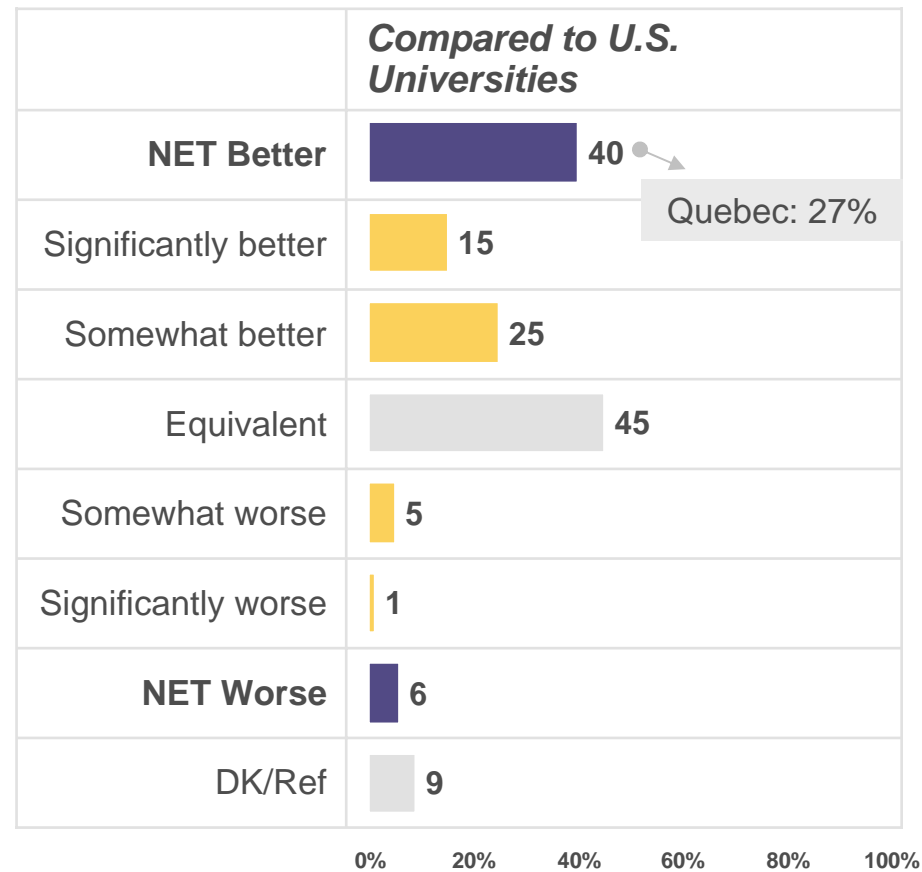
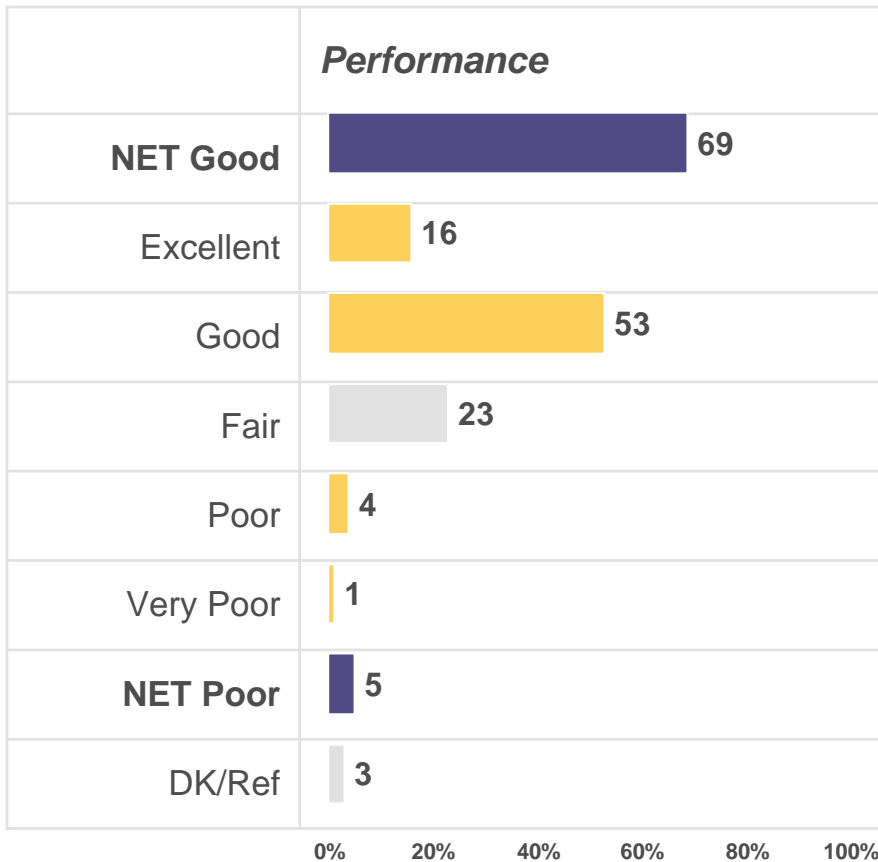
Base: All respondents (n=1018)

Universities as a “Window on the World”



Q4f, g, h. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, using a 7-point scale where 1 means you strongly disagree, 7 means you strongly agree and the mid-point 4 means you neither agree nor disagree.
 Base: All respondents (n=1018)

Generally positive ratings for Canadian universities in terms of performance and comparison to the U.S.

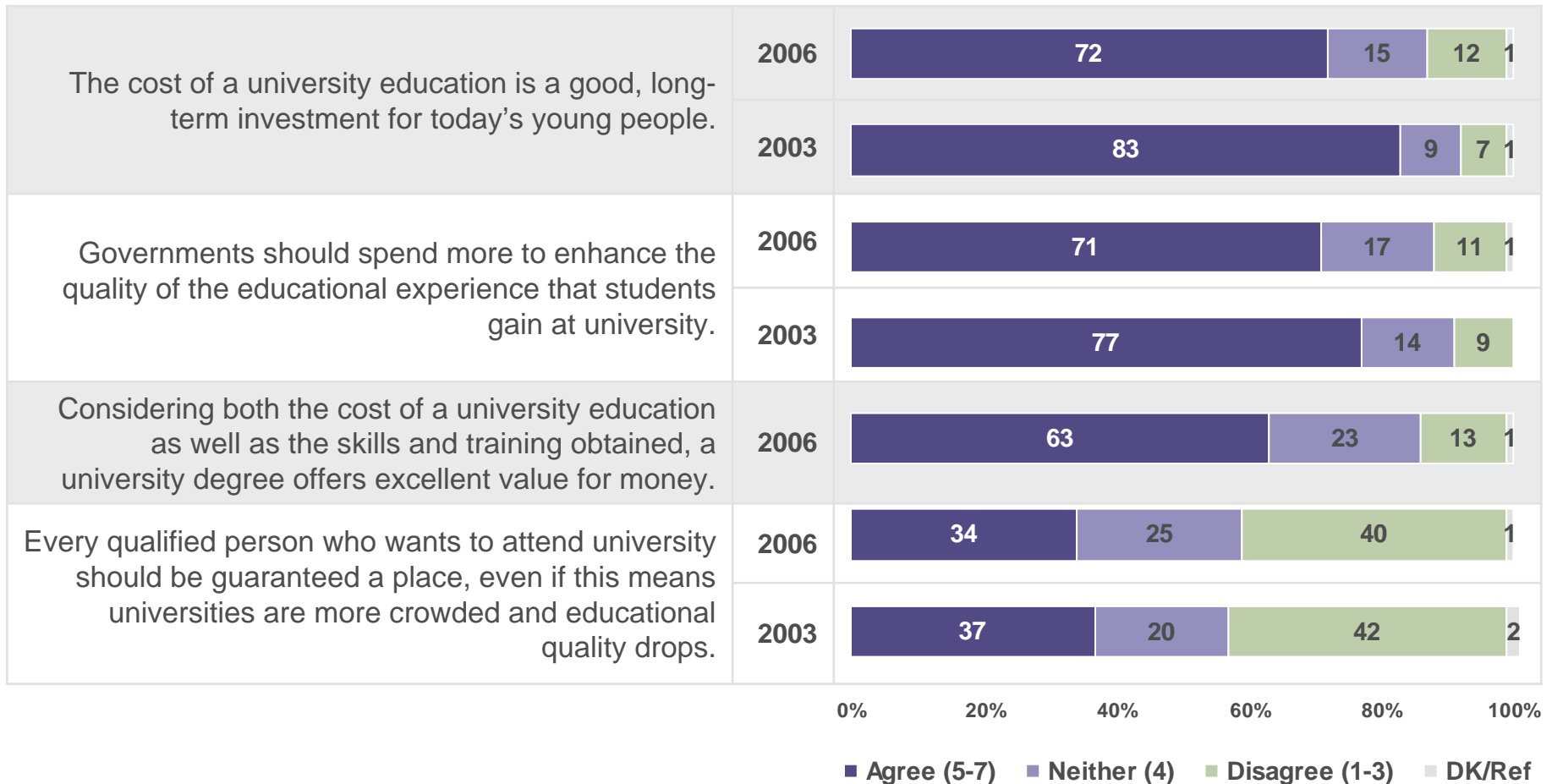


Q2. Overall, how would you rate the performance of Canada's universities in producing graduates that meet the needs of today's job market? Would you rate them as ...?

Q3. And, in your view, do you feel that Canada's universities offer a significantly better, somewhat better, equivalent, somewhat worse or significantly worse education compared to universities in the United States?

Base: All respondents (n=1018)

Some caveats...



Q4a, b, c, j. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, using a 7-point scale where 1 means you strongly disagree, 7 means you strongly agree and the mid-point 4 means you neither agree nor disagree.

Base: All respondents (n=1018)

Other myths... other perceptions...



- Articles in *The Ottawa Citizen*, the *National Post*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *Halifax Daily News*, the *Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*, and reports on Global News and CBC radio, have raised the alarm about declining enrolments and questioned the value of a university degree
- Perception is that as “echo generation” moves through universities, we will be left with an “echo bust”

Reflections



“Within 20 years, the pool of typical PSE-age Canadians will be substantially shallower than it is today.”

Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation

“If the government waits long enough, the problem will solve itself.”

Demographer David Foot on overcrowding at some Canadian universities

Trends in higher education



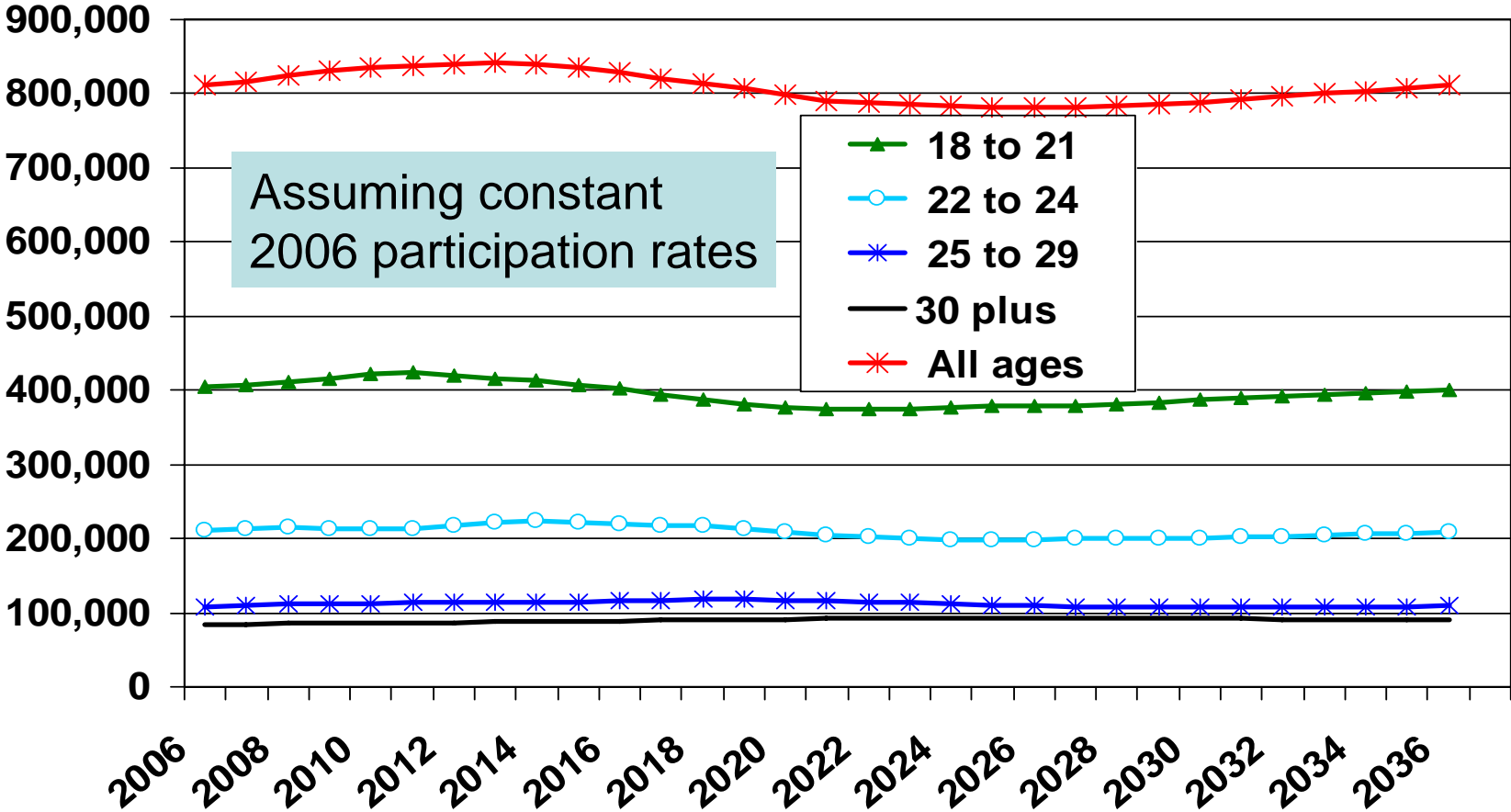
- Volume 1: Enrolment, published May 1, 2007
- First in 2007 edition of flagship publication
- Now published and distributed largely online
- Culmination of comprehensive analysis of enrolment and participation rates

Trends key message #1



- Labour market demands for increasingly higher education levels, together with other important socio-economic factors, are driving university participation rates
- Rising participation more than offsets demographic change on a national level

Impact of population changes on aggregate full-time university enrolment, minimal over the next 30 years



A great number of factors influence participation rates



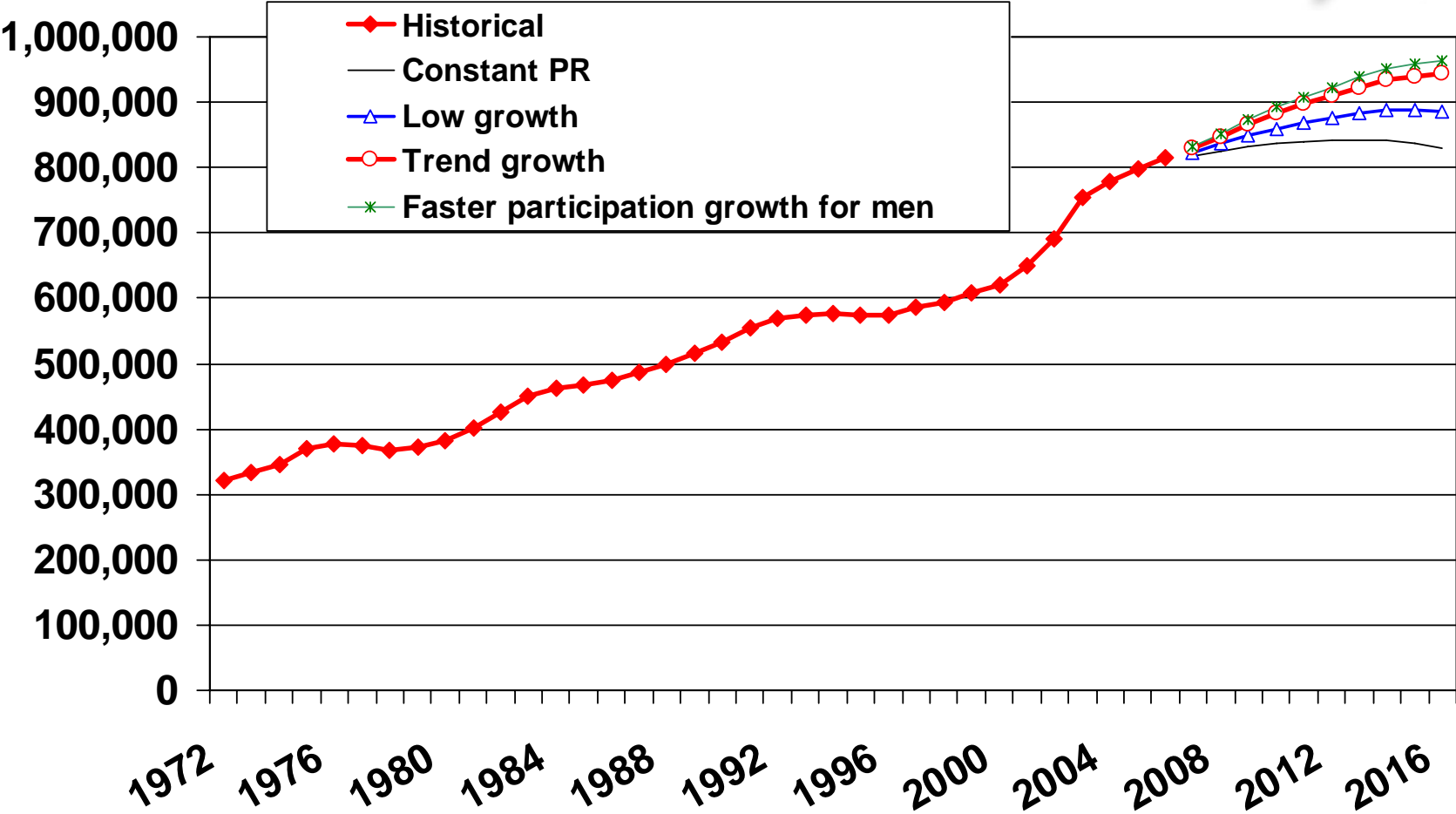
- Urbanization
- Immigration and international students
- Parental influence
- Socio-economic status
- Labour market demand
- Demand for graduate education
- Financial returns of a university education /
Affordability

Trends key message #2



- Taking into account the many pertinent factors that influence university enrolment in Canada, a new study by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada forecasts overall Canadian university enrolment will grow nationally by an additional 70,000 to 150,000 full-time students over the next decade.

Nationally, full-time enrolment will continue to grow under any scenario that projects participation growth

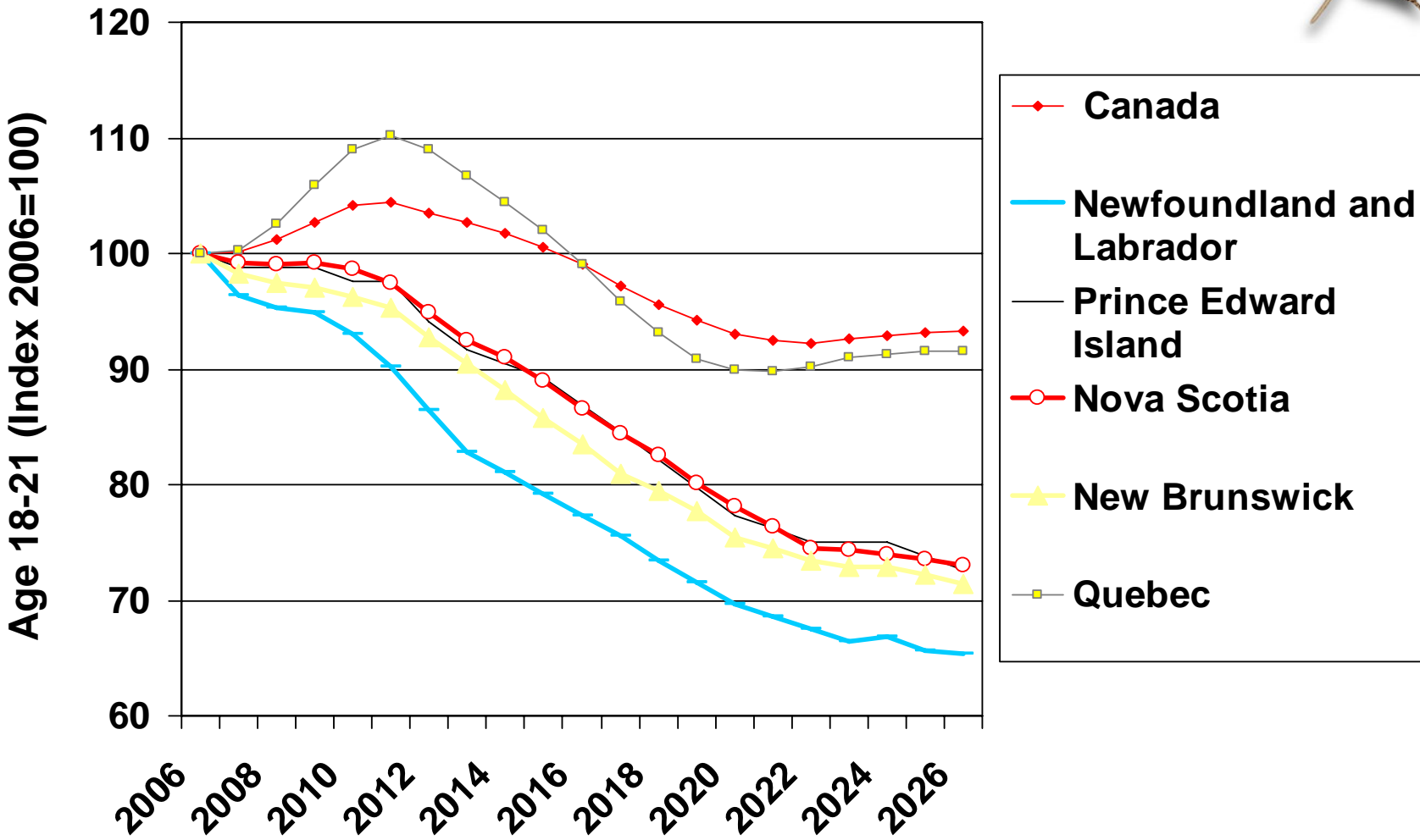


Trends key message #3

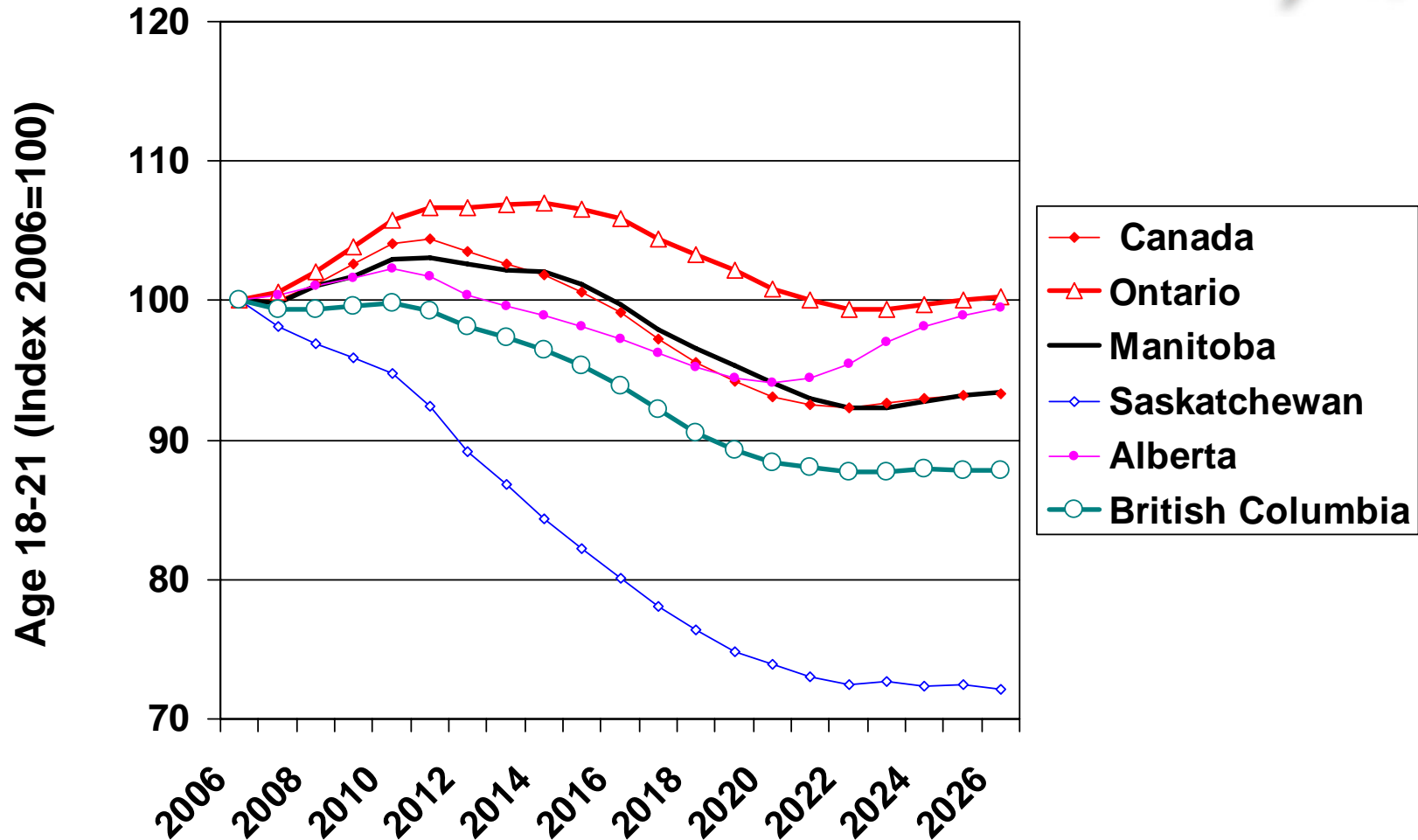


- Canadian education trends are seldom uniformly applicable across all regions and institutions – and enrolment is no exception
- Individual institutions will continue to face unique challenges with respect to enrolment
- Future excess capacity in some provinces allows institutions to reach out to new student groups
- Constrained capacity in other areas will force universities to seek investments in capacity and quality, on which future growth in both supply and demand for higher education hinge

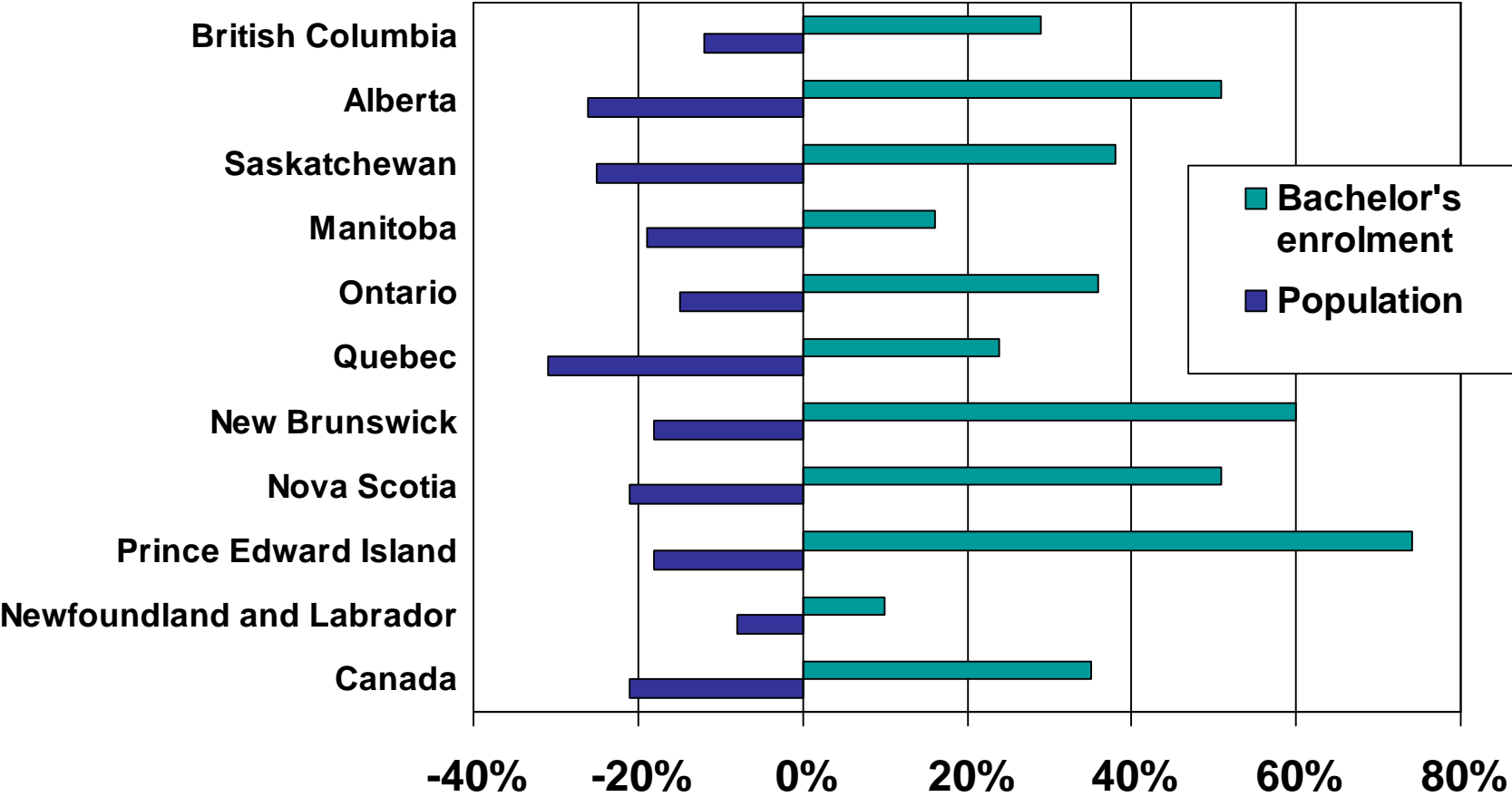
Changes in the 18-21 age cohort will have a strong, long lasting impact in eastern Canada, less so in QC



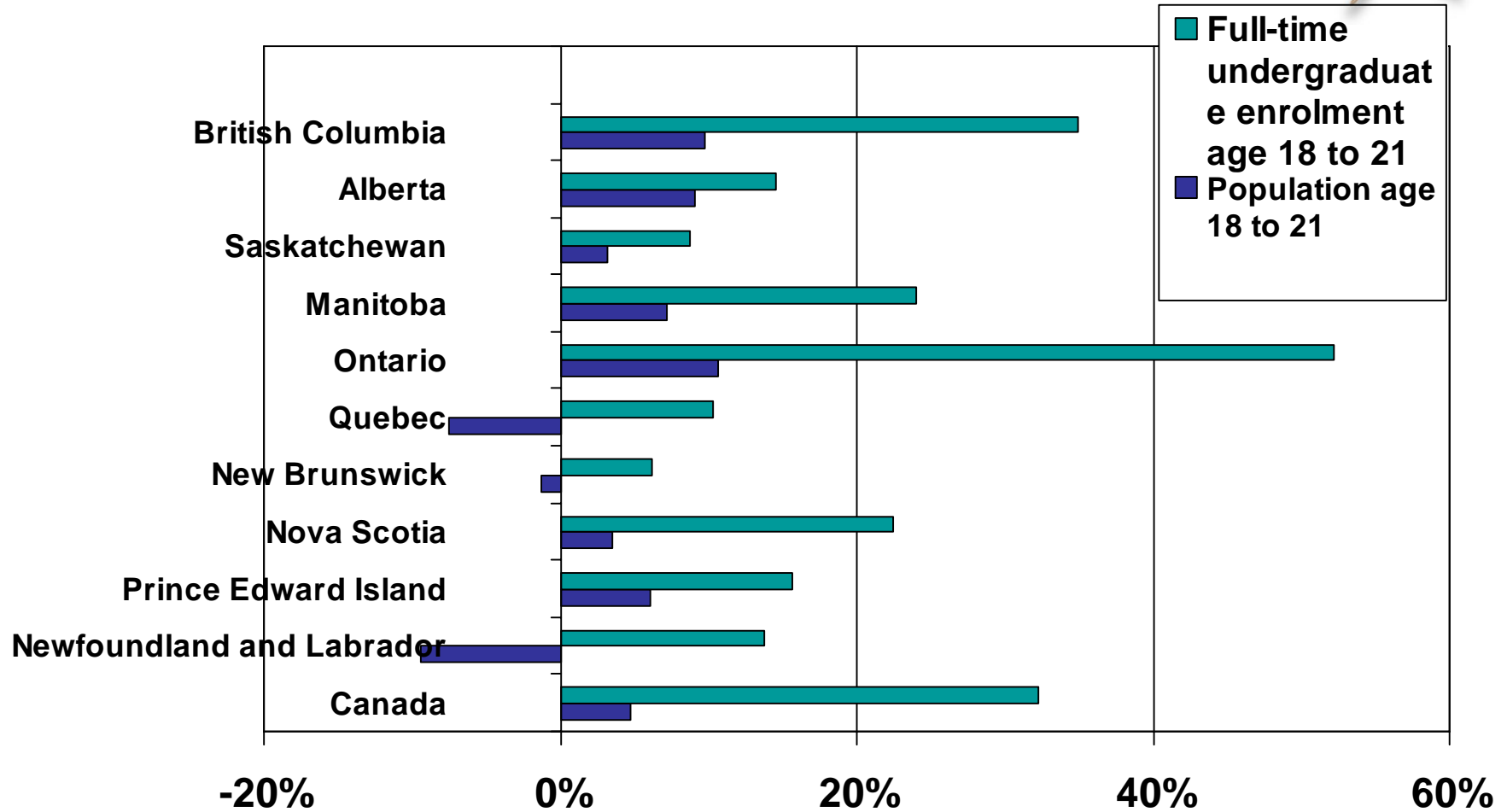
Population change in the 18-21 age cohort will have strong negative impacts in BC, SK, MB



Between 1980-1993, the number of full-time bachelor's students 18-21 grew strongly despite population declines in that cohort



Between 2000 and 2005, participation rates increased, even in provinces with declining population



Trends key message #4



- In our ever-intensifying knowledge-based economy, Canada's universities are poised to play an even more pivotal role in helping Canadians attain their educational goals and supporting Canada's prosperity and competitiveness

Labour market advantage



- Income increases early in most Canadians' careers but flattens out relatively quickly for those with little education
- Those with a university education generally see their incomes increase steadily throughout their careers
- When the income differentials are accumulated over a 40-year working life, the average advantage for a university graduate was about \$1 million more income than that earned by a high school graduate

Challenges ahead



- Currently, Canadian universities award proportionally fewer master's and PhD degrees than is common in several OECD countries
- At the PhD level, Canada trails most of the G8 countries in terms of PhDs awarded annually on a per capita basis
- When compared to the U.S., Canada awards one-third fewer PhDs and only half the number of master's degrees

Challenges ahead



- Contrary to public opinion that deemed Canadian university performance on par or better than that in the U.S., Canadian universities trail U.S. institutions in two important areas:
 - Active and collaborative learning
 - Student/faculty interaction
- NSSE evaluation

AUCC's role going forward



- Dynamics that affect and shape Canadian higher education are complex and multi-faceted
- Simplistic, or black and white descriptions of phenomena lead to misperceptions
- AUCC committed to objective research, public opinion research to:
 - inform communications, advocacy, government relations
 - anticipate member challenges and opportunities
 - educate the public and stakeholders to facilitate public policy development in the public interest



Questions?

www.aucc.ca

