



DEGREES AND CREDENTIALS AWARDED

2024-2025 Academic Year
Degrees and Credentials Report

A photograph of a graduation ceremony. In the foreground, a young man in a black graduation gown and cap is smiling and shaking hands with an older man in a red and black academic robe. In the background, other graduates in black gowns and caps are visible, along with a large crowd of spectators.

FEBRUARY 2026

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Why Does Degree and Credential Production Matter?

To make Kentucky's workforce more competitive, Kentucky needs 60% of adults to have a postsecondary degree or credential by the year 2030. Current statewide attainment is 56.2%, just 3.8 points shy of the goal. Statewide attainment is critical to the prosperity of our state, as it leads to:



Higher earnings for graduates, increased tax revenues, lower poverty rates and less reliance on public assistance



Higher levels of employment and a more highly skilled workforce



A more educated citizenry with higher rates of voting, volunteerism and charitable giving



Healthier residents, less chronic disease and lower healthcare costs

Executive Summary



Total Degrees and Credentials:
1YR Change: 5.0%
5YR Change: 15.1%

Growth in total degrees and credentials was driven by gains in undergraduate and graduate degrees in all three sectors.



Associate Degrees:
1YR Change: 7.5%
5YR Change: 5.0%

Like other sub-bachelor's awards, over 90% of associate degrees are awarded by KCTCS. All sectors experienced growth over last year.



Master's & Specialist Degrees:
1YR Change: 10.5%
5YR Change: 31.5%

Master's and specialist degrees increased in both four-year sectors, with pronounced growth at AIKCU institutions.



Low-Income Degrees & Credentials:
1YR Change: 9.4%
5YR Change: 8.6%

Both two- and four-year public sectors had significant increases in low-income awards last year. CPE does not collect financial aid data (low-income status) from AIKCU institutions.



Certificates & Diplomas:
1YR Change: 4.2%
5YR Change: 20.0%

Over 90% of all certificates and diplomas are awarded by KCTCS. However, growth was observed in all three sectors.



Bachelor's Degrees:
1YR Change: 1.4%
5YR Change: -2.2%

Bachelor's degrees increased in both four-year sectors (public and independent) over the previous year.



Doctoral Degrees:
1YR Change: 4.1%
5YR Change: 33.4%

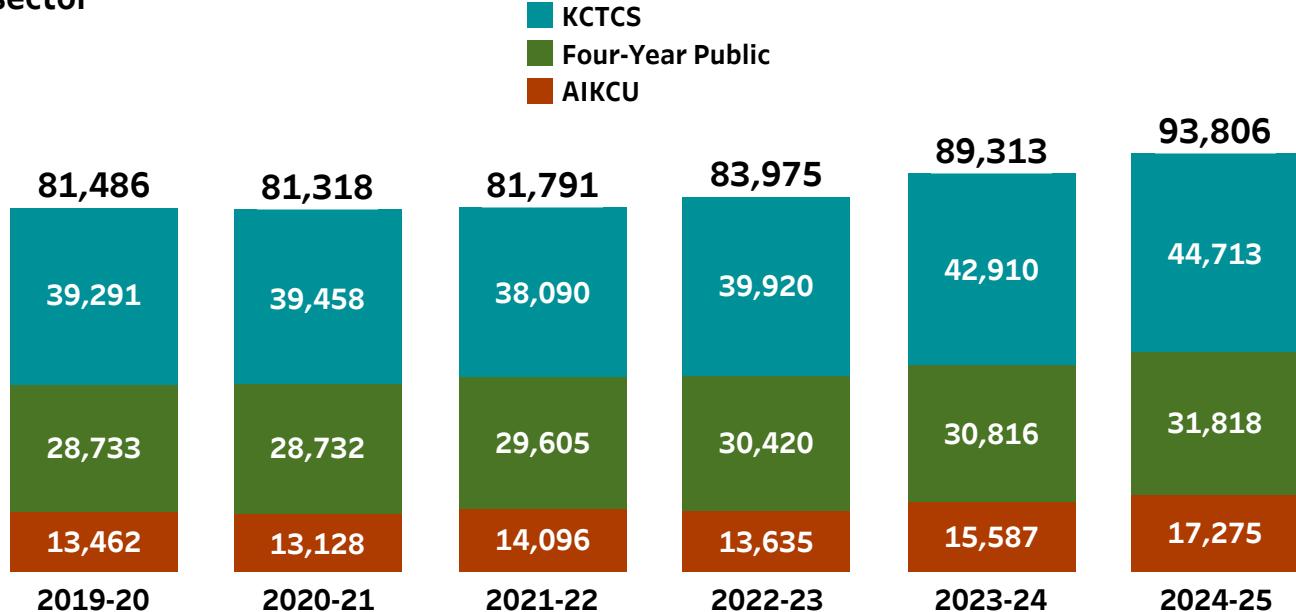
Doctoral degrees increased in both four-year sectors, with rapid growth at AIKCU institutions over the period.



Adult Degrees & Credentials:
1YR Change: 4.7%
5YR Change: -4.8%

After sustained declines, adult degree and credential production has increased for two consecutive years in all three sectors.

Figure 1. Total degrees and credentials awarded (undergraduate and graduate) by sector

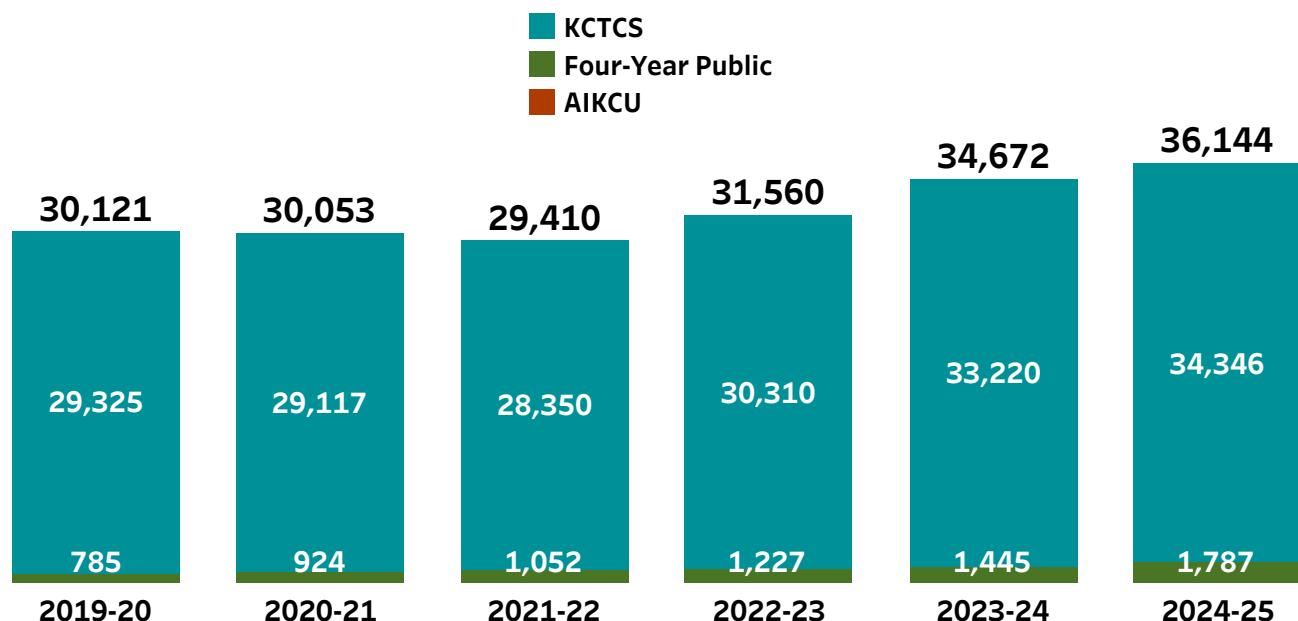


Total degrees and credentials awarded encompasses all undergraduate and graduate credentials awarded by public and private institutions. Total awards grew in every sector, bringing the statewide total to 93,806 in 2024-2025. This growth reflects an increase of 5.0% over the previous year and 15.1% over the past five years.

- KCTCS increased credential production 4.2% over last year and 13.8% over five years.
- Public universities grew total awards 3.3% over last year and 10.7% over five years.
- AIKCU institutions grew total awards 10.8% over last year and 28.3% over five years.

Total degrees and credentials awarded is the metric tied most closely to Kentucky's educational attainment rate (the percentage of working-age Kentuckians with a postsecondary credential, which currently stands at 56.2%). The goal is to reach 60% by the year 2030, which Kentucky is on track to achieve.

Figure 2. Total undergraduate certificates and diplomas awarded by sector



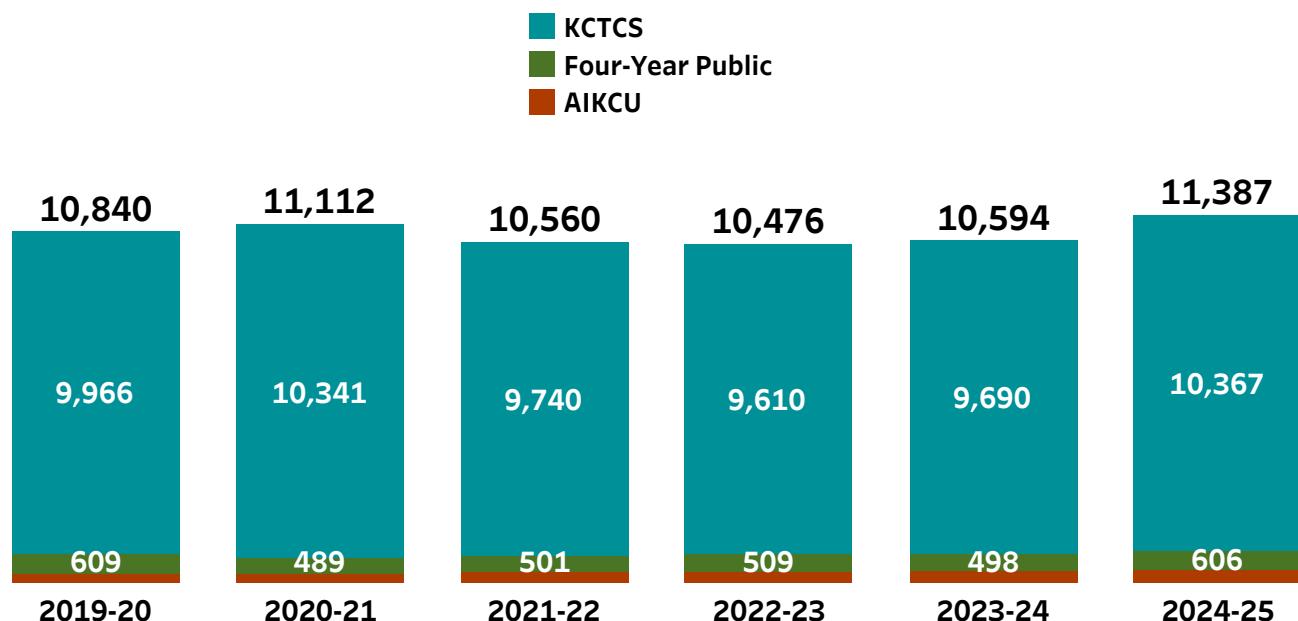
Note: Counts for certificates awarded at four-year private colleges and universities (orange bars) are omitted due to spacing. The counts are: 2019-20 = 11; 2020-21 = 12; 2021-22 = 8; 2022-23 = 23; 2023-24 = 7; 2024-25 = 11.

Total undergraduate certificates and diplomas awarded grew to an impressive **36,144** in 2024-2025, reflecting an increase of **4.2%** over the previous year and strong five-year growth of **20.0%**.

- Nearly all short-term credentials are awarded by KCTCS, which increased production by **3.4%** over the previous year and **17.1%** over the past five years.
- Public universities awarded **342** more certificates in 2024-2025 than the previous year, bringing the total to **1,787** (a **23.7%** increase). Undergraduate certificates and diplomas awarded by public universities have increased by **127.6%** over five years.
- AIKCU institutions awarded just **11** certificates in 2024-2025, up **4** from the past year.

Certificates and diplomas are short-term postsecondary credentials that enable recipients to enter vocational fields more quickly than a two- or four-year degree. Due to their technical nature, most of these programs are offered by KCTCS.

Figure 3. Total associate degrees awarded by sector



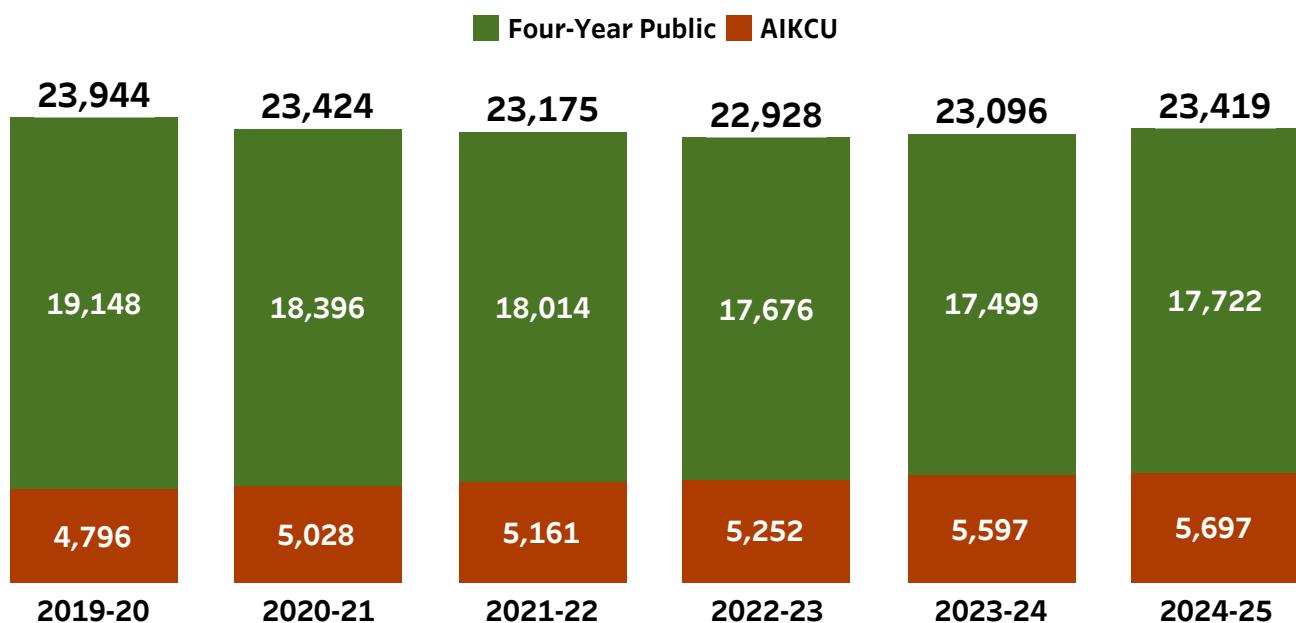
Note: Counts for associate degrees awarded at four-year private colleges and universities (orange bars) are omitted due to spacing. The counts are: 2019-20 = 265; 2020-21 = 282; 2021-22 = 319; 2022-23 = 357; 2023-24 = 406; 2024-25 = 414.

Total associate degrees awarded increased **7.5%** over the past year, reaching **11,387**. This represents a **5.0%** increase over the past five years.

- Most associate degrees are awarded by KCTCS, which increased associate degree production by **7.0%** over the previous year and **4.0%** over the past five years.
- Public universities awarded **108** more associate degrees than in the previous year, bringing the total to **606** (a **21.7%** increase). There has been little change in associate degrees awarded by public universities in the last five years.
- AIKCU institutions awarded **8** more associate degrees over last year, raising the total to **414**. This reflects **56.2%** growth, up from **265**, over the past five years.

Most **associate degrees** can be completed in two years and lead to employment or further study at a four-year college or university. Completing general education courses at a KCTCS college and transferring to a public university offers an affordable path to a bachelor's degree.

Figure 4. Total bachelor's degrees awarded by sector

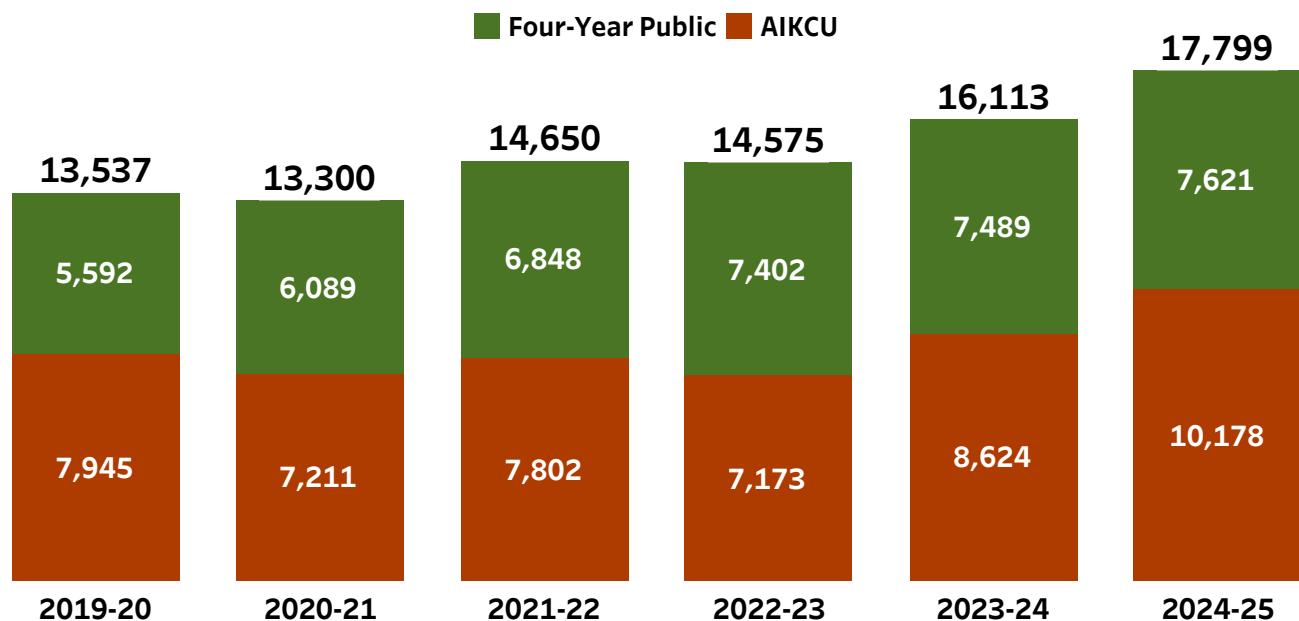


Total bachelor's degrees awarded climbed to **23,419**. With this **1.4%** increase over the previous year, Kentucky has nearly returned to pre-pandemic totals.

- Public universities increased bachelor's degree production by **1.3%** over the previous year, but awards are still down **7.4%** compared to five years ago.
- AIKCU institutions increased bachelor's degrees by **1.8%** over the previous year and **18.8%** over the past five years.
- **Note:** KCTCS does not award bachelor's degrees.

A **bachelor's degree** is a four-year program that provides both foundational and in-depth knowledge, preparing graduates for a wide array of professional careers or postgraduate study. The percentage of adult Kentuckians with a bachelor's degree (18%) is considerably lower than the national average (23%), presenting an opportunity for growth for the Commonwealth.

Figure 5. Total master's and specialist degrees awarded by sector

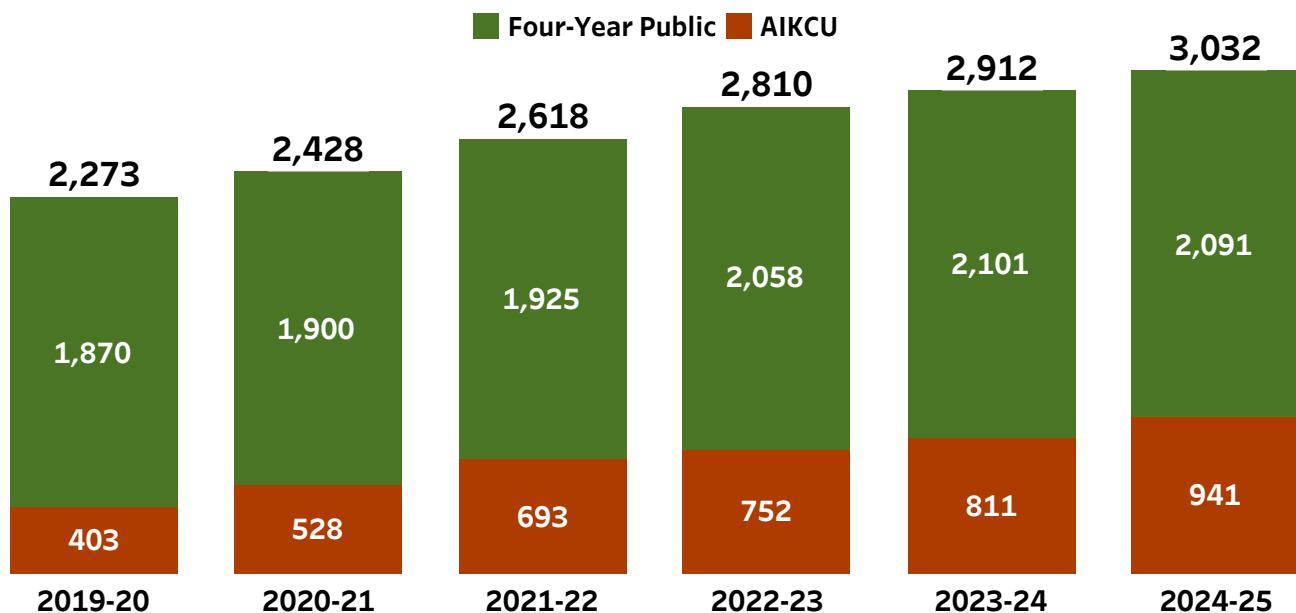


Graduate degree production has experienced extraordinary growth over the last five years, which bodes well for the state's professional sectors. **Total master's and specialist degrees** increased to **17,799**, a **10.5%** gain over last year and **31.5%** over the past five years.

- Public universities increased master's/specialist degrees by **1.8%** over the previous year and **36.3%** over the past five years.
- AIKCU institutions increased master's/specialist degrees by **18.0%** over the previous year and **28.1%** over the past five years.
- **Note:** KCTCS does not award graduate degrees.

Master's degrees are awards that require the successful completion of an academic program of at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the post-baccalaureate level. **Specialist degrees** normally require 60 semester hours of concentrated and approved graduate coursework beyond the bachelor's degree. They are generally offered in the field of education to acknowledge completion of advanced graduate study designed to help individuals meet licensure requirements.

Figure 6. Total doctoral degrees awarded by sector

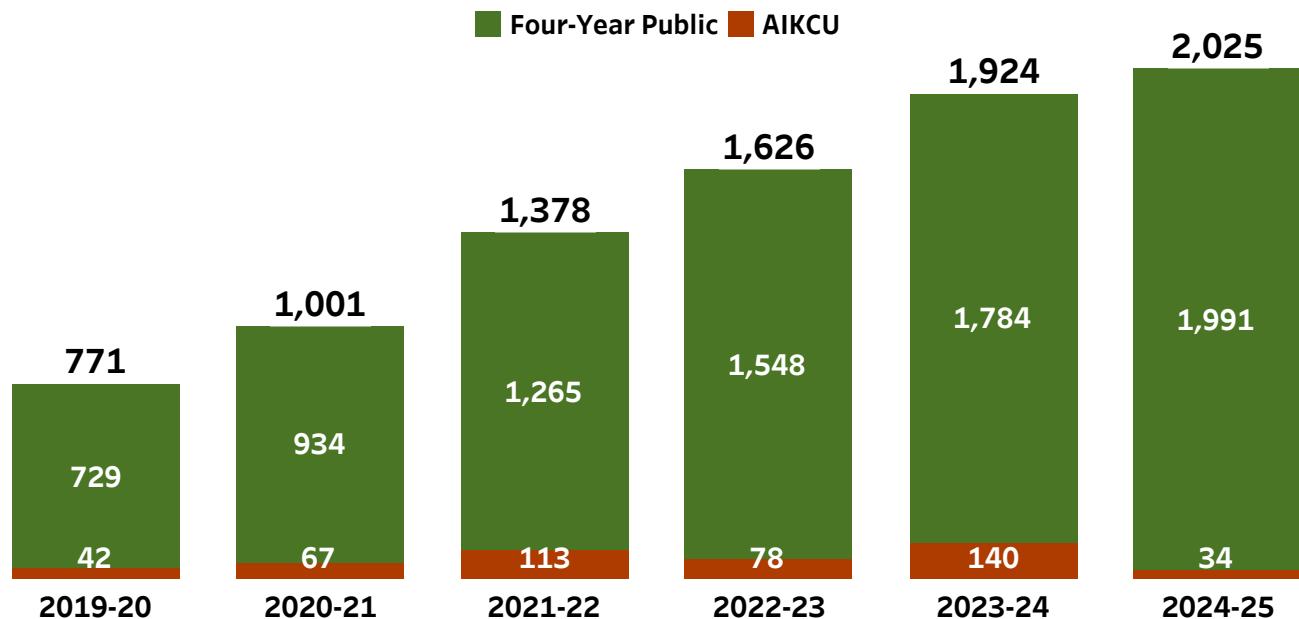


Doctoral degrees represent the highest level of academic achievement and are essential for advanced careers in higher education, law, and more. Total doctoral degrees grew **4.1%** over the previous year and **33.4%** over the past five years, driven largely by AIKCU institutions.

- Public universities saw total doctoral degrees decline slightly (**0.5%**) over the previous year, but they have increased **11.8%** over the past five years.
- AIKCU institutions increased doctoral degrees by **16.0%** over the past year and **133.5%** over the past five years.

Doctoral degrees require advanced work beyond the master's level. CPE recognizes four classifications for doctoral degrees (doctor's degree, completed all coursework and dissertation; doctor's degree, completed all coursework but working on dissertation; doctor's degree, professional practice; and all other doctor's degrees that are not research/scholarship or professional practice degrees).

Figure 7. Total postgraduate certificates awarded by sector

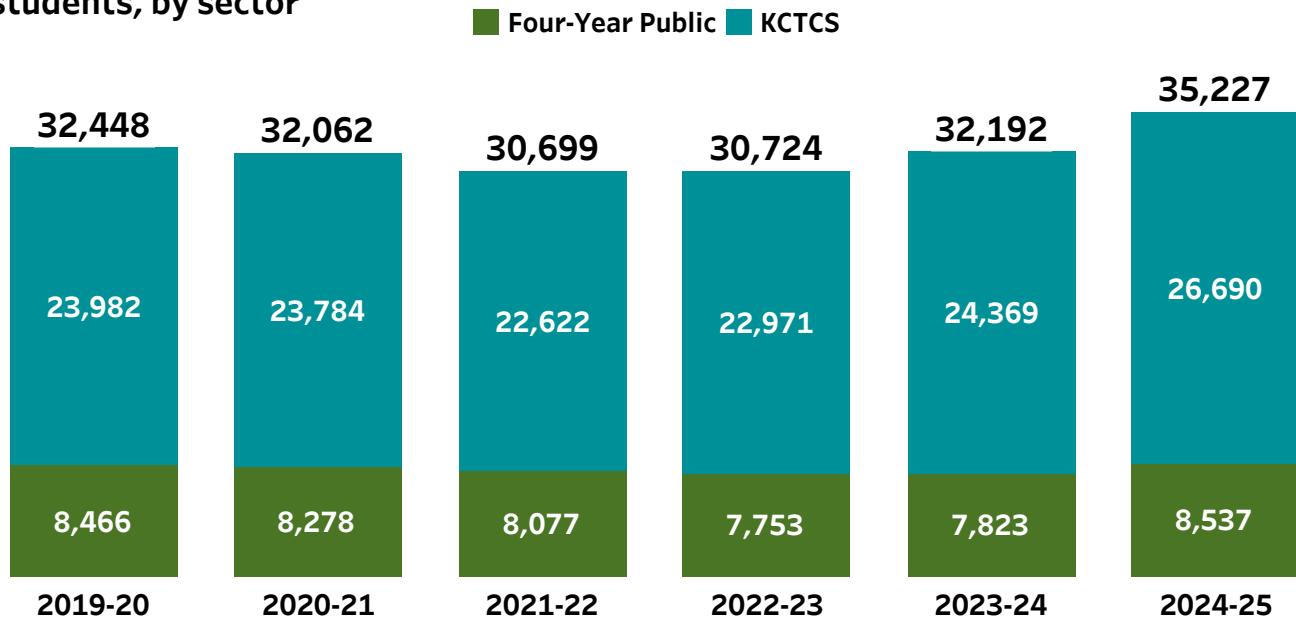


Total postgraduate certificates increased to **2,025**, rising **5.2%** over last year and **162.6%** over the past five years.

- Public universities awarded **1,991** postgraduate certificates in 2024-2025, up **207** from the prior year (an **11.6%** increase) and **1,262** since 2019-2020 (a **173.1%** increase).
- Over the last five years, AIKCU institutions awarded a high of **140** postgraduate certificates (in 2023-2024) and a low of **34** in 2024-2025.

Postgraduate certificates are shorter than a master's degree (about one-third of the credits) and focus on specific subjects. They are ideal for professional development, providing an opportunity for advanced learning without a dissertation. Nearly all postgraduate certificates are awarded by public universities.

Figure 8. Total undergraduate degrees and credentials awarded to low-income students, by sector

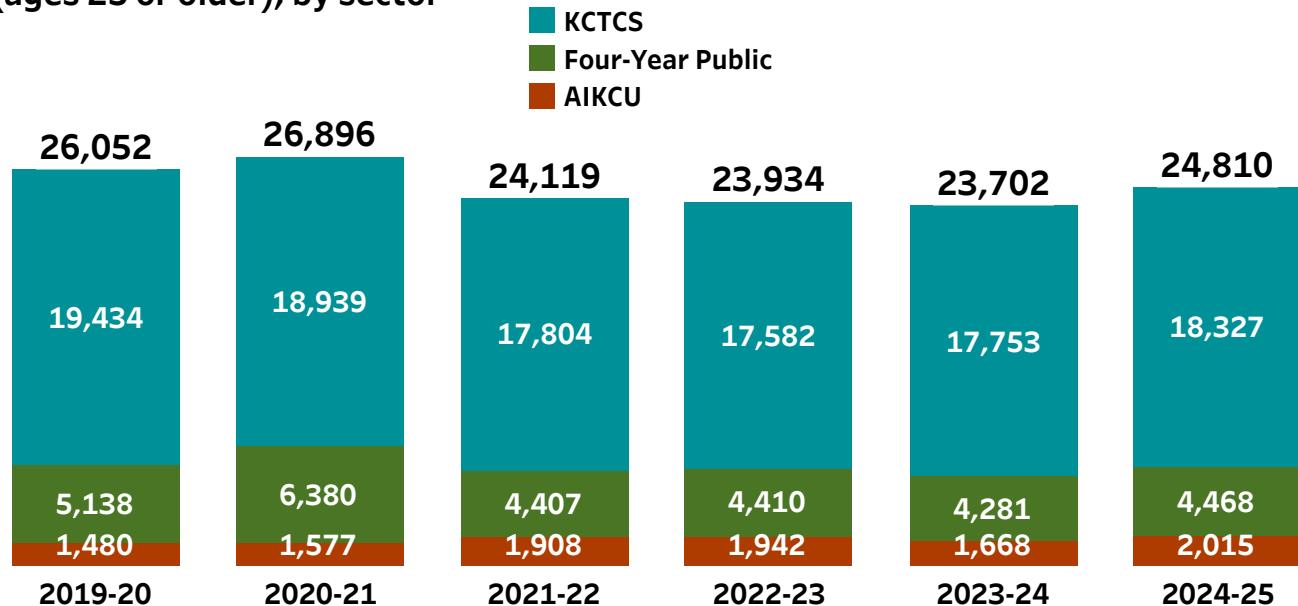


Total undergraduate degrees and credentials awarded to **low-income students** rose to **35,227**, a one-year increase of **9.4%** and an **8.6%** increase over the past five years.

- At KCTCS, low-income degrees and credentials increased **9.5%** over the previous year and **11.3%** over the past five years.
- At public universities, low-income degrees and credentials increased **9.1%** over the previous year and **0.8%** over the past five years.
- **Note:** CPE does not collect financial aid information for graduate students or any students attending AIKCU institutions.

A **low-income student** is one who received a federal Pell grant at any point during their enrollment. Pell grant eligibility is determined by financial need and considers factors such as family income and size. CPE monitors educational outcomes for low-income students to ensure higher education is accessible and affordable for our most vulnerable populations.

Figure 9. Total undergraduate degrees and credentials awarded to adult students (ages 25 or older), by sector



Total undergraduate degrees/credentials awarded to **adult learners (ages 25 or older)** declined for nearly two decades before reversing course in 2022-2023. Awards reached **24,810** in 2024-2025, a **4.7%** increase over last year but **4.8%** less than five years ago.

- Degrees/credentials awarded to adults by KCTCS increased **3.2%** over the previous year but are still down **5.7%** compared to five years ago.
- Degrees/credentials awarded to adults by public universities increased **4.4%** over the previous year but are still down **13.0%** compared to five years ago.
- Degrees/credentials awarded to adults by AIKCU institutions increased **20.8%** over the previous year and **36.1%** over the past five years.

Thousands of **working-age adult** Kentuckians have some college credit but no postsecondary degree or credential. Increasing the educational level of our adult workforce helps individuals remain competitive in an economy where 60% of all jobs require education and training beyond high school.

About the Council

The Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is Kentucky's higher education coordinating agency and is committed to strengthening Kentucky's workforce, economy, and quality of life. The Council achieves this by guiding the continuous improvement and efficient operation of a high-quality, diverse, and accessible system of postsecondary education.

Key responsibilities include:

- Implementing a strategic agenda for higher education with progress measures.
- Submitting a biennial budget request for public funding of higher education.
- Determining tuition rates and admission criteria at public postsecondary institutions.
- Collecting and distributing data about postsecondary performance.
- Ensuring the coordination and connectivity of technology among public institutions.
- Licensing non-public postsecondary institutions to operate in the Commonwealth.



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