

The Power of Post-secondary Education*

The evidence is in: Post-secondary education packs a powerful punch.

Few policy areas can claim such singular consensus. Higher education is the key to economic security for both individuals and nations. There is a strong link between educational and skill attainment, and income and economic security.

The benefits for individuals are clear. Over the past 15 years, the unemployment rate for Canadians with less than high school completion was almost double the rate of those with a university degree.

Since 1980, the earnings of post-secondary graduates have grown, while the wages of those with high school or less generally have not. Not surprisingly, the

poverty rate is twice as high for families headed by someone without a university degree compared to those with this credential.

Nearly two-thirds of job openings over the next decade will require some form of advanced education. Only six percent of positions will be available to workers with less than high school.

Young adults who do not pursue post-secondary education are more likely to experience low income, unemployment, poor health and less job satisfaction than those who seek skills upgrading and higher education.

But the benefits of post-secondary education go beyond employment and wage

* This series of five commentaries on post-secondary education derives from an in-depth study entitled *Student Aid Meets Social Assistance*. Relevant statistics and references are available in the full report and core references cited here.

outcomes. It has become an important determinant of social well-being.

Individuals with higher education report better health. Evidence from the United States suggests that advance educational can reduce arrest rates, incarceration and self-reported crime.

In 2006, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development noted that the percentage of people claiming positive life satisfaction and of individuals contributing to charities rises with educational level.

Post-secondary education is vital not just for individual success. It is linked to positive societal outcomes – including higher productivity, innovation and economic growth as well as stronger communities with more civic engagement and social cohesion.

Canada's prosperity in an increasingly competitive world rests on our ability to invest in new technologies and to continually upgrade the capacity of the labour force. Fostering higher levels of knowledge and skill contributes immeasurably to an innovative economy.

While knowledge has become a primary driver of financial security and economic growth, not all Canadians have equal access to this stepping-stone to prosperity.

Several groups, notably aboriginals, persons with disabilities and youth from lower-income households, are under-represented in post-secondary education. Their lack of personal opportunity represents a loss of national prosperity.

The obstacles they face are considered in the associated commentary *Barriers to Post-Secondary Education*.

Sherri Torjman

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401-1390 Prince of Wales Drive
Ottawa, ON K2C 3N6
CANADA

Tel/Fax: (613) 729-3340

E-mail: caledon@caledoninst.org
Website: www.caledoninst.org