

# We're staying in school: census

More Quebecers are completing university – and it translates into better lifetime earnings

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THE GAZETTE

Get an education. It's a rant that students hear from parents, teachers and employers, and one

that more and more Canadians – Quebec high school students, especially – are taking seriously.

Three-quarters of working-age Quebecers had earned at least a high school education in 2001,

compared with only 66 per cent in 1991, says a Statistics Canada report issued yesterday. And more Quebecers now hold a university degree (22 per cent, compared with 16 per cent in 1991).

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## Census | Despite better education, we're just keeping up with inflation

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But the brain-ing-up of Quebec – part of a Canada-wide surge in higher education and, correspondingly, high-paying jobs – has had little impact on average earnings in the province.

Full-time workers in Quebec have only slightly more pocket money to spend than they did a decade ago. Salaries still haven't returned to the pre-recession levels of 1980 (taking inflation into account). The average worker earned \$39,150 in 2000 – up 1.5 per cent from 1990 – but still lagging about \$600 behind the average wage in 1980.

That means Quebec is keeping pace with inflation – but just, says Mikal Skuterud of Statistics Canada.

The same is true for most of Canada, he added. Only Ontario has taken a leap ahead in average salaries since 1980.

"The big difference is the number of workers with six-figure earnings," he said, noting that Ontario had almost twice as many \$100,000-plus earners as Quebec in 2000.

Who is making the big bucks?

Among men, senior managers, lawyers, Quebec notaries and physicians; the top female wage earners are lawyers, notaries, physicians and senior managers.

That makes a university degree a great investment, says Philip Merrigan, professor of labour economics at Université du Québec à Montréal.

One or two years more schooling can add several thousand dollars in annual income, he said. "Since people are living longer, that makes it even cheaper to get a higher diploma."

A 26-year-old student with a master's degree in economics can expect to earn \$40,000-\$45,000, compared with about \$28,000 for someone with a BA, Merrigan said. That's over \$10,000 a year more for two year's extra study.

But high earners account for

less than two per cent of Quebec's working-age population (three per cent nationwide).

Almost one in five full-time workers in Quebec earns less than \$20,000 (half of them women); the majority of low-earners have less than high-school education.

"It's very difficult for people with low education to get ahead today," Merrigan noted.

Among the reasons:

✦ High-paying manufacturing

jobs for labourers have dried up.

✦ Many low-wage jobs have moved out of Canada.

✦ New immigrants seeking entry-level jobs keep wages low.

✦ Computer-driven occupations that didn't exist 20 years ago require higher education.

"I can't stress enough the importance of a university education," Merrigan said. "I tell my students, 'It's cheap – just do it.'"

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### AVERAGE EARNINGS OF FULL-TIME WORKERS\*

	1980	1990	2000	% change
Canada	40,943	41,013	43,231	5.4
Newfoundland & Labrador	37,082	37,703	37,806	0.3
Prince Edward Island	32,575	34,812	33,381	-4.1
Nova Scotia	35,892	37,518	37,800	0.8
New Brunswick	35,705	36,828	35,982	-2.3
<b>Quebec</b>	<b>39,726</b>	<b>38,569</b>	<b>39,150</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Ontario	41,103	43,831	47,247	7.8
Manitoba	36,888	36,017	36,549	1.5
Saskatchewan	38,901	33,901	35,252	4.0
Alberta	44,659	40,540	44,080	8.7
British Columbia	45,389	42,439	44,231	4.2
Yukon	48,672	45,359	44,605	1.7
Northwest Territories	...	...	51,823	...
Nunavut	...	...	48,017	...

\* Before taxes. Dollar figures are adjusted for inflation

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA

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