

# After high school...

Jeffrey Frank

Changing labour market conditions have affected workers of all ages and education levels, but particularly young people. The job market in Canada has become increasingly competitive. Finding and retaining satisfactory work requires not just a basic education, but also the right combination of training, skills, initiative and good work habits. High school graduation by itself no longer guarantees a job; further education or training beyond high school offers definite advantages and is usually required today for most better jobs.

This article, which previews the findings of the 1995 School Leavers Follow-up Survey, provides information about the education, training and labour market experiences of young people during the first few years after leaving or graduating from high school. A comprehensive report on young people's school-work transitions based on both the initial and the follow-up survey (see *About the surveys*) is expected later this year.

## High school leaver rates lower in 1995

According to the 1991 School Leavers Survey, 18% of 20 year-olds had left high school before graduation. (A substantial proportion of 18 and 19 year-olds were still in high school.) Data from the 1995 School Leavers Follow-up Survey indicate that by the time these same people were 24, their high school leaver rate had fallen to 15% (Table 1). Finishing high school is a longer process for some than for others.

*Adapted from After High School, The First Years: The First Report of the School Leavers Follow-up Survey, 1995. Jeffrey Frank is with the Centre for Education Statistics. He can be reached at (613) 951-1504, or franjef@statcan.ca.*

## About the surveys

The primary objectives of the 1991 School Leavers Survey (SLS) were to establish high school leaving rates and to compare secondary school students who had successfully completed high school (**graduates**) with those who were still attending (**continuers**) and those who had left school before graduating (**leavers**). The SLS was conducted between April and June 1991. The 1995 School Leavers Follow-up Survey (SLF), conducted between September and December 1995, gathered information on school-work transitions of these young adults by focusing on education and work activities beyond high school. Human Resources Development Canada commissioned Statistics Canada to conduct both surveys.

The SLS target population consisted of youths aged 18 to 20 (as of April 1, 1991) from the 10 provinces. They were contacted four years later for the SLF, by which time they would likely have had one or more jobs. In addition, most continuers in 1991 would be graduates or leavers by 1995, allowing a more in-depth labour market analysis.

The SLS sampling frame was formed from five years (1986 to 1990) of Family Allowance (FA) files. The FA files were believed to provide the most complete listing of young persons under 15 in Canada available at the time of the survey. These files provided indicators used to create a derived variable, "payment status," that could identify potential leavers – youths for whom FA payments had stopped because they had left the household or had become employed and would thus be at higher risk of leaving school. The frame was stratified using province of residence, age and payment status (the latter to help ensure an adequate number of leavers for analysis).

In 1991, 63% of youths aged 18 to 20 were high school graduates, 16% were school leavers, and 21% were high school continuers. By 1995, 85% of these same young people had

The SLS sample consisted of 18,000 individuals from the 10 provinces who were selected using the stratified design described above. The sample was selected to provide national and provincial leaver rates for 20 year-olds with a maximum coefficient of variation (CV) no greater than 16.5%, and to allow estimation of some characteristics for continuers, leavers and graduates, each considered separately, with a CV no greater than 16.5%. (This level of relative precision was also obtained for other estimates. For some estimates, however, CVs fall into the 16.6% to 33.3% range. Such estimates are reliable enough for some purposes, but should be used with caution. Those with CVs above 33.3% are not published.) The SLF sample consisted of individuals who had responded to the SLS (with very few exceptions, noted below).

Both surveys were conducted by telephone using a computer-assisted telephone interviewing system. SLS respondents were asked to provide contact information for a follow-up. Interviewers confirmed certain respondent information from the SLS before beginning the SLF interview.

Of the 18,000 individuals in the SLS sample, 9,460 provided completed interviews. Of these, 11 preferred not to participate in further surveys, and 18 participated in a pre-test for the SLF. These individuals were excluded from the SLF, leaving a sample of 9,431. Of these, 6,284 responded (including agreement for data sharing). In both surveys, an adjustment for non-response was included in the weighting procedures.

graduated and 14% were school leavers. In absolute numbers, over 160,000 youths aged 22 to 24 in 1995 had left high school without completing their diploma. Less than 1% of

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those aged 22 to 24 were attending high school in 1995.<sup>1</sup>

Among high school leavers in 1991, 25% had returned to high school and obtained their diploma by 1995. In addition, 88% of those who were continuers in 1991 had graduated by 1995 (Chart).

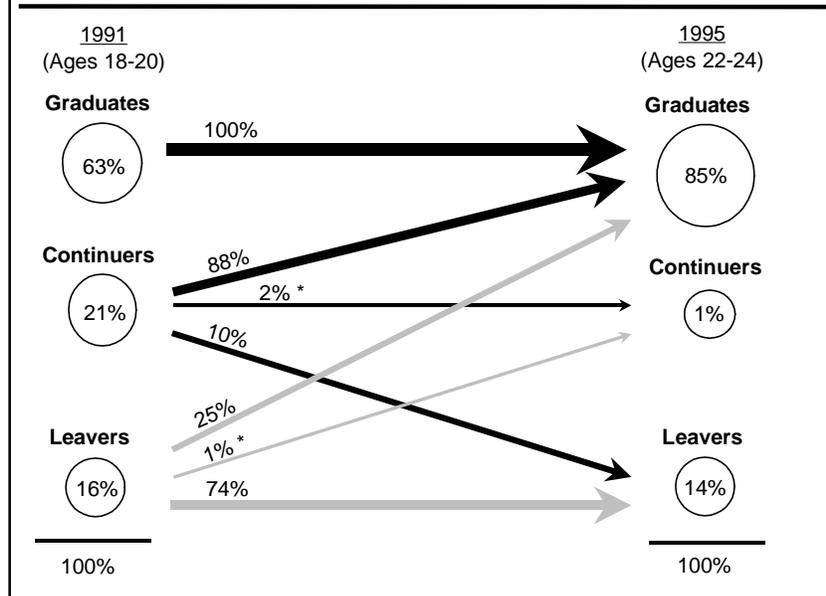
### Young women more likely to finish school

Among women aged 22 to 24, 89% had completed high school by 1995, while 10% were high school leavers. In comparison, 81% of young men had graduated by 1995 and 18% were leavers. Men accounted for nearly two-thirds of those who had left high school by then. This pattern – where smaller proportions of men than women were high school graduates – was evident in every province (Table 2).

### Graduates pursue further education

Four out of five youths who were high school graduates in 1995 went on to postsecondary education or training toward a certificate, diploma or degree (Table 3). In contrast, just one in four high school leavers had done so. Some leavers may have decided not to enrol for a variety of reasons (for instance, lack of money,

**Chart**  
**Most 1991 continuers went on to graduate from high school, as did one-quarter of the leavers.**



Sources: School Leavers Survey, 1991 and School Leavers Follow-up Survey, 1995  
\* Because of high sampling variability, data should be interpreted with caution.

family responsibilities, time constraints), while many others may have been unable to because they lacked required credentials.

Among high school graduates, a larger proportion of women than men had continued their education (83% versus 77%). Among leavers, how-

ever, men were somewhat more likely than women to have taken further education or training.

Some 42% of high school graduates reported university as their highest level of further education toward a certificate, diploma or degree. Women were somewhat more likely than men to have done so (Table 4).

Three in ten high school graduates reported education or training at a college or CEGEP as their highest level of additional schooling. Proportions for men and women were similar.

Just 7% of graduates enrolled in a trade or vocational school, or a registered apprenticeship program for their highest level of further training. Male graduates were slightly more likely than their female counterparts to have made this choice.

Finally, as their highest level of postsecondary education to date, some 2% of high school graduates had worked toward certification in a program offered by a private business

**Table 1**  
**High school leaver rates for those aged 20 in 1991 and 24 in 1995**

	1991 (Aged 20)	1995 (Aged 24)
	%	
<b>Canada</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>
Newfoundland	24	19
Prince Edward Island	25	21
Nova Scotia	22	17
New Brunswick	20	16
Quebec	22	19
Ontario	17	14
Manitoba	19	14
Saskatchewan	16	11
Alberta	14	11
British Columbia	16	13

Sources: School Leavers Survey, 1991; School Leavers Follow-up Survey, 1995

Table 2  
High school status of youths aged 22 to 24, by sex and province

	High school graduates			High school leavers		
	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women
	%					
<b>Canada</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>10</b>
Newfoundland	79	76	82	20	22	17
Prince Edward Island	80	75	85	19	23	15
Nova Scotia	85	81	88	15	19	12 *
New Brunswick	86	80	91	12	17	8 *
Quebec	81	76	86	18	21	14
Ontario	88	84	92	12	16	7
Manitoba	84	78	91	16	22	9 *
Saskatchewan	87	84	91	12	16	9 *
Alberta	86	81	91	14	19	8
British Columbia	86	85	88	14	15	12

Source: School Leavers Follow-up Survey, 1995

\* Because of high sampling variability, data should be interpreted with caution.

or commercial school, for example, or by a professional association (such as accounting, banking or insurance).

### Some leavers take further training

Among high school leavers in 1995, 12% reported, as their highest level of formal education or training, attendance at a trade or vocational school, or registration in an apprenticeship program. Further education of this type was most common among young men who had left high school. In addition, under 10% of high school leavers reported further education or training at a college or CEGEP as their highest schooling since leaving.

### Women's participation lower than men's...

Among high school graduates who had taken further education or training, labour force participation was about the same for men and women (84%). For graduates without further education or training, however, participation was much higher among men (92%) than among women (77%) (Table 5). Family responsibilities may have kept some of these young women out of the labour force.

The gap was greater among high school leavers: 91% of men versus 63% of women were labour force participants. Family responsibilities were likely an even greater factor for women's participation rate in this case (Gilbert and Orok, 1993).

### but high school diploma helps

High school graduates with some further education or training had the lowest unemployment rates: 11% for men and 10% for women. Unemployment rates for graduates without further education or training were somewhat higher.

Among school leavers, unemployment rates were higher and differences between the sexes more marked. Fully 30% of young women were unemployed, compared with 17% of men. Leaving high school before graduation appears to have especially serious consequences for young women.

### Full-time work common

In the week before the survey, high school graduates with no further education or training were most likely to have been working full time (64%). In comparison, 57% of high school leavers and 53% of high school graduates with further education or training were working full time (Table 5).

Table 3  
Proportion of youths aged 22 to 24 with further education or training, by high school status, sex and province

	High school graduates			High school leavers		
	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women
	%					
<b>Canada</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20 *</b>
Newfoundland	77	76	78	38 *	43 *	32 *
Prince Edward Island	77	69	83	28 *	30 *	‡
Nova Scotia	78	76	82	23 *	24 *	‡
New Brunswick	67	65	69	14 *	16 *	‡
Quebec	83	75	90	17 *	‡	‡
Ontario	83	82	84	27 *	31 *	‡
Manitoba	71	67	73	15 *	20 *	3 *
Saskatchewan	81	78	84	‡	‡	‡
Alberta	75	75	75	28 *	33 *	‡
British Columbia	75	71	78	35 *	42 *	‡

Source: School Leavers Follow-up Survey, 1995

Note: Table refers to further education or training toward a certificate, diploma or degree beyond high school.

\* Because of high sampling variability, data should be interpreted with caution.

‡ Data not reliable enough to publish.

**Table 4**  
**Highest level of further education or training for youths aged 22 to 24, by high school status and sex**

	High school graduates			High school leavers		
	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women
	%					
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
University	42	39	45	†	†	†
College/CEGEP **	29	28	30	8 *	8 *	†
Trade/vocational or registered apprenticeship **	7	8	5	12	15 *	†
Other education or training †	2	2 *	3 *	†	†	†
Total with further education or training	80	77	83	24	26	20 *
No further education or training	20	23	17	76	74	80

Source: School Leavers Follow-up Survey, 1995

Notes: Table refers to further education or training toward a certificate, diploma or degree beyond high school. People are classified according to their highest level of education.

Because of rounding, totals may not add to 100%.

\* Because of high sampling variability, data should be interpreted with caution.

\*\* College/CEGEP and trade/vocational or registered apprenticeship sometimes overlap. Respondents may have mentioned either category for certain programs.

† Includes further education or training toward private business school or commercial school diplomas or certificates; and diplomas, certificates or licences from professional associations (for example, accounting, banking and insurance).

‡ Data not reliable enough to publish.

The lower rate of full-time work among graduates with further education or training is not surprising, as many of these graduates were involved in education or training activities at the time of the survey. In fact, 15% of this group reported only education or training activities in the week before the survey, and another 24% were combining various forms of school and work.

As was the case in the rest of the labour force, part-time work was more common among women than men. Among graduates with further education or training, 24% of women reported having part-time jobs as did 20% of men. Again, this was not unexpected, as they were most likely to be involved with their studies in the week before the survey.

Among high school graduates with no further education or training, 13% of women and 7% of men were working part time. Similarly, 11% of female and 5% of male high school leavers had part-time jobs.

### Education and training important to many youths

Young people are keenly aware of the importance of education and training in the current labour market. In 1995, about 8 out of 10 youths intended to take further education, training or instruction<sup>2</sup> over the next five years. High school graduates who had already worked toward a certificate, diploma or degree were most likely to consider further schooling (88%) (Table 6). This was not surprising, since this group included those already enrolled in such programs.

In comparison, 76% of graduates with no further education or training and 72% of high school leavers planned to continue their studies sometime over the next five years. Further schooling did not figure into the futures of 10% of high school graduates who had already taken some further education or training, 19% of those who had not done so, or 23% of those without a high school diploma.

### What will they be doing in 2000?

The young people surveyed were also asked what they expected their main activities to be in five years. (Multiple responses were allowed.) The vast majority (92% of high school graduates with further education or training, 84% of those without, and 84% of high school leavers) expected to be working at a job or business. Among graduates as well as leavers, larger proportions of men than women expected to be working five years later (Table 6).

Proportionately more high school leavers (17%) and graduates without further education or training (16%) reported going to school as one of their main future activities, compared with 12% of graduates with further education or training. Young women who had left high school were more likely than their male counterparts to foresee a return to school in five years. Generally, few leavers or graduates, with or without further education or training, saw themselves both working and going to school.

Another commonly reported future activity was handling family or household responsibilities. Not surprisingly, women were much more likely than men to see this as a main activity in five years' time. Young women who had left high school without graduating (39%) and those who had graduated but not gone further (37%) were especially likely to mention this activity, compared with

**Table 5**  
**Labour force indicators (in the week before the survey) for youths aged 22 to 24, by high school status and sex**

	High school graduates (with further education or training)			High school graduates (no further education or training)			High school leavers		
	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women
	%								
Labour force participation rate	84.1	84.4	83.9	85.4	92.0	77.0	80.7	90.6	62.9
Unemployment rate	10.8	11.3	10.4	12.9	14.1 *	11.2 *	20.9	17.3	30.2
Full-time work	52.8	54.8	51.2	64.4	71.9	54.9	56.6	69.8	32.7
Part-time work	22.0	20.1	23.7	9.6	7.1	12.8	7.2	5.1	11.1

Source: School Leavers Follow-up Survey, 1995

Note: Table refers to further education or training toward a certificate, diploma or degree beyond high school.

\* Because of high sampling variability, data should be interpreted with caution.

**Table 6**  
**Plans and expectations of youths aged 22 to 24, by high school status and sex**

	High school graduates (with further education or training)			High school graduates (no further education or training)			High school leavers		
	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women	Both sexes	Men	Women
	%								
<b>Future education (over next five years)</b>									
Planning to take further education, training or other instruction **	88	88	87	76	75	79	72	73	70
No plans for further education or training	10	10	10	19	20	18	23	23	22
Don't know	2 *	2 *	3 *	4 *	5 *	3 *	5 *	4 *	7 *
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>Expected main activities † (in five years)</b>									
Working	92	95	90	84	90	77	84	88	75
Going to school	12	10	12	16	14	19	17	14 *	22
Working and going to school	7	7	8	9	7 *	12 *	10 *	9	11 *
Family responsibilities	18	11	24	26	17	37	28	21	39
Doing something else	1 *	2 *	1 *	2 *	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡

Source: School Leavers Follow-up Survey, 1995

Notes: Table refers to further education or training toward a certificate, diploma or degree beyond high school.

Because of rounding, totals may not add to 100%.

\* Because of high sampling variability, data should be interpreted with caution.

\*\* The question about future education plans asked, "Do you plan to take any further education or training such as courses, workshops, seminars and tutorials?"

† Multiple responses were allowed.

‡ Data not reliable enough to publish.

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24% of women who had graduated from high school and taken further education or training. In contrast, only 21% of male leavers, 17% of male graduates without further education or training, and 11% of male graduates with such training expected family responsibilities to be one of their main future activities.

### Further analysis

The combination of findings from the 1991 School Leavers Survey and the 1995 School Leavers Follow-up Survey should provide a rich database for further research on the school-work transitions of young people. A public use microdata file is now available. In addition, a volume of comprehensive analyses based on the two surveys will be released later this year. □

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### ■ Notes

1 These high school continuers are not included in the remainder of this analysis. Because of the small numbers involved, estimates of the characteristics and activities of high school continuers have unacceptably high sampling variability.

2 The question about plans for the next five years covered a fairly broad range of activities outside postsecondary education or training toward a certificate, diploma or degree; these include programs, courses, workshops and tutorials.

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