

Stakeholder Summary

More than money: The social impacts of higher education

Economic benefits have long been a staple in the on-going debate about the value of higher education. A new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) steps away from the market place to examine individual social returns -- from civic engagement to happiness.

Social returns: Assessing the benefits of higher education is the second HEQCO report to specifically consider the social impacts of postsecondary education. The report notes that those with some form of higher education are more likely to reap social returns than those with only a high school diploma.

Project description

Based on a synthesis of new and existing analyses, the report explores the benefits of education at the individual level, focusing on civic engagement; health/happiness; crime; and welfare/unemployment.

Findings

While no *consistent* pattern was found between level of postsecondary education and the social returns studied, the study generally found a clear dividing line between secondary and postsecondary education.

Overall, research suggests that individuals who have been to college or university are more likely to volunteer, donate money and vote, have lower unemployment rates and are less likely to require social assistance.

Educated individuals are less likely to be incarcerated. Those with more education have lower unemployment rates and fared better during the most recent economic recession. They were less likely to require social assistance and had shorter welfare spells, especially for women.

In terms of civic engagement, university graduates are more likely than high school graduates to volunteer and donate money. Higher levels of education also increase the likelihood of voting and other forms of political participation. University graduates tend to rate their physical and mental health higher than those with fewer years of education and are also less likely to smoke. Happiness and life satisfaction also tend to increase with education.

HEQCO's [first report](#) on Ontario postsecondary performance indicators, published in April 2013, also examined the social impact of higher education, noting that educated Ontarians (and their fellow Canadians) are more likely to be civically engaged and satisfied with their lives than citizens of other OECD nations.

Author of *Social returns: Assessing the benefits of higher education* is HEQCO researcher Lindsay DeClou.