

MARITIME PROVINCES HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION
Will fewer Maritimers be heading to university over the next decade?

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For immediate release

(Fredericton, NB) - Fewer Maritimers have been enrolling in the region's universities in recent years, largely the result of flattening demand after the peak in 2004, reveals a report released today by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission.

The study shows that demand for university education among Maritimers has been quite variable over the long term – there were steep increases in the late '80s, followed by a plateau through much of the '90s, and a period of growth again in the early 2000s.

Of the three provinces, Nova Scotia has had the largest drop in demand. Between 2002 and today, the number of Nova Scotians studying in the province, relative to the size of the provincial population aged 18-24, declined four percentage points to 21.0 per cent. It remains the highest in the region. By comparison, the demand in Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick peaked around 2005 and has since declined about one percentage point in each province, to 18.0 and 18.6 per cent, respectively.

"Since 2004, we have seen demand soften. The question is, are we looking at part of a recurring cycle, or is there a new trend underway?" said Mireille Duguay, CEO of the commission. The Commission is working on determining the reasons that might be behind the decreasing demand for university education amongst Maritimers.

Ms Duguay said, "It is important to share this information now, even though we may not have a complete sense of why demand among Maritimers has stopped growing."

Ms Duguay added that the region is facing a projected decline in its population. "The data tell us that, if uncorrected, the shift in demand will compound the effect of the demographic decline, leading to even fewer Maritimers entering university," explained Ms. Duguay. The paper projects nearly 7,000 fewer Maritimers enrolling in the region's universities in 2025 if demand remains at the same level as today.

Are Maritimers just going to university somewhere else? "If we look at the number of Maritimers enrolling in university anywhere in Canada, we also see evidence of a declining demand," said Ms. Duguay. The decrease in demand across the country ranged between one percentage point for New Brunswickers and three percentage points for Nova Scotians, since the peak around 2005.

"We have been hearing that job growth in Canada will be concentrated in those areas where a postsecondary credential will be required. Declining demand for university education among Maritimers is surprising at a time when earning a degree is seen as a key to being competitive in the job market," said Ms. Duguay.

The paper notes that to date, the declining demand among Maritimers has not meant declining enrolments in Maritime universities. Enrolments have remained fairly stable in recent years through the recruitment of students from outside the region.

In 2010-11, 17,527 students from outside the Maritimes were enrolled full-time in the region's universities, representing 30% of total full-time enrolment.

The commission welcomes discussion of the paper's findings and its implications.

The report, *Is Demand for University Education Shrinking Among Maritimers?*, is available at www.mphec.ca.

The Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission was established in 1974 to help institutions and governments enhance the post-secondary learning environment. The commission's 20 members are drawn from the Maritime provinces, and represent higher education institutions, provincial governments and the general public.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

A report released today (February 7th) by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission shows fewer Maritime students have been enrolling in the region's universities compared with the peak reached in 2004.

Commission CEO Mireille Duguay says the study shows that the demand for university education among Maritimers has been quite variable over the long term with steep increases in the late '80s, followed by a plateau through much of the '90s. Since then, she says, demand has softened, a surprising trend at a time when earning a degree is seen as a key to being competitive in the job market," said Ms. Duguay.

Of the three provinces, Nova Scotia has had the largest drop in demand, declining four percentage points to 21 per cent but is still the highest in the region.

Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick have declined about one percentage point to 18 and 18-point-6 per cent, respectively.

The region faces a decline in the 18-24 age group over the next 13 years meaning that unless demand picks up there could be nearly 7,000 fewer Maritimers enrolled in universities in the region in 2025.

The report, *Is Demand for University Education Shrinking Among Maritimers?*, is available at www.mphec.ca.

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