

**Gains Made by Inuit in Formal Education and School Attendance,
1981-2001**

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
and
Research and Analysis Directorate

Research Project Manager: Sacha Sénécal,
Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

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The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of
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1. Background

This report is the third in a series that looks at some of the social, demographic and economic changes experienced by Inuit in Canada over the past 20 years. Based on census information, it provides knowledge on educational accomplishments¹ from 1981-2001 for those with Inuit ancestry.² The focus is on changes in level of school success and full and part-time attendance. Progress over time for Inuit living in the north and south of Canada is examined and comparisons are made to the non-Inuit population where appropriate.

The ***Inuit ancestry population*** includes those whose ancestors were all Inuit and those who reported having Inuit and non-Inuit ancestors on the census.

This report is based on research initially carried out by Jeremy Hull (2002) and has been developed by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami in collaboration with the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate (SRAD) of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

¹ The focus of this report is formal education that takes place within the school system. Among Inuit, much learning takes place in informal settings such as on the land or through discussions with elders. While the importance of this type of learning cannot be overstated, it is not at the centre of this data-based report.

² There are many ways to define the Inuit population. For this report and for others in this series, the focus is on those with Inuit ancestry. Another way to define the population is by focussing on those whose ancestors were all Inuit (no non-Inuit ancestors). There are important differences between these two populations. For further information, please see the report in this series entitled "Determining the Inuit Population: Definitional Issues and Differences" (INAC, 2006). The Inuit identity definition is not used, as data for the identity concept were not available from the census until 1996. The counts in this report exclude institutional residents.

2. Highest Level of Schooling

Highest level of schooling refers to the highest grade or year of elementary or secondary (high) school attended, or to the highest year of university or college education completed. It assumes that any type of trades, college or post-secondary education is more advanced than high school completion and that any university education is more advanced than any college or trades education. In this report, the following categories are used:

Less than grade 9
Incomplete high school
High school certificate
Incomplete post-secondary
Completed trades
Completed college
Completed university

Source: Statistics Canada, 2002a.

Table 1 shows information on changes in levels of formal education over time for Inuit and non-Inuit aged 15 and over.³ From the information, it is clear that Inuit have made educational gains at many levels over the 20-year period. The proportion with less than grade 9 fell from 61% in 1981 to 24% in 2001. At the post-secondary level (which includes completed college, trades and university), there was an increase, from 10% to 24%. For Inuit, post-secondary progress was especially rapid at the college and trades levels. The percentage of Inuit with a trades certificate nearly doubled over the 20-year period, increasing from 6% in 1981 to 11% in 2001, while the percentage of those with a college diploma jumped from 2% to 10%.

³ When interpreting the data provided in this report, it is important to remember that the age distributions of the Inuit and non-Inuit populations are very different. The Inuit population is much younger, with 10.2% of the population aged 15-19 and 8.1% aged 20-24, versus 6.9% and 6.5% respectively for the non-Inuit population. This data is based on the 2001 Census.

Table 1
Highest Level of Schooling of Inuit and Non-Inuit Aged 15 and Over, Canada, 1981-2001

Highest Level of Schooling*	Total with Inuit Ancestry					No Inuit Ancestry				
	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001
	Percentage									
Less than grade 9	60.5	49.8	33.3	28.8	23.5	20.0	17.2	13.9	12.0	9.8
Incomplete high school	20.1	25.2	24.0	27.9	29.3	27.9	27.1	24.3	22.7	21.4
High school certificate	3.2	5.1	6.9	6.5	7.3	13.0	12.8	14.8	14.3	14.1
Incomplete post-secondary	6.3	8.6	13.8	14.8	15.6	14.0	15.7	15.9	16.2	16.8
Completed post-secondary										
Completed trades	6.0	6.2	11.5	11.1	11.4	9.9	9.3	10.3	9.9	10.2
Completed college	2.2	3.7	6.9	8.5	9.7	7.2	8.3	9.4	11.5	12.2
Completed university	1.6	1.3	3.6	2.4	3.3	8.0	9.6	11.4	13.3	15.4
Total (N)	14, 500	22, 085	30, 240	29, 930	34, 765	18, 594, 785	19, 612, 015	21, 274, 455	22, 598, 995	23, 866, 595

* Note: Percentages are for the highest level of schooling completed. For example, the figures for completed high school represent those that received a high school diploma and did not go on to any post-secondary schooling. For more information, see the text box entitled "Highest Level of Schooling".

The figures for completed university education are an exception to the general pattern. Between 1981 and 2001, the percentage of Inuit with a university degree fluctuated, declining from 1981 to 1986 and again from 1991 to 1996. This could be due in part to changes in the census questions used to determine the Inuit ancestry population and more specifically, changes in the way people chose to answer them. Those changes in reporting are also likely responsible in part for jumps in the proportion of Inuit with trades, college and university diplomas and degrees from 1986 to 1991.⁴

The non-Inuit population also made gains at all levels over time and as a result, a significant gap still existed between Inuit and non-Inuit. Non-Inuit were more likely to have completed high school and post-secondary studies, although since 1991, a slightly larger proportion of Inuit had a trades certificate. In 2001, 10% of non-Inuit had less than grade 9, compared with 24% of Inuit. At the post-secondary level, 38% of non-Inuit had a college, trades or university certificate or diploma, compared with 24% of Inuit. With time, however, at most levels, the gap between these two groups has narrowed.

There are many reasons that help explain this gap and only a few are outlined here. Until the recent past, Inuit learned in an open environment, free from the confines of walls and buildings. Much learning took place on the land in an informal setting. Traditional knowledge and life skills were gained by observing the actions and listening to the words of parents, elders and other knowledgeable community members (National Inuit Youth Council, 2005). The environment in which Inuit now learn is very different. In addition, some Inuit attended residential schools where they were not allowed to speak Inuktitut or practice their traditions and where contact with their families, communities and culture was sometimes very limited. These experiences have in some cases negatively impacted the level of formal education of these people and their children (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2002).

Similarly, many of today's Inuit are exposed to a curriculum developed in the south and that may lack cultural relevance. Chronic housing shortages have resulted in crowded conditions and quiet places to study and work are often difficult to find. There are no ongoing campaigns to encourage young Inuit to stay in school, while those that wish to pursue post-secondary studies are often obliged to leave their families and communities in the north, sometimes facing communications barriers in the south (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004).

⁴ For example, on the 1991 Census form, check boxes were provided for those answering the ancestry question. An unusually large number of Ontario residents checked all boxes provided. This resulted in a large increase in the number of people reporting mixed Inuit ancestry in 1991 for that region and likely contributed to an increase in the overall percentage of Inuit with completed post-secondary schooling.

However, some positive Inuit-specific education models do exist. For example, the Kativik School Board⁵ has incorporated a balance of English and Inuktitut as “Language of Instruction” (LOI) in both primary and secondary schooling. Culturally relevant components are also included in the curriculum. Among the four main Inuit regions, the Inuktitut language is strongest in Nunavik where in 2001 95% of Inuit had Inuktitut as their mother tongue.⁶ Incorporating Inuktitut in the classroom helps ensure the strength of the language. A healthy language can also act as a tool to encourage Inuit students to continue using their mother tongue, in which they are more intellectually capable (see Kativik Initiated Research). Similarly, a virtual university is being developed for those in the Arctic in an effort to deliver post-secondary distance education (National Inuit Youth Council, 2005).

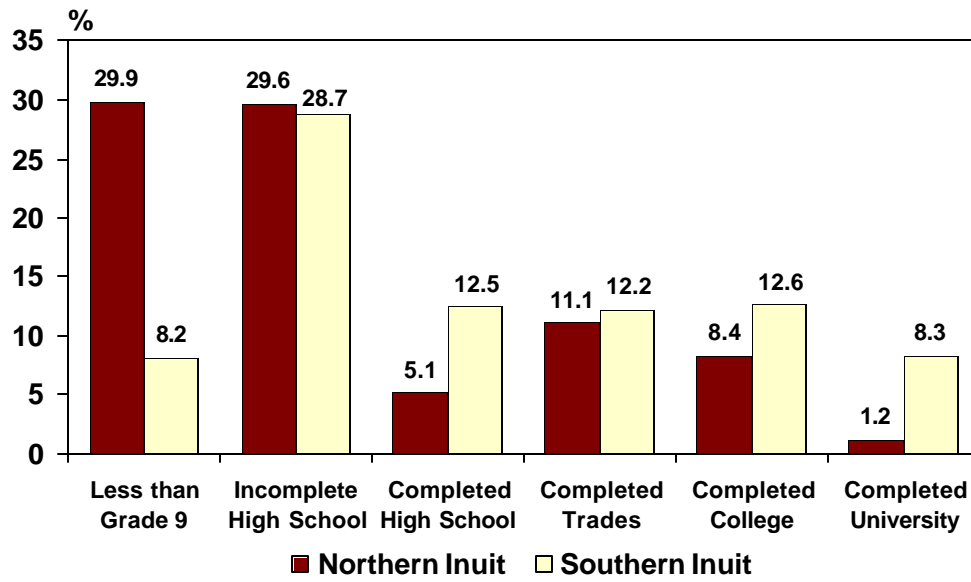
There are significant differences in the education levels of Inuit living in northern⁷ and southern Canada. According to the 2001 Census, 7 out of 10 Inuit aged 15 and over lived in the north of Canada. Figure 1 below shows differences in educational accomplishments for Inuit living in the north and south in 2001. Both northern and southern Inuit have made progress in the formal education system in the past 20 years. However, there was a smaller proportion of southern Inuit with less than grade 9, and they had higher proportions with college, trades and university diplomas and degrees. In 2001, while 30% of northern Inuit had less than a grade 9 education, the figure for southern Inuit was 8%. At the other end of the spectrum, 21% of Inuit in the north had completed post-secondary studies, compared with 33% in the south. Inuit in the south were much more likely to have a university degree than those living in the north. In 2001, 8% of southern Inuit had a degree, compared with 1% in the north. This difference can be attributed to at least two factors. Many Inuit with higher levels of formal education leave the north for better job prospects in the south. Also, many leave their home communities for post-secondary schooling, find work and do not return to the north.

⁵ The James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (Gouvernement du Québec et Hydro-Québec, 1998) created the Kativik School Board in 1975 to serve the people living in the 14 communities of Nunavik and to lead to greater Inuit control over education.

⁶ The mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2002b) is the first language learned in childhood and still understood.

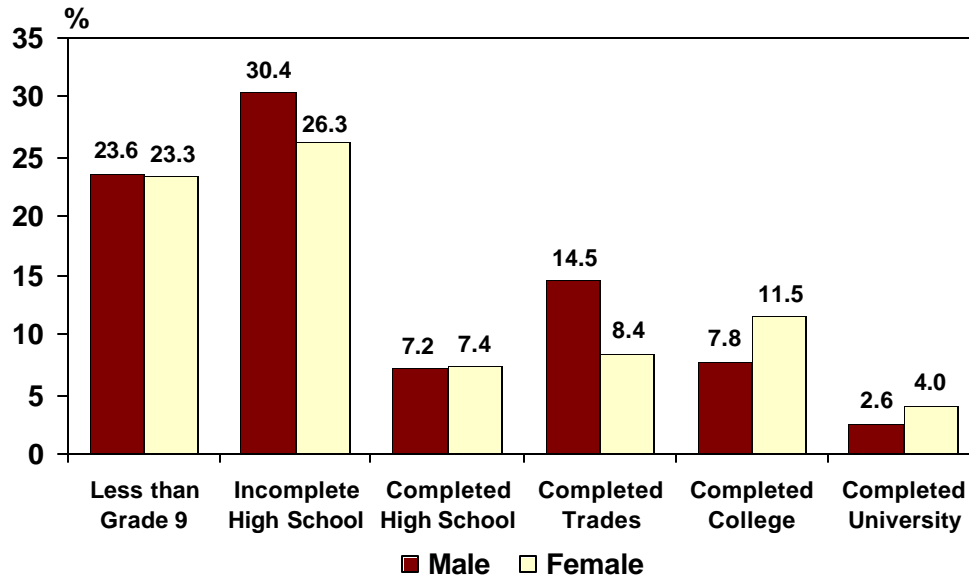
⁷ For the purpose of this report, “north” includes Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Northern Québec and Labrador. The area that remains is considered “south”. With the exception of Nunavut, the northern regions referred to here are somewhat different from those of the remaining Inuit land claim regions (Nunatsiavut in Labrador, Nunavik in northern Québec and the Inuvialuit region in the Northwest Territories). The geographic units provided here are based on census delineations.

Figure 1
Highest Level of Schooling of Inuit Aged 15 and Over, Northern and Southern Canada, 2001



Education profiles of Inuit men and women differed somewhat. Figure 2 shows that in 2001, a larger proportion of Inuit men obtained trades certificates - 15%, versus 8% of Inuit women. However, women were more likely than men to have a college diploma (12% versus 8%) or university degree (4% versus 3%).

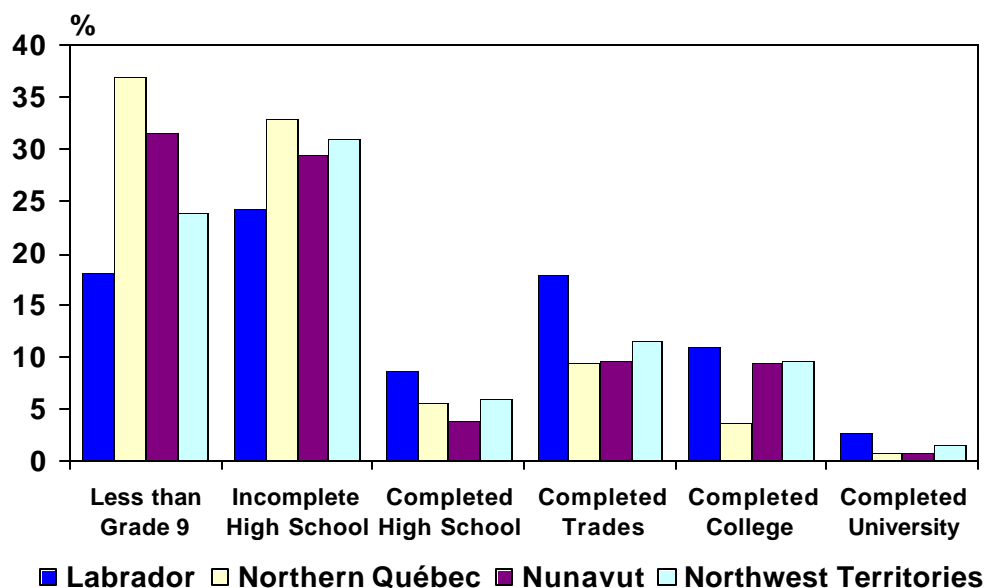
Figure 2
Highest Level of Schooling of Male and Female Inuit Aged 15 and Over,
Canada, 2001



From one region to the next across the north, there were great differences in levels of formal education (Figure 3). Inuit in Labrador were more likely than those elsewhere to have a post-secondary diploma or degree. Just over 30% had completed some kind of post-secondary education, compared with 14% in northern Québec, 20% in Nunavut and 23% in the Northwest Territories.

The difference between Labrador and other regions can be explained in part by the fact that a large percentage of Labrador Inuit live in the community of Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Here, they are able to take advantage of a broader spectrum of more advanced courses and other resources not available in other more remote communities. Post-secondary education is often a pre-requisite for jobs in this centre, while this is not the case in many communities with largely natural-resource based economies.

Figure 3
Highest Level of Schooling of Male and Female Inuit Aged 15 and Over by Region, 2001

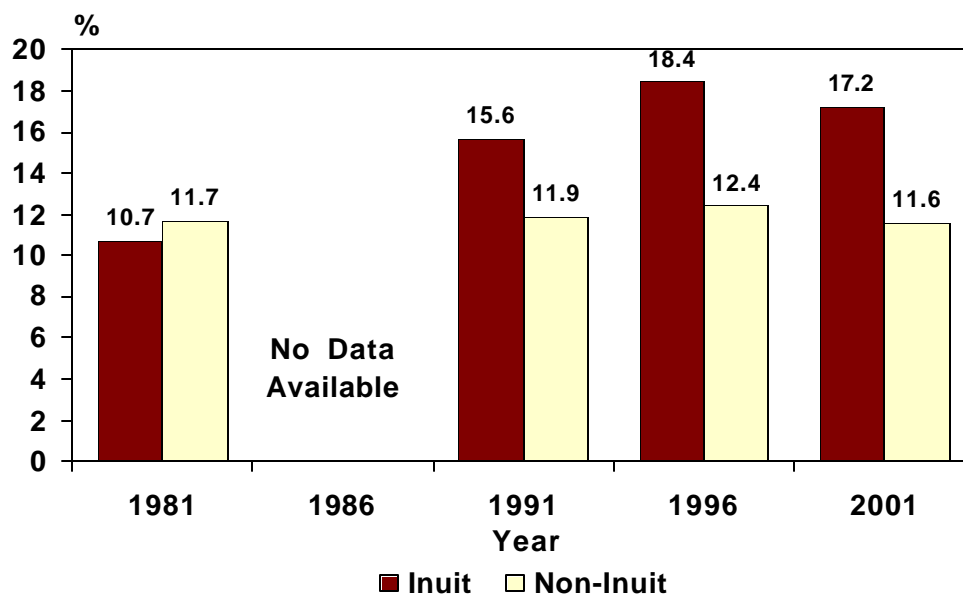


3. School Attendance

Data on **school attendance** are available from the 1981, 1991, 1996, and 2001 censuses (no data are available for 1986). Attendance can either be part-time or full-time, in an elementary school, high school, post-secondary institution or private school or college. Information provided refers to the academic year preceding the census.

Figure 4 shows that full-time attendance rates for both Inuit and non-Inuit increased from 1981 to 1996 and then declined slightly in 2001. Between 1981 and 1996, the rate for Inuit increased much more rapidly than did those for non-Inuit. For all years except 1981, Inuit aged 15 and over were more likely than non-Inuit to attend school on a full-time basis.

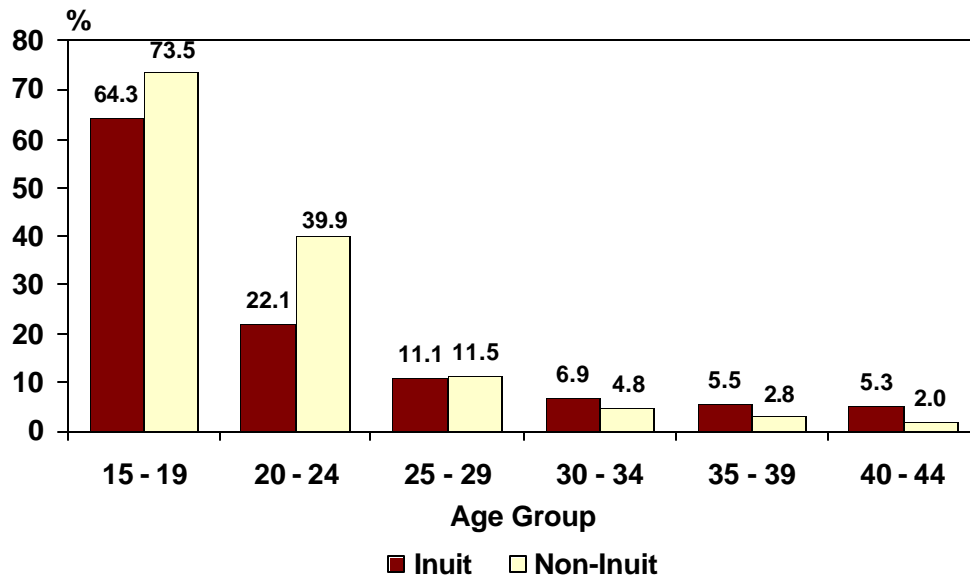
Figure 4
Full-time School Attendance of Inuit and Non-Inuit Aged 15 and Over,
Canada, 1981-2001



The decline in full-time attendance in 2001 for both groups can be better understood by looking at differences between age groups. For Inuit, the percentage of youth aged 15-19 attending school full-time remained almost unchanged between 1996 and 2001. In 1996, the figure was 63%, increasing just slightly to 64% in 2001. However, for most of the remaining age groups, smaller percentages of Inuit attended school full-time in 2001 than in 1996. The situation was somewhat different for non-Inuit. In 2001, 74% of 15-19 year olds attended school on a full-time basis. This was down from 79% in 1996.

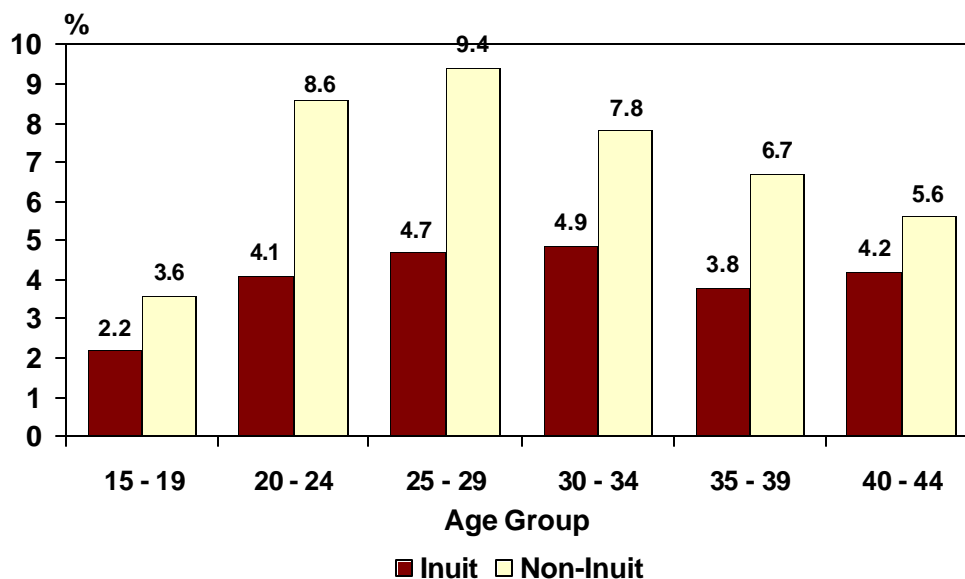
Attendance rates are related to age, with the highest attendance rates occurring in the younger age groups. In 2001, Inuit full-time attendance rates were lower than those of the non-Inuit population for age groups between 15 and 24, but higher for age groups 30 or older (Figure 5). For those aged 15-19, for example, 64% of Inuit and 74% of non-Inuit were in school full-time. In the 20-24 year age group, a much larger percentage of non-Inuit were again attending full-time - 40%, versus 22% for Inuit. The situation changes at the 30-34 age group, where 7% of Inuit and 5% of non-Inuit people were attending school on a full-time basis. This difference could in part be attributed to different fertility patterns between Inuit and non-Inuit. Inuit are more likely to start childbearing at an earlier age and have more children than non-Inuit. This may result in Inuit deferring their education until their children are older.

Figure 5
Full-time School Attendance of Inuit and Non-Inuit for Selected Age Groups, Canada, 2001



Inuit were much less likely than non-Inuit to be enrolled part-time. In 2001, the rates for Inuit of all age groups were lower than those for the non-Inuit population (Figure 6). The gap between Inuit and non-Inuit was smaller for those in the youngest and oldest age groups and peaked for those aged 25-29. Here, the part-time attendance rate for non-Inuit was double that for Inuit (9% versus 5%). This difference is likely due to the lack of availability of post-secondary institutions across most of the north. If facilities do exist, course selection is usually very limited. Consequently, it is often difficult to pursue post-secondary studies on a part-time basis without leaving the community.

Figure 6
Part-time School Attendance of Inuit and Non-Inuit for Selected Age Groups, Canada, 2001



There were some differences in school attendance between Inuit men and women. In 2001, full-time attendance rates for young Inuit men and women aged 15-24 were about the same (45% and 46% respectively). However, among those who were somewhat older, women were much more likely than their male counterparts to attend school full-time. For example, 9% of Inuit women aged 30-34, compared with 5% of Inuit men in the same age group, attended on a full-time basis. The corresponding percentages for those aged 35-39 were 4% and 7% respectively. There was a similar situation for those attending part-time. For those aged 25-29, 3% of Inuit men and 7% of Inuit women attended school on a part-time basis. For those aged 30-34, the figures were 3% and 6% for men and women.

4. Summary

From 1981 to 2001, Inuit made much progress in the formal education system. In particular, there was a surge in percentages of those completing trades and college educations, and smaller proportions had less than a grade 9 education. Levels of formal schooling among Inuit (and especially those in the north) still fell below those of non-Inuit. This can be partially attributed to factors such as curriculum and learning environments that were not always culturally appropriate, as well as lack of access to post-secondary institutions in the north. However, at many levels, the gap between Inuit and non-Inuit was closing with time.

Inuit women and men had different experiences in the education system. Inuit men were somewhat less likely than women to have completed high school and were more likely to have received a trades certificate. Larger percentages of women had completed their college or university studies.

In 2001, while younger Inuit (those aged 15-24) were less likely than non-Inuit to be in school full-time, the reverse was true for those aged 30 and over. Inuit were less likely than non-Inuit to attend school on a part-time basis, due in large part to a lack of post-secondary institutions in Inuit communities.

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