

**Constitutional responsibility.** The Constitution Act, 1982, re-affirmed the provisions of the Constitution Act, 1867 (formerly called the British North America Act), Section 93 of which placed education "exclusively" under the control of each province. Thus, variations in the systems that already existed in Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were ratified. Other provinces that were admitted (Manitoba 1870, British Columbia 1871, Prince Edward Island 1873, Saskatchewan and Alberta 1905, and Newfoundland 1949) were able to establish their own education systems.

Despite variations such as ages of compulsory attendance, course offerings and graduation prerequisites, the education systems that evolved in each province basically consist of three levels: elementary, secondary and postsecondary. The number of years required to complete each level and the dividing lines between them differ from province to province.

**Growth in education.** Until the late 1940s, Canada, according to a report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, was "one of the less educationally developed of the great democracies". Today, Canada ranks among the world's educational leaders.

In the post-war period, Canada's enrolment increased faster than that of any other industrialized country, spurred by unprecedented population growth combined with the desire of students to continue to higher levels. The population grew because of the post-war baby boom and sizable net immigration. Rising expectations and widespread belief in education as a means of upward mobility encouraged students to stay in school longer.

Between 1951 and 1971, elementary-secondary enrolment more than doubled. The 1960s were the decade of fastest growth, with the number of elementary-secondary students increasing 40%, and postsecondary enrolment, 170%. Enrolment reached its peak in 1970-71.

During the 1960s, education expenditures grew at an average yearly rate of more than 15% (sometimes 20%) to \$7.7 billion in 1970. These expenditures were equivalent to 9% of GNP and absorbed 22% of government spending, more than any other major area. By 1983, expenditures on education represented an estimated 7.8% of GNP, and social welfare had assumed first place.

Chart 4.1

**Enrolment growth and decline, 1970-71 to 1985-86**

1970 = 100

