

FPSE BC Budget Submission

Turning the Page: Updating BC's post-secondary system for modern work and learning patterns

Introduction

BC's post-secondary system has gone through many phases in the more than one hundred years of its existence. From research universities, to colleges, institutes, and teaching universities, the post-secondary system in BC has gone through legislative and regulatory change in accordance with the needs of our society and priorities of the government of the day. Today, dramatic changes to established career and learning patterns has brought us to a crossroads: the time has come to turn the page on the privatization of post-secondary to keep focus on the delivery of affordable, comprehensive, and sustainable access to post-secondary education for all British Columbians.

Three key challenges facing the post-secondary system are:

- Sustainable funding
- Fair employment
- Decolonizing the post-secondary system

Any public policy or funding model should be subject to review in order to answer the question: are the desired outcomes of the policy or system being achieved? In terms of post-secondary, is our system providing the highest quality education possible accessed by the greatest number of BC students? Our analysis of the post-secondary system reveals that more can be done to improve accessibility and outcomes.

Post-Secondary Funding

Since the reversal of the 1996 tuition freeze¹ in 2001², the composition of post-secondary institutions' funding has changed dramatically.

Where government funding (in the form of operating grants) was 70-80% of the institutions' overall budget, that percentage has now dropped to below 50% at a growing number of institutions. Tuition revenues have increased over 400% since 2001 due to the combination of rapid increase to tuition when the freeze was lifted, and the growth in international student numbers and in the tuition those students are charged.³ At KPU tuition makes up 47.7% of the 2018-19 budget with 64% of that being international tuition.

¹ <http://www.fin.gov.bc.ca/archive/budget96/brochure.htm>

²

https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2015/09/Whats_the_Difference.pdf

³ https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/international-education/internationaleducationstrategy_web.pdf

The last serious review of system funding took place in the early 2000s, when block funding replaced formula funding and tuition was allowed to double in two years. Despite a 2% cap on domestic tuition increases ever since 2004, tuition revenues have more than quadrupled and in 2017 equaled government operating grants to institutions: \$1.831 billion compared to \$1.828 billion. The government anticipates tuition revenue to top \$2 billion this year.⁴

Some changes to the funding model have been made, but the consequences of past decisions are still reverberating throughout the system: when policy is changed without funding, the policy is undermined and resources are strained. In 2007, Campus 2020 made 52 recommendations for the post-secondary system, two of which we'll highlight.

This report recommended free ABE and ELL; when that decision was reversed in 2015, it had a devastating impact on program enrollment. Campus 2020 also recommended that university colleges transform into teaching universities, but little funding accompanied those changes in early 2008, and Capilano has suffered massive adjustments because it did not start from the same base as Kwantlen, Malaspina/VIU, UFV, and Emily Carr. Rural colleges, once comprehensive community colleges, have also undergone dramatic changes in their program offerings, arguably to the detriment of their communities.

Chart:

Year	% of institutional funding from gov't operating grant	% from tuition	% from other
1997	80	15	5
2017	44.5	36.8	18.6
2018-19 KPU	36.1	47.7	16.2

International Education

The exchange of ideas and perspectives from other countries made possible by international education has many benefits – in classrooms, campuses, and communities – but the growing reliance on this now-booming economic sector asks two questions: will our public post-secondary system be able to withstand a bust,⁵ and how is the system serving British Columbians?

It is incumbent upon us to ensure that international students either have on their arrival in Canada, or acquire after their arrival, sufficient language, literacy, social support, and scholastic skills to meet the requirements of courses before they are admitted to such courses, and to provide ongoing supports for international students while they are enrolled to give them a fair chance to succeed. In a sector that has undergone rapid change, the responsible course, financially and socially, is to review our system compared to other provinces and the world with a view to finding the balance we want in BC.

It is heartening that this government is developing “a renewed strategic approach to international education focused on positive student experience and not just enrolment numbers”⁶, as there is

⁴ BC Budget 2018: Working for You. Budget and Fiscal Plan 2018/19 – 2020/21, p. 140; and Operating Grants by Institution, Fiscal Years 2001/02 to 2017/18 (Ministry of Advanced Education, April 2018).

⁵ <http://www.international.gc.ca/education/report-rapport/impact-2017/index.aspx?lang=eng>

⁶ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-international-students-1.4741913>

certainly a path forward that keeps the system on solid financial footing while welcoming learners from abroad. In recognition of the depth and complexity of this issue, FPSE encourages the government to form a broad stakeholder group to investigate and discuss all aspects of fairness for international students during this review: from tuition to recruiters to educational and social supports, as well as the impacts of international education on the system including class composition, educator workloads, and costs of attending post-secondary for international and domestic students.

Other aspects of international education worthy of review are the financial and human resources required for institutions to engage in the recruiting process: jaunts to foreign countries, deals with agents, placement tests, the potential to mislead non-English speaking students, and the high (and unregulated) fees.

A review of international post-secondary education in these broad terms will also capture information that may identify policies and practices to increase affordability and access for domestic students as well as adding protections for international students. The social and economic benefits of PSE to society far outweigh the costs⁷, so government should maximize access and affordability of PSE. It's time to turn the page on institutions' operating on a business model.

Student Affordability

Analysis of measures to increase affordability for students reveals that federal funding in the form of tax credits and RESPs favour learners whose families are already in higher income brackets⁸. It is reasonable to expect this relationship to extend to provincial funding as well. When financial barriers are removed, access to post-secondary education increases, as exemplified by the removal of tuition for Adult Basic Education, English Language Learning, and the expansion of tuition waivers for former youth in care. When the provincial government imposed \$1600 per term tuition on developmental programs, enrolments dropped by as much as 60% at some institutions. With tuition removed, anecdotally, enrollment is increasing. These results lead us to believe similar benefits⁹ could be derived by extending the same tuition-free policy to all developmental programs.

Former ABE students were asked if they had ever had to stop their studies due to financial reasons—15 percent said that they had. This has increased since 2012, when 12 percent reported having to take a break from their studies. Age had an impact on ABE respondents' pursuit of their education—older respondents were more likely to have taken a break from their studies for financial reasons.¹⁰

As we look to the broader student population, we see a steady increase in the student debt accumulated by graduates caused by increased post-secondary costs, in addition to cost of living increases that have outpaced wage growth. The average student debt is said to be around \$30,000 after completing four years of post-secondary studies, but our sampling shows that number is very low. Two

⁷ See publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/BP/bp319-e.htm; or financingpse.ca/index.php/students/benefits-post-secondary-education

⁸ Federal Parliamentary Budget Office, Federal Spending on Post-Secondary Education. 2016.

⁹ [file:///C:/Users/nseguin/Downloads/2014%20Developmental%20Student%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report%20of%20Findings%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nseguin/Downloads/2014%20Developmental%20Student%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report%20of%20Findings%20(1).pdf)

¹⁰

[file:///C:/Users/nseguin/Downloads/2014%20Developmental%20Student%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report%20of%20Findings%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nseguin/Downloads/2014%20Developmental%20Student%20Outcomes%20Survey%20Report%20of%20Findings%20(1).pdf)

of our locals engaged with current and former students to measure their debt against the average: at Okanagan College, they found a student who had amassed \$89,000 in student debt; at the University of the Fraser Valley, a student's debt was \$169,000.

While FPSE supports measures such as tuition waivers and open textbooks, we also support the calls from student unions to look for broad policies that can significantly reduce financial barriers and debt for all BC learners, recognizing that income and employment fluctuate in today's job market. People often need training or upgrading the most when they can afford it the least. This reinforces the importance of non-repayable grants and loans.

Education and training will play an increasingly important role in the labour market outlook over the next 10 years. The focus in training is moving away from training for a specific job. Instead it has shifted to recognize the value and importance of learning skills for a career. Having a broader base of knowledge and being adaptable opens up more job opportunities for students and workers.¹¹

Precarious Work

The underfunding of the post-secondary system also affects faculty and staff in addition to students. The increase in precarious, low-wage academic work is of concern not only to contract academic staff, but also to supporters of a high quality and fair post-secondary system in BC, and Canada. Just as government funding for post-secondary institutions has decreased across Canada from 80% to 50% since 1985 (as a percentage of funding for post-secondary institutions)¹², the use of contract work within post-secondary employment has increased across the country, including in our province.

From CUPE National's 2016 Report on PSE:

Full-time, tenure-track teaching positions are being replaced by sessional instructor positions with much lower pay, fewer benefits, and little job security. Some sessional instructors have worked for over 20 years, but still need to apply for their job every four months. In 2013, 27 per cent of university professors and 24 per cent of college professors were in temporary positions. Across the sector, the proportion of temporary workers has grown steadily since 2000.¹³

Contract faculty now make up approximately 70% of college faculty in Ontario¹⁴; this extraordinarily high percentage of precarious work contributed last fall to the longest college strike in Ontario's history which concluded when educators were legislated back to work. The resulting arbitration granted workers a pay increase and created a government-run task force to make recommendations on issues including faculty complement and precarious work. Ontario has also addressed precarious work through legislation to remove the discriminatory wage differentials: Bill 148 obligated employers to provide equal pay to work of equal value.

¹¹ 2017 Labour Market Statistics, p. 10 (https://www.workbc.ca/getmedia/12e9c92b-172a-47ee-bdfa-261b06efc37c/BC_Labour_Market_Outlook_2017_English.PDF.aspx)

¹² cupe_2018_backgrounder_1_pse_federal_funding_2018_08_31_en.pdf

¹³ https://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/nsc_post-secondary_2016_eng_final.pdf

¹⁴ <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2017/10/26/college-students-and-striking-faculty-face-same-challenges-with-precarious-work.html>

In BC, contract faculty currently make up 35% of post-secondary faculty in B.C.'s colleges and teaching universities. Within the KFA non-regular faculty make up 43% of our membership, with 32% of our membership in positions less than 50% of a full time workload and without access to benefits. However, the rapid acceleration of hiring educators to contract positions is a clear indication that unless action is taken, BC may well be on the same path as Ontario.

Quote:

"It takes a very heavy emotional toll on you," said Andrea Eiding, who has spent eight years teaching on contract at universities and colleges in British Columbia. "I basically have to reapply for my job every four months."

For this, Eiding said she gets paid less than minimum wage, as contract faculty salaries don't take into account time spent preparing courses, marking or emailing students outside office hours.¹⁵

Precarious work is a major issue for FPSE, as these sessional or part-time faculty have made little progress since regularization was negotiated in the late 1990s, and as employers have found many ways to subvert it.

Decolonization and Reconciliation

Funding also impacts efforts to decolonize the post-secondary system to close the gap in post-secondary enrollment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.¹⁶ Every cohort of students represents an opportunity for learners to gain knowledge and understanding of the residential school system and Indigenous history – key steps in moving forward towards reconciliation in BC.

Quote:

Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

Call to Action 63.2 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Only ten institutions (out of twenty-five) have been provided Aboriginal Service Plan dollars. More dollars have gone to building gathering places for Indigenous students – but little of that has been spent on curriculum, enhancing access for indigenous students, or support for faculty, staff and students. Institutional funding needs to be equitable and aimed at fulfilling our commitment to reconciliation at all post-secondary institutions in BC.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As is expected from a system serving complex and changing needs of students in a province with diverse geographies and local economies like BC, finding a sustainable funding system that serves all BC learners presents a challenge. However, there is widespread agreement among stakeholders that the current

¹⁵ <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/09/03/contract-faculty-at-canadian-universities-struggle-to-make-ends-meet-survey-finds.html>

¹⁶ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/post-secondary-education/aboriginal-education-training/aboriginallearnerdatareport-june2018.pdf>

funding system is imperfect at best, and creates challenges of its own at worst. Therefore, while the recommendations below focus on individual measures intended to address the affordability, accessibility and sustainability of PSE, broader consideration and review of post-secondary funding is also recommended.

Consultation:

- FPSE encourages the government to form a broad stakeholder group to investigate and discuss all aspects of fairness for international students during the formation of a new strategic approach to international education: from tuition to recruiters to educational and social supports, as well as the impacts of international education on the system including class composition, educator workloads, and costs of attending post-secondary for international and domestic students.
- FPSE supports the calls from student unions to look for broad policies that can significantly reduce financial barriers and debt for all BC learners through non-repayable grants, further reduced interest rate on student loans, and continuing to implement increased availability of open textbooks.

Developmental programs:

- Find a new name for Adult Special Education
- Make all developmental programs tuition-free
- Extend the ABE/ELL AUG policy for students taking non-ABE/ELL developmental programs to access the AUG

Precarious work:

- Work with all stakeholders to reduce institutional reliance on precarious academic labour and to ensure those faculty are provided with a fair wage and fair working conditions.

Reconciliation:

- Implement the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including those pertaining to post-secondary education such as call 63.2 to fund professional development for educators to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms

Thank-you for your attention.