

July 15, 2022

Attn: Don Wright

Engagement Lead

Post Secondary Funding Formula Review

RE: Public Post Secondary Funding Review

This written submission has been compiled by the Justice Institute Students' Union (JISU), a member of the BC Federation of Students (BCFS). JISU represents over 500 students who have been studying to become first responders in BC since the beginning of 2020. We are committed to advocating for affordable, accessible, high quality post-secondary education for all students, including those currently training to become future first responders at the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC).

A review of institutional funding is key to ensure that all students, including those at institutions like JIBC, have access to quality education and training programs. Through the equitable distribution of funding, students and workers in British Columbia will have access to a truly world class education system no matter where they live in the province.

**Significant contributions of the post-secondary education system contribute to the economic, social, and physical well-being of the province of British Columbia**

Post-secondary education is a vital aspect of a well-functioning society— one that directly contributes to the economic, social, and physical well-being of British Columbia. Critical sectors such as healthcare, technology, skilled trades and education all rely on post-secondary institutions to meet the labour demands of these sectors and ensure British Columbians can access the services they need.

The post-secondary education system also serves as a space for students with diverse backgrounds to exchange knowledge and learn about other cultures. British Columbia is a diverse province with a large population of immigrants and international students – and post-secondary institutions are natural spaces that support diversity and equity engagement, foster social inclusion, and ultimately help students find community connections.

Post-secondary institutions are hubs for innovation and advancements in areas such as environmental sustainability, healthcare, housing, cyber safety, and so on. However, more specifically, institutions such as the JIBC help ensure that emergency responders are trained and equipped. JIBC is the only public institution which provides the required training for first responders in our province. Skilled first responders are vital to ensuring that British Columbians

can access our healthcare and social security systems. The need for these literal life-saving services has been further emphasized by recent health-impacting events, including last year's heat dome, increasing natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the worsening opioid crisis. British Columbians should not need to wonder if there will be a certified paramedic, firefighter, or police officer available to assist them. However, but in many cases last year, the realities of staffing shortages made it clear that the supply of emergency responders, police officers, and health care workers in our provinces is detrimental. was simply not sufficient, and ironically, the individuals tasked with supporting the community during emergency situations were being underpaid and overworked. Ensuring that there is an adequate supply of certified, well-trained emergency responders is one of the reasons that post-secondary institutions like JIBC are vital to ensuring the stability of BC's social, economic, and healthcare systems.

### **Changes to improve the contributions of the post-secondary system to the economic, social and physical well-being of the province as a whole**

By making education more accessible, the post-secondary system would be able to increase the contributions it makes to the economic, social and physical well-being of the province as a whole, and move away from the financial reliance on students, specifically international students who face high barriers, including extremely high tuition costs. Funding towards improving facilities, ensuring instructors are paid fairly, and student support resources on campus would create an educational environment that is more sustainable and accessible to all. It would lower the financial barriers many British Columbians face when it comes to accessing high quality education, and allow individuals to invest in their own skills, enabling them to find jobs and contribute to the local economy.

Other changes that the funding system could make that would increase its contributions to the province include increasing financial assistance to low-income families through increased grants and providing support in navigating complicated financial information. Providing additional support would effectively reduce drop-out rates and promote equitable educational opportunities for low-income students.

Investing in additional distance learning opportunities would also greatly benefit students with accessibility needs or those living in rural communities. If courses had the same credit cost delivery amount – this would help ensure skilled professionals are able to take jobs in smaller towns and cities and ensure labour is evenly distributed throughout the province. Other opportunities that could be created include a co-op or other paid-internship programs which would provide students with career networking opportunities and help meet the current labour demands.

At JIBC, our students do not currently have the support systems they need to succeed. There is a critical need for government funding, which would allow the institute to provide

more resources for students. Funding would effectively resolve current challenges including a high ratio of sessional instructors over full time, an underfunded writing and disability services program, and the lack of any existing mental health or counselling support programs.

### **Supporting students, supporting communities**

These necessary resources would create a support system that students need prior to heading into high-stress careers that serve communities across British Columbia. Special attention must be paid to ensure that JIBC is able to stay up to date with changes, such as preparing first responders in-training with a new set of skills for a changing demographics like our aging population and combating the opioid crisis. Inclusive language resource training would also be useful for students who will potentially serve communities with unique needs. Finally, wellness resources and increased police awareness to changes in culture are other considerations.

In addition, with the upward increase of immigration, investing to have an adequate immigration pathway would create more opportunities for international students and experienced first responders (certified in other countries) to study and train as first responders in BC would help to lessen the chances of turning away those who are interested in serving BC as first line of support, and ease the immediate needs of the so-called labour shortage.

Ultimately, society is complex and ever-changing – and it is important to address and provide essential training to students (and future first responders) to promote a healthy transition between school and career.

### **Key economic, demographic, social and technological trends that will impact post-secondary education in BC over the next 30 years**

Ensuring that students have access to technology such as electronic devices, reliable high speed internet, and the necessary digital infrastructure to effectively deliver classes online will continue to be vital. However, there are still some programs, including first responder training courses at JIBC include necessary in-person training components.

Economic challenges that will continue to affect students in the future will be the high cost of living and rising inflation, a competitive job market and income disparity. To address economic challenges mentioned in the previous section, learners facing financial barriers may need to shift from full-time to part-time study, or choose between tuition and food, resulting in a slower rate of available, skilled graduates across the province. In addition, many students may also choose to move out of the province to one with a more affordable cost of living and education. This marks a troubling problem that is contributing to an aging population, and the loss of international students to other provinces with a lower cost of living, both of which contribute to the labour demands in our current market.

Social trends that will impact post-secondary education in BC over the next 30 years include the shift towards inclusivity and other topics relating to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

### **Responding to future trends**

#### ***Technological***

Not all learning can be done remotely, and while it does create more opportunities for accessibility - there are some crucial components of first responders' courses in which an online format could not replace the traditional hands-on format. Hybrid learning would be more appropriate to apply in these cases.

Allocating and evenly distributing funding to post-secondary institutions to enable them to ensure all learners have access to technology. Possible solutions include implementing bulk purchase programs for low-cost electronic devices for learners, and facilities to serve remote and hybrid learning models.

#### ***Economic***

Shifting away from the current model of financial over-reliance on students (and particularly international students) to a sustainable, regulated re-investing model. In addition, providing on-campus learning opportunities at JIBC (and all institutions) would ensure that students have opportunities to network and build their careers. Options include paid internship or co-op program models.

This would create an educational system that is accessible to all British Columbians, not only urban and abled learners.

#### ***Social***

In response to future trends, including financial insecurity for students in groups with additional barriers, mental health challenges, and those relating to topics of diversity and inclusion - there are a variety of key focus areas that will be critical. These include the implementation of accessibility supports for disabled students, access to low cost or no cost food sources like on-campus food banks, mental health counselling, no-cost menstrual products, student extended health & dental coverage to access paramedical services and language inclusivity training.

### **Recommended modifications to the funding formula**

In cooperation with the BC Federation of Students, the JIBC Student Union aims to achieve a system of post-secondary education which is accessible to all, which is of high quality, and which is nationally planned; which recognises the legitimacy of student representation and

the validity of students' rights; and whose role in society is clearly recognised and appreciated. Right now, our system's over-reliance on tuition fees causes numerous problems.

JIBC has been forced to make choices to fund different areas each year in response to urgent and emerging issues, such as investing in technology to effectively deliver online courses during a worldwide pandemic, efforts have also been made to regulate international tuition fees to protect students, which has been done since 2014, despite the impacts on operational revenue. Areas that currently require our attention critically include infrastructure and facilities and student support services such as mental health counselling.

As the only institution in our province that provides training to first responders, we recognize the irony of expecting students who are headed into jobs which are high stress in nature, to succeed without access to support resources, and then provide support to their communities.

All post-secondary institutions have important contributions to make. These contributions need to be recognized – and funding formulas should ensure they are in line with the needs of all students not just the ones at large and urban centres. They should be rational, transparent, equitable, predictable and center the needs of students and our province.

On behalf of the Justice Institute Students' Union,

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