

DSU Vision of an Accessible & Public Institution for All

This submission has been compiled by the Douglas Students' Union, a member of the BC Federation of Students. The DSU represents over 14,000 students attending Douglas College in New Westminster and Coquitlam for over 50 years. We are committed to advocating to all levels of government for accessible post-secondary education for all that is fully funded, public, and of the highest quality.

However, Douglas College and institutions like them have not been adequately funded properly for generations. Over the past two decades, the proportion of provincial funding has decreased substantially and as a result, institutions have looked to other funding models to fill the growing gaps in their operating budgets. Students and the tuition they provide to keep public institutions afloat now account for over 55% of operating revenue – while only a few generations ago British Columbians could expect the province to provide more than 90% of funding to our institutions. This exemplifies the active divestment in public education that face current young people and generations to come in comparison to the support provided to those attending our public institutions in decades past.

One of the most worrisome ways that institutions have filled the gaps in their budgets is the use of international fees, which Douglas College has also been forced to do. International students at Douglas college are estimated to make up \$56.6 million of the college's revenue in the 2022/23 operating budget. This means just over 30% of the colleges operating budgets are not tied to a stable or predictable source of revenue, and that ~30% of the students are providing nearly 2.5 times the tuition that domestic (~70%) provide. While the lived experience of these two categories of students means an individual international student will pay over 5.5 times the tuition of their domestic counterparts.

Over the last decade, international enrolment has tripled and accounted for almost 58% of program growth, compared to the 10% increase in enrolment numbers of domestic students.¹ In the event of natural disasters, geopolitical conflicts, or other forces outside our control, institutional over-reliance on international tuition revenue is a critical weakness in BC's post-secondary sector.

This funding review is an excellent step in the right direction in terms of addressing the funding issue by ensuring we have a funding model that is fairly and impartially distributed across the province. Redistribution of the total funding allocation will not solve all the problems, but it is an especially crucial step in the next evolution of the world-class system of post-secondary education we have today in British Columbia.

Public Post-Secondary Education as an economic and societal Driver

Post-secondary provides the framework to train workers for the current and future labour market needs of this province. Institutions have developed programming that provide short-term diplomas, trades certification, undergraduate and graduate degrees, and adult education. This division of programming amongst institutions provides for the flexibility to support short-term changes to the labour market without the full reimagination of the system. The system also is important in providing economic and social integration for new immigrants. Research shows that within the first four years of arrival 46% of immigrants enrolled in post-secondary education, likely influenced by the need and desire to participating in the economy^[iv]. It is not just new immigrants, but British Columbia has become a world-class destination for international students, many of which decide to immigrate after their studies. In 2017 alone, international students spent over \$3.5 billion dollars on tuition fees which generated over \$2 billion dollars to the provincial GDP and supported 29,300 jobs.^[v] Having a strong and diverse post-secondary sector allows for the support of existing industry, the expansion of training for in-need sectors, as well as the develop of new economies for the province to diversify. University research in climate change, epidemiology, and geopolitical issues can assist in making our world a better and safer placed for all.

Canada depends on immigration to meet its replacement population goals, as well as achieve its workforce and labour targets to sustain economic growth. In its 2019-2024 international education strategy, the federal government recognises that in the next decade immigration is projected to account for 100% of net growth in the workforce, up from 75% currently

Not only do international students make excellent candidates for permanent residency, but many would also like to stay after their studies. The Canadian Bureau for International Education found 60% of international students surveyed intended to apply for permanent residence, and 70% of respondents indicated their intention to work in Canada after their

studies. However, the current system of immigration to Canada is overly complicated and challenging for new graduates to navigate.

One of the most important contributions of post-secondary education is its influence of social cohesion. Students in higher education learn empirical analysis, independent reasoning, develop rational and self-critical lenses, can help bridge division in society. We would be remiss as a society to only consider advancement in higher education as an individual value because of its positive impact on social mobility and teaches the tools of examination, promotion of civil debate, and civil engagement. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw first-hand the rise of disinformation and misinformation which causes real harm, not only to individuals but to communities. Post-secondary institutions provide an opportunity to arm a whole generation with the ability to be critical, find appropriate sources, and increase digital and media literacy. Now, this is more important than ever before.

What could be done differently to enhance this contribution

As mentioned in our introduction, post-secondary institutions have a large mandate but do not have the appropriate funding to keep up with need in society. However, despite the underfunding, there is challenges in the system that are making the situation more challenging.

Public institutional cooperation not competition is required

Since 2010, there has been little growth in domestic FTE enrollment, a decrease of 3.5% over ten years. There has been a notable increase in the amount of advertising campaigns, with institutions trying to differentiate themselves to get a piece of that enrollment. This is not just a trend in British Columbia. Uniformly across the country stakeholders at institutions have reported massive increases to public relations and advertisement spending. One of the most prolific examples of advertising noticed in the Lower Mainland is Douglas College. There advertisements placements have ranged from the Vancouver International Airport, ferry terminals, and newspaper ads all over the province. Based on a review of their Statement of Financial Information for the year ended March 31, 2021, we estimate that on just contracts over \$25,000 dollars the College spent over \$938,000 to companies, designers, or consultants for advertising purposes. We acknowledge this number is not the full story, it is based on our

best assumption of what these expenses relate too. This number excludes any expense solely for international recruitment. This also excludes any internal cost of running their internal offices dedicated to communications, public relations, and recruitment.

This is not an argument to say that the College is misusing or misallocating funds, but rather to illustrate a problem in our system. Our system of community colleges and regional universities works very well when each institution is part of a holistic plan of sustainable higher education in the province. Colleges are uniquely positioned to offer short-term programming through diplomas that can get student into the workforce quickly and for a low cost. In addition, some colleges can provide a ladder into universities that allow students to save money, work in small class sizes, and have a smoother transition into post-secondary education if needed. However, since the conversion of some colleges to universities or polytechnics the purpose of some institutions has been lost. Now, Douglas College competes for students from Kwantlen University when they use to provide similar education south and north of the Fraser. Presently, 50% of FTE's at Douglas come from outside the Tri-cities region and of that 25% reside in Surrey.

This is not to say that Douglas College should never recruit students outside its catchment, but it is to illustrate that there is some creep outside its geographic realm and that those domestic FTEs are in short supply. With more clear directives of mandate in terms of enrollment, institutions could spend less time competing for enrollment but rather more time innovating their course offerings and drilling down into their specialties. In times when students are providing more and more percentages of funding to institutions, money spent on communication and marketing initiatives is spent because of systematic underfunding. A system reliant on tuition fees for survival will do whatever is necessary to recruit students, even to the detriment of others in the sector or students' own experiences.

All in all, our view of the system is that there is a requirement for sustainable, predictable, funding that is regularly reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of students. British Columbia provides world-class education in the province and significant investments have been made by the government to ensure increased access to education for all those who need it. However, it is now time for our funding model to be fixed so that we can continue building a system that works for everyone. Education is a crucial component of a happy and healthy community, society, and economy which needs to be prioritized appropriately.

What needs to be changed

Students across the province priority is 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 over reliance on tuition fees cause numerous problems.

Institutions are forced to make choices that will encourage enrollment above all else, which means we have seen:

- Over promotion of 'trendy' programs like business degrees over less desirable but still important programing
- Use of unscrupulous recruiters to get international students by any means necessary
- Reduction of language requirements to aid in the increased enrollment of international students
- Lack of long-term planning in favour of short-term gains
- Lack of support for departments who are less 'profitable' for the institution
- Incredible amounts of money being used by communication and marketing departments to promote the institution to domestic and international markets
- Less diversification of classes and program offerings

Our vision for post-secondary would include a system that is rationally funded, with a funding model that aims to distribute resources considering an institution's regionality, mandate, course offerings, and student demographic. A re-distribution of resources would recognize the many contributions Douglas College makes to the community. It will allow them to not only continue a more stable basis but to grow in the future and be the community college we need. This model must ensure that it centres on student success, by looking at what students need to succeed and graduate. This includes considering cultural needs, mental health supports, childcare, immigration support, cooperative learning, and apprenticeship training. We would also look for a system where each institution is playing a key role in the sector to avoid too much competition while encouraging innovation. Colleges and Universities should have

specialties and try to make their like departments competitive but also play a particular role, so they are not attempting to 'poach' students from different regions.

Overall, our view of the system is that there is a requirement for sustainable, predictable, funding that is regularly reviewed to ensure its meeting the needs of students. British Columbia provides world-class education in the province and significant investments have been made by government to ensure increasing access to education for all those who need it. However, it is now time for our funding model to be fixed so that we can continue building a system that works for everyone. Education is a crucial component to a happy and healthy community, society, and economy which needs to be prioritized appropriately.