

The background of the page features a series of thin, wavy lines that flow from the bottom left towards the top right. These lines are colored in a gradient, transitioning from a warm orange on the left to a light grey on the right. The overall effect is a sense of movement and modernity.

# Post-secondary for all: A student-centred vision for the future





# A STUDENT CENTRED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

## ABOUT THE BC FEDERATION OF STUDENTS

This submission has been compiled by the BC Federation of Students. The BCFS represents over 170,000 students in all regions of the province at 15 different colleges, universities, and institutes and has been doing so for over 40 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.

The Federation's membership is comprised of:

Camosun College Student Society

Coast Mountain Students' Union

College of New Caledonia Students' Union

Douglas Students' Union

Emily Carr Students' Union

Justice Institute Students' Union

North Island Students' Union

Northern British Columbia Graduate Students' Society

Okanagan College Students' Union

Quest University Students' Association

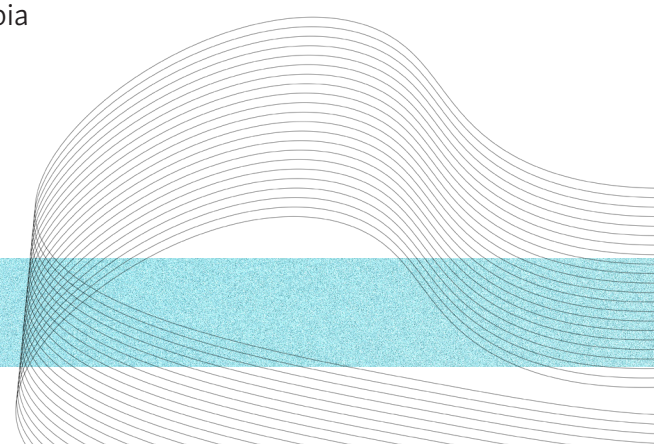
Selkirk College Students' Union

Students' Union Okanagan of the University of British Columbia

Students' Union of Vancouver Community College

Thompson Rivers University Students' Union

Vancouver Island University Students' Union



## INTRODUCTION

British Columbia has one of the strongest post-secondary systems in the country: there is a variety of course offerings in a variety of different cities and regions, the transferability between institutions is second to none, and BCcampus has become leaders in developing Open Educational Resources. There is no doubt that no matter where or what you study in the province, students are learning valuable skills and receiving an excellent education.

However, there is a problem in the sector: institutional funding. Between 2000 and 2016, the proportion of provincial funding decreased by 24% in BC<sup>1</sup> and as a result institutions have looked to students to fill the gaps in their budgets. In the last 50 years, the proportion of public funding to BC colleges and universities has dropped to 43.6% of total operating revenue,<sup>2</sup> down from more than 80% in the 1980s and more than 90% in the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> This constitutes a massive divestment in public education for the current generation of young people compared to the support provided to those who attended college and university in past decades.

One of the most worrisome ways that institutions have filled the gaps in their budgets is the use of international tuition fees, which are now estimated to make up 25% of BC universities' operating budgets.<sup>4</sup> This means a quarter of operating budgets are not tied to a stable or predictable revenue source. 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.<sup>5</sup> In the event of natural disasters, geo-political conflicts, or other forces outside our control, institutional over-reliance on international tuition revenue is a critical weakness in BC's post-secondary sector.

There are two unintended consequences of underfunding post-secondary education: With tuition providing more base funding for institutions than before, enrollment is central to decision-making which is often at odds with societal and community needs. More and more of institutional budgets are being used on marketing, communications and expansion of middle management. This spending is to the detriment of students and communities, where precious resources could be used to expand access and support for learners who historically have been underrepresented in PSE. These funds are now being spent to compete with other institutions for students who fit into the box of an 'ideal learner'. The second consequence of the underfunding of post-secondary education is that it forces institutions to make cuts and rationalise programs based on the cost of delivery, rather than their importance to the region or the ecosystem of post-secondary education in the province. Specialised programs cost more to run and specialised education supports for students who do not fit the mold of an 'ideal learner' cost more to deliver. When institutions do not have clear mission and mandate to support through when making tough financial decisions, institutions often do what is easy, rather than what is right. Budgets are a matter of priority, and even a quick skim through institutional budgets will show that institutional priorities have shifted drastically over the last forty years.

This funding review is an excellent step in the right direction to addressing the chronic underfunding of post-secondary education. It also provides an opportunity to ensure that societal values and community needs are prioritised by being intentionally funded. Having a funding model based on the principles of fairness, impartiality, equity and on being responsive to community and social needs, will allow the resources currently available to have a greater impact on socio-economic development in the province. Redistribution of the total funding allocation will not solve all the problems caused by chronic underfunding, but it is a critical step to laying the foundation for the next step in the evolution of the world-class post-secondary education system we have in British Columbia today.



## CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM TO BC

The post-secondary system contributes significantly to the province: it trains the workers of tomorrow; it provides the resources to researchers to innovate and problem-solve in an interdisciplinary manner; it provides spaces for examinations of communities and society, while being a generator of family wage jobs in communities across the province. Our system of higher education provides and promotes access to lifelong learning in manner that is flexible and mobile. Students can return to school at any point in their life and transfer those credits to one of the 25 post-secondary institutions in the province with ease. British Columbia has one of the most cohesive systems to transfer credits in the country, with the BC Transfer guide.

Post-secondary provides the framework to train workers for the current and future labour market needs of British Columbia. 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 the flexibility to respond to short-term changes to the labour market without necessitating a full re-imagination of the system when shifts in the market occur. The post-secondary system is also an important tool that aids in the economic and social integration of new immigrants. Research shows that within the first four years of arrival, 46% of immigrants enroll in post-secondary education, likely influenced by the need and desire to participate more fully in the economy<sup>6</sup>. In addition to new immigrants, international students – many of whom immigrate after graduation – have identified post-secondary education in British Columbia as a worthy investment to further their professional and personal goals. 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 development of new economies in the province. University research in climate change, epidemiology, and geopolitical issues can assist in making our world a better and safer place for all.

One of the most important contributions of post-secondary education is its positive influence on social cohesion. Students in higher education learn empirical analysis, independent reasoning, develop rational and self-critical lenses, all of which can help bridge division in society.<sup>8</sup> We would be remiss as a society to view increased participation in higher education as solely of benefit to students, as this myopic view ignores the collective benefits reaped from increased social mobility, the ability to understand and interact with nuance, the art of civil debate and civic engagement. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw first-hand the rise of disinformation and misinformation which caused real harm, not only to individuals but to communities in British Columbia, Canada and across the globe. Post-secondary institutions have the ability to arm whole generations with the ability to be critical, inquisitive and curious about the world around them, find appropriate sources to develop deeper understanding of their world and their place in it, all while increasing digital and media literacy. Today, these hard and soft skills are 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 successfully fulfill that mandate. Setting aside the issue of underfunding, there are some additional challenges that could be mitigated by changes to the funding model.

## COMPETITION

Since 2010, there has been little growth in domestic FTE enrollment, a decrease of 3.5% over ten years.<sup>9</sup> There has been a notable increase in the amount of advertising campaigns, to compete for the shrinking domestic enrollment that is at odds with some early thinking of how a holistic system should operate like the Macdonald report. It is not useful for institutions to try to increase enrollment for revenue sake because it is at the expense of others in the sector. This is not just a trend in British Columbia; Clare Polster reports that uniformly, informants at institutions have reported massive increases to public relations and advertisement spending.<sup>10</sup> One of the most prolific examples of advertising noticed in the Lower Mainland is Douglas College. Their advertisement 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 contracts over \$25,000 dollars alone, the College spent over \$938,000 on companies, designers, or consultants for advertising purposes.<sup>11</sup> We acknowledge this number does not tell the full story, and it is based on our best assumption of what these expenses relate to. This number excludes any expense for international recruitment. Estimate expense also excludes the internal cost of Douglas running its own internal offices dedicated to communications, public relations, and recruitment.

Highlighting the growth in institutions' advertising and public relations spending is not an argument that Douglas College – or any other post-secondary public institution in the province is misusing or misallocating funds. Rather, advertising and public relations spending illustrates one of the ways that chronic underfunding is expressing itself in our current post-secondary system; It forces institutions to stray from the carefully balanced relationship between colleges and universities put forward by the Macdonald report. Our system of community colleges and regional universities works very well when each institution is able to function as part of a holistic system of sustainable higher education, geared to serving the distinct educational needs of people in specific geographies and communities in the province. Colleges are uniquely positioned to offer short-term programming and specific skill development at a low cost. They can respond quickly and effectively - in a regionally-appropriate manner - to labour and knowledge gaps that are presenting in specific communities and smaller labour markets. In addition, colleges provide a ladder into universities for students who require a smoother transition into post-secondary education, and for students who are (re)entering post-secondary after some time away. However, since the conversion of some colleges to universities or polytechnics, the responsiveness to unique community and individual educational needs has been lost. Now, Douglas College competes for students with Kwantlen University when they initially provided a similar educational experience for communities and individuals living north and south of the Fraser respectively. Presently, 50% of FTEs at Douglas come from outside the Tri-cities region and of that, 25% reside in Surrey (their fastest growing demographic).<sup>12</sup>



This is not to say that Douglas College should never recruit students outside its catchment, but it is to illustrate that the creep outside its original geographic catchment comes at the expense of a more tailored post-secondary experience for communities north of the Fraser; that domestic FTEs are in short supply compounds the issue. With more clear directives of mandate in terms of enrollment and offerings, institutions could spend less resources competing for enrollment and instead use those resources innovating their course offerings and refining their specialities. In a time where students are providing an ever-growing percentage of operational funding to institutions, decisions made solely to recruit students are often at odds with the needs of institutional communities and student success because of systematic underfunding. A post-secondary system reliant on tuition fees to function, will cause institutions to do whatever necessary to recruit more and more students, even to the detriment of others in the sector, and at the expense of equitable access to higher education.

## SUPPORTING UNDER SERVICED GROUPS

When institutions shift away from their mission and mandate to focus on FTE increases to survive, learners from communities who have historically been denied access to post-secondary education, as well as those who do not fit the normative definition of a student suffer. Systems, including the post-secondary system, are designed around the idea of an ideal user with the policies and practices of a system intended to ensure success for ideal users. If institutions in a system do not have specific mandates or missions that require service to users – learners – who fall outside of the ideal, competition among institutions will primarily be focused on attracting learners closest to the ideal. In 2018, the BC Council On Admissions & Transfer examined equity and access to post-secondary education at institutions who participated in the BC Transfer System for nine underrepresented groups.<sup>13</sup> It found that institutions have typically responded to equity issues in three main ways: programmatically, through service provision and through the development of policy and practices. While service provision to, and policy and practices that support individual students overcoming barriers to access were present at the vast majority of institutions, institutional awareness of what groups were underrepresented in post-secondary education was low.<sup>14</sup> Only seven institutions reported using the terms ‘underserved’ or ‘underrepresented’, with Indigenous learners and learners with ability limitations being the most common groups mentioned.<sup>15</sup>

With low institutional awareness, underserved and underrepresented learners wishing to access post-secondary education from one of the nine groups cannot expect support or targeted outreach efforts designed for them prior to being enrolled at an institution. We can tell by the marketing and advertising efforts of institutions that they are recruiting ‘ideal students’ not necessarily those from underrepresented groups. Or, when they are recruited their unique needs cannot be supported or met.

As an example, many institutions have been tasked with Indigenisation of their campuses in attempts to reframe knowledge production and dissemination in academia. These efforts are immensely important, especially in terms of moving closer to government’s commitment to fulfilling the calls for action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, only 63% of Indigenous people who graduated high school go on to PSE compared to 72% of non-Indigenous graduates.<sup>16</sup> Of course, efforts to Indigenise on-campus offerings is important to making academia a safer space for Indigenous learners, but there are numerous systematic barriers impacting access and success that class offerings or on-campus events can only go so far to improving. Looking at Indigenous student enrollment shows the rural institutions doing better than most: Indigenous enrollment is far higher at rural schools like College of



New Caledonia, College of the Rockies, and Thompson Rivers University who see enrollment of about nine (9%) percent compared to Simon Fraser University and University of British Columbia at about two and half (2.5%) percent.<sup>17</sup> Though these numbers are increasing annually, more needs to be done to address the unequal representation in post-secondary.

Pre- and post-enrollment supports for those who access higher education are crucial for student success, but budget considerations are always at the forefront of administrators minds. Often, the concepts of decolonising education focus far too much on policies and programming offered on campus and not on ensuring access to education for underserved groups who have been historically left out of post-secondary education because they were not valued in the system. With this funding review, we have the opportunity to demonstrate to learners from underserved groups and communities underrepresented in post-secondary education, that they are valued and that there is a place for them in PSE. What better way to demonstrate this than returning institutions to missions and mandates that centre their participation in PSE as a true metric of growth for a region.

## **COST OF DELIVERY**

In redesigning a funding model that supports all students, considerations must be made for special and crucial post-secondary programming that has a higher cost of delivery. In Minister Kang's 2020 mandate letter, Premier Horgan asks the Minister to ensure that the work of the ministry be committed to the principles of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, and equity and anti-racism. The letter also asks for the Minister to look at increasing the eligibility of the BC Access Grant and the tuition fee waiver program for former youth in care.<sup>18</sup> With expansion of the Access Grant and the tuition fee waiver programs, we must consider that more folks with diverse needs, many of whom will experience barriers from 2 or more of the underrepresented groups outlined in the BCCAT paper, will be attending campuses with already strained services.

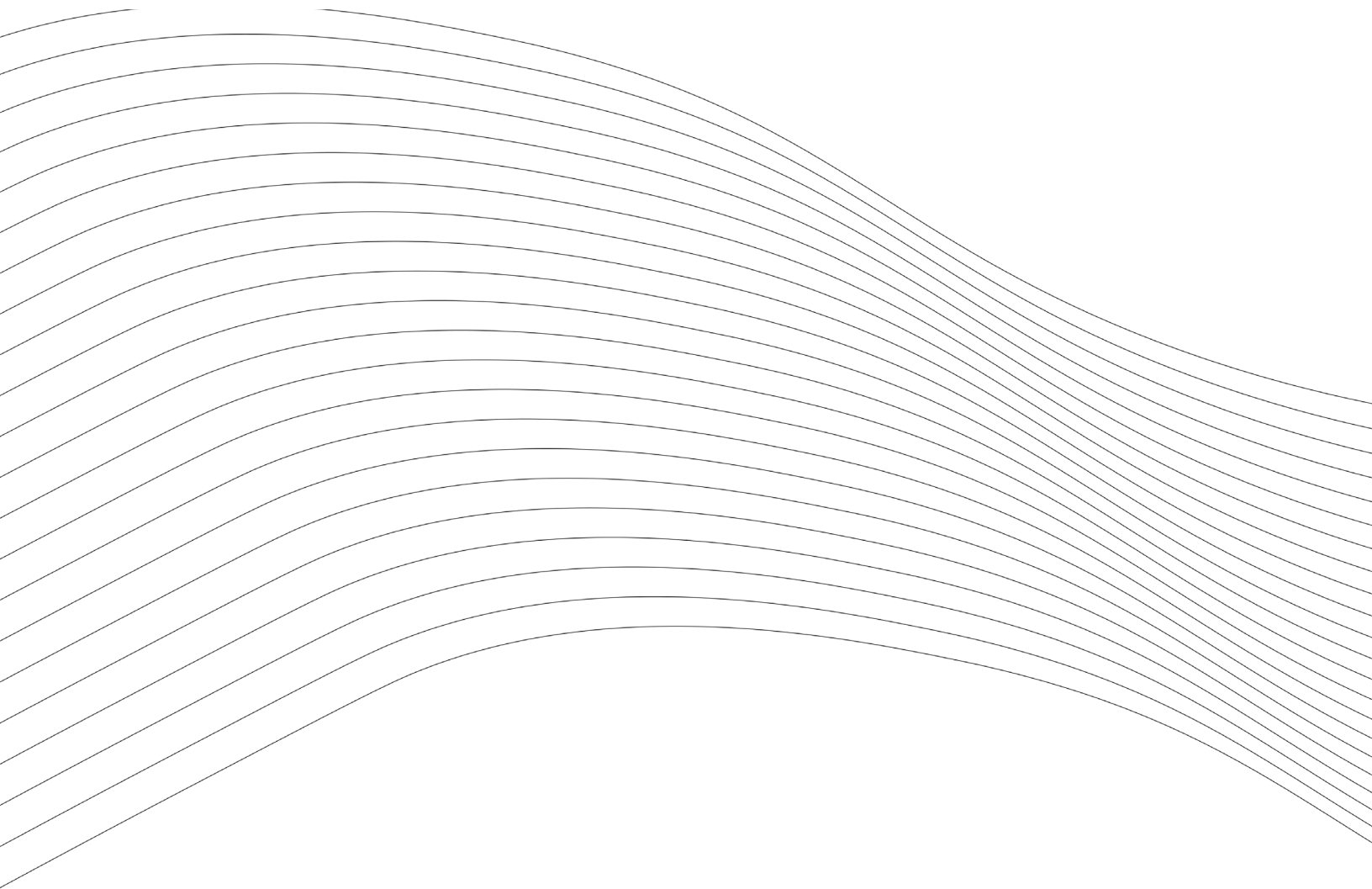
We hear reports of counselling services booking out six weeks in advance, on-campus childcare being unavailable, lack of immigration supports, lack of disability services, and the list goes on.

Accessible education is not just about getting people in the doors, it is also about adequate and appropriate support for student success. If the province wants to ensure more access to education for those who have traditionally been left out of post-secondary like Indigenous students, mature and part-time students, students with disabilities, students who need to upgrade their skills, then the on-campus offerings must support their success with the appropriate services. Institutions like Vancouver Community College, who offer unique programming in English language learning, adult basic education, continuing studies, classes for the deaf and hard of hearing, and classes for the visually impaired, need to have the funding necessary to provide these specialized courses. In addition, institutions need the funding necessary to support students who have specialised learning requirements to successfully complete regular course and program offerings. This includes students who



seek out education in more rural or remote communities, where services and supports outside of the post-secondary system are not as plentiful as in urban settings.

There are some programs that also simply cost more to deliver because of things like location of study, technology expenses, or required teaching expertise. Institutions like Emily Carr University who offer some of the only public art programming like 3D and 2D animation, communication design, illustration, photography, and film. The creative economy is an important component of building a diverse economy, in 2020 alone the creative economy generated more than \$4.4 billion dollars to our provincial GDP.<sup>19</sup> Yet, Emily Carr University is attempting to do a lot with little and has faced significant operating deficits.<sup>20</sup> This could be for a number of reasons, the impacts of COVID-19, the economy, the cost of providing specialised training for the sector, but what is clear is that students often have to deal with the brunt of this underfunding, especially international students to make up the difference.





## OUR VISION FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

The BC Federation of Students' goal 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 valued. Right now, our system's over reliance on tuition fees causes 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 programming
- 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
- Lack of recruitment of students from populations that require high-touch and specialised learning supports

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. The system would be more cooperative with one another than competitive by sharing more resources. Along with the funding model

review, any efficiencies, rationalisation or amalgamations proposed through this process, must include greater community oversight and operational transparency to ensure that service to specific communities does not become collateral damage in process of reducing redundancy and administrative overhead.

This model must ensure that it centres 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 post-secondary sector to avoid needless competition while encouraging collaboration and innovation. Colleges and universities should have specialities and also try to make their like departments competitive but also play a particular role so they are not attempting to 'poach' students from different regions.

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 is 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.



This document is respectfully submitted to the Funding Formula Review Project on behalf of the Executive Committee of the BC Federation of Students.



## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada (2019). Table 477-0058 - Financial information of universities and degree-granting colleges, revenues by type of funds, annual (dollars), (accessed: May 25, 2022)

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada (2019).Table 37-10-0026-01: Revenues of universities and degree-granting colleges (x 1,000) Date accessed May 25

<sup>3</sup> Ivanova, Iglika. (2015). "Paid in Full Update: Who Pays for University Education in BC?" Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, January 2012

<sup>4</sup> Note; This is a rough estimation based on the 2016 average tuition fee costs for undergraduate domestic students and international students, estimated number of international and domestic students enrolled in BC bachelor level studies, and the proportion of tuition fees that make up university operational revenues. Sources: Statistics Canada (2019). Table 477-0019 - Postsecondary enrolments, by registration status, Pan- Canadian Standard Classification of Education (PCSCE), Classification of Instructional Programs, Primary Grouping (CIP\_PG), sex and student status, annual (number)(accessed: June 20, 2019); Statistics Canada (2019). Table 477-0077 - Canadian and international tuition fees by level of study, annual (dollars)(accessed: June 20, 2019); Statistics Canada; Table 37-10- 0026-01 Revenues of universities and degree-granting colleges (x 1,000).

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada (2021). "International Students Accounted for All of the Growth in Postsecondary Enrolments in 2018/2019." <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201125/dq201125e-eng.htm>. Date accessed May 25

<sup>6</sup> Adamuti-Trace, Maria (2010). "First 4 Years in Canada: Post-Secondary Education Pathways of Highly Education Immigrants" International Migration & Integration 12,61-83 (Feb 2011). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-010-0164-2>

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Advance Education Skills and Training (February 27, 2017) "Thriving international education sector in B.C. boosts provincial economy" <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2017AVED0018-000393>

<sup>8</sup> Heyneman, S. (2007) Higher education and social cohesion: Introduction to the Open File. Prospects 37, 291–292 . <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-008-9032-7>

<sup>9</sup> Government of British Columbia (2021) "2020-21 Student Full Time Equivalent Enrolments at BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions" Data Catalogue <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/full-time-equivalent-enrolments-at-b-c-public-post-secondary-institutions/resource/0a424d2a-c620-43a5-8b99-01d395509e5b> Date accessed May 25

<sup>10</sup> Shaker, E., Our Schools/Our Selves, Fall 2011 - Instruments of Social Change, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Retrieved from <https://canadacommons-ca.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/artifacts/1875721/instruments-of-social-change/2624759/> on 12 Jul 2022. CID: 20.500.12592/drwpfm.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas College (2021 and 2020) Statement of Financial Information Report <https://www.douglascollege.ca/about-douglas/campus-information/finance-purchasing/finance/publications-and-reports>

<sup>12</sup> Kathy Denton (2022) Presidents Report found in June's Board of Governors Documents

<sup>13</sup> Merner and Beatty-Guenter (2018) "Admissions Policies and Practices for Underrepresented Groups of Students" <https://www.bccat.ca/pubs/UnderrepresentedGroups.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Douglass Todd (2021) "How are BC Indigenous Students Climbing the Higher Education Ladder" <https://vancouver.sun.com/opinion/columnists/douglas-todd-b-c-indigenous-students-climbing-the-higher-education-ladder> Date accessed May 25

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Premier John Horgan (2020) Ministerial Mandate Letter: Advance Education, Skills and Training [https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/premier-cabinet/mlas/minister-letter/kang\\_mandate\\_2020.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/premier-cabinet/mlas/minister-letter/kang_mandate_2020.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Creative BC (2021) Annual Impact Report

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/sports-culture/arts-culture/creative-sector>

<sup>20</sup> Emily Carr University of Art and Design (2021) Institutional Accountability Plan and Report <https://d1bdilxpumkn65.cloudfront.net/assets/hero-images/ECU-IAPR-2020-21-2021-10-15.pdf>