



**UNBC: A place of  
opportunity, collaboration  
and excellence.**

**Post-Secondary System  
Funding Review Submission**  
June 30, 2022







# Introduction

British Columbia's post-secondary system is strong, collaborative, and world-class. As the most northern degree-granting institution in B.C. and serving an area roughly the size of France, UNBC is a critical component of that system. We provide education access to a wide mix of populations, including Indigenous and rural sectors. British Columbia must support education as a means to empowering people, especially those from previously underserved populations; with nearly 80% of the one million projected job openings over the next decade requiring some level of post-secondary education, investment in the educational aspirations of B.C.'s population from all reaches of the province will be imperative for success.

UNBC remains committed to our vision of being personal in character while transforming lives and communities in the North and around the world. We are a vital connection between government and the communities of the North, conducting research and delivering education that directly responds to, and aligns with, the needs of northern communities. We are committed to Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and are passionate about partnerships and community engagement.

We have achieved significant accolades and societal impact at a very young age and flourish due to our experiential, research-enriched and intimate learning experiences, passionate employees, community engagement, and connectedness with Indigenous communities.

- Reached #1 in Canada in the primarily undergraduate category in the annual Maclean's Magazine university rankings – the third time in seven years. UNBC consistently scores well in student awards, student-to-faculty ratio, research, and mental health services for students.
- Included as one of Canada's Top 50 Research Universities (#41); #1 in not-for-profit research income growth and university cross-sector collaboration publication growth, and 5th in the Research Universities of the Year list in the undergraduate category
- Named one of B.C.'s Top Employers (the eighth time since 2012).

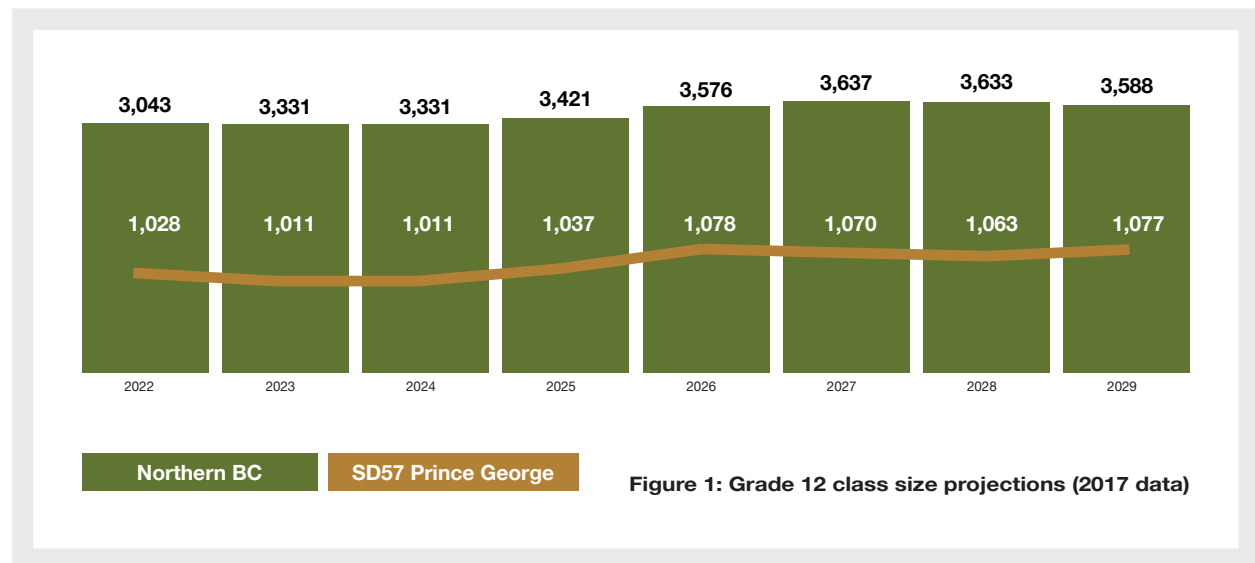
We know that by delivering high-impact solutions to commonly shared problems or unique challenges specific to northern communities, these “made in the North” solutions will not only serve UNBC and the North but will contribute to British Columbia's success.

# Trends

What are the key economic, demographic, social and technological trends that will unfold over the next 30 years that will impact British Columbia's PSE system? How can the PSE system adapt to them?

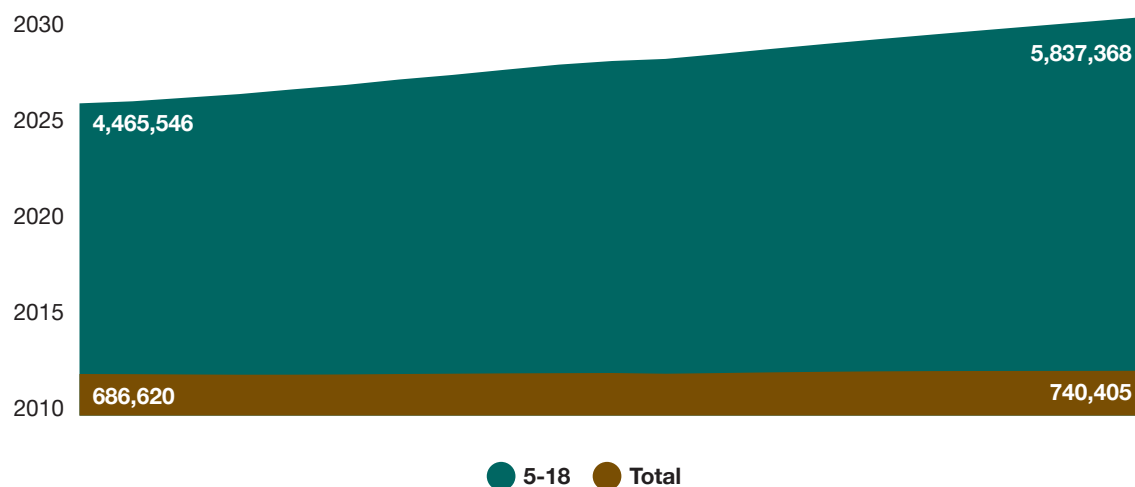
## Demographics

The number of people in the K-12 population is projected to remain flat or decline across northern B.C.



The trend of limited growth holds true across B.C. as well, with the population of those aged 5 to 18 remaining relatively flat in comparison with B.C.'s current and projected overall population growth. The exception to this is with Indigenous communities; according to recent Statistics Canada figures, the Indigenous population of Canada could increase from 1.8 million in 2016 to as much as 3.182 million by 2041. B.C. is projected to be one of only three provinces with an Indigenous population greater than 400,000 people, which provides an opportunity to provide education pathways and programs that best serve the needs of these communities.

**Figure 2: projected population growth in B.C. to 2030. Source: BC Stats**



However, opportunity comes with these demographic changes. We will see more adult learning and mature students returning to post-secondary after an initial career or family obligations prevented them from pursuing their education after high school.

## The Economy

The economy is a significant factor affecting the post-secondary sector, especially given the potential for an impending recession. Economic “boom and bust” cycles, especially common in resource-based regions, have an impact on enrolment. When resource industries are booming, potential learners face fewer entry barriers to the labour market, thus resulting in enrolment decreases.

In difficult times, some students and families may be averse to taking on loans or the increasing expense of financing an education, therefore, needing to fund their studies through part/full-time work, which makes flexible offerings even more vital to student success. Increasing job market compensation trends may also affect students’ major choices and student/staff recruitment. Demonstrating the value and “return on investment” of a degree will be critical to the sector’s success.



## **The Learning Environment**

Reliable, affordable access to a safe online environment is critical for any hybrid or online delivery, particularly in rural or remote regions of B.C. We are seeing the globalization of post-secondary education; the “live here, study anywhere” effect provided by institutions that are wholly online, or that have devised methods of “bundling” credentials from multiple institutions to provide one completed degree. Our sector must remain competitive in this area.

COVID-19 has shown we can provide education differently but to do it very well requires careful planning and significant up-front human and financial resources that address many considerations.

Digital learning strategies that are flexible and feature a robust online presence, learning environment, and access to completion will likely become more popular. These will be expected to not only enhance traditional “on-campus” learning but potentially replace them in some instances where face-to-face or traditional on-campus delivery isn’t a necessity. We are also seeing a shift to short-term learning, micro-credentials, and competency and soft-skills assessments. Employers seek graduates who have degrees but also a set of soft skills and competencies that can be applied directly in the workplace. More institutions will be looking at prior learning assessments to apply as credits towards degrees. Will the previous “staple” of a diploma or degree be replaced by these new, shorter alternatives to the traditional?

In the K-12 system, curriculum, teaching, and evaluation models and standards have changed from those of 15 years ago. This requires the post-secondary sector to shift our learning strategies and change our expectations and styles. It has also left some high school graduates unprepared for the rigours of post-secondary, both academically and socially (with the pandemic amplifying that over the past two-plus years).

Addressing these trends as a sector will require coordination across a range of activities at the system level.

- a. Prioritize working with Indigenous knowledge keepers to create pathways for the success of all students.
- b. COVID confirmed that hybrid teaching worked in many but not all circumstances; the trend toward developing innovative remote learning opportunities is expected to continue.
- c. Greater collaboration across institutions for efficiency and effectiveness.
- d. Better use of data/analytics to recruit/retain/exchange/transfer students.
- e. Ability to quickly develop new programming options in response to emerging needs.
- f. Associate degrees would be a powerful tool for international student recruitment.
- g. Deliver a consistent level of secondary education across the province.

## **The work environment**

Changes to the work environment are inevitable. The complexities of a “one-size-does-not-fit-all” approach to remote or hybrid work are daunting. Highly trained and qualified staff are scarce. Changing job, technology, and training needs are costly to employers to deliver. And automation, including the emergence of viable artificial intelligence platforms, is a significant development for the North, having both positive and negative impacts (such as job reductions as automation and robotics are introduced on a larger scale).

Better, stronger systems that can be used by many to realize economies of scale should provide more resources to help fill gaps elsewhere. For example, unleash the potential of BCNet for a wide variety of services, especially IT-related, in an age of greater dependency and hyper-competitiveness for human resources.

## **Health and wellbeing**

Student mental health and well-being are crucial considerations. Even before the pressures brought on by the pandemic, UNBC was seeing increases in the frequencies and complexities of mental health issues for students. Students also expect more “wrap-around” services – academic support, life skills, career counselling and more.

With the shift in the demographics to more part-time, mature students and increased hybrid delivery also comes the need for more support related to cultural considerations or travel costs within northern communities to increase retention and success. For example, language courses delivered in Indigenous communities required the addition of knowledge keepers (arrangements within the community to facilitate face-to-face contact) along with technical support such as providing internet access and computer services to enable student success.

In addition, the toxicity of social media that is fueling negative interactions and having an impact on mental health is making investment in higher education even more critical to the health and wellbeing of British Columbians.

## How does your institution need to evolve in response to those trends?

The majority of UNBC students come from northern B.C. Yet UNBC also attracts students from across the province, country, and around the world.

<b>Where are students from</b>	
Northern B.C.	65.5%
Southern B.C.	19.0%
Outside B.C.	15.5%
International	11.0%

Students choose to attend UNBC for a variety of reasons, but recent admissions surveys undertaken by the student recruitment team have identified the top five:

- 1. The University offered my program**
- 2. Proximity to home**
- 3. Affordability to attend**
- 4. Award/scholarship/bursary offer**
- 5. Ranking/reputation**

These insights help guide UNBC's response to some of the trends influencing B.C.'s post-secondary sector.

## Be in the North, for the North

UNBC was created due to a vision of a northern University serving community needs and interests through education and research. To this day, that creation story and the resulting ongoing support are not lost on us. We must continue to be in the North for the North with the expectation that our educational programs and especially our research will have global relevance. We don't necessarily need brick-and-mortar locations, but distance learning to remote communities, cohort-based learning opportunities, and hybrid delivery are all approaches that significantly enhance our reach to remote and rural communities. UNBC is already seen as a leader in the North, but we are ready to take on an even more impactful role to respond to these shifts. For example, our recent transition to a five-faculty model is already yielding value. The Deans are building connections and relationships across northern communities and gaining deeper understanding of the region's challenges and needs. Our focus on program and curriculum renewal is critical not only for academic excellence but to be inclusive of Indigenous and sustainability practices as well. This requires partnerships and coordination across northern communities to gain economies of scale, something that we hear repeatedly from communities across the North. We will need to increase our presence in communities to ensure meaningful connections and that UNBC is responding to the needs of the North.



## **Optimize programming**

Continuous program review and development are important for UNBC to address emerging trends. For example, degree program reviews, which include a self-study and external review, allow for relevant and useful input from others, such as graduates of the program and representatives of industry, the professions, practical training programs, community members and employers. This allows units to revise and refresh programming, as needed, to align with the region's economic and social needs.

We have the opportunity to enhance our collaborations with other institutions such as our northern college partners to develop delivery approaches and new programming that enable students to remain in their home community and complete at least their first-year program requirements at their local PSI.

UNBC also needs to be flexible and creative in our course/program offerings (e.g. the new regional B.Ed program offering or the Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program in collaboration with Northern Lights College). In some areas, however, this is not just a task for UNBC – the Ministry and accrediting/professional bodies need to continue working with PSIs collaboratively in looking for new ways to offer programs, particularly professional programs.

## **Modernize operations**

- Employ the principles of Strategic Enrolment Management.
  - Conduct market research on all aspects of programming - content, delivery, locations.
  - Identify the trends.
  - Make data-informed decisions.
- Undergo a digital transformation (academics and operations, especially in areas of critical need such as Information Technology).
- Evaluate programming with a continuous eye to revitalization.
- Employee development for recruitment and retention success. Even if they do decide to move on from UNBC, they are still good ambassadors for the University and the recruitment of employees and students.
- Enhanced collaboration within the UNBC community (students, faculty, staff, unions).
- Diversify revenue streams and develop more “external” funding sources to drive growth and sustainability while allowing us to pivot to respond to student and employee needs.

## **Canada's Green University**

- UNBC must remain a sustainability leader in the North and in communities, not only leading by example but by leading in knowledge exchange and research as well.
- Lead education and research in critical and emerging areas, including but not limited to, rapid environmental change, disaster prediction, mitigation and response.
- Connect community challenges with research and experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students.
- Demonstration projects in partnership with industry and other bodies.

## **Student Success**

- Review and revise our policies and procedures to ensure UNBC is a place that welcomes different learners, recognizing prior learning and different epistemologies.
- Enhance collaboration with regional colleges.
- Remove barriers to admissions, registration and completion but also recognize we may be welcoming a group that may not be academically prepared.

# Contributions to the Economic, Social and Environmental health of British Columbia

What are the most important contributions your institution makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of British Columbia?

UNBC was founded because 16,000 people paid \$5, signed a petition and joined the interior University Society. Our presence in the North meant a University education was now far more accessible to Northerners than at any previous time. In the 30 years since that time, UNBC has developed more than 16,000 graduates; of them, 82.2% remain in British Columbia contributing to the social, environmental and economic success of the province, with more than 60% of that number remaining in the North. They are health-care workers, scientists, teachers, entrepreneurs, government leaders, and administrative professionals, applying their education directly to communities, creating economic stimulus and generating new opportunities.

As one of the Nation's premier small Universities and as a member of the Research Universities' Council of British Columbia, UNBC consistently delivers above expectations when it comes to research, having a profound positive influence on the economic, social and environmental health of B.C. From the environment, Indigenous studies, and health and social sciences to business, engineering, economics, and more, the findings and results are relevant around the world.

The faculty and students leading this research are not constrained to working within the walls of the academy; they are in our communities, working with people, meeting needs, and effecting meaningful change. For example, the Community Development Institute is a major contributor to policy decisions at multiple levels of government and provides information and resources that are valuable to northern communities and beyond. And in areas such as natural resource management, we develop new processes and strategies regarding environmental impact and sustainability, and connect industry with scientists. The Rio Tinto Industrial Research Chair in Climate Change and Water Security is an example of just that approach. UNBC scientists provide information that contributes to science-based decisions regarding natural resource management and stewardship. In short, we understand the unique needs of the regions we serve and apply those learnings to a broader community.





We bring a unique perspective and understanding, often acting as an intermediary between smaller colleges and research institutions and straddling both worlds on various provincial working groups with colleges and research institutes. We also provide valuable input on provincial bodies such as RUCBC, BC Net, BC Campus, Post-Secondary Access and Privacy Professionals, and many others.

UNBC is an advocate for northern communities providing important linkages and a voice to government regarding policy and strategy that is deeper in the understanding of the unique challenges and complexities that are not faced by larger urban centres. We are also a community connection for many; our employees and students contribute meaningfully to the communities in which they reside and work. From sharing critical research findings and supporting individual community needs to community engagement and significant volunteer contributions, the UNBC community is actively engaged in all facets of life in the North.

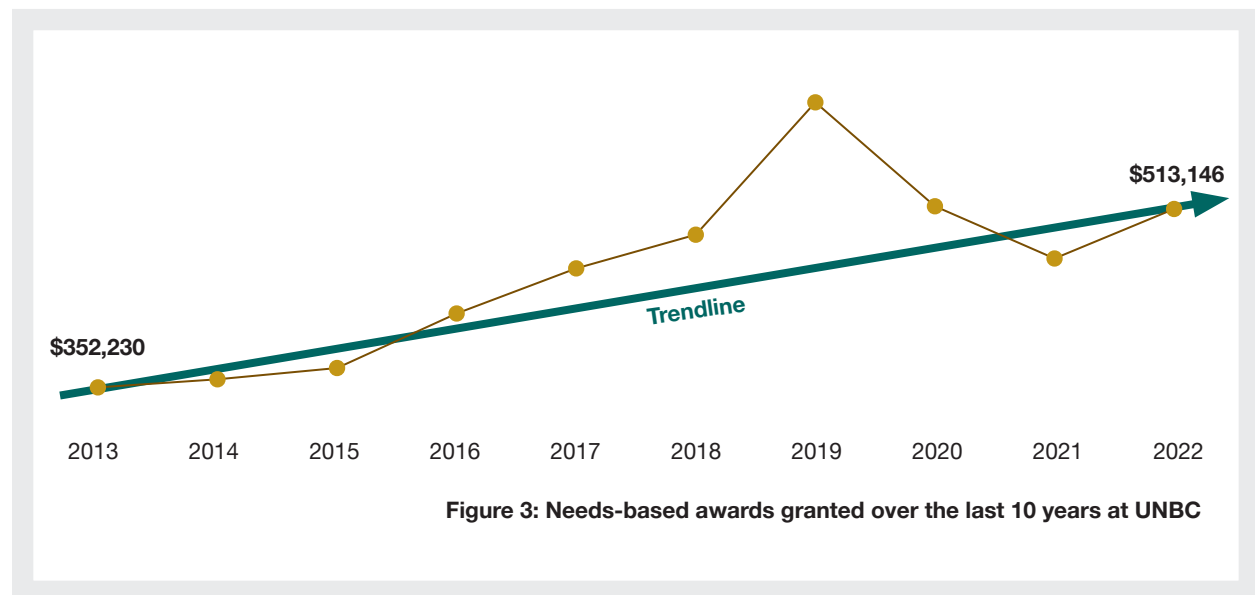
## What is your institution doing to promote Reconciliation with Indigenous People and First Nations?

A fulsome list of initiatives that promote Reconciliation is provided annually in UNBC's Institutional Accountability Plan and Report. Some highlights include the following:

- An Office of indigenous Initiatives, a robust First Nations Centre, and a recently created Office of Equity Diversity and inclusion are geared towards serving Indigenous peoples and communities, reducing barriers, and promoting Reconciliation. All are staffed by dedicated, compassionate experts in their fields.
- The Senate Committee on Indigenous Initiatives reviews, considers, advises, and makes recommendations to Senate concerning a range of Indigenous and Reconciliation initiatives and priorities that are relevant to UNBC.
- We celebrate partnerships with local First Nations, including a tuition waiver agreement with the Lheidli T'enneh Nation in Prince George, on whose ancestral lands UNBC's largest campus lies.
- We have multiple initiatives dedicated to Indigenous communities, such as dedicated housing spaces, research ambassador programs, awards and scholarships, pathway programs, and customized training for employees and through Continuing Studies.
- We house significant research facilities, including the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health and the Northern Biobank Initiative, and are home to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research's Institute of Indigenous Peoples' Health, whose Scientific Director is a UNBC faculty member.
- UNBC enjoys a continued, strong federation agreement with the Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute in the Nass Valley.
- We recently hired an Indigenous scholar into an endowed research chair in Indigenous Environmental Health.

## What is your institution doing to promote equitable access for people who come from disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances?

Equitable access to education is the very reason UNBC exists. Northern and rural communities are traditionally made up of underserved or vulnerable demographics, and UNBC strives to make a difference in this area each day. Our needs-based award program has delivered consistent and increasing support to those who need financial supports to pursue education.



UNBC also uses a vast assortment of resources and initiatives to promote access:

Youth in Care Waiver		Laptop loans for Indigenous students		Access Resource Centre		Youth programming	
Tutoring		Welcoming community		Health benefits		Pre-Academic Year boot camp	
Daycare		Food bank		Student Awards		Medical clinic	
Priority housing		Counselling		Dedicated space		Tuition waiver	
WWNI partnership		Emergency Assistance Fund		Regional language courses		Fee waivers	



# What are your major challenges in enhancing the contribution your institution makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of British Columbia?

The largest challenges UNBC faces are resources, financial and human. Yet investment in the post-secondary system and a commitment to continuous improvement from institutions creates a path forward.

Additional challenges are varied, but include the following:

- Although we have extremely positive engagement with communities, major gaps remain, including industrial liaison for research and development opportunities, especially those that could lead to new start-ups.
- Relationship building takes time; and while we have a solid foundation of partnerships, as we grow as a University, we need to invest more time in developing new relationships and cultivating existing ones. This becomes a challenge with other immediate demands on staff time.
- Government policies, on occasion, do not always translate into the northern ecosystem. The challenges remote and rural communities face are far different than those faced in the Lower Mainland.
- Face-to-face outreach and engagement with northern Indigenous and rural communities need to be authentic and continuous to build capacity in support of responsive programming where common interests exist. The travel costs of doing so across a vast geographical area are significant.
- There is a narrow interpretation of credentialing and not recognizing other ways of knowing and learning particularly regarding Indigenous perspectives; when not taken into consideration, it can create significant barriers for students.

All of this is compounded by human capital resources (space or people) and the ability to capitalize on the opportunities. This is a fundamental barrier and a challenge.



# Collaborations

What are the most significant contributions your institution makes in collaboration with other parts of BC's PSE system?

## Academic Partnerships

One of the most important contributions UNBC makes in the North in collaboration with other post-secondary partners is health-care education.

The Northern Medical Program, one site of UBC's distributed medical program, is an example of another northern, grassroots initiative that directly influenced the creation of a distributed medical school for British Columbia. In June 2000, a critical health care shortage in northern B.C. sparked a public rally in Prince George with thousands of people in attendance demanding improvements. In just four years, the NMP was up and running, training the next generation of doctors. Since its inception, some 60% of NMP graduates in permanent practice have gone on to practice in rural and northern communities, with 30% of them setting up practice in northern B.C.

Other partnerships with UBC include a joint Environmental Engineering program, and new Physical and Occupational Therapy programs.

The Northern Collaborative Baccalaureate Nursing program is another example. UNBC works with the College of New Caledonia and Coast Mountain College to deliver a four-year degree program that provides a consistent and reliable stream of highly qualified graduates supporting health care in northern B.C. and province-wide.

Further, the Midwives (BCCNM) program is available at three sites: Prince George, Quesnel and Terrace. CNC provides the initial years in Prince George and Quesnel, while Coast Mountain College provides the initial years in Terrace. UNBC provides the final coursework at all sites.





## Research Partnerships

UNBC, as one of B.C.'s six research intensive Universities, is a major centre of research with priority given to addressing complex topics, including social, environmental, health, economic and cultural issues. UNBC is a founding member of the Interior University Research Coalition, with a stated goal of accelerating the B.C. Interior's research and innovation ecosystem by harmonizing resources, enhancing student and faculty mobility, increasing academic opportunities, and establishing community connections, thereby addressing problems common to all three regions through collaborative research.

UNBC has also partnered with the UBC Faculty of Medicine and Northern Health for the recently announced Northern Centre for Clinical Research. This centre will support research relevant to rural and remote communities, and make clinical trials available to people who live in the North – from which they were previously excluded.

We have developed critical and highly productive partnerships with government agencies, such as the ministries involved in natural resources and the environment, and Northern Health, which ensures our research addresses real-world problems and is guided by those who deal with them.

## Additional Partnerships

UNBC is committed to growing and improving educational pathway/laddering/transfer agreements with other institutions. We have many in place already but recognize more can be done to create a more inclusive, accessible post-secondary sector. We are also working on areas of shared interest with other institutions. For example, all Northern institutions are facing the same challenges with aging/outdated technology, high upgrade costs, and recruitment challenges. The institutions have begun meeting to discuss the challenges and look for opportunities to collaborate in addressing them.

## What stands in the way of you collaborating more with the rest of BC's PSE system?

Collaboration requires intensive effort and resources upfront to get it right. Multiple barriers immediately present themselves:

- Resourcing challenges (personnel, money, limits and depth of participation that we can provide) limit UNBC's capacity.
- Systems/logistics, especially if there's a desire to consolidate some administrative functions.
- Do all institutions need to collaborate? Would some be happy to proceed "business as usual?"
- Systems that reward competition rather than collaboration (e.g. granting agencies, greater ability of larger institutions to lobby government).

Yet solutions exist to help smaller institutions facing resource challenges to improve their standing:

- Develop easy referrals from one post-secondary institution to another. If a student is not ready for university, there are outstanding Colleges in B.C. that could receive these students and help them be successful, completing certificates and diplomas before transitioning to UNBC.
- Ensure healthy competition (enable institutions to develop niche programming suited to their unique environments).
- Enhance collaboration and laddering; play to institutional strengths and support enhanced development of flexible options for our learners.
- Some institutions are oversubscribed and turning away outstanding students, such as in highly competitive professional programs. Develop an application ecosystem and referral process that gives under-subscribed institutions a group of willing applicants.
- Partner with Indigenous communities – and be creative in doing so.

## Funding model considerations

1. Increase provincial contributions to post-secondary education to reduce the increasing reliance on tuition, particularly that from international students.
2. Acknowledge that smaller post-secondary institutes cannot achieve the economies of scale as larger PSIs.
3. Acknowledge that post-secondary institutions, particularly those in rural and Northern communities can provide perspectives to government that can't be obtained through traditional channels.
4. Acknowledge that there are added costs – for example transportation and delivery of remote learning opportunities –to do this well.
5. Recognize that the North provides potential as a knowledge base. We are a voice in and for the North and can interact with business, industry and communities on research, education, and training opportunities by fostering and building relationships.
6. Increase supports outside the classroom (health and wellness, financial need, etc.)
7. Consider models that are not solely reliant on student body FTEs.

## Conclusion

British Columbia's post-secondary system is an exceptional ecosystem that fosters knowledge, creativity and inclusion. A reinvigorated funding model will allow B.C.'s PSIs to increase student satisfaction and success, develop more responsive programming, foster sustainability and a healthy environment, enhance community engagement, improve diversity, and support economic growth. UNBC is a critical component to that success, both through its actions as an institution and through collaboration with others, supported by the communities we are honoured to serve. Our actions today will provide immeasurable benefits to all British Columbians and help propel the province into a new era of innovation, inspiration and prosperity.

[unbc.ca](https://unbc.ca)