



FORMAL SUBMISSION TO THE PROVINCIAL POST-SECONDARY FUNDING MODEL REVIEW

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Introduction

The BCIT Student Association greatly appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the independent review of the provincial government's funding model for the public post-secondary sector. Representing close to 50,000 students in any given year, the Association is a firm believer in the essential role that education plays in building a clean and dynamic economy alongside a diverse and socially just society. In addition to representing the student body, the BCITSA also employs a team of professionals to support learners throughout their academic journey, regularly investing over \$2.5 million annually in direct service delivery for students.

The provision of high-quality support services for our students is a defining characteristic of the Association's work and this distinguishes us in several ways. Alongside conventional operations like a health and dental plan and campus pub, the BCITSA also offers career services and entrepreneurship workshops, in addition to operating a childcare on-campus. A complete overview of these offerings can be found in the Annual Management Report tabled at the 2021 AGM, while longer-term efforts are guided by the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan.^{1 2}

Our unique work has also been favourably recognized by staff and faculty at the Institute. In a recent academic study, the Association was described as "strong and proactive, but not political," with a definite focus "on supporting students and the student experience."³ Said one faculty member:

"We have a wonderful Student Association. If you can't get organized, we will do it ourselves, and it is holding a bit of a mirror up to the institution. Okay we are glad you are doing it, but we should be doing it too, and we should be doing it together — coaching, mentoring, math tutoring — all working together to pool those resources."⁴

Consequently, this submission will address the review's core questions with a particular emphasis on affordability, coupled with our perspective as a major provider of student services.

¹ "Resilience through Change: BCITSA Annual Management Report, 2020-21." BCIT Student Association: November 29th, 2021 ([link](#)).

² "Raising the Bar: BCITSA Strategic Vision, 2019-2024." BCIT Student Association: May 2019 ([link](#)).

³ Gibson, Jill (2020). *Bridging the Divide: Collaborative Practice Between Faculty and Student Services Staff* [Doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby]. SFU Summit research repository ([link](#)).

⁴ *Ibid.*

Aims of the review:

1. *“Establish a funding model that fairly and impartially distributes provincial financial resources across the public post-secondary sector.”*

The BCIT Student Association is in complete agreement with this aim, underpinned by the review’s eight core principles. Ideally, the funding model established via this process would also be subject to regular review and adjustment, where necessary, to avoid the “constraints and inequities” created by the current system.⁵ Subsequent reviews need not be as comprehensive but their increased frequency supports both the transparency and the adaptability referenced in the core principles.

In order to enable post-secondary institutions to prepare for the long-term, it is also essential that the model prioritize the principle of stable and predictable levels of funding. This could take many forms but should, at minimum, consider providing institutions with reasonable expectations of their allocation over multiple fiscal years. One option might be the three year timeframe utilized by the Ministry of Finance in the annual budgetary framework.

2. *“Align provincial funding with the education and skills training needs of British Columbians and the communities served by the 25 public post-secondary institutions.”*

This is a worthwhile aim and overlaps well with the first and sixth core principles, aligning with citizens’ priorities and improving performance output, respectively. Such an alignment would address the needs highlighted in the Labour Market Outlook while also advancing the vision set out in *StrongerBC*.⁶ In considering how best to achieve this aim, special consideration should be given to the purposes of a school like BCIT. While the geographic community directly served by the Institute is Metro Vancouver, the statutory mandate of BCIT is to “to act as a polytechnic institution for British Columbia.”⁷ To the extent that the entire province is therefore the community served by the Institute, the funding model should incentivize collaborations between BCIT and regional colleges, consistent with the eighth core principle.

3. *“Support student success by ensuring access to affordable, high-quality post-secondary education and expanding key student supports.”*

It is this aim, in particular, where the Student Association sees the greatest promise for significant and targeted improvements in the funding model. Both the public post-secondary system and society itself have evolved considerably since the 1962 Macdonald report, or even in the twenty years since the funding model was last reviewed. The student body is far more diverse than in previous decades, the pandemic has had a particularly detrimental impact on young people, and there are increasingly higher expectations on government, on post-secondary institutions and on student associations to provide world class student supports.⁸ As shall be further elaborated below, the funding model must absolutely reflect this need.

⁵ “Province launches public post-secondary funding review.” Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training: March 31st, 2022 ([link](#)).

⁶ “B.C.’s Economic Plan: Building an economy that works for everyone.” Ministry of Jobs, Economic Recovery, and Innovation: February 17th, 2022 ([link](#)).

⁷ Section 8.1, *College and Institute Act*. Ch. 52, Revised Statutes of British Columbia (1996).

⁸ Page 33, “Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Health and Well-being of Young Adults in British Columbia”. BC Centre for Disease Control: July 2021 ([link](#)).

Questions posed to stakeholders:

1. *“What are the most important contributions the PSE system makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of BC?”*

With respect to the contributions made by the PSE system for the betterment of British Columbia and Canada, the results speak for themselves. In a given year, public post-secondary institutions enrol 424,000 students and award close to 54,000 credentials.⁹ After graduation, young people with a credential experience unemployment rates almost 10% lower than those with a high school diploma or less.¹⁰ As with any jurisdiction, these positive results contribute to economic growth and social well-being for British Columbians across the province.

As the world works to respond to the climate crisis and re-orient towards a cleaner economy, the innovation being pioneered at post-secondary institutions through both applied and pure research will be critical to our shared success. This is seen not only in the research done at various institutions but also in the invaluable skills and knowledge gained by students in the system. In this regard, the contributions of the PSE system, and of BCIT in particular, are worthy of recognition.¹¹

The social impacts of post-secondary education are innumerable and often self-evident. From the perspective of the Student Association, the opportunity to develop oneself fully and reach the extent of one’s true potential as a human being are of incalculable value to students, their families, their community, and society generally. Where there are insurmountable barriers to access, we are all diminished. Where there are overwhelming obstacles to student success once enrolled, the system and the individual are worse off.

Finally, British Columbia’s post-secondary system is also an indispensable pathway by which our society grows and becomes more diverse. While not all international students will seek to remain in Canada, a great many do so and make our communities more vibrant, more dynamic, and richer, both culturally and economically. While B.C. would inevitably occupy a place of prominence as a destination for immigration, a robust public post-secondary system greatly enhances the province’s attractiveness as a place to get an education, start a business, and raise a family.

2. *“What could the system be doing differently to enhance its contributions to the economic, social, and environmental health of BC?”*

As articulated above, the fundamentals are quite strong as it relates to the system’s contributions to British Columbia. However, no system is perfect and there are definitely improvements which would enhance the system’s contributions. The Student Association will be focusing on three areas in this submission: affordability issues which reduce access, issues for fairness which negatively affect international students, and issues regarding the inconsistent levels of funding for essential student supports while in school. A funding model that addresses these critical areas would greatly enhance the system’s contributions to BC.

⁹ “BC Public Post-Secondary System: 2020/21 Accountability Framework Highlights.” Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training ([link](#)).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ “BCIT AC-10: Support for Sustainability Research.” The Sustainability Tracking, Assessments & Rating System, Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education: March 30th, 2021 ([link](#)).

3. *“What do you see as the key economic, demographic, social and technological trends that will impact post-secondary education in BC over the next 30 years?”*

The ambit of this question speaks favourably to the comprehensiveness with which this exercise is being approached, and the Funding Formula Review Project Office will no doubt be inundated with all manner of submissions on this matter. For reference, one need only consider the volume of changes, and their rapidly increasing pace, that have impacted post-secondary education during the past 30 years, even just in the past decade alone.

Suffice to say, several prominent trends stand out:

- Ongoing cost of living issues will have several impacts on post-secondary education. Higher learning will offer a pathway to greater job prospects and increased earnings, but affordability issues will also negatively affect, for so long as they persist, access to education for those who would most benefit from it.
- At present, fluency with evolving technologies is not evenly distributed across age groups. For younger demographics, basic familiarity with smartphones, computers, and online platforms will increasingly be near-universal. Currently, the same cannot be said for older demographics. Over the next thirty years, the balance will invariably shift.
- Coming out of the pandemic, there will be heightened expectations about the diversity of delivery options available in education. The capacity of individual institutions to respond to these expectations will become a competitive advantage in and of itself, and it is reasonable to anticipate that learners will take this into account when selecting which school to attend.
- Though not yet fully quantified, it is unavoidable that post-secondary education and society will be significantly impacted by increasing automation, by the shift to a clean economy, and by our aging population. These disruptions will require a coordinated response from government, educators, employers, labour, the private sector, and civil society — the availability of nimble and flexible post-secondary opportunities for affected workforces to adapt, re-skill, and come out ahead is absolutely essential.
- Immigration will continue to be a leading source of population growth and workforce renewal. Anticipating this, the post-secondary sector and the immigration system must be well-resourced and proactive — if successful, Canadian-educated foreign-born workers will contribute to a growing economy and an even richer and diverse society.
- Alongside the changing role of technology and even further globalization, post-secondary institutions will expect even greater competition within their sector. Students will be able to choose from among a wider array of post-secondary options, not only in their own communities but also through institutions offering more comprehensive online options. Given this increased competition, it would be anticipated that students will also have higher expectations of their post-secondary institutions, particularly relating to quality of education, receiving value for money, and the availability of reliable and consistent student support services.
- In tandem with the profound changes taking place in the economy, it is likely that there will be greater instances of adults returning to school at later stages in life. Some of this may be the result of job losses in various sectors, while other instances will be efforts by employers or workers to up-skill and acquire additional competencies through shorter programs and more flexible routes. This will also have an impact on the demographic composition of the student population, with increases in working professionals, parents, and older workers.

4. *“How do you think the PSE system needs to evolve in response to those trends?”*

In relation to the seven interrelated trends referred to above, they are not equally urgent, nor is it necessarily possible in this submission to canvass all of the ways in which the post-secondary education system could evolve to meet them. That being said, there are several which merit further discussion and could be addressed through updates to the funding formula, or via other policy measures outside of the review.

The availability of reliable student support services will take on an increasingly relevant role for students as they assess the value proposition of studying at one school over another. Considerations such as the availability and quality of library or recreational services will continue to be quite important, but so too will the quality and availability of services such as mental health counselling or childcare. With the expected increase in competition between institutions for new enrolments, being able to offer the full suite of necessary services will become its own type of competitive advantage. In order to further the principle that no student should experience limited access to services based solely on which school they chose, the government should collaborate with post-secondary institutions and student associations to ensure that comparable levels of service are available across all institutions.

The challenge of affordability has been present for quite some time, but is not expected to improve anytime soon. Although domestic tuition and ancillary fee increases are capped at 2% annually, there are many other cost of living challenges facing students today, including: limited supply of available on- and off-campus student housing, reduced earnings and opportunities for work experience due to the pandemic, and under-investment in provincial student aid, coupled with scheduled reductions in temporary Canada Student Grant increases. Insofar as there is overlap between the province's post-secondary system and the policy tools of the Ministry, meaningful measures to address the affordability crisis would include a renewal of the capital financing program for on-campus housing and finally implementing the 2020 mandate letter commitment to expand the BC Access Grant for students.¹²

One final way in which the system must evolve is to recognize the overlap between international students and future citizens. As highlighted in previous sections, many of the students who come from abroad will one day walk the road to permanent residency and, eventually, Canadian citizenship. In recognition of this dynamic, coupled with the principle that all student should be treated fairly, British Columbia should position itself as a leading jurisdiction when it comes to the regulation of international tuition rates. This could be advanced, for example, by reducing unpredictability for students through the implementation of tuition fee transparency guidelines, something the Ministry is already actively considering.¹³

5. *“What modifications to the funding formula would you recommend considering the above?”*

As referenced in the commentary, above, on the specific aims of the review, there are several necessary changes to the funding model which should be examined further. The model must become nimbler and subject to periodic review so that it can be sufficiently responsive to evolving dynamics in the workforce and the post-secondary system. For the benefit of proper long-term planning, the funding levels should be set out for institutions over a multi-year basis.

¹² Page 3, Mandate Letter to the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Training. Office of the Premier: November 26th, 2020 ([link](#)).

¹³ Page 3, Freedom of Information Request AED-2021-15276. Information Access Operations, Ministry of Citizens' Services: February 14th, 2022 ([link](#)).

Recognizing that the 25 public post-secondary institutions, collectively, support a system intended to provide for the educational and workforce development needs of British Columbia, proper consideration should be given to ways in which all of them can properly play their part. Smaller and regional schools occupy an essential role providing opportunities for remote and rural communities. At the same time, an institution like BCIT has a special role to play in providing polytechnic education for the province but is geographically based in the Lower Mainland. To accommodate these widely varying circumstances, the funding model must promote collaborations and partnerships where possible, but should also provide special consideration for post-secondary institutions with a provincial mandate.

Adequate funding for student support services is an area in which the BCIT Student Association strongly believes the funding model must be modified. Over the years, significant disparities have developed which are not properly provided for by the current formula. Ultimately, this is unfair for students and disadvantages post-secondary institutions and student unions who are nonetheless called upon to fill the gaps as they arise.

The funding model must evolve to incorporate these additional needs. A decade ago, the Province provided \$1.84 billion in annual operating grants to the institutions, which is worth approximately \$2.29 billion in today's dollars; for 2021/22, the total spend on operating grants was almost identical, \$2.3 billion. This does not, therefore, sufficiently provide for the myriad of additional services that are required.

Childcare and housing are two significant examples. The Province has recently been quite forward-thinking in its approach to capital investments in these two areas. However, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training should also support service providers with operating funding once construction is complete. In the case of childcare, this would need to recognize that services are currently provided via a variety of models, including the institutions themselves, student associations, and local non-profits. It would be fairer for students if the model recognized and supported these service providers, while also offering sufficient incentives to grow these services, especially at under-served institutions.

Furthermore, there are numerous additional services that should be taken into account, many of them far less capital-intensive. Among these are: mental health supports, advocacy and ombuds offices, food banks, career advising, supports for survivors of sexual violence, distinct supports for Indigenous learners; the list goes on. The Ministry should establish minimum service standards for these supports and provide dedicated funding to meet these standards, while also recognizing and compensating the providers of pre-existing services where standards are met.

Further matters for consideration:

The above submission highlights certain aspects of British Columbia's post-secondary system which the Student Association believes are worthy of examination in this review. At its core, the system's fundamentals are strong and there is much to commend in the ways that institutions, faculty, students, staff, and their representative organizations navigated the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are a variety of persistent challenges which could be addressed through policy changes, additional funding, or revisions to the funding formula.

Strictly speaking, funding levels for StudentAidBC are quite distinct from the \$2.3 billion granted annually by the Province to the public post-secondary institutions. However, many in the student movement see the BC Access Grant, and student loans, as inextricably linked to the questions of affordability and access inherent in certain of the aims and principles of this review. In the event that the total envelope for operating funding does not increase any time soon, it would be anticipated that tuition levels will continue to rise across the province. Expanding the BC Access Grant, as promised during the 2020 election and reiterated in subsequent mandate letters and Finance committee recommendations, can help to promote access for those least able to afford rising fees.¹⁴ For several budgetary cycles now, the Student Association, along with others, has been calling for this policy to be implemented.¹⁵

Like funding levels for student financial assistance, the regulation of international tuition rates also does not fall squarely within the determination of the funding model. That being said, there exists a highly relevant causal relationship at play. Within the context of caps on domestic increases and inadequacies in the current funding model, international students find themselves in a precarious position and may be subject to unreasonable and unpredictable tuition increases. In conjunction with the current funding review, the Province should also expand the scope of the current Tuition Fee Limit Policy to regulate international tuition increases, rather than leaving them unregulated. This is already being considered by the Ministry; last November, the Finance Committee also expressed a preference for greater transparency and predictability here.¹⁶

Ultimately, the total level of funding available to post-secondary institutions creates an inherent constraint in responding to many of the questions raised in this review. According to the the BC Government's own data, \$1.84 billion was the value of the grant ten years ago, which is worth more or less the same, in 2022 dollars, as the current level of the grant.¹⁷ For the system to be able to expand and remain dynamic, more funding is necessary. In order for institutions, student associations, and civil society to be able to ensure there are sufficient support services available, more money is required. It was recently said, "*When negotiating, don't aim for a bigger piece of the pie; aim to create a bigger pie.*"¹⁸ As it relates to the post-secondary sector, we could not agree more.

¹⁴ Page 22, "Report on the Budget 2022 Consultation." BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services: November 2021 ([link](#)).

¹⁵ "External Policy 2 - Needs-based Grants." BCIT Student Association: January 2021 ([link](#)).

¹⁶ Page 21, "Report on the Budget 2022 Consultation." BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services: November 2021 ([link](#)).

¹⁷ "Operating Grants at B.C. Public Post-Secondary Institutions." British Columbia Data Catalogue: May 11th, 2022 ([link](#)).

¹⁸ Wright, Don. "Resource Revenue Sharing: Ideas and Consideration." Presentation at the 2022 Indigenous Partnerships Success Showcase: May 27th, 2022.