



# Restoring Public Funding and Focus to BC's Post- Secondary Education System

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BRITISH COLUMBIA  
POST-SECONDARY FUNDING FORMULA REVIEW

SUBMITTED BY



CUPE BC represents more than 104,000 workers in British Columbia who deliver public services across a wide range of sectors including public and post-secondary education, childcare, community social services, community health, local government, transit, emergency services, and libraries.

We acknowledge that our province of British Columbia is located on the homelands of 203 distinct Indigenous nations and cultures; more than 30 different languages and close to 60 unique dialects are spoken in the province. We ask all participants to reflect, acknowledge and honour in their own way the First Nation land on which they live, work and play.



Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia  
410 – 6222 Willingdon Ave. Burnaby, B.C. V5H 0G3

T: 604.291.9119

TOLL FREE: 1.877.263.8568

E: [info@cupe.bc.ca](mailto:info@cupe.bc.ca)



Don Wright, Engagement Lead  
Post-Secondary Funding Formula Review

July 15, 2022

Dear Dr. Wright,

In response to your letter of April 22, 2022, the Canadian Union of Public Employees British Columbia (CUPE BC) appreciates the opportunity to submit its views in the first phase of the post-secondary funding review. Herein, we provide discussion on the five questions posed, particularly speaking to issues affecting working people in our province.

CUPE BC represents over 104,000 workers in British Columbia who deliver public services across a wide range of sectors, including: public post-secondary education, childcare, community social services, community health, local government, transportation, emergency services, and libraries. CUPE is one of the principal unions representing workers at every level of B.C.'s education systems, from early childhood education to post-graduate education and research. In post-secondary education, CUPE represents over 15,000 members in support and clerical roles, trades and technical work, instructional roles such as sessional instructors, and in the provision of other important services to post-secondary campus communities. Many CUPE members working in the post-secondary sector are themselves students, working as teaching assistants, research assistants and in other study-related types of employment. Post-secondary institutions in B.C. cannot operate without the vital work of our members.

All British Columbians benefit from improved access to affordable, inclusive, high-quality public post-secondary education, and would benefit from a restoration of post-secondary funding back to majority public dollars. As B.C. navigates the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, universities and colleges have a key role in social and economic recovery: addressing labour force shortages and misalignment, innovating away from a boom-and-bust resource-based economy, and advocating for a diverse and inclusive society are important responsibilities we need our post-secondary system to help shoulder. The globe has finally been forced to address the climate crisis, innovate energy solutions that cause no harm to the planet, and engineer a post-fossil fuel economy.

Our province needs a focused and responsive post-secondary system that meets these challenges, not one focused on free market competition. Yet systematic withdrawal of public funding to the post-secondary sector has caused lasting damage to higher education in B.C., and this must be corrected. Withdrawal of post-secondary funding affects B.C.'s ability to compete globally, impacting capacity for

research, innovation, labour force and economic development. Where once our institutions could focus on their core mission of curriculum delivery, student success, research and development facilitation and community support, they now must focus on the sale of international education, fundraising, advertising and marketing and other considerations that distract from their core service to our province.

The timing of this funding review is critical. Coordinated and strategic work is needed to restore capacity among our public colleges and universities and return them to their core mission. The remedy for the current challenges facing the system is the restoration of public funding to produce an affordable, high-quality, fully-funded system of public post-secondary education. This cannot be achieved solely by the reallocation of funds within an underfunded system.

Sincerely,

Karen Ranalletta  
President

Trevor Davies  
Secretary-Treasurer

## What are the most important contributions the PSE system makes to the economic, social, and environmental health of BC?

One of the key functions of the post-secondary system is to contribute to a better society through excellence in academic research. A broad range of research contributions, emphasizing the quality and impacts of those contributions, advances the health, social health, social justice and sustainability of our province. Public funding for research, such as the recent \$25 million in awards through the B.C. Knowledge Development Fund, helps to ensure that research is done for the public good, rather than primarily funded by and benefitting private sector interests. Research conducted at public post-secondary institutions makes substantial contributions to addressing issues with which our communities and province struggle, and which do not have financial incentives generating private sector investment.

A good example of such research is on reconciliation, a key government priority. Research that supports Indigenization, decolonization and reconciliation is necessary for Indigenous and ally educators to put this important work into action and align with the BC Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act<sup>1</sup>. Continued excellent research capacity displayed by B.C. institutions will help to attract world-class scholars and continue to ensure that British Columbia's post-secondary education is globally competitive. Simultaneously this would enable our institutions to further prioritize the hiring of Indigenous scholars and educators, indigenize curricula and physical spaces, and create Indigenous pathways to education. Nineteen of the 94 Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action have direct implications for the post-secondary sector, and the post-secondary sector is a venue within which Indigenous students, scholars, faculty, staff, and communities can be the ones to lead this conversation and work. As Chief Justice Murray Sinclair stated, "Education got us into this mess, and it will be education that gets us out".<sup>2</sup>

Reconciliation is but one example of a huge number of social, economic and environmental issues that the post-secondary system can help address. Other examples include the impacts of climate change, leadership in information technology, improvement of resource extraction and reuse practices, urban design and sustainability challenges, creating a more inclusive society, lowering community and domestic violence, reducing poverty and crime, improving community health, and evolving medical practice and treatments. The climate crisis is one of the most urgent issues of our time, and one on which our colleges and universities must continue to make substantial contributions. Research, innovation, education and re-training are needed elements of our work on climate change mitigation and adaptation, and our public post-secondary institutions can only contribute to these needs if properly funded and supported.

Providing high-quality trades programs with up-to-date technology is another integral function of the post-secondary system. These programs fuel our economic growth and recovery, provide fulfilling career paths through the Red Seal trade certification program, and provide stable jobs that support families. The Skilled Trades B.C. Act provides for the certification of the initial 10 mechanical, electrical, and automotive trades, and is an important step not only in recognition of the importance of the trades, but in protecting and creating more stable and well-compensated employment opportunities. The post-secondary education system has always been at the core of addressing the shortage of skilled tradespeople in B.C., and especially to ensuring that equity-deserving populations have access to careers in the skilled trades. The onset of this legislation will further increase the post-secondary system's

capacity for trades certifications as well as the system's ability to improve outcomes for skilled tradespeople.

Providing a supply of skilled trades workers is only one way that the post-secondary education system contributes to the labour force. Colleges and universities provide necessary retraining to unemployed and underemployed workers, which is of particular benefit to those whose skills and qualifications are misaligned with current labour force demands. Additionally, post-secondary education provides a mechanism to reduce unemployment, as those entering the education system are temporarily removed from the labour market surplus. These two roles mean that our colleges and universities are positioned to take surplus labour for which there is no work and provide the skills and training necessary to reintegrate workers into the labour market in areas where demand outstrips supply. A further benefit is that while in study, unemployed workers have access to programs and services that provide socio-economic supports and thereby relieve pressure from other government programs. The important caveat to the above is that the post-secondary system can only perform this critical role if it is properly funded, properly staffed and providing the services students and their families require.

Labour force predictions for British Columbia between 2021 and 2031 predict a demand for 1,004,000 new workers. A staggering 77 percent of these workers, 773,000, will require some post-secondary education.<sup>3</sup> For those in some scientific, professional and medical roles, multiple degrees are required. Further, as the effects of the climate crisis continue and work to mitigate these effects impacts our economy, there will be a need to further retrain workers whose industries are no longer sustainable. Without such a plan, the economic impacts for workers, families and communities will be dire. Universities and colleges need to have the resources, mandate and capacity to contribute to a just transition for workers, both

by providing education and retraining, but also by helping to innovate the sustainable options towards which our economy must evolve.

Universities and colleges are dynamic engines of economic activity and are often major regional employers. Our public post-secondary sector provides well-paying, fulfilling, unionized jobs for thousands of workers in faculty, staff, and student positions. Many of these jobs provide workers with additional benefits such as tuition waivers, access to continuing education, and access to high-quality childcare facilities, which have positive impacts generationally for the children and families of post-secondary workers. Especially for workers who are of equity-deserving identities, these benefits are often no less than life-changing.

## What could the system be doing differently to enhance its contributions to the economic, social, and environmental health of British Columbia?

Chronic underfunding has put immense pressure on all parts of our post-secondary system, and the changing nature of funding has forced institutions to focus on revenue generation over and above considerations about the economic, social and environmental well-being of their communities and our province. Institutions make decisions at College Board and Board of Governor tables based on the economic realities of their existence – the most important one being shrinking provincial government resources. Colleges and universities as revenue generators focus on selling education to the international market and attracting private investment, and research and program profiles reflect this pattern. Program profiles at institutions reflect a business model, and this can be seen in the growth in commerce and business programming, which is easy to market and inexpensive to deliver.

Restoring public funding and public focus is the best way to have our post-secondary system better resource the shared economic, social and environmental needs of our province. Functionally, this would mean restoring the level of funding for public institutions to a majority of public dollars for each institution, and progressively reversing the trend of privatization that has seen public support wither as a proportion of overall budgets. A tool of defunding was the block funding model, which delinked public funding from direct, program-based student enrolment. This model should be reversed, and institutions better funded for the diversity of costs of programs and research required to fulfill each institution's mandate. Block funding creates a negative impact to institutions funding programs that cost more

than a conventional lecture-based course of study. Programs of research needed to deliver significant contributions to our communities may require extra facilities, instructional time, materials, services or administrative overhead. Institutions are not funded properly for these considerations. Block funding also undermines public accountability, with an overall focus on student numbers as a sum rather than the delivery of the specific programs that our communities require.

The effects of changing funding models have created distinct operational challenges. Outlined below are several of those challenges and proposed solutions. While these issues are important to consider and address, they cannot be sustainably resolved without a restoration of public funding that restores historical proportions of public funding and public focus to our colleges and universities.

### END THE DOWNLOADING OF CUTS TO STUDENT SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Institutional budget cuts have been disproportionately applied to campus services and facilities. In some cases, programs and services have been cut on the basis that they are deemed unjustified in an environment of shrinking budgets, but more commonly these cuts are due to failure to keep pace with demand. With student enrolment numbers being the bar by which each institution's performance is judged, decision-makers cut programs and services seen as unrelated to the work of increasing student numbers. These services, focused directly or indirectly on student success, are often relied upon by equity-deserving students from marginalized backgrounds who have social, health or academic needs not

addressed in the classroom. High demand in general for post-secondary education may hide the effects of these cuts as student enrolments are not always noticeably impacted. However, it becomes a matter of who is left behind. The current funding model that does not provide direct and accountable funding for services facilitates this pattern.

Not only do cuts to services have a disproportionate effect on equity-deserving students, but they have a profound effect on university and college staff. Without sufficient staff, workloads have increased dramatically while pay increases did not match inflation, and work became more precarious. Increasingly, as full-time regular staff retire, institutions are not replacing these positions. Instead, institutions are turning to part-time and casual staff with often limited access to benefits, seemingly to retain staffing numbers while saving costs. In some areas, institutions are contracting work out to low-wage, for-profit companies with predictable results: a reduction in service to the campus community in exchange for a savings to the institution. Services are a key element of the education and research provided at our colleges and universities, from academic and library services to food services and campus maintenance. Public funding must hold institutions accountable for their support of student, campus and ancillary services, and must provide for the necessary supports to ensure fair and equitable access to education for those who rely on these services for academic success.

It should be noted that while student services have been perhaps the most disproportionately affected, other service departments and workers also keenly feel the effects of downloaded funding cuts. All post-secondary workers in support roles, including clerical and administrative workers and teaching assistants, are facing increased precarity and overwork coming out of the pandemic. Expansions of

programming and infrastructure, against a backdrop of historical underfunding, have created more need for support staff without the resources they need to do their work. The result has been an expansion of non-permanent positions, and the addition of more work to those already struggling with workloads. Patterns such as these are examples of why system funding must be addressed at a higher level, and why re-arranging existing funds is not a solution to the challenges faced by the post-secondary system.

### **END CONTRACTING OUT AND BRING WORK BACK IN-HOUSE**

The effects of underfunding are disproportionately felt by low-wage and precarious workers on campus, and the negative effects of contracting out in the post-secondary sector are most strongly felt by those who work in ancillary services such as food, custodial, facilities and maintenance. This work, vital to keeping students and staff healthy, is often outsourced to large corporations such as Compass, Sodexo, Chartwells, Best Service Pro, and a host of firms providing trades and maintenance services. These corporations pay lower wages and use corporate strategies to maintain poor working conditions, as compared to the in-house workers they are displacing. Further, the focus of these firms is revenue generation, not contributing to the campus community in any meaningful way. Campuses are special places where people, predominantly young people, spend their whole day. Campuses are homes for students and oftentimes also their families, including their children. Campuses must provide for people who have no options beyond the services that are available at their institution. The contracting out of key services has ramifications for B.C.'s post-secondary campuses as a safe and healthy home and place to learn and study, and for the overall quality of employment provided by B.C.'s tax dollars.

This government has recognized that privatization weakens communities and has supported the repatriation of public sector work in health care. This principle should extend to post-secondary institutions, with the development of a framework to bring outsourced work back in-house. Not only will this ensure that students, staff and the public is better served, it is an important equity and racial justice issue as women and racialized people are primarily impacted by contracted-out work at post-secondary campuses. The negative effects of privatization on equity-deserving workers are felt generationally, with contracted out workers and their families unable to access the key benefits of working in a post-secondary institution, such as fair wages, tuition waivers, and access to high-quality on-campus childcare that are provided to in-house non-academic staff.

#### **END PREDATORY INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION**

Heavy dependence on revenue from international student tuition fees to make up for reductions of public funding is not a practice worthy of a jurisdiction like British Columbia. British Columbia is a wealthy jurisdiction as compared to many around the globe and should be using this privilege to provide college and university education to those from countries where no such education is accessible. Instead, B.C. is selling education at a profit to an international market. As of 2019, international education represented B.C.'s fourth largest export.<sup>4</sup> While many international students have the means to pay profit-generating fees, that is not true of all. International education tuition for many students represents the contributions of an entire family's income, with students living in near poverty conditions in our province in order to access educations they cannot gain in their home country. While some of the higher fees paid by international students are indeed used for dedicated services, this is not proportional to the sums charged, and regular increases in

international tuition fees are about institutional budget-balancing, not service to students.

Sadly, international education in British Columbia is a system in which students from equity-deserving groups are seen not as learners but as a revenue stream. It is an undertaking that consumes immense institutional resources through all levels of decision-making and management; yet resources that are rarely properly accounted for against the overall contribution of international education to institutional budgets. International education as a concept can have substantial benefits for students, communities and institutions. However, its operation should be consistent with the values of our province, not focused on revenue generation over service to students and the global community.

#### **CONTINUE TO MAKE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION MORE AFFORDABLE**

Since 2017, the B.C. government has made significant advancements in post-secondary affordability, with expanded grants, elimination of interest on student loans and the tuition waiver program. While these programs relieve costs and provide access for some, the up-front barrier of high tuition fees and the burden of student debt continue to prevent some of the province's most historically marginalized people from accessing a post-secondary education in B.C.'s colleges and universities, while high student debt loads impact graduates' ability to participate in the economy. Increased reliance on student tuition to fund institutions is a product of reduced public funding and should be addressed as public funding is restored. Lower- and middle-income learners and Indigenous learners require additional non-repayable funding supports from post-secondary institutions.

Tuition fee levels have become a function of public policy relative to provincial efforts to remove public support from institutional budgets. This has proven detrimental to many

programs that have not produced the enrolment required to supply labour markets. Financial barriers prevent students from low- and middle-incomes accessing programs in high-demand, and students with the funds to meet the financial barriers are pushed into programs seen as leading to a more lucrative career. Examples of this exist at all levels of the post-secondary system, from medical program fees that push students away from family practice to early childhood education program fees that are not relational to the wages in the field. Tuition fee freezes and a tuition fee reduction, in conjunction with increased government funding, is a key strategy to make post-secondary education universally affordable for everyone, and to address key labour market shortages across a wide variety of fields.

#### **RESTORE DIRECT FUNDING FOR MAINTENANCE**

Huge capital investments have been made in colleges and universities, yet the subsequent allocation of funding towards core budgets for ongoing maintenance, handover of building operations, and ongoing renovations is lacking. Too often, the focus is on new builds rather than ensuring that current infrastructure is in good condition. The lack of attention to ongoing maintenance is also a key component on the slippery slope towards privatization of services in the post-secondary sector. Post-secondary funding must include direct funding to be utilized for deferred and ongoing maintenance. All workers and students on our post-secondary campuses need reliable, safe and clean infrastructure, and those working to provide these services on campuses deserve decent working conditions and fair pay for their essential work. Ignoring deferred maintenance creates a significantly more expensive problem down the line.

#### **INCREASE TRADES FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR APPRENTICESHIPS**

While there was significant focus on capital expansions in the post-secondary sector in

Budget 2022, the costs of these expansions were excessive because B.C. does not have adequate numbers of domestic skilled tradespeople available to do this work. Yet our post-secondary system itself is the key to addressing the shortage of skilled tradespeople. Holding a Red Seal trade certification improves the wages, job prospects, especially for equity-deserving groups who are underrepresented as skilled tradespeople. Our post-secondary sector is well-positioned to support apprenticeships, but has yet to do so on the scale at which it is possible. The Skilled Trades B.C. Act, coming into effect in phases between 2022 and 2024, may be an opportunity to address this. Improvement of avenues for skilled trades apprenticeships within the post-secondary sector, which represents diverse vocations and opportunities, has far to go. Additionally, the repatriation of contracted-out maintenance and building operations positions would also increase the ability to provide trades apprenticeships in post-secondary institutions. In-house positions come with flexibility for training that lower wage, less reliable contracted-out positions do not.

#### **INCREASED FUNDING FOR RESEARCH TO MEET B.C.'S NEEDS**

A key contribution that post-secondary education makes to society is solving problems through relevant and dependable research. However, our research infrastructure has become commercialized, often with a heavier focus on bringing benefits to the private sector than on supporting the public good. Due to underfunding for public research, scholars are forced to spend less time doing research and more time attempting to secure funding for themselves. Institutional funds and countless hours are used by academic researchers in searching for grants and navigating Tri-Council and Common CV systems (the major source of national post-secondary research grant funding, and the application system used to compete for this funding). Many researchers are

simultaneously disadvantaged by these systems, especially those less likely to have staff to do their administration work for them, including Indigenous, Black and racialized researchers, young researchers, and researchers who are women, especially in STEM fields — this is a loss of research capacity and important scholarly voices that must be prioritized, not further marginalized.

Research funded by the B.C. government would ensure that research projects tackle the most pressing issues of our time for the benefit of our province and communities. Dedicated and stable research funding that breaks down systemic barriers would ensure that diverse voices are better and more equitably reflected in our research opportunities, and that the time of research staff and academic faculty is spent on just that – research, not administration.

#### **ENHANCING REGIONAL OPTIONS AND STRENGTHENING THE TRANSFER SYSTEM**

The collaborative nature of the B.C. transfer model is a unique quality of the post-secondary system in our province. The model has evolved significantly over the past 30 years as university-colleges were created, gained degree-granting status, and eventually became universities; colleges too now have degree-granting ability. The original notion of the transfer system was based on limited access to university education, with only three degree-granting universities in the province located in Victoria and the Lower Mainland. This is no longer the reality, and university access is much better distributed than it was 30 years past. This means that students who have chosen to attend a local college rather than travelling to the South Coast have options to access university education in their region.

While expansion of university access is excellent for those seeking university programming, and those who can travel or relocate within their region, many students are seeking college

education specifically due to program choice, affordability or lack of mobility. Issues with systemic discrimination in our systems also affect a student's choice to attend a college rather than a university. Recent years have seen small, rural and inner-city colleges decline as competition for enrolments have intensified and public funding has been withdrawn. Our college system, without economies of scale, an equal ability to attract international revenue, and reliance on a transfer system used by fewer students, has suffered as a result. This pattern has had a detrimental effect on access to programs like adult basic education, English language learning and English as a new or second language, which are key ports of entry and re-entry into the post-secondary system for adult learners, particularly those from equity-deserving groups.

From the budget challenges at Vancouver Community College and Coast Mountain College, to location closures at North Island College, multiple examples exist to illustrate how our system of colleges has suffered real setbacks under the current funding, designation and transfer model. At a time when small and rural colleges are sorely needed to expand trades and professional education to a diverse array of rural, equity-deserving, mature and indigenous learners, they lack the resources to do so. This pattern should be reversed by investing in colleges, expanding rural campuses and centres, better promoting the transfer system, and better equipping universities to help students transferring from colleges into third year university studies.

## 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 rising cost of living is a substantial barrier to students accessing post-secondary education as well as to institutions attempting to fill job postings. For workers supporting dependents, access to high-quality, affordable on-campus childcare may even factor into their decisions to work in the post-secondary sector; being unable to access affordable or on-campus childcare, especially for student families, can be a make-or-break situation in terms of success in both employment and education.

For all but the most privileged in our province, the affordability of housing is a dire challenge. A May 2022 survey of UBC administrative and library workers with nearly 1,000 survey participants showed 36 percent spending 50 percent or more of their combined net household incomes on rent. A June 2022 survey of University of Northern British Columbia teaching assistants showed that the situation is grim for these workers, with 56 percent of survey participants spending 50 percent or more of their household incomes on rent. With expenditures as high as this, many post-secondary workers both in and outside of urban centres are currently, or will be, looking for opportunities in other areas where the real value of their earnings is higher. Additionally, when student workers such as teaching assistants are paying rents totaling over 50 percent of their household incomes, it can be reasonably expected that they will be more likely to leave their current community after they finish their educations.

The pattern of privatization, contracting out and service discontinuation in post-secondary institutions exists across a variety of campus services and trades labour. Financial crises

have been used to justify commodification of campuses in the form of corporate sponsorships of buildings, spaces and programs; in some cases, post-secondary institutions already divesting of services utilized the pandemic adaptation period as a time to accelerate such plans. The private sector also increasingly sees universities and colleges as avenues for profit, and this has manifested in the form of privately operated residences, recreational facilities, and design/build/operate models of construction.

The differential effects of the pandemic have meant that Indigenous, Black and racialized people as well as women, people with disabilities, gender minorities, and people belonging to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community have disproportionately experienced job and income loss and suffered negative impacts to their mental health and wellbeing. Post-secondary institutions should be at the forefront of truth and reconciliation work and in furthering opportunities for equity deserving groups, both in terms of staffing and student recruitment. In recent years, significant progress has been made especially around truth and reconciliation and Indigenous student recruitment, and it is imperative that efforts continue and extend further. While there has been significant social change in the past decade, a great many historical inequities continue to exist and to be perpetuated and amplified in our systems. Coming years must bring a continued focus on advancing truth and reconciliation, and on eliminating the systemic discrimination inherent in our colonial systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced most campus operations across the province to shut down entirely, and the suspension of face-to-face

learning led to closures of campus services and the movement of campus staff to working from home. Now that services have re-opened, many of those campuses are operating with fewer resources and at reduced capacity. While many CUPE members experienced continued full employment during the height of the pandemic, casual, auxiliary, and term/contract members were laid off or underemployed. Two years into the pandemic, many have had to look for other work, and all workers are feeling the effects. Opportunities to re-assign work on campus rather than re-hiring are leading to heavily increased workload for regular staff, as well the downloading of work onto student workers and non-academic staff. One such example is an emerging pattern of faculties creating more teaching assistant positions, filled by undergraduate students rather than graduate students. Undergraduates work for lower wages than graduate students but hold less education than those at the graduate level. Other examples include non-academic staff who are asked to undertake a significant proportion of practicum teaching, especially in medical fields, and increased numbers of work-learn/work-study positions, which replace regularized union positions with short, low-wage contracts.

While it is not possible to predict the future, signs of growing environmental and economic instability are difficult to ignore. The pandemic and extreme weather events of the past two years caused disruptions not seen in our time—other than on television happening elsewhere. For British Columbia to be prepared for the coming thirty years, our vital systems, of which post-secondary education is one, must be protected, but also enhanced. The pandemic illustrated the fragile nature of a post-secondary system overly reliant on international education and travel. With respect to the likely instabilities of the coming thirty years, a funding model requiring institutions to fundraise and sell education commercially, especially to a global

market, does not appear sustainable given the role the system is meant to play in keeping our province and economy running.

## How do you think the PSE system needs to evolve in response to those trends?

Our post-secondary system can only be as stable and responsive as the funding model that provides for its operation. Therefore, we believe that the ultimate answer to this question leads back to the larger question of whether our public post-secondary system has sustainable and reliable funding, whether the funding reflects the objects of the system, and whether the level of funding is sufficient to match needs. The answer to each of these questions, in our view, is no. The challenges made visible in the system by the COVID-19 pandemic are signs that its present state is not sustainable. A conversation about evolution must begin with an understanding of how the system arrived at its current state and a plan to reverse the elements limiting its growth. Without addressing the core issue, lack of stable public funding, evolution of the system and its abilities to respond to the challenges of the future will necessarily be limited.

Beyond restoring funding, the public post-secondary system's evolution relies on it working cohesively, rather than as a collection of independent corporate entities. B.C.'s post-secondary system of 25 institutions spread between the four categories of college, institute, teaching university, and research university is the result of both intentional planning and political decision-making. There is a logic to British Columbia's transfer model, which is unique and beneficial for learners and government. This model is set up to be one of cooperation, not competition. Yet, recent years have seen growth in public institutions using resources for advertising and seeking to attract students from each other's geographic regions. This competition moves the system towards a fragmented and uncooperative existence—further from the values of the transfer model that make the system strong, effective and efficient.

The creation of university-colleges and then their evolution to universities has caused some of the current competitive environment, but the competition for enrolment in a resource-scarce climate is likely the larger cause.

Our institutions are unique, each with their own cultures, program offerings, campus lives, and governance. Past considerations by the Ministry have included shared service models and other such considerations to find efficiencies. These have fallen short, in part because they stand in contrast to a system that is exercising more competition than cooperation. Reducing competition between institutions, restoring a systems-approach, and developing a protocol to limit institutional spending on commercial advertising should be a key goal in evolving this system. A cooperative approach would open the door to institutions working collaboratively to share best practices, participate in common procurement, and ensure that budgets are spent on education, not advertising.

Part of this work requires addressing the way institutions act as agents and collectives. B.C.'s public institutions are organized into three lobby groups, one each for colleges, research universities, and a remainder group for teaching universities and institutes. Setting aside the issue of why public post-secondary education institutions should require lobby groups, the existence of these groups and their advocacy for different public policy and funding goals further fractures the system. Their existence underscores how the post-secondary system has been privatized in culture as well as funding; it is a barrier to institutions working for the common good of the province and the communities and students they are intended to serve.

# CONCLUDING REMARKS

As stated throughout, the most significant challenge facing the post-secondary system in B.C. is underfunding. Several generations of governments have contributed to a reversal of the post-secondary funding model, moving from majority public funding to a system of mostly private funding at many institutions. This has left our institutions short on resources and focused on increasing user fees, fundraising, the sale of education to international students and other revenue generation. Institutions should be fully funded and focused on education and research for British Columbians, preparing our province for the challenges ahead, developing solutions to current and future labour market challenges, and supporting student success. Our public post-secondary education system has been forced to focus too heavily on their own revenue generation, abandoning their core missions in the process.

The inversion of public funding is a result of direct cuts to the post-secondary system and a stagnant funding model that has not accounted for system growth and inflation. Limited capital infusions have come primarily as infrastructure spending, constructing new buildings that institutions cannot afford to operate and maintain. Deferred maintenance issues, growing numbers of precarious workers, lack of funds to support research and innovation, services that cannot meet demand, and waning enrolment among our most vulnerable students are all symptomatic of a system in crisis.

Our province prides itself in having a well-connected, well-functioning system of public post-secondary education. However, the integrity of our system and the principles by which it operates have been damaged by under-funding over many decades and by many governments.

Our current provincial government is showing clear intention to remedying the damage of under-funding, for example with the introduction of the B.C. grants program, elimination of fees for students from the foster care system, and the elimination of interest on student loans. We hope that this is a sign of further improvements to the post-secondary sector, as only a return to a fully funded and affordable system of public post-secondary education can guarantee that the system does not become unaffordable and profit-driven, but rather remains driven by the principles of equity and inclusion, excellence in research, competitive wages and exceptional working conditions, and life-long learning.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Our core recommendation is the restoration of majority public funding with a plan to return public funding levels to 75% of institutional base-budgets, including restoration of the annual capital allowance, increased research funding, and increased funding for campus services.

Additional and issue-specific recommendations are as follows:

**RECOMMENDATION A:** Move away from the block funding model and return to enrolment- and service-specific funding formulas that ensure funds are spent accountably, and that proper funding is delivered for the varying programs and services in relation to their cost and value.

**RECOMMENDATION B:** Returning services and facilities that have been contracted out to in-house operations, beginning with non-fair wage employers whose workforces are made up of majority equity-deserving populations.

**RECOMMENDATION C:** Creating plans to address deferred maintenance issues and to support renovation projects utilizing in-house staff.

**RECOMMENDATION D:** Develop a robust funding model to expand trade programs and apprenticeships and make these programs more accessible to students from equity-deserving groups, such as Indigenous, Black and racialized students, and women and gender minorities.

**RECOMMENDATION E:** Create a funding model with dedicated funding allocations for student, academic and ancillary services, and measures to hold institutions accountable for meeting demands for these services.

**RECOMMENDATION F:** Complete the review of B.C.'s international education strategy and create an updated strategy to lower reliance on international student revenues as a funding mechanism, and develop a values-based approach to international education focusing on supporting students from low-income backgrounds, refugees and other equity-deserving peoples from the global community.

**RECOMMENDATION G:** Create ongoing, dedicated and sufficient annual public funding allocations to institutions for maintenance and minor capital expenditures that provide the resources required to maintain in-house trades and maintenance staff teams.

**RECOMMENDATION H:** Increase levels of non-repayable student financial assistance options through the B.C. student grant program and targeted grants to align with labour market needs (both by program and region), including increases to core funding for Indigenous students.

**RECOMMENDATION I:** Progressively reduce tuition fees as public funding increases to make post-secondary education more universally accessible to all students, and better facilitate learner choice of programs and careers.

**RECOMMENDATION J:** Create a funding model to support public research projects, infrastructure and facilities at our colleges and universities, with simple and inclusive application processes that prioritize diverse researchers undertaking projects relative to the needs of British Columbia.

**RECOMMENDATION K:** Create terms for the funding model that prohibit institutions from diverting resources to advertising, marketing and commercial ventures furthering competition between colleges and universities and create funding mechanisms that enhance the way in which public institutions work in unison as an integrated system.

**RECOMMENDATION L:** Enhancing regional options and strengthening the transfer system by investing in colleges, expanding rural campuses and centres, better promoting the transfer as an option, and better equipping universities to help students transferring into third year studies.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training, 2021. 2021/22 to 2023/24 Service Plan. Retrieved July 11, 2022 from <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2021/sp/pdf/ministry/aest.pdf>
- 2 Watters, H., 2015. Truth and Reconciliation chair urges Canada to adopt UN declaration on Indigenous Peoples. CBC News. Retrieved July 11, 2022 from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truth-and-reconciliation-chair-urges-canada-to-adopt-un-declaration-on-indigenous-peoples-1.3096225>
- 3 Government of British Columbia, 2021. British Columbia Labour Market Outlook 2021 to 2031, 2021 Edition. Retrieved July 12, 2022 from <https://www.workbc.ca/labour-market-industry/labour-market-outlook.aspx>
- 4 Kunin, R., 2019. An Assessment of the Economic Impact of International Education in British Columbia. British Columbia Council for International Education. Retrieved July 11, 2022 from <https://bccie.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Kunin-report-2019.pdf>

