



BCIT Faculty and Staff Association
Submission To:

Don Wright, Engagement Lead

Public Post-Secondary Education
Funding Review

Ministry of Advanced Education and
Skills Training

July 22, 2022

Introduction

The Faculty and Staff Association (FSA) is a certified trade union at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) representing faculty, technical staff, and specialized faculty at our Burnaby and Downtown Vancouver campuses. Our 1800 members teach into over 80 programs, work in IT Services, and a myriad of other roles, either in the classroom or supporting the educational enterprise at BCIT.

We are pleased to provide our perspective on this funding review and were pleased to learn that this submission, along with the July 22 sector-wide consultation, will be part a year-long iterative process. The review is timely given the challenges facing the sector coming out the COVID 19. We believe it has been far too long since BC did a rigorous, systematic examination of its funding model. Though there have been a couple of superficial reviews in the past decade, there has been no ambitious overhaul of the system since Campus 2020 in 2007. We are hopeful this review will be a wellspring of debate and original policy ideas to modernize the funding formula and allow our members to continue delivering world class applied education.

We will weave our vision through the questions you have posed and provide some additional context. In addition, as we examined the questions it became clear that several of the questions flow into each so that it makes sense to answer some of them in tandem.

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

BC's post-secondary education system is integral to the well-being of the province and BCIT's unique culture and delivery model position us to address the most pressing economic, social, and environmental issues facing the province. BCIT's economic productivity is well documented and, as set out in BCIT's submission, every \$1 million invested in BCIT generates \$3.45 million in regional economic activity. That investment proposition would be hard to match in the private sector and it is driven in large part by BCIT's applied, 'job ready' approach. BCIT's unique pedagogical model emulates the challenges and pressures students will face in the modern workplace. That approach makes our graduates highly sought after by employers across the province and country. In addition to the applied nature of education at BCIT, our members also sustain and create a culture of flexible problem solving and creative solutions to real world problems

Some of BCIT's programs are open access and provide entry into the opportunities offered by post-secondary education for equity denied groups. This approach makes an important contribution to reducing social and economic inequities and helps fulfil one of the key recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC); expanding post-secondary access for Indigenous students. The provincial government has made it clear that it expects institutions to be leaders in the effort meet BC's obligation as set out in the TRC and United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. BCIT is also making strides in realizing its equity, diversity, and inclusion values on the ground. However, the

reality is that lasting changes, social inclusion, and meaningful anti-racism work require resources. While the province has funded some initiatives promoting hiring and student supports, the commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion must be included in the funding formula. To cite one example, while we are encouraged by the effort to hire more Indigenous faculty and staff at BCIT, our Indigenous members report crippling workloads associated with the burdens of being a mentor for students while often carrying their own personal trauma and the generational trauma of their communities. Ensuring that Indigenous faculty have the support they need and are hired in adequate numbers is fundamental to ensuring lasting and sustainable change.

Another key area in which BCIT makes a critical societal and economic contribution is research. Unfortunately, BCIT is hampered in this regard by the province's policy on research conducted outside of the research universities. This another area of outdated, controlling policies that do not serve British Columbians. The constrictive bargaining regime imposed on BCIT, like all public sector employers and unions, has a number of trickle down effects, one of which is the very curious treatment of research and graduate studies at BCIT.

Though BCIT is not a research institution, research plays an integral role in keeping BCIT at the cutting edge of pedagogical and technological innovation. Our members are engaged in a number applied and industrial partnership research projects along with research funded by the national granting councils. However, despite producing nationally and internationally competitive research BCIT is neither recognized nor resourced for its research output. Indeed, despite the excellent research our members do there seems to be a reticence to publicly recognize this work. The nadir of that absurdity being the fact that the PSEA has expressly forbidden BCIT from negotiating job descriptions with the FSA that recognize the research work of our members. BCIT also has virtually no funding to support research either in the form of matching grants nor even in the barest of administrative and release time. In addition, BCIT is in the curious position on the one hand of having graduate programs approved by the Ministry with the explicit condition that the programs be supported by research and on the other having the province provide neither the resources nor the policy framework necessary to incubate research.

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

Though not a novel solution, we would be remiss if we did not make the case for more core funding from the province. Provincial funding for post-secondary education in BC has declined by over 10% in real dollars over the past 20 years. Though the province has funded wage increases in most of the recent rounds of collective bargaining, the reality is that the buying power of the provincial grant has eroded over time and that process has, of course, been accelerated by the historically high levels of inflation we are currently experiencing. The post-secondary sector faces unique fiscal challenges in that many of the goods and services it must purchase to operate far outpace the household inflation calculations.

The system is fraying at the edges after decades of educators and staff ‘doing more with less’ and the funding cuts in the 2000’s.’ Our members report the need for upgraded equipment across the campus to meet needs in applied programs, as well as the ongoing maintenance cost of new and legacy buildings. Though the province has provided substantial new capital funding in recent years, the funding formula has not been adjusted to reflect the cost of operating new buildings. This shortfall in funding was largely covered off by a substantial increase in the number of the international students. The pandemic has laid bare the risk of that fiscal strategy. And while there is good reason to believe international student enrolment will bounce back in the medium term, the reality is that this revenue is not a sustainable way to build and maintain a system of post-secondary education.

Another way that the province could empower institutions to deliver results for British Columbians would be to give institutions more flexibility and autonomy in how they utilize their funding. While we support accountability to the taxpayers of British Columbia for the work BCIT does, the intrusion of the provincial government in the day-to-day affairs of BCIT is an impediment to creating a bold, innovative culture. Though we are on the record as opposing the Post-Secondary Employers Association (PSEA) intrusion into free and fair collective bargaining, it also important to note the degree to which PSEA and the province meddle in the affairs of post-secondary institutions in BC. It is an accepted principle of public administration that those closest to the ground are best positioned to make decisions. Decisions made in Victoria and imposed on institutions rarely produce good policy or meaningful outcomes.

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?

That question is difficult to answer and, to be candid, given the accuracy of predictions 30 years ago about what the system would look like today, it may not be the right question. In our view, a 5-10 year horizon is more appropriate.

Though we all hope the pandemic is largely behind us, the reality is that the effects of the pandemic will linger for a number of years. The debilitating toll the pandemic has taken on the health care sector has had a substantial effect on BCIT. Finding faculty to teach in rapidly expanding nursing programs, in particular, has become more difficult as a result of the pandemic. However, these staffing shortages persist across the entire health care sector and affect all of the programs in Health Sciences at BCIT. An alarming number of health care professionals are leaving the field all together, further constricting an already tight labour market. As has been a theme in our submission, the depressed wage rates for faculty in British Columbia are creating retention and recruitment challenges in an era of high inflation and tight labour markets.

Even if inflation is brought under control in the next 12-18 months, the impact on the sector could be far reaching. Though it is certainly an opportunity now that government is rushing to produce more graduates in the health sciences, this review is timely reminder to think of the funding model in a more systematic way as opposed to the episodic and crisis driven model that has predominated in the past 20 years. In

addition, the demographic shift in the health sciences and other professionals been accelerated by the pandemic with an increasing number of workers retiring and leaving the workforce. The retirement of the 'Boomer' generation and shortly enough the Gen X cohort means that pressure will increase on an already overburdened health care system which, in turn, will place more demand on post-secondary institutions to produce graduates in the relevant fields.

It is important to also note that while the pressures facing the health care sector are the most acute, these demographic changes will be felt across the system. BCIT faces recruitment challenges in a number of areas, most particularly IT Services and those challenges will only be exacerbated the generational changes we are starting to see with retirements and the demand for remote work. BCIT will be facing increasing competition for talented faculty and staff from other jurisdictions and the private sector and wage rates and working conditions will define value in that market. Extending flexible work arrangements will be particularly important for recruiting non-instructional staff.

The provincially controlled policy of bargaining in BC has ensured that the wage rates of our members have consistently fallen behind comparator institutions nationally and well behind private sector comparators, which is particularly important for recruitment at BCIT. The bargaining mandate imposed on BCIT and all public sector employers and unions has a number of downstream effects, most notable the second class status of faculty teaching into part time programs at BCIT. Faculty teaching into those programs make 60 cents on the dollar compared to their full time colleagues, often teaching the same course at a different time of the day. BCIT has the unique situation of programs in which our members teach full time but paid at the part-time rate. We have been unable to remedy this glaring inequity because of the intrusive bargaining regime in BC.

Though not a demographic trend per se, one other area of change we would like to note is the increased focus on mental health and the greater openness and awareness about mental health challenges. The paradox facing BCIT students and faculty is that as the stigma attached to talking about mental health has been eased (though not eliminated) mental health services have become increasingly difficult to access. In addition, the unique delivery model of BCIT puts many students under immense pressure and that distress is very often downloaded to our members. As front line educators our members consistently strive to be a compassionate ear for their students but they are neither equipped nor resourced to provide even the most basic mental health support students need. Our members report a massive increase in students approaching them with mental health challenges in recent years. In our view, the province should work with BCIT and the Student Association to provide stable funding and personnel to ensure that our students have access to the resources they need. In addition, we will be foregrounding the issue of mental health benefits for our members in the upcoming round of collective bargaining and given the province's extensive focus and commitment on this issue, we are guardedly optimistic about making some progress.

4. How do you think the system needs to evolve in response to these trends?
AND
5. What modifications to the funding formula would you recommend considering the above?

The current block grant formula with its cap on funded students is a cryptic, ad hoc, outdated model of funding post-secondary education. There is so little clarity and transparency about how the current formula works it is challenging to provide feedback. However, it is clear that the formula fails to recognize the unique pressures and mandates of institutions in the Lower Mainland. It is only because of the massive influx of international students that this model has not been exposed sooner. A related but distinct fact is that by the end of 2022 over 50,000 immigrants will have settled in British Columbia over the last 2 years, and the vast majority of those newcomers will settle in the Lower Mainlandⁱ. While we support a robust system of post-secondary education across the entire province, we believe the funding formula should reflect the unique enrolment pressures and supports at BCIT and other urban institutions.

In closing, one area we would advise the province to avoid in this review is Performance Based Funding (PBF). PBF has been introduced in a number of provinces recently, notably Ontario and Alberta, and like most jurisdictions that have introduced PBF it has been a policy flop. There is a growing body of research that shows that PBF chases labour fads and forces institutions to change behavior to meet arbitrary objectives but does not nothing to enhance the student experience or the societal value of post-secondary education.ⁱⁱ

Respectfully Submitted,

Colin Jones, President



Michael Conlon, Executive Director



ⁱ [B.C. welcomes more than 100,000 people, the most in 60 years | BC Gov News](#)

ⁱⁱ [The ugly side of performance-based funding for universities - Academic Matters](#)