



Dr. Don Wright,
Engagement Lead
Post-secondary Funding Formula Review Project Office
Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training

July 18, 2022

Dear Dr. Wright,

On behalf of the Administrative and Professional Staff Association (APSA) at Simon Fraser University, I want to thank you for the opportunity to respond to your letter of April 22, 2022, in regards to the Province of BC's post-secondary funding review.

APSA is a "member benefit professional association" with the responsibility to advocate, educate, and negotiate on behalf of the approximately 1,500 members we represent at SFU. APSA members range from Managers to Directors, Academic Advisors to Research Grant Coordinators, and IT professionals to Finance professionals to Facilities professionals. Our members' roles cover the entire spectrum of university operations: administrative, academic and research, and student life.

In your April letter, you describe how the review will be principles-based, listing three broad goals and then giving five questions for further discussion. In discussions with our board of directors, we found that there was much overlap in the opportunities and challenges APSA sees looking to the future of post-secondary institutions in BC and the funding necessary to achieve the best outcomes for the province, the institutions, and the students, faculty, and staff within those institutions. We are further encouraged that the approach to this process will be one of inquiry and iterative in nature.

Taking that into consideration, our initial response is structured around three themes that we believe holistically address the principles and questions raised, and do so through an equity lens. Those themes are campus vibrancy and student experience, staff recruitment and retention, and equity and reconciliation.

Before we get into those themes, while understanding that this will be a holistic funding model, I wanted to briefly touch on a couple of items that make SFU unique.

Simon Fraser University consistently ranks #1 in surveys of Canadian comprehensive Universities, is a leading research-intensive University, and we are known as the Engaged University – engaging students, research, and communities. Those qualities have allowed SFU to provide distinctive opportunities in post-secondary education, including but not limited to:

- **A multi-campus environment:** Offering major campuses in the Metro Vancouver cities of Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey allows SFU to bring university education “out of the ivory tower” and into communities. This also allows students to live at home, study within their communities, focus on their studies, and champion topics they have experienced in their day-to-day lives. A multi-campus environment also requires a particular funding model.
- **Co-operative education:** SFU is a Canadian leader in co-operative education, offering co-op in all academic disciplines across 54 undergraduate and ten graduate programs, with approximately 4,000 co-op work terms each year (pre-COVID). The co-op program allows for such things as skills transfer and work experience, employment and salary during the co-op term, industry partnerships, etc. The co-op program allows many students to transfer seamlessly from their academic to professional careers. The co-op program also requires particular funding assistance regarding professional staff to assist the students and provide industry outreach.
- **An NCAA School:** SFU is the only Canadian University to compete in the National Collegiate Athletic Association. This allows student athletes to better integrate athletics into their post-secondary education, providing greater opportunity for scholarships, and a well-rounded educational experience. This also creates additional funding needs for the University in terms of scholarships, athletics coaches, and staffing.
- **Engaging Communities:** As part of our mission as the Engaged University, SFU offers additional programs related to community outreach and issues of community importance – especially at the Vancouver and Surrey campuses. These initiatives include partnerships with the Vancouver Board of Trade, the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Surrey Innovation Blvd, the Semester in Dialogue, and many other programs. These initiatives are designed to impact and educate the community directly and therefore require unique funding models and sources of revenue.

Now speaking directly to the themes APSA has identified as being of interest to all post-secondary institutions:

Community Vibrancy & Student Experience:

The University is more than the classroom. Not only do we engage in study and research, but students are looking to be engaged members of society and learn and contribute more broadly:

- Students are looking for support beyond the classroom – co-operative education programs, athletics (now including e-sports), opportunities for entrepreneurship, and the assistance and ability to have an impact beyond the classroom.
- Students are also expecting more supports within the classroom. Whether that involves additional academic advising, supports for accessible learning, or supports for hybrid and remote learning.
- Students are looking for institutions that provide an overall experience that can include financial assistance and a sense of community: student housing and transportation, sustainability and fair-trade programs, offices for reconciliation or LGBTQ+ supports, etc.

All of the above have historically fallen outside the definition of a “traditional post-secondary education”, but students and our communities are demanding that we redefine that tradition. That redefinition of tradition aligns well with a process to redefine funding.

Staff Recruitment and Retention:

Universities often seem like miniature municipalities, and we compete for staffing talent with cities, crown corporations, and industry.

- Like hybrid learning, hybrid work has become a staff recruitment and retention issue. Supports and systems, and funding for those supports and systems, need to be in place to maintain the staffing and supports Universities require.
- Particular to SFU, market surveys and other comparative salary analyses have shown a distinct mismatch between compensation for administrative professionals in the post-secondary environment compared to similar positions in other industries. This has resulted in staff recruitment challenges, understaffing, and loss of expert staff to better-compensated opportunities elsewhere.
- As Universities try to do more, especially on the equity, sustainability, and reconciliation fronts, staff find that in the present funding environment these duties are being “added on to the side of the desk” instead of having the personnel resources assigned to them that they require. This is almost always a result of budgetary constraints.

Universities require students, faculty, and staff to meet their goals, and numerous surveys with APSA staff over the past number of years have indicated that staff feel like they are being left behind. This is a two-pronged funding challenge: staff compensation needs to be brought in line with comparators, and staffing levels need to be increased in tandem with the new initiatives, goals, and traditions the post-secondary sector of tomorrow is expected to meet.

APSA expects that meeting the staff recruitment and retention challenges in the post-secondary space will vary from institution to institution. A “one size fits all” funding model for staff compensation may not be the best solution.

Equity and Reconciliation:

Post-secondary institutions are paramount not just in educating students within a particular academic discipline, but also in helping British Columbians develop the society they want to live in in the future:

- Understanding the impacts of colonialism is the first part of reconciliation. The ongoing process requires not just the understanding but also the ideas and actions to correct past wrongs and move forward together. Those ideas and initiatives can be planted and grown to fruition within the post-secondary environment – if we have the funding and supports to do so.
- Equity is a lens by which we are all attempting to re-align our views of the world and more specifically, our view of post-secondary education. Lack of funding has meant we often don't know what we don't know – we need the resources to identify equity-seeking groups, engage with those groups, and then adopt policies, initiatives, and systems that address their needs.

Equity and reconciliation fundamentally link to current and future topics of societal concern: sustainability, affordable housing, living wages, etc. From an APSA perspective, you cannot separate the funding of these initiatives. Working towards a more sustainable post-secondary environment necessitates conversations on equity and reconciliation. Students are a key constituent in driving the ideas behind improving the social, environmental, and economic well-being of British Columbians, and we need a funding model that does two things: engages with them in mutually developing those ideas, and assists them in implementing the initiatives that come out of those ideas.

In identifying the above themes, I hope that APSA has demonstrated the interconnectivity between the principles and questions raised in your April 2022 letter. For example:

- *Student housing* is a student experience issue, a community issue, a transportation and sustainability issue, and an affordability and equity issue.
- *Co-operative education* can address the skills and training needs of BC, increase the affordability (through salary) of advanced education, and ensure future student success beyond the university environment.
- *Recruitment and retention* are necessary to provide supports for equity, reconciliation, a more sustainable campus environment, etc.

APSA sees these themes as not just themes for interconnectivity and collaboration between post-secondary institutions but also the opportunity for the funding model within the Ministry of Education to be collaborative in how this funding can meet the overarching goals of other Ministries and the province – whether in affordable housing, equity and diversity, transportation, and/or reconciliation.

We acknowledge that we have not yet addressed any ideas for how the above is funded. As this is an iterative process, we first wanted to address what we saw as current and future needs. If these themes align with the goals of the province and other stakeholders, we look forward to working together to establish an appropriate funding model.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond, and we look forward to further discussion.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'D' followed by a horizontal line and a small upward curve.

David Agosti

President, APSA

cc: Dr. Joy Johnson, President and Vice-Chancellor of Simon Fraser University