



July 22, 2022

Response to funding review of public post secondary in British Columbia.

North Island College (NIC) is unique, having four campuses and a learning centre on Vancouver Island & Northern BC, over 80,000 square kilometres, making up the largest catchment of BC's Public Post-Secondary Institutions (PSI). NIC and North Island Students' Union (NISU) are honoured to acknowledge territories of the combined 35 First Nations; Nuu-chah-nulth, Kwakwaka'wakw and Coast Salish peoples, on whose unceded lands we learn, live and play. Our learners are diverse and represent around 9000 students, annually. International and domestic students alike come to NIC and find it to be a friendly college with caring staff and faculty and a Students' Union who aims to serve them and create a community of engaged learners. Across all our campuses, we hear the inspiration students hold and we also hear their worries about funding for education, housing, equity in education and mounting stress around high costs of living. We thank you for the opportunity to provide this feedback.

This funding review of post secondary education is coming at a very relevant moment in time. That it is past due might be the thoughts of some, but here at the Students' Union we feel this is a perfect moment to reassess the structure of education in BC as well as reaffirm community goals and how the funding model can best reach those goals.

John B. Macdonald showed great wisdom and foresight when he stated in his 1962 report on Higher Education In British Columbia that "The kind of new world into which we are plunging headlong will bear little resemblance to the world we now know" (p.4). Little could he have imagined the relevance of that statement in regards to today's learning environment. The last few years has seen significant disruption to education, as institutions were forced to reassess teaching pedagogies and best practices as people were hunkering at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The speed and efficacy with which colleges and universities were able to move the entirety of educating online was incredible and really speaks to the knowledge and motivation held by the staff and faculty that contribute to post-secondary education. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light how precarious and vulnerable many BC residents are and showed that inequality runs deep throughout our communities. This is true in post-secondary education also, with some learners facing multiple barriers to education.

During the last two years, BC has had another seismic shift as the recovered bodies of children who perished at residential schools have sent shockwaves through settler communities and validated the truths that Indigenous communities have been speaking about the trauma and oppression inflicted on them during the colonisation of Canada. Right now, is the moment when BC can reflect on the past in a fulsome and honest way and right now is also the moment that community by community we can strive for better days ahead. A review of funding for post-secondary education is not just about how each institution can best balance their budgets but also about how post-secondary education holds opportunities to strive for equity amongst people. Education is not just a means to fuel the economy, but a fundamental part of our society that can elevate communities through inspiration, education, and action. Now is the time to continue the deep and meaningful work of reconciliation through the Indigenization of education.

Budget considerations, as recommended from North Island Students' Union;

1. Each institution receive the same student subsidisation rate, equal at each PSI across BC.
2. Enhanced funding available to institutions who are offering courses in high demand sectors.
3. Implement an international education tuition limit policy.
4. To have Indigenization of post-secondary education funds available to institutions that are leaders in reconciliation.

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

Creating a system where each learner is valued equally is the vision of North Island Students' Union. Creating an equitable system where rural learners are subsidised at the same rate as urban learners. The current adhoc distribution model where large institutions receive more funds than smaller colleges is outdated and arbitrary. Historically, the cost of living in an urban centre may have been higher than a rural setting. In today's market, this is no longer justified. According to Statistics Canada, shelter cost rose by 6% last year, province wide, making it the fastest growing inflation since 1990 (Statistics Canada, 2022). These costs affect everyone, not just students living in urban centres. Rural areas and small towns see a lack of access to rental stocks, with vacancy rates in the Comox Valley for example at just .5 %. Further, the densification of urban areas see supports near or on campus, where rural institutions must provide these services, in each of the areas they serve. For example, access to mental health services is a challenge in rural settings, colleges are often the first contact learners have with supports. Waitlists to access campus provided mental health supports are growing and the depth of care that learners need to access while with mental health supports is broadening. No longer just course stress supports, campus provided mental health supports are now supporting a wide variety of whole life needs, with life

counselling necessary to ensure student success. Colleges in particular are tasked with providing these wrap around services for longer hours than an Urban institution, with less per learner funding than Urban centres.

The merit of accreditation is standardised across all institutions, a business student or nurse graduating from NIC will have the same work place qualifications as a business student or nurse graduating from any other institution. Equal merit should equate to equal funding.

Many students wish to stay in their home community to study and NIC offers the opportunity to do that, through on campus and online learning. Recognising the value of each learner as an individual should be the guiding principle of this funding review. Equal distribution per student should be the funding model policy, as this is the only way to assure equity.

2. Continue to align provincial funding with the education and skills training needs of British Columbians and the communities served by the 25 public post-secondary institutions.

The labour market in BC is shifting and NIC has a strong program base to facilitate education and training in relevant fields. The Labour Market Outlook released by Work BC in 2021 states that 77% of job opening will require some level of post-secondary training (Work BC. 2021). It is forecast that 75% of the jobs will be in five category groups (Work BC. 2021). NIC offers degree programs, certificates, training, and university transfer programs in all five of the top categories putting it in a strong position to serve the needs of learners and industry.

It is our recommendation that a second revenue stream, of short term funding, continue to be available for institutions offering high demand training. While we recognise the need for the industry responsiveness of short term funding opportunities, we offer that as many two year offerings as possible, instead of annual offerings, should be considered. The ability to plan and respond to short term seats would help the institution, year in and year out, contributing to a stable learning environment.

3. International education tuition limit policy creation

International students bring much needed young people to BC and are essential in the creation of a strong labour market. Immigrants are forecast to represent 34% of the workforce in BC within the next ten years (Work BC. 2021). The lack of a tuition limit policy for international students means that students who come to BC to study are unable to do basic financial planning, leaving them vulnerable. In 2015, international students were responsible for 50% of tuition fees across BC yet make up only 20% of the student body (BCFS. Fairness for International Students document, n.d.). Institutions can raise international fees without notice and regularly do, since 1991, tuition fees for international students have risen by 485% (BCFS. n.d.).

NIC was an industry leader in 2019 when it committed to a maximum 2% tuition fee increase for international students for the following two years. Creating a tuition cap offers international learners a basic level of security and planning currently denied them. Implementing a tuition limit policy for international students will be a low cost project that will have a lasting and positive effect.

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

Student life has a reputation for being challenging, and that reputation is deserved. One of the best supports for students is having the ability to stay in their community. NIC offers a variety of programs both online and on campus, that act as a lifeline to people in smaller cities and rural areas on Vancouver Island & Northern BC. The ability to stay rooted in their community offers students a way to elevate themselves and their families while sending a ripple effect through the community. Many of our graduates are the first in their families to finish higher education, and that is really something to celebrate.

Online learning has created a wider reach for NIC and this includes the capability to offer programming to people not within reach of a campus. It has also created access to affordable education for people who don't want to attend campus-based learning. There are a variety of reasons why people choose home-based learning, but of particular importance is the relevance of home based learning for Indigenous learners. Educational institutions have been used as means of oppression during colonisation and Indigenous students continue to face discrimination.

Working Together, is a cross campus plan that was created by NIC's Indigenous Education team in 2019. According to Working Together, reconciliation is about action and commitment (NIC. 2019). Working Together has a vision of restoring balance and initiating measures to address the social divide, the rampant racism, and socio-economic inequity that exists for Indigenous people along every social determinant of health (NIC. 2019). Ensuring that Indigenous students have culturally relevant guidance, counselling and course content along with physical spaces on campus are all priorities that take time and finances to create and maintain. Creating a funding stream at the provincial level will ensure that the work of reconciliation through the Indigenization of education stays a priority for PSIs.

Attending the four graduation ceremonies in communities NIC serves was deep joy, this year. Witnessing students cross the stage with their heads held high as friends and family cheer, is a special day of celebration. Bringing equity to the funding model so that it may align with the ethos of equity for students, assessing upcoming labour needs and continuing the work of Indigenizing education are our hopes for the new funding model. As we re-envision the system that is public post secondary in BC, now is the perfect time to create a tuition limit policy for international students.

Thank you for taking the time to read and reflect on our submission. If you have any thoughts or questions, we would love to hear from you.

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- (1) Macdonald Report. <https://www.bccat.ca/Media/NEWBCCAT/pubs/HighEdBCPlan.pdf>
- (2) Statistics Canada. https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/subjects-start/prices_and_price_indexes/consumer_price_indexes
- (3) Work BC. Labour Market Outlook. <https://www.workbc.ca/Labour-Market-Industry/Labour-Market-Outlook.aspx>
- (4) British Columbia Federation of Students, Fairness for International Students research document https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/bcfs/pages/106/attachments/original/1611180148/Rsch-International_Students-2019-web.pdf?1611180148
- (5) Working Together: <https://www.nic.bc.ca/pdf/nic-indigenization-plan.pdf>