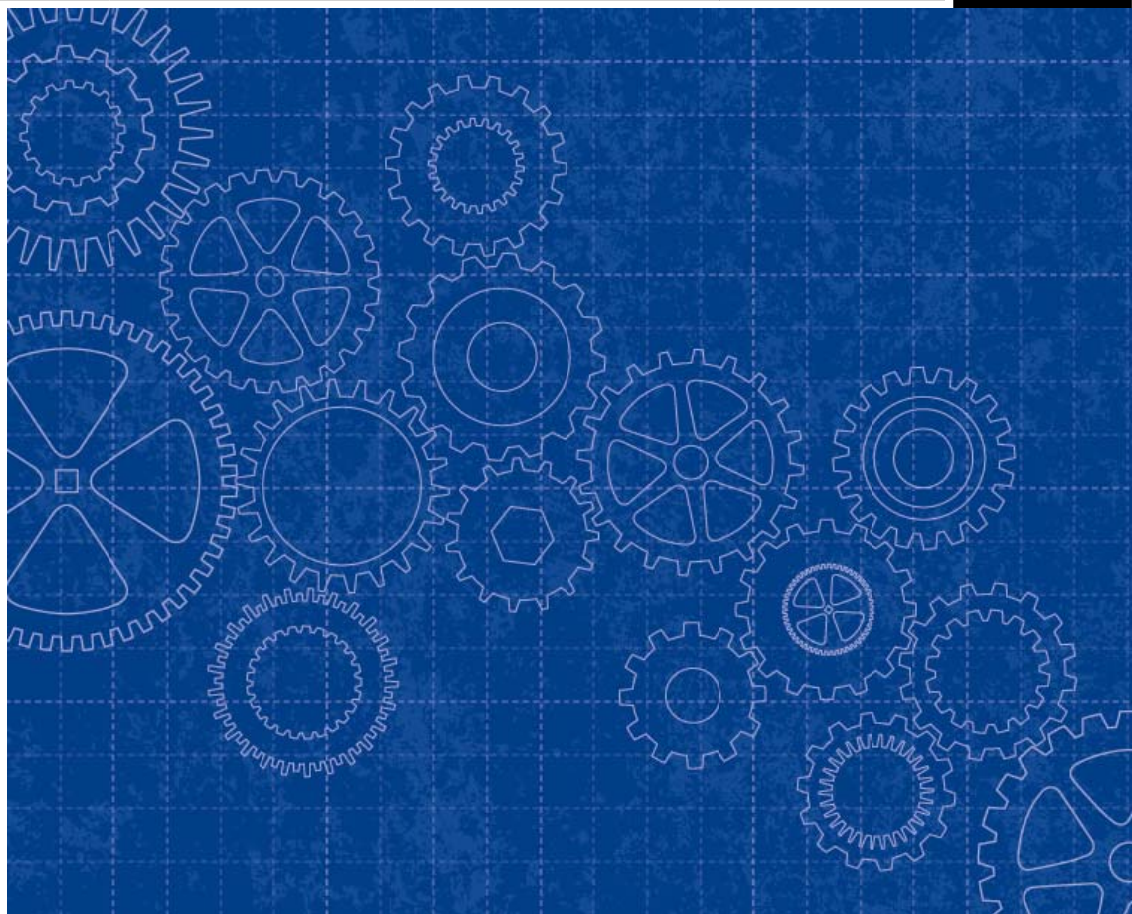




Post-Secondary  
Education in BC:

# A blueprint for change



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## Executive Summary

Post-secondary education is a critical contributor to economic and social conditions in British Columbia. Through its 27 public post-secondary institutions, BC citizens have access to high quality learning, research and skills development opportunities. In turn, those opportunities create a more engaged and informed citizenry, enhance innovation and research, and support increased labour mobility as well as greater access to new work and higher incomes.

This document summarizes some of the major issues and challenges facing post-secondary education in BC. It details the significant policy and funding choices made during this decade. It assesses the impacts of those choices. But most of all, it lays out a blueprint for change in post-secondary education that will help our sector reach its full potential. It is certainly not intended as the last word on how post-secondary education can be improved. Rather, it is the starting point for a broader conversation with communities, students, families, faculty and administrators, all of whom have a vital interest in seeing post-secondary education thrive and succeed.

## Why Post-Secondary Education Matters

Learning is a very personal experience. It involves a complex relationship between student and teacher, citizens and their government, institutions and the communities in which they operate. Learning can include the acquisition of skills. But at a more fundamental level, it is an iterative process of inquiry that builds confidence in the pursuit of knowledge, insight and skills.


For adult learners, post-secondary education represents an opportunity to re-engage with learning in ways that move the process of inquiry and confidence building well beyond the levels achieved in primary and secondary education. The new level of engagement provides tangible benefits to the learner and the broader community.

In economic terms, post-secondary education is a further investment in human capital. Those investments translate into new skills and knowledge which, in turn, support a higher lifetime income for the learner and increased productivity for the broader economy.

## From Thinking Ahead to Falling Behind

Throughout the 1990's, BC's public post-secondary education system went through a number of major shifts. Early on in that decade, the provincial government gathered stakeholder input to develop a new policy framework for post-secondary education. The key principles and objectives were detailed in a report called *Charting a New Course* in which the provincial government committed itself to increasing access and affordability.

Throughout the decade those commitments translated into positive change across all post-secondary institutions. Some of the most significant features of that change were the steady



increase in post-secondary enrolment and the significant change in post-secondary participation rates. BC, for example, started the decade with the second lowest participation rate of all the provinces in Canada. By the end of the 1990's BC recorded the second highest participation rate.

Much of the progress recorded during the 1990s was erased when the newly elected BC Liberal government took office in 2001. They implemented a number of policy and funding changes in their first term. Three specific changes had the greatest impact. Within the first ninety days of taking office, the BC Liberals announced that tuition fees would be de-regulated, a move that set the stage for a doubling of tuition fees over the next four years. In February 2002, with the tabling of their first full-year budget, it became obvious that per-student operating grants to post-secondary institutions would not keep pace with either inflation or the growing needs of post-secondary institutions. And finally, the BC Liberal government abandoned the policy of targeted funding and, instead, opted for block funding of post-secondary institutions. This change gave enormous discretion to senior administrators to shift away from programs and student support services that had previously maintained access for adult learners who were not direct entry students.

### **A Blueprint for Change**

Our organization believes there must be a significant revision in the policies and funding choices made over the last eight years. Post-secondary education needs to be strengthened because many of the reforms made over the last eight years have proven to be wrong-headed. The prospect for change lies in making post-secondary education a part of the larger public debate and to that end we are encouraging the public to consider the following recommendations as part of the new blueprint for change in our public post-secondary system. They include:

- 1. Improve Funding, Affordability and Access by:**
  - Committing to real per-student funding increases in post-secondary operating grants.
- 2. Strengthen BC's Commitment to Developmental Education by:**
  - Creating policy and funding options that support adult learners returning to post-secondary education.
- 3. Expand Opportunities for English Language Training at our public institutions by:**
  - Ensuring that new ELT programs, services and funding target public post-secondary institutions.
- 4. Change BC's system of trades training and apprenticeships by:**
  - Reforming the Industry Training Authority (ITA) to ensure that all stakeholders, not just employers, are given a voice in the running of BC's trades training system.



**5. Effectively Regulate BC's Private Post-Secondary institutions by:**

- Holding private post-secondary institutions fully accountable and ensure that they meet the high standards of BC's public institutions.

**6. Establish Better Policies for Recruitment & Retention by:**

- Guaranteeing free collective bargaining throughout BC's public sector.

**7. Make All BC Post-Secondary Institutions Leaders in Technology, Research and Scholarly Activity by:**

- Ensuring all post-secondary institutions have equal access to research funding and supports.



## **Introduction**

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The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators (FPSE) is the largest union in BC's post-secondary education sector and represents the majority of faculty and staff employed in BC's public institutions. From our inception over thirty years ago, FPSE has maintained an active voice on post-secondary education policy issues. Our goal has always been to advocate for and support policies that ensure the greatest possible access to high quality post-secondary learning opportunities for every citizen in BC. We recognize that to achieve this goal FPSE needs to press governments—mostly the provincial government, but also the federal government—to implement policy and funding choices that strengthen both the opportunities for access as well as the quality and diversity of program offerings at our public institutions.

FPSE is currently working with other organizations in the broader public education sector (K-12 and post-secondary) to ensure that education issues maintain an active profile leading up to the May 2009 provincial election. Through increased public debate, we believe that voters will become more informed on the critical policy and funding issues in education. As well, that debate will help establish an appropriate context for evaluating what has happened in post-secondary education and what changes are needed to strengthen its capacity and potential.

This document summarizes some of the major issues and challenges facing post-secondary education in BC. It details the significant policy and funding choices made during this decade. It assesses the impacts of those choices. But most of all, it lays out a blueprint for change in post-secondary education that will help our sector reach its full potential. It is certainly not intended as the last word on how post-secondary education can be improved. Rather, it is the starting point for a broader conversation with communities, students, families, faculty and administrators, all of whom have a vital interest in seeing post-secondary education thrive and succeed.

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For adult learners, post-secondary education represents an opportunity to re-engage with learning in ways that move the process of inquiry and confidence building well beyond the levels achieved in primary and secondary education. The new level of engagement provides tangible benefits to the learner and the broader community.

In economic terms, post-secondary education is a further investment in human capital. Those investments translate into new skills and knowledge which, in turn, support a higher lifetime income for the learner and increased productivity for the broader economy.

A number of studies have documented the specific connections between higher learning and higher incomes. The most comprehensive and current summary of this research has been carefully assembled by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL-CCA), which released its 2006 report, *Canadian Post-Secondary Education: A Positive Record—An Uncertain Future*, in December 2007. The report provides some valuable insights that provide a critical context for understanding why post-secondary education is so important. In terms of understanding that context we have included the following excerpt from the CCL-CCA report that captures the more significant benefits to both the public and to individuals:

#### **Results and Benefits of Post-Secondary Education (PSE)**

Participation and attainment trends and expenditure levels provide valuable evidence regarding PSE, but it is not possible to make conclusive statements about PSE quality or benefits simply by assessing its cost. Consequently, there has been increased attention in recent years to questions of results and value achieved through public and private expenditures. Later chapters explore the outcomes in greater detail.

Evidence worldwide clearly demonstrates that investment in post-secondary education pays unequivocal dividends—in terms of standard of living and quality of life through PSE's impact on economic growth and social cohesion, as well as particular benefits for individuals who have had the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education.

One useful summary of public and individual benefits associated with PSE—both economic and social—is provided in a 1998 document published by the U.S. Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Research in Canada provides evidence that post-secondary education plays an important role in reducing regional economic and social disparities. The studies conclude, "Roughly 50% of the differences in the growth of per capita income, and more than 80% of the relative income levels, can be explained in terms of convergence in the stocks of human capital."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Coulombe, S. & Tremblay, J.F. (2001). "Human Capital and Regional Convergence in Canada", Journal of Economic Studies, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 154-180.*

A post-secondary education yields economic dividends to individuals who acquire post-secondary education credentials. The research community has calculated a “rate of return”<sup>3</sup> for individuals, which helps answer the question of whether spending money to attend PSE—and giving up potential earned income had the individual worked instead of having pursued higher education—is a “good investment.”

3 Junor S. & Usher A. (2004). *Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada*. Millennium Research Series, Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Canada.

*The rate of return is usually measured by determining the “internal rate of return” (IRR) associated with an individual’s investment in education. The IRR analyzes the lifetime stream of benefits and costs of education to come up with an annual “return” on education similar to that which permits comparison of investments in human capital with other types of investment. There are generally two types of rate of return discussed: the “private rate of return,” which accrues to the individual and the “total rate of return” which increases the value of the GDP (assuming that an increase in workers’ income reflects an increase in the value of the marginal product of labour) relative to the resource cost of education. p. 323.*

Table 1.6.1: **Post-secondary education benefits for individuals and society**

<b>Public Benefits</b>		<b>Individual Benefits</b>
<i>Increased tax revenues</i>		<i>Higher wages and benefits</i>
<i>Greater productivity</i>		<i>Employment</i>
<b>Economic</b>	<i>Increased Consumption</i>	<i>Higher savings levels</i>
	<i>Increased workforce flexibility</i>	<i>Improved working conditions</i>
	<i>Decreased dependence on government financial support</i>	<i>Personal and professional mobility</i>
<b>Public Benefits</b>		<b>Individual Benefits</b>
<b>Social</b>	<i>Reduced crime rates</i>	<i>Improved health/life expectancy</i>
	<i>Increased charitable giving and volunteering</i>	<i>Improved quality of life for children</i>
	<i>Increased civic engagement</i>	<i>Increased personal status</i>
	<i>Stronger social cohesion /appreciation of diversity</i>	<i>Increased leisure activities/hobbies</i>
	<i>Improved ability to adapt to new and emerging technologies</i>	<i>Better consumer decision-making</i>
	<i>Less reliance on health-care system</i>	<i>Better ability to cope with stress</i>

Source:

*The Institute for Higher Education Policy. Reaping the Benefits. Defining the Public and Private Value of Going to College. (Washington DC). 1998. 9*

Table 1.6.2: **College and university graduate private rates of return in the 1990s**

	<b>Rate of Return</b>
<i>College</i>	15-25%
<i>Male</i>	15-28%
<i>Female</i>	18-26%
<i>University</i>	12-20%
<i>Male</i>	12-17%
<i>Female</i>	16-20%

Source: Boothby D. & Rowe G. (2002). *Rate of Return to Education*. Human Resources Development Canada. Ottawa, and Vaillancourt F. & Bourdeau-givng, and lower crime rates. CCL's Composite Learning Primeau S. (2001). *The Returns to Education in Canada: 1990 and 1995*. Centre de recherche et développement économique (CRDE), Université de Montréal.

Table Source: Junor S. & Usher A. *Price of Knowledge. Access and Student Finance in Canada*. Millennium Research Series, Millennium Scholarship Foundation. Canada. 2004.

University graduates represent 16.1% of the population, provide 33% of income tax, and consume 9.1% of government transfers such as employment insurance or social assistance. Those with less than a high-school education represent 19.2% of the population, provide 8.8% of income tax, and consume 35.1% of government transfers.

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Excerpted from *Canadian Post-Secondary Education: A Positive Record—An Uncertain Future*, pp. 9-10.

Beyond the direct benefits to individuals, post-secondary education as a sector is an important generator of economic growth. For example, a 2006 study of 13 BC colleges and institutes showed that these institutions created close to \$7.7 billion in income each year, an amount that equals over four percent of the provincial GDP (***Economic Contribution of BC Colleges: Analysis of Investment Effectiveness and Economic Growth***, 2007, CCbenefits Inc.). The report documented how these post-secondary institutions not only supported local employment, they also expanded new employment by providing students with the skills needed to secure new jobs and new careers. The report also showed that for every dollar invested by taxpayers in BC colleges and institutes, the provincial and local governments received \$3.80.

### **From Thinking Ahead to Falling Behind**

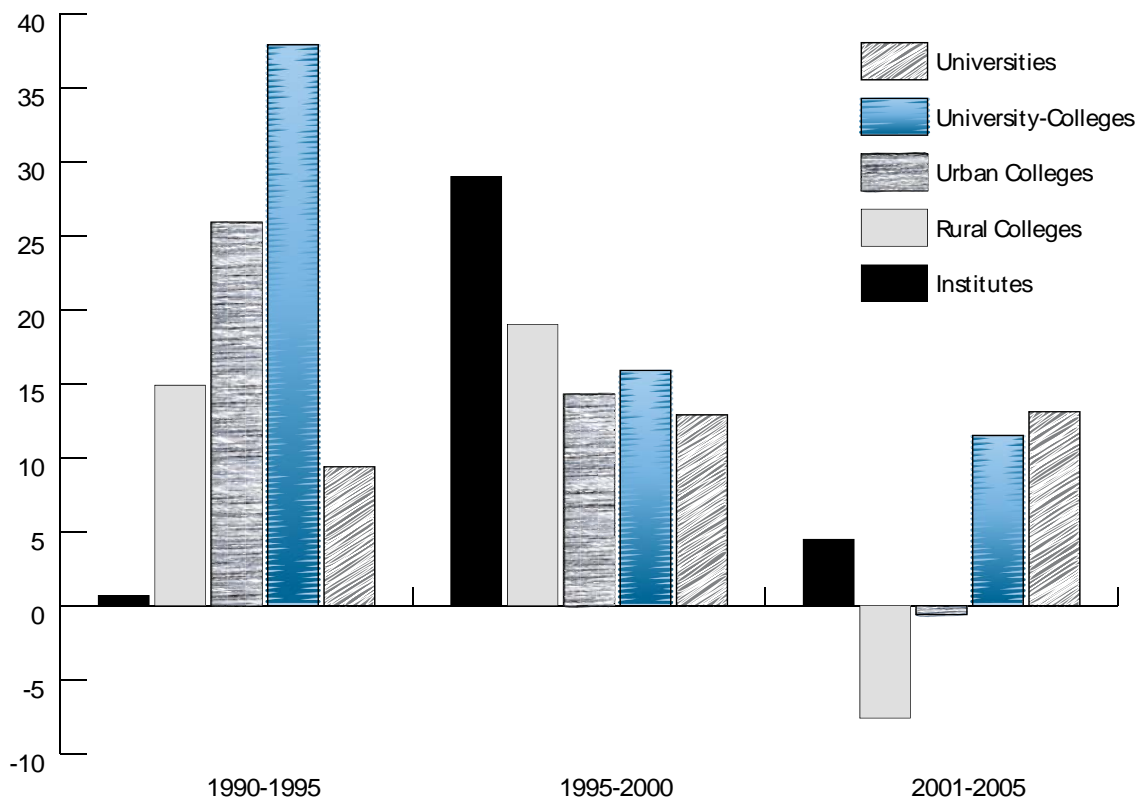
Throughout the 1990's, BC's public post-secondary education system went through a number of major shifts. Early on in that decade, the provincial government gathered stakeholder input to develop a new policy framework for post-secondary education. The key principles and objectives were detailed in a report called *Charting a New Course* in which the provincial government committed itself to increasing access and affordability.



Throughout the decade those commitments translated into positive change across all post-secondary institutions. Some of the most significant features of that change were the steady increase in post-secondary enrolment and the significant change in post-secondary participation rates. BC, for example, started the decade with the second lowest participation rate of all the provinces in Canada. By the end of the 1990's BC recorded the second highest participation rate.

The table below summarizes the changes in enrolment that occurred over the period 1990-2005. The data assesses how the changes in enrolment compared across the various public post-secondary institutions in the province. The strong growth in enrolment recorded during the 1990's was largely dissipated during the 2001-2005 period. Although the aggregate level of enrolment for the entire post-secondary system plateaued during the 2001-2005 period, that trend understated the shifts in enrolment for medium and smaller post-secondary institutions.

**Percentage Change in Actual FTE Post-Secondary Students by Type of Institution, 1990-2005**



Source: Based on Ministry data from Table 1

The shifts in enrolment reflect the significant policy and funding changes that were introduced in 2001 and 2002 by the newly elected BC Liberal government. Three specific changes had the greatest impact. Within the first ninety days of taking office, the BC Liberals announced that tuition fees would be de-regulated, a move that set the stage for a doubling of tuition fees over the next four years. In February 2002, with the tabling of their first full-year budget, it became obvious that per-student operating grants to post-secondary institutions would not keep pace with either inflation or the growing needs of post-secondary institutions. And finally, the BC Liberal government abandoned the policy of targeted funding and, instead, opted for block funding of post-secondary institutions. This change gave enormous discretion to senior administrators to shift away from programs and student support services that had previously maintained access for adult learners who were not direct entry students.


Average Tuition Fees for BC Degree Credit Programs by type of institution, 2001-2005				
Type of Institution	2001/2	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5
College	\$1,306	\$1,831	\$2,324	\$2,536
University College	\$1,264	\$2,286	\$3,078	\$3,315
University	\$2,168	\$2,766	\$3,617	\$4,137

*Source: Canadian Federation of Students*

The funding problems for post-secondary education stem from the government's unwillingness to make substantial new investments in the system. Those investments are most urgently needed in the form of increased per-student operating grants. Those increases have not been forthcoming since 2001. In fact, between 2001 and 2007 real per-student operating grants to post-secondary institutions have dropped by 8 percent. That decline reflects not only an unwillingness to increase funding in-line with inflation, it also reflects a problem with the basic funding formula, a formula that needs to be revised to reflect the divergent fiscal realities that various post-secondary institutions face. Smaller rural colleges, for example, have a much more difficult time filling programs than is the case for many urban post-secondary institutions, a reality that has a direct impact on the costs and funding support for smaller colleges.

### **New Initiatives Lack Real Funding**

Those disparities became even more apparent when the government announced plans in 2004 to add another 25,000 new post-secondary spaces by 2010. Many believed that the policy would begin to address some problems that chronic underfunding and tuition fee de-regulation had created. Several provincial budgets later, it has become obvious that the 25,000 new spaces were more fiction than fact. Per-student operating grants to public post-secondary institutions continued to decline, in real terms, despite the announcement. In



fact, it was not until the BC Auditor General's 2006 report on the status of the 25,000 new spaces that we had verifiable third-party information confirming that progress on the 25,000 new spaces was falling well short of the much heralded promise.

The Auditor General's report left little doubt that the government's approach to post-secondary was not working. The report noted:

"Post-secondary education enrolments are sensitive to several factors: tuition fee increases, revised student aid provisions, changes in debt levels, fluctuations in the labour market and shifts in demographics. British Columbia has experienced changes in all these areas in recent years.

The impact of these intersecting factors helps explain the softening in student enrolment. We expected the Ministry and institutions to be well aware of these influences and to have been developing strategies to offset any negative impacts. We found, however, that softening enrolment caught many institutions and the Ministry by surprise.

Although the Ministry recognized the need for institutional capacity-building, it did not do an environmental scan to better understand the challenges institutions would face in attempting to achieve their performance targets and did not develop a strategy to help struggling institutions build capacity. Given the improving provincial economy and job market, increasing tuition and other fees, and increasing competition for students coming from other provinces and institutions, there is good reason to question whether struggling institutions will be able to meet the enrolment targets set by the Ministry."

— Auditor General's report, *Government's Post-Secondary Expansion—25,000 Seats by 2010*, December 2006, p31-32

While the impact of under-funding has been wide spread, some of the hardest hit program areas have been University Transfer Programs (UT), student support services, including Librarians and Counsellors, and Developmental Education Programs, including Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English Language Training Programs (ELT).

The table below summarizes the significant changes in UT enrolment over the period 2003-2007. The data shows that rural colleges saw the steepest decline in UT enrolment during this period. University Colleges saw a similar pattern in UT enrolment, although the declines were not as severe as was the case for rural colleges; at university colleges, UT headcounts were down by two per cent, while the overall headcount total was up slightly. At urban colleges, the impact on UT programs mirrored the pattern recorded at rural colleges: UT headcounts dropped by 13.1 per cent while overall headcounts for these institutions increased by 6.3 per cent.

<b>BC Student Headcount by Program and Type of Institution, 2003-2007</b>					
Type of Institution	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	% change 2003-2007
<i>Urban Colleges</i>					
Arts & Science	24,648	22,936	22,227	21,421	-13.1%
Total	91,186	93,386	94,635	96,989	6.3%
<i>Rural Colleges</i>					
Arts & Science	4,652	4,393	4,055	4,008	-13.8%
Total	55,949	56,821	60,403	61,921	10.7%
<i>University Colleges</i>					
Arts & Science	15,706	15,882	15,576	15,394	-2.0%
Total	52,802	54,082	53,797	53,452	1.2%

Source: Ministry of Advanced Education, Data Warehouse

In many respects the 25,000 new spaces created additional problems for UT programs. The choice to allocate a larger portion of the 25,000 spaces to universities in the initial phase was one of many factors contributing to the diversion of college and university-college bound students into universities. In effect, by prioritizing the spaces to universities the government simply shifted students rather than grow the enrolment levels in the college and university college programs.

### **Perrin Report**

The extent of the funding problem has also pitted post-secondary institutions against one another as the provincial government moved to address some of the funding problems within the system. Unfortunately, those measures only complicated matters when a review done by Perrin-Thoreau Consultants recommended immediate measures for universities, effectively leaving other institutions behind. This uneven treatment put additional pressure on colleges and university colleges. The Perrin review was undertaken in early 2006 to identify ways to address some of the fiscal imbalances that post-secondary institutions face. The initial recommendations led to an increase in base funding for universities. A subsequent recommendation to have base funding increases apply as well to college and university colleges was rejected by the provincial government. The effect of this was to further erode the capacity of colleges and university colleges to attract students.



## Budget Cuts and University Status

In March and April of 2008, a series of government announcements have further complicated the funding problems for post-secondary institutions. In mid-March, the Minister of Advanced Education met with college and university presidents to tell them that operating grants for 2008-09 would be cut by 2.6 per cent. The cut was a surprise to every institution. They were in the second year of a three-year service plan and the unilateral cut to their operating grants pushed their 2008-09 budgets into deficits. That, in turn, led to major revisions in institutional Educational Plans.


Since the mid-March budget cut, post-secondary institutions have been scaling back on programs and course offerings. UT programs, already feeling the adverse effects of five years of poor policy choices by the provincial government, have come under increased pressure. In some institutions this has meant significant reductions in the number of sections offered in various UT programs. In others, the budget cuts are used to justify “vertical cuts” which means that certain disciplines will be completely eliminated.

In both cases, the impact on enrolment goes far beyond the direct loss of sections or disciplines. Many students start their post-secondary education with a limited idea of what they want to pursue. They take a cross section of courses and pick from there. If students know that certain disciplines are not offered at their local college, they may choose to go somewhere else. The cuts also affected students’ underlying trust of their institutions’ ability to continue offering courses in their area of interest, a development that further undermines longer term enrolment trends.

It’s also important to note another cascading impact of these budget cuts. They put even more pressure on colleges to scale back on their comprehensive approach. That approach is one of the reasons why, for example, colleges tolerate low class size numbers in courses where only a single section is offered. However, with these new budget pressures that ability to maintain their comprehensive approach will be significantly undermined.

The provincial government’s decision in mid-April to change three university colleges into universities and designate Capilano College and Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design as universities further complicates the picture for UT programs. None of the university announcements included any additional funding, a move that most media characterized as “contradictory.” Clearly, the announcements were not intended to improve access or affordability because both of those improvements could only be achieved with better funding.

In many respects the mid-April university announcements are like the government’s pledge to add 25,000 new spaces by 2010. The university announcements won’t address the overarching problem of declining enrolments, especially in the UT program area. In fact, the university announcements could simply lead to greater competition between both established and newly minted universities for a shrinking pool of potential students. What the post-secondary education system needed was not a “re-branding” of various



institutions, but a more thoughtful and appropriately funded strategy to encourage and support students to enter and complete their post-secondary education.

### **The Public's Perception**


The public has an enormous stake in post-secondary education. In sheer dollar terms, the \$2 billion budget of the Ministry responsible for post-secondary institutions ranks as one of the top five provincial program expenditures.

Obviously, the public's views on changes in the provincial post-secondary education system play a critical role in advocating for change within that system. In 2006, FPSE conducted a public opinion survey to gauge the public's assessment of post-secondary education. We wanted to find out if voters shared our concerns about conditions in our sector. The answers that came back were quite revealing:

- 62 per cent agree that tuition fees at BC's colleges, universities and training institutes are too high. This same question has been asked in previous polls. In 2003, 43.8 per cent said tuitions were too high. In 2005, the number climbed to 55 per cent.
- 70 per cent agree that high tuition fees are preventing young people from getting the degrees and diplomas they need to get ahead.
- 74 per cent agree that many young people can't get the courses or programs they need to complete their post-secondary education.
- 74 per cent think that students in colleges, universities and other post-secondary institutions are taking on an unfair burden of debt to pay for their education.
- 81 per cent agree that student debt is making it harder for students to complete post-secondary education and training.

British Columbians think that the provincial government needs to do more to ensure that post-secondary education is more affordable and accessible for all.

- 90 per cent agree that one of the best ways to solve BC's current skills shortage is for the provincial government to invest more in public colleges, universities and training institutes.
- 80 per cent support the idea of reducing tuition fees.
- 84 per cent think that the provincial government should increase public funding to post-secondary institutions to support more course options and higher enrolments.
- 87 per cent support an increase in student grants.



The public's response to the question of BC's looming skills shortage is particularly noteworthy. Citizens share the same concern as many policy analysts and even the Minister of Finance's Forecast Council: our provincial economy is at risk if we do not take steps now to encourage higher levels of post-secondary participation and completion. Unfortunately, most of the policy and funding choices made over the last five years run counter to the needs of our province and the urgency of addressing the looming skills shortage.

### **Changing Status, Changing Governance**


One of the major accomplishments from the decade of the 1990s was the democratization of post-secondary governance. *Charting a New Course* initiated many of those changes by calling for the formation of Education Councils in colleges and university colleges. This change in governance allowed faculty to have significant input into the academic, curriculum and education issues within their institution. Those inputs not only ensured high quality and standards in the design and delivery of post-secondary programs, it also built on the collegial model that has long been a central feature of post-secondary governance.

When the government moved to "re-brand" five post-secondary institutions to universities, it also moved to amend the legislation that governed the new universities. Those amendments are still being implemented, but the most significant feature of them is that they dramatically alter the governance structure in ways that undermine collegial governance. Senior administrators will now have much more power over the new Senates (these Senates replace the Education Councils at the five new universities).

For faculty, the change in governance means that their input on academic and education issues can now be effectively vetoed by senior administrators. The changes call into question why the provincial government would want to make these changes in the first place. Collegial governance had functioned well at colleges and university colleges. There were no examples of where that governance structure had created problems for students, faculty or administrators. However, the amendments appear to be part of a larger effort by the provincial government to centralize decision-making and, in the process, shut out the views of important and legitimate stakeholders.

### **Trades Training in Disarray**

Trades training and apprenticeship programs are an important part of the public post-secondary system. Over 90 per cent of trades training and apprenticeship programs are delivered by public post-secondary institutions. However, starting in 2002, the BC Liberals moved to make radical changes in that system. They began by dismantling the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC) and replacing it with the Industry Training Authority (ITA).



The ITA was supposed to incorporate a so-called new model for trades training. The new model would more closely reflect the demands of employers for just-in-time skills rather than broadly based portable skills that had been the hallmark of the ITAC. The so-called new model also meant a massive revision in the relationship between post-secondary institutions and the new ITA. Institutions were no longer seen as stakeholders in the trades training system. Instead, they were now viewed as “service providers”. Moreover, many of the important decisions dealing with funding of new or existing training programs were unilateral, with ITA dictating the terms and conditions of funding rather than working collaboratively with the public institutions.

By all the objective measures of performance, the ITA experiment has been a failure. Although registrations for apprenticeship programs increased over the period in which ITA was responsible, those increases never resulted in an increase in the number of apprentices completing their program. In fact, the completion rate fell by almost 40 per cent in the first four years of the ITA. It has since improved but still has not surpassed the levels achieved by ITAC. That shortcoming is in spite of a 30 per cent increase in ITA’s budget over that of the ITAC.


In November of 2008, BC’s Auditor General’s Office released a report assessing the ITA. The conclusion of the report was anything but positive. The Attorney General found many aspects of the ITA’s performance falling well short of acceptable standards. In one area of interest to those in the labour movement the report took issue with the ITA’s exclusion of important stakeholder input. The report noted that the labour movement has a long history of advocacy in the area of trades training, but has been effectively shut out when it comes to policy development and priority setting within the ITA.

### **Developmental Education Programs**

One of the real setbacks for adult learners in BC during the last eight years has been the cuts to programs and supports for those accessing developmental education programs. Many of those programs are designed to help bridge adult learners who are returning to a post-secondary institution to either complete their Grade 12 or upgrade their skills as they prepare for a new career or complete the necessary prerequisites to enter a degree or certificate program.

During the period 2001-2002, the provincial government made a number of significant policy and funding changes, all of which affected Developmental Education students. The first was to end the Institutional Based Training program (IBT) that provided targeted support for adult learners who faced a number of barriers in their quest for skills. The loss of IBT meant that many on income support programs could no longer enroll in a post-secondary program. Another loss these students suffered was the elimination of financial aid programs that covered the costs of transportation, childcare, books, supplies and other potential barriers to attending classes. As well, the provincial government reinstated tuition fees for students of Adult Basic Education (ABE), a move that saw numbers of ABE





enrolments fall across the province. After much lobbying by FPSE and the CFS over a six-year period, the provincial government finally eliminated tuition fees for ABE programs. We maintain that the most vulnerable students should not bear the brunt of ill-considered provincial policies that further restrict access to post-secondary education opportunities.

The provincial government also allowed English Language Training (ELT) programs to suffer through the steady privatization of those programs and by under-funding the level of support provided in public institutions. The effect of the changes was that ELT students had to either shoulder an increasing portion of the costs of their language training or face the prospect of longer wait times to access the courses they needed.

### **Failures of “Self Regulation”**

The problems that have taken place at public post-secondary institutions have not been the only source of turmoil in this sector. The provincial government’s approach to private post-secondary institutions has also been problematic. The most significant issues have been the unsavory business practices of some private colleges that have resulted in students losing courses and in some cases tuition fees. The most common pattern has been for a private college to suddenly close its doors leaving students and faculty at the college unable to get back tuition fees or wages from the private operator.

These questionable business practices have resulted in reputational damage for the entire post-secondary system. Many of the students attending these private colleges are international students. In the worst cases, they have been misled by the private operator when it comes to standards and credentials that the institution is able to provide.

The national governments of India, South Korea and China have taken the unusual step of warning their students about problems with BC post-secondary institutions. Those warnings have, for the most part, not distinguished between private and public institutions. This is where the reputational damage has had the greatest impact.

The problem, of course, is that private post-secondary institutions are poorly regulated. In fact, the governing body of the private institutions is nothing more than an industry association in which those who are providing questionable service are the ones in charge of regulating the service.

Those glaring deficiencies were evident when media reports surfaced in 2006-07 showing that members of the Board of Directors of the Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA) were implicated in questionable business practices. In one instance a PCTIA Board member’s private college was found to be offering degree programs in collaboration with institutions that had no standing in BC. While the revelation led to the resignation of the Board member and directives to end the questionable collaboration, the entire episode demonstrated just how ineffective the “self-regulation” model had become.



## **Creeping Commercialization**

The problems that first surfaced in the failures of the self-regulation model in PCTIA also became apparent in other aspects of the government's laissez-faire approach to post-secondary regulation. For example, during its first term in office the BC Liberals moved to dramatically restructure the Degree Quality Assessment Board (DQAB). That Board makes recommendations to the Ministry of Advanced Education on applications for degrees (regular and applied), applications for exempt status (from the DQAB process) and applications to use the word "university". The DQAB is also tasked with assessing applications as to whether a new degree is required as existing degrees are revised.

The DQAB currently has no representation from either faculty or students yet the Board's decisions are vitally important to both of these stakeholders. The DQAB, however, has significant representation from the province's business community, a fact that raises serious questions about the extent to which post-secondary education policy making is being led by a public interest or a business interest.


If there was any doubt about that imbalance in representation and its impact on how policy priorities are shaped, one only has to look at the dramatic increase in the number of private and out-of-province applications for university status. These applications obviously draw on the time and resources of DQAB, a draw that many believe is detrimental to the public post-secondary system. Unfortunately, the government's push to attract private post-secondary institutions is driven more by a view to expand commercial opportunities and benefits than it is to strengthen the quality of post-secondary education available in BC. As long as the balance is tilted in favour of commercial interests, the public interest is relegated to a lesser status, a move that FPSE believes disadvantages existing public post-secondary institutions and further undermines the principle of more access and opportunities for BC students.

## **Recruitment, Retention and Labour Relations**

One of the major strengths of BC's public post-secondary education system is its capacity to both attract and retain the faculty and staff needed to create and deliver high quality programs. In that respect, BC has benefited from its ability to attract the diverse talents of faculty from not just across Canada, but internationally as well.

However, demographic realities will put increasing pressure on BC's public post-secondary education system. Within the next five to ten years, close to half of the existing faculty members within BC post-secondary institutions will have reached retirement age. Filling those vacancies will, increasingly, become a major focus for BC's post-secondary employers.

Unfortunately, the restrictions placed on public sector bargaining in BC over the last eight years will seriously impede that recruitment effort. Salary scales in other jurisdictions, especially Alberta and Ontario, have moved past BC's top-of-scale salary level. More



importantly, the pattern of settlements in these competing jurisdictions include percentage increases in future years that will likely widen the salary gap that has developed between BC and these other provinces.


Three initiatives need to be mobilized in order to close that gap. Obviously, free collective bargaining in BC's post-secondary education sector must not only be encouraged, it needs to be strengthened. Second, post-secondary employers need to understand the important contribution that negotiated benefits play in strengthening their capacity to recruit new faculty. Contractual benefits like the College Pension Plan, our comprehensive coverage for Extended Health Benefits and our relatively compressed salary scale—which allows new faculty to reach top-of-scale sooner—all contribute to making recruitment more effective. And finally, post-secondary employers need to recognize that employment security provisions in existing contracts can also help strengthen recruitment efforts. When prospective faculty have better access to stronger employment security protections (e.g. regularization or tenure), the recruitment effort is made that much more effective.

### **Technology, Research and Scholarship**

Chronic underfunding of our public post-secondary institutions has done more than reduce access and undermine affordability for students. It has also created more limited conditions for new and applied research, made it more difficult for programs to remain technologically current and fostered conditions that undermine the pursuit of scholarly research and scholarly activity of faculty.

Funding shortfalls have often forced faculty to use old or out-dated technologies in their classrooms. With operational budgets not even keeping pace with inflation, post-secondary institutions are pressed to find ways to cut costs. Forgoing new purchases of classroom equipment is one of the more obvious targets for cost cutting. As a result, many program areas are forced to use equipment that should have been replaced much sooner. Even basic support equipment for faculty is often five to ten years out of date. That kind of deficiency undermines program quality and can erode faculty morale.

The funding problem has become even more compromised by the announced changes in university status. Under these changes the provincial government is severely limiting the extent to which faculty at the newly designated teaching universities can have access to research funding. Many colleges for example are already excluded from some of this research funding. Now that exclusion will be expanded to include the new teaching universities. These exclusions fail to recognize the important research contributions that these institutions have made over the years. The new restrictions will further limit the capacity and opportunity of faculty in those institutions to access provincial, national and international research funding.



The funding crunch has also led many senior administrators to take a very narrow view of scholarly research and scholarly activity. More and more, faculty are finding that unless their area of study fits very specific criteria, access to institutional support for their scholarly activity is effectively denied. What these administrators fail to recognize are the diverse ways in which post-secondary educators contribute to the knowledge base in their discipline and, at the same time, remain current in their area of interest.

## **A Blueprint for Change**

Our organization believes there must be a significant revision in the policies and funding choices made over the last eight years. Post-secondary education needs to be strengthened because many of the reforms made over the last eight years have proven to be wrong-headed. The prospect for change lies in making post-secondary education a part of the larger public debate and to that end we are encouraging the public to consider the following recommendations as part of the new blueprint for change in our public post-secondary system.

### **1. Changes to Funding, Affordability and Access**

- BC needs to make a comprehensive commitment to public post-secondary education that leads to meaningful reductions in tuition fees and substantial increases in per-student operating grants for public post-secondary institutions.
- BC also needs comprehensive University transfer offerings that not only encourage students to begin their post-secondary education at a local community college, but also continue that education with the full confidence that needed courses will not be cancelled.
- In the short-term, the BC government needs to adopt all the funding recommendations in the Perrin-Therreau consulting report undertaken in 2006.
- Over the longer term, the BC government needs to revise and re-balance the funding formula for post-secondary institutions. The current formula does not adequately support the real costs of delivering post-secondary education throughout the province.
- To begin addressing some of the financial barriers that post-secondary students face, the BC government should fund a new initiative that would guarantee that the first-year of post-secondary education is tuition free.
- To strengthen BC's current articulation system, the Ministry of Advanced Education should compel all universities to fully participate in the articulation process.



## 2. Changes to Developmental Education

- Use targeted funding mechanisms to ensure that every college, institute and university is able to provide adequate ABE programs in their communities.
- Re-establish funding for the Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Program to ensure that students have sufficient support to pay for associated fees, books, childcare and transportation while enrolled in ABE programs.
- Maximize the use of our public colleges, institutes and universities to deliver any publicly funded training program for adults.
- Establish separate funding targets to overcome the systemic barriers that women, single parents and First Nations face in completing ABE programs.
- Give post-secondary institutions sufficient funding to allow greater flexibility in establishing realistic timelines for ABE students trying to complete their programs.
- Raise the age of the youngest child to eight years old when a parent on income assistance must begin looking for employment.
- Allow those receiving Income Assistance to be enrolled in ABE and post-secondary education programs.
- Provide additional funding to ensure that income assistance is sufficient to cover extra costs associated with returning to school.
- Recognize literacy as a barrier to employment and support literacy upgrading in the public post-secondary system as part of their employment plans.
- Acknowledge and support the work that the public post-secondary institutions do to deliver the vast majority of adult literacy programs in the province.
- Use the public post-secondary education system to deliver any new programs in adult literacy.
- Respect the needs of adult learners to learn in an adult environment.
- Ensure that federal literacy programs are delivered by the public post-secondary education system.



### 3. Changes to English Language Training

- Reform BC's language and settlement services in ways that adopt the best practices identified in the Report Card on Inter-Provincial Language and Settlement Services. Those practices should include:
  - More funding for language training services beyond current ELSA levels.
  - More funding for specific support services such as counseling and financial assistance for ESL students.
  - Childcare support for those attending language training classes.
  - Maximum limits on class size in ELT programs.
- Improvements in funding should not come at the expense of other modes of ESL delivery.
- Utilize the expertise and reliability of public post-secondary institutions to deliver high quality language training in the community by establishing targeted funding for ELT programs in those institutions. In addition, require public post-secondary institutions to collaborate with one another to fully utilize the targeted funding.
- Amend legislation to ensure that private post-secondary institutions, especially private language training institutions, are effectively regulated, operate in more transparent ways and are more accountable to their students.
- Direct the FPSE-PSEA policy table to develop a work plan that will increase the capacity of our public post-secondary institutions to meet the growing need for language training of new immigrants, new Canadians and their families.

At the federal level, the government of Canada needs to:

- Commit to fully support the language and settlement needs of new immigrants, new Canadians and their families.
- Overhaul the current funding formula for language and settlement services to ensure that the new commitment has the resources necessary to meet the goals of full social and economic integration of new immigrants.
- Work with provincial governments and the public post-secondary system to improve Canada's capacity to recognize foreign credentials and ensure that new Canadians are able to reach their full potential in the Canadian labour market.
- Support the efforts of provincial governments that are committed to effective regulation of private post-secondary institutions, especially private language training institutions.




#### **4. Changes to BC's System of Trades Training**

- Guarantee true mobility consistent with Canada's Charter provisions by strengthening measures that would allow an individual to achieve a Red Seal certification if it is available in their chosen trade.
- Strengthen the integrity of trades training in BC by ensure that the public post-secondary institutions, which currently provide over 90 percent of trades training and apprenticeship programs, continue to be the trainer of choice for all trades training and apprenticeship programs.
- Reform the governance structure of the agency tasked with delivering trades training programs in BC to include faculty union representation as well as representation from the broader labour movement.
- Improve the reporting and accountability function of the ITA by ensuring that the Authority remains within the reporting structure of the Ministry of Advanced Education.
- Enhance the capacity of public post-secondary institutions to deliver high quality trades training by adequately funding curriculum development, capital costs, counseling services, and registration. As well, the ITA's funding formula needs to be changed in ways that support classes of students and allows institutions and faculty to appropriately manage and deliver trades training.
- Increase access for under-represented groups in trades training. These groups would include women, First Nations, visible minorities, and those with disabilities.
- Provide trades training instructors with contractual commitments equivalent to academic freedom currently provided to other faculty in public post-secondary institutions.

#### **5. Effective Regulation of Private Institutions**

- Reform the governance and oversight capacity of the Degree Quality Assessment Board and the Private Career Training Institutions Agency to ensure that faculty and students have a greater voice on both Boards.
- Require private training institutions to post a bond equivalent to the tuition fees collected to ensure that those fees are completely refundable should the private institution be forced to close for any reason.

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- Ensure that the Ministry of Advanced Education funds the full costs within institutions for degree development and degree approval.
  - Direct the DQAB to work more closely and collaboratively with public post-secondary institutions to streamline its various application processes.
  - Require private post-secondary institutions to pay the full costs of their DQAB applications.

## **6. Recruitment, Retention and Labour Relations**

- Guarantee free collective bargaining throughout BC's public sector.
- Strengthen employment security provisions in post-secondary collective agreements to ensure that new faculty members have more consistent and reliable access to available work within their institution.
- Improve the funding and coverage of negotiated benefit plans (including the College Pension Plan) as part of a broader strategy to strengthen recruitment and retention in BC's public post-secondary education system.

## **7. Technology, Research and Scholarly Activity**

- Increase base funding to post-secondary institutions as part of an initial commitment to improve the quality classroom infrastructure at BC's post-secondary institutions.
- Remove current restrictions that prevent newly designated universities from participating in or receiving provincial research funding.
- Commit to a doubling of provincial research funding for post-secondary institutions over the next five years.
- Direct the Policy Table established in the 2007 round of post-secondary bargaining to develop a new protocol that supports both scholarly research and scholarly activity at post-secondary institutions.
- Establish a separate funding mechanism that would allow individual post-secondary institutions to better support professional development activities of its faculty as part of a larger effort to ensure that all faculty members are able to remain current in their discipline.