

2015-2016 ACTION PLAN

Open to Learning:

Policies and Perspectives on Post-Secondary Education in BC



Federation of
Post-Secondary Educators
of BC

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The 2015 provincial budget raises serious doubts about the current government's commitment to properly fund post-secondary education in BC. Whether it is the steady downward shift in real per student operating grants which will have dropped by more than 20% over the period 2001 to 2016, or the increasing reliance on tuition fee revenue from both international and domestic students, post-secondary education in BC has undergone major changes over the last decade and a half. Despite those changes, we know that the public looks to our institutions as the place where students have the opportunities to transform their lives in ways that will have lasting and positive impacts on our province. The challenge we face as educators and as union activists is to ensure that the public understands the disconnect that exists between the government's current support for post-secondary education and the broader aspiration of BC citizens for accessible and affordable post-secondary education.

Through our colleges, institutes and universities, BC could have the capacity to provide opportunities for students to learn while also providing communities with a hub for innovation and civic engagement. Unfortunately, achieving the true potential of BC's post-secondary education system has not been supported by policies and funding choices at either the provincial or federal level.

At our 2014 convention, delegates supported a call to mobilize and engage our members and their communities on key issues that undermine our institutions and adversely affect our members who work and teach in those institutions. One of the goals of this campaign effort is to support and advance policies which ensure 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 also recognizes that the rights of our members need to be respected and enhanced. Achieving that goal can move in tandem with our broader public campaign efforts, but it also needs to be addressed directly through coordinated bargaining strategies and ongoing support for labour relations and contract oversight at both the local and provincial level. Part of that effort needs to focus on how FPSE supports contract negotiations. It also needs to focus on our capacity to provide grievance and arbitration oversight during the term of

Local agreements. And finally, it needs to strengthen our longstanding commitment to organize the unorganized in both the public and private sectors of post-secondary education.

Over the next twelve months, FPSE is proposing an Action Plan that will mobilize its members, staff, resources, organizational capacity, and alliances with the broader labour movement and progressive community partners to advance our interests in five major areas. Those areas include:

1. Strengthening the rights and benefits of all members by:

- Supporting the conclusion of the current round of contract bargaining by providing Labour Relations Staff support for Local bargaining committees and ensuring that this support coordinates research, Local strategy development and communications to achieve settlements that have the support of Local members.
- Ensuring that our bargaining priorities address issues that are critical to all of our members to ensure equity and good working conditions.
- Spearheading efforts to improve the employment security of all members by mobilizing against plans to cut programs and course offerings across the public post-secondary education system.
- Joining with the broader labour movement's campaign to overhaul BC's labour laws and employment standards, a campaign that will make it easier for workers to form or join a union.
- Mobilizing members to secure stronger contract language and related provisions for non-regular faculty to address the needs of those members for greater job security as well as equitable treatment.
- Continuing to support the efforts of every local to organize the unorganized at their institutions.
- Making strategic and effective use of FPSE's capacity to service and fund the grievances and arbitrations advanced through the Grievance and Arbitration Review Committee.
- Providing needed support and advocacy to Locals as they implement new OH&S rules dealing with bullying and harassment and advance the rights of workers affected by workplace harassment.

2. Building our capacity to improve the post-secondary education system by:

- Starting with the launch of FPSE's *Open the Doors* campaign, continue to target key issues of funding and program prioritization as part of a broader effort to increase the public's understanding of post-secondary education and the disconnect that exists between what the public wants from post-secondary institutions and what the BC government is failing to provide because of chronic under-funding of our institutions.

- Expanding the specific campaign efforts that have targeted the provincial government's cut to English Language Training programs delivered by public post-secondary institutions as well as the recent decision to re-institute tuition fees for Adult Basic Education (ABE) provided to post-secondary students.
- Working with our allies in the Canadian Federation of Students to improve affordability and access by pressing governments and our institutions to strengthen student grant programs, increase student financial aid and lower overall cost of tuition. As well, continue to expand on work done with CFS and others to stop the exploitation of international students.
- Supporting efforts of community allies, students and the broader labour movement in opposing the relentless privatization of post-secondary education in BC.
- Coordinating with the broader labour movement to ensure that post-secondary educators are active and mobilized for the 2015 federal election
- Calling on the Ministry of Advanced Education to undertake a thorough review of the provincial funding formula for post-secondary institutions to ensure fair and sustainable funding provisions are in place.
- Advocating for an overhaul of the province's trades training and apprenticeship system to ensure greater input from educators and workers as well as greater utilization of our public institutions for delivering that training.
- Emphasizing the value and importance of the policies and funding that support the delivery of developmental education within our post-secondary institutions.
- Spearheading efforts to not only re-regulate private post-secondary institutions but also strengthen the capacity of faculty in those institutions to have more direct and effective input into the oversight of private institutions.
- Working to revitalize Liberal Arts programs and expand the number of Arts and Science offerings to ensure that these programs play an integral role in the learning opportunities available to every student and the pathways they take to complete their post-secondary education.
- Continuing to press governments for better scholarly activity funding support as well as more equitable access to that support for all post-secondary institutions.

3. Supporting the efforts of private post-secondary faculty to unionize and fully access their right to bargain collectively by:

- Funding the organizing efforts of locals who have identified opportunities for unionization.
- Providing labour relations staff support at the Labour Relations Board and at the bargaining table.

- Including advocacy on public policy issues that affect private colleges and institutes as part of the support that FPSE will provide to existing and newly organized private college faculty members.
- Continuing to support the sponsorship of activists who are interested in participating in the BC Federation of Labour's Organizing Institute.

4. Democratizing post-secondary governance structures by:

- Increasing the capacity of activists within our ranks to participate on Councils, Senates and Boards of their local institutions and do so in ways that are supportive of the faculty who have elected them to those positions.
- Creating greater awareness among faculty members of the importance of participation in governance by providing workshops and educational material on this issue to every local.
- Reinstating the right of faculty to choose their own representatives to Boards of Governors.

5. Making full restoration of ESL and ABE funding a priority focus by:

- Utilizing our internal expertise and capacity on both ESL and ABE to develop comprehensive policy proposals that would form the basis of our lobby effort with governments.
- Ensuring that FPSE's ESL and ABE Caucuses are fully engaged in the drafting of these policy proposals.
- Working with unions, community allies and student organizations who share our concerns about the funding cuts that have taken place in both ESL and ABE program areas.
- Using our collective agreements and advocacy roles within our institutions to resist efforts by local administrators to implement program prioritization plans that adversely impact ABE and ESL programs.
- Analyzing any government efforts to address financial support for vulnerable and poor students with an eye on ensuring that proposed changes fully support ESL and ABE students to successful completion of their studies not only in ESL and ABE, but through to certificate, diploma, or degree completion.