

It's time to Open the Doors to post-secondary education in B.C.

Executive summary

The B.C. government's current policy on post-secondary education funding is failing students by:

- Systematically **reducing operating grants**;
- Allowing **tuition and service fee increases that are more than double** its own 2 per cent cap on fee hikes;
- Overseeing a **50 per cent increase in the number of administrators at post-secondary education institutions** since 2002, along with a salary bill that has almost doubled in the same period;
- Continuing to pursue **job creation priorities that are no longer relevant** or less relevant to the economy than they were when the policies were established several years ago.

This means students are compelled to take on huge debts to help finance their education, and colleges and universities have no option other than to cut programming, increase the number of international students, or seek outside support to make up funding shortfalls.

By continuing to focus on the job creation policies set out in the Skills for Jobs Blueprint, the government is limiting course choices and forcing students into career paths that may not be appropriate for them, their communities or the economy's future workforce needs.

Public opinion polling conducted for FPSE shows that more than 80 per cent of British Columbians are not happy with key aspects of the current post-secondary education policy and support:

REDUCED



TUITION FEES

FORGIVABLE



LOANS

NO INTEREST ON



STUDENT LOANS

MORE GRANTS FOR



LOW & MIDDLE INCOME

- Reduced tuition fees (84 per cent);
- Forgivable loans to students who "give back to the province" (84 per cent);
- No interest on student loans (82 per cent); and
- More grants to low and middle income students (82 per cent).

Post-secondary education is in crisis and unless the government acts quickly, the consequences for British Columbia's economy could be dire. The B.C. 2024 Labour Market Outlook predicts that 78 per cent of the projected one million job openings will require post-secondary education, but the funding to enable students to access the education they need to fill those jobs is not available.

The vast majority of the projected jobs will require problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and the ability to communicate effectively. Yet many of the programs that teach these skills are being cut to save money.

FPSE is recommending a major policy review that will Open the Doors to post-secondary education in B.C.

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British Columbia's post-secondary education funding crisis

The largest single investment the B.C. government makes in post-secondary education – the per-student operating grant – has declined by over 20 per cent since 2001, when adjusted for inflation. Consequently, colleges and universities are forced to seek other sources of funding to

The per-student operating grant has declined by over 20% while tuition revenue has increased 400%

STUDENT FUNDING



DOWN 20%

TUITION REVENUE



UP 400%

make up the shortfall, which many are unable to do. That means students are paying the price.

The cost of post-secondary education has primarily been shifted to students. Tuition revenue for the BC government has increased by almost 400 per cent since 2001 forcing many students, who are already struggling to cope with spiralling rent and living costs in the main centres, to rack up even higher student loans.

Community colleges around the province are cutting back on university transfer programs, while adult basic education and English-language training now come with hefty price tags for all but a few who qualify for the Adult Upgrading Grant. This means students who need to upgrade courses, or complete a Dogwood diploma, or complete pre-requisites, are unable to access the education they need to get the jobs they want.

While trades training in B.C. is important, the government's over emphasis on just one aspect of the economy's future needs means that it is neglecting a full and diverse post-secondary education system that trains people for the jobs of today, and prepares them for the challenges of tomorrow and beyond.

Two years after the launch of the government's Skills for Jobs Blueprint, the projected 100,000 jobs in LNG that the Blueprint was designed to support have not materialized and are unlikely to in the foreseeable future – if ever. Yet the government refuses to acknowledge the changes that have occurred since the Blueprint was published and revise its post-secondary education policies accordingly.

The Blueprint restricts funding to only specialized, targeted post-secondary programs, which threatens to undermine economic diversity and student success. Since 2014, the B.C. government has been moving to limit post-secondary funding to what it has determined are its top priorities. While those programs deserve support, so do those in other disciplines that students may choose, but which are being eliminated or reduced due to funding cuts.

Post-secondary education is about more than the jobs the government has chosen for students or which suit a specific business sector at a particular point in time. Narrowly funding programs that only match jobs that the government believes are in demand will lead to failure in the long-term. It is unfair to students because it limits their choice and forces public colleges and universities to cut back in other areas, which reduces flexibility and undermines a truly diversified economy.

There has been a 50% increase in the number of administrators and a 200% increase in executive compensation since 2002

EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION



UP 200%

ADMINISTRATION



UP 50%

In essence, the government failures in post-secondary education can be summed up as follows:

- A Blueprint for education designed for industry, not students;
- “Re-engineering” post-secondary education while ignoring its own Campus 2020 report;
- Declining operating grants for B.C.’s public institutions — by over 20 per cent since 2001, when adjusted for inflation;
- Annual increases in fees for students and an increase in tuition revenue of almost 400 per cent since 2001;
- Program renewal by cutting existing ones, updating them, and relaunching with huge tuition increases;
- The elimination of tuition-free Adult Basic Education at public post-secondary institutions;
- The elimination of tuition-free English as an Additional Language programs at public post-secondary institutions;
- An Adult Upgrading Grant designed to exclude the vast majority of British Columbians;
- A 50 per cent increase in the number of administrators in public post-secondary institutions, and a 200 per cent increase in executive compensation since 2002;
- Failing to invest to improve Aboriginal representation in most areas of study. Only 11 of 25 institutions get funding for Aboriginal programs
- Program or section cuts at community colleges, particularly across rural B.C., including over 100 individual course sections at one college alone.

What British Columbians think about post-secondary education funding

Public opinion research for FPSE in May and June this year showed that:

- 83 per cent of survey respondents agreed that “now more than ever the B.C. government needs to take steps to increase the opportunities for communities and individuals to enroll in the program of their choice;”
- 77 per cent agreed that “B.C. needs to invest more in post-secondary education so that students will get the kind of high quality education and job training they need to compete for jobs in the 21st century;”
- 81 per cent agreed that salaries of executives at post-secondary institutions should be reduced;
- 77 per cent agreed that the number of administrators at colleges and universities should be cut;
- Only 9 per cent support increased spending on programs to meet industry needs if it involves cutbacks to other programs.

83%
AGREE

“Government needs to increase opportunities for communities and individuals to enroll in the program of their choice”

77%
AGREE

“B.C. needs to invest more in post-secondary education so students can compete for jobs in the 21st century”

81%
AGREE

“Salaries of executives at post-secondary institutions should be reduced”

77%
AGREE

“The number of administrators at post-secondary institutions should be cut”

Recommendation

FPSE recommends that the government conduct a thorough review of post-secondary education policy based on the following considerations:

- The funding formula is not adapted for specific community needs. Rural community colleges and large urban ones are all funded based on estimates of student FTEs.
- The funding formula requires post-secondary institutions to view students as “revenue-generating units” rather than as learners and contributors to an education community, and beyond that, as economic and social contributors to the communities in which they live.
- The Skills for Jobs Blueprint views post-secondary education only as job training, devaluing its critical role in developing engaged citizens. The Blueprint requires institutions to direct up to 25 per cent of their operating grants over 3 years to programs supporting their “Top 100 Jobs.”
- The number of administrators has increased by 50 per cent since 2002, and their salary bill has almost doubled over the same period. There is currently a freeze on executive compensation, but reclassifications or new classifications get around that.
- Public institutions are being encouraged to seek more international students, further shifting the cost of education on students and their families.

About FPSE

The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC is the provincial voice for faculty and staff in BC teaching universities, colleges and institutes, and in private sector institutions. FPSE member locals, represented by President’s Council and the Executive, represent over 10,000 faculty and staff at 18 public and 12 private sector institutions.

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