Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC

BC Post-Secondary Education Sustainability / Modernization Review
FPSE Submission

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About FPSE

The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC (FPSE) is the voice of 10,000 faculty and staff teaching at universities, colleges, institutes and unionized private sector institutions, offering support with grievances, bargaining, pensions, learning, and advocating for educational quality and post-secondary educators' interests in the province of British Columbia.

FPSE Positioning Statement

Thank you for the opportunity to provide FPSE's input to the independent review of British Columbia's public post-secondary education system.

FPSE recognizes that the system is facing unprecedented financial pressure, including the first projected sector-wide consolidated deficit and rapidly depleting reserves. The recent federal immigration policy changes have accelerated these pressures, but they have also exposed longer-standing structural vulnerabilities in the funding model that pre-date the international tuition collapse. We agree that the challenges confronting the system are now system-wide and require system-level responses.

Our submission is intended to engage directly with the review's Terms of Reference and the issues identified in the province's background materials. We acknowledge the importance of operational efficiency, collaboration, and shared service effectiveness in stabilizing the system. At the same time, drawing on sector experience and member input, we seek to clarify the limits of efficiency-only approaches in a system that has already undergone decades of internal adjustment and cost containment.

FPSE's perspective is grounded in the view that sustainability must be understood not only in fiscal terms, but also in relation to educational quality, access, equity, and public confidence. This is particularly important for rural, remote, and access-oriented institutions that deliver significant public value. Where collaboration, alternative delivery models, or structural reforms are considered, we emphasize the importance of sequencing change carefully, aligning incentives at the system level, and without weakening the governance frameworks that ensure academic quality and respect collective agreements.

We offer to participate in this review, with both verbal and written submissions, in the spirit of constructive engagement, grounded in a shared interest in the long-term health and public value of British Columbia's public post-secondary education system. Our intent is to contribute sector experience and educator perspectives to the review's consideration of options that are fiscally responsible, educationally sound, and capable of sustaining public confidence over the long term.

Introduction

The timing and structure of this review have provoked strong reactions from our membership, not least due to the content and framing of some of the questions giving us cause for concern. Thematically, the manner in which the challenges we face as a sector are presented completely absolves the government of any share of the blame for the fiscal and policy realities we face. The fact of the matter is that the government encouraged and, at some level, sponsored the aggressive recruitment of international students as a solution to the funding gap at BC's colleges and universities. The provincial government also created the unique structure of the special purpose teaching universities (SPTUs) without a proper funding model or a legislative regime that befits a university. Yet the background document for this review is written in a very passive manner, as if government were a mere witness and bystander to all this tumult. We thought that we were on a path for a productive dialogue to address these challenges when the government engaged Don Wright to undertake a funding formula review. Wright began his work in 2021, but his review was abruptly cancelled after the initial stage; oddly, the government never really told the sector the process had been cancelled until several years later. That approach to public policy and transparency does not engender trust.

We think that this is useful background for our lack of trust in this government in the context of how this process came together very quickly prior to the holiday break. However, we are prepared to engage in good faith and have an open dialogue on the future of our sector. The sector faces seismic challenges that were masked and delayed by the massive influx of international students. In addition, we have the parallel uncertainly and anxiety generated by the Trump regime's trade policies. However, we believe there is a strong foundation to build on, and these challenging realities provide us with an opportunity to reaffirm the social contract at the core of what post-secondary institutions do. Our institutions are a beacon of hope and opportunity for British Columbians looking to pursue a degree, learn a trade, become a healthcare professional, or pursue a myriad of other professions that are vital for the long-term economic, cultural, environmental, and physical health of British Columbians. British Columbians look to the province to ensure the system remains affordable and provides them with the post-secondary educational opportunities they need. This expectation, no doubt, includes a commitment to sustainable funding.

As we will explore in greater detail below, the long-term viability of the system requires a partnership and mutual understanding amongst the various stakeholders: students and their families, British Columbia taxpayers, industry, and, of course, our members who deliver education and services across the province. What distinguishes the public system is the commitment of our members to ensure the quality and relevancy of all the programs they offer. And this quality control comes through the collegial governance process embedded, primarily, in senates and education councils. When first created, education councils were a bold experiment, and we believe they provide an inclusive and innovative way to ensure the proper breadth and quality of academic programming. And yet, several of the questions seem to assume that senates and education councils are the problem thwarting academic administrators from responding more immediately to the government of the day. We reject that measure of efficiency and pivot from the assumption that collegial governance inhibits "nimble" adjustments to argue for their unique benefit to our sector.

Faculty have an explicit investment in the well-being and long-term sustainability of our institutions, so instead of undermining the role of faculty in this dialogue, the solution is to harness the expertise and passion our members have for the work they do.

Similarly, the SPTUs are often framed as a policy problem or as ill defined; in contrast, put bluntly, we believe that ambiguity is the signature strength of these institutions. These are institutions with

regional mandates that offer comprehensive undergrad programs in standard academic programs along with trades training and a small sliver of applied research. Unless the vision for undergraduate education in the province is to fund only a small number of institutions in major urban centres, we hold fast to the view that the SPTUs are a success story that has not been shared widely enough. Though BC's economy has evolved in the past 30 years from a primarily resource-based economy to a more diversified economy, there is no escaping the fact that BC remains at the mercy of volatile market fluctuations in the forestry, fishing, and mining industries.

We now find ourselves attempting to reform the sector in the midst of this crisis. The reality is that difficult conversations need to happen about a sustainable path forward, and we will answer the questions provided in that spirit. To contribute to a productive dialogue, we will also pose questions of our own prompted by the phrasing of the questions from the Ministry.

Q1: Fundamental Purpose / Value of the Public Post-Secondary Education System

What do you see as the fundamental purpose and value of the public post-secondary education system? Does the purpose/value change in the context of our shifting landscape right now (i.e., swift technological advances, evolving societal views and expectations, demographic changes, economic trends and future of work expectations, etc.)?

British Columbia's public post-secondary system operates under multiple overlapping mandates: workforce preparation, civic and democratic capacity, regional access, reconciliation, and knowledge creation. Faculty input on this question strongly reinforces that the system's legitimacy depends on sustaining this balance rather than narrowing purpose to a single economic function.

While employment outcomes remain an important and visible dimension of public value, our members consistently caution that an increasing policy emphasis on labour-market preparation risks crowding out the system's other core mandates. When workforce alignment becomes overly dominant, institutions are incentivized to prioritize short-term, measurable outputs in ways that can weaken their capacity to deliver broader educational, civic, and social outcomes. We worry about this right now. Over time, this narrowing of focus undermines the very adaptability and resilience we are intended to support.

Faculty emphasize that the system's most enduring contribution lies in developing critical thinking, communication, and information literacy. These capacities enable individuals to navigate technological change, misinformation, and economic volatility across their working lives. While less visible in short-term labour-market metrics, they are central to long-term productivity, social cohesion, and public trust.

Faculty also underscore the democratic function of public post-secondary institutions. Academic freedom, open inquiry, and knowledge creation are not ancillary values; they are core conditions supporting an informed public and a resilient civic culture. In this sense, post-secondary institutions function as social infrastructure, not simply as sites of credential production.

Accessibility and place-based delivery are integral to this public purpose. Colleges and universities act as anchor institutions, particularly in rural and remote communities where they are often the primary access point for education and skills development. For many learners, such as mature students, first-generation students, and those unable to relocate, public post-secondary education is the pathway to participation.

The system's fundamental purpose has remained stable over time. What has changed is the risk environment. Declining public investment and rising market pressures have weakened the system's capacity to sustain its full public role, increasing the importance of deliberate policy choices that protect the core functions.

Q2: Operating Funding Stabilization / Sustainability

Given that additional provincial operating funding is not anticipated for the foreseeable future, what measures do you see as necessary to stabilize the system over the near term and, further, to work towards sustainability over the longer term?

Our members express strong concern with the premise that no additional provincial operating funding is anticipated, emphasizing that this is not a neutral constraint but a policy choice with foreseeable system consequences. While institutions have a responsibility to operate efficiently, stabilization of a public post-secondary system cannot be achieved by institutional action alone where funding levels are misaligned with mandated responsibilities. Government retains primary responsibility for ensuring that system expectations and available resources are coherent.

In the near term, members identify protection of core educational capacity as the central stabilizing priority. Teaching capacity, faculty complement, curriculum development, and student support services constitute foundational infrastructure rather than discretionary spending. Further reductions in these areas are likely to yield diminishing fiscal returns while accelerating workforce instability, program contraction, and uneven impacts across regions and institutions.

At the same time, members recognize that government and the public reasonably expect institutions to pursue efficiencies where they remain credible. From a system perspective, administrative growth represents the most viable area for such efforts. Expansion in the number of senior management positions and layers is widely viewed as contributing to cost pressure without commensurate educational benefit. Targeted administrative rationalization offers greater potential for cost containment than further erosion of front-line education.

Over the longer term, sustainability requires a shift from crisis management to stewardship. Members emphasize the need for predictable funding frameworks that support long-range planning and reduce reliance on volatile revenue sources. A sustainable model must better reflect the true costs of delivering high-quality public education, including the additional costs associated with small class sizes, student supports, and place-based delivery in rural and regional communities.

Q3: Reduce Competition / Increase Collaboration

How would the system need to change in order to reduce competition between institutions? What are the opportunities for collaboration across institutions?

Competition between post-secondary institutions in British Columbia derives from funding that has not kept up. Inadequate funding levels pit institutions against one another for students and visibility. With high international student tuition levels, institutions have been incentivized to compete for revenue rather than collaborate strategically to meet system-wide goals.

This competitive behaviour stands in contrast to the foundations of the BC post-secondary system, which were built through collaboration among communities, school boards, taxpayers, and governments, and continue to operate collegially through academic governance structures and a

strong place-based commitment to improving quality of life in the regions institutions serve. Reducing competition therefore requires changes to system design rather than simply urging institutions to cooperate.

British Columbia already has proven collaborative infrastructure in the post-secondary sector. The work of the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer demonstrates how system-level coordination can reduce duplication while improving student mobility and outcomes. For decades, institutions have collaborated through articulation committees to support credit transfer across the province. However, recent policy approaches have encouraged institutions to develop standalone products outside this shared framework, fragmenting pathways for learners and undermining efficiencies that the credit system has already achieved.

Similarly, BCcampus has demonstrated the value of shared platforms and collaborative approaches to teaching and learning, open education, and digital infrastructure. More sustained investment in BCcampus could enable deeper cooperation across institutions, reducing duplication while preserving academic autonomy.

The trades system provides another instructive example. Centralized curriculum development under SkilledTradesBC, combined with regional delivery, has enabled consistency, portability, and flexibility without forcing institutional uniformity. This model illustrates how common standards and shared frameworks can coexist with local delivery.

Ultimately, reducing competition requires aligning policy incentives with collaborative outcomes. If institutions are funded and assessed as components of a coordinated public system, collaboration becomes the default behaviour. Increased and more predictable public investment, particularly for shared initiatives, is therefore not only a funding issue but also a system-design tool essential to long-term sustainability.

Q4: Structural / Governance Changes

Are there structural and/or governance changes that may be necessary to increase the potential for longer term system sustainability? How should these changes be actioned and sequenced?

We believe that questions 4 and 6 are largely indistinguishable in how they are structured and what they are asking. We will, therefore, answer them in tandem; please see the response to question 6 below. However, on the specific question of governance and boards, there are some thoughts we would like to share.

There are both structural and governance changes that will increase the potential for long-term sustainability. First, to address the structural changes, we note that the province's universities rely entirely on a board system to ensure financial accountability. This system has demonstrably failed to deliver objective oversight and restraint on institutional spending. In most instances, boards vote to approve every management motion even when budgets contain significant cost overruns. This pattern persists because the board system as currently configured is unable to address its own limitations as a body tasked with institutional oversight.

By design, boards are dominated by eight Order in Council (OIC) appointees drawn from professions deemed helpful to the board in executing its duties. Many of these volunteers come from the world of business and have little or no acquaintance with the culture of universities, understanding of collegial governance, or direct knowledge of the institutions they serve. They

convene for approximately six meetings a year of several hours apiece, although some also serve on board committees.

Given their background in corporate life and lack of institutional knowledge, most OIC appointees identify with and defer to the authority of the administrations that report to them. They are content to receive detailed reports and reassurances from university presidents whose jobs depend on their positive opinion. The relationship of board-employer to president-employee is blurred by the dependence of OIC members on the president, who is motivated to provide the most optimistic view of the institution's functioning and, by inference, their own performance.

It is a self-contained system that provides no critical reflection and is further undermined by the grooming by presidents of OIC members through private socializing, behind-the-scenes meetings of the "inner circle" without elected members, flattery, and appeals for sympathy as leaders of beleaguered institutions.

Outside the closed relationship between OIC members and the president are the elected members of the board: the faculty, students, and staff. Because faculty and staff are the only board members with independent knowledge of the institution, they are viewed as potential threats to the sunny narratives produced by administrators. Critical reflections or questions posed by elected members are dismissed by OIC members as insubordination. Attempts by elected members to hold administrations to account are regarded as interference and obstructionism. Many have been treated with disdain, paternalism, and outright hostility by OIC members.

Clearly, this system is structurally flawed and, to the extent that it has failed to restrain institutional spending, must be reformed. We recommend that the government produce an onboarding instructional video that clearly outlines the role of OIC members as independent of the administrations they oversee and the role of elected members as vital contributors to collegial governance. We also recommend that the terms of OIC members be limited to three years with no opportunity for reappointment. Boards should require that parts of their meetings be held without administrators present, and clarification of their arm's-length relationship to the president would be enhanced by annual 360 presidential evaluations. Currently, most university presidents are the least scrutinized employees in their institutions.

Further structural changes that will improve board functioning include providing boards with their own secretaries. Currently, the university secretary is the president's secretary who is also responsible for handling board communications. Locals across our sector report they are regularly blocked from communicating with their institution's boards by university secretaries. While still respecting institutional autonomy, the province could also assist post-secondary institutions (and save money) in the production of templates for policies that it requires across the system. The Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Policy, for example, has been reproduced at every post-secondary institution across the province at enormous cost to the public.

Further structural measures that will increase financial accountability include visualizing spending over time on graphs so that boards can see concerning trends at a glance. Currently, all that they see are budgets that capture last and next year's spending. Visualizations could also be used to track administrative hires over time, as well as increases in compensation relative to enrolment. Universities should also return to more transparent accounting practices abandoned in 2006 that clearly show where funds are spent. Currently, large sums are housed in vague budget categories labeled "support" or "other." The government should also require that all revenue and expenditures be reported on financial statements. Some administrations have refused to disclose how much money is spent in settlements with departing employees or how much has been received through

insurance claims. Finally, senior administrators should be incentivized to control their budgets by linking pay increases to budget restraint. If costs escalate, salaries should decrease.

To address the question concerning governance changes that will enhance sustainability among universities, we recommend the government consider changes to the *University Act*. Although teaching is the focus of SPTUs, teachers are the minority on university senates (section 35.1(2)(g)). We recommend the number of faculty on university senates be increased to be the majority of voting members.

We also recommend that the *University Act* require the senates of SPTUs to approve the annual budget before it is sent to the board (section 37(1)(e)). Currently, these senates only advise the president on the preparation of the budget, advice which they can ignore. Likewise, we recommend making the chair of the senates of SPTUs an elected position (section 63(b)). We also recommend making contract faculty full voting members of faculties. Although the legislation does not prevent this, some universities effectively marginalize significant numbers of their contract faculty by refusing them voting rights in their own faculties.

Finally, if the government wants to see its wishes realized in the robust functioning of its post-secondary institutions, it will need to revise legislation to provide penalties for leaders of institutions that fail to respect the intentions of legislation.

Q5: Consolidation

If government was prepared to consider consolidating some institutions, what are some key elements of a well-functioning consolidated system structure? What are the principles and considerations that should guide such a process? How should government approach this?

Like so much of this review, the not-so-hidden assumption of this question is to solve a problem created by government. The current systemic challenges are largely a product of recommendations made by previous reviews, including *Charting a New Course* and *Campus 2020*. Those reviews spawned the unique patchwork of research universities, colleges, institutes, and SPTUs we now have. As with any review, it is up to government to ensure that recommendations come with appropriate legislative and funding support. However, the reality is that the history of evolution in the post-secondary sector is the history of half measures and buyer's remorse born of political pressure and policy expediency along with the laudable intention of the system to provide as wide a variety of opportunities in as many corners of the province as possible.

In particular, the SPTUs, created in 2008, were a response to immense political pressure to create more college and particularly university seats for a wave of students coming through the system in the mid-2000s. Those demographics have now shifted, and some of the hasty policy decisions made to alleviate that pressure have come due. The SPTUs were never properly funded or granted proper legislative authority to ensure the autotomy and collegial governance that define universities, and many of these institutions are now struggling. However, it is difficult to see how mergers or shared services will solve these underlying issues. What the SPTUs excel at are connecting with their local communities and remaining responsive to the needs of students not traditionally served by the research universities. Many of the SPTUs remain hybrid institutions offering a variety of programs ranging from trades and microcredentials to graduate programs. The reality is that despite ambiguous beginnings, these institutions have become embedded in the communities they serve, and there has been no credible case made for mergers addressing any of the fiscal challenges resulting from a myriad of decisions outside of their control.

There are also several colleges in the province in financial distress, and while this is a uniquely challenging period for BC's system of regional colleges, they were never designed to be run on a market rationale. In addition, as the Trump tariffs start to further undermine BC's resource economy, a robust system of post-secondary education outside of the Lower Mainland is vital. Put more bluntly, colleges in smaller, more remote corners of the provinces were always envisioned to require substantial public funding. These colleges serve as a hub in the communities they serve and meet the government's goal of rural development and access to services and opportunities for all British Columbians, regardless of where they live. Closing or collapsing those institutions would betray that promise. There was never any expectation that these colleges could survive under any kind of market regime and would always require a degree of public support. And yet, judging from the background document, the government is shocked (shocked!) that they would now be carrying deficits as a result of plummeting international student enrolment. The core focus of these institutions should be serving their wider communities and ensuring they continue to be a hub for access and opportunity in the more remote corners of the province. While there may well be some merit in shared services and pooling of resources where it makes geographical and financial sense, it is again hard to see how either the government's fiscal or social goals would be better achieved by wholesale mergers.

Though there is a perception that the Lower Mainland and other urban centers across the province are well resourced, urban colleges are underrated engines of economic independence, especially for people who did not get a clean launch the first time around in the education system. This element of what our urban colleges do is often underappreciated. They sit close to where people actually live, work, parent, care, and rebuild, which matters when rent is due and transit time is a real budget calculation. For second-chance learners, including adults who were told early on that school "wasn't for them," urban colleges offer shorter, affordable credentials that stack and translate quickly into decent work and financial autonomy, without the debt hangover or cultural gatekeeping of more elite pathways. They are places where education is not a detour from life but woven into it, where faculty expect complexity rather than perfection, and where returning to school is treated as a practical, courageous step rather than a confession of failure. In a system under strain, these institutions are doing exactly what public education is supposed to do: widening access, stabilizing households, and giving people the tools to stand on their own two feet, even if the path there took a few extra turns.

Q6: Legislative Changes

Are there any legislative changes to the University Act or to the College and Institute Act that would assist institutions in being more responsive to government priorities and more nimble operationally?

As previously noted, we believe that questions 4 and 6 are largely indistinguishable in how they are structured and what they are asking. We will, therefore, answer them in tandem.

There seems to be some implication in both questions that college administrators are constrained from being "more operationally nimble" by legislation and collective agreements. However, the underlying premise of this question is puzzling to us; the reality for our membership is that the non-regular cohort of faculty has been virtually eliminated on some campuses, and upwards of 10% of full-time regular faculty jobs will be eliminated by the end of the fiscal year, all in response to the precipitous drop in revenue generated by international student tuition. The only impediments to these layoffs have been the requirement to issue section 54 notice under the anemic *Labour Relations Code* provision and a respect for seniority lists embedded in collective agreements. Beyond that, administrations have largely had a free hand to cut faculty and restructure institutions.

Most collective agreements have some provisions or policies governing how program closures can take place. But there is no evidence whatsoever that these provisions or policies pose any threat to the sustainability of the sector, despite that assumption being embedded in the questions themselves. It seems the prevailing, if unstated, narrative of the questions and the review backgrounder is that faculty are the primary impediment to innovation and flexibility. However, there is a categorical error at the heart of this narrative. It is faculty who will be tasked with developing, testing, and delivering this more flexible and responsive model of post-secondary education. It is a foundational and proven reality that faculty input into the creation of courses and programs results in a more engaged, connected, and responsive model of post-secondary education. It is also worth mentioning that, despite government leaning into this rhetoric in recent years, there has been scant data on the issue of student success and outcomes. Where there is data, it generally says very good things about the quality of the education students believe they are receiving.

Collegial governance is the more-than-century-old model that best delivers these results. Microcredentials serve as an instructive example of the limits of government overreach and the safeguards collegial governance provides. Several institutions in the province were approached as the pandemic restrictions were slowly lifting to develop a set of microcredentials in an incredibly concentrated period—in some cases, less than three months. Contrary to popular belief, faculty and administrators rose to this challenge and developed courses in line with Ministry directives, belying the argument that education councils and faculty input in course development inhibit nimble responses. More critically, our members designed these courses so that they could be "laddered" into existing credentials, up to and including a bachelor's degree. It is this signal feature of quality control and academic rigour that separates microcredentials from continuing education courses and private for-profit providers. Yet despite this response to the Ministry's demands, the fact remains that microcredentials, with some exceptions, still do not have a proven market and require heavy subsidization for their viability. Quite plainly, microcredentials offer a corrective, real-world example to disprove the narrative that faculty cannot adjust under pressure and that Ministry bureaucrats are better placed than academic professionals to pick "winners" in the race to provide responsive, relevant post-secondary education.

The framing of the questions and some recent high-profile cases give rise to larger questions: to what extent should our institutions be extensions of government at their beck and call, and to what extent do they flourish with legislated and real autonomy? These are complex questions without either/or answers, but it is very clear that unelected bureaucrats within the Ministry are clamouring for more control and day-to-day oversight of BC's post-secondary institutions. However, there is zero evidence that government-controlled institutions would provide a better quality of post-secondary education or make a more meaningful contribution to the economic, social, and cultural well-being of British Columbians. Indeed, most of the evidence tilts in the other direction. It seems clear that senior leadership in the Ministry are very enamoured with the Singapore model of post-secondary education. This is a highly controlled, highly centralized system in a small geographic footprint that is all underwritten by an authoritarian political system. Everyone in that system ostensibly reports to the Minister and serves at the pleasure of the Minister; there seems no small desire for a move to a similar system in BC. It is also worth noting that, unlike BC, the Singapore model is supported by robust, ongoing public investment in post-secondary education. Micromanaging BC's colleges and institutes even further will upset the delicate equilibrium between legitimate public policy goals and institutional autonomy. Put differently, if you want better results from post-secondary institutions, lean into the model that has worked for 400 years; do not impose external expertise via an authoritarian command-and-control model. It is the expertise, skill, and commitment of our members that ensure quality in the classrooms of BC's

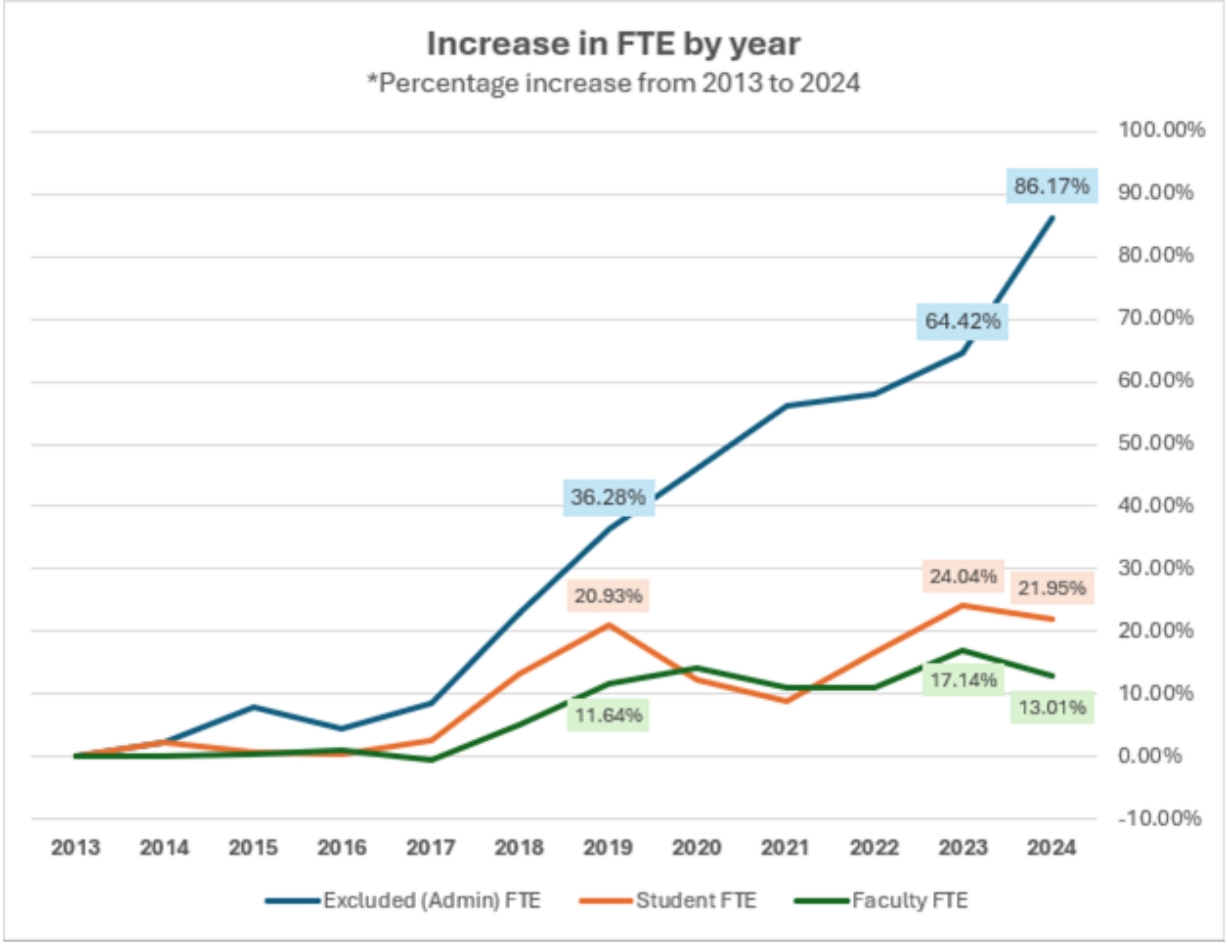
colleges and universities. It is this expertise, deployed in the service of curriculum development, quality assurance, and meeting the rigorous standards set by national and international accrediting bodies, that differentiates public universities and colleges. This expertise cannot be replaced by a bureaucrat, a bot, or AI.

The balance between expediency and quality is a tension to be managed, not a problem to be solved. If free market approaches could solve this "problem," they would have done so already. Genuine consultation and shared governance require time and patience, neither being the hallmark of state-controlled post-secondary education. Faculty are open to a dialogue about how to make the system more responsive and flexible; however, based on the framing of this question, it would appear that government has already made its mind up that legislative changes are required. The question is how to decide the best direction for the sector. What is the alternative to collegial governance? Is there any evidence that bureaucrats and administrators would be more responsive and effective in managing student needs and public expectations?

A distinct but closely related issue is the unstated but pervasive narrative that runs through the backgrounder and the questions posed by the review that unions and collective agreements are a problem to be dealt with or an impediment to a more "nimble" system. That is particularly discouraging, though by now not surprising, coming from an NDP government. As noted above, collective agreements have provided little if any resistance to mass layoffs and restructuring throughout the province. In some cases, administrators have been cravenly ignoring collectively bargained language and engaging in protracted and costly legal battles that seem designed to lure unions into a financial war of attrition. This review appears ready to expand those powers and reward this anti-union activity from administrators. The reality is that almost all of our agreements have collegial governance provisions embedded in them, and most explicitly refer to education council. If the proposal is to radically dilute or eliminate education councils, that would require legislative changes to the *College and Institute Act* that explicitly void collectively bargained language. At the end of the day, faculty in British Columbia are fully unionized with legally negotiated collective agreements, and that reality must be taken into account for any kind of seamless, functional transition of the system. Proceeding via legislative fiat is a recipe for a generation of conflict, resistance, and resentment not seen since the Campbell government tried to rip up collective agreements in the health sector.

The reality that our members have experienced in the past 18 months is that employers have all the tools they need to reduce the workforce as required. It is also worth noting that while our members are being laid off, there seems to be no commensurate reduction in administrators. As the following two charts from the Kwantlen Faculty Association demonstrate, the proportion of administrators has actually grown in the past 20 years.

	Administrators (excluded)		Students		Faculty	
Year end	FTE	% increase in relation to 2013	FTE	% increase in relation to 2013	FTE	% increase in relation to 2013
2024	235.872	86.17%	13942	21.95%	708.862	13.01%
2023	208.317	64.42%	14182	24.04%	734.707	17.14%
2022	200.161	57.99%	13338	16.66%	695.967	10.96%
2021	197.657	56.01%	12451	8.90%	696.143	10.99%
2020	185.247	46.21%	12843	12.33%	716.187	14.18%
2019	172.661	36.28%	13826	20.93%	700.268	11.64%
2018	155.707	22.90%	12935	13.14%	658.626	5.01%
2017	137.466	8.50%	11734	2.63%	623.652	-0.57%
2016	132.278	4.41%	11471	0.33%	634.324	1.13%
2015	136.558	7.78%	11496	0.55%	629.976	0.44%
2014	129.394	2.13%	11679	2.15%	628.43	0.19%
2013	126.696	0.00%	11433	0.00%	627.229	0.00%



Another related issue that would require enabling legislation is the regime of collective bargaining currently employed in the sector. Each of our member unions is the certified bargaining agent for their members, as democratically decided by the membership. There have been suggestions emanating from the Blakely Report about collapsing all of the unions in the sector into one common union. Put bluntly, this is a recipe for disaster. The individuated culture on each campus is reflected in the union, and a "one size fits all" approach would undermine the nuance and local expertise that animate the institution. Collective bargaining is always already skewed in the employer's favour, and that is even more so in BC with PSEC setting, what we believe to be, unconstitutional government mandates that are locally enforced by PSEA in bargaining. Standing back from the labour relations environment, we are compelled to ask, what problem is it you are trying to solve? Beyond making it more convenient for PSEA to enforce bargaining mandates, we are at a loss to see any advantages to consolidating bargaining units that would not be immediately outweighed by the labour strife, court challenges, and resentment such a move would generate. To be blunt, this feels like a misguided attempt at deepening micromanagement by government and a distraction from delivering quality post-secondary education in the classrooms of the province.

Q7: Shared Services – Administrative / Academic

What impediments exist to limit greater use of shared services amongst post-secondary institutions – in both administrative and academic spheres? How might those obstacles be addressed?

The limited uptake of shared services across British Columbia's public post-secondary system reflects structural and governance impediments rather than a lack of institutional willingness to collaborate. Current funding and accountability frameworks emphasize institution-level financial performance and risk management, which creates disincentives for shared service arrangements that involve upfront costs, transitional complexity, and uncertain distribution of benefits. In this context, institutions reasonably seek to protect local budgets, staffing, and decision-making authority. Trust deficits among faculty and staff further constrain progress, particularly where shared services are introduced through efficiency or sustainability exercises without clear assurances regarding workforce impacts, public accountability, or reinvestment in core educational functions.

Practical implementation barriers compound these challenges. Geographic distance; uneven broadband capacity in rural and remote regions; incompatible IT systems; and inconsistent procurement, privacy, and data-governance regimes limit the feasibility of uniform shared-service models. Smaller and access-oriented institutions face disproportionate constraints, as they often lack the capacity to absorb start-up and transition costs or service-disruption risk. Addressing these impediments is consistent with the emphasis of the Terms of Reference on operational efficiency and system sustainability and would require dedicated, multi-year funding for shared services that explicitly supports transition costs, standardized provincial frameworks for IT and data governance, and service models that are adaptable to regional and institutional contexts.

In the academic sphere, impediments reflect legitimate governance and quality considerations. While informal academic collaboration is widespread, formal shared academic services raise concerns related to academic freedom, intellectual property, curriculum ownership, and pedagogical autonomy. For shared academic services to advance efficiency without undermining quality, governance frameworks must embed faculty oversight and focus collaboration on enabling infrastructure rather than curricular control. British Columbia already has established mechanisms that demonstrate how coordinated approaches can improve system effectiveness while

respecting institutional autonomy, including the work of the BC Council on Admissions and Transfer in supporting student mobility. Consistent with the Terms of Reference, expanding shared services at scale will require system-level coordination, clear governance arrangements, and treatment of shared services as long-term public infrastructure investments rather than short-term cost-containment measures.

Q8: Technology Delivery Leverage

With advances in online learning, and with the emergence of A.I.-assisted methodologies, are there alternative program delivery models that could assist with maintaining and, where possible, extending the reach and effectiveness of post-secondary institutions? How can we leverage these opportunities?

Many FPSE members question the assumption that advances in online learning and AI will automatically improve educational reach or quality. Our experience during the COVID-19 period, when institutions shifted to emergency remote teaching, reinforced that online delivery is not inherently high quality. Effective digital learning takes time to design and depends on pedagogical expertise, strong student supports, and reliable infrastructure. Decisions about technology must be guided by teaching and learning goals, not by assumptions about cost savings or scale. Education remains a social and relational process with public purposes that extend well beyond narrow employment outcomes.

On AI specifically, members were clear that it should be used as a support tool, not as a replacement for human teaching or professional judgment. Faculty noted that current AI tools often increase workload; require significant support; and raise serious concerns about reliability, bias, academic integrity, intellectual property, and privacy. Faculty also emphasized that colleges and universities should be places where learners develop critical understanding and literacy about AI and warned of uncritical adoption.

To use digital and AI-related tools responsibly, we identify several necessary conditions: sustained investment in broadband and digital equity, particularly in rural and remote regions; reliable shared digital infrastructure; dedicated time, training, and workload recognition for faculty to design and deliver high-quality online courses; clear, sector-wide policies on academic integrity, privacy, data governance, and intellectual property; and governance frameworks that ensure meaningful faculty oversight.

In summary, alternative delivery models can extend reach and effectiveness in specific contexts, but only when they are pedagogically driven, faculty-led, properly resourced, and governed in the public interest. Members cautioned that treating online learning or AI as blanket efficiency measures risks weakening educational quality, increasing inequities, and undermining public trust in the post-secondary system.

Q9: Tuition Limit Effects

What are the effects of government's limits on tuition increases over time? If government was to consider adjustments to current policies to address anomalies, what considerations should be taken into account?

FPSE's position on tuition is grounded in access and the minimization of student debt, with a strong preference for government grant funding over cost-shifting to students and families. British Columbia's Tuition Limit Policy, in place for more than 20 years, has been effective in supporting affordability and participation and is consistent with the province's stated affordability objectives.

However, tuition policy cannot be considered in isolation. Where tuition growth is constrained in the public interest, sustainability depends on complementary funding and system design choices that do not push institutions toward unstable revenue sources or erode educational capacity.

Tuition limits should therefore be treated as one component of a coherent public funding framework and aligned with predictable public investment, appropriate system-level efficiencies, and clearer shared responsibility for workforce development. Adjustments to either the level of tuition or to the rate growth of tuition should not be viewed as a substitute for these other elements of the funding framework.

FPSE therefore urges the province to ensure that responses to current system pressures do not alter the Tuition Limit Policy or otherwise shift costs onto students and families, in effect penalizing students and their families for the current crisis in our sector.

Q10: Increasing System Access

How can we better support underrepresented groups in engaging in post-secondary education and training opportunities? How should these groups be supported through any transition coming out of this review?

Feedback from our members highlights a system risk: structural change disproportionately affects learners with the least flexibility. Supporting underrepresented groups therefore requires attention not only to access but also to persistence, completion, and continuity during periods of transition.

Our members consistently identify Adult Basic Education, English language training, upgrading, and bridging programs as essential equity infrastructure. These pathways are relatively low cost compared to their social return yet highly vulnerable during fiscal constraint or restructuring. We worry that British Columbia already lags behind comparable jurisdictions in adult education access and that further erosion would predictably reduce participation and completion among populations most dependent on public provision.

Wraparound supports are similarly identified as a core system capacity. Mental health services, disability and accessibility support, childcare, housing and food security initiatives, and culturally safe spaces are viewed as integral to student success. Highly centralized or virtual-only service models are widely seen as insufficient for many learners and risk widening participation gaps.

Place-based delivery remains critical. Members emphasize that underrepresented learners are best served when education is available close to home, particularly in rural and northern communities.

Distributed or mobile delivery can extend reach where appropriately resourced but should complement rather than replace local, face-to-face capacity.

Support for Indigenous learners requires particular attention. Members stress that reconciliation must be operationalized through Indigenous-led programs and services, equitable recognition and compensation for Indigenous knowledge keepers, and sustained efforts to recruit and retain Indigenous faculty and staff. Absent these structural commitments, reconciliation risks remaining symbolic.

Finally, members consistently highlight transition risk. If we look at consolidation, restructuring, or service centralization without explicit safeguards in place, then we are likely to narrow access and disrupt completion for underrepresented learners.

Conclusion

Though we take issue with many of the assumptions underlying this review, we agree that difficult conversations need to happen about the long-term sustainability and responsiveness of the current system. However, the leading questions that frame this dialogue and the passive voice of the absent, yet ubiquitous, government agenda make this a challenging process to believe in. However, we have been as candid as we can in framing our responses and asking questions of our own. It is our hope that these questions will guide sustainable solutions to the challenges our sector faces and force government to take responsibility for the crisis it has largely created.

FPSE Questions - Posed for Dialogue

1. What structural or legislative changes are being contemplated that would *not* undermine the collective bargaining process and strip out existing language from agreements?
2. The government has conveniently ducked any responsibility or accountability for the crisis in the sector, cynically referring back to the alleged autonomy of institutions. Is government contemplating stepping forward to take both control of and accountability for what happens in the sector? To date, it has been fixated on the former to the exclusion of the latter.
3. How does the demand for increased control square with the pronouncement that BC will not provide any new funding for the system?
4. How can the long-term viability and effectiveness of the sector be managed while meeting "just in time" demands from industry and government? Does an excessive focus on cheap, quick-fix, authoritarian solutions run the risk of undermining what post-secondary institutions do best and what distinguishes them from corporations, financial institutions, and government bureaucracies?
5. How autonomous should post-secondary institutions be from government? Who decides? If the SPTUs are to become more closely controlled by government, at what point do they cease to meet the definition of a university? Beyond high-level policy initiatives, what is to be gained by stripping the limited autonomy currently enjoyed by colleges?
6. Given the significant upheaval and the challenges of melding different cultures, collective agreements, and "brands," what is the anticipated net savings of mergers? Has the Ministry undertaken a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis? If so, would it be willing to share that with us?
7. As expectations around labour-market readiness increase, should the review examine whether existing funding and responsibility frameworks adequately account for the role of employers as direct beneficiaries of workforce training? In other words, if private sector employers are the direct beneficiaries of this training, at what point do we have a direct conversation with industry about paying their fair share of the cost?
8. Given that consolidation and capacity reduction are often difficult to reverse, how should the review distinguish between short-term fiscal relief and long-term system resilience when evaluating structural change?