

Joint Submission to the  
Legislative Assembly of British Columbia  
Select Standing Committee on Finance  
and Government Services

September 1, 2016

## CONTEXT

British Columbia's 25 public post-secondary institutions are represented here today by Lane Trotter, President of Langara College, Mark Evered, President of the University of the Fraser Valley, and Jamie Cassels, President of the University of Victoria. The presidents have come together to speak to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services on issues central to the success of young British Columbians who access post-secondary education in British Columbia.

BC's post-secondary institutions are committed to high quality education and are aligned with the Province's objectives for job creation and economic growth as reflected in the *BC Jobs Plan*, *Balanced Budget 2016* and the *#BCTECH Strategy*. The public post-secondary system serves approximately 300,000 full and part-time students a year, with total annual revenue of \$5.5 billion, of which \$1.9 billion is provided by the provincial government.

Today, the presidents would like to discuss dimensions of post-secondary education that have become significantly more complex and urgent than twenty years ago. Issues facing students, in areas such as mental health and sexual violence, have become more predominant, requiring substantive responses and services. Other supports, such as work-integrated learning, are key to students and to prospective employers as relevant experience for transition into employment. Additionally, consistent with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action, institutions are committed to improving the levels of participation and success for Aboriginal learners, and to implementing BC's *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan*.

These are all vital elements in providing high quality post-secondary education that will situate students to successfully pursue personal and career goals and contribute to the resource of talent that is critical to the continued economic growth of the province.

# STUDENT SUCCESS

## Labour Market and Employment Attachment

BC has positive economic prospects as a global trade hub, through major infrastructure and resource projects and through new knowledge-based industries. Key to this economic activity in all regions of the province is new entrants into the labour market from BC's post-secondary institutions. BC employers consistently agree that long term success is dependent upon this talent pool, and that access to talent is the most significant challenge they face.

BC's labour force relies heavily on workers with post-secondary education. According to *Post-Secondary Education Skills for a Prosperous British Columbia—2016*, prepared for BC's public post-secondary institutions by the Conference Board of Canada, in March 2016, 70 percent of BC's jobs were filled by workers with post-secondary education. This was not always the case and as recently as 1991, the share was evenly split between those with and without post-secondary education.

Additionally, the Conference Board reports that for the ten-year period from 2006 to 2016, BC added approximately 266,000 jobs that were filled by post-secondary educated individuals, and shed approximately 42,000 jobs that were previously occupied by workers with high school level of education or lower.

Demand for post-secondary educated workers in the BC labour force is rising, quickly and continuously. *Government's 2025 Labour Market Outlook* estimates that as many as 935,000 jobs will open up in the province from 2015 to 2025 through retirements and new job creation. New entrants into the labour market are expected to account for 46 percent of total new supply, while migrants are expected to fill 35 percent of future supply needs (27 percent from other countries and 8 percent from the rest of Canada), and the balance will be filled by others cycling back into the labour force. The Conference Board report notes that some sources of labour supply, such as international migration, are failing to fully meet this rising pressure, placing at risk the ability of market supply to match demand.

In this context, it is important not only to provide the skills and knowledge for students to match to labour market demand, but also to expand the scope of initiatives which have shown to improve outcomes for students. While employment outcomes are high (for example, five years after graduating degree holders from the Class of 2008 had a 4.7 percent unemployment rate) employers' survey results indicate that graduates would benefit more with work-integrated learning, offering direct experience that translates into employment relevance.

## Work-Integrated Learning

Work-integrated learning experiences, including co-op, internships, apprenticeships, practicums and clinical placements, community service, mentorship programs, research assistantships and work study, are increasingly important learning tools for students. The application of classroom concepts to workplace scenarios provides relevant experience to transition into the workforce and longer placements, such as co-op, can also be a valuable source of income for students.

For employers, these programs provide an opportunity to evaluate potential new full-time employees and to equip students with the skills needed in a particular industry or profession. They also strengthen the relationships between industry and post-secondary institutions.

The trend in the number of co-op placements in BC institutions has moved upward from approximately 10,000 student placements per year in 2010/11 to approximately 14,000 in 2015/16, a 39.6 percent increase. Growth has been concentrated in engineering, computer science, business, and science with offerings in other programs such as humanities/social science and hospitality/tourism. Other institutions offer forms of work-integrated learning in keeping with their specialized mandates and, while some smaller institutions have found it challenging to offer co-op programs due to the lack of availability of employers and resources, all offer some component of experiential learning.

### Examples of Innovative Work Integrated Learning Initiatives for Students

One post-secondary institution offers a Construction Craft Worker Aboriginal Bridging Program, which is a hands-on program designed to benefit students with limited construction experience or those looking to refresh or enhance their skills. The program includes work boots, bus passes, group study sessions, cultural activities, volunteer work experience and job search skills.

Another institution offers an International Exchange Program that is open to all its students. The program allows students to spend one or two terms at a partner university outside of Canada while earning credit towards their degree. The university also offers a Semester in Dialogue Program, designed to inspire students with a sense of civic responsibility through interdisciplinary experiences involving dialogue, experiential learning and community engagement.

Another plans to establish an Innovation Acceleration Co-op Program for students with interests in computer coding, entrepreneurialism, and in community social innovation. The program would link co-op students with mentors to create an innovation hub to support the creation, design and launch of technology, entrepreneurial, or community projects.

At the same time, although work-integrated learning is recognized for its contribution to the success of student and employer outcomes, institutions have reached a threshold where they are constrained by a demand from students that is outstripping the supply of placements. New measures and creative approaches are needed to encourage placements across disciplines and address barriers that face employers, particularly for small and medium sized enterprises and not-for-profit organizations. Expanded outreach to employers to secure placements would increase the inventory of opportunities. New approaches could include vouchers for employers to provide for some of the costs associated with placements and mentorship, and additional financial assistance to support student participation in non-paying experiential learning opportunities.

## Mental Health Supports for Students

It is also essential to support students individually as they pursue post-secondary education. The role of institutions in providing high-quality education to students has become substantially more complex over the last ten years. Increased and new student supports and services are expected, and these supports are resource intensive, with the demands for them increasing year over year.

According to a 2013 survey by the American College Health Association (ACHA) of 34,000 students at 32 Canadian post-secondary institutions, 20 percent of students reported being diagnosed or treated by a professional for a mental health condition. At one large BC institution, this number increased from 23.5 percent in 2013 to almost 30 percent in 2016. Documented conditions include anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and eating disorders.

Personal counselling for students at one medium-sized institution has increased by 56 percent from 2012 to 2015 (as measured by counselling hours). Counsellors at this institution are now carrying workloads of 1,000 students to each counsellor. There has been growth not only in volume but also in complexities of the disorders that students are presenting with. Another BC institution reports that approximately 10 percent of those seeking counselling support are assessed as high risk for suicide, while another institution reported that 29 percent of students who sought counselling considered withdrawing from programs due to their condition.

While some of these students are able to address these concerns as they emerge, other students continue to struggle. Close to 40 percent of students captured in the ACHA survey reported that, within the last 12 months, either anxiety or stress attributed to a negative impact, along with the potential stigma associated with mental health disabilities. There are also financial implications for students who take longer to complete their education, including students who take multiple breaks in study which may jeopardize continued access to student loan funding.

## Examples of Innovative Mental Health Supports for Students

One post-secondary institution has opened a Peer Resource Leadership Centre through which student leaders help their peers with information in areas such as mental health and sexual violence, identifying resources available to them and providing peer support and mentorship in a safe and inclusive space.

Another institution has established an on-campus health and wellness centre with a Nurse Practitioner providing primary care. Approximately 60% of the 800 students who sought treatment from the NP were assessed with a mental health diagnosis. In some months, this number is closer to 80%.

Another has established a Case Management Team to collaboratively respond to significant student issues. Many students present with profiles that strongly suggest an undiagnosed mental health disorder and raise concerns as their behaviour in and out of class brings them into conflict with Instructors, staff and fellow students.

Other institutions have established behaviour intervention response teams, which serve as coordinating hubs for existing resources for prevention as well as early intervention for students who may be experiencing distress or who are perceived to pose a threat to their own safety and/or the safety of other students, faculty, and staff. A secondary purpose is to arrange education and training for students, faculty and staff to recognize and report potential behavioral risks to the Team.

By providing students with the skills and capacity to cope with stress and other challenges, institutions can contribute significantly to a student's success and advancement. Additional initiatives in mental health services could include employing counsellors who have specific experience in trauma, disability and humanistic approaches to supporting students struggling with mental health. This would reduce wait times for meeting with a counsellor and increase the knowledge base for appropriate care to be provided. Initiatives such as on-site psychiatric nurses could also support broader health promotion and extend early intervention initiatives, as would the broader implementation of 'Early Alert' systems for identifying and responding to students who present performance and attendance issues in the classroom.

Another initiative could include the establishment of student well-being health promotion specialist units which would focus on addressing mental health using a public health model. Students are more likely to remain healthy on the wellness continuum with the help of professionals who focus on establishing upstream resilience skills and healthy campus environments. The number of students becoming mentally

ill and requiring medical intervention and/or suffering adverse personal and academic impacts would be reduced.

## Supports for Students for Issues of Sexual Violence

Safety from sexual violence is critical to a student's success and overall well-being. BC's post-secondary institutions do not tolerate sexual assault and any acts of sexual violence, and are committed to making their campuses respectful environments where students can study and live free from concerns of sexual assault, while also being more responsive to the needs of victims.

One of the challenges institutions face in providing sexual violence supports for students is a lack of staffing, including shortages in health, counselling and legal affairs, to deal with the increased volume of this need. The complexity and difficulty of cases presented to university staff is manifold with increasing requirements for third party investigations, and all the while balancing the needs of the victim/survivor with the administrative fairness and rights of the accused. Jurisdictional issues are also a significant problem.

In addition, there are expectations that institutions can duplicate all community services on campus (counselling, clinics, judicial) to address these matters comprehensively. The scope of educational responsibility is expanding to include major community services.

BC's post-secondary institutions are undertaking various consultations and strategies to improve policies and practices that address sexual assault and sexual harassment. These strategies will provide clear direction and a more coordinated approach on programs and resources to educate campus communities on the prevention of sexual assault, and on resources and options available to those affected.

### Examples of Sexual Violence Supports Adopted by BC Post-Secondary Institutions

One post-secondary institution is developing and implementing a comprehensive Bystander Intervention Training Program to help students identify and interrupt sexualized and other forms of violence. The first goal is to train over 1,000 students in bystander intervention by April, 2017.

Another institution is convening a regional Sexual Violence Task Force in partnership with RCMP, the regional Health Authority, First Nations Health Authority, Corrections, Ending Violence Association of BC and other community agencies engaged in sexual violence support work.

Another will be offering bystander training, third party reporting and training for receiving disclosures of sexual assault for front-line staff and students.

Counselling staff specifically trained to work with sexual assault survivors is critical to a survivor-centred response. Additional initiatives in sexual violence services could include specific disclosure response/support training for counselling staff. Also, student residences present a risk factor for sexualized violence on campus and providing specific disclosure response training for residence staff is an important mitigation strategy.

Other initiatives could include sexual violence education and prevention initiatives, with the goals of increasing safety and security, making reporting easier, increasing understanding of consent, dispelling misinformation, informing how to support victims and promoting a culture that does not tolerate sexual violence.

### Supports for Aboriginal Students

BC's post-secondary institutions are strongly committed to a post-secondary system that is relevant and effective for the success of Aboriginal learners by making substantial increases to programs and initiatives developed with Aboriginal partners and increasing the number of Aboriginal students, faculty and staff. While education and employment outcomes have improved, more work needs to be done. Aboriginal learners continue to face challenges in accessing and completing post-secondary education, particularly in relation to undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

#### Examples of Innovative Supports for Aboriginal Students

One post-secondary institution has established an Indigenous Support Centre, which is working with the institution's Academic Success Centre to offer Aboriginal designated tutors for Aboriginal students on a drop-in basis.

Another institution offers an Academy of Indigenous Scholars program, which is a holistic multi-dimensional support program that focuses on enhancing first year transitions with a goal to increase grade averages, retention, and self-confidence.

Another is offering mentorship opportunities for prospective, new and returning Aboriginal students, connecting Aboriginal university students with prospective students in local high schools to share their personal education journeys and offer those high school students an opportunity to explore their educational goals.

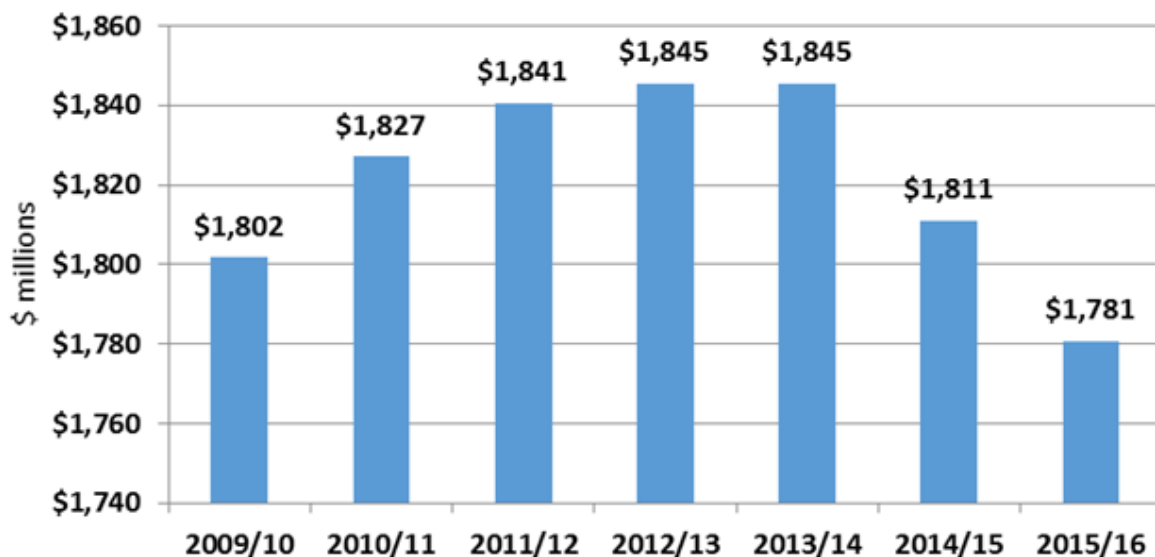
Additional initiatives for Aboriginal students could include enhanced Elders programs to provide the connection to culture and community that Aboriginal students require. Aboriginal counsellors on staff who can work with students experiencing mental health issues, inter-generational trauma, or effects of residential school experiences; and Aboriginal student advisors who are knowledgeable about Aboriginal funding practices and policies, would be able to advocate and advise Aboriginal students on programs and education plans.

## BUDGET RE-INVESTMENT

BC's post-secondary institutions fully understand the need to maintain fiscal discipline and have undertaken significant initiatives to achieve efficiencies and diversify revenue sources to support their students. While educational program spending has increasingly been focused on the areas of greatest need, in many cases some educational program spending has had to be diverted to address the complex non-educational challenges facing institutions and students today.

The \$50 million reduction in annual provincial operating grants for public post-secondary institutions which occurred over the three year period 2013/14 to 2015/16 has been a challenge for institutions as service needs have increased so significantly. While Government's Administrative Services Delivery Transformation Project allowed for some cost avoidance and service enhancements into the future, the net result was a decrease to operating budgets at a time of compression from students' needs for services. As a result, the reduction in operating grants and the ability to meet demands has placed a real risk to the quality and accessibility of programs and services to students.

### BC Public Post-Secondary Institutional Operating Grant Allocations





## Going Forward

It is evident that post-secondary education in BC is the path to economic and individual success for young British Columbians. It is also clear that the labour market in BC continues to demand more educated workers to fill the jobs opening over the next ten years. For students to succeed and move into employment, high quality post-secondary education that is responsive to their complex needs is essential for their long-term success.

In May 2016, the provincial government re-invested a \$25 million administrative savings reduction in the K-12 education system, allowing the school district to allocate their share of the re-investment into areas of greatest need. The post-secondary institutions propose that the \$50 million reduction in the post-secondary system be re-invested, specifically in areas of greatest student need such as those identified in this submission. The successful engagement and completion of post-secondary education benefits all British Columbians. The leadership of BC's 25 public post-secondary institutions are committed to working with the provincial government to continue to offer high quality post-secondary education to British Columbians.