



Federation of
Post-Secondary Educators
of BC

September 7, 2012

Hon. John Yap
Minister of Advanced Education
PO Box 9056, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Yap,

On behalf of the faculty, staff and students who are part of BC's public post-secondary education system, our organizations play an active role in advocating for our institutions and the communities in which they operate. For a number of years now we have stressed the important role that post-secondary education can and must play in advancing and sustaining growth in British Columbia. We know from research done by reputable public policy organizations, including the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), that public investments in post-secondary education have a positive rate of return because the public dollars spent on post-secondary education help move students to higher lifetime earnings which, in turn, translate into higher tax revenues for the provincial treasury.

Despite this good research and obvious benefit to both the provincial treasury and to BC's post-secondary students, your government has failed to make the needed investments in our public post-secondary institutions. When the impact of inflation is taken into account, real per student operating grants—the core provincial funding without which our post-secondary institutions simply could not operate—have declined over the decade. Moreover, the push to have every institution enroll more students without a commensurate increase in core funding only exacerbates the funding squeeze. Over the last ten years, tuition fees have more than doubled. The net effect of both policies has been to further limit access to post-secondary education to those students who either have the financial wherewithal to afford ever higher tuition fees or are prepared to go deeper into debt to finance their post-secondary education. Neither option makes for good public policy.

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The steady deterioration in real per student operating grants means that our institutions and their faculty face the inevitable struggle of “doing more with less”, a struggle that might be endurable for a year, but becomes damaging when it lasts a decade. For much of that time we have appealed to senior administrators, who share our frustration with your government’s funding choices, to join our call to have your government change direction. After the tabling of the last provincial budget it appears some of those senior administrators finally decided to speak out. In a letter signed by 25 of the public post-secondary institution Presidents, they outlined their concerns about the constant squeeze of institutional budgets. Their particular objections focused on the \$70 million reduction in institutional grants contained in the 2012 budget as well as the lack of any substantial measures by the Ministry to address the on-going inflationary pressures that every institution faces.

Although that letter was sent to the Minister’s office in late-February, there has been no announcement that would give any indication that the provincial government is prepared to address these concerns. In fact, quite the opposite seems to be occurring—many institutions, anticipating little change in their funding status, announced faculty layoffs, cuts to program offerings, curtailed course options and further reduced valuable support services for students.

Rather than address the chronic under-funding problem directly, your Ministry has opted instead to launch the Administrative Service Delivery Transformation Project. Little has been shared with our organizations about this project, leaving many to speculate as to its value, purpose and ultimate impact. Moreover, what we have been able to determine so far is that a significant focus of this project is the further rationalization of services across the public post-secondary system, a move that will translate into more layoffs across all our institutions. Our major concern is that the transformations that are being contemplated in this project will do nothing to improve the quality learning experience that students want and need. As well, unless the funding issues are addressed more directly, the underlying challenge of improving access and affordability will not receive the priority it deserves.

Like institutional Presidents, our various organizations see the continued underfunding at our institutions as a serious threat to not only local students and local communities, but also a serious undermining of BC’s future. Post-secondary education plays a critical role in building the skills and knowledge upon which future growth within our province will rely. In the absence of adequate funding by your Ministry, BC’s next generation of contributing citizens, and with them, BC’s future prospects, will vastly underperform and fail to reach their true potential.

Neither our province nor our public post-secondary institutions can afford a continued policy of neglect. We are appealing to you to convene an emergency summit of post-secondary education stakeholders—the leaders of our organizations, senior administrators and students. At this summit we can begin to draft the changes needed to put BC's post-secondary education system back on track and ensure it is capable of achieving the positive contributions that we know are possible. Your leadership is critical and we look forward to your support for this important initiative.

Signed,

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