

August 25, 2020

Budget 2021 Consultations: Analysis of Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services Report

The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services submitted its report to the legislative assembly on August 21, 2020 following their provincial Budget 2021 Consultation.¹ The full report comprises two volumes and a combined 178 pages long. The report is organized into sections with each section addressing one of British Columbia's public sectors. For the purpose of this analysis, the section reporting on advanced education is enclosed.

Background

Each year, the Select Standing Committee opens itself to the public as part of a consultation process to inform the upcoming provincial budget. This committee comprises members of the legislative assembly from across the political spectrum and is itself non-partisan.

Consultation Process and COVID-19 Accommodations

The consultation process has traditionally taken place in the late fall but for the second year in a row, consultations took place in June. For the first time in history, presentations were conducted virtually due to interruptions caused by global pandemic. This move allowed for novel changes to the process such that instead of signing up for a dedicated timeslot on a date of their own choosing like in previous years, all would-be presenters were instead asked to submit a request to present and then the Select Standing Committee approved requests, organized presenters into groups with similar interests, and assigned the date and time of presentations.

On June 18, CUFA BC's President Jacqueline Holler presented alongside representatives of FPSE, Camosun College Faculty Association, and Vancouver Community College Faculty Association.² CUFA BC also provided a formal written submission (enclosed).

CUFA BC Recommendations

Our themes for the budget consultation focused on **recovery**, **innovation**, and **transformation** at BC's research universities. CUFA BC advocated that public universities will be the engines of economic recovery, cultural and social innovation, and green transformation.

¹ The report can be found here <https://www.leg.bc.ca/parliamentary-business/committees/41stparliament-5thsession-fgs>

² Hansards from the public presentation can be found <https://www.leg.bc.ca/documents-data/committees-transcripts/20200619pm-Finance-Victoria-Blues>



CUFA BC made six recommendations organized around three topics:

Institutional Funding Stability

1. Government has the opportunity to strategically invest in universities at a time when they will best fulfill the public mission as engines of economic recovery, cultural and social innovation, and green transformation. Commit to sector stability by restructuring the funding model, assert the primacy of public funding to universities and concomitantly reduce overreliance on precarious employment and international student tuition.
2. Provide loans or emergency transfers to help institutions facing revenue shortfalls.

Graduate and Undergraduate Student Financial Supports

3. Supporting graduate students is critical for the successful mission of universities as engines of recovery, innovation, and transformation. Now is the time to invest in the graduate scholarship program by following through on the fifty-million-dollar government commitment and expanding it to include non-STEM disciplines.
4. Incentivize enrollment, minimize student debt by enhancing scholarships and bursaries for students especially at the graduate level and in all disciplines (STEM and non-STEM), providing targeted funding for on-campus student employment for research and teaching assistantships, and targeted tuition grants for low- and middle-income students.

Research Supports

5. Transform the Knowledge Development Fund into a broad-based provincial grant competition open to STEM and non-STEM disciplines.
6. Provide institutions with supports for essential US-based resources and supplies affected by fluctuating currency exchange rates, such as online textbooks, journals, and other licenses, as well as lab supplies and reagents for research and teaching needs.

Highlighting Our Successes

The Select Standing Committee incorporated some of CUFA BC's recommendations into the advanced education report giving voice to what have been longstanding issues for our members. Most notably, the committee took up the theme that post-secondary will be a driver of economic recovery and wove a narrative around the value of advanced education. In other positive news, where the committee did not adopt our recommendations, they acknowledged our points and gave legitimacy to our position.

On the topic of *research*, the report acknowledged, "The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia stated that graduate student and faculty researchers are dealing with interruptions in programs and funding shortfalls for grants due to the pandemic. They suggested retooling the Knowledge Development Fund to support infrastructure and a system of arm's-length, peer-reviewed grants for research."



On the topic of *tuition and financial assistance*, the report stated, “In light of the pandemic, the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia advocated for special funding to enhance scholarships and bursaries for students, to provide targeted funding for student employment on campus, and to offer targeted grants to low- and middle-income students.” They further report, “The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia also recommended increasing funding for the BC Graduate Scholarship, noting that many graduate students are facing an extra year of study because their research has been disrupted.”

Of eleven recommendations made for the advanced education sector, the final report made the following recommendations, which reflect those made in our submission:

Online Learning and Digital Infrastructure

Recommendation 11: Provide sufficient support to post-secondary institutions for teaching and learning tools, infrastructure and technology, and training to facilitate professional development for the online delivery of courses.

Operational Funding

Recommendation 12: Explore mechanisms, such as allowing the use of accumulated surpluses, to provide post-secondary institutions with short-term flexibility to navigate the financial impacts of the pandemic.

Tuition Fees and Financial Assistance

Recommendations 15: Provide a multi-year extension to the BC Graduate Scholarship and expand its eligibility to graduate students in non-STEM disciplines.

Considering we were among several hundred participants who participated in the consultation process, the report successfully acknowledged CUFA BC by name and in turn adopted some of our recommendations in its report on advanced education. In future, we will be able to anchor our positions to this report and further build on these successes in our lobbying platform with the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training.

Looking to Others

In looking at what other groups in our sector presented, there was a great deal of commonality in our recommendations this year, more than in previous ones. In large part, the recommendations coalesced around the emerging gaps and needs caused by COVID-19. Faculty associations, students, and university administrators alike talked about online learning and digital infrastructure needs, open education development, stable and predictable funding needs, issues of accessibility, equity, diversity and inclusion, as well as implementing the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and BC’s adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).



Pandemic aside, though, much of the focus for all the presentations centred on student issues regardless of if it were an organization representing students, faculty associations, university administrators, or non-student provincial advocacy groups. Student issues continue to be the single lens through which our sector advances issues about faculty, funding, capital projects, research supports, and even articulating the needs of colleges, polytechnics, and teaching, research, and doctoral universities.

As unique and deserving of advocacy as they are, students persist as the default audience and remain one of the more effective agents everyone else uses to advance their interests under the auspices of the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. It is what it is but CUFA BC should work to establish itself as an important audience rather than relying on the piggyback model that has set the narrative that faculty interests are valid only in relation to those of students.

Advanced Education in the Provincial Context

Advanced education will be one avenue through which our province can mitigate the effects of pandemic. There are, however, other very real concerns for the people of British Columbia. The category of 'education' ranked sixth in importance in the provincial budget consultation survey. Of course, it would be insightful for us to disentangle support for K-12 education from that of post-secondary but the data were not collected in a way to permit this granular an analysis.

Responses to the provincial survey question, *"If you had one dollar to put toward programs and services across government, how would you choose to divide it?"* respondents indicated they would spend 3.6 cents on post-secondary education and skills training. Translated into a percentage of the provincial budget, 3.6% is a little less than actual government spending on advanced education and would be a move in the opposite direction of what our sector needs.³

All of this is to say that while British Columbians value advanced education, they rank it as less a priority compared to other public sectors like the environment, poverty reduction, child care, physical and mental health supports, and health care.

A Big Budget Year

The single greatest focus throughout the consultation process was the massive and complex disruption of post-secondary education due to COVID-19. This interest is not exclusive to advanced education either which has been affected to a lesser degree than, say, the health and tourism industries. Budget 2021 will have to reconcile the profound disruption of every aspect of our society with the ever-increasing humanitarian crises of British Columbia's homelessness, poverty, accessibility, and climate emergency. All this with a minority government whose term expires at the latest in fall 2021.

³ In the budget forecast for the 2020/2021 Budget and Fiscal Plan from February 2020, the government forecasted spending \$2.33 billion on advanced education out of a total of \$42.276 billion expense budget, which represents 5.5% of the budget. See page 107 https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2020/pdf/2020_budget_and_fiscal_plan.pdf



All budgets being equal, some budgets are more equal than others. As a Big Budget Year for the sitting government, the next budget will serve as a campaign promise for the NDP's re-election and fodder for platforming for all other parties. It will be no small feat to satisfy the competing needs of so many in our province. In fact, it may well trigger an early election if the opposition fails to support it.

Anticipating Government Priorities

The report on advanced education focused on recurring themes that telegraph some of the government's potential priorities for budget 2021. Specifically, the committee emphasized issues of looming mental health concerns for students, redressing issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, building capacity for digital connectivity in the face of remote teaching and learning, as well as incorporating the recommendations of TRC and UNDRIP. CUFA BC expects to see funding allocated to these particular issues.

The committee also recognized the need for incentivizing student participation in advanced education given the uncertainties around domestic and international student enrollments. We would welcome targeted funding to encourage enrollment as well as funding for eventual resumption of on-campus employment opportunities like teaching and research assistantships.

Finally, we anticipate increased support for non-traditional training programs in colleges and trade schools. While the committee touched only briefly on the topic of technology, trades, and skills training, the current Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training has a particular appetite for the development of micro-credentials whereby people already in the workforce but who are in need of upgraded skills and training can complete programs of education in less time than traditional college or university programs.

Micro-credentialism in itself has some real benefits to re-training and upskilling an experienced workforce in a short timeframe so long as (1) faculty associations and union groups on campus are vigilant in protecting employment rights for non-traditional employment contracts and (2) students' unions are concomitantly protecting domestic and international students from exploitative costs.

Summary

The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services captured well the plurality of issues in advanced education and focused on high level recommendations, avoiding the weeds of any particular topic. CUFA BC is pleased with the representation of its recommendations to government through this report. The report is thorough enough to have influence in the cabinet's behind-the-scenes 2021 budget preparations.

Composition of the Committee

Members

Bob D'Eith, MLA	Chair	Maple Ridge-Mission
Doug Clovechok, MLA	Deputy Chair	Columbia River-Revelstoke
Rich Coleman		Langley East
Donna Barnett, MLA		Cariboo-Chilcotin
Mitzi Dean, MLA		Esquimalt-Metchosin
Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA		Courtenay-Comox
Nicholas Simons, MLA		Powell River-Sunshine Coast

Committee Staff

Susan Sourial, Clerk Assistant, Committees and Interparliamentary Relations

Karan Riarh, Senior Research Analyst

Katey Stickle, Natalie Beaton and Jesse Gordon, Committee Researchers

Executive Summary

The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services (the “Committee”) is mandated by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia to conduct an annual budget consultation. This year’s consultation was held in June with the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic very much front of mind. By the closing date of June 26, the Committee heard 281 presentations, received 1,362 written and video submissions, and received 3,625 responses to an online survey – the highest level of participation in nearly 10 years. British Columbians shared how the pandemic affected their families, their work, and their communities, and the need for supports in the coming weeks, months, and years.

This report summarizes the results of the consultation, including input shared by British Columbians and the Committee’s 124 recommendations for Budget 2021. The report begins with a discussion on equity and inclusion in recognition of how this theme was highlighted across many sectors and policy areas, particularly with respect to the pandemic. Themes thereafter are presented alphabetically; the numbering of recommendations does not indicate priority.

Committee Members recognize that the upcoming budget presents a critical opportunity to address inequities and make significant progress on reconciliation, diversity and inclusion, and accessibility. They recommend sufficient resources to continue work on implementing the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. They also recommend ensuring ministries adopt a diversity and inclusion lens and recognize systemic barriers to address the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic, and providing programs and supports for equity-seeking groups who face systemic barriers, as well as strengthening public construction policies to require new public construction projects to meaningfully meet accessibility best practices and standards.

Inequities related to digital infrastructure are another key issue. As British Columbians shifted to an online environment, the pandemic exposed gaps and barriers related to broadband access and affordability of internet services, especially in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. The Committee acknowledges how essential digital connectivity is to individual, social, and economic resiliency, especially in the current environment, and recommends accelerating investments in extending and strengthening digital infrastructure, including addressing challenges related to affordability.

Committee Members also highlight the need to provide urgent recovery funding and multi-year stabilization to several sectors. They recommend health and social services not-for-profit and charitable organizations be provided with emergency support, as well as providing incentives to British Columbians to donate, in acknowledgement of the essential services they provide to British Columbians. For the tourism sector, the Committee emphasizes the importance of supports being accessible and flexible, and notes opportunities to invest in infrastructure, destination development, and marketing, as well as incent British Columbians to be visitors in their own province. The Committee also recommends targeted, multi-year recovery, along with donation incentives, tax breaks and infrastructure investments, for the arts and culture sector which has experienced significant challenges.

With respect to broader COVID-19 related recovery, the Committee recommends continuing to work with the federal government on federal and provincial programs and measures to support British Columbians as well as transitioning emergency funding to provide targeted recovery and financial relief based on need. Committee Members also recognize financial challenges related to the pandemic and vulnerabilities in the financing structure for local governments and recommend municipal finance reform. The importance of embedding economic reconciliation in recovery is also highlighted. They additionally identify opportunities to temporarily adjust the employer health tax with a view to supporting businesses during the pandemic.

The Committee recommends BC's budgetary and taxation framework be prudent and responsive, support competitiveness, and proactively incorporate an equity lens, to address short- and long-term challenges. Investments in a variety of public infrastructure projects is also supported. Other areas of interest related to fiscal and regulatory policy include co-operatives, prompt payment legislation, luxury tax thresholds, property tax structure, and provincial sales tax (PST) non-compliance. Committee Members also support extending the ability of restaurants, bars, and tourism operators to purchase liquor at wholesale prices.

As it relates to advanced education, the Committee recognizes financial pressures facing post-secondary institutions as a result of the pandemic and recommends exploring mechanisms to provide short-term financial flexibility. Committee Members also see opportunities to make increased investments in the sector to facilitate economic recovery, including by expanding seats, providing flexible reskilling and upskilling opportunities, providing supports for the online delivery of courses, addressing direct and indirect financial barriers to education, and providing additional funding and resources for community literacy and adult education. They additionally recommend supporting post-secondary institutions with advancing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Other recommendations relate to capital funding, an international student post-secondary education strategy, and the BC Graduate Scholarship.

In addition to recovery funding for the arts and culture sector, Committee Members make recommendations to increase funding for Creative BC and Amplify BC. Maintaining existing film and production tax credits and renewing the book publishing tax is also supported. As well, the Committee recommends exploring measures, such as hiring tax credits, to address inequities and barriers for underrepresented groups. Libraries are another area of interest with recommendations to provide sustainable and reliable increases in funding and to promote reconciliation programs in libraries.

Food security and production emerged as keys area for action with respect to agriculture. Committee Members recommend supporting local food production, processing and distribution hubs, as well as implementing policies that support agricultural productivity and regional production. The Committee also highlights the importance of investing in infrastructure and innovation and reviewing risk management supports to help farmers and ranchers manage and adapt to crises. Other recommendations relate to investments in processing facilities and capacity, a multi-year extension to the Tree Fruit Replant program, and investments in the protection of domestic animals, livestock, and wildlife.

The Committee also makes several recommendations with respect to other natural resources, including encouraging adaptation and innovation and exploring market and product diversification in the forestry sector. With respect to mining, Committee Members recommend examining enhancements to the mining exploration and the mining flow-through share tax credits. Increased funding for the British Columbia Geological Survey and Geoscience BC is also supported. Additional areas for investment with respect

to economic development include supporting BC's aerospace industry and regional airports, supporting growth and innovation in science and technology, improving recruitment, training and retraining of a skilled workforce, and supporting rural development with funding to community organizations.

As it relates to the environment, Committee Members note opportunities to invest in climate change adaptation and resilience to ensure a sustainable recovery. They support continued investments in CleanBC and clean energy solutions, including reducing vehicle emissions and adopting a climate lens for all infrastructure spending. The Committee also recommends expanding and enhancing energy retrofit programs and working towards electrification in collaboration with industry. Other areas of interest include: funding for fish and wildlife conservation, management, and data collection; invasive species education, prevention, monitoring, response, and enforcement; water sustainability; and biodiversity. Committee Members additionally recommend increased funding for BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC.

The importance of expanding and accelerating digital health infrastructure to improve access to health care is highlighted with Committee Members noting the increased use of and need for digital health solutions during the pandemic. Long-term care, and how the pandemic exposed significant gaps, is another point of focus. The Committee recommends sustaining investments in this regard, particularly with respect to staffing and care standards, as well as investing in home supports. Committee Members also favour continued investments in a continuum of mental health and addiction services, and team-based primary care models. Other recommendations in health care relate to supports and services for British Columbians with chronic and complex diseases, dental care, health human resources, pharmacare, health research, reproductive health, maternal care, wellness, and surgical capacity. The Committee additionally highlights opportunities to improve decision-making and service provision for health care delivery in rural and remote communities.

With respect to housing, Committee Members recommend accelerating the building of a continuum of supportive and affordable housing across the province, as well as working with the federal government on housing for Indigenous peoples. The Committee also recommends working with local governments to streamline the development approval process to address delays and accelerate housing supply. Reviewing the property transfer tax thresholds to reflect current housing prices is another area of interest.

Ensuring the safety of students and staff in K-12 education, as well as ensuring families and students have access to technology for remote learning, is highlighted by Committee Members. They also recommend fully funding the new curriculum and providing a broad suite of programs to support all students. The Committee expresses support for developing new curriculums that recognize diversity and systemic racism, along with corresponding training and resources for staff and school administrators. Other areas for increased investment in K-12 education include funding for students with special needs and mental health supports. Committee Members additionally recommend encouraging coordination and collaboration between school districts, community partners, parents, caregivers, and volunteers to support the development of school food programs.

The Committee makes several recommendations with respect to public safety and justice, including increasing investments in legal aid services, community restorative justice programs, and digital transformation of court services. Committee Members also recommend specific investments in Indigenous justice programs and services, including ensuring a distinction-based approach for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. They again emphasize the need to invest in prevention, mitigation, adaptation, response, and recovery for wildfire, flood, and climate-related natural disasters. The importance of creating a comprehensive, distinction-based emergency response, as well as funding for prevention, intervention, and recovery programs for people-

facing gender-based violence is also highlighted. The Committee additionally makes recommendations related to child and youth advocacy centres, and programs and services for individual who engage in sex work. Other areas of interest include correctional services and ground disturbance.

Child care is a key focus in social services as the Committee recognizes its importance for economic recovery and enabling parents and caregivers, especially women, to return to work. Committee Members also recommend funding to reduce wait times and improve access to assessments, therapies, programs, and supports for children and youth with special needs and their families. Youth is another point of focus with the Committee recommending improvements in supports for youth aging out of care as well as wrap-around programs and services for vulnerable youth. Committee Members also support developing a comprehensive, outcome-focused social policy framework and continuing to fund and support the provincial poverty reduction strategy along with reviewing the framework for income and disability assistance to ensure equitability and appropriate consideration of individual circumstances. Other recommendations relate to increased funding to Community Living BC, and investment in a comprehensive program for assistive devices and medical equipment for people with disabilities.

With respect to transportation and transit, Committee Members recommend increasing and expanding HandyDART services as well as fully funding the provincial active transportation strategy, noting the increased use of active transportation during the pandemic. They also support strengthening funding models and addressing transit gaps in rural and remote communities, and accelerating the deployment of electric buses, as well as working with local governments and transit authorities to explore new pricing mechanisms to help make public transit more accessible for youth and low-income families.

Consultation Overview

Background

The *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*, S.B.C. 2000, c. 23, requires the Minister of Finance to make public a budget consultation paper, including a fiscal forecast, key issues to be addressed in the next budget, and information on how British Columbians may provide their views on those issues, no later than September 15 each year. The paper is referred to a select standing committee of the Legislative Assembly which must conduct a consultation and report on the results of that consultation no later than November 15. The Legislative Assembly assigns this responsibility to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, one of 10 permanent parliamentary committees established to undertake business on behalf of the Legislative Assembly.

Last year, the Minister of Finance released the budget consultation paper earlier in the spring, and the public consultation took place in June to enable the Committee to deliver a final report to the Legislative Assembly in August, leaving more time for review and consideration of the Committee's recommendations. Following review and feedback on the adjusted timeline, the Committee, in consultation with the Minister of Finance, opted to once again have the consultation take place in the summer.

Budget Consultation Paper

The *Budget 2021 Consultation Paper* described the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on BC's economy as well as on individuals and businesses. The paper also outlined BC's response to the pandemic, including initiatives with respect to health care, housing affordability, child care, education, and reconciliation. Input was requested on the following questions:

1. What are your top three priorities to help make life better for you, your family and your community as we come through COVID-19?
2. Aside from the immediate need to keep people healthy and safe through the COVID-19 pandemic, what actions should government prioritize to help strengthen B.C.'s economy?
3. If you had one dollar to put toward programs and services across government, how would you choose to divide it?
4. Given the ongoing demand for government programs, supports and services, how would you like to see your government continue to pay for them?

British Columbians were invited to respond to these questions through an online survey. Survey results are referenced throughout the report with a full summary in Appendix A. See *Consultation Process* for more information.

Advanced Education

COVID-19

Post-secondary institutions, student associations and faculty associations described the wide-ranging impacts of the pandemic on the post-secondary sector. They expressed concerns about financial challenges due to a decline in enrolment, particularly with respect to international students who contribute significant revenue, and increased costs due to new health and safety measures and shifts to online learning. Gaps in digital infrastructure and access were also highlighted, especially for students joining classes from rural and remote communities across BC.

The direct impact on students was another key theme as some students and families are unsure of their ability to afford post-secondary education as emergency aid programs have excluded students. They also described how the financial impact, coupled with shifts to online learning, have affected and amplified mental health challenges. Student associations noted that international students have also experienced unique impacts as they may now be studying online from their home countries, at odd hours, and are not able to experience Canadian culture and life, which is a key component of their choosing to study in Canada.

Literacy organizations noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated changes related to automation and digitization, with communities turning to literacy programs and services to develop digital literacy skills for jobs and access to information. Other submissions similarly discussed the importance of supporting workers who have been displaced due to the pandemic through reskilling and upskilling programs.

Survey Highlights

- Question 1: Education was the 6th most common topic.
Key theme: increase funding and financial supports for post-secondary education.
 - Question 2: Increasing opportunities for training and post-secondary education received the 8th most selections.
 - Question 3: Post-secondary education and skills received 3.6 cents.
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Adult Education and Literacy

Literacy organizations requested increased, stable, multi-year funding for community literacy. Organizations such as the Cariboo-Chilcotin Partners for Literacy Society and the Chilliwack Learning Society explained that demand for literacy programs and services remains high and continues to grow, and that current funding is

insufficient to meet need. With many services and supports moving online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations further stressed the importance of digital literacy skills. Decoda Literacy Solutions explained that workplace changes such as automation and the shift to digital technology has resulted in job displacement and that many of those displaced typically have low literacy and lack essential skills. READ Surrey/White Rock Society, Dawson Creek Literacy Now and the Dawson Creek Literacy Society outlined the importance of literacy skills for maintaining community connections and access to information, as well as for access to jobs. Other organizations, including the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy and the Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society, described the importance of their programs and services for supporting vulnerable adults.

A number of submissions also advocated for increased investments in adult education. The Vancouver Community College Faculty Association explained that adult basic education programs serve adult learners who have not graduated from the K-12 system, often for reasons related to social inequality. They shared that developmental programs are a lifeline to equity-seeking communities; however, they do not typically generate revenue for the institution, so these programs are constantly at risk of being cut.

Some submissions pointed to inequities in funding when compared with K-12 education and advocated for increased funding as well as a broader range of course offerings. The BC Teachers' Federation explained that the current basic per-student funding for adult education is \$4,773 a year while for K-12 education it is \$7,648. The Federation noted that adult learners often work full-time while going to school, are single parents, or English language learners, and that the funding discrepancy means no additional funding is available for support services such as learning support or speech and language pathology or counselling.

Capital Funding

The Committee received requests for specific infrastructure projects related to aging facilities and student housing. The Vancouver Island University Faculty Association advocated for infrastructure investment on remote campuses noting that many schools are suffering from wear and tear. Similarly, Langara College noted that their original academic facility is well past its useful life but still holds more than half of all classroom space on campus and requested capital funding to build a new facility. Capilano Students' Union explained that their university is one of only three publicly funded universities in BC without dedicated on-campus residences or nearby purpose-built student housing and requested financial support to deliver on-campus housing.

Indigenous Students

With regard to Indigenous students, Langara College recommended including all post-secondary institutions in the Aboriginal Service Plan or replacing it with a new model that increases investments across the system to support Indigenous learners. They explained that they do not receive any funding from the program even though they serve a large Indigenous population. Supports for Indigenous students was also a priority for Okanagan College. They shared that they have a growing number of Indigenous students and would welcome additional supports with respect to credential completion and transitions to employment, as well as institutional support for developing cultural competencies among employees and Indigenization of the curriculum and services.

Métis Nation British Columbia requested funding for their Métis Employment and Training Program. The funding would support the provision of provincial liaison officers to educate post-secondary institutions and

other organizations on the program's services as well as provide Métis specific cultural education; it will also support life skills education for youth and the provision of forestry and environmental programs.

International Students

Many student organizations described how the reliance on international student tuition has made post-secondary institutions financially vulnerable. Vancouver Island University Students' Union shared that at Vancouver Island University, international students make up approximately 20 percent of the total student population but contribute half of the total tuition revenue. Capilano Students' Union noted that BC has been able to attract international students by relying on the reputation of Canada as a good place to study abroad; however, unpredictability in tuition increases, coupled with students already cautious about their education plans due to COVID-19, could result in BC post-secondary institutions experiencing a drastic decline in international student enrolment over the next few years. The lack of regulations on tuition fee increases for international students and how that contributes to unpredictability was also discussed by the Douglas Students' Union who recommended a cap on the annual increase. The British Columbia Federation of Students emphasized that a decline in international student enrolment will result in BC losing millions of dollars in annual spending from international students living in the province.

Several student organizations, including the Alliance of BC Students, recommended reducing or eliminating the Medical Services Plan (MSP) premiums for international students as a means to make the province more attractive for international students. The Simon Fraser Student Society stated that increasing MSP premiums for international post-secondary students highlights the dependence on international students to contribute a disproportionate amount to the funding of programs and services. The University of Victoria Students' Society explained that international students are struggling with affordability and are twice as likely to access support services as domestic students.

Some student associations proposed creating an international educational strategy in consultation with students and key stakeholders in the sector. The Thompson Rivers University Students' Union reflected on the value that international student enrolment brings to post-secondary institutions and communities across the province and advocated for a new international student strategy to maximize these benefits while also ensuring that international students are supported. The Okanagan College Students' Union similarly emphasized the importance of having a strategy to assist international students in their cultural, social, and academic integration.

Online Learning and Digital Infrastructure

Post-secondary institutions described their quick shifts to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for investments in online learning supports and infrastructure. Langara College noted that COVID-19 has highlighted the need for additional investments in information technology hardware, software, and infrastructure as well as improvements to wireless infrastructure across BC to ensure all students can participate in remote learning. Similarly, the University of British Columbia stated that as online learning will continue for some time, it is important to ensure that students still receive high-quality learning experiences and services that support their academic success and mental well-being.

Open Education

Several organizations requested increased funding to expand open education resources – teaching and learning resources that are available in the public domain and free to use. They stated that open education resources help address affordability and financial barriers related to the cost of textbooks. Okanagan College Students' Union explained that textbooks typically cost more than \$200 each so many students choose to either not purchase the book, to share books with multiple classmates, or to buy outdated editions, impacting their success in the classroom. The British Columbia Federation of Students further noted that open education resources can be made available in formats that are accessible to people with disabilities and those who do not have reliable access to the internet. Several student associations, including the Alliance of BC Students and the Alma Mater Society at UBC Vancouver, suggested increased investment in BCcampus, the primary developer of open education resources in BC, to allow for increased adaptation of open textbooks.

Operational Funding

Post-secondary institutions outlined expected revenue shortfalls due to a decline in enrolment of both international and domestic students who may be rethinking beginning post-secondary education at this time, particularly as it relates to receiving value-for-money and online learning. Camosun College Faculty Association explained that a loss of tuition revenue is forcing post-secondary institutions to look at cuts, including staff reductions, to meet the continued expectations for balanced budgets. The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC shared that institutions have been prompted to lay off faculty due to the budget shortfalls which will result in reduced course offerings and student support. To address these challenges, a number of institutions, including Okanagan College, suggested providing financial flexibility to allow institutions to draw on reserves across different years to permit timely responses to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations such as the Alliance of BC Students recommended allowing post-secondary institutions to run budget deficits.

Some submissions discussed long-standing challenges with funding for post-secondary institutions. Selkirk College Faculty Association stated that public funding is decreasing each year with approximately 50 percent of the funding coming from government and the rest from domestic and international tuition, contracts, and research grants. Submissions described the impact of decreasing public funding, including program cuts, increased waitlists for programs and courses, deteriorating equipment and antiquated facilities, and increased reliance on increases in tuition fees and ancillary fees. The Emily Carr Students' Union and the Emily Carr Faculty Association requested a review of the post-secondary funding model with the goal of increasing funding within the system, reducing reliance on profit-generating activities, and restoring majority-public core funding.

The Committee also received funding requests for specific institutions and programs. Simon Fraser University referred to a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2006 in which the province pledged to double the size of their Surrey campus from 2,500 to 5,000 domestic student seats by 2015; however, this commitment has not yet been met. Thompson Rivers University requested support for several programs, including: Nursing and Health Care Assistant; Respiratory Therapy; Master of Nursing and Nurse Practitioner; and Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical Engineering and Bachelor of Engineering in Computer Engineering. They noted that COVID-19 has highlighted the value and need for health-care workers, as well as for people who work in and create technology, and that these programs will help to address these needs.

Research

As it relates to research, submissions highlighted both challenges and opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing how research is responding to the pandemic. The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia stated that graduate student and faculty researchers are dealing with interruptions in programs and funding shortfalls for grants due to the pandemic. They suggested retooling the Knowledge Development Fund to support infrastructure and a system of arm's-length, peer-reviewed grants for research. Thompson Rivers University shared that their scientists are working with local authorities to investigate sewage, identify traces of the coronavirus, and create a possible early warning detection test. They requested support to establish an Interior Region Research Development Fund as well as increased investments in graduate students and additional research funding opportunities for undergraduate students. The University of Victoria highlighted how research and training can contribute to scientific, medical and socioeconomic issues and advocated for enhanced partnerships with postsecondary institutions to advance high-impact research.

Student Supports

Several submissions requested additional investments in student supports including financial assistance, supports to navigate the job market, and mental health and counselling supports. Organizations such as the Capilano Students' Union and the Research Universities' Council of British Columbia explained that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted continued gaps in mental health support available on-campus, including in-person counsellors available for follow-up and continual care. They noted that an investment in in-person mental health services on post-secondary campuses would be greatly welcomed during a time where many are struggling to find access to the support systems they need. Thompson Rivers University shared that demand for student service supports has been a growing concern for universities in recent years with students worried about finances, adapting to the change in the delivery of education, and dealing with other personal and family issues. They requested additional capacity to target needs-based resources directly, particularly to vulnerable students.

Technology, Trades and Skills Training

The Committee also heard about opportunities to support workers who have been displaced due to the pandemic and trends towards automation and digital technology, including through reskilling and upskilling as well as the recognition of skills acquired through prior learning and experiential learning. The Enderby and District Chamber of Commerce noted a need for increased access to post-secondary technology, trades, and degree programs to address the existing and increasing worker shortage in technology services. They explained that as shifts to remote solutions continues, more workers must service these networks and provide support for online platforms and development. The Chamber also recommended the expansion of online courses into other ticketed arenas to allow workers looking to upskill to work and learn at their own pace. Similarly, BC Prior Learning Action Network explained that more and more people who have acquired skills in the workplace are being displaced and these individuals have skills that have not been identified or validated other than with their company of employment. They noted that prior learning assessment and recognition is a crucial part of assisting in the transition of the workforce and recommended investment in the prior learning process.

Tuition and Financial Assistance

Many submissions encouraged additional measures to address the affordability of post-secondary education, including investing in financial assistance and freezing and reducing tuition. In light of the pandemic, the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia advocated for special funding to enhance scholarships and bursaries for students, to provide targeted funding for student employment on campus, and to offer targeted grants to low- and middle-income students.

Several organizations recommended increased investments in graduate student supports. The Graduate Student Society of UBC Vancouver explained that BC has historically lagged other provinces in supporting graduate education. They acknowledged that the province introduced the BC Graduate Scholarship in 2018; however, the funding period is slated to end in 2021 and it was limited to science, technology, engineering and math programs. Accordingly, they recommended making the program permanent and extending eligibility to other disciplines. The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia also recommended increasing funding for the BC Graduate Scholarship, noting that many graduate students are facing an extra year of study because their research has been disrupted.

Royal Roads University advocated for distance programs to be recognized for loan eligibility and for the removal of the restriction of full-time student loans for executive programs. They explained that currently only on-campus courses and their online versions are eligible for full-time federal or provincial loans, meaning that only 10 of their 72 programs are eligible. They also noted that executive programs are currently not eligible for student loans as the rules assume that these students work full-time and therefore do not require assistance. They explained that not all students can choose to work while studying which results in a discriminatory barrier, particularly for family caregivers.

Pearson College UWC requested two scholarships for BC Indigenous students in the amount of \$120,000. They highlighted how the College is unique in representing diversity and bringing students from around the world to study and learn from one another. They shared that over 50 percent of their students are on full financial scholarships provided through the College, which is achieved through fundraising and their endowment; the College receives supports from several other Canadian jurisdictions but does not currently receive funding from BC. They described the scholarships as an opportunity for the province to support their students, particularly those facing systemic barriers.

Conclusions

The Committee recognized that the post-secondary sector is facing significant financial challenges due to the pandemic. Committee Members agreed that mechanisms and flexibility need to be provided in the short-term to address these financial challenges. Financial vulnerability associated with international student tuition was also discussed; stakeholders should be brought together to develop a comprehensive international student education strategy to examine the business model and the integration of international students within the context of broader goals and outcomes for the post-secondary system in BC.

Increased operational funding for the sector in order to facilitate economic recovery and encourage further education was also recommended. The Committee discussed opportunities to increase spaces at institutions, such as Simon Fraser University and Kwantlen Polytechnic University, as well as to increase capacity at smaller institutions across the province. Committee Members emphasized that investments also need to support

access to education for underrepresented groups and address ongoing and predicted labour gaps. They also noted similar opportunities through capital investments to upgrade post-secondary infrastructure.

The Committee further recommended increased support to post-secondary institutions to fulfill their commitments to reconciliation and to make post-secondary education accessible to all Indigenous students. Committee Members noted that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls for Justice from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls provide for a framework and that it is important to ensure the post-secondary system honours and recognizes all aspects of Indigenous culture.

Committee Members also noted that increased investments in post-secondary education could help individuals who have been displaced by COVID-19 and other workplace changes, such as automation and digital technology, to transition to new careers, including in trades and technology. Part of this includes providing flexible learning opportunities as well as recognizing skills acquired through prior and experiential learning. The Committee also supported increased funding for literacy and adult education to enable individuals to acquire the core literacy skills required for additional learning and training.

Committee Members appreciated how post-secondary institutions adapted and collaborated to support each other with online delivery over the last months and recognized the challenges this presented. As institutions continue to look at online delivery models, the Committee agreed that investments are needed in teaching tools, technology, and professional development, along with general investments in connectivity to enable students to participate in online learning (see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion).

With respect to student supports and financial assistance, Committee Members acknowledged recent initiatives related to mental health and the provision of grants to students. They recognized opportunities to better support graduate students and recommended that the BC Graduate Scholarship be extended and that eligibility be expanded to additional disciplines. The Committee also recognized opportunities to address systemic inequities to education more generally by addressing a broad range of financial barriers related to the direct and indirect costs of post-secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

Adult Education and Literacy

6. Provide stable, multi-year funding for community literacy across BC.
7. Increase resources to adult education to provide a broader range of course offerings and ensure equity in the funding of adult students and school-age students.

Capital Funding

8. Invest in upgrading existing post-secondary infrastructure, including encouraging and leveraging opportunities to expand satellite campuses in rural, remote and underserved communities.

Indigenous Students

9. Support post-secondary institutions in advancing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls by ensuring post-secondary education is accessible to Indigenous learners and honours and recognizes Indigenous culture.

International Students

10. Create a provincial international student education strategy, in consultation with students, post-secondary institutions and other key stakeholders, which examines the business model, the cultural, academic and economic integration of international students, and intended goals and outcomes of post-secondary education.

Online Learning and Digital Infrastructure

11. Provide sufficient support to post-secondary institutions for teaching and learning tools, infrastructure and technology, and training to facilitate professional development for the online delivery of courses. [see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion]

Operational Funding

12. Explore mechanisms, such as allowing the use of accumulated surpluses, to provide post-secondary institutions with short-term flexibility to navigate the financial impacts of the pandemic.
13. Invest in post-secondary education and expanding the number of seats available to students as a means to facilitate economic recovery and address immediate and projected gaps in the labour market, including ensuring local training and reskilling opportunities and reducing barriers for underrepresented groups.

Technology, Trades and Skills Training

14. Provide flexible reskilling and upskilling opportunities in online and in-person formats with a lens to equity, reconciliation and accessibility, and recognize skills acquired through prior and experiential learning, to support workers displaced due to automation, shifts to digital technology and the pandemic, including promoting and expanding technology and trades-related training and careers.

Tuition Fees and Financial Assistance

15. Provide a multi-year extension to the BC Graduate Scholarship and expand its eligibility to graduate students in non-STEM disciplines.
16. Facilitate access to education by addressing financial barriers related to the direct and indirect costs of education, including child care and transportation.

Students with Special Needs

96. Increase funding for students with special needs, including funding for early identification and intervention, the provision of appropriate support programs, and the training and recruitment of education assistants. [see also: Recommendation 112 in Social Services]

Vulnerable Students

97. Ensure a range of options of trauma-informed mental health supports in schools with increased access points for students.
98. Encourage coordination and collaboration between school districts, community partners, parents, caregivers, and volunteers to support the development of school food programs. [see also: Recommendation 31 in Economic Development]

Summary of Recommendations

Equity and Inclusion

Reconciliation

1. Provide sufficient resources to continue concrete action on the implementation of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, including recognizing and addressing the needs of distinct First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.

Diversity and Inclusion

2. In order to address ongoing inequities and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable, marginalized and equity-seeking populations, ensure all ministries adopt a diversity and inclusion lens and recognize systemic barriers.
3. Increase programs and supports for equity-seeking groups who face systemic barriers.

Accessibility

4. Strengthen public construction policies to require new public construction projects to meaningfully meet accessibility best practices and standards.

Digital Connectivity

5. Work with the federal government and telecommunication companies to accelerate investments in extending and strengthening digital infrastructure and ensure the provision of affordable, equitable access to the internet across the province, with particular attention to rural, remote and Indigenous communities, in recognition of the critical importance of universal connectivity to the social and economic well-being of British Columbians.

Advanced Education

Adult Education and Literacy

6. Provide stable, multi-year funding for community literacy across BC.
7. Increase resources to adult education to provide a broader range of course offerings and ensure equity in the funding of adult students and school-age students.

Capital Funding

8. Invest in upgrading existing post-secondary infrastructure, including encouraging and leveraging opportunities to expand satellite campuses in rural, remote and underserved communities.

Indigenous Students

9. Support post-secondary institutions in advancing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls by ensuring post-secondary education is accessible to Indigenous learners and honours and recognizes Indigenous culture.

International Students

10. Create a provincial international student education strategy, in consultation with students, post-secondary institutions and other key stakeholders, which examines the business model, the cultural, academic and economic integration of international students, and intended goals and outcomes of post-secondary education.

Online Learning and Digital Infrastructure

11. Provide sufficient support to post-secondary institutions for teaching and learning tools, infrastructure and technology, and training to facilitate professional development for the online delivery of courses. [see also: Recommendation 5 in Equity and Inclusion]

Operational Funding

12. Explore mechanisms, such as allowing the use of accumulated surpluses, to provide post-secondary institutions with short-term flexibility to navigate the financial impacts of the pandemic.
13. Invest in post-secondary education and expanding the number of seats available to students as a means to facilitate economic recovery and address immediate and projected gaps in the labour market, including ensuring local training and reskilling opportunities and reducing barriers for underrepresented groups.

Technology, Trades and Skills Training

14. Provide flexible reskilling and upskilling opportunities in online and in-person formats with a lens to equity, reconciliation and accessibility, and recognize skills acquired through prior and experiential learning, to support workers displaced due to automation, shifts to digital technology and the pandemic, including promoting and expanding technology and trades-related training and careers.

Tuition Fees and Financial Assistance

15. Provide a multi-year extension to the BC Graduate Scholarship and expand its eligibility to graduate students in non-STEM disciplines.
16. Facilitate access to education by addressing financial barriers related to the direct and indirect costs of education, including child care and transportation.

Arts, Culture and Libraries

Arts, Culture and Libraries

17. Recognize the value of the arts and culture sector during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing recovery funding for the sector.
18. Support long-term recovery, innovation and adaptation in the arts and culture sector by providing increased, flexible, multi-year funding through the B.C. Arts Council, incenting individual and corporate donations, offering tax breaks for patrons to reengage in arts and culture activities, and working with other levels of government and community partners to increase investments in arts and culture infrastructure.

Digital Media, Music and Film

19. Provide multi-year funding for Amplify BC.
20. Invest in Creative BC to build the industry and leverage federal funding, including funding for domestic production.
21. Maintain existing film and production services tax credits and renew the book publishing tax credit, and review tax credits periodically for competitiveness with other jurisdictions.
22. Explore measures, such as tax credits or hiring incentives, to address inequities and barriers for underrepresented groups in the arts, culture and digital media industry.

Public Libraries

23. Provide sustained and reliable annual increases to the provincial operating grant for public libraries, including funding for training and professional development, and support the delivery of library services in Indigenous and rural communities.
24. Encourage collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to promote reconciliation programs in libraries.

Economic Development

Aerospace

25. Support research, development and innovation in BC's aerospace industry, including green technologies, and the creation of robust, local supply chains.

Appendix A: Survey Results

Question 1

The B.C. government is committed to making life more affordable, delivering the services people count on and building a resilient, sustainable economy. What are your top three priorities to help make life better for you and your community as we come through COVID-19? (3,583 responses)

The response option to this question was open-ended. All responses were reviewed and coded by theme.

Anti-racism, policing and reconciliation were the most common themes in responses to this question with a focus on Indigenous rights and structural discrimination. Respondents identified a number of areas for action, including: re-allocating policing budgets to social services, education, mental health support, and affordable housing; and reforming and providing better de-escalation training for police interactions. Respondents also emphasized the importance of fulfilling obligations under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by focusing efforts on reconciliation, including providing better supports for urban Indigenous peoples and communities. Individuals also expressed support for including anti-racism and anti-discrimination frameworks into many aspects of society, including education, government, and policing.

Social services was the second most common theme in response to this question. Respondents advocated for a continuation of income assistance to seniors, students, and those who have lost their income as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as more financial support for people living with disabilities. Improvements to labour practices was also highlighted with respondents referencing initiatives such as the implementation of a livable income, allowing workers to continue working from home, a reduced work week, improved safety standards, a continuation of hazard pay for essential employees during the pandemic, and paid sick leave. Other responses included support for a universal basic income, poverty reduction, funding for community organizations, and access to affordable child care.

The third most common theme was housing. Respondents focused on the need for additional investments in affordable housing for purchase and for rent and for homelessness.

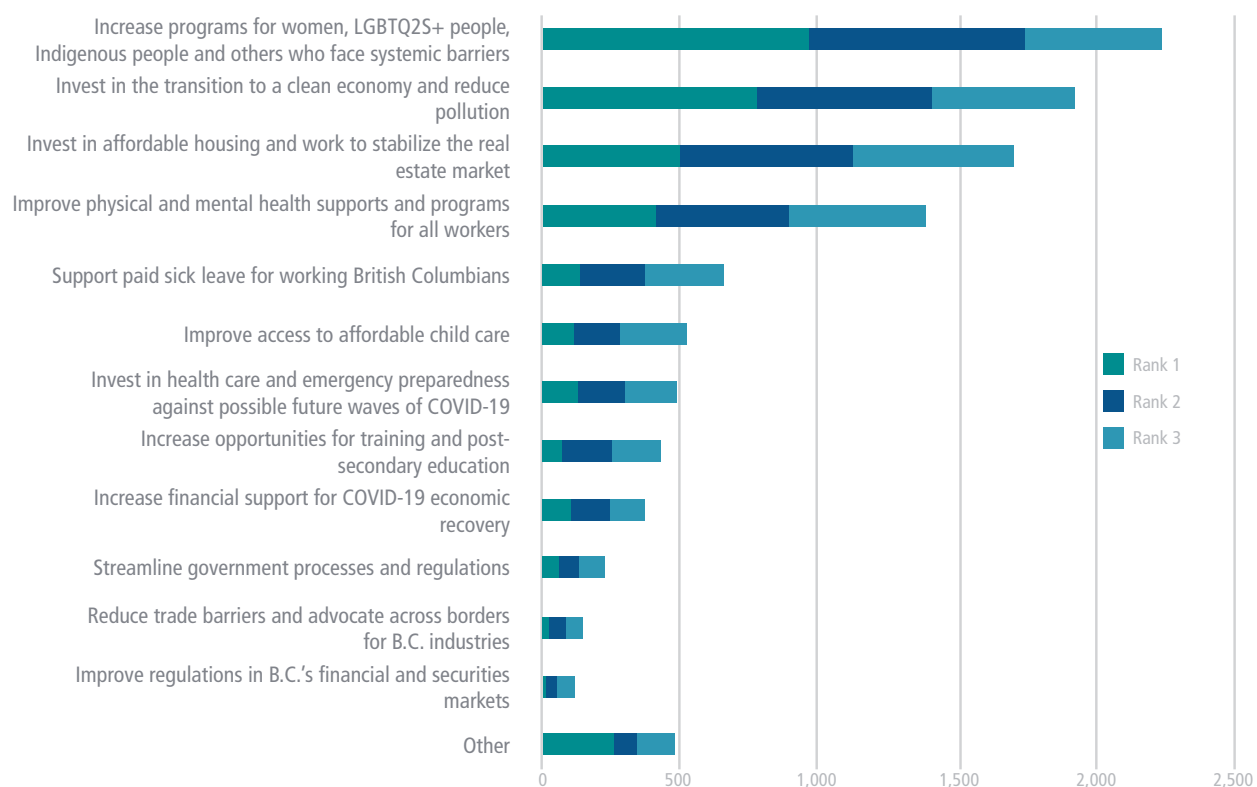
Health care was the next most common theme with improvements to seniors' and long-term care homes a key focus. Respondents also recommended more comprehensive health care coverage, comprised of dental care, prescription coverage, and preventative medicine. Others requested more funding for mental health and addictions services and supported the decriminalization of drugs. Shorter wait times to see a doctor, improved access to health care services, and an increase in the number of health care workers, especially in rural areas, were also identified as areas for action. There were also a number of responses specific to increasing awareness and support for myalgic encephalomyelitis.

The environment was identified as the fifth most common theme. Specifically, respondents were interested in stronger environmental protections, especially the preservation of old growth forests. Improved funding to the fight against climate change was also identified as a key priority with respondents suggesting investments in developing a green economy and furthering developing green spaces such as public parks.

Other themes included: funding for K-12 education and schools as well as funding and financial supports for post-secondary education; and economic relief for small businesses.

Question 2

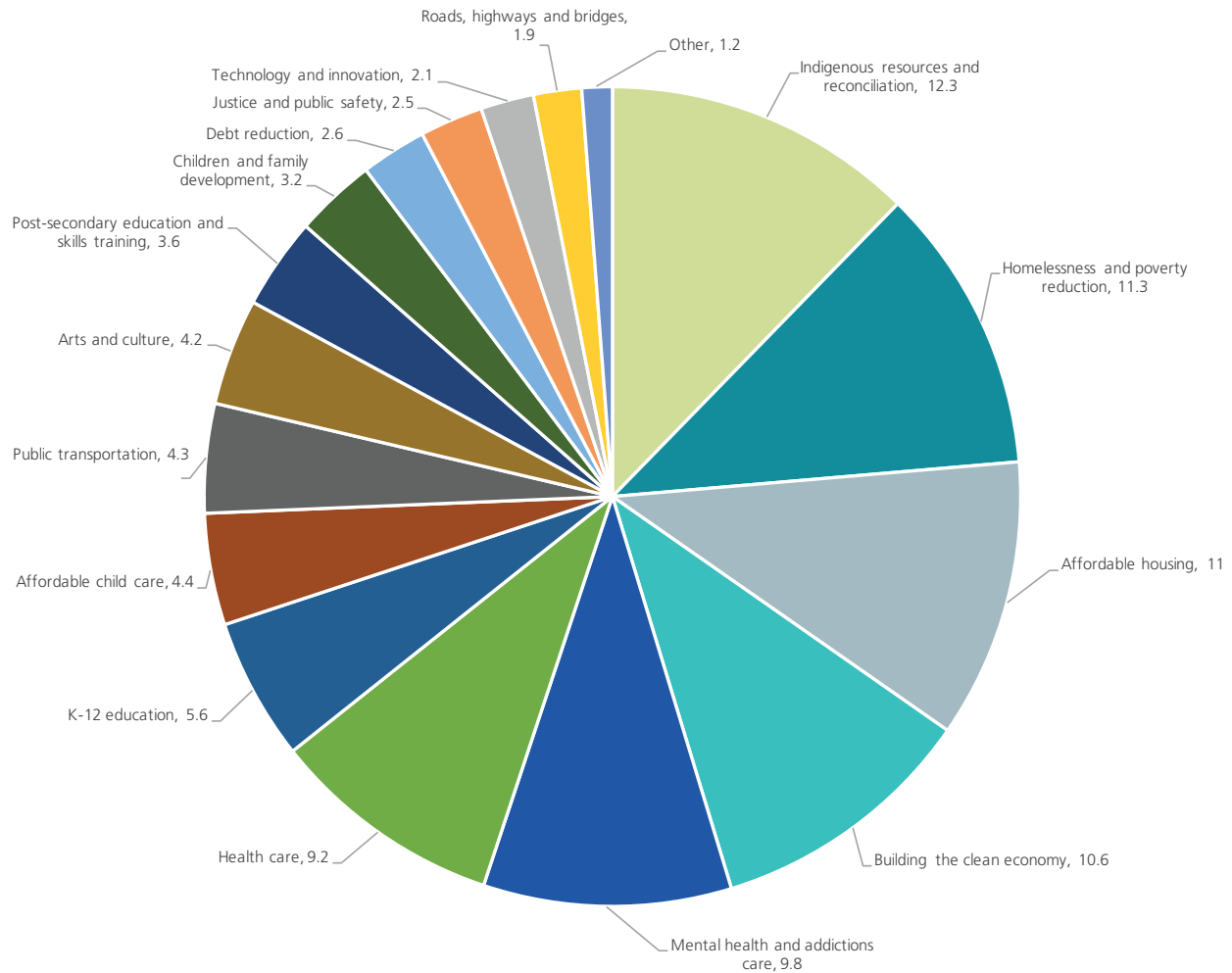
Aside from the immediate need to keep people healthy and safe through the COVID-19 pandemic, what actions should government prioritize to help strengthen B.C.'s economy? Please rank your top three choices (3,567 responses)



In the “other” category, the most common response was reallocating funds away from policing and towards community programs such as social services, education, health care, and environmental protection. A number of respondents also suggested addressing systemic and structural inequities and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Other respondents advocated for increasing income assistance for students, seniors, families, people with disabilities, and those who have lost their employment due to COVID-19, and adequately addressing climate change and protect the environment, specifically by ending the logging of old growth forests

Question 3

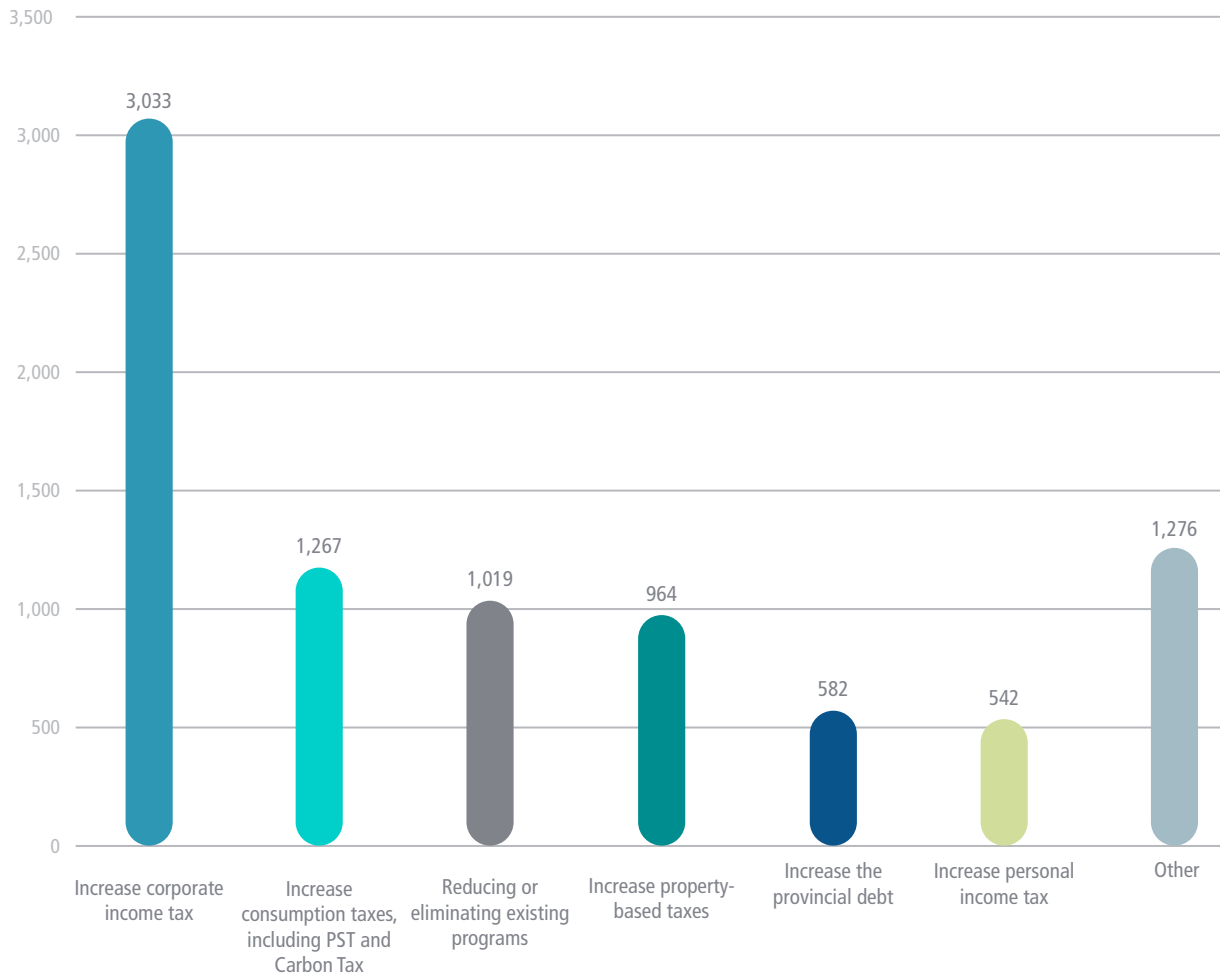
If you had one dollar to put toward programs and services across government, how would you choose to divide it? (3,566 responses)



In the "other" category, environmental protection and conservation, including the protection of old growth forests, was the most common response. Respondents also recommended creating more green spaces in BC such as parks, investing in more active transportation, reallocating police budgets, and increasing, and increased support for people with disabilities.

Question 4

Given the ongoing demand for government programs, supports and services, how would you like to see your government continue to pay for them? (3,599 responses)

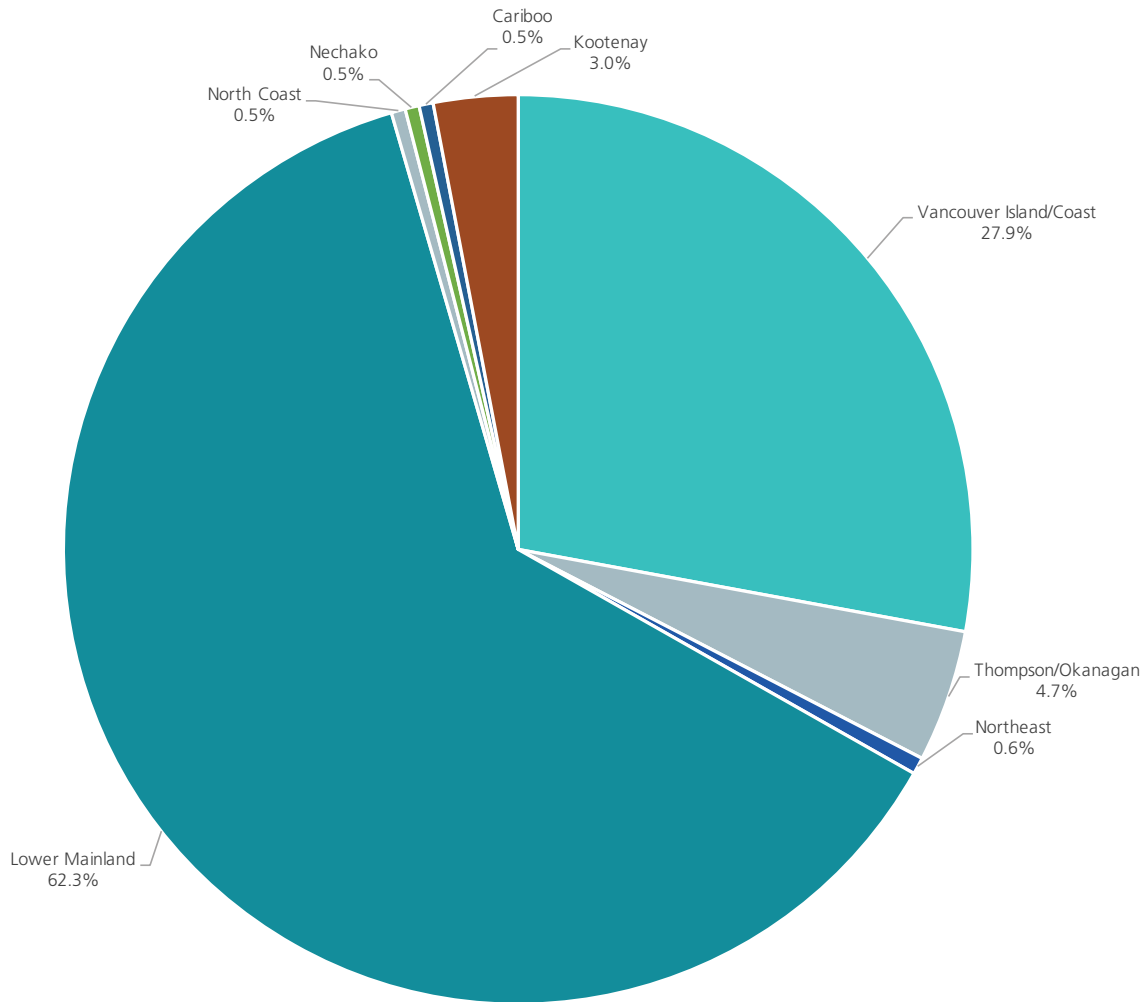


Note: More than one selection was permitted for this question.

Approximately one-third of respondents to this question opted to complete the “other” category. The most common suggestion was reallocating funding from policing efforts to pay for proposed other programs and services. Second was support for increased taxation on the wealthy. Other suggestions included less government spending, reducing red tape, and reduced government salaries.

Question 5

Please identify your region. (3,312 responses)



A Submission to the
2021 Pre-Budget Consultations of the
Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
by
the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia
June 2020



The Confederation of University Faculty Association of British Columbia

The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia (CUFA BC) supports high-quality post-secondary education and research in BC. We represent over 5,500 professors, lecturers, instructors, librarians, and other academic staff at the five research-intensive universities in British Columbia. These are: the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the University of Northern British Columbia, Royal Roads University, and the University of Victoria. The Confederation has been in existence for fifty years and works closely with member Faculty Associations at each institution.

We believe that public universities will be the engines of economic recovery, cultural and social innovation, and green transformation. Our resiliency as a province rests, to a significant extent, on the education provided at universities and on the knowledge produced there. Faculty and students will need supports both to ensure the survival of universities and to allow them to achieve their potential as drivers of recovery, innovation, and transformation.

Our themes for this year's budget consultation focus on **recovery**, **innovation**, and **transformation** at BC's research universities in 2021.



Summary of Recommendations

The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of British Columbia (CUFA BC) recommends:

Institutional Funding Stability

1. Government has the opportunity to strategically invest in universities at a time when they will best fulfill the public mission as engines of economic **recovery**, cultural and social **innovation**, and green **transformation**. Commit to sector stability by restructuring the funding model, assert the primacy of public funding to universities and concomitantly reduce overreliance on precarious employment and international student tuition.
2. Provide loans or emergency transfers to help institutions facing revenue shortfalls.

Graduate and Undergraduate Student Financial Supports

3. Supporting graduate students is critical for the successful mission of universities as engines of **recovery**, **innovation**, and **transformation**. Now is the time to invest in the graduate scholarship program by following through on the fifty-million-dollar government commitment and expanding it to include non-STEM disciplines.
4. Incentivize enrollment, minimize student debt by enhancing scholarships and bursaries for students especially at the graduate level and in all disciplines (STEM and non-STEM), providing targeted funding for on-campus student employment for research and teaching assistantships, and targeted tuition grants for low- and middle-income students.

Research Supports

5. **Transform** the Knowledge Development Fund into a broad-based provincial grant competition open to STEM and non-STEM disciplines.
6. Provide institutions with supports for essential US-based resources and supplies affected by fluctuating currency exchange rates, such as online textbooks, journals, and other licenses, as well as lab supplies and reagents for research and teaching needs.



Institutional Funding Stability

1. Strategic Investment

Government has the opportunity to strategically invest in universities at a time when they will best fulfill the public mission as engines of economic **recovery**, cultural and social **innovation**, and green **transformation**. Commit to sector stability by restructuring the funding model, assert the primacy of public funding to universities and concomitantly reduce overreliance on precarious employment and international student tuition.

The provincial government, since coming into power in 2017, has made significant progress in delivering improved health care, education, and childcare to BC residents. One of the great strengths of this government to date has been its commitment to stable and predictable funding in the post-secondary sector.

We need to continue these efforts and focus on the role research and doctoral universities will serve as drivers of BC's economic **recovery**, cultural and social **innovation**, and green **transformation**. Facing the challenges of local and global pandemic and the uncertainties of the economy, this commitment to stability will be the triumph of 2021.

One of the most pressing priorities for CUFA BC has been the chronic underfunding of post-secondary institutions at the hands of previous governments—a topic we have presented on in the past to this very committee. BC lags behind other provinces in terms of student funding whether measured in dollars or in percentage of per-capita GDP, despite our robust economy.

Global pandemic has brought into sharp relief the unsustainability of the current funding model for post-secondary education. Institutional reliance on private fees has left universities exposed to this massive market and labour disruption that will have long-term implications for the institutions and an entire generation of students.

Looking at the most recent available Statistics Canada data for actual spending per student FTE, as reported by Higher Education Strategy Associates in Figure 1 below, BC is marginally ahead of only Ontario and Nova Scotia. BC fares even worse on per-student spending as a percentage of per capita GDP in Figure 2 below, BC's contributions (at 22%) rank second-last in the nation, while other provinces contribute substantially more to post-secondary education, such as Quebec's 27% or Newfoundland's 36%. The provincial government's contributions as a percentage of per-capita GDP are ahead of only Ontario's and again telegraph systemic under-resourcing of post-secondary.

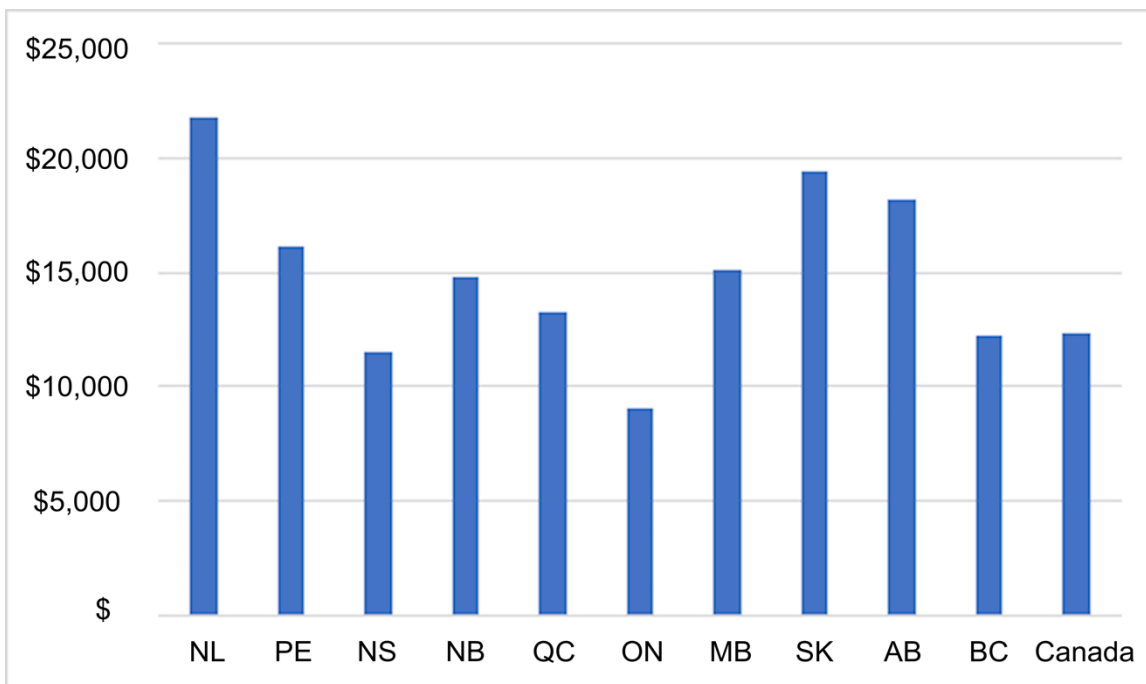


Figure 1: Provincial Government Transfers to PSE Institutions per FTE Students, 2015-2016. Source: Higher Education Strategy Associates. <http://higheredstrategy.com/comparing-provincial-expenditures-on-post-secondary-education>

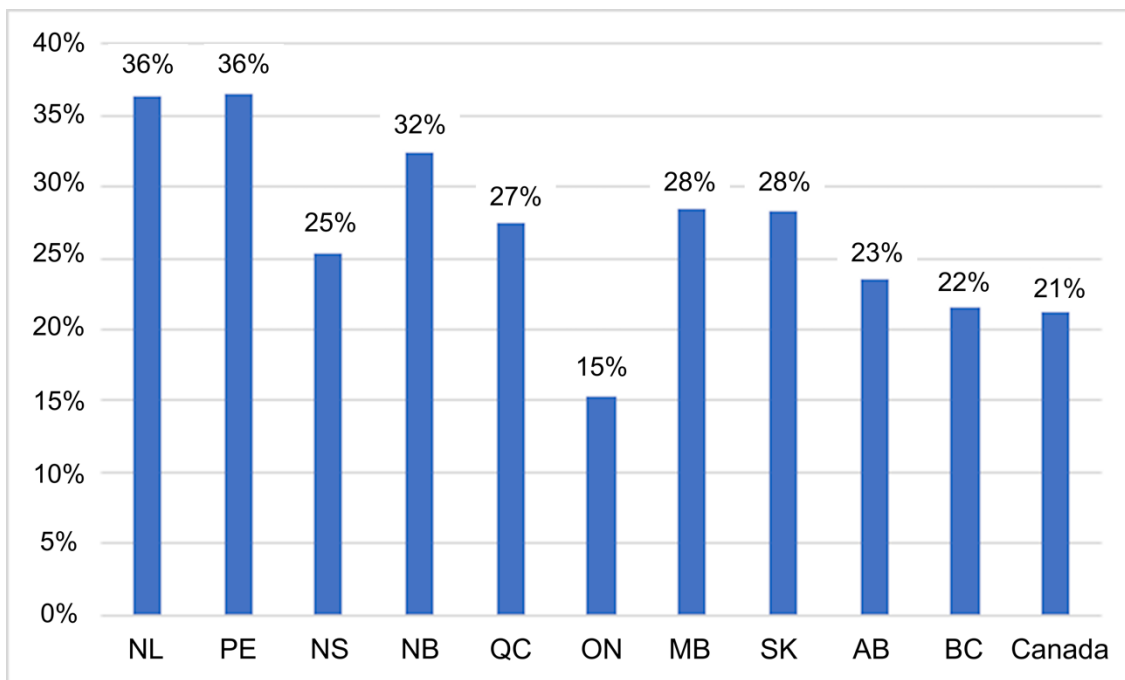


Figure 2: Per-Student Provincial Transfers to Institutions as % of GDP per Capita, 2015-2016. Source: Higher Education Strategy Associates. <http://higheredstrategy.com/comparing-provincial-expenditures-on-post-secondary-education>



These funding decisions have compounded over decades, resulting in an overreliance on precarious employment and international tuition revenue to meet funding shortfalls. Precarious employment has continued to grow in BC's PSE sector, with important implications for social equality. Equity-seeking groups are greatly overrepresented among precarious faculty. This situation is problematic at the best of times, but particularly pernicious in times of economic instability, when precarious faculty are the first to be laid off or simply not rehired. The differential impact of such decisions on equity-seeking groups should be a policy priority. In the current situation, institutions' reliance on international tuition revenue has been exposed as a massive enterprise risk for institutions, as they now grapple with declining international student enrollment. Universities are now facing huge expenses, lost revenue, and uncertain futures.

Despite these ongoing uncertainties, universities have continued to play a key part in responding to the COVID crisis and keeping on track the province's social, human, and economic development. The crisis presents an opportunity to re-invest in the right ways, including rebalancing the funding formula in a manner consistent with socially responsible policy:

- Stabilize the sector with sufficient base funding to facilitate **recovery**
- Minimize the reliance on precarious employment and international tuition revenue to facilitate **transformation**
- Incentivize enrollment to facilitate **recovery**
- Support research that feeds **innovation** needs (social, economic, medical, environmental) beyond the academy.

It is time to strategically reinvest in universities, thereby enhancing their ability to contribute to the resiliency of our communities and our province.

2. Emergency Transfers to Institutions Facing Revenue Shortfalls

Government should provide emergency transfers or loans to help institutions facing revenue shortfalls.

Research universities are facing immense financial consequences with respect to lost revenue from student housing, conferences, events activity, tuition, and other revenue streams. At the same time, costs are increasing as a result of COVID. Universities have been forced to invest in novel and costly online platforms for research and teaching. Many classes have been reduced in size to facilitate better online learning experiences for students, but these reduced class sizes mean either fewer opportunities for students or hiring of additional instructors. Costs are increasing at a time when student enrollment is uncertain for September and January.

Universities are legally prohibited from carrying deficits. The shortfalls in revenue as a result of strategic weakness brought on by unsustainable funding models is going to mean that institutions *this year* will face make-or-break decisions over faculty complement, program offerings, and operational capacity. There will need to be in place emergency transfers or loans on a temporary basis to help the **recovery** of institutions facing revenue shortfalls. The biggest purpose for such emergency money is to buffer institutions until they can get to a point where enrollments stabilize and people can resume more normal participation on campus.



Graduate and Undergraduate Student Financial Supports

3. Invest in the Graduate Scholarship Program

Supporting graduate students is critical for the successful mission of universities as engines of **recovery, innovation, and transformation**. Now is the time to invest in the graduate scholarship program by following through on the fifty-million-dollar government commitment and expanding it to include non-STEM disciplines.

CUFA BC is supportive of the government's commitment to fund a fifty-million-dollar graduate scholarship program. To date, however, only \$12 million has been received, and we are asking for a follow-through on the remaining thirty-eight million dollars. We also believe that the remaining money can be used to address an unnecessarily narrowed focus of the scholarship program that will negatively affect students' access to education.

We call attention to the program's focus on students in the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). CUFA BC recognizes that the technology sector is growing rapidly and will be important to the future **recovery** and **innovation** of BC. Moreover, CUFA BC welcomes efforts to increase the participation of Indigenous and women graduate students in STEM, including the Women in Technology and Indigenous Women in Technology scholarships. However, we believe that a graduate scholarship program that only targets STEM will not meet the needs of our universities or the province.

Many of the graduates we will need in the future will be drawn from the non-STEM areas, especially to replace an aging civil service. CUFA BC's members supervise graduate students in all disciplines across the academic spectrum, including arts and humanities students who are building successful careers in government. In addition, many of the questions we must solve—including the social, cultural, and ethical questions produced by the pandemic and by the growth of STEM technologies—will require extended training and research in the humanities. We would urge government to think broadly when completing its investment in this program. It is our position that a fifty-million-dollar graduate program, extended to all disciplines, would make a remarkable difference in British Columbia's ability to encourage graduate student enrollment, attract the very best students, and retain them so that their future careers continue to build BC.

4. Incentivize Enrollment, Minimize Student Debt

Incentivize enrollment, minimize student debt by enhancing scholarships and bursaries for students especially at the graduate level and in all disciplines (STEM and non-STEM), providing targeted funding for on-campus student employment for research and teaching assistantships, and targeted tuition grants for low- and middle-income students.

It has been the case historically that post-secondary enrollment tends to increase during economic downturns; however, that may not be the case this time given students' concerns about the remote learning environment. Our members are hearing from many students who are uncertain about



whether to return to school in the fall, or whether they should take full course loads. Institutions are already reporting uncertainties about fall enrollments for domestic students and some have experienced declining international student enrollment as they consider whether or not they can travel to BC safely and whether this is the right time to relocate for school. It will be the case that international student enrollments are down and will likely take longer to rebound. We have yet to see the domestic student enrollment numbers play out. Our sector requires **innovative** actions from government to address this looming crisis.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) and the Canadian Federation of Students released a survey of current and prospective students in May that highlight the following (https://www.caut.ca/sites/default/files/caut_board_presentation_may_2020_en.pdf):

- one-third of post-secondary students say they have doubts about starting or returning to college or university this fall.
- students worry about their health and finances. The majority report their summer job plans were negatively affected by pandemic, as well as their own financial situations or that of their parents
- Marginalized populations are being affected disproportionately. A larger number of women and those identifying as visible minorities saying it will be harder to afford post-secondary and they will have to increase their debt levels even more to attend school.
- They believe that online learning is less valuable and they're wondering if it's worth the effort and cost.
- They won't be able to use the on-campus resources if they're not on campus and they will lose out on the full experience of being a student. Many students are considering taking a gap year.
- The survey found that if tuition fees were reduced, about 85% of students considering deferral would in fact return to school.

The prospect of a significant proportion of domestic and international students deferring their decision to undertake higher education means that university's core income streams will be severely jeopardized. Keep in mind that less than half of the revenues of the public universities come directly from tuition fees, and the consequences on students' loss of income due to the increase in unemployment during this crisis could be devastating for the entire university sector.

In times of unemployment, uncertainty, and income loss, gains made by equity-seeking groups can quickly deteriorate. For example, women students are more likely to have caregiving responsibilities exacerbated by the COVID crisis and earn, on average, less than their male counterparts. Indigenous students are also more likely to have such caregiving responsibilities and less likely, should they live in BC's Indigenous communities, to have the internet connectivity required by many remote-learning technologies. Students with disabilities face particular crises in accessing needed services, in addition to generally depressed incomes relative to students without disabilities. We urge government to consider, in every case where policies for PSE are being implemented, their impact on equity-seeking groups and Indigenous people.



We need government to make **innovative** decisions, taking immediate actions toward **recovery** efforts by incentivizing student enrollment in post-secondary. We also need government to help minimize student debt. Both of these recommendations can be achieved by enhancing scholarships and bursaries for students especially at the graduate level and in all disciplines (STEM and non-STEM), providing targeted funding for student employment on campus in the form of research and teaching assistantships, and providing targeted tuition grants for low- and middle-income students. We believe these measures will go a long way toward **recovery** by stabilizing enrollments and encouraging students to remain in their programs.

Supporting Research

5. Transform the Knowledge Development Fund

Transform the Knowledge Development Fund into broad-based provincial grant competition.

We suggest a bold **transformation** of the Knowledge Development Fund (KDF) program to offset the granting shortfall in federal tri-council funding and to help research **recovery** interrupted by the pandemic. The Premier announced in 2018 \$125 million in new KDF funding, a remarkable and forward-thinking investment. The KDF has been a crucial funder of research infrastructure at our member institutions, but we believe that the dramatic and welcome infusion of funds into the KDF provides an excellent opportunity to enhance its overall value. Currently, the KDF funds institutions and infrastructure, not actual research. Certainly, the fund's current role as a matcher of CDI infrastructure funding is important and should continue to be a feature of the KDF program, but should not be the KDF's sole role or purpose.

We would propose instead to **transform** the KDF along the lines of the three federal granting councils (SSHRC, NSERC, and CIHR) that fund research in the humanities, social sciences, engineering, natural sciences, and medicine. Our proposal would call for the majority of KDF dollars to be dedicated to a peer-reviewed system of grants, at arm's-length from the government, focussing on research that addresses the most pressing social, economic, cultural, and environmental challenges facing British Columbia today. There are models within Canadian provinces that can guide this vision; we draw your attention to one in particular that serves as a gold standard for a provincially funded research program.

Quebec has created three independent research funding agencies that promote and financially support research, knowledge dissemination, and research training. The [*Fonds de recherche du Québec \(FRQ\)*](#) supports researchers in three areas: 1) natural sciences and engineering; 2) social sciences and humanities (including arts and literature); and 3) biomedical and health sciences. The provincial government contributes research money to each funding agency, which in turn makes decisions based on a peer-reviewed model of evaluation much like the federal tri-council funding agencies. Within each of these funds, money is allocated to primary research projects at universities and colleges, research groups, graduate and undergraduate student training and mentorship projects, community research partners, as well as careers in research supporting fellows, clinicians, and research support staff.



Professors at CUFA BC's member institutions are obligated to complete research, which constitutes approximately 40% of their workload. Many are struggling to meet their research obligations in the new environment, particularly given that travel is necessary both for conducting the research itself and communicating its results. Tri-council funding has responded in some ways. NSERC has generously extended research deadlines by a year and is providing additional funding for that time. SSHRC and CIHR, however, have only granted extensions without funding and CIHR has canceled this year's Spring Project Grant competition, which is going to hit health researchers hard this fall.

When grants are drying up and competitions are canceled, bridge funding from institutions may be needed, but most institutions do not have the funding to address these shortfalls. Funding shortfalls hit entire research programs and even graduate students, who are supported from faculty grants.

The KDF will be more important than ever to facilitate **recovery**, **innovation**, and **transformation** in research. We cannot stress enough the need for broader funding beyond non-STEM disciplines. Medical historians, for example, created the concept of "flattening the curve" through their historical work on public health measures in the Spanish influenza epidemic of the early twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, social sciences and humanities research will inform public policies and research on global pandemic, and complement the work of medical professionals, economists, and STEM scientists.

The KDF **transformation** we propose would be a bolder, more comprehensive approach to research and would improve upon the KDF as initially envisioned by the province. The research universities continue to be one of the most important sources of creative solutions to the pressing challenges we face as a society. Enhanced investment in the KDF will catapult BC to the forefront of research advancement in all STEAM disciplines; that is, science, technology, engineering, math, and the arts, including humanities, language arts, dance, drama, music, design, and more.

6. Protection from Fluctuating Currency Exchange Rates

Provide institutions with supports for essential US-based resources and supplies affected by fluctuating currency exchange rates, such as online textbooks, journals, and other licenses, as well as lab supplies and reagents for research and teaching needs.

Libraries and archives are responding to the pressures for **transforming** resources to online access, such as textbooks, journals, electronic books, and other licenses. The majority of these online resources are based in US dollars. They are exorbitantly costly in a normal year costing hundreds of thousands of dollars and will be more so as institutions enhance their online repertoire to support research and teaching come fall and winter semesters. Online holdings are not the only things affected by the US exchange rate. Many lab supplies and reagents are purchased from wholesale outlets based in the US, which are costly and necessary for programs.

As the economy fluctuates so too will the exchange rate, making online resources and lab supplies even costlier. Institutions are going to be hard pressed to maintain their online access, even increase it, and stock labs with appropriate supplies to support research and teaching. Institutions will need financial resources to help **recover** losses from external market pressures.



Summary

We have seen colleges and universities across Canada, and especially leaders within BC, stepping up and supporting their communities in this time of need, donating medical equipment and **innovatively** retooling processes to manufacture more. We've seen our students, recent graduates, in medical fields rushing to be of service in support of our health care systems. With the right investment, universities can also continue to play a critical role in building skills and increasing global competitiveness, helping BC **recover** from the social and economic hardships post pandemic.

We know, too, that quality education for our fellow citizens is just as important to the development of our society as it is to our economic **recovery**. Thus, in order to adequately fulfill this responsibility, universities will have to count on stable funding that persists beyond the pandemic. It is crucial to restate the importance of preserving the current programs and faculty and staff complement to ensure that students already registered in our public universities can pursue their programs of study in all disciplines. The same goes for those who would like to attend university in the coming years.

Our strategic priorities address core goals of the 2021 budget by catalyzing action to support **recovery, innovation, and transformation**. In this moment of crisis, the government of British Columbia has an opportunity to shape a forward-thinking agenda for recovery in which we believe post-secondary education can play an important role. Now is the time to make investments in PSE to help universities continue to fulfill their public mission as generators of high-quality research invaluable to the public and private sectors of this province. These investments will also meet the needs of a large student body that depends on university education for a successful future as productive and creative citizens in a diversified and complex knowledge economy.

We thank the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for its willingness to meet with us and to listen to our suggestions for the 2021 provincial budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Jacqueline Holler
President
Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC