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BC's Union for Professionals



University of Victoria  
Faculty Association

April 22, 2024

Dear Premier Eby and Minister Beare,

The undersigned post-secondary unions and student organisations from the University of Victoria (UVic) are writing to express our concerns regarding the budget cuts at UVic and to provide suggestions to the provincial government in addressing these budgetary cuts and layoffs.

First and foremost, the layoffs associated with these budget cuts are unacceptable. They are devastating to the workers and families of those who will lose employment. The University of Victoria is set to cut the operating budget by 13 million dollars in the upcoming fiscal year and many departments will face 4-6 % budget cuts, in some areas even more. These cuts have detrimental effects on our students and workers by reducing the number of classes that can be offered and reducing supports that help instructors be the best teachers they can be, while increasing workloads of remaining instructors and staff and thus negatively affecting the quality of education that can be delivered. Our workers and students should not be punished because of the inherent instability of our current post-secondary funding model, and poor management by UVic's senior administration.

In 2023, tuition made up more than 50% of the operating revenue of post-secondary institutions. This can be directly explained by the fact that public funding of post-secondary institutions has dropped dramatically over the past fifty years. Government funding currently makes up only 41.1% of post-secondary operating revenue. This is a decline from nearly 70% in the early 2000s, 80% in the 1980s, and 90% in the 1970s. This pattern of funding decreases has pushed Colleges and Universities in BC to become over-reliant on tuition fees, particularly from international students, to maintain their financial positions. This puts immense pressure on the student community. Tuition isn't just a number; when it increases, there are concrete impacts. As tuition increases, the campus community changes: the most marginalized students are excluded, and those who remain are increasingly divided. The large number of students who rely upon financial aid are put under increased pressure to perform. As wages fail to increase at the rate of both tuition and housing costs, students have to work longer hours or take on additional debt to continue their studies.

This over-reliance on tuition is unfair to students and has predictably created instability in the post-secondary system. International student enrollment fluctuates over time. With the recent IRCC caps on study permits, UVic and other public institutions are projected to see significant drops in international student enrollment. When significant declines in enrolment occur, post-secondary institutions are forced to slash budgets and lay off staff. The provincial government needs immediately to intervene and stabilise the post-secondary system. While the current provincial budget is a minor step towards improving the funding, it is nowhere near the levels required to return to public funding that existed before 2000. Significant increases in government funding for the post-secondary sector are required to mitigate the negative impacts of fluctuating international student enrolment and federal student caps. We therefore recommend the following measures to stabilise employment and the financial situation in the post-secondary sector:

1. Authorise a funding review of BC post-secondary education with the aim of developing a sustainable funding model based on provincial government funding making up a significantly increased proportion of postsecondary budgets, thus reducing the reliance on tuition fees. Adjust corporate tax levels to ensure there are governmental funds available. As part of the funding review, assess whether the extent of post secondary budgets devoted to senior administration makes up a growing or excessive proportion of post-secondary budgets and whether the province should mandate any realignment, to ensure that post-secondary institutions focus on their core mission and avoid administrative bloat.
2. Stabilise employment to limit the impacts of reductions in international enrollment by providing bridge funding. Access to government bridging funding should be contingent on colleges and universities at least maintaining current employment levels. Provide emergency temporary transfers to colleges and universities to ensure their available revenues remain consistent, accounting for revenue declines from reductions in international enrollment.
3. Allow post-secondary institutions to operate with budgetary deficits until the International Student Caps are lifted. Ensure that there is necessary funding allocated in the institutional budgets for the following key areas:
  - a. On-campus student and worker housing
  - b. Accessible learning
  - c. Health and wellness services
4. Create better accountability mechanisms for investments/funding allocated to post-secondary institutions. Ensure that funding allocated towards workers is used towards the unionised workforce at the university who do the bulk of the work. In the last few years, we have seen substantial growth in the management-excluded positions at UVic, hence better oversight is required in the use of funds. Further, distribute funding equitably across academic units.
5. Alter the Board of Governors composition in the University Act to ensure better representation from within the university community. Currently, the provincial appointees are largely disconnected from the university. An active, informed and engaged group of Board of Governors members will help ensure better oversight over the President and Senior Administration.

We understand there are many demands on government funding. However, given the crucial role that the post-secondary sector plays in ensuring that BC's citizenry is informed about the realities of current social and political challenges, and trained for the opportunities of the future, our colleges and universities need stable funding, not funding that is reliant on the shifting trends of international enrollments. A strong government commitment to us and universities would ensure that they don't have to lay off staff, thereby decreasing the quality of education and creating a negative feedback loop that causes enrolments to decline further. These are concrete goals that can be achieved. Across the world, many nations already ensure universally accessible public funded post-secondary education. It is time for BC to take steps on that path.

Signed,

CUPE 4163, CUPE 951, CUPE 917, the University of Victoria Faculty Association, the Professional Employees Association (PEA) and the University of Victoria Students' Society.

