



## Submission from the BC Association of Institutes and Universities To the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

June 27, 2019

Dear Committee Members, Chair: MLA Bob D’Eith, Deputy Chair: MLA Dan Ashton, Members: MLA Doug Clovechok, MLA Rich Coleman, MLA Mitzi Dean, MLA Ronna-Rae Leonard and MLA Nicholas Simons

The BC Association of Institutes and Universities represents five teaching universities and three institutes in British Columbia – University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), Vancouver Island University (VIU), Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU), Capilano University (CapU), Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECUA+D), BC Institute of Technology (BCIT), Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), and the Justice Institute of BC (JIBC).

A strong, sustainable and accessible post secondary system is a great social equalizer. We offer access to post secondary education for anyone wishing to pursue their life goals. With the rapidly changing economy it is more important than ever that students can not only access the education they need, but also fully participate in the economy. We partner with industry and business, both provincially and regionally, to provide our learners with optimal learning opportunities, and work collaboratively with other public post secondary institutions in British Columbia.

This is an opportune time to express appreciation to the government for supports that have been provided, for example programs that support student success and access. The initiatives to build student housing as well as enhancing levels of student financial support will increase attachment to and completion of post secondary education. New investment in work integrated learning recently announced is essential to engage learners in their education and transition to the workplace.

### **Indigenous Learners**

Consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Calls for Justice in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Report, and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, we are committed to recognising the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, working to develop and maintain respectful long-term relationships, and increase engagement of Indigenous learners. We continue to work to provide specific supports on campuses to Indigenous students and work actively in communities to encourage participation in post secondary education.

This commitment requires ongoing resources for programs and initiatives developed with Indigenous partners, to ensure our system is relevant and effective. We call on the government to consider appropriate, stable financial support within an effective policy framework to support Indigenous Adult Higher Learning Association schools, as these important institutions are often the first place that Indigenous learners begin their journey into the world of post secondary education.

Creating pathways for Indigenous students to move from the K-12 system in to post secondary education, so that they feel they have a place there, is another area where more supports are needed.

### **Financial Flexibility**

BCAIU institutions acknowledge and appreciate the significant investments in post secondary student housing. However, as is the case with BC's college sector, accounting policy restrictions and inconsistencies hamper our ability to utilise existing financial resources to respond to demand. Inconsistencies in approaches in the K-12 versus post secondary systems include the ability to operate with deficits consistent with provisions under the School Act, and the ability to access Retained Earnings for student housing and other capital projects. This matter has been raised with the Select Standing Committee in the past, and we continue to work with the Ministry of Advanced Education on these matters. Changes in accounting policy would allow us to better support our students and our communities, within the existing financial envelope.

### **Funding for Graduate Programs**

It has been over ten years since the Teaching Universities were created through amendments to the University Act. Since that time, these institutions have worked to further develop and enhance their mandates and their roles in the regions and the province. Several Teaching Universities along with BCIT offer graduate level programs, but these programs are not fully funded. The BC Graduate Scholarship Program announced earlier this year and recent funding announced for master's programs through NVIT are important steps and we should build on this progress. We recommend that government consider funding graduate spaces to ensure that the necessary talent will exist to continue to fuel BC's rapidly changing economy and support the Research Universities Council recommendation on funding graduate spaces.

### **Student Supports**

We have a duty to ensure our campuses are safe, and we have implemented enhanced policy and practice to end sexual violence and harassment, but there is more to do. We need to provide integrated health teams, additional counsellors, and other programs to ensure that our students are not only safe, but also supported in terms of their mental health and we recommend government increase financial support.

We appreciate the recent announcement around "A Pathway to Hope", providing better access to mental health and addictions care, and support increased funding so that our institutions can integrate programs like these into our existing services to students.

## Research and Innovation

The Research Universities Council submission recommended a targeted provincial investment in research and innovation to take advantage of opportunities to leverage matching federal funding. We support this recommendation, and several of our member institutions are partners in the Digital Technology Supercluster. However, provincial funding for research and innovation is less than in Quebec, Alberta and Ontario and is below the national average.

Strengthening relationships between industry and post secondary results in innovative programs that reflect dynamic and evolving work environments. The design of programs is applied, relevant and current, and collaboration across disciplines helps students understand the interconnectedness between disciplines. As a result, students moving into work are better prepared for complex work environments, and are therefore better able to participate in, and support, a dynamic new economy.

Investment in research and innovation plays a key role in driving innovation and economic growth, and we believe progress must be made to close this gap.

We thank the Committee for this opportunity.



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