

2023 PROVINCIAL **BUDGET** SUBMISSION

Recommendations from the TRU Students' Union to the BC Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services in advance of the 2023 Provincial Budget.



Expand the BC Access Grant

Students across the province have consistently advocated for need-based grants because they are targeted to students with financial need, provided at the time of when the largest costs of education are due, and transparent, therein allowing students to be sure of their financial position before incurring the costs of education. Compared to other forms of student finance aid, these characteristics uniquely position need-based grants to increase participation in post-secondary education, completion of studies, and transition into employment.

The Federal government has doubled the Canada Student Grants program for 3 years starting in the 2020/21 academic year. This has increased the maximum grant for low-income students from \$3000 per academic year to \$6000 in federal funding for programs longer than two years in length.

This increase will be expiring at the end of the 2022/23 school year though. As the increase in federal grants money returns to normal levels there will be students across BC facing rapidly increasing costs for food, transportation, housing, and other areas. This is an opportunity for the BC Government to invest in the future through increasing accessibility to post-secondary education.

Our recommendation therefor is that the BC Government increase the value of the BC Access Grant starting in fall 2023 to make up for a reduction in federal funding.

Create a Provincial Strategy for International Students

Thompson Rivers University has a large number of international students, with over 3500 currently enrolled. With only approximately 8000 students enrolled in a given semester on campus at the institution this is a significant number. This has led to a corresponding increase in revenue from international student tuition as well, with the 2022/23 budget anticipating \$67.8 million from international students. This is significantly higher than anticipated domestic student revenue at \$41.9 million.

TRU is not unique in the province in this regard either. Across BC colleges and universities have a growing number of international students, and a corresponding budgetary reliance on their tuition dollars.

There are significant benefits for communities, and the province more broadly, in hosting international students. They are a significant economic driver, spending money in local economies and paying large amounts of taxes. They also bring soft benefits as well through enriching our communities in a wide variety of ways.

But despite the significant role international education plays in our provincial economy, the entire sector has largely grown without any broad strategic plan. Each post-secondary institution across BC tends to recruit as many international students as they believe they can accommodate and charges fees at a level they believe students will pay.

BC needs a new strategy for international students that ensures that international education continues to benefit post-secondary institutions, communities, and the province as a whole at a time when the entire sector is particularly vulnerable. We believe that the provincial government needs to have a stronger role in this important part of our economy.

Restore Apprenticeship Offices to Support Post Secondary Trades Students

In Summer 2021 the BC Government announced that they would be bringing back mandatory trades certifications for trades workers in the province. This rollout be phased in across a number of trades leading into 2024. As an organization representing post-secondary students, particularly where a large number of our members are engaged in trades training, we applaud the BC Government for this move. Compulsory trades training will help to ensure that workplaces have a high level of safety, all workers are appropriately trained, and that our members are paid fairly.

In the long term this program will help provide clear pathways to trades through post-secondary education. But in the shorter term there will be an increased number of students seeking certification in order to continue to work in their chosen field. With this increasing demand on post-secondary campuses across BC there will be a greater corresponding number of students looking for financial support, employment support, and career counselling.

In order to meet this need for greater support for trades students we are recommending that the BC Government restore apprenticeship offices at post-secondary institutions across the province. Some of the services that were provided by apprenticeship offices in BC up until 2003 are currently provided by the Industry Training Authority (ITA), but in many ways this model has fallen short in adequately supporting students. Institution specific apprenticeship offices would be much better placed to help meet the unique needs of trades students across the province. These offices would be able to take a

much stronger role in connecting students to employers throughout the apprenticeship process, identify students struggling financially, and provide other supports for students. In other words, we believe that apprenticeship offices at each institution could be much more successful in tailoring their approach and services to what their students need.



