

Hi, my name is Crystal Yamak and I am a 2nd year student currently studying supply chain management at Thompson Rivers University. I am also currently serving as the Campaigns Committee Representative for the Thompson Rivers University Students Union which provides Advocacy, Services, and Entertainment to the 29,000 students who study at Thompson Rivers University.

I would like to begin by thanking you for the opportunity to share our recommendations for how the 2026 British Columbia Budget could and should invest in the post-secondary education system. We believe that completing the post-secondary funding review and expanding the BC Access Grant are not only investments that will benefit students and their families but that are also timely given the current financial crisis facing BC's universities and colleges.

Let's begin with our recommendation to complete the provincial post-secondary review. As you may or may not be aware the Thompson Rivers University Students Union has been working on the issue of funding since 2014. At the time TRU ranked 18th out of 25 post-secondary institutions in BC in per student funding and over 5000 individuals, several regional municipalities, and a large number of community organizations joined together with us under the "Fund the Future" campaign banner to call for a review of the provinces funding model. Before jumping to the position of "give us more money" we thought it prudent to attempt to better understand how the existing model was allocating public dollars and why? So as you can imagine we were very excited in 2022 when the government committed to conducting a system wide review. As good faith participants our students' union both organized a stakeholder engagement session and made a written submission to the review. Nearly four years later nothing. No response, no report, no next steps. As if the whole thing never happened. While some of our colleagues have appeared before you and have requested specific amounts of money in new funding or funding that meets a certain percentage of their university or college budget. Our request is not that but is the same as it has been since 2014 and as the government committed to do in 2022. Review the current post-secondary education system funding model and publish that report. Ideally we would have done this before the current financial situation in the sector became dire for many institutions. If then was best. Now is second best. We simply cannot have an informed conversation about how this system might need to move forward into the future unless there is a shared understanding of how it is being funded now and how that model is working or not working. We urge you to complete and publish this review.

Our second recommendation is to expand the BC Access grant. In 2020 the government introduced the BC Access grant as a form of non-repayable financial aid. The literature is clear. First, that the BC Access grant reduces real and perceived financial barriers leading

to increased enrollments. Enrollments that are more important now than ever. And second, that the BC Access Grant increases a student's likelihood of completion. As a student's share of non-repayable student financial aid (grants) increases and their share of repayable financial aid (student loans) decreases the probability of that student graduating increases. Given the high demand for public tax dollars across a range of sectors and the importance of graduating folks to become the next labour force and tax base. Maximizing the public investment in students is a no brainer. Growing the BC Access Grant and reducing dependency on student loans and ultimately post-graduation debt will both attract new students into the system and maximize the investment in students already in the system. In short increasing the BC Access Grant is good for students, for taxpayers, and for the economy. We recommend a gradual and continual increase to the BC Access Grant.

This concludes our recommendations for you here today. We would again like to thank you for your time and consideration and we are happy to take any questions you may have.