

# **Response to Campus 2020 Final Report**

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**Federation of Post-Secondary Educators**

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## **Introduction**

The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Campus 2020 report *Access and Excellence: The Campus 2020 Plan for British Columbia's Post-Secondary Education System*. The report is the culmination of a public review process launched in the fall of 2006. That process included a number of public forums and planning sessions, as well as submissions from citizens and stakeholders concerned about the future of post-secondary education in British Columbia.

In our response to the Campus 2020 final report, we have identified seven critical areas where we believe the Minister needs to reconsider or amend the advice that has been offered. Those areas include strategic direction and values, governance, affordability and access, funding, degree granting status, regulation of private post-secondary institutions, and trades training and apprenticeship programs.

## **Setting the Context**

Part of the rationale for launching the Campus 2020 review was to ensure that BC's post-secondary education system was meeting the current and future needs of our province. There is no question that BC's post-secondary education system has undergone significant change — particularly in the last few years — after the current government, in its first mandate, moved to deregulate tuition fees, allowed private colleges and training institutes to “self-regulate”, and instituted a new system for trades training and apprenticeships.

During this first mandate, the new government also limited funding increases to the public post-secondary system. Its stated fiscal priorities were to support cuts in personal and corporate tax rates. Moreover, it believed that with higher tuition fees, post-secondary institutions would now have

additional revenue to make up for shortfalls in provincial government operating grants to post-secondary institutions. Later in this document we will discuss the impact of those shortfalls, but the important context point to make here is that these policy and funding choices set the tone for how the post-secondary education system would function.

Six years into those initial reforms it has become apparent that many of the policy and funding decisions taken have not yielded the kind of outcomes that would have justified the changes in the first place. Skyrocketing tuitions fees have placed a serious financial burden on students and their families. Not surprisingly, public opinion for the government's deregulated approach to tuition fees has been losing ground. In September 2006, FPSE released an Ipsos Reid poll showing that two-thirds of British Columbians felt tuition fees were "too high". That number has grown steadily over the preceding two years, a strong indication that deregulated tuition fees do not enjoy majority support in our province.

Similar problems have developed in the area of private colleges, where so-called self-regulation has proven to be a major failure. The inability of private colleges and institutes to effectively police themselves has cost students money and lost time, and has damaged BC's reputation internationally.

We have also seen problems with the "new model" for trades training in the Industry Training Authority (ITA). Completion rates for apprenticeships dropped by 40 per cent between 2001 and 2005. Although they improved slightly during 2006, they are still well below the level recorded in 2001, an outcome that has made the current skills shortage just that much worse.

Against that backdrop, a review of post-secondary education makes good sense. The reforms introduced five-and-a-half years ago have not strengthened our capacity as a province to meet the demands of a changing economy, a changing workforce, and a broader public interested in pursuing "life long learning".

Initially, we had doubts that Mr. Plant could bring the necessary objectivity to that review. As a former Cabinet Minister from 2001 to 2005, he was part of the decision-making process that approved many of the policy and funding choices we now realize were misguided. To what extent could Mr. Plant now stand in judgment of decisions to which he would have been party as a Cabinet Minister at that time? In reading his report, we find that on many of the core problems within the post-secondary education system — chronic underfunding, high cost of deregulated tuitions, etc. — his review stays close to the government’s own view that their initial choices from the first mandate were the right choices.

Where the policy changes from the first mandate have gone seriously off-track — “self-regulation” of private colleges, a new model for trades training — his recommendations are somewhat tepid: add more “independent” appointees to the regulatory body for private colleges, and conduct an independent review of the ITA. Hardly the kind of remedial action necessary to fix either problem, but at least he is prepared to acknowledge that there are problems.

Our expectations going into this review were that the final report would deal in a more substantial way with these larger problems. Unfortunately, that hasn’t happened but the report has re-ignited a debate both within government and the broader public about what kind of reforms are necessary within our post-secondary education system, and how those reforms will improve access to and opportunities within that system. The debate has already begun and our Federation intends to play an active role in expanding that discussion.

As that process rolls out over the coming weeks and months we will continue to stress our concerns about what is missing in terms of substantial new recommendations from the Campus 2020 document, as well as how to re-cast the current recommendations to make them better. As noted earlier, we have focused our comments on seven critical areas. We have

summarized our comments on each and suggested ways to either amend or strengthen those recommendations to achieve better results.

## **1. Strategic Direction and Values**

Mr. Plant deals at some length with the strategic direction and values that need to guide BC's post-secondary education system over the next thirteen years. His approach is to incorporate key values and policy directives that he believes will strengthen our current system. While FPSE agrees with his general approach, we have deep concerns about values and strategic directions that are missing. For example, our current public system operates with significant opportunities for real public input and public oversight. In fact, the mandates of our public post-secondary institutions, especially our community colleges, institutes and university colleges, are quite specific in requiring those institutions to both respond to and incorporate the needs of their local community in their programming and operating decisions.

In Mr. Plant's report, much of that input and oversight is at risk. Real accountability and institutional autonomy are not strengthened by the values and strategic direction that the Campus 2020 report details. Moreover, we believe Mr. Plant's approach may well diminish public input at the institutional level, a move that we see undermining the democratization of our post-secondary education system in BC.

Mr. Plant's report also itemizes a series of post-secondary "targets" to guide the progress and successful implementation of BC's Access and Excellence Strategy. Certainly, the words and sentiments would be difficult to challenge. However, the real test in terms of strategic direction and values comes from his recommended timeline for implementation. While he proposes to increase participation rates within eight years, ensuring that there is equality across income quartiles in those participation rates won't happen for at least thirteen years.

What's misguided about this approach is that the current tuition fee policy has been the most detrimental to BC's low income students. They are the most adversely affected and most likely to postpone or cancel their post-secondary education, yet any attempt to address that imbalance is given the lowest priority in his overall plan.

We maintain that, if the government is serious about increasing participation rates, it needs to concentrate its support for students and learning on those who have been most adversely affected by the initial policy choices implemented in 2002.

We also question whether research funding should be ranked (in terms of timeline) ahead of broader funding for all post-secondary institutions. Again, the entire public post-secondary system has suffered as real per-student operating grants have declined. Reversing that decline should have greater priority than simply addressing the narrower target of research funding.

Two additional points on direction and values need to be emphasized. If you consider the timeline priority that Mr. Plant gives to research — his research targets are met by 2010, while all other targets are met by either 2015 or 2020 — and his recommendation that research funding be restricted to universities, the bias in these directions and values tilts heavily in favour of established, metropolitan universities. Colleges and "Regional Universities" would, under Mr. Plant's blueprint, be excluded from any meaningful participation in research.

That sends the wrong signal to the post-secondary education system. Innovation and scholarly activity are part of every post-secondary institution, but the Campus 2020 report will greatly limit that activity. The Minister should re-consider Mr. Plant's advice on these points and work to ensure that all institutions are able to access research funding.

One final point that needs to be emphasized in the area of strategic direction and values is the unwillingness of the Campus 2020 report drafters to consider new options to increase participation rates. As part of an overall strategy, for example, it

makes good sense to look at ways to encourage students to move from K-12 to post-secondary by making the first two years of post-secondary more affordable. The Campus 2020 report could have advanced the concept of lowering tuition fees at community colleges in order to encourage greater participation and, ultimately, greater completion rates. These options were not seriously addressed and, as a result, opportunities to increase access and improve affordability have been frustrated.

## **2. Governance**

The most substantial recommendations in the final report deal with governance. The centerpiece of those governance recommendations calls for the establishment of at least two new entities: the Higher Education Presidents' Council and the Higher Education Board. The Council would be responsible for implementing the Access and Excellence Strategy. The new Higher Education Board would facilitate collaboration and planning within the provincial post-secondary education system. Both structures have merit; however, who is included, how they are supported, and to what extent they are publicly accountable all make an enormous difference to whether these recommended governance structures will improve our post-secondary education system.

From the brief description in his report, Mr. Plant's recommendations to establish a Presidents' Council and a Higher Education Board seem to be derived from the Health Authority model that has been used to consolidate the delivery of health care in BC. The Health Authority model has had problems, not the least of which are the delivery of public access, accountability and oversight. To what extent Plant's recommendations will lead to the same problems in post-secondary education is a serious concern to FPSE, and one that we hope the Minister is prepared to address head-on. We agree that collaboration internally within our system makes sense. However, the authority model often leads to a system in which public input and scrutiny of a public service are

further removed from the very public that the authority is supposed to be serving.

The new governance structures proposed in this report will add to the administrative layer that currently exists within the public post-secondary education system. The Minister needs to seriously question whether this is the most effective allocation of resources. Given that the Campus 2020 report makes no substantial recommendations to improve per-student funding, the new governance structures will eat into already inadequate funding levels. That makes no sense given the ongoing problems associated with chronic under-funding.

The new governance structures raise another important question about Mr. Plant's report: he has been virtually silent on the role of the Ministry in his vision for the futures. For a skeptical public, that omission may well signal less public input and public oversight. British Columbians legitimately expect that their public institutions, funded by public dollars, should be accountable to elected representatives. Mr. Plant's new governance structures limits that accountability and raises serious questions about what role the Ministry will play in the future to ensure that accountability remains in place.

The new governance structures also raise serious questions about how existing institutions will develop consensus when there are such enormous differences in size, operation and mandate. How will the proposed Presidents' Council balance the interests of small rural colleges, for example, with those of urban university colleges or universities? To what extent will the Ministry of Advanced Education play a role in this structure to protect the broader public interest? Many important and detailed questions will arise that will need to be addressed up front if the government and various stakeholders are to be able to properly benefit from these governance recommendations.

We are also troubled by the suggestion that private post-secondary institutions would play an active role in these new governance structures. Over the last four years, the problem of self-regulation of these private institutions has become more

apparent. Those institutions need to be re-regulated, a change that should be a pre-condition to their participation in any new governance structure.

### **3. Affordability and Access**

It's unfortunate that the Campus 2020 report did not recommend changes that would lead to a lowering of tuition fees for post-secondary education. Although it did call for the elimination of fees for Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs — a move our organization supports and applauds Mr. Plant for making — the broader question of affordability and access has been ignored. BC has the fiscal capacity to make meaningful improvements in affordability and access, but this report is only recommending changes that will entrench the high cost of post-secondary education, not lower it.

We also found it disturbing that the report had little to say on important issues like English as a Second Language training or improving support in Developmental Education. Both of these initiatives play a central role in improving participation and completion rates in post-secondary education, but the final report recommends little in the way of funding or policy changes that will allow that to happen.

It's important to emphasize that if the Minister accepts Mr. Plant's recommendations on making ABE tuition-free, post-secondary institutions need to be compensated for this policy change. The funding crunch at post-secondary institutions would only be made worse if the policy change did not include compensating increases in operating grants.

The question of affordability and access goes well beyond the issue of tuition fees. A student is able to participate in the post-secondary education system because a broad range of supports are in place. They include administrative supports, counseling services, specialized programming and teaching support. The move to block funding has threatened most of these supports.

In several cases, block funding has completely eliminated these programs.

Affordability is also affected by the shift to ancillary fees at every institution. In many cases, these fees can add as much as 30% to the total cost of enrolling in post-secondary programs.

As well, affordability includes housing and transportation. For thousands of post-secondary students, those costs stifle the opportunity to more fully participate – more and more students opt to go only part-time in order to balance work and school demands. These concerns have not been adequately dealt with by the report.

By failing to respond to these affordability problems, Mr. Plant's report has missed an important opportunity. Talented students are being discouraged by rising costs and this report provides little comfort or guidance on how those affordability problems will be addressed in the future.

## **4. Funding**

One of the major frustrations we find in Mr. Plant's report is his failure to tackle the question of block funding. In 2002, the provincial government made a critical policy change when it moved to block funding of public post-secondary institutions. The move wiped out valuable programs and support services, many of which ensured that more vulnerable students had better opportunities to participate in post-secondary education. Those students have, for the most part, disappeared. Mr. Plant's recommendations will do very little to bring those students back. The Minister should re-consider the policy of block funding and look at new ways to ensure greater participation.

The public post-secondary system has seen real per-student funding of operating grants decline since 2001. The system can't meet targets unless it is given the resources necessary to reach

those targets. To do otherwise is a cynical exercise designed to side-step responsibility and avoid real scrutiny.

In our written submission to Campus 2020 we talked about the importance of proper funding and the need to move on recommendations detailed in a recent report by Perrin, Thoreau and Associates. This report was initially commissioned by the Ministry of Advanced Education to try to resolve funding inequities between post-secondary institutions. However, the report's analysis provides an important reference point for Campus 2020.

Although there are several recommendations in the Perrin report that FPSE finds problematic (e.g., the continuation of block funding for colleges and university colleges), we find much of the analysis useful in understanding why post-secondary institutions are struggling to improve access and expand programs. For example, Perrin suggests that there should be a shift from actual to mandated FTEs as a primary performance measure. Our concern is that, while we agree that FTE counts are a flawed measure of performance which often fail to capture specific conditions at individual institutions, we see merit in the suggestion that the objective of funding should be to support teaching capacity at the institutional level.

Our experience with actual FTEs over the last five years has been that they are an ineffective way to offset broader problems brought on by tuition fee deregulation and system-wide underfunding of operating grants. It has been particularly hard for smaller rural colleges whose potential student base has been discouraged by rising tuition costs and the prospect of fewer program options or long wait-lists for preferred programs. In many respects, the government's policy choices have, for some institutions, created a downward spiral in which actual FTE counts become contributing factors to a further downward trend.

Of course, not all post-secondary institutions have suffered the same ill effects from higher tuition fees and real declines in per-student operating grants. Certainly, BC's two largest universities

have been better able to withstand any adverse effects. Their fund-raising capacity far exceeds that of other post-secondary institutions in the province. As well, the majority of their student base is drawn from households capable of adjusting to rising tuition costs.

One of Perrin's most important contributions to the analysis of the fiscal crunch affecting post-secondary institutions comes from his assessments of how inflationary pressures have been consistently under-funded. In combination with his analysis of the problems with FTE measurements, his report makes a strong case for increasing core funding for colleges and university colleges. His recommendations call for an immediate 5.6 per cent or \$25.8 million increase in the operating grants of colleges and university colleges for the 2005/06 budget year. He also notes that special adjustments need to be made for rural colleges whose size and operating conditions require added base support from the provincial government. At the very least, the government needs to endorse the funding improvements outlined in the Perrin reports. The opportunity that the Campus 2020 report provides to make those fiscal commitments should not be lost.

## **5. Degree Granting Status**

The Campus 2020 report recommends removing degree granting status from community colleges. The recommendation is controversial and has created enough confusion within the public system that the Minister has had to issue a statement clarifying the status of degree granting colleges.

We see significant problems in the report's recommendations. We believe that community colleges and university colleges play a major and efficient role in improving participation and completion rates in post-secondary education. This is particularly true for BC's non-metropolitan communities, where access to a local community college means not having to leave one's community to attend post-secondary classes.

It seems inconsistent for Mr. Plant to stress the importance of “learning where you live” and then to recommend the removal of degree granting status from community colleges. The recommendation will further erode enrolment in these colleges at a time when we should be looking for ways to build that enrolment.

It’s worth noting that for many students who first attend college before transferring to university to complete a degree, their completion rates are often higher than for the average direct-entry student moving from K-12 to university. System-wide data is not available but, for some institutions, the results are very significant: one study showed that 90 per cent of those transferring from a college to a university completed, while only 55 per cent of direct-entry students did so. That kind of difference should be of great interest to a government that wants to increase participation and completion rates in post-secondary education.

We believe the Minister should reject Mr. Plant’s recommendations on removing degree granting status from community colleges. It will limit the capacity of the public post-secondary system to improve participation and completion rates across the province.

We also believe the Minister needs to re-examine the effectiveness of the Degree Quality Assessment Board. In a 2005 submission to the Minister, FPSE outlined our concerns with DQAB. Those concerns have not been addressed and the current review provides an opportunity to look for a more inclusive model for the DQAB.

## **6. Regulation of Private Post-Secondary Institutions**

The final report from Campus 2020 makes only modest recommendations for strengthening the regulation of private post-secondary institutions. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of policy and funding choices over the last five

years has been the steady and deliberate encouragement of private post-secondary institutions and trainers. The provincial government has, in many respects, gone out of its way to encourage the expansion of those institutions without any substantial regard for the uneven policy and regulatory consequences of that preference.

Our fundamental concern is that private post-secondary institutions have none of the accountability mechanisms that are well-established features of our public system. Basic governance, for example, in the private institutions is a closed book. Board meetings have no provisions for public, community or student input. The concept of Education Councils or Senates, which are the mainstays of every public institution in BC, is unheard of at BC's private institutions.

The unfortunate fact is that the less transparent and accountable a private institution becomes, the more likely it is that problems will arise and that students will be adversely affected. That is certainly the case at Kingston College where questionable practices have left students short-changed (some have lost as much as \$8,000 in tuition fees). Of far greater concern, however, is that the black mark against Kingston becomes a black mark against the reputation of BC's entire post-secondary education system.

How many more Kingston Colleges are there? No one knows. In fact, the current "self-regulating" approach for private post-secondary institutions raises concern that Kingston College was far from an isolated incident.

Adding "independent" board members to an existing regulatory body does not begin to address the problem. Private institutions need to meet the same scrutiny as public institutions do. The Minister needs to move on this issue immediately.

## **7. Trades and Technical Training**

The so-called new model for trades training and apprenticeships is not working. Since it was established four years ago, the Industry Training Authority (ITA) has failed to meet even the most basic demands for skilled trades in our province.

The Campus 2020 report calls on the government to do an independent review of ITA. That recommendation is far too modest. The organization needs to be substantially reformed, starting with its Board which is dominated by employer interests. Students, post-secondary institutions (which deliver more than 90 per cent of trades training in the province) and workers deserve equal representation on that Board to ensure that training is meaningful and is recognized across Canada.

FPSE also questions whether the proposed review of ITA will provide timely reforms to make trades training more effective. In submissions to the Minister of Finance on the question of training tax credits, we detailed our concerns with the lack of labour input within ITA. As well, we have concerns in terms of increasing opportunities for women in trades as well as under-represented groups and visible minorities.

## **8. Other Issues**

The Campus 2020 report fails to properly address a number of other issues. We have already mentioned our concerns about the virtual silence in the report on the role of the Ministry. That's a troubling omission. We also question why the Campus 2020 report did not deal in a more substantial way with English as a second language (ESL) programs. Demographic shifts in BC's population will increase the need for ESL programs. However, the Campus 2020 report makes only passing references to those needs and provides little guidance to government on how best to meet those demands over the next thirteen years.

The report also fails to recognize the important contribution and role that community colleges, institutes and university colleges play in the area of research. Mr. Plant's recommendations call

for a re-organization that would completely eliminate those institutions from accessing research funding. The recommendation makes no sense and completely ignores the fact that several federally funded research chairs are attached to both community colleges and university colleges. His recommendations, if implemented, would seriously undermine the continuation of these research positions.

## **Conclusion**

FPSE appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Campus 2020 report. We are particularly interested in the role that the Minister's Advisory Committee will play in evaluating various options associated with the report's recommendations. We hope that the Committee will be given the opportunity to review those options before any final decisions are made on legislation or budget matters.

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