

*Mayor Shirley Ackland
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June 08, 2016

Dear Mayor and Council:

As both a local government leader and a post-secondary educator, I know how important a robust, fully-funded, public post-secondary system is to our province. Education is both a social and economic driver. It leads to better paying jobs, improved social and health outcomes, and a more engaged population within our communities. That's why the Port McNeill Council is so concerned about the direction the provincial government has been taking in post-secondary education.

Since 2001, operating grants to public post-secondary institutions have decreased by 27 per cent, when adjusted for inflation. Cash-strapped colleges and universities are shifting that burden onto students: in that same period, student fees have increased by nearly 400 per cent.

Yet as students are paying more for their education, they're getting less for their money. The BC 2024 Labour Market Outlook predicts that 78 per cent of the projected one million job openings will require post-secondary education. Since the launch of the Skills for Jobs Blueprint in 2014, institutions have been required to direct at least 25 per cent of their public funding to targeted programs that will serve specific jobs, designated by the government. That means that government is choosing career paths for students, rather than allowing them to choose for themselves. This threatens to undermine economic diversity and student success.

Last year, the policy granting free tuition to domestic students in Adult Basic Education and English Language programs was rescinded. Now, students have to pay as much as \$1,600 per semester or \$550 per course for high school-level courses.

Post-secondary education is about more than the jobs the government has chosen for students. Narrowly funding programs that only match what might be up and coming jobs will lead to failure in the long-term. Not only is it completely unfair for the students, forcing public colleges and universities to cut back in other areas limits choice, reduces flexibility and doesn't foster a truly diversified economy.

I'm writing to you today to urge you and your council to join us in asking the Premier and her Ministers to invest in our communities and the people who live, work, and learn in them, by investing in post-secondary education.

I'm asking your Council to adopt the enclosed resolution, to submit it for consideration to the UBCM Convention, and to ask other Local Government leaders to do the same. Please feel free to share this letter and the enclosures with other municipal leaders to support that effort.

Let's work together to increase access and affordability for all public, post-secondary institutions. It's time to open the doors to better choices and better opportunities for all British Columbians.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shirley Ackland', written in a cursive style.

Shirley Ackland
Mayor

President, North Island College Faculty Association (FPSE Local 16)

SAMPLE RESOLUTION FOR COUNCIL

Whereas education is both an economic and social driver, and therefore of benefit to local communities; and

Whereas two major changes in Advanced Education policy in the past two years (the elimination of tuition-free Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language programs and the launch of the Skills for Jobs Blueprint) have had a dramatic negative effect on student choices and access to post- secondary programs for BC students;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that Council endorse the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators' "Open the Doors" campaign and pledge support for a fully-funded, public post-secondary system; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Council requests the Mayor to write a letter to Minister of Education Mike Bernier, Minister of Advanced Education Andrew Wilkinson, and Premier Christy Clark requesting the Government of British Columbia to restore full funding to BC's public post-secondary system, including free tuition for Adult Basic Education and English language programs; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that this motion be submitted to the convention of the Union of BC Municipalities before the June 30, 2016 deadline.

BACKGROUNDER ON POST-SECONDARY FUNDING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Public post-secondary education in BC is experiencing a funding crisis. The largest single investment the BC government makes in post-secondary education – the per-student operating grants – has declined by 27% since 2001, when adjusted for inflation. Consequently, colleges and universities are forced to seek other sources of funding to make up the shortfall. The cost of post-secondary education has primarily been shifted to students, as tuition fees have increased by almost 400% since 2001. Institutions are also seeking private and corporate sources of funding, which are having a larger influence on our public education system.

In addition to the funding crisis, BC's Skills for Jobs Blueprint limits students' program choices by directing them into the career streams the government has determined as priorities. This Blueprint, combined with the funding squeeze, means that institutions have reduced or even eliminated other programs. University transfer, Adult Basic Education, and English language programs have all been negatively affected.

FUNDING FACTS

- Provincial revenue from tuition and ancillary fees is currently \$1.67 billion, and will be \$1.92 billion by 2018. It was \$450 million in 2001.
- Student debt averages nearly \$30,000 after completing a four-year degree program.
- Per-student operating grants (approximately \$1.78 billion) have declined by 27% since 2001 (after adjusting for inflation).
- Government cut \$6.9 million in Adult Basic Education funding in 2014, and revoked the policy of providing tuition-free ABE. Government now spends \$7.6 million for the Adult Upgrading Grant.
- Eligibility for the Adult Upgrading Grant is limited to students earning less than \$23,700 annually, or just over \$11 per hour for a full-time worker.
- English language programs for domestic students were tuition-free until 2014, funded through a \$22 million federal transfer payment.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- The funding formula is not adapted for specific community needs. Rural community colleges and large urban ones are all funded based on estimates of student FTEs.
- The funding formula requires post-secondary institutions to view students as "revenue-generating units," rather than as learners and contributors to an education community, and beyond that, as economic and social contributors to the communities in which they live.
- The Skills for Jobs Blueprint views post-secondary only as job training, devaluing its critical role in developing engaged citizens. This Blueprint requires institutions to direct up to 25% of their operating grants to programs supporting their "Top 100 Jobs."
- Executive salaries: the number of senior administrators has increased by 50% since 2002, and their pay has almost doubled over the same period. There is currently a freeze on executive compensation but reclassifications or new classifications get around that.
- Public institutions are being encouraged to seek private sources of funding or developing infrastructure through P3s.

SAMPLE LETTER TO MINISTERS

Honourable Andrew Wilkinson, MLA
Minister of Advanced Education
Parliament Buildings, Rm 133
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

June 30, 2016

Dear Minister Wilkinson,

On behalf of Council and the **Town of Port McNeill**, I am writing to request that the provincial government restore full funding to public post-secondary institutions, including reinstating free tuition for Adult Basic Education and English language programs.

Education is both a social and economic driver. It leads to better paying jobs, improved social and health outcomes, and a more engaged population within our communities. The BC 2024 Labour Market Outlook predicts that 78 per cent of the projected one million job openings will require post-secondary education. We need an accessible and affordable post-secondary system to ensure our communities will have the educated workforce needed to fill these jobs.

Since 2001, per-student operating grants have declined by 27 percent, after adjusting for inflation, while tuition fees have increased nearly fourfold. Squeezed by funding shortfalls, colleges and universities are shifting the financial burden onto students.

Additionally, the elimination of free tuition for English language programs and Adult Basic Education programs has denied the access our more marginalized and vulnerable residents need to upgrade their skills and pursue new and better careers. The Adult Upgrading Grant, intended to offset the financial cost of the tuition fees, sets an income threshold that excludes many students who previously would have been able to access these programs but who can no longer afford to do so.

Post-secondary education is a stepping stone to opportunity, allowing our residents to become more meaningful participants in the workforce, gaining the trade and professional skills needed to sustain a viable economy.

Our students represent a bright, prosperous and sustainable future for British Columbia. Providing fully-funded, affordable and accessible public colleges and universities not only increases social equality, but also economic stability in our communities. The social return on investment is high; by improving their lives, students are contributing to the health of their families, our communities and to the economy. I am therefore writing to state our support for public post-secondary education, and to request that the Province invest in the future of our province by increasing post-secondary funding today.

Sincerely,

[Mayor's name]