



**Council Member Motion  
For the City Council Meeting of July 23, 2015**

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**To:** Council

**Date:** July 17, 2015

**From:** Councillor Jeremy Loveday and Councillor Isitt

**Subject:** Support for Adult Basic Education

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**Background:**

Adult Basic Education, which until recently included tuition-free secondary school level courses, assists many residents of Victoria, including new immigrants, single parents, and young workers who didn't finish high school.

Adult Basic Education is essential in helping people to access post-secondary school, qualify for skills and trades programs, and realize careers that pay a living wage.

In December 2014, the Province of British Columbia reversed its policy to offer free basic education to adults. As of January 1 2015, colleges and universities can charge for secondary school classes and as of May 1, 2015 school districts will no longer be able to offer classes to high school graduates who would like to take classes to upgrade their marks or take classes to further their study or work.

**Motion:**

Be it resolved that Council requests the Mayor to write a letter to Minister Peter Fastbender stating support for Adult Basic Education and requesting the Ministry to reinstate funding for Adult Basic Education programs and that the letter be copied to the Canadian Federation of Students BC, the Camosun College Student Society and the University of Victoria Student Society.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Loveday".

Councillor Jeremy Loveday

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Isitt".

Councillor Ben Isitt

## New financial barriers will further restrict access

Adult basic education (ABE) includes foundational education in basic literacy and numeracy up to and including high school completion, as well as academic upgrading and employment preparation courses. Currently, ABE is offered through the K-12 system and at eighteen public post-secondary institutions across the province.

ABE has been tuition-free in BC since the BC Liberal government of Gordon Campbell eliminated ABE tuition fees in 2007 [1].

"We are helping people upgrade their education so they can take advantage of our growing economy and enjoy rewarding careers," said former BC Liberal Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell in 2007. "We're acting on the Campus 2020 report by offering free tuition for adult basic education, whether students have graduated from high school or not. We're also going beyond that by helping more adult learners pay for books, transportation and child care."

On December 4, 2014, the provincial government announced a \$6.9 million cut to adult basic education programming at public post-secondary institutions in BC and removed the tuition-free ABE mandate. As of January 1, 2015, public post-secondary institutions were allowed to charge up to \$1,600 per term in tuition fees for full-time ABE courses [2].

Beginning May 1, 2015, the provincial government will no longer fund school districts for tuition-free upgrading courses for adults with high school diplomas, cutting an additional \$9 million from ABE.

### Grants Don't Cut It

The BC government claims that low-income adults can apply for a grant to cover the new tuition fees, but their definition of "low-income" will shut out thousands. The Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG) is only available to those making \$23,647 or less. This means that if a person makes \$11.37 per hour or more, they are not low-income in the eyes of the provincial government. A single parent making more than \$29,439 will not be eligible for a full grant either [3].

ABE helps those most in need qualify for higher education and employment.

Contrary to the government's claim that adults who have already benefited from the public K-12 system can probably afford to pay for upgrading, the majority of basic education students are lower-income earners who enroll because their high school marks or courses do not qualify them for entry into further schooling or employment.

To gain access to a trades program, for example, many adults have to upgrade basic courses such as English or Math.

In 2013-14, 58 school districts provided upgrading courses to 15,000 graduated adults. A further 25,000 students were provided adult upgrading courses through eighteen public post-secondary institutions across the province.

[1] BC Government Media Release (September 7th, 2007)

[2] BC Government Media Release (December 4th, 2014): Adult upgrading courses supported by grants for low-income learners

[3] StudentAidBC: Adult Upgrading Grant Application Form

**\$15.9  
million**

**cut to adult basic  
education funding**

**77%**

**of learners are  
taking ABE to  
prepare for future  
study.**

## Who are ABE students?

- 58% are women
- 20% are parents
- 18% are Aboriginal
- 79% have a high school diploma
- 77% are taking ABE to prepare for future studies
- 10% just want to complete high school

More than half (56%) of ABE grads surveyed in 2012 had gone on to further education, and of those not enrolled in additional studies at the time of the survey, 29% had pursued other education since finishing ABE courses. Together these numbers mean that 70% of ABE students go on to further studies.

In terms of how ABE students paid for their schooling, 55% of them worked while studying; 35% relied on support from family and friends; 19% relied on personal savings to support themselves; and only 11% relied on ABESAP (the former student aid program for ABE students prior to the Adult Upgrading Grant) for support [4].

## Economic Impact

According to the BC 2022 Labour Market Outlook, in less than one decade, it is estimated that almost one million new jobs will be available in BC [5], and 78 percent of these new jobs will require some form of post-secondary education or training (43 percent will require trades or technical training, and 34 percent will

require a university degree) [6].

In its recommendations for the 2015 provincial budget, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services recommended that the province support and invest in skills training initiatives in recognition of the looming skills shortage. The provincial government has done the opposite by cutting funding to and introducing tuition fees on adult basic education.

## Government Can Afford It

The funding cuts announced in December will save the government \$15.9 million (\$9 million cut from the K-12 system, \$6.9 million cut from the post-secondary system). With BC's 2015 Budget projecting a three-year \$879 million surplus [7], it is clear there is no justification for cutting funding to basic education and asking students and their families to pay more. The new fees to high school and upgrading courses will only create financial barriers to adults returning to school, preventing them from meaningfully accessing the labour market.

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[4] BC Government Report: 2013 Developmental Student Outcomes Survey

[5] British Columbia 2022 Labour Market Outlook, WorkBC

[6] B.C.'s Skills for Jobs Blueprint: Re-Engineering Education and Training, 2014

[7] 2015 BC Budget Speech