



Graduate Students' Society
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

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Don Avison, KC
Independent Reviewer – Post-Secondary Sector Sustainability

December 12, 2025

Dear Mr. Avison,

We are writing today to address the Post-Secondary Sector Sustainability Review you have been charged to lead. While we agree wholeheartedly that our sector requires substantial change in order to remain financially sustainable during a period of rapidly shifting international relations, we are concerned by the scope of this review. Many of our colleagues, including campus labour unions and student societies have reached out to address these concerns as well. We stand in solidarity with these groups in asking the Province to reconsider the terms of reference for your work to allow for meaningful and comprehensive consultation with the students, workers, and communities this review will impact. We are especially calling on the Province to remove the mandate that a financial sustainability review may not include additional funding from the Province.

The University of Victoria Graduate Students' Society (GSS) represents ~3,000 graduate students and is incorporated under BC's *Society Act*. We are constituted to promote the educational, social, economic, and personal welfare of our membership, and we advocate for affordable, accessible, and equitable access to higher education. Today, as outlined above, we are reaching out to you urgently to address flaws in the planned Post-Secondary Sector Sustainability Review.

First, we'd like to speak up for students as the timing of the announcement for this review significantly limits students' ability to meaningfully contribute to this review. BC's university and college students have the current, on-the-ground, living experiences of our campuses and post-secondary institution (PSI) service models. We are the people best positioned to speak up for future generations of students who will be impacted by this review, as we see the benefits and faults of the current system every day. Despite this, of an apparent eight-week consultation period, post-secondary students are either finishing classes, in exams or the universities/colleges are closed for six of those weeks.

To use UVic's schedule as only an example, this review was announced November 25, 2025, one week before the end of classes on our campus (Dec 5) and immediately before a two-week exam period (Dec 6-20) and thereafter two-week university closure (Dec 25-Jan 5). Given the fact that your own report is due to Legislative Assembly in March and that consultations are set to wrap by mid-January, we were shocked to see that the Province chose to announce this review immediately before students hit their busiest time of year. Indeed, students are focused on exams or universities are closed for two thirds of the total consultation time. The scheduling of this review and the timing of this announcement makes it

entirely clear that the Province does not wish to hear from students. **We are asking for the Province to correct this by increasing the length of consultation period.** This request has already been issued by the [Camosun College Faculty Association](#) and [UBC's AMS and the Alliance of BC Students](#).

Next, **we ask for the Province to release the results of the 2022 PSI funding model review to promote transparency as to the causes of the current funding crisis.** While the funding landscape for public PSIs has indeed changed due to the student visa caps unilaterally imposed by IRCC, we disagree with the government's position that the information from 2022 has become entirely outdated. We are given to understand that this review included a call for the Province to increase base funding for PSIs (outside keeping up with inflation and contract negotiations) to decrease reliance on international tuition. We are firmly in agreement with the necessity of decreasing reliance on international student tuition.

The Province made a significant gamble in the early 2000's, alongside many other provinces across Canada, that they could continue to balance PSI budgets through uncontrolled international tuition rates. We acknowledge that this gamble did not pay off due to policy changes imposed by the federal government. However, funding affordable, accessible education that supports the development of informed citizens and meets our province's workforce requirements remains a provincial responsibility. The Province may not continue to abdicate their responsibility to fund education that supports our community needs and economic priorities. The [Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC \(CUFA BC\) found](#) that in 1977-8, government grants accounted for ~75% of university revenues. By 2006-7, government grants accounted for 52.9% of university revenues while tuition and fees accounted for 21.9% of university revenues. By 2020-1, government grants slipped to 43.8% of university revenues, while tuition and fees grew to 31.0% of revenues. (pages 14, 31, 33) From 2010-1 to 2020-1, CUFA BC found that tuition income grew by 72.6% in real terms for BC's research universities.

Our university and college budgets should not be forced to balance on any specific class of students' tuition, be it international, domestic, "microcredential" or "Continuing Studies" students. There is an intense focus on the proximal causes related to IRCC imposed student visa caps. However, there's been limited to nonexistent focus on the distal causes of many decades of decreased provincial funding for post-secondary education. As should be evident from the previous review, there is an urgent need for increased base funding for public PSIs, beyond keeping up with inflation and labour costs. **Therefore, we further demand that the Province remove the limit on "no new funding" from the current review's terms of reference.**

Additionally, we, [along with the Alliance of BC Students](#), are **demanding the Province immediately and publicly commit to maintaining the 2% cap on domestic tuition.** Taking this step would allay concerns that the Province is undertaking a fast-tracked review during a period where post-secondary students have limited capacity to respond in order to eliminate or hamstring the 2005 Tuition Limit Policy. We demand the Province keep public education public. To quote the [Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC's 2023 report](#) coming out of the abandoned 2022 PSI funding review: "Public post-secondary institutions must be primarily publicly funded. While there is a place for private funds generated by tuition and public-private partnerships, the public purposes of post-secondary education can only be ensured when the citizens of British Columbia, through their elected government, maintain a majority interest in the public post-secondary sector."

Data from [Statistics Canada](#) clearly demonstrate that access to higher education in Canada is tied to parental income. In 2022, only 43.2% of 19-year-olds in the lowest-income quintile were enrolled in post-secondary education, compared with 75.2% of their peers in the highest-income quintile.

This gap highlights the financial barriers low-income youth face in accessing university, which discourage enrolment. Students from less affluent backgrounds are already less likely to attend or complete their programs under current funding models. Lifting tuition caps risks triggering steep fee increases that could place post-secondary education further out of reach for the province's most vulnerable groups, widening equity gaps. We urge the provincial government to recognize the tuition cap as a crucial tool for maintaining fairness and equitable access to higher education for all.

As noted above, the UVic GSS is in favour of a review of the current funding model as there is ample room for improvement. We were in support of the 2022 review and worked with our partners across UVic to provide the Province information in that review. Likewise, in this case, we wish to provide you with specific recommendations for reducing costs within our sector. These recommendations are:

1. Cap executive compensation. This call has been issued by numerous campus labour unions throughout the last two rounds of collective bargaining. At present, the President, Vice-President, Associate Vice-President and other executive management suites at public PSIs are expanding, and with them the total labour costs for a very small number of individuals. These salaries are all negotiated and approved in collaboration with BC's Public Sector Employer's Council Secretariat (PSEC), yet in 2024 the salaries of the presidents of UVic and UBC (\$464,377 and \$515,000, respectively) outpaced that of even former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (\$406,200). We respect the need for BC PSIs to remain competitive in hiring these top leadership positions, but feel strongly that these university and college leaders should lead by example and cap their pay.
2. If the Province mandates PSIs host a service or initiative (e.g. harm reduction on campus), they should staff and fund these services. As [Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC made clear in 2023](#), there has been a shift in university expenditures away from "instruction, libraries and non-specialized research (64.4% of total operating funds in 2006/07 to 58.9% in 2020/21). Spending has increased, meanwhile, for student services, administration, and computing and technology" (page 14). While we respect the institutional autonomy built into the current legislative and bicameral governance structures for our public PSIs, the continual mandates to expand student services is increasing strain on university budgets without sufficient funding to support these mandates. We hope that as a key part of your review of services which may be shared amongst PSIs, you will include all student support services mandated by the Province.

We have challenging circumstances as a sector. We are optimistic that a review of the funding model for BC's post-secondary education sector will bring to light the impact of underfunding and galvanize change. However, the review that has been proposed now restricts meaningful consultation with students and abdicates the Province's responsibility to fund affordable, accessible education.

To re-iterate, the University of Victoria Graduate Students' Society is issuing the following calls to action:

1. Rescind the associated terms of reference and make amendments based on meaningful and transparent consultation with the post-secondary sector, including graduate students. Extend the consultation period and stakeholders to be engaged.
2. Release the 2022 PSI funding review results to promote transparency as to the cause of the current funding crisis and to respect the significant work done across our sector to support this review.
3. Remove the “no new funding” restriction for this review’s mandate. As our many colleagues have made clear, there can be no successful sustainability review of Provincial entities without Provincial funding.
4. Publicly commit to maintaining the 2% cap on domestic tuition. The Province has made multiple attempts in the last 30 years to shift responsibility for sustainably funding PSIs onto different classes of students, whether domestic, international or “microcredential”. The only sustainable path to a strong public post-secondary sector is a provincially funded post-secondary sector.
5. Cap executive compensation for university Presidents, Vice Presidents, Associate Vice Presidents, and other executive management.
6. Provide direct funding for the student services that the Province mandates PSIs host.

Thank you,

The University of Victoria Graduate Students’ Society Executive Board

Kyla Turner, Executive Director

Rosemary Webb, Chair

Jitendra Palaparty, Director of External Relations

Sarah Roberts, Director of Internal/University Relations

Maggie Lawton, Director of Finance

Asma Noureen, Director of Student Life