

Post Secondary Education

108.4, 113.2, 118.6, 119.1, 119.5, 122.7, 123.3, 124.13, 128.4, 129.1, 129.9, 130.11, 132.14, 134.7, 134.13, 134.19, 135.6, 137.12, 138.10, 140.1, 140.12, 140.14, 141.9, 141.10, 141.15, 141.37, 141.45, 150.3, 104.7, 108.4, 108.13, 111.12, 114.15, 122.7, 123.3, 124.13, 128.4, 129.1, 130.5, 130.13, 130.14, 138.10, 140.1, 141.37, 141.45, 150.3

Although the public hearings dealt to a large degree with principles governing the K – 12 public education system, it was the panel’s intent to address issues at all levels of public education from early childhood to post-secondary education and beyond. For this reason the Charter Panel decided to use the term “learner(s)” rather than “students”, because it was understood that public education occurs throughout life and throughout communities, not just in institutionalized settings.

Representatives of various sections of the post-secondary community made a number of presentations to the panel. In the main, they addressed issues of access, funding, academic freedom and research.

Access

The issue of access to post-secondary education is clearly of concern to many people. The constant message from politicians and media is that to have a successful life one must have a “good” job and to have a good job one must have some level of post-secondary education. However, there are a number of obstacles for entrants to post-secondary programs.

The first and perhaps the most significant is a lack a spaces in programs leading to wait listing and inflation of entry requirements. A student may have the required courses and grades from high school but, because the spaces are limited, the institution admits only those whose grades far exceed the minimum requirement. Thus, perfectly capable and qualified applicants are turned away.

Every British Columbian who can benefit from post-secondary education ought to have the opportunity; every British Columbian who is qualified should have the opportunity; a large number are qualified but can’t attend University (or College) because their grade is below the real grade average for being accepted; there is not enough space.

Rick Coe and Rob Clift, Vancouver
East Side

A second factor limiting access is that of geographic location. Students from remote and rural areas of the province have difficulty accessing post-secondary education in their community. Often they have to move far away from their home and family support group to an alien environment that can put them at a great disadvantage in relation to their

peers from urban settings. In addition, the costs of relocating, living away from home and travelling add additional financial pressures which severely limit the numbers of qualified applicants who can take advantage of a post-secondary education.

Costs are constantly rising and limiting access to those who have the means to pay the fees, accommodation, material and travel costs associated with attendance at a post-secondary institution or program.

Again it's simple, higher costs mean that people without money are unable to participate. The result – an increasing stratification of the have and have-nots in our society, the loss of diversity of perspective in our schools and arguably in certain sectors of our society.

Christine Ellis, Ben West, Christian Botelho, Vancouver East Side

Funding

Considerable discussion took place at several of the hearings about the significance of fully funding some or all of a post-secondary education. There was also concern expressed regarding the apparent reduction of funding at the same time as increased pressure is applied to provide more seats in various high demand programs. This pressure also leads to the elimination of some courses which are not seen as practical in career preparation but which are really designed to ensure that learners gain a well-rounded education rather than simply a ticket to a job.

Where is the funding? The government forgets that accountability is a two-way street – they are accountable to students – if there are inadequate resources for kids, then government has failed. Accountability seems to be a code word for control. First year university should be seen as a student's right. Most good jobs require at least some post-secondary. Why should people pay for that?

Rick Coe and Rob Clift,
Vancouver East Side

The recent removal of the freeze on tuition fees received a lot of comment at the hearings. Most presenters felt that British Columbia, and even Canada, should be looking to other countries which have chosen to provide free access to post-secondary education. Many of these countries coincidentally are enjoying a strong economy. This raised the question of the cost effectiveness of raising tuition fees as opposed to removing them completely and thus reducing the barrier faced by those in low socio-economic conditions.

A charter for public education, we believe, must include the principle that adequate public funding for our post-secondary educational institutions is essential if we are to fulfill our role as educators.

Thomas Friedman, Kamloops.

Research

The issue of academic freedom at the college and university levels was raised a number of times. Some presenters suggested that the commercialization of funding for research is fundamentally changing the independent nature of university research.

A Charter for Public Education, in our view, must recognize the importance of scholarly research to post-secondary education, specifically research conducted in an atmosphere of academic freedom... Far more ominous than inadequate funding, however, is the increasing commercialization of scholarly research.

Thomas Friedman, Kamloops

A number of submissions drew attention to the change in nature or purpose of public education and research from that of a process to provide opportunity to participate in discussions about a good and worthwhile life, to seeing education, and specifically research, as simply another commodity to be gathered.

This analysis can appropriately be applied to all aspects of public education, not just the post secondary level.



This commodification of education has been up to now a slow and sometimes subtle process. It has happened as a result of much larger forces that are at play in the world right now. What is happening with the current BC government is a reflection of a broader ideology that has many different labels: Neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, free market systems, all of which stress the importance of small government, low taxes and the freedom of the private sector. The fundamental belief is that these mechanisms are at the core democratic and will eventually provide for all the needs of all of the people. We are in a time where the questioning of this belief automatically labels you as being on the left, questioning democracy, a socialist, or a professional protester. These labels are increasingly being used to dismiss any dialogue about whether this is the way we should be proceeding.

Christine Ellis, Ben West, Christian Botelho, Vancouver East Side

