

## NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release  
Tuesday, February 13, 2024

### **Local 6, Douglas Student's Union, joins Students' Unions and Coalition Partners Across BC to Call on Premier Eby to Deliver for Students and Address Critical Systemic Issues Facing the Post-Secondary Sector**

In a united effort to address the critical challenges facing the post-secondary education sector in British Columbia, students' unions and coalition partners representing diverse sectors have penned an open letter to Premier Eby, urging immediate action to prevent the collapse of the province's post-secondary institutions.

The open letter, titled "We Can Do Better for Students: Our Vision for a Post-Secondary Education System that Delivers for Students and Communities in BC," underscores the urgent need for government intervention to rectify systemic issues that plague the sector, the effects of which are likely to be exacerbated following the Federal government's two-year cap on international study permits.

"Studying in Canada comes with a lot of challenges. Many international students are questioning whether studying in Canada is worth it. As an international student, my academic journey is seen as a business by post-secondary institutions. It took me a year longer to complete my studies because of the high tuition fees and the restricted number of hours I could work. Many of us struggled to find safe and livable place to live that was affordable. From financial challenges, difficult living conditions, and restricted immigration policies younger people are seeing their dreams to gain the Canadian experience vanish." Maya Moalla, Campus Representative, New Westminster.

For many years, student advocates have warned about the precarity created by the overreliance on international student tuition fees as a revenue source for BC's institutions and called for the government to commit annual funding to the sector to relieve the reliance on tuition fees and return the government as the main source of operational funding.

The open letter also outlines the concerns of students, which include the fear that international student tuition fees and ancillary fees will continue to rise and vital services students rely on will be cut as a result of the additional pressures the loss in revenue will place on the already cash-strapped public post-secondary sector.

“Our public post-secondary system is well-desired by students worldwide. However, the education sector is shifting focus from student-success focused to profit-driven. We need to fix the imbalance that exists in our education system and return the focus to rewarding hard-working students who strive to engage and develop their growing skills to become well-rounded, integrated members of the working society.” said Bailey Cove, Director of External Relations.

The open letter calls on the provincial government to undertake the following immediate actions:

1. Cap international student tuition fee increases at 2% annually.
2. Release a plan on how international study permits will be distributed to institutions in BC.
3. Complete the Post-Secondary Funding Formula Review and determine gaps in government funding, in particular for regional colleges and universities.
4. Develop a funding model that provides long-term financial stability for institutions, delivers quality education and services for students, and does not rely on student tuition fees as the main source of funding.
5. Invest in BC’s public post-secondary institutions to ensure post-secondary education is affordable, accessible and that the province is able to produce the skilled workers needed in the labour force.

The letter, which is signed by 22 organizations that represent 280,000 students, stakeholders and allies, ends with a formal invitation to Premier Eby to become a leader in the fight for a more affordable and accessible post-secondary system that delivers for British Columbians.

The Douglas Student’s Union represents over 12,600 students across the lower mainland for 50 years. The Douglas Student’s Union represents full- and part time students completing bachelor, diploma and certificate programs. Together with the British Columbia Federation of Students we advocate for a well-funded system of post-secondary education in BC that is affordable and accessible for all.

For more information, please contact:

Genessa Yan, Organizer-Campaigns 604-527-5055  
Bailey Cove, Director of External Relations 604-527-5110

*Open Letter included below.*

Tuesday, February 13, 2023

Honourable David Eby, K.C.  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC  
V8V 1X4

**We Can Do Better for Students: Our Vision for a Post-Secondary Education System that Delivers for Students and Communities in BC**

Dear Premier Eby and the Government of BC,

We write on behalf of more than 22 students' unions, labour unions and community organisations who collectively represent more than 280,000 British Columbians.

We call on the BC government to recognize the critical need to act urgently and intentionally to address the root cause of what's led to the exploitation of international students and the precarity of the post-secondary system's current funding model. Decades of government underfunding has created an overreliance on international student tuition fees and a situation where we now find our post-secondary system on the brink of failure following the federal government's announcement of a two-year cap on international study permits.

But it doesn't need to fail. We have the opportunity to choose a path forward that will advance a shared vision of post-secondary education in BC that will deliver for students, institutions, BC's communities, the province's economy, the healthcare sector and the labour market.

We have a world-class public post-secondary education system that should reward hard work, engage students in transformative learning experiences, and develop the skills and passions of tomorrow's workers. Our post-secondary system should be a tool to create a flexible, adaptable workforce, a tool to lift individuals and families out of poverty, a tool to work towards reconciliation with our Indigenous communities, a tool to increase equity, diversity and inclusion, and a tool that supports the prosperity of our local communities.

A world-class public post-secondary education system should not involve the exploitation of international students nor constantly assess the need to cut services to balance an institutional budget. With consistent, stable, and predictable funding for BC's public post-secondary institutions, the financial predation on students, both international and domestic, will no longer be seen as necessary for an institution's survival.

If we continue to treat public post-secondary as a business, institutions will continue to feel pressure to make decisions based on the finances needed to maintain their operations. Instead, investing in institutions will allow them to deliver high-quality programming that aligns with the needs of the labour market and to offer wrap-around support to students. Public education has and should always be about more than generating revenue – its focus must remain on creating a better tomorrow for all of us.

We are currently at a critical crossroads. Our dependency on international fees and lack of funding for post-secondary education has led us to a point where band-aid solutions are no longer enough. We need to fund our post-secondary system and shield current and future students from the consequences of systemic underfunding.

We call on the provincial government to make a commitment to our shared vision for students, institutions, and our communities and to immediately undertake the following actions:

- 1. Cap international student tuition fee increases at 2% annually.**  
Amend the Tuition Fee Limit Policy to include the regulation of fee increases for international students capped at 2% annually, to protect international students from being used as a tool to balance institutional budgets and to address the overreliance on these fees as a source of institutional revenue.
- 2. Release a plan on how international study permits will be distributed to institutions in BC.**  
Immediately release a plan to provide transparency to students and institutions on how international study permits will be distributed in BC, and that considers the impacts on institutions and their communities.
- 3. Complete the Post-Secondary Funding Formula Review and determine gaps in government funding, in particular for regional colleges and universities.**  
Finalise and release the results of the first phase of the Post-Secondary Funding Formula Review. In 2022, stakeholders, including nearly all of BC's public institutions, students' unions, faculty and staff unions and the Federation, participated in the sector-wide funding review to assist the government in developing "an updated, modern funding model for BC's public post-secondary system." This review is vital to developing a sustainable pathway forward.
- 4. Develop a funding model that provides long-term financial stability for institutions, delivers quality education and services for students, and does not rely on student tuition fees as the main source of funding.**

Recommit to and prioritize the development of a funding model that “fairly and impartially distributes provincial financial resources across the public post-secondary sector”, “aligns provincial funding with the education and skills training needs of BC and the communities served by the 25 public post-secondary institutions”, and “supports student success by ensuring access to affordable, high-quality post-secondary education and expanding key student supports.”

**5. Invest in BC’s public post-secondary institutions to ensure post-secondary education is affordable and accessible and that the province is able to produce the skilled workers needed in the labour force.**

Increase annual funding to the sector to return the provincial government as the main source of funding for BC’s public post-secondary institutions, to make up for anticipated losses in institutional revenue as a result of the international study permit cap and to meet the labour needs of critical sectors such as health care workers, early childcare education workers and skilled tradespeople.

The quality of our education and further cuts to services are at risk when reduced tuition fee revenue impacts institutions’ budgets. Students are concerned about which parts of their education experience will be deemed not essential, how much international tuition fees will rise and how much more they will have to give up to fill the funding gaps.

We applaud your government for announcing new measures, including fee transparency on international tuition fees, on January 29 and taking the first step to stop the exploitation faced by international students at post-secondary institutions. With past actions like introducing the BC Access Grant and eliminating interest charged on student loans, your government has shown that students, stakeholders, and advocates can count on our voices being heard.

We are again counting on the government to listen and take steps to address the systemic underfunding of the post-secondary sector and put an end to the unfair tuition fee increases experienced by international students, who already pay 4 to 5 times more than their domestic peers in British Columbia. Your government is dedicated to building a stronger BC, but without post-secondary education, more people will get left behind.

British Columbia has the opportunity to become a leader and demonstrate the benefit to our economy, communities, workforce and students, and show that systemic change is within reach when we reimagine what’s possible in the public post-secondary education sector.

Premier Eby, this is a formal invitation to join our fight for a more affordable, accessible post-secondary education system and demonstrate that your government is committed to the future of British Columbians by implementing the 5 actions set out in this letter. We are counting on you. Will you join us?

Sincerely,

*Signatory Information:*

**Post-Secondary Education**

British Columbia Federation of Students  
Camosun College Student Society  
Coast Mountain Students' Union  
College of New Caledonia Students' Union  
Douglas Students' Union  
Emily Carr Students' Union  
Justice Institute Students' Union  
Northern British Columbia Graduate Students' Society  
North Island Students' Union  
Okanagan College Students' Union  
Selkirk College Students' Union  
Students' Union Okanagan of UBC  
Students' Union of Vancouver Community College  
Thompson Rivers University Students' Union  
University of Victoria Students' Society  
Vancouver Island University Students' Union

**Community Organisations**

BC Poverty Reduction Coalition  
Centre For Family Equity

**Labour Unions**

CMAW Local 1735  
CUPE 2396  
UFCW 1518  
Vancouver & District Labour Council

*CC:*

Honourable Brenda Bailey, Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills

Honourable Rachna Singh, Minister of Education and Child Care

Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Finance

Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health

Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing

Honourable Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

Honourable Brenda Bailey, Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation

Honourable Harry Bains, Minister of Labour

Honourable Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions

Honourable Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction