



**Building BC's Recovery, Together  
Public Engagement  
July 2020**

**Submitted by the University of Victoria**

## **Introduction**

The University of Victoria (UVic) is pleased to join our colleagues in the post-secondary ecosystem and British Columbians everywhere to provide our thoughts, insights and suggestions for how we move towards inclusive and sustained recovery. Together, through this valuable public engagement process, we can build a more inclusive, resilient, fair and prosperous British Columbia. We have faced this crisis with cohesion, resilience, resolve and empathy. These values are the key ingredients necessary to build a brighter future for all. Every day within our communities, we are encouraged by stories and real life examples of how British Columbians are working hard to help one and other through this unprecedented time.

UVic is very proud to be a part of our community not only here on Southern Vancouver Island, but across the province. To ensure a strong future for all, we must take swift and bold action to support those who have been hardest hit by this crisis or we risk setting back an entire generation. Now is the time for all sectors of our province to come together, start looking towards our future, and take the lessons we have learned to emerge a more connected and strengthened community. While COVID-19 has left us looking into a deep canyon, together we can take strong action to build a bridge to the other side. Education and research can serve as the girders and foundation of that bridge. We must continue to act quickly by making targeted investments in our students, as those investments will be critical to their success.

The University of Victoria would like to share some of our ideas on how to ensure the success of BC's post-secondary students.

## **Supporting Our Students:**

Students and young people are disproportionately impacted by this crisis; youth unemployment remains at 29%. Currently, among students aged 20-24 who will be returning to their studies in the fall, employment rates are at 35.2% in comparison to 72.8% in June of 2019. This younger generation will bear the economic scars of the COVID-19 crisis for many years. We must work together to ensure their future success, our shared success.

At UVic, we have worked hard to find and create job placements for our students and create supports to help them through this crisis. Matching the generous contributions of government, alumni, donors and our community, UVic has provided almost two million dollars in emergency bursaries and supports for our students. Nearly 2,000 UVic students have received emergency supports through our COVID-19 Support Bursary, but more must be done. Students are faced with pressures related to their studies, well-being and academic performance, as well as pressures around housing, food, childcare and online learning.

**Recommendation #1:** We request that Government make targeted investments in post-secondary students across British Columbia through emergency bursaries, work-integrated learning opportunities and technology grants to support students, and to ensure access and affordability, especially for those in difficult circumstances (e.g. needs-based grants, technology grants, access grants).

## **Providing Equal Access to Online and Distance Learning:**

In the fall, the vast majority of British Columbia's over 115,000 full-time post-secondary students will be engaged in new and innovative forms of learning: remote, hybrid and distance. We anticipate nearly 18,000 or about 75% of our total student body will be learning from outside of the Greater Victoria region, some of them in rural, remote and urban locations across the Province. To maintain quality and continuity through this shift, UVic has invested almost \$5 million in new technologies to develop our resource rich *Teach Anywhere* and *Learn Anywhere* platforms. We are also in the process of installing an entirely new learning management system to provide the very

best learning experience for our students.

While post-secondary institutions, like UVic, will be nimble, and adapt our approaches to preserve the quality and continuity of our academic offerings through online learning, there is much more that must be done to support learners. Connectivity experiences are uneven across British Columbia. Many rural and remote communities across British Columbia lack affordable, reliable and high-quality connectivity options. Statistics Canada estimates that one in four lower-income Canadian households use smartphones as their primary internet access, while 10% of households, mostly in rural areas across Canada, lack reliable internet access. This lack of fair and equal access has a significant impact, not only on learners in their educational experience, but also in the economic development of our rural regions. Investments in rural connectivity will be key to growing our province's economy in every region and ensuring the sustained growth of our technology sector beyond Victoria and Vancouver. Through critical investments in connectivity for rural and remote areas, post-secondary will be able to deliver high-quality skills training opportunities to every corner of our province that will contribute to a stronger future for all of British Columbia for years to come.

**Recommendation #2:** We request that Government make investments in rural connectivity and online learning to support equal access to distance education. This would be a legacy investment serving all British Columbians well into the future.

**Responding to the Need: Future Skills Opportunities and Lifelong Learning:**

On the South Island, COVID-19 has had significant impacts on our local region and disproportionately affected women, young people, new Canadians and Indigenous communities. One of our country's greatest assets has always been human capital. As we think about recovery, we must rethink how we invest in society. We must invest in our human capital by creating new programs and expanding existing ones. Upskilling and reskilling British Columbians will create equity and resilience in our economy and help us maintain our competitive advantage. Education is the bridge to a better future for individuals and for our province.

COVID-19 has laid bare some of the greatest challenges facing our communities – inequality, homelessness, the opiate crisis and much more. Universities including UVic must respond with innovative new programs and create space in existing programs to bring our best resources (our people) to bear on these significant challenges. For example, UVic's Health Information Science program cannot keep pace with student applications and the graduates of that program have a 90% plus placement rate at the front lines of health information management. Nurse Practitioners and graduates from programs like Nursing Leadership are also vital to meeting health care demand. Additional investment in these essential and innovative programs is needed.

When it comes to necessary future skills, Canadians are among some of the most well educated people on the planet, but we fall behind greatly on later career training and development compared to our peers. We know there is more work to do, as 36% of Canadians aged 25 to 64 do not have post-secondary credentials, and only 48% of Indigenous people have some post-secondary education in Canada. Skills, talent and innovation are the fuel for a positive, inclusive and stronger future for all British Columbians. Over the next decade, 900,000 jobs will open up with 75% requiring post-secondary education. It is critical that we make investments today to ensure equitable access to BC's high quality post-secondary system. We must invest in post-secondary programming related to upskilling and reskilling so we can provide our disrupted workforce with opportunities to learn new job-ready skills that will empower them in a fast changing labour market.

Continued provincial investments, like the \$9 million in 2019, in work-integrated learning

opportunities will help post-secondary create employment opportunities for all of our students and employers seeking new talent. These investments will allow employers to rebuild, rehire and create valuable labour market connections for our students. Our economy is rapidly shifting to a skills based economy, where human skills are at its heart. By investing in long-term human capital development strategies, we can work to protect our workforce from future shocks that will be caused by disruption, dislocation and skills-biased technological change.

**Recommendation #3:** We request that Government make significant investments in universities for new, additional academic programs such as health information science, nursing leadership and the nurse practitioner programs as well as ensure British Columbians have easy access to upskilling and re-skilling programs to build skills in the emerging economy and insulate our workforce from future shocks.

### **Investing in Graduate Students and Talent to Remain Competitive:**

Investments in people and ideas will help us build capacity and tackle issues that are and will remain front and center for British Columbia. Thus, the next generation of graduate students are critical in advancing critical research and innovation. These students are paramount in reinforcing the links between research, teaching and real-world challenges. Their work in the classroom, labs and in our communities contributes significantly to enhancing the undergraduate educational experience. UVic students have been successful in accessing significant research funding and have gone on to make important contributions to health care, business and economic development, scientific and technological innovation, environmental sustainability and social justice in both the public and private sectors.

Graduate students are vital to not only the research and teaching enterprises at post-secondary, but also to our province's competitiveness and economic recovery. We must continue to support and invest in our graduate students, or we risk losing their skills and talent to other provinces and nations. This loss of innovators and their ideas will only serve to hamper British Columbia's overall competitiveness and prevent us from building the critical mass of human capital that will be necessary to help us recover in the post-COVID context. We must work to build capacity within the graduate student space, as it will supply us with talented, dynamic and entrepreneurial innovators. By continuing to attract and retain world-class graduate level talent we can lead the way in the transition to a stronger future where these students will be key economic drivers in our communities across British Columbia.

**Recommendation #4:** We ask that Government provide ongoing and stable funding to Graduate Student Scholarships to keep British Columbia a competitive destination for top talent and innovators, and to enhance our overall economic competitiveness.

### **Investments in High-Impact Research to Protect Against Future Shock and Increase Competitiveness:**

While COVID-19 has presented a number of challenges, we cannot ignore the opportunities created. One such opportunity is the critical need for expertise, and innovation, and the significant role of research in responding to the pandemic. As we work through the present crisis, there are tremendous opportunities to do things differently in a healthy and sustainable way. British Columbia research universities and the rest of the post-secondary ecosystem produces the talent, ideas and innovation necessary to shape what our world looks like in the future.

UVic is committed to bringing an increased focus to how our research and training can contribute to scientific, medical and socioeconomic issues. Through investments in high-impact research we can continue to harness new technologies that will help us create a more competitive and inclusive economy. New technologies and high-impact research will be critical in preparing for future public

health challenges and in our transition to a low-carbon economy. We should use our made-in-British Columbia innovations to create the next generation talent, skills and infrastructure. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bridge divides between government, industry and post-secondary for a better future.

Through research partnerships, we can build up our new economy in cleaner, more resilient and secure communities through a discovery driven recovery. UVic is proud to be working on innovative partnerships to create resilient and healthier communities in rural and remote British Columbia. One such example being the Blind Channel Marine Energy Innovation Centre, which with a partnership from the Government of British Columbia could facilitate further discovery and development of micro and small-scale tidal energy technologies that would have practical uses across the globe. This project would utilize local suppliers and act as a living lab for Indigenous and community leaders to observe turbine operations, build partnerships with technology developers and identify skills training opportunities for their communities. New high-impact research partnerships will equip British Columbians with the necessary skills and ingenuity to further our global position as a leader in research and innovation performance, increase our economic prosperity, improve our social and community well-being, and create technological export opportunities.

**Recommendation #5:** We ask that Government enhance partnerships with postsecondary, to advance high-impact research, accelerate innovation and build critical skills for British Columbians.

**Supporting the BC Post-Secondary System is the ‘the British Columbia Advantage:’**

The British Columbia post-secondary sector works hard with our partners in business, industry, and communities to support all students and to equip our disrupted workforce with the necessary skills for a more equitable, inclusive and resilient society. Integration and collaboration have long been the British Columbia advantage. In British Columbia, when it comes to post-secondary education we enjoy integration unlike anywhere else in Canada, and possibly the world,. Our colleges, institutes, research and teaching universities all play unique but vital roles in this system. UVic is proud to endorse the recommendations put forward jointly by the Research Universities’ Council of BC, the BC Association of Institutes and Universities and BC Colleges to the Committee, who propose that Government of BC invest in the following:

- \$40 million for emergency financial aid and student support;
- an additional \$20 million to work-integrated learning;
- an additional \$10 million in surge capacity funding for increased mental health and COVID-19 related health supports;
- \$10 million in one-time funding to support the development and implementation of new curricula that is responsive to the needs of employers and students across the economy;
- enhance learning opportunities by allocating funding to secure space and increase broadband capacity at public facilities in remote communities;
- \$50 million for a clean research fund that will help BC leverage federal research dollars, open up new opportunities for jobs and growth throughout BC, and establish BC as a national and global leader in green economic solutions.

It is critical that we continue to build on our strengths and keep our postsecondary system whole through this crisis. By working together, we can ensure the health, safety and success of our students and ensure our post-secondary system emerges with the strength and capacity required to serve British Columbia and its citizens.

**Conclusion:**

Investment in our collective recovery must respond to the greatest need and together we must be

considerate, thoughtful and deliberate of the world we are building for our children and grandchildren. Here in British Columbia we have an incredible opportunity to accelerate our shifts to a cleaner, greener economy that is more inclusive and creates opportunities for all regions and all people. The University of Victoria is committed to partnering in a recovery that ensures all British Columbians are able to participate in our new economy, as it is our people who are central to any successful economic recovery plan.