



**Submission to the Select Standing  
Committee on Finance and  
Government Services  
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**Introduction:**

The COVID-19 pandemic is unlike anything we have experienced in our lifetimes. It has caused disruption, loss and affected every person within our society. Through a shared adversity brought on by COVID, our communities across British Columbia are working hard to stay connected. Every day, we hear and share stories of neighbors helping each other and lending a hand to get through these trying times. Without a doubt, this cohesion of community will see us through, deliver us to a brighter, more resilient, and equal future. To achieve this future, we must take swift and bold action to support our younger generation and students who have been hit the hardest by this pandemic. Without bold action, we risk setting back an entire generation of future leaders.

**Acknowledgement:**

The University of Victoria (UVic) would like to acknowledge the significant supports and actions of the British Columbia government and the public service to support students and ensure their health, safety and well-being through this pandemic.

Specifically, we acknowledge the efforts of government to support students through the BC Access Grant introduced in Budget 2020 and the financial and mental health supports through the Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training to ensure the healthy, safety and well-being of our students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

UVic would also like to acknowledge our partners in the education and post-secondary education sector across British Columbia. We are grateful for the incredible collaboration through these extraordinary times to continue to provide world-class education to our students.

**Supporting Students:**

Our students have shouldered an incredible weight and disproportionate impact through this pandemic. Youth unemployment in British Columbia is currently at 29%; and more than 115,000 jobs have been lost by youth since the start of COVID-19. It is likely that many of these jobs may never return. While we are currently looking at a deep canyon because of the current crisis, we can choose to build a bridge to the other side. Education and research are the foundation and girders of that bridge. While our students' lives have been turned upside down, and many are worried about an uncertain future, UVic knows that we must do all we can to support students. Building on incredible supports and contributions from government, alumni and donors, we have provided almost two million dollars in emergency bursary supports. Together we must continue to act, and act quickly. These investments will be critical to success of our students.

- *Therefore, we ask the Committee to recommend that Government make targeted investments in emergency bursaries, work-integrated learning opportunities and technology grants to support students, especially those in difficult circumstances to ensure access and affordability.*

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

In the fall of 2020 at UVic, 18,000 students or about 75% of our student body, will attend classes online from outside of Victoria. These students will login from remote, rural and urban locations. To facilitate this shift to online delivery, UVic has invested over five million dollars in new technologies to develop our *Teach Anywhere* and *Learn Anywhere*, resources. We are 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 such as UVic will continue to be nimble, and adapt our approaches to preserve the quality and continuity of our academic offerings through online learning, we know there is more to do. Many rural and remote communities across British Columbia lack reliable and high-quality connectivity options. The lack of access affects their education and every single sector in our province and our overall competitiveness. It is critical that we make investments

in rural and remote connectivity so that every corner of our province can have equal access to high quality online and distance education.

- *Therefore, we ask the Committee to recommend that Government make investments in rural connectivity and online learning to support equal access to distance education. This would be a legacy investment serving the province well into the future.*

### **Upskilling/Re-Skilling:**

Here closer to home on the South Island, COVID-19 has had significant impacts on our local region and disproportionately affected women, young people, new Canadians and our Indigenous communities. As we think about recovery, we must rethink how we invest in society – we must build back up by investing in human capital through upskilling and reskilling to create equity and resilience in our economy. Education is the bridge to a better future for individuals and for our province. Education is the great equalizer. 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 we make investments today to ensure equitable access to BC's high quality post-secondary system.

- *Therefore, we ask the Committee to recommend that Government make investments in British Columbians to provide upskilling and re-skilling programs.*

### **Investing in High-Impact Research and Graduate Students:**

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 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 socio-economic issues. Investments in people and ideas will help us build capacity and tackle issues that will remain front and center for British Columbia.

To emphasize, the next generation of graduate students are critical in advancing research. 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 educational experience. Our 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 are vital to our province's competitiveness and economic recovery.

- *Therefore, we ask the Committee to recommend that Government enhance partnerships with post-secondary, to advance high-impact research and provide ongoing and stable funding to Graduate Student Scholarships to keep BC competitive for top talent.*

**Conclusion:**

The British Columbia post-secondary sector will support all students and work hard with our partners in business, industry, and communities 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, we enjoy integration unlike anywhere else in Canada, and possibly the world, when it comes to post-secondary education. Our colleges, institutes, research and teaching universities all play unique but vital roles in this system.

In closing, UVic is proud to endorse the recommendations put forward jointly by the Research Universities' Council of British Columbia, the BC Association of Institutes and Universities and BC Colleges to the Committee. It is critical we continue to build on our strengths and keep our post-secondary 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 required to serve British Columbia and its citizens.