

WRITTEN SUBMISSION PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS IN ADVANCE OF THE UPCOMING FEDERAL BUDGET **BY SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

AUGUST 7, 2020

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RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1

INCREASE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

To equip workers dislocated by COVID-19 with new knowledge and skills, to develop the human capital required to grow the economy, and to build a more prosperous, equitable and sustainable Canada, the Government of Canada should significantly enhance access to post-secondary education by increasing the financial support it provides to students.

RECOMMENDATION 2

INVEST IN POST-SECONDARY INFRASTRUCTURE

To provide the next generation of knowledge infrastructure required to stimulate growth, create jobs, and address pressing economic, social and environmental priorities, the Government of Canada should invest in post-secondary infrastructure, including support for the construction of an Interdisciplinary Life Sciences Building on SFU's Burnaby campus.

RECOMMENDATION 3

INVEST IN A HIGHER EDUCATION KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION FUND

To increase the contributions made by research universities to Canadians, the Government of Canada should invest in a Higher Education Knowledge Mobilization Fund to support programs and initiatives that better enable universities to translate their research and innovative capacities into economic opportunities, social benefits, and environmental solutions.

RECOMMENDATION 4

SUPPORT STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

To build a more robust, diversified and sustainable economy, the Government of Canada should help provinces advance strategic economic development initiatives that have high potential to generate wealth, create employment and reduce Canada's carbon-dependence. Examples include British Columbia's recently announced Quantum Algorithms Institute and an anticipated agritech initiative.

RECOMMENDATION 5

FUND GREEN TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS

To help build more resilient, interconnected, and green communities, the Government of Canada should prioritize low-carbon transportation infrastructure, including the proposed Burnaby Mountain Urban Transit Gondola.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is arguably the most consequential historical event since the Second World War. It's also far from over. While we remain locked in a battle to flatten the curve, save lives, and find a vaccine, it is imperative that we begin planning a recovery from the societal impacts of COVID-19 that is worthy of the sacrifice made by so many during these difficult times.

In this historic undertaking, Canada has many advantages. Among the most important are the skills and abilities Canadians possess, owing in large part to the strengths and capacities of our post-secondary sector. In British Columbia and across the country, universities and colleges provide hundreds of thousands of students from home and abroad with knowledge and skills that are relevant to the demands of a modern economy and that contribute to the well-being of every community.

As we confront a world reeling from the pandemic's health, economic, and social consequences, governments have a unique opportunity to harness Canada's post-secondary resources to help support a transformative economic recovery that builds human capital, promotes social equity and mobility, and generates the research and innovation we need to create a more prosperous, environmentally-sustainable, and inclusive society.

As one of Canada's leading research universities, Simon Fraser University (SFU) is defined by its commitment to engagement, leveraging our educational, research, and other capacities to develop stronger communities in pursuit of these larger goals.

SFU offers five recommendations to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance Pre-Budget Consultation. These recommendations complement and amplify those offered by Universities Canada and the Research Universities' Council of British Columbia.

We thank Canada's Parliamentarians and public servants for this opportunity and for their leadership through the COVID-19 crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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INCREASE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

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The most valuable assets of any country are the skills and talents of its people. In a world in which knowledge is the main currency, building human capital must be the central pillar of a successful COVID-19 recovery plan.

COVID-19 resulted in tremendous economic hardship for hundreds of thousands of Canadian workers, many of them on low incomes, and upended by disrupted labour markets. For example, youth unemployment in B.C. stands at a staggering 29 percent.

Helping these Canadians get back on their feet, even as the pandemic continues, is a collective challenge shared by all. It is also an opportunity. Through education we can help those most affected by the pandemic – especially women, Indigenous peoples, and youth – develop the human capital Canada needs to build a more prosperous, sustainable and inclusive future.

The federal government responded with an array of emergency financial aid programs, including an ambitious student support package – welcome relief that will allow tens of thousands of Canadians to commence or continue their studies. However, COVID-19 disrupted labour markets in ways that require an ongoing commitment to increase support for students as a means to build human capital by expanding the reach of post-secondary education. With labour market forecasts predicting an increasing number of new jobs requiring post-secondary knowledge and skills, even before COVID-19, the expansion of the post-secondary franchise is an urgent economic and social priority.

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Forward-looking governments around the world are responding to COVID-19's economic impacts with ambitious plans to invest in infrastructure.

Canada's post-secondary institutions should be a high priority for infrastructure investments. The post-secondary sector has proven its ability to utilize federal-provincial infrastructure programs to create vital facilities that enhance Canada's capacities to advance knowledge, research, and innovation. In its submission to this committee, Universities Canada points out that infrastructure needs at Canadian universities are at critical levels with approximately \$7 billion in shovel-ready infrastructure projects.

SFU's proposal for an Interdisciplinary Life Sciences Building (ILSB) epitomizes the potential to create post-secondary infrastructure that will have lasting health, social, and economic benefits.

Housing more than one thousand faculty, staff, and students, the ISLB will be a centre for discovery, invention, and innovation in science to resolve human disease and epidemiological problems. Harnessing the power of data, molecular biology, and biochemistry to confront urgent societal health issues, the ILSB will bring people together across multiple disciplines to understand how to anticipate and address disease, counter its transmission, and better protect people and communities from future contagions and health crises.

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Owing in large part to sustained federal support, Canada's universities and institutes are research powerhouses.

Despite this strength, lack of national commitment and program support makes it difficult for universities to transform their research into marketable innovations that create jobs, grow our economy, reduce environmental impacts, and improve our quality of life.

SFU stands out as a leader connecting researchers and students with industry and community partners to drive business development and social innovation. Drawing on SFU's example and the experience of other institutions, Universities Canada has joined the call for a national knowledge mobilization strategy to better support university-based programs and initiatives such as innovation hubs, shared research facilities, lab-to-market programs, and business incubators and accelerators.

A new Higher Education Knowledge Mobilization Fund would fuel these efforts, enabling the federal government to help universities maximize the economic and social benefits of their knowledge, discoveries, and inventions to help build a more robust, resilient, and green economy.

RECOMMENDATION 4

SUPPORT STRATEGIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

To build a more robust, diversified and sustainable economy, the Government of Canada should help provinces advance strategic economic development initiatives that have high potential to generate wealth, create employment and reduce Canada's carbon-dependence. Examples include British Columbia's recently announced Quantum Algorithms Institute and an anticipated agritech initiative.

Throughout Canada's history, the federal government's leadership pushed the country's economic development forward. Today, in the face the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, similar leadership and vision is needed to nurture and develop the industries that will generate tomorrow's jobs, create new wealth, and reduce our carbon dependence.

In this regard, Canada's post-secondary sector is a source of extraordinary potential that Ottawa can utilize with the provinces as part of a coordinated national economic strategy.

Two Province of British Columbia initiatives highlight the need and potential for federal participation and support:

1. The recently announced Quantum Algorithms Institute (QuAI) located on SFU's Surrey campus will bring together research universities, industry and government to position B.C. as a world leader in the application of quantum computing technology. The Province of British Columbia's five-year, \$17 million contribution to establish the institute, plus \$3 million anticipated for facilities, will help anchor an innovation corridor in Surrey and the Fraser Valley that will attract investment and talent from around the globe. Matching support from the federal government would amplify the impact of the provincial investment and advance the development of this cutting-edge industry.
2. In their February report, *The Future of B.C.'s Food System*, the Government of B.C.'s Food Security Taskforce recommended an agritech initiative involving post-secondary institutions, industry, and government to help increase agricultural production and jobs in B.C. Combining an institute, accelerator, and associated educational program, the initiative would seek to harness technology and innovation to strengthen B.C.'s agriculture sector while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting conservation. This initiative, while still in its infancy, would benefit from federal participation and support.

RECOMMENDATION 5

FUND GREEN TRANSIT SOLUTIONS

To help build more resilient, interconnected, and green communities, the Government of Canada should prioritize low-carbon transportation infrastructure, including the proposed Burnaby Mountain Urban Transit Gondola.

The availability of good public transit is a measure of a society's overall health and well-being. Public transit connects people, communities, and businesses in ways that promote opportunity and nurture citizenship, contributing to everyone's quality of life and well-being. Investing in public transit, therefore, is an investment in a greener, healthier, and more inclusive society and economy.

Canada's post-secondary sector relies heavily on public transit to move people and to connect campuses to the communities they serve. For example, SFU students use public transit to travel to school, work, and home, at rates much higher than the national average. Yet the transit route carrying thousands of students on diesel buses from the SkyTrain to SFU's Burnaby Mountain campus is among the worst in the Lower Mainland. Wait times are long, and in the event of poor weather conditions, students may be left stranded. Transportation planners have extensively reviewed the problem and say that an urban transit gondola is the best solution. It is safe, cost-effective, and green. And it works, even when it snows.

CONCLUSION

COVID-19 exposed significant weakness in Canadian society and shone a light on its many strengths. As we begin to look beyond the immediate crisis and to recovery, Canadians are presented with a historic opportunity to learn the pandemic's lessons and build a more robust, equitable and green future.

Canada's post-secondary institutions are an enormous asset in this national project of repair and renewal. The five recommendations put forward in this submission highlight key pillars of a Canadian economic strategy for the COVID era, and some of the important ways in SFU is ready contribute.

WORD COUNT: 1,991