
**A REPORT ON THE CONSULTATIONS WITH
STUDENTS, EDUCATORS AND
ADMINISTRATORS
REGARDING THE TUITION FEE FREEZE**



**BRITISH
COLUMBIA**

Ministry of Advanced Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS

• Executive Summary	2
Consultation Process	2
Results of the Consultations	2
• Detailed Report	4
Background	4
Consultation Process	4
Consultation Meetings	5
Results of the Web-based Survey	7
Consultation Correspondence	10

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CONSULTATION PROCESS

A multi-staged consultation process was designed to elicit comment on the tuition fee freeze from a full range of educators, students, and administrators. The major stages of the consultation were:

- Letter to stakeholders in the post-secondary system - September 17, 2001
- Web-based survey which ran from October 18 until November 30
- Consultation meetings: November 1 - students
November 15 - educators, administrators and unions

In addition to this formal process, the Minister received many comments regarding the tuition fee freeze through other forums, such as meetings with various stakeholders and correspondence from interested individuals through regular mail and email.

RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATIONS

In total, the Minister met with 81 individuals at consultation meetings and received 1,029 responses through the Web-based survey from students, educators, administrators, parents and other interested individuals. A significant number of the students who responded to the Web-based survey used a template response developed by the Canadian Federation of students. Input varied widely across individuals and stakeholders.

Generally, students were in favour of the freeze, believing that it had benefited them and improved the quality of education. They were in favour of retaining the freeze, and some even suggested reducing or eliminating tuition altogether. Administrators cited inflexibility and deteriorating quality as major factors in favour of lifting the freeze. Educators were split on the issue: some felt that the freeze had been beneficial for students and should be retained; while most stated that impacts of the freeze had reduced the quality of education and that tuition should be allowed to increase but with protection for students in economic need. The union and association representatives cited increased access and participation as reasons to maintain the current freeze on both tuition and ancillary fees.

Session highlights:**Sample quotes:**

- Thirty-nine student representatives participated in the meeting with the Minister on November 1, 2001. Thirty-six students thought the freeze had been beneficial and supported its continuation. Only three students indicated they would accept increases in tuition fees if it meant improvements in the system.
- Seven hundred and seventy-eight students provided responses to the web survey. A majority supported the freeze as they believed it had improved access and the affordability of education. They wanted to retain the freeze. A minority suggested increasing tuition fees as a way to address the negative impacts of the freeze.

“[There are many] students who, were it not for the tuition fee freeze, would never have had the opportunity to participate in post-secondary education.”

“I need the tuition to remain low so that I can go to school and have enough money to send my children to daycare.”

“Thanks to low tuition, I cannot get the courses I need because my school cannot afford additional professors or teaching space.”

- Sixteen educators attended the meeting with the Minister on November 15. They were generally in favour of lifting the freeze to address its negative impacts. They suggested financial aid for students should also be expanded.
- Ninety-two educators responded to the survey. They were split on the impacts of the freeze. Some felt it had been beneficial and wanted to keep the freeze, other felt that there had been substantial costs and that tuition fees should be increased.

“Because of the freeze, we have had to cut sections which has resulted in long wait lists and increased frustration for both students and faculty.”

“I feel lower tuition really helps more people get a better education, and that in the long run will help BC.”

Tuition freeze has resulted in a “reduction in experimental labs with an increase in paper-based labs [which] means that students have limited exposure to lab equipment and do not acquire valuable lab skills.”

- Seventeen administrators met with the Minister on November 15. They were in favour of raising tuition fees to address the negative impacts the freeze had caused.
- Similar points of view were expressed by the 15 administrators that responded to the survey.

“For many students, the tuition freeze has proved to be a false economy because of having to take an additional year to complete graduation.”

- The Minister met with nine union and association representatives. They believed that the freeze had been a benefit for students and were in favour of maintaining the freeze.

“The costs of post-secondary education funding should be borne by society as a whole, through adequate government funding.”

- Sixty-eight survey responses were received from parents. Most parents believed the freeze has been beneficial for students by improving access and participation. They wanted to retain the freeze.
- A smaller number of parents stated that the freeze had reduced the quality of education. These parents were willing to accept an increase in tuition fees.

“I believe it is the responsibility of government to provide quality educational opportunities that are available to all, not just to those who can afford it.”

“There comes a point when it becomes economically smarter in the long run for students to take on more debt and pay for a better quality of undergraduate education, than accept a degree from a university of mediocre reputation.”

DETAILED REPORT

BACKGROUND

In 1996, the government legislated a freeze on tuition fees at public post-secondary institutions. Tuition fees were frozen at the 1995/96 levels established by each post-secondary institution. Mandatory ancillary fees (e.g. registration fees, laboratory fees, athletics fees, etc.) were not frozen until two years later and remain at 1997/98 levels. The freeze continued until 2000/01. For the 2001/02 school year, the government instituted and fully funded a tuition fee reduction of 5%, while keeping ancillary fees frozen.

Prior to 1996, university boards of governors had the exclusive statutory authority to establish tuition fees and other ancillary fees. Although boards of colleges, university colleges, institutes and the Open Learning Agency were free to set their own fees, changes had to be approved by the Minister of Advanced Education.

Compensation for the tuition freeze was not provided in 1996/97 and 1997/98. Partial compensation was provided to institutions: in 1998/99 (\$1.2 million) and in 1999/00 (\$1.5 million). In 2000/01, \$5.95 million was provided to institutions as an adjustment for the tuition freeze and to cover the costs of wage increases under current collective agreements. The 2001/02 budget announced on July 30, 2001, provided approximately \$6 million (including Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission programs) to compensate institutions for the reduction in tuition and the extension of the freeze on mandatory ancillary fees.

Post-secondary institutions indicated that the two years of not being compensated for the tuition freeze has resulted in cut backs to the system. They state that student access and course availability have suffered as institutions were forced to reduce services.

A promise in *A New Era for British Columbia* specifically addressed this issue:

“consult with educators, students and administrators on the hidden costs to students and institutes of previous tuition freezes that were not properly funded by government and that have reduced student access and reduced course offerings.”

CONSULTATION PROCESS

In following through on this commitment, the Minister of Advanced Education adopted a multi-staged consultation process designed to elicit comment on the tuition fee freeze from a full range of educators, students, and administrators. The following chart indicates the stages in the consultation process.

Activity	Description
• Letter to major stakeholders in the post-secondary education sector	• A letter was sent to all major stakeholders (faculty associations, unions, institution councils) on September 17 asking for their comments on the hidden costs of the tuition fee freeze and suggestions for the future of the freeze.
• Web-based survey	• A web-based survey was launched October 18. Interested individuals were given the opportunity to respond to a set of questions about the tuition fee freeze. The survey period ended November 30.
• Meetings with students, educators and administrators	• November 1: the Minister met with student representatives. • November 15: the Minister met with administrators, educators and union/associations representing staff and faculty.

In addition to this formal process, the Minister received many comments regarding the tuition fee freeze through other forums. For example, meetings on other post-secondary issues elicited opinions on the freeze; and the Core Services Review process gave institutions an opportunity to make their points of view known through formal submissions and meetings with the Minister. The Minister also received correspondence from interested individuals through regular mail and email. In all, the Minister received over 50 items of correspondence on this issue outside the formal consultation process.

CONSULTATION MEETINGS

The Minister held a series of meetings with educators, students and administrators during the month of November 2001. The objectives were to obtain input regarding the hidden costs of the tuition fee freeze and to discuss policy options for the future of the freeze.

Students

Thirty-nine student representatives met with the Minister on November 1, 2001, with most students being representatives of their respective institution's student societies. For the three institutions that do not have student societies (Justice Institute of BC, Institute of Indigenous Government, and Open Learning Agency), the presidents of these institutions nominated a student representative. The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) were also invited to send representatives.

- Thirty-six students supported the tuition fee freeze and the 5% tuition fee reduction. The main benefits they perceived were improved access, participation and affordability. Many stated that enrolments had increased and that education was now available to a broader range of people.
- Some students said that the average debt level for students on graduation in BC was lower than the national average. The differential was explained as a result of the tuition fee freeze. Many students felt that high tuition fees and high potential debt levels create a "sticker shock", which prevents capable students from low income families from attending post-secondary education. The tuition fee freeze was viewed as an excellent policy that addresses this issue.
- A number of the students present indicated they were from disadvantaged backgrounds, some were single mothers, others were from low income households, one had learning disabilities. These students all emphasised how important the freeze had been in encouraging them to further their education. They believed education provided them with a way to break out of the cycle of poverty. Many stated that, if tuition were raised, they would likely have to reduce their studying to part-time or quit altogether.
- Many of the students from rural and northern institutions emphasised how important education was in their communities during hard economic times. They said that education provided opportunities for people to improve their level of education, gain new skills, upgrade and find new employment. However, they felt that their institutions had been hit by funding cut backs and capital freezes to the point that many programs were unable to meet demand.
- Some students suggested that it was a fallacy to assume that increasing tuition fees would lead to quality improvements. A few cited Ontario and Alberta as examples where, in their view, tuition increases had not lead to any marked quality enhancements.
- Many students stated that the issue was really a funding issue, not a tuition issue. For them, the main problems were cut backs in the federal government's transfers and reductions in core funding by the province. Some students argued that since tuition provided such a small percentage of operating revenues, raising tuition fees would provide little incremental revenue. Students recommended that the province should increase its funding for post-secondary education. This point of view was further reinforced by many students who stated that education is an investment in the human capital of the province, which leads to a stronger economy. Therefore, they felt the province should increase its funding. Several students said government should adopt a no tuition fee policy.
- Three students indicated that they thought the freeze had imposed costs, such as a decline in the quality of education, a reduction in the availability of courses, and an increase in degree completion times. These students were willing to consider a tuition fee increase if it led to improvements such as better technology, labs and equipment.

Administrators

Seventeen representatives of post-secondary education administrators (including Vice Presidents Academic/Education, Vice Presidents Finance and Administration, and administrators responsible for student services) met with the Minister on November 15, 2001. A representative of The University Presidents Council (TUPC) was also present. Administrator representatives were chosen to provide points of view from universities, university-colleges, urban colleges and rural colleges.

- All the representatives indicated that the tuition fee freeze had imposed a variety of hidden costs, such as: a decline in the number of courses, increasing wait lists, cut backs in library hours, longer time for students to complete their programs, an inability to provide access to smaller communities, degraded equipment, and a rising student/faculty ratio.
- The administrators felt that most of the efficiencies had been rung out of the institutions and that any extension of the freeze would mean actual cut-backs in programming.
- It was suggested that the tuition fee freeze also curtailed innovative programming. According to these representatives, institutions found it difficult to be creative and provide flexible educational options within the tuition freeze. For example, these people indicated offering courses demanded by students and businesses on a cost-recovery basis could not be done if the course were offered elsewhere by the institution and institutions could not afford to offer the courses any other way.
- The tuition fee freeze was cited as a one-size-fits-all policy, which does not work for the broad range of institutions in BC. For example, many administrators felt they had been unfairly disadvantaged by the freezing of tuition rates at levels significantly lower than at other institutions.
- The freeze on ancillary fees was also noted to be a problem. Institutions were unable to recoup the true cost of supplying materials and equipment for courses. A common complaint was that institutions were unable to keep their information technology up-to-date without being able to increase the technology fee students paid. Another example suggested that co-op programs could be expanded if co-op fees could be increased to pay for larger programs.
- The representative from the Institute of Indigenous Government (IIG) cautioned that there is already a smaller demand for education from First Nations students. Raising tuition fees could reduce that demand even further.

Educators

Sixteen educators from the post-secondary education system met with the Minister on November 15, 2001. Written submissions were provided by the invitees who were unable to attend. The educators were primarily Education Council chairs from the college, university college and institute sectors. Appendix 4 provides a list of participants.

- All educators indicated that the tuition fee freeze has imposed hidden costs on the system. They identified similar costs to those mentioned by administrators, including: reduced students services such as counselling, longer completion times for students, reduced course selection (one educator stated that the focus at their institution had shifted to upper year courses with the result that entry level courses were reduced), the need to take courses at different campuses, longer wait lists, reduced library hours and materials, degraded equipment, and reduced services at smaller campuses.
- Some of the educators noted that their institutions compete nationally and internationally for students (e.g. Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, and British Columbia Institute of Technology). The freeze has impacted their ability to compete in that they do not receive the same level of funding and as a result the quality of their programming suffers in comparison to that of their competition.
- The freeze was also viewed as stifling creativity and innovation in the system. For example, institutions could not offer cost recovery courses, and new programming was difficult to undertake due to the up-front development cost.
- The freeze on ancillary fees was also viewed as a serious issue. It was stated that many courses did not have sufficient materials and supplies because their fees could not be raised to cover the costs of inflation over the period of the freeze.

- In spite of the list of costs, many educators indicated that the freeze was very beneficial for low income and “at risk” individuals taking courses such as Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language and vocational skills. The Vancouver Community College representative noted that most of its student body consisted of people enrolled in these basic education and skill courses.

Unions/Associations

Nine representatives of the unions and associations who represent staff and faculty in the post-secondary sector met with the Minister on November 15, 2001. Present were representatives from the Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC (CUFA), the British Columbia Government Employers Association (BCGEU), the College Institute Educator’s Association of BC (CIEA) and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

- All representatives supported the tuition fee freeze. All wanted government to maintain the freeze and to reduce tuition fees further, possibly even eliminating the fees altogether.
- The representatives suggested that the real issue was the lack of core funding for post-secondary education. The issue for them was funding, not tuition fees.
- They asserted there was no guarantee that, if tuition fees increased, there would be a resulting rise in quality. Moreover, if tuition went up, there would likely be a drop in demand.

RESULTS OF THE WEB-BASED SURVEY

This section summarizes the results of the 1,029 responses to the web-based survey. Survey responses were received from students, educators, administrators, parents and other interested individuals. Approximately three-quarters of the surveys were completed by students.

The survey was located on the ministry’s web site where four questions were posted with text boxes provided for responses. Responders were also asked to identify themselves as students, educators, administrators, parents or other.

Some responders identified several issues for each question, others chose not to answer all the questions. Therefore, the counts should not be considered as cumulative. The analysis merely identifies how many people indicated a certain response.

Students

Seven hundred and seventy-eight responses were received from students. At least 300 of the responses were submitted using a pre-written response template developed by the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS). These responses were made available on the CFS web site; where students could simply submit a response to the Ministry site.

Students who believed the tuition fee freeze has been beneficial

- Most students believed the tuition fee freeze has been beneficial by increasing access and participation, making education more affordable and reducing debt levels, and encouraging students from lower income families to attend post-secondary institutions. Many of these students stated that the tuition freeze has made post-secondary education less elitist; that enrolment is based on grades not ability to pay; that it has permitted people to break out of a cycle of poverty by allowing them to improve their education and skills to gain better jobs; and that the low cost of post-secondary education has provided an incentive for people to further their education. Some thought that institutions had become more efficient and cost-effective as a result of the freeze.

- When asked if the tuition freeze had impacted the quality of their education, most students believed that the freeze has had a positive impact on quality. Many pointed to BC universities' high ranking in the MacLean's survey of universities as proof the freeze has had little, if any, impact on reducing quality. These students indicated that the tuition freeze allowed more students from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds to take post-secondary education. This increased diversity was viewed as a major contributor to improved quality. In addition, students believed their professors and instructors taught well and maintained high standards, which also improved quality.
- Similar responses were provided by students to the question of what the impacts would be if tuition fees remained frozen. Most students believed it would continue to be beneficial in attracting more students, especially low income students, and in providing more access, and being more affordable.
- It should be noted that many students in this majority group stated their belief that the issue was really a lack of funding, not low tuition fees. Many students felt that post-secondary education should be considered an investment in human capital; which benefits the economy by providing skilled workers. They believed core funding should be increased, and that the federal government should restore its level of transfers for post-secondary education.
- In keeping with the majority view, more than half favoured keeping the freeze, while other suggestions included reducing tuition fees and eliminating tuition fees altogether. Students suggested BC should follow the European example where there are no tuition fees: that education is a right and should be free of charge. Some specifically suggested that government increase its funding of the system to address any of the hidden costs. Students stated they did not believe that increasing tuition fees would result in an improvement in quality, citing the recent Ontario experience.
- Some students stated they would be forced to quit their education if tuition fees increased, as they would not be able to afford the increase.

Students who believed the tuition fee freeze has imposed costs

- A minority of students believed there had been negative impacts from the tuition fee freeze. Identified costs included: larger class sizes, increased fees, longer completion times, reduced course selection, old and out-dated equipment and labs, increased wait lists, and reduced standard of education. Some students also noted that the quality of faculty had been reduced with professors being replaced with teaching assistants or sessionals. Other issues included a reduction in services, library hours, and few new programs/courses.
- This group expressed similar concerns if the freeze were to be continued. They identified declines in quality, increases in class sizes and a general erosion of the post-secondary education system as potential impacts. A few noted that BC's institutions would likely lose out to the competition (other institutions in Canada and the US) for graduates and perhaps even undergraduates as they would not be able to maintain a sufficient quality of learning.
- This minority is willing to accept higher tuition fees. Most suggested any increase should be scheduled and that it should be capped, others proposed an increase without any stipulations. Other suggestions included: increasing fees for out-of-province students, or increases based on inflation.

Educators

Ninety-two responses were received from people who identified themselves as educators. They were generally split on the issue.

Educators who believed the tuition fee freeze has been beneficial

- This group believed the freeze had been beneficial mainly through improving access and participation, and affordability. They did not observe any declines in quality, if anything, they believed quality was improved. Some noted the increase in diversity of the student body as a positive impact. Similar to the students, some framed the issue as a funding problem not a tuition problem and believed the solution was for government to increase base funding.

- These educators believed that continuing the freeze would improve access, affordability and that institutions would not be affected. Some noted education as being an investment that produces highly skilled people which is beneficial for the economy.
- Most of this group wanted to keep the freeze, while some wanted to lower tuition fees even more than present levels.

Educators who believed the tuition fee freeze has imposed costs

- The other group of educators viewed the freeze as having substantial costs including: reduced revenues for institutions, stagnation of programming, increased wait lists, out-of-date equipment and labs, reduced services, increased job stress, insufficient faculty and staff, and insufficient supplies and materials.
- This group also perceived continuing negative impacts if the freeze were maintained. They believed quality would be eroded and institutions would continue to cut back.
- Tuition fee increases were supported by this group. A group suggested that tuition should be kept affordable through a scheduled increase. Other suggestions included: charge higher tuition for out-of-province students, use market value rates, and charge cost-recovery. These educators also believed that student financial assistance programs should be expanded in conjunction with an increase in tuition fees.

Administrators

Fifteen administrators responded to the survey.

- Most felt that the freeze has had negative impacts on the quality of education. The costs of the freeze included: reduced course selection, increased wait lists, difficulty in retaining qualified faculty, out-of-date equipment, fewer new programs developed, and larger class sizes. They believed these costs would continue if the freeze is maintained. These administrators suggested tuition fee increases were necessary and that student financial assistance should be improved as well.
- A smaller group believed the freeze had been beneficial for students by improving access and affordability. They indicated that there has been little impact on quality. When asked about the impact if the freeze remained, they believed there would be similar benefits. One administrator asked that adult basic education remain tuition free.

Parents

Sixty-eight responses were received from parents.

Parents who believed the tuition fee freeze has been beneficial

- Most parents believed the tuition fee freeze has been beneficial for students by providing more access and improving participation, and keeping education affordable. A few noted that a freeze meant that tuition fees were a known quantity and could be budgeted for by students. Parents believed that the freeze had had little impact on quality; moreover, some stated that the freeze improved quality by attracting a wider socio-economic range of students.
- Asked about the future impacts of maintaining the freeze, parents suggested improved access and affordability would continue to be the main impacts. Many suggested that education should be viewed as a critical instrument for economic policy as it produces educated and skilled workers, and for this reason government should continue funding support.
- These parents generally wanted to keep the freeze, while some wanted to reduce fees and some wanted to eliminate fees altogether.

Parents who believed the tuition fee freeze has imposed costs

- A smaller number of parents believed that the freeze has had negative impacts on the quality of education. Some of the potential impacts they identified included: deterioration in the quality of education, reduced revenues for institutions, larger classes, and less qualified faculty.
- These parents were willing to accept increases, including a managed increase and charging higher tuition for out-of-province students.

Others

Seventy-six responses were received from people who either did not indicate who they were or who selected the “other” category.

- A majority believed the tuition fee freeze has had positive impacts on quality. Most identified access and increased participation and affordability as the most important benefits. A smaller number of these people felt that the issue was really a funding issue, not a tuition issue. They identified federal cutbacks and inadequate funding by the province as the real areas of concern.
- Asked about the impact of continuing the freeze, these people believed it would continue to improve access, increase the diversity of the student body, especially attracting lower income students, and increase affordability of education. Many suggested that education should be thought of as an important economic policy; educating skilled workers would bring economic prosperity. Thus, they felt government should increase its funding.
- Maintaining the freeze was the main recommendation, although reducing tuition and eliminating tuition altogether were also suggested.
- A smaller number felt that the quality of education had been affected. They identified reduced services, reduced course selection, and longer completion times as the main impacts. They identified similar impacts if the freeze was maintained.
- It was suggested that tuition increases should be implemented, however, some felt that the increases should be managed in some way.

CONSULTATION CORRESPONDENCE

The tuition consultation process prompted many institutions, stakeholders and students to convey their points of view to the Minister of Advanced Education, Shirley Bond. Over 60 written submissions were received by Minister Bond.

Students

Written submissions were received from student associations representing many public post-secondary institutions and from the Canadian Federation of Students and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. These submissions were made in support of presentations at the meeting Minister Bond had with student representatives on November 1, 2001. Most submissions indicated that the tuition fee freeze had improved student access and supported continuing the freeze.

Written submissions were also received from numerous students from around the province. Again, most of their comments focused on the aspects of the freeze such as providing greater accessibility and affordability. The majority of these students supported continuing the freeze, however some students indicated that they had been adversely affected by the freeze and would be willing to pay more tuition if this would solve the problems they were experiencing.

Institutions

- Most institutions commented on the tuition fee freeze as part of their submissions to the Core Services Review process. All of these institutions indicated that the freeze had imposed a variety of costs that had reduced their flexibility and imposed cost pressures, which affected the quality of education. Hidden costs identified included: reduced student access, reduced course availability, increased degree completion times and reduced student services.
- Written submissions were received from the University Presidents' Council and from the University Colleges of BC on behalf of their members. Both organizations recommended lifting the tuition fee freeze and permitting institutions to set their own tuition fees. They further recommended that government provide an overall policy framework to guide the increases.

Administrators

- Several written submissions were received from administrators to support presentations they made to the Minister Bond at a November 15, 2001 meeting. These submissions identified hidden costs of the tuition fee freeze, including: reduced student access, increased degree completion times, reduced innovation and competitiveness for institutions.
- The submissions recommended that the freeze be lifted, and that tuition fees be permitted to rise. In place of the freeze, it was recommended that institutions' boards be able to set their own tuition fees within a broad policy established by government.

Educators

- Written submissions were received from some institutions' faculty associations, as well as from educators who were unable to attend the meeting with the Minister on November 15, 2001. Similar to administrators, these educators identified a variety of hidden costs of the tuition fee freeze, such as: reduced course availability, reduced student services, and lack of flexibility to offer new courses. These educators also suggested that the tuition fee freeze be lifted. They called for improving student financial assistance as a way to address impacts on students most in need.

Unions

- Written submissions were received from unions represented in the public post-secondary education system. All submissions indicated support for the tuition fee freeze as they felt it had improved accessibility and affordability for students, especially for students from low income families. The union submissions recommended that the tuition fee freeze be extended and that government should work to reduce tuition fees and ultimately eliminate them.