

Submission to the Select Standing Committee  
on Finance and Government Services

# BC's Research Universities: Creating Futures

THE Research  
Universities' Council  
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



June 20, 2019

Thank you for this opportunity to present to you today.

The Research Universities' Council of British Columbia (RUCBC) represents BC's six research universities:

The University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria, the University of Northern British Columbia, Royal Roads University and Thompson Rivers University.

RUCBC works on behalf of these institutions to improve the quality, accessibility and coordination of university education in British Columbia. We also work closely with BC's public colleges and institutes to offer British Columbians one of the best and most highly-integrated post-secondary systems in the world.

BC's public post-secondary system was built over generations and supported by successive governments. The system reflects our province's broader commitment to the ideals of shared citizenship, economic prosperity, and social mobility. A strong and sustainable public post-secondary education system is one of the great equalizers in our society. Affordable, accessible, high-quality post-secondary education contributes to the health of our democracy, to the strength of our economy, and to the well-being of our communities.

I would like to begin my presentation today by thanking the committee for its recommendations to government in previous years. Your recommendations have had an impact.

## The Challenge:

Improve and expand university education to secure our economy, to extend opportunity and to meet the challenges of a world defined by accelerating change.

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In a world of accelerating technological and economic change the knowledge we possess is one of (if not the) most important and stable resources we possess. And tomorrow's most successful regions will be those that best leverage the skills and talents of their citizens.

As good as our universities are at providing British Columbians with high-quality education, we cannot be complacent. We are always looking for ways to improve the quality of university education and expand its reach to more people across more fields of study.

Let me provide you with a few facts that underline the challenge and the opportunity.

A recent report from the Business Development Bank of Canada found that nearly half of BC's small and medium sized businesses had difficulty recruiting new talent over the last 12 months.

In 2016, the Conference Board of Canada reported that BC's relative lack of educated workers costs our economy almost \$8 billion in lost GDP and nearly \$2 billion in revenue to government.

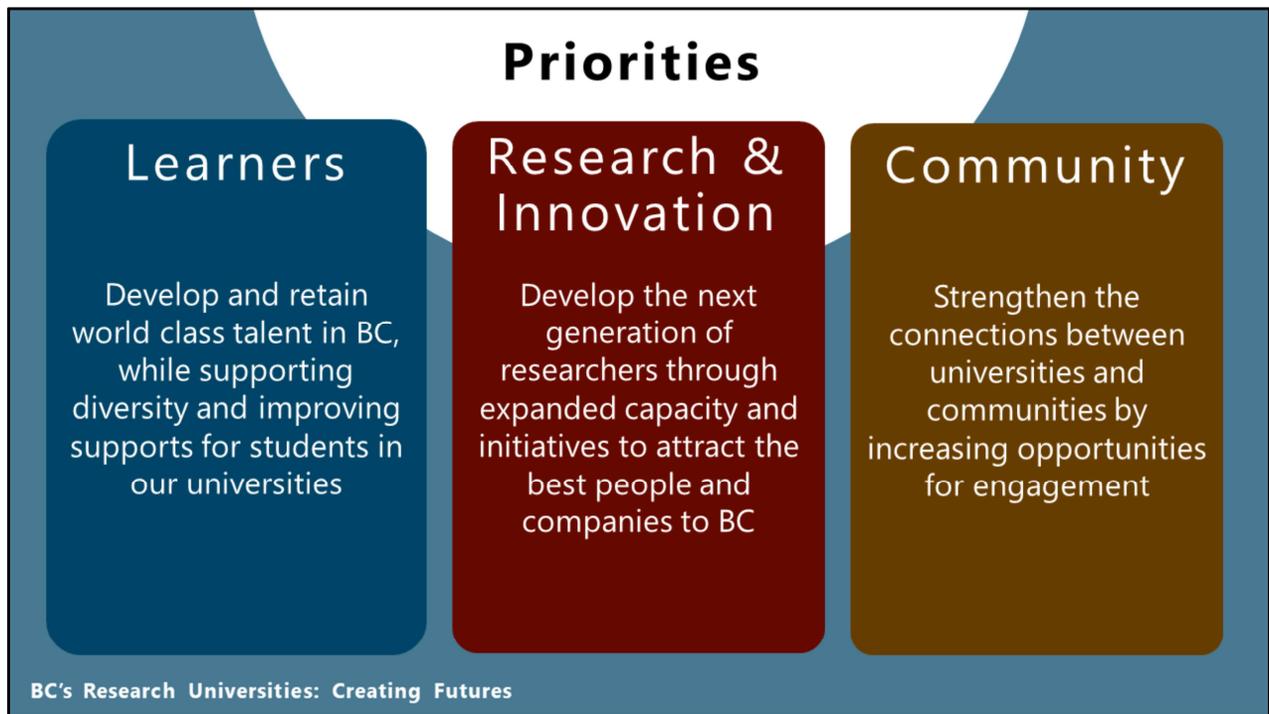
Longer term, the BC Labour Market Survey forecasts that of the 900,000 new jobs BC will need over the next decade, more than three-quarters will require some form of post-secondary education.

The bottom line:

BC is home to some of the best public research universities in the world, built over generations by forward-looking governments. We are producing some of the province's, country's and world's top talent right now.

BC's public universities make a huge contribution to the economic and social well-being of the entire province.

As we look ahead, we can, and should, improve and expand university education to secure our economy, to extend opportunity and to meet the challenges of a world defined by accelerating change.



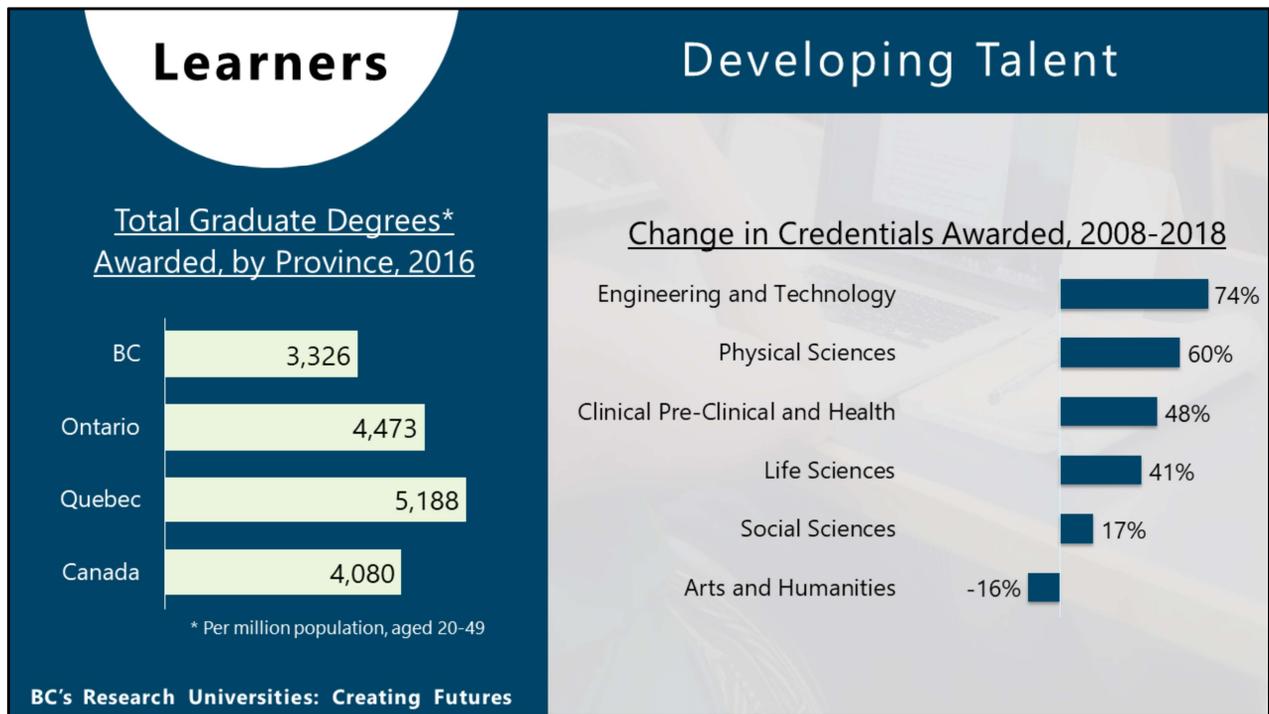
## **Priorities**

We recognize that governments have significant and competing priorities for the limited number of tax dollars available to them.

The BC government has supported post-secondary education because it advances our shared aspirations for a more prosperous and healthy society where everyone benefits from that prosperity.

And so today, in this presentation, I want to acknowledge that commitment and focus on three priority areas with five concrete, practical recommendations that will further improve and expand the reach of university education in BC.

Those priorities center on Learners, Research and Innovation, and Community.



## Developing Talent

When it comes supporting learners, BC's universities are committed to offering programs that are in demand and relevant to the hopes and aspirations of our students. Problem solving, critical thinking, the ability to write and communicate clearly, active listening and active learning, inter-cultural understanding – these are the skills that are in high demand across our economy. And these are the skills university graduates excel at.

But the fact remains: BC trails other provinces in graduate degrees as a percentage of the population. And we have a demonstrated shortage of undergraduate spaces in growing regions like Surrey.

BC's universities are beginning to tackle this problem by directing resources to high demand programs such as engineering and technology. And the BC government's recent investment in 2,900 new technology spaces is starting to make a difference.

But we still have a long way to go. For example, to reach the national average for graduate education, BC's universities would need to increase the number of degrees awarded by 1,500 – or 23 percent.

And so, RUCBC's first recommendation to the committee is the following:

**1. We ask that the committee once again recommend funding for new graduate and targeted undergraduate student spaces so we can develop the necessary talent to fuel BC's prosperity.**

## Learners

“Work-integrated learning gives students the opportunities to build the best future for themselves and their families”

- Honourable Melanie Mark,  
Minister of Advanced  
Education, Skills and Training

## Work-Integrated Learning

- Considered by employers to be one of the most important sources of relevant work experience
- Provides students with high-quality, meaningful work experiences while meeting the needs of employers
- Engages learners in their education and transition to the workplace
- Increasing across all disciplines as universities partner with employers

### Work-Integrated Learning

In addition to expanding access to graduate and undergraduate education, BC can help to develop talent through work-integrated learning which offers students practical work experience and employers the opportunity to identify and foster talent through co-ops, internships and mentorships.

These programs are extremely popular with students and employers. In response to growing demand, the federal government is making significant investments in work-integrated learning. Ottawa aims to provide every young Canadian with work-integrated learning opportunities across a broad range of disciplines with an emphasis on science, engineering, technology, math and business over the next decade.

In preparing this presentation, we intended to come with 6 recommendations, not 5. But we had to drop one because, on June 10, the province announced \$9 million in additional funding to support work-integrated learning.

So instead of asking the committee to recommend additional support for work-integrated learning, RUCBC thanks the government for supporting these programs with new investments that are crucial to their expansion and success.

## Learners

As awareness of sexual misconduct and student mental health issues continue to increase, support is required to enable universities to shift to a more proactive, rather than reactive, role

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## Improving Student Supports



### Improving Student Supports

In addition to developing talent, BC's universities also have a duty to ensure our campuses are safe. To that end, BC's universities have implemented and enhanced policies and practices to end sexual violence and harassment – policies and practices that go beyond what is required under BC's *Sexual Violence and Misconduct Policy Act*.

BC Universities also have a duty to meaningfully address the health challenges often faced by students, particularly those related to mental health. Universities have recruited additional counsellors and investigators, introduced peer mentorship programs and new integrated health teams to help students in distress.

But we need to do more. Suicide is among the leading causes of death in 15 to 24 year old Canadians, second only to accidents; 4,000 people die prematurely each year by suicide. Additional supports are required – urgently so. Those come at a cost. We recognize that. But the demand is there. And collectively, we need to address it. Therefore RUCBC's second recommendation to the committee is the following:

**2. We ask that the committee recommend an increase in provincial operating grants to expand supports for students in areas of mental health, safety and security.**

## Learners

## Diversity and Reconciliation



BC's research universities are committed to supporting students through initiatives and practices that support diversity and inclusivity, and moving forward on the response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* and the United Nation's *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

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### Diversity and Reconciliation

One of the BC government's central priorities is to advance true and lasting reconciliation with First Nations. The BC government is committed to fully adopting and implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The government has instructed its ministers to review policies, programs and legislation to determine how to bring the principles of the declaration into action.

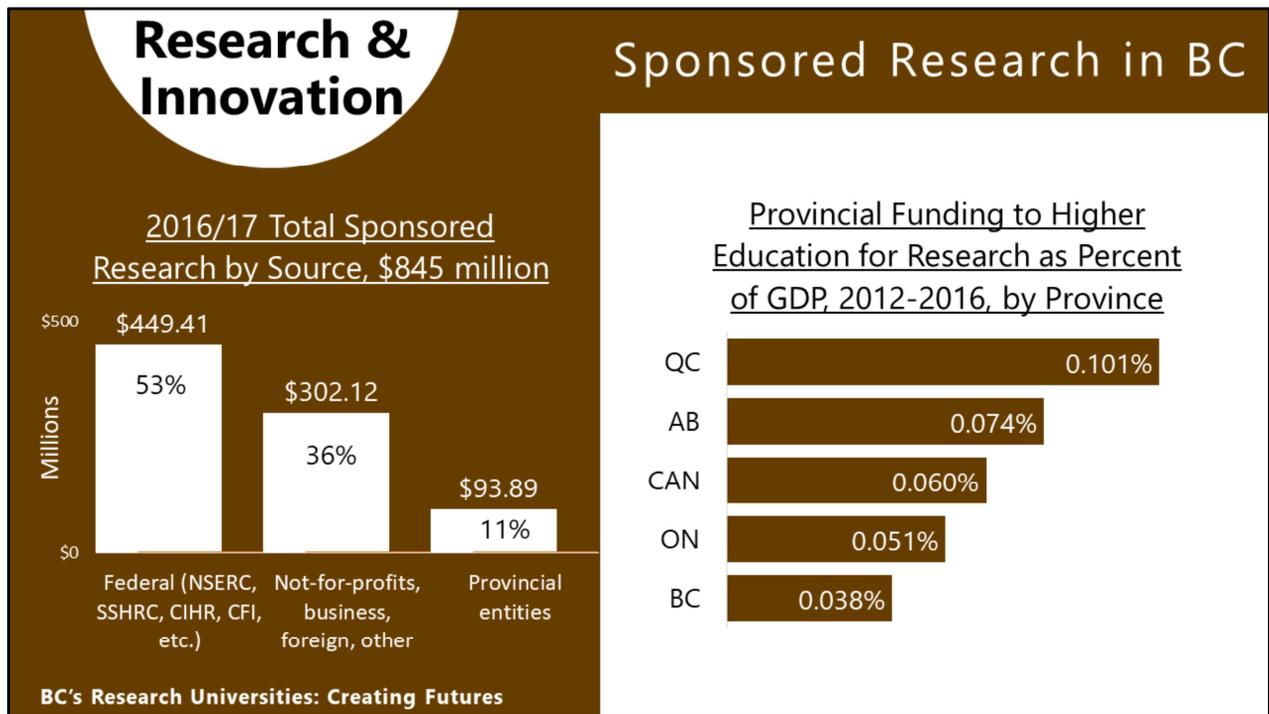
BC's research universities share this commitment and are taking action.

We believe passionately that education is central to true reconciliation with First Nations. In collaboration with our Indigenous partners, BC's universities are actively recruiting Indigenous learners, faculty and staff, promoting meaningful engagement with Indigenous peoples, and incorporating Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing into all of our practices. And because the path to post-secondary education begins early in life, we are also working with our partners in public education to help young people from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds successfully access post-secondary opportunities.

We are making progress. Indigenous student enrollment has increased 36 percent at RUCBC universities over the last ten years. But much work remains to be done.

Given our shared commitment to reconciliation, diversity and the health and well-being of our students, RUCBC's third recommendation to the committee is the following:

**3. We ask that the committee recommend a meaningful increase in provincial operating grants to increase diversity and inclusivity on our campuses, including dedicated funding for Indigenous student support.**



**Sponsored Research and Innovation in BC**

Let me return to the challenge that I laid out at the beginning of the presentation.

To secure an economy where prosperity is broadly shared, BC needs to continually improve university education and expand its reach.

To do that we need to expand access to graduate and undergraduate education, connect students to employers through work-integrated learning, promote diversity, ensure our campuses are safe and support our students.

That's the first of our three priorities: *Supporting Learners*.

I want to turn now to a second critical priority: *Research and Innovation*

Innovation drives economic growth and productivity. And research drives innovation.

Our researchers study hundreds of issues that affect the planet—from human health to new materials technology, and sustainable water supply to economic policies. We strengthen civil society through our research on advancing justice, equity and social responsibility. BC's research universities have played a key role in making BC a hub for world-leading research which is making a measurable contribution to our economy, to jobs and to productivity.

That success results in part from the fact that BC's universities punch above their weight in securing federal research dollars.

In 2016/2017, BC's research universities attracted more than \$750 million in research dollars from federal, business and non-profit sources, accounting for almost 90 percent of all institutional research revenue in the province.

The BC Knowledge Development Fund has been invaluable in attracting matching federal grants from the Canada Foundation for Innovation. And it has contributed enormously to the strength BC's universities have developed in areas like data analytics, genomics, quantum computing, and virtual, mixed and augmented reality.

In 2018, our universities were important partners in securing Canada's Digital Technology Supercluster, which will help move ideas and research into the market place. And many of the province's leading biotechnology and high-tech companies are direct spin-offs from university-based research.

That said, provincial investment in research does not match other provinces. As a percentage of GDP, provincial funding to higher education for research lags behind Quebec, Alberta and Ontario and is below the national average. This shortfall cannot be solved in the short term: for BC provincial research funding to reach the national average would require an annual \$53 million increase. But we can make progress toward closing the gap.

Given the fundamental importance research plays in driving innovation and economic growth, RUCBC's fourth recommendation to the committee is the following:

**4. We ask that the committee recommend a targeted provincial investment in research and innovation to take advantage of opportunities to leverage matching federal funding.**

## Research & Innovation

Universities have increased scholarships, bursaries and prizes by 49 percent since 2011 to attract and retain the best students. More provincial funding for graduate student scholarships would allow us to better compete with other provinces for the best talent.

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## Graduate Scholarships

The BC Graduate Scholarship Program provided one-time, three year funding \$12 million in merit-based awards.

Eight hundred graduate students will receive \$15,000 each.

### Graduate Scholarships

Graduate students play an outsized role in BC's labour market and our economy. The research and innovation conducted by graduate students at BC's universities results in substantial economic and social innovation. For example, research into how people with addictions access the health care system is improving cost-effectiveness of services, and research into quantum materials is transforming existing industries in areas such as information processing, nanoelectronics, and medicine.

However, just as BC lags behind other provinces in support for research, we also lag behind in the financial support we offer to graduate students. As a result, BC is at a disadvantage when it comes to attracting, retaining and nurturing talent.

The BC government's recently announced *BC Graduate Scholarship Program* (\$12 million over three years) was an important step forward in addressing this challenge. Taken together with the increased focus BC's universities are placing on scholarships, bursaries and prizes for graduate students, BC's research universities have been able to increase the number of talented graduate students studying in BC by 19 percent over the last ten years.

This is important progress. And we can and should build on it. Therefore, RUCBC's fifth recommendation to the committee is the following:

**5. We ask the committee to recommend that the one-time BC Graduate Scholarship funding be increased and made ongoing so that BC universities can better compete with other jurisdictions in attracting and retaining talent in the province.**

Community	Engagement
<p>RUCBC universities encourage social cohesion and involved citizenry by providing opportunities for social, creative and cultural engagement.</p> <p>BC's Research Universities: Creating Futures</p>	<p><i>"The presence of the community on campus — be it through research partnerships, knowledge exchanges, or social and cultural activities — as part of the life of the university, enriches the student experience, informs research questions and broadens the range of perspectives considered. It gives universities better exposure to where their intellectual resources are most needed."</i></p> <p>-Ian Bird, President, Community Foundations Canada and Paul Davidson, President and CEO, Universities Canada</p>

## Community

Finally, I would like to conclude this presentation by speaking about the role BC's universities play in the economic, social and democratic life of the communities they serve.

Universities do not exist in isolation from the broader society. Their impact can be seen in almost every area of life. From breakthrough research that changes our lives and world, to international education that broadens our horizons, to driving innovation in the province's economy, BC's universities support every community, large and small, throughout the province.

In today's world, these connections to community are more important than ever. The social and economic capital universities have built over generations is being harnessed to build a better, more prosperous and socially cohesive society, helping sew together the bonds of trust and understanding that underwrite local and global citizenship.

Take, for example, the role universities play fostering cross-cultural understanding. In BC today, students from over 180 countries study at a BC university. And every year, thousands of BC students study abroad. The impact this has on our economy and our society cannot be understated. International education to and from BC contributes to the diversity of the university experience and deepens our connections to each other and to the world. The result is a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources that is contributing to more sustainable, just and healthy communities across the province.

## Recommendations

### Learners

- Funding for new graduate and targeted undergraduate student spaces
- Funding to expand supports for students in areas of mental health, safety and security
- A meaningful increase in provincial operating grants to increase diversity and inclusivity, including dedicated funding for Indigenous student support

### Research & Innovation

- A targeted investment in provincial research and innovation as part of BC's economic development policy
- Make the one-time BC Graduate Scholarship funding in 2018/19 a base budget adjustment

**BC's Research Universities: Creating Futures**

By improving and expanding the reach of university education, the five recommendations contained in this submission are all aimed at advancing this goal – supporting the communities we serve as centers for knowledge, dialogue and positive economic and social change.

Because at the end of the day, universities in BC exist to serve your constituents – to help build a better, more sustainable, and more prosperous BC for all of our fellow citizens.

And in a world defined by the pace of disruptive change where knowledge is the most important and most stable asset we have, the work of our universities and post-secondary system is more critical than it's ever been.

The Research Universities' Council has considered these recommendations carefully. They are supported by all our members. And I know that you will give them your fullest consideration as you prepare your recommendations to government.

RUCBC thanks the committee for the opportunity to present today.



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