

BC ELECTION 2017

Comparative Platform Analysis: Post-Secondary Education

Elections are about choices. They matter because democracy entails the right to vote as a way you can support ideas and visions that you believe will make our province a better place to live.

On the May 9, how you vote in the provincial election will shape post-secondary skills and training over the next four years.

As educators who advocate for a stronger, more accessible post-secondary system in BC, we want you to know what types of commitments the major political parties are offering students in their platforms.

Making an informed choice as a voter isn't always easy. Even when you attend all-candidates meetings, ask questions, and study the party platforms, it can be difficult to read between the lines to know what the parties are really promising. We've produced this guide to voting for post-secondary education to make it a little easier for you.

Below is an overview of the tangible measures for students that are offered in the platforms of BC's political parties; on the following pages, you'll find an in-depth analysis of the parties' platforms.

BC Liberals

- Maintain the two percent cap on tuition fee increases.
- Lower the interest rate on student loans to prime (from prime plus 2.5 percent).
- Create a centralized point for student applications.
- Change the student eligibility for loans to increase the limit for certain borrowers.
- Commit an additional \$10 million to the open textbook program over the term.
- Create 1,000 new seats in science, technology, engineering and math.
- Create a new Truck Logger Training Credit.
- Make the BC Training Tax Credit (an employer incentive to hire/train) permanent.
- Work with post-secondary institutions to develop new housing financing rules that allow student housing to be built without impacting the provincial debt load or credit rating.

BC NDP

- Eliminate interest on student loans.
- Eliminate tuition fees on Adult Basic Education (high school upgrading).
- Eliminate tuition fees on ESL training.
- Provide a \$1,000 completion grant to people who graduate college/university/trades programs.

- Invest \$50 million over two years to create a new graduate scholarship fund.
- Invest \$100 million to create more spaces in technology, information and communications, digital media and entertainment, life sciences and health, clean-tech, IT and engineering.
- Maintain the two percent cap on tuition free increases, but close the loopholes that have allowed institutions to dramatically increase tuition and other fees.
- Continue to support the BC UPass Program.
- Change regulations to allow colleges/universities to build rental housing on/near campuses.
- Provide renters with a \$400 rebate per year.
- Create a merit-based graduate-level scholarship program.
- Mandate apprenticeship ratios for government-funded projects, provide employer incentives to increase the number of women in apprenticeships, and increase the number of skilled First Nations and mandate local hiring on government projects.

BC Greens

- Implement needs-based grants for post-secondary students.
- Offer tax forgiveness up to \$2,000 per year for up to five years to assist in paying off student loans.
- Present a task force report by July 2018 on funding that identifies ways to make PSE more relevant, accessible and affordable.
- Invest \$65 million over four years to support co-op and work experience programs.
- Allocate up to \$10 million per year for skills re-training.
- Provide \$10 million per year to restore funding for adult secondary education upgrading and language training.

Those are the platform commitments directed at students in post-secondary, now it's up to you to make your choice and cast a ballot. We urge you to vote in support of post-secondary education to ensure we have a government that invests in the people who are the province's future.

*The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC
May 2017*

BC LIBERALS

Read the full platform: <https://www.bcliberals.com/platform/>

ON INVESTMENT

What they say

Invest \$2.6 billion in capital spending by post-secondary institutions for new buildings and renewal of infrastructure at campuses across the province” [Platform, p. 85]

What it means:

They’ll be putting more money into new buildings than into operating grants for all the public post-secondary institutions in BC combined.

What’s missing:

Without improving access and affordability, there’s a \$2.6 billion commitment to building classrooms that students can’t afford to sit in. Repairing crumbling infrastructure and building new buildings is great – but bricks and mortar don’t make for an education.

What they say:

Invest nearly \$6 billion in education and training in 2017. [Platform, p. 87]

What it means:

A review of the 2017 budget documents and of the Ministry of Advanced Education service plan suggests that this “investment” is actually a combination existing funding, which includes not only the operating grants but also the money they bring in from tuition AND the capital spending that was included as a separate platform commitment.

What’s missing:

The truth. Counting tuition revenue as part of their overall investment is disingenuous at best. They also claim that they’ve invested an increase of over 45% since the BC NDP was in power [Platform, p. 86]. Our numbers show that operating funds have actually declined by 20% in real dollars since they formed government in 2001.

What they say:

Complete the redirection of \$3 billion in training investments to focus on skills and better align annual investments into programs for in-demand jobs by 2024. [84]

What it means:

The *Skills for Jobs Blueprint* remains in effect, targeting all new post-secondary funding to programs aligned with “in-demand” jobs. What this really means is that other programs – such as university transfer programs – become starved for cash, and students are forced to pursue studies and careers that have been selected by government and industry. The plan to re-engineer the post-secondary fails to consider student choice, leading to the risk of narrowly-defined economic development, focused too heavily on resource extraction, rather than growing a diverse and robust economy.

What’s missing:

Increased investment for robust, diverse programming in all our public post-secondary institutions, to ensure students have better choices and better opportunities. The Blueprint focuses largely on targeting funds to trades programs, leaving important courses of study – such as those that develop communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skill – underfunded.

ON TUITION & AFFORDABILITY

What they say:

Maintain the 2% cap on tuition and fee increases at provincial universities, colleges and technical institutes. [Platform, p. 87]

What it means:

On paper, students will be protected from unmanageable fee increases such as the massive fee hikes they experienced from 2002-2005, when the Liberals deregulated fees. In practice, however, BC students have still experienced fee increases over 2%, as cash-strapped colleges and universities have found ways to bypass the cap. Post-secondary tuition fees increased more in BC than in any other province since 2001 (Generation Squeeze, 2017).

What they say:

Provide a 50% tuition rebate for Canadian Armed Forces veterans to help them upgrade their education at B.C. public post-secondary institutions and transition into civilian life. [Platform, p. 87]

What it means:

It's great to see veterans who have served have opportunities for education and re-training when they return to civilian life. But if this is about upgrading, then restoring free tuition for Adult Basic Education (ABE) would help not only veterans, but other vulnerable BC students as well.

What's missing:

A provincial policy mandating free tuition for youth in the foster system and those who have aged out of care.

What they say:

Change how student eligibility is assessed to exclude assets for students not residing with their parents or a spouse which will allow the loan limit to be increased for almost 25% of borrowers. [Platform, p. 87]

What it means:

Rather than finding means of making post-secondary education more affordable, this platform commitment allows 25% of borrowers to go even deeper into debt.

What's missing:

Since there's no commitment to restore tuition-free ABE, they could have changed the eligibility requirements for students who do reside with their parents to make it easier to access the Adult Upgrading Grant, since ABE students aren't eligible for student loans.

What they say:

Lower the interest rate on student loans to the prime interest rate – saving students approximately \$45 million over the next three years. [Platform, p. 87]

What it means:

The budget documents show that the interest rate reduction will cost the government \$11.3 million this year. When you look at the forecasted increase in tuition revenue – an increase of \$85 million in the coming year – that \$11.3 million is a drop in the bucket. The government will still be raking in an additional \$74 million compared to last year. Additionally, while it's estimated that 205,000 people will benefit from the reduced interest rate, that works out to a meagre savings of just \$55.12 per student debtor for the year, or a large coffee and donut per month at Tim Horton's.

What's missing:

Relieving student debt should be a top priority: BC's average student debt load is the highest in Canada at \$35,000 compared to a national average of \$27,000. (Bank of Montreal Student Survey, 2013). Eliminating interest on student loans and establishing a grant system, as other provinces have done, would do a lot more to assist students.

What they say:

Continue to expand the open textbook program by committing an additional \$10 million over the term. [87]

What it means:

The open textbook program provides students with some financial support by reducing the cost of often-expensive required books for their courses.

What's missing:

Many courses still require books that aren't a part of this program, so the overall savings for students is limited, and there are concerns about academic freedom in the assignment of texts and intellectual property in their production and use.

ON APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINING

What they say:

Make permanent the BC Training Tax Credit program that provides employers with an incentive to hire and train apprentices and trade workers. [Platform, p. 84]

What it means:

Incentives are an important part of ensuring there are opportunities for apprentices to get their on-the-job training. This tax credit applies both to employers and to a certain extent, the apprentices themselves, which is valuable.

What's missing:

Eighty percent of apprenticeship programs are on-the-job training. Tax credits aren't enough to secure the number of apprenticeship spaces needed for the students to get the training they need to enter the

workforce. This commitment would be more meaningful if it included mandated ratios on government-funded projects.

What they say:

Continue the Canada-BC Jobs Grant to provide up to \$15,000 to offset the cost of training new employees in high demand occupations – helping up to 6,800 British Columbians. [84]

What it means:

This is a cost-sharing program to assist small business with training new employees. The money goes to employers, and doesn't do anything to assist post-secondary students in accessing their education.

ON ACCESS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

What they say:

Match qualified students with available seats across the province with a coordinated management of excess capacity in our public post-secondary schools. [87]

What it means:

Rather than addressing the problem of growing waitlists at some institutions – which are the result of underfunding – the Liberals promise to help students find out other institutions are offering the programs they want. Students wanting to take advantage of the available seat would likely need to move to a new community.

What's missing:

Increased funding for cash-strapped colleges, universities, and institutes to allow for increased spaces and reduced waiting lists.

What they say:

Create 1,000 new seats in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math to help British Columbians get training to work in the tech sector, and once the first 1000 are graduating, work on another 1000. [84]

What it means:

More spaces will be made available for students wanting to enter STEM programs.

What's missing:

Measures to make these spaces more affordable, and funding for other programs that encourage problem solving and critical thinking.

ON STUDENT HOUSING

What they say:

Working with post-secondary institutions, develop new student housing financing rules that allow student housing to be built without impacting the provincial debt load or credit rating. [87]

What it means:

They won't count the cost of borrowing to build student housing as part of the overall provincial debt.

What's missing:

Commitments to increase the availability of affordable housing for students.

BC NDP

Read the full platform: <https://action.bcndp.ca/page/-/bcndp/docs/BC-NDP-Platform-2017.pdf>

ON TUITION AND AFFORDABILITY

What they say:

We will keep a cap on tuition fees at colleges and universities. [Platform, p. 16]

What it means:

Tuition fees won't be deregulated and annual increases will continue to be capped.

What's missing:

Specifics on how much the cap will be.

What they say:

We will make life more affordable for people just starting their careers by making all current and future BC student loans interest free. [Platform, p. 13]

What it means:

BC will join the growing trend across Canada to eliminate interest on student loans, reducing the overall burden of student debt for individuals.

What they say:

We will provide a \$1,000 completion grant for graduates of college, university and skilled trades programs to help pay down debt when they finish their programs. [Platform, p. 13]

What it means:

It's similar to getting a bonus or gift for signing a contract. It's not a significant amount of money for someone with \$35,000 of student debt (or more), but it's a nice bonus to get as a graduation gift.

What's missing:

Both the elimination of interest and the completion grants are great starts to fixing a student loan system that's long overdue for an overhaul, but there's no commitment to establishing a grant system or better yet, working toward the reduction or elimination of tuition fees.

What they say:

We will make Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) free again. [Platform, p. 16]

What it means:

There is a real commitment to making education affordable and accessible to the students who need it most. This policy re-opens doors that the Liberals closed in 2014/15 when they allowed tuition fees to be imposed.

What they say:

We will introduce a new graduate student scholarship fund to encourage excellence in BC's graduate programs. [13]

We will create a competitive, merit-based graduate scholarship program designed to attract and retain the best graduate students, based on hard work and talent. [17]

We will begin by investing \$50 million over two years to create a new graduate scholarship fund. [17]

What it means:

Self-explanatory.

What's missing:

Commitment to establish grants or other financial aid based on need, rather than merit.

ON APPRENTICESHIPS & TRAINING

What they say:

We will mandate effective apprenticeship ratios on government-funded projects, so new roads, bridges, schools and hospitals are also creating skilled workers for the future. [Platform, p. 17]

What it means:

Publicly-funded projects will have a minimum requirement on the number of apprentices hired to ensure there are enough apprenticeship spaces available for the growing number of students entering the trades.

What they say:

We will provide incentives to public sector employers to hire and train apprentices. [Platform, p. 17]

What it means:

Exactly what it says.

What's missing:

Specifics about what the incentives might be.

What they say:

We will provide incentives to employers to increase the number of women in apprenticeships. [Platform, p. 17]

We will partner with First Nations to increase the number of skilled First Nations and mandate local hiring on government projects. [17]

What it means:

There's a commitment to increasing the number of certain underrepresented, equity-seeking individuals in apprenticeship programs.

What's missing:

A similar commitment to increasing the number of youth in apprenticeships.

What they say:

We will improve safety, quality and consumer protection by strengthening credentialing requirements, as we improve training. [17]

What it means:

Rules about required qualifications on job sites would be strengthened.

What's missing:

Unclear whether the intention is for the onus for providing safety and consumer protection is on the employer or the apprentice/trainee/employee.

ON STUDENT HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION

What they say:

We will change regulations to allow colleges and universities to build affordable on and near-campus rental housing, and ensure student renters receive the renter's rebate of \$400 per year. [16]

What it means:

Similar to the BC Liberal promise to increase opportunities to build affordable housing, but with an added commitment to improve other options for affordable housing.

What they say:

We will continue to support the UPass, to ensure transportation to and from class is affordable. [16]

What it means:

Self-explanatory. Other parts of the platform address commitments to improve public transit.

ON INVESTMENT

What they say:

We will invest \$100 million to expand technology-related post-secondary programs and invest in information and communications, digital media and entertainment, life sciences and health, clean-tech, IT and engineering and more. [17]

What it means:

There's a commitment to invest in programs leading to well-rounded graduates and a diversified economy, without limiting the possibility of funding other fields of study.

What's missing:

Commitments to increase overall operating funds to public post-secondary institutions, which have declined by 20% in real dollars over the past 16 years of Liberal government.

What they say:

We will partner with universities throughout BC to build technology and innovation centres in key areas of BC's economy. [17]

We will help inspire innovation by partnering with universities, colleges, technical institutions and businesses to build and fund specialized innovation centres in the interior and northern BC that will help us grow and strengthen our traditional industries, like mining, agriculture and forestry. [55]

What it means:

Attention will be paid to encourage growth of post-secondary opportunities in communities outside the lower mainland. The funds will be targeted to resource sectors.

What's missing:

A similar commitment to increasing funding for comprehensive programs in those same interior and Northern institutions, to ensure that students have more diverse choices than just studies leading to jobs in the resource sector.

GREEN PARTY OF BC

Read the full platform: <http://www.bcgreens.ca/platform>

ON TUITION AND AFFORDABILITY

What they say:

A BC Green government will offer tax forgiveness of up to \$2000 a year for up to five years to assist qualifying graduates to repay outstanding debt incurred for tuition fees. [Platform]

What it means:

Unclear. “Tax forgiveness” isn’t a technical term – it could mean a tax credit, which would amount to roughly \$200-300 in tax savings per year, depending on income, or it could mean a \$2000 tax rebate, or it could mean something else.

What’s missing:

Interest-free student loans; commitment or to reduce, freeze, or cap tuition fee increases; explanation of what “qualifying graduates” might mean and what they’ll do for those who don’t qualify.

What they say:

A BC Green government will implement needs-based grants for post-secondary students. [Platform]

What it means:

This is a long-overdue part of BC’s student financial aid system, which would allow post-secondary students with the greatest need to have better access to education without incurring unmanageable debt.

What’s missing:

A commitment to restore tuition-free Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language programs.

ON IMPROVING THE POST-SECONDARY SYSTEM

What they say:

A BC Green government will set up a task force on post-secondary education and funding with a mandate to identify ways to make post-secondary more relevant, accessible, and affordable. The task force will present its report by July 2018.

What it means:

Rather than committing to specifics in the platform, they'll undertake a review to determine needs and priorities.

What's missing:

A commitment to ensure the task force includes stakeholder consultation, including faculty, staff, and students.

ON TRAINING

What they say:

A BC Green government will invest \$65 million over four years to support co-op and work experience programs for high school and undergraduate students.

What it means:

Self-explanatory.

What's missing:

A similar commitment to invest apprenticeship, by mandating apprenticeship ratios and offering incentives to create spaces.

What they say:

A BC Green government will allocate up to \$10 million per year for in-service skills training for workers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); and, retraining for those displaced by automation or changing markets.

What it means:

The in-service training piece appears to be funds directed to employers to maintain skilled workers; instead of Skills for Jobs, it'll be Skills On-the-Job. It's unclear how displaced workers would access the funds for retraining, or how those funds would be directed.

What's missing:

LIBERALS

- Work to have the highest labour market participation for people with disabilities by 2024. [84]
- Create a new Truck Logger Training Credit to help offset the cost to train people on the job. [84]
- Create a one stop shop for student applications with a single point of entry for applicants to B.C. post-secondary institutions to reduce the necessity of providing an application and fee to each institution a student applies to. [87]

CUPE 1004

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