

Ministry of Advanced Education Estimates

Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell
Victoria
Tuesday, April 25, 2006

It's a pleasure that I rise today to present the 2006-2007 spending estimates for the Ministry of Advanced Education. Before I begin, I'd like to introduce the staff who are with me today. Deputy Minister Moura Quayle, Assistant Deputy Minister Tom Vincent and Assistant Deputy Minister Ruth Wittenberg are with me this evening.

I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and the dedication of all the staff at the Ministry of Advanced Education and especially all our post-secondary partners.

Let me begin by highlighting a number of major commitments which demonstrate the ministry's success on behalf of students, parents and taxpayers. We have limited tuition to the rate of inflation, expanded the system through our strategic investment plan and strengthened B.C.'s network of colleges, institutes and on-line learning. We've expanded training and post-secondary programs for health care and social workers and doubled the annual number of graduates in computer science and electrical and computer engineering.

Our work is continuing. We are training more workers to meet the critical skills shortages to fill the jobs in our growing economy. We're increasing the number of medical school graduates, and we're building a stronger and more vibrant research and technology sector. In the final analysis, advanced education, research, innovation, technology and all British Columbians benefit from Budget 2006.

Today I'd like to highlight the importance of research, innovation and technology in driving economic development and growth. Research investments inform social, health and environmental policy development and decision-making. They train scientists. They enhance intellectual capital. They ensure that research reaches the marketplace for the betterment of our society, our environment and our economy. Across government, plans focus on funding research. This research addresses ministry mandates, covers many disciplines and involves many stakeholders.

Fiscal 2006-2007 clearly signals the Ministry of Advanced Education as the ministry responsible for research and innovation. We play a leadership role. We will enact government's major commitments on research and innovation. I am committed to putting in place a framework within which individual ministries can better leverage research activities for the benefit of British Columbians.

Currently we provide funding in a variety of ways: infrastructure funding through the B.C. knowledge development fund; research support for the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research and for Genome B.C. — and marketing dollars for Leading Edge B.C. as well; funding to improve access to post-secondary institutions; support to help industry and investors through the B.C. Innovation Council; and endowed research chairs under the leading-edge endowment fund. We also provide operational grants to post-secondary institutions and undertake research through ministries such as Health, Forests and Range, Environment, and Agriculture and Lands.

British Columbia has a reputation for leading-edge research. We plan to improve our position, keep our resource sector competitive and sustainable, strengthen our high-tech sector, grow new sectors, fuel economic growth and create jobs.

Budget 2006 shapes the research and technology agenda. We have earmarked \$50 million for an endowment focused on natural resources and applied sciences. The endowment will support research, innovation, technology transfer and commercialization through partnerships involving post-secondary institutions and industry.

In life science, we have allocated \$45 million for Genome B.C. and \$70 million for the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research. Genome B.C.'s work is critical to a broad range of life science research, including health, forestry, fisheries, environment and agriculture. We're pleased to help build Genome's capacity to undertake cutting-edge research.

We're investing \$40.5 million in a graduate program for digital media education located at Great Northern Way campus in East Vancouver. The first intake of students will be September 2007. Our goal is to use new and emerging interactive digital content to entertain, to educate and to inform people.

B.C. has Canada's largest digital media cluster, with over 800 companies. Vancouver is the largest game-development centre in the world, with more than 156 companies. B.C. is also the third-largest film and TV production centre in North America. These companies have created thousands of jobs and contribute to our economy in a very large way. Our investment will build on our natural competitive advantages and put B.C. in a position to lead the sector and to be number one in the world. It creates exciting opportunities for our young people and is unlike any other program in Canada.

We're also finding solutions to social issues through research and innovation. Budget 2006 builds on our successes in medical research and the excellent work of organizations such as the leading-edge endowment fund, the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research and the B.C. Cancer Research Centre. Our investment in research chairs helps us to attract some of the top researchers in their prospective fields.

We are committed to finding the causes of and the ways to prevent and treat cancer, dementia and many other major illnesses. Budget 2006's increases include \$4 million to fund a new cancer chair focusing on prevention. We have an aging population, and we are committed to create a better quality of life for our seniors. That is why we will invest another \$15 million towards Alzheimer's research this year.

Budget 2006 also enhances post-secondary education. The provincial government is working hard to expand our economy by developing a highly skilled workforce. In order to succeed, we recognize that students need quality, accessible post-secondary education. We are taking the steps necessary to create this access. The Ministry of Advanced Education's strategic investment plan is the largest in the past 40 years and will ensure that the province has the ability to meet the social and economic needs of British Columbians.

Our commitment is designed to enhance post-secondary education for students while balancing the needs of taxpayers. In 2006-2007 it marks the third year of a six-year plan to create 25,000 new student spaces by 2010. This represents average annual seat growth of more than 2 percent and an average cost to government and to taxpayers of \$9,200 per space.

To fund the system expansion, we also have allocated \$800 million to capital funding over the next three years. In total, we are investing more in post-secondary education by increasing our ministry's base budget of \$1.9 billion. Over the next three years more than \$185 million will be added to the ministry's budget, including \$70 million in 2006-2007. In other words, we are allocating \$6 billion to the Ministry of Advanced Education's budget over the next three years — approximately \$2 billion per year starting in 2006-2007.

We recognize that greater expansion of the post-secondary system is needed to meet society's needs. Our expansion will improve post-secondary education. To help offset the cost for students, three-quarters of this money, or more than \$4.7 million, will flow directly to post-secondary institutions and other organizations. That is more than \$1.5 billion per year beginning in 2006-2007 and more than \$1.6 billion in 2008-2009.

We are making meaningful, positive and significant progress. In Surrey and the Fraser Valley we have added thousands of new spaces at Simon Fraser University, Douglas College, Kwantlen University College and the University College of the Fraser Valley. This growth includes the creation of the SFU Surrey campus and the new trades-and-technical campus for Kwantlen University College in Cloverdale, which is currently under construction.

In the southern interior post-secondary enhancements abound. UBC Okanagan has quickly and cost-effectively created access to a major research university. To help fill skill shortages, the new Okanagan College is providing expanded post-secondary training opportunities to meet the needs in the region.

In the Cariboo, in the Kamloops area, we've created Thompson Rivers University. This new teaching university focuses on a comprehensive range of programs, although, along with the open learning and distance education, Thompson Rivers University concentrates on innovative and effective institutional methods that meet the needs of today's students.

We are dedicated to the future needs of post-secondary education. Moving forward, we look forward to further defining a vision for a system that will ensure that the needs of British Columbians continue to be met in the decades ahead.

We're offering competitive tuition rates. To compete, British Columbia's post-secondary system must ensure that students are provided with a world-class education. We must be cost competitive to ensure that our students have the same ability as other Canadians to enjoy access to high-quality post-secondary education.

We are working with the post-secondary institutions to limit tuition to the rate of inflation and to keep it at the national average. To help ensure that the system remains healthy and competitive, we're keeping tuition down. We will increase operating transfers to the institutions by a minimum of \$130 million in the three-year budget planning period ending in 2008-2009.

We're increasing student financial assistance. British Columbia's student assistance programs relieve financial pressure for students in need. Today half of B.C. grads finish without any student loans at all. Advanced Education funds about two-thirds of every student's direct public post-secondary education cost through direct grants to institutions.

Budget 2006 will provide more than \$485 million in funding over three years toward a comprehensive student financial assistance program. This includes student loans, loan reductions for students most in need, grants for students with disabilities, debt relief programs and the loan forgiveness programs. Over \$300 million has been available annually for B.C. student loans, and this year we're increasing the funding for student financial assistance by 16 percent. This takes into account a 10-percent increase in the disability grant funding and \$800,000 more for loan reductions. This year we will also follow through on our commitment to help post-secondary students pursue their studies in other countries, including the Pacific nations, through the One World Scholarship.

We will continue to help students overcome debt by creating opportunities to work in underserved communities. Loan forgiveness programs improve access to core services — such as nurses,

doctors, pharmacists, midwives, speech therapists and other professionals — in underserved communities.

We're creating access for more students. Government is committed to providing the flexibility needed to expand course options, to improve lab facilities, to add services and space for students and to create new bursaries and scholarships.

In 2004-2005 Advanced Education put in place a six-year strategic investment plan to create 25,000 new seats by 2010. In the first three years we will have funded almost 12,000 additional full-time-equivalent student spaces in B.C.'s public post-secondary system. Our goal is to ensure that students with a "B" average or higher have an opportunity to pursue a post-secondary education and become productive members of our society immediately on graduation.

Greater access means more options for young people to ensure their hopes and dreams. We are leveraging our investment in post-secondary education to ensure that future generations benefit from an excellent education system in British Columbia.

Within the context of our plans, we are enhancing transparency by changing the way we count students in the college sector and moving to a method that is more like the university model. Simply, one full-time student equals one FTE. An FTE represents one student completing all requirements of a full-time program in a period that extends over one normal academic year.

Currently, different methods of counting FTEs are used for different programs in the college area and the university college and institute sector. The new model removes inconsistencies that had risen in the past. It allows for innovative delivery and eliminates disincentives for some programs. I understand the new method is also simpler and easier. A ten-member peer review committee has put a lot of time and effort into considering this approach.

We have adopted a multi-ministry approach to overcome shortfalls, particularly when it comes to health care professionals and trades. Advanced Education is helping the Ministry of Health to develop a ten-year plan to train, recruit and retain more health professionals in B.C. The capital investment of \$134 million and additional operating funds have already enabled the universities of British Columbia, Victoria and Northern British Columbia to almost double the number of first- and second-year medical school students. We will continue to add new student spaces to help programs in the public and post-secondary sector in 2006-2007. Through our investment, we expect about 6,500 new nurses to graduate between 2001 and 2006.

As British Columbia prepares to market itself leading up to and beyond the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, we must fill a variety of skills shortages. Our post-secondary education system is working cooperatively with the Ministry of Economic Development and the Industry Training Authority to prepare more people for jobs in all regions of the province. As well, we must ensure the success of thousands of students enrolled in apprenticeship, technical training and entry-level trades training programs at the colleges, university colleges and institutes throughout B.C. Our system has an important role to help increase the number of people being trained to fill existing and projected shortages of skilled trades.

We are also engaging more aboriginal students. To be truly successful, we must enlist the support of all people, including attracting more aboriginal students to post-secondary education. All of our institutions use some of their annual operating grants to deliver aboriginal programs. On top of that, the ministry's aboriginal special projects fund will provide \$1.8 million in 2006-2007 to support programs around the province that help aboriginal learners to start and finish post-secondary studies.

Since 2001 the provincial government has provided a total of \$7.8 million in aboriginal special projects funding to approximately 150 projects. Over 3,400 aboriginal learners have benefited from this funding. The primary purpose of this program is to increase participation, success and retention rates for aboriginal learners in British Columbia. As well, two of British Columbia's six regional innovation chairs are dedicated to important aboriginal issues, including early childhood development.

In closing, I would like to reinforce this government's commitment to continue to enhance North America's transfer system. Closely related to quality assurance is transferability, and in that regard B.C. is fortunate. Our transfer system is recognized as one of the most comprehensive and effective in North America. This year we intend to improve the transfer system further as we work together to train more students than ever before.

We're making a record investment in new facilities on our campuses, and we're limiting tuition to the rate of inflation. We're doing our part to improve the health care system, training more doctors and nurses, and we're making important investments in research and innovation. We're bringing out the best of our people through the hard work and dedication of the entire post-secondary sector.

I want to thank the parents, the faculty and the staff who help make our students' dreams come true. Through cooperation, students of this province are realizing the true value of an investment in post-secondary education. I look forward to the comments from members of the opposition and members from our side of the House as well.

Thank you.