

CAN THE FUTURE LEARN IN THE SOUTH FRASER REGION? THE NEED FOR MORE INVESTMENTS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Opening Statement

B.C.'s Labour Market Outlook for 2018 to 2028 estimates that 77% of the expected employment openings will require a university degree or some post-secondary education (including trades); however, in 2016, only 58% of Surrey's workforce had any post-secondary certification, compared to 71% in the rest of Metro Vancouver in 2011. Further education for a greater proportion of recent high school graduates and for the current workforce is of paramount importance for BC and for BC's economic and social development.

To help build a sustainable, livable, healthy community, Surrey's Official Community Plan aims to balance the number of local jobs with the resident workforce, to provide local employment opportunities for residents and to reduce regional commuting. Surrey's goal is to have one job in Surrey per resident in the workforce. Since most of these jobs will require post-secondary education, increased post-secondary access is vital.

The provincial government has begun to make the necessary additional investment to Surrey's and the South Fraser economic region's K-12 educational system. To realize the return on that investment (ROI), a similar phased-in capital expenditure plan focused on the South Fraser region's post-secondary institutions is essential.

All aspects of post-secondary education in Surrey and its region must be expanded; three areas deserve special comment: literacy and English language programs; trades training programs; and, research and professional programs. Although these three areas are specific to Surrey and its region, all regions throughout the province can hope to benefit from enhanced attention paid.

Background

The 983,000 people in Surrey and the South Fraser region – the largest and fastest-growing region of British Columbia – produce 19.2% of British Columbia's high school graduates; however, students have much less access to post-secondary institutions than other students in the rest of British Columbia. Kwantlen Polytechnic University and Simon Fraser University-Surrey together offer only 12.7 post-secondary spaces for every hundred 18-24-year old's in the region. The rest of B.C. receives almost four times that level of access, with 48.7 spaces for every hundreds of these young adults.

All aspects of post-secondary education in Surrey and its region must be expanded; three areas deserve special comment:

1) Literacy and English Language Programs

An essential part of B.C.'s post-secondary system is its adult basic education and English Language programs. These programs give students the skills to succeed in further education, and to be capable entry-level employees.

2) Trades Programs

Trades training is essential for the economic vitality of our region: According to the BC Labour Market Outlook, 2018-2028, approximately 11% of all job openings will be in the trades. The demand for trades

employees has outpaced the supply; however, while the region has 20% of BC's population, only 4.4% of B.C.'s trades training is offered there.

3) Research and Professional Programs

Post-secondary education includes studies in areas of high importance for Surrey's industries and sectors – for example, in clean energy engineering and in health sciences, both priority areas for the city; however, research in the region's universities is severely limited by lack of available program funding and facilities. The provincial government promised increasing student seats in SFU from 2,500 to 5,000 by 2015, but that has not happened. From 2019-2024, SFU expects to grow 320 undergraduate seats, and 120 graduate seats.

Benefits for Business

Post-Secondary education is crucial to economic development. Educated people can more easily adapt to the changing nature of work and can better apply their knowledge and skills in different contexts. Research undertaken as part of advanced and graduate-level programs often leads to innovative start-up companies and to knowledge and technology transfer by which existing businesses can expand.

It is imperative that the level of access to post-secondary education in Surrey and the South Fraser region be brought up to the level provided to the rest of B.C. Such an increase is crucial for the regional and provincial development.

To achieve this, the number of full-time equivalent student spaces (FTEs) per resident in this region must be increased from the current level of 18.8 FTEs per 1,000 residents to 37.8 FTEs per 1,000 region residents (this accessibility ratio of 37.8 FTEs per 1,000 region residents is still 17% lower than the level of post-secondary access provided to the rest of the province: 45.7 FTEs per 1,000 residents).

Since the region's population will also increase over this time period, this means that the actual number of post-secondary student spaces offered in our region must be increased to 46,060 FTEs by 2025 – an increase of about 3,000 FTEs per year.

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Without this action, B.C.'s most populous and fastest growing region may not be capable of harnessing its potential to become a social and economic powerhouse. The scarcity of skilled labour and research facilities in the local market will continue to significantly hinder the growth of Surrey's core business community. The region's need for capital expenditures targeting socio-economic problems will increase. The challenge for local businesses seeking to attract and retain skilled individuals – especially those seeking opportunities for advancement – will increase.

With this action, Surrey and the South Fraser region – and the province – will reap the many social and economic benefits mentioned above. In the short term, local businesses will benefit directly from the increased spending in the region from the universities' operating expenditures, by employees of

the universities, and from the spending on capital expenditures needed for the expansion of campuses.

More importantly, in the medium-to-long-term, businesses will gain from the region's improved competitive positioning. Lastly, fostering the growth of this region's businesses and significant increases to tax revenue for the provincial government.

THE CHAMBER RECOMMENDS

That the Provincial Government phase in a tripling of the number of post- secondary student spaces per resident in the South Fraser region from 2020 thru 2029.

Submitted by the Surrey Board of Trade