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Eliminating bottleneck in PSE system vital to B.C. economy

summarizes the key challenges facing post-secondary education in B.C. and suggests how businesses can support the post-secondary system.

This report calls for a comprehensive approach, where all parts of the post-secondary system — trades training, college programs and university education — are supported as “complementary parts of a coherent structure,” rather than competing for scarce resources.

The PSE report focuses on two challenges facing post-secondary education in BC: access and strategic planning. It points to a bottleneck due to the “echo boom,” children of baby boomers. Over the next 10 years, the B.C. 18 to 24 year-old population will increase in size. It will increase by 30 per cent by 2010, while the zero to 14 year-old cohort will decrease. Thousands of young people are being turned away or put on waiting lists and this will only get worse without more learning opportunities.

The Task Force found that while B.C. has had the highest college participation rate in Canada, it has among the lowest participation rate in university programs and participation in trades programs is stagnant.

The Task Force report concludes

that the six-year tuition freeze was “ruinous” to B.C.’s post-secondary education system, and that several years of increasingly discounted funded spaces and pressure to improve productivity have put B.C. into “catch-up” mode.

The PSE report points to a number of post-secondary pressures, including very high grade point averages required for entry to many university programs and the difficulty of college students transferring into university programs to complete their degrees. There are also regional mismatches where huge population growth in the Fraser Valley is juxtaposed with unused capacity in other parts of the province.

What can be done? The Task Force has no quick fixes, but as a start it offers a few suggestions.

1. The B.C. government needs a longer-term strategic plan with concern for future skills and expected skill shortages.
2. As the provincial budget comes into balance, consideration must be given to increasing post-secondary education funding.
3. Options for reallocating funding within the current post-secondary

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and provincial budgets must be pursued.

4. Businesses need to strongly support post-secondary education (e.g. participating on PSE boards and advisory committees and supporting co-op programs, etc.)
5. The new **Industry Training Authority** should open up trades training and make it more accessible to small businesses and young people.

What else should be considered?

- Expand capacity as much as possible through Internet and work-based learning, and through the availability of more PSE programs in high school.

- Promote B.C.’s world-class private post-secondary education sector and engage it as part of a comprehensive approach to addressing the PSE challenges.
- Encourage individuals to relocate to attend PSE institutions where space is available.
- Create innovative tax measures to stimulate greater investment in education and training by employers and learners.

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