



# Party Platform Analysis BC Election 2020

October 2020

## Executive Summary

The Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC (CUFA BC) is the provincial voice of over 5,500 faculty members, academic librarians, instructors, lecturers, and sessional instructors at BC's research and doctoral universities: the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria, the University of Northern British Columbia, and Royal Roads University.

We produce an analysis of provincial party platforms as they relate to post-secondary education in the province of British Columbia. We are a non-partisan organization.

This evaluation of party platforms is done through the lens of CUFA BC's core policy priorities as identified by our Council, identified as follows:

- Stable and predictable core funding
- Legislative support for free and fair collective bargaining
- Legislative reform to ensure collegial governance
- Financial support for basic research
- The transformation of the Knowledge Development Fund into a province-wide research fund, expanded to include non-STEM disciplines
- The permanent establishing of the graduate scholarship program, with expansion to include non-STEM disciplines
- Measures to ensure equitable access to post-secondary education for marginalized faculty and students

The primary conclusions of our analysis are as follows:

- The **Green Party** is strong on supporting student access for low- and middle-income undergraduate students by expanding the BC Student Access Grant; weak on issues of core funding, collegial governance, and collective bargaining.
- The **Liberal Party** platform commits to \$200 million of new money over three years, focuses on supporting education in health and trades to bolster economic recovery, and encouraging apprenticeships and student work experience. The party introduces a UK-style disclosure requirement for prospective students that would, at the time of registration, identify total costs of program as well as graduation and employment rates. The Liberal platform is weak on issues of core funding, collegial governance, and collective bargaining.
- The **New Democratic Party (NDP)** platform focuses on affordable education by proposing to expand the BC Student Access Grant (no details how), keeping student fee increases low, expanding tuition waivers for former youth in care, and focusing supports for education in health care and high tech as well as trade apprenticeships. Perhaps most concerning is the commitment to a funding review of post-secondary operating grants to *"make sure public post-secondary institutions are aligned for economic recovery and student success."* The NDP has promised a second medical school to be housed at SFU's Surrey campus with the first 60 students scheduled to start 2023-24.



## BC Provincial Election October 2020: Post-Secondary Commitments

BC Green Party	BC Liberal Party	BC NDP
<p>Total spending for all public education (PSE and K-12; new money not specified):</p> <p>Year 1: \$557M</p> <p>Year 2: \$657M</p> <p>Year 3: \$807M</p>	<p>New Funding: \$200M over 3 yrs</p> <p>Total Funding: \$3,300M over 3yrs</p>	<p>New Funding: \$95M over 3 yrs</p> <p>Year 1: \$5M</p> <p>Year 2: \$45M</p> <p>Year 3: \$45M</p>
<p><b>Theme:</b> BC Green Party’s Plan for a More Equitable and Sustainable BC.</p>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Restore Confidence. Rebuild BC.</p>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Working For You Advanced Education: “John Horgan and the NDP will continue to create new advanced learning spaces and apprenticeship opportunities, while keeping programs more affordable for everyone.”</p>
<p>“Double the funding of the B.C. Access Grant to help support post-secondary part-time students, and those enrolled in multi-year programs.”</p>	<p>“Learn from the pandemic to build and train the health work force of the future with increased spaces for doctors, nurses and health professions we need.”</p>	<p>“Making education and training more affordable for more students: After the BC Liberals cut student grant programs, we made the first new investment in post-secondary student grants in 15 years with Budget 2020’s needs-based BC Access Grant. We will move to expand this program by increasing eligibility to reduce barriers and make sure more British Columbians have the skills they need for the jobs ahead.”</p>
	<p>“Adopt the disclosure-requirements of the UK Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, to ensure all BC students know, before they register, the total costs of a program, the graduation rate and employment rate.”</p>	<p>“Keeping student fee increases low: We will strengthen the existing Tuition Fee Limit Policy to make sure institutions are not increasing fees beyond the prescribed limits. At the same time, we’ll conduct a funding review of post-secondary education operating grants to make sure public post-secondary institutions are aligned for economic recovery and student success.”</p>
	<p>“Establish a new Work Experience for Students (WESt) program, including co-ops and job creation programs in times of high unemployment, in collaboration with the federal government.”</p>	<p>“Making post-secondary education and training more available: We are creating more learning and training opportunities around the province, particularly in fast-growing fields like health care and high tech. We’ve opened up the first nursing degree program in the north; we are committed to opening BC’s second medical school to expand our health care workforce; we are creating new spaces in early childhood education; and we will create 2,000 new tech-relevant spaces in public post-secondary institutions.”</p>



BC Green Party	BC Liberal Party	BC NDP
	<p>“Encourage more British Columbians to pursue and complete apprenticeship training, by streamlining registrations and credentials.”</p>	<p>“Investing in apprenticeships to deliver good-paying jobs and keep the public safe: The BC Liberals left British Columbia as the only province without a compulsory trades system – meaning the person hooking up gas pipes to a new office tower, for example, isn't required to complete an apprenticeship and get red seal certified. We will restore the compulsory trades system to improve safety and give more workers access to apprenticeships that develop their skills for the work ahead.”</p>
	<p>“Bring trades competency into the school system, and expand secondary school trades programs to begin credentialing earlier.”</p>	<p>“Expanding tuition waivers to all former youth in care: A little over three years ago, we introduced the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program for former youth in care, providing them access to post-secondary learning tuition-free. Restricted to people ages 19-26 then, we will expand this program to all former youth in care, regardless of age.”</p>
<p>Source: Page 7 <a href="https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/greenpartybc/pages/6954/attachments/original/1602705331/2020_BC_Greens_platform_%281%29.pdf">https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/greenpartybc/pages/6954/attachments/original/1602705331/2020_BC_Greens_platform_%281%29.pdf</a> <b>Website</b> <a href="https://www.bcgreens.ca/public_education">https://www.bcgreens.ca/public_education</a></p>	<p>Source: Page 10 <a href="https://www.bcliberals.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/BC-Liberal-Party-2020-Platform-Restore-Confidence-Rebuild-BC.pdf">https://www.bcliberals.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/BC-Liberal-Party-2020-Platform-Restore-Confidence-Rebuild-BC.pdf</a> Website <a href="https://www.bcliberals.com/">https://www.bcliberals.com/</a></p>	<p>Source: Page 47 <a href="https://www.bcndp.ca/sites/default/files/bcndp_platform2020_final4.pdf">https://www.bcndp.ca/sites/default/files/bcndp_platform2020_final4.pdf</a> Website Section Training for a Changing Economy <a href="https://www.bcndp.ca/platform">https://www.bcndp.ca/platform</a></p>



## Green Party of British Columbia

The Green Party of British Columbia, led by Sonia Furstenau, is running candidates in almost all ridings in the province, and has released a full platform available online, with advanced education appearing on page 7 [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/greenpartybc/pages/6954/attachments/original/1602705331/2020\\_BC\\_Greens\\_platform\\_%281%29.pdf](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/greenpartybc/pages/6954/attachments/original/1602705331/2020_BC_Greens_platform_%281%29.pdf). The platform is comprehensive in all public sectors; however, it does not separate advanced education from K-12 public education. It is clear that the campaign focuses on K-12 public education only mentioning one commitment specifically for advanced education.

### Core Funding

The Green Party platform is silent on core funding but commits to supporting education, inclusive of K-12 and advanced education. Under the Green's leadership, public education would receive \$557M, \$657M, and \$807M over three years. The costing is provided in a way that obscures details on specific commitments. Though there is no reference to cutting current budgets, there is no commitment to enhance funding or backfill cuts in post-secondary from previous governments.

### Collegial Governance

While there is no reference to university governance, especially collegial governance, in the platform, the Green Party has been a vocal critic on the issue in previous years. No comment has been made by current leader Sonia Furstenau during her two-week tenure as party leader prior to the writ being dropped; however, former party leader Andrew Weaver was a proponent of curtailing politicized appointments of Board of Governor representatives and bolstering collegial governance at the BC's teaching intensive universities.

### Collective Bargaining

There is no reference to collective bargaining or PSEC in the platform nor has leader Sonia Furstenau made comments about either. Former leader Andrew Weaver has commented in public, on Twitter, and elsewhere criticizing teachers and BCTF members following a ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada striking down the BC Liberal government's education funding mandate. The ruling found the BCTF to be the aggrieved party in the Liberal government's taxpayer funded attack on teachers, unions, and the very principle of collective bargaining. The BC Green Party leader disagreed with the court ruling. Weaver's comments, inflammatory as they were, were never retracted.

### Student Access and Financial Aid

The Green Party has one commitment to supporting students: *Double the funding of the B.C. Access Grant to help support post-secondary part-time students, and those enrolled in multi-year programs.*

The proposal to expand the needs-based grant introduced by Horgan's NDP government in August 2020 is vague on both cost and architecture of the program. A grants program is expensive and it is unknown the full cost of this commitment. While a certain level of generality is to be expected in a party platform, the lack of costing and detail throughout the Green Party platform makes it challenging to gauge the likelihood of program implementation should the party form government.



## Liberal Party of British Columbia

The Liberals were in power for seventeen years and have the advantage of a long record of actions in advanced education. We will limit commentary primarily to the platform released online <https://www.bcliberals.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/BC-Liberal-Party-2020-Platform-Restore-Confidence-Rebuild-BC.pdf> (advanced education section can be found on page 10).

### Core Funding

The Liberal Party promises advanced education \$200 million of new funding over three years, but that largely seems to go to infrastructure. There is no detailed costing provided in their platform so it is not entirely clear what new funding, if any, would go toward addressing core funding. It is also unclear how the Liberals would pay for any of its costing with the proposal to pause PST for one year and reduce it in future years.

In looking at the Liberal's track record while in power, they had a mixed record on core funding. When funding was allocated, allocations never kept pace with inflation or enrolment growth. Liberals made record cuts in their tenure that left research universities worse off with conservative estimates of loss around 10% adjusted for inflation. These funding cuts created an overreliance on international student fees and contract faculty as a means to balance budgets. It is worth noting that this decline in funding took place during a period of robust growth and burgeoning surpluses. Research universities have never recovered, leaving BC's institutions in disadvantaged positions when now our province is faced with real challenges brought on by the pandemic.

### Collegial Governance

There is no party position on collegial governance but there is important historical context to the Liberal's position. It is worth noting that the current leader, Andrew Wilkinson, was previously the Minister of Advanced Education when the Liberals were in power.

The current system of university governance in British Columbia allows the government of the day to appoint a voting majority to university Boards of Governors. This system ensures a process of political patronage and micromanaging of BC's research universities and has had predictable results at times of crisis, coming to a head under Liberal government and then-Minister of Advanced Education Andrew Wilkinson. The controversial handling of Arvind Gupta's ouster as UBC president was driven by Liberal appointees who acted in secret from the rest of the Board of Governors. The Liberal appointees to the UNBC's Board of Governors were crucial in the 7-6 vote to appoint [James Moore as Chancellor](#) in the face of institutional opposition. These are a few examples of Wilkinson's role in the sector. At the time, CUFA BC [released a public statement](#) criticizing the Minister for refusing to meet with faculty or deal with faculty concerns.

As a general rule, the Liberal government has historically exhibited active disinterest in post-secondary, except where it served as a workhorse for niche programs deemed worthy of enhanced funding. Should the Liberals return to power, we would hope that its advanced education minister would value a relationship with BC's faculty and labour organizations.

CUFA BC has released its white paper on university governance entitled "[Recalibrating University Governance: Restoring Collegial Engagement in Decision Making](#)." This will be a pivotal document for advocating on issues of governance reform with the next government.



## Collective Bargaining

There is no Liberal platform position on collective bargaining. The Liberal's record on free and fair collective bargaining is dismal. For nearly two decades, the Liberals expanded the pernicious role played by the Public Sector Employers' Council (PSEC) in collective bargaining in British Columbia. The bargaining mandate for the province is set centrally and there is very little room for creative, collaborative bargaining under the PSEC model. When the Liberals were in power, they adopted an adversarial, disrespectful, and ultimately self-defeating approach to unions and collective bargaining in the province, resulting in a stunning supreme court judgements against the province in both health care and education, costing BC taxpayers millions of dollars in legal fees and penalties.

## Student Access and Financial Aid

The main focus of the Liberal's campaign platform on advanced education is on student access and financial aid. They propose building and training the health work force with increased spaces for doctors, nurses, and health professionals (presumably by increasing spaces in programs, but details are unclear).

The Liberal party proposes establishing a new Work Experience for Students (WESt) program, including co-ops and job creation programs in "times of higher unemployment, in collaboration with the federal government." CUFA BC welcomes supports for student employment on campuses and recognizes this as one of our own recommendations made to government throughout the pandemic.

They also commit to adopting the disclosure requirements of the UK Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, to "ensure all BC students know, before they register, the total costs of a program, the graduation rate and employment rate." This commitment, shrouded in claims of transparency, introduce the kinds of metrics that feed government's desire for micromanaging institutional programming and metrics-based funding outcomes. Transparency is valuable so long as it is apolitical and without agenda, and so long as it has meaningful significance in the real world. There are myriad factors that contribute to rates of graduation and employment that are not directly related to each other or to program costs.

The Liberal campaign proposes encouraging more British Columbians to pursue and complete apprenticeship training, by "streamlining registrations and credentials." They also propose bringing trades competency into the school system, and expanding secondary school trades programs to begin credentialing earlier. While these last initiatives primarily interact with programs in colleges and polytechnics, there is merit to them so long as they are carefully done without eroding regulatory systems or labour rights of minors. There is always concern that the Liberals will rely on deregulating systems of oversight for short-lived cost-savings resulting in long-term unintended negative consequences.



## New Democratic Party of British Columbia

The NDP platform outlines its goals for advanced education on page 47 [https://www.bcndp.ca/sites/default/files/bcndp\\_platform2020\\_final4.pdf](https://www.bcndp.ca/sites/default/files/bcndp_platform2020_final4.pdf), though it appears to be a lower priority than other public sectors. The campaign continues the trend of government in its narrow focus on advanced education as a tool for economic recovery in areas exclusive to health, tech, and trades. The campaign also affirms the NDP focus on student aid and access for domestic undergraduate students, predominantly in STEM disciplines and the trades, to the exclusion of almost everything else in the portfolio of advanced education.

### Core Funding

The NDP platform is silent on core funding but commits to new funding of \$5-\$45-\$45 million over three years. They do, however, commit to a funding review of post-secondary education operating grants to “make sure public post-secondary institutions are aligned for economic recovery and student success.” Should the NDP form government, we would emphasize the importance of meaningful consultation with all advanced education stakeholders, especially research faculty, in the formative stages of the review. We agree that the current system needs adjustment with the priority being long term, predictable and stable funding that is not reliant on contract faculty, international students, and cost-recovery tuition to cover core funding shortfalls.

Given the NDP’s propensity to focus on undergraduate students in “fast-growing fields” like health care and high tech, this funding review offers a convenient cover for their push to create micro-credentials and the ever-increasing trend of provincial governments to create performance-based metrics for funding models. Both of these issues are highly politicized and problematic in the ways they circumvent collective agreements, limit student choice and institutional autonomy, and actuate sector stability.

The NDP has committed to creating a second medical school in the province. Since the release of its platform, the NDP has announced the medical school would be housed on SFU’s Surrey campus. A timeline was established with the first 60 students anticipated to start in 2023-24 and this commitment has not been costed. Costing for the medical school was not delineated. No further details of the plan were available by the time of this document’s release.

At this time, there is no reference to cutting advanced education core funding in future budgets. On the other hand, there is no commitment to stabilize the sector by enhancing funding to backfill years of cuts under previous governments. In looking at the NDP government’s track record, they did achieve their promise of stable and predictable funding for three years as implemented through PSEC. The NDP platform makes no promises to continue this stability in the wake of pandemic disruptions to the economy.

### Collegial Governance

There is no reference to collegial governance or the continued role of PSEC in bargaining within the NDP platform, nor has John Horgan’s government made comments about either of these. During her tenure as Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training, Melanie Mark did not engage in discussions of governance issues at BC’s research and doctoral universities, though she did meet regularly with CUFA BC about other matters. While in power, the NDP government has largely upheld the highly politicized process for appointing representatives to Boards of Governors at BC’s research and doctoral universities, with one notable exception. They eliminated a statute in the University Act



that prevented certain faculty from serving in elected roles on the Board of Governors. A welcome and appreciably beneficial act. There is no further commitment to strengthen collegial governance.

As mentioned earlier, CUFA BC has released its white paper on university governance entitled [“Recalibrating University Governance: Restoring Collegial Engagement in Decision Making.”](#) This will be a pivotal document for advocating on governance reform with the next government.

### Collective Bargaining

The NDP has the strongest commitment and track record on free and fair collective bargaining. Its changes to the Labour Relations and Employment Standards Codes last year were modest and welcome by labour, though less broad sweeping than they might otherwise have achieved if they held a majority government. While in power, the NDP achieved its promise of stable and predictable funding through PSEC mandates that imposed 3-year agreements with 2/2/2 annual increases. Though there were no cuts, the NDP government has failed to restore funding to sufficient levels following decades of cuts by the former Liberal government. The NDP government makes no mention of PSEC or its continued threat to free and fair collective bargaining. It is unlikely that PSEC will dissolve or relinquish its grip on bargaining in post-secondary institutions. Less than half of institution funding now comes from government as a result of years of cuts alternating with minimal growth in funding allocations that have failed to keep pace with inflation. This reality challenges government’s rationalization of keeping collective bargaining in advanced education beholden to PSEC’s authority. PSEC is the single greatest threat to free and fair collective bargaining in BC’s research universities.

### Student Access and Financial Aid

Of the three parties, the NDP devotes the most attention and committed funding to student access and financial aid, particularly in undergraduate and trade programs in the fields of health care, high tech, and STEM disciplines. They further commit to offering tuition waivers to all former youth in care regardless of age, expanding on a program they introduced in 2017 that was restricted to people ages 19-26.

The NDP platform introduces few novel campaign promises and instead focuses on expanding upon programs they’ve introduced while in power, fulfilling commitments made in 2017. With the introduction of the BC Student Access Grant in August 2020, the NDP commits to expanding eligibility for the needs-based grant. It is unclear if this program eligibility would expand to include graduate students (who are currently excluded and equally deserving of financial support) or would be expanded based on income levels or some other measure of need.

The NDP platform promises to keep student fee increases low by “strengthening” the existing Tuition Fee Limit Policy “to make sure institutions are not increasing fees beyond prescribed limits.” There are no details on what is meant by *strengthening* the policy. There is also no evidence to suggest institutions are not complying with prescribed limits. It is possible that they are signalling an interest in regulating international student tuition, which currently falls outside of government limits.

There was no mention in the campaign of completing the 2017 campaign promise on the \$50 million merit-based graduate scholarship program. The scholarship was created in July 2018 and has only ever received \$12 million of the \$50 million promised. The scholarship, set to expire in 2021, has only been eligible to students in STEM disciplines. The BC Graduate Student Societies have [released a call for funding](#) in which they recommend making this scholarship permanent and expanding it to include non-STEM disciplines, all things CUFA BC supports.



## SUMMARY

It is clear going into the election on 24 October 2020 that all three parties have advanced education in their platforms, though post-secondary education is rarely a defining election issue. There are some valuable campaign promises that would improve the lives of students, increase access to post-secondary institutions, and boost supports for undergraduate students in targeted disciplines.

Both the NDP and Liberal parties discuss reviewing the funding formula for post-secondary institutions and while CUFA BC certainly has its thoughts on fixing the funding model, there is a great deal of anxiety over the potential outcomes when government focuses its attention on money, especially in the economic climate we face here and now. The current funding system has resulted in substantial financial risk and exposure to institutions forced to rely on international student tuition to cover core funding cuts of previous governments. Addressing this problem by rebalancing the funding formula to strengthen core funding should be a priority of government.

There is room for caution in BC, however, if the funding review were to entertain the possibility of performance-based metrics and funding allocations that other provincial governments have explored across Canada. Governments are notoriously poor at predicting both long-term labour market trends and the actual needs of research universities. Given the lag between emergent trends and institutional response to creating programs that meet government demands, engaging in performance-based metrics can be high cost and high risk for faculty, students, and post-secondary institutions. Doing so during a pandemic brings additional uncertainties. As was stated earlier, governments should not be in the business of micromanaging the research and teaching priorities of universities. We encourage early and frequent consultation with faculty and labour representatives throughout any funding review.

The Liberals and the NDP have articulated advanced education visions in their platforms, formulating a campaign on the premise of economic recovery through supports targeted at undergraduate students in health care, tech, and trades. All three parties have their attention on domestic undergraduate students, offering little in the way of supports for graduate students who receive fewer government resources and complete their degrees with higher student loan debt than their undergraduate counterparts. If campaign promises are anything, they telegraph where governments would funnel resources and funding should their party come to power.

There are two missing pieces of significance from all the election platforms that are integral to advanced education. These are *faculty* (a term used inclusively to represent professoriate, academic librarians, lecturers, and sessional instructors) and *research universities*, each of which entails distinct needs within the advanced education sector that merit recognition and targeted supports. In the absence of targeted core funding or assurance that funding will grow with inflation, institutions will face erosion in real terms, which will pressure them to rely even more on international student fees to make up for shortfalls in funding.

On behalf of CUFA BC's 5,500 members, we argue that faculty and institutions need to be better funded by government. Our resiliency as a province rests to a significant extent on the education provided at universities and on the knowledge produced there. Faculty and students (including graduate students) need supports to ensure the health of universities and to allow them to achieve their potential as drivers of recovery, innovation, and transformation.



## Recommendations to the Government of British Columbia

CUFA BC regularly makes recommendations to government on key priorities that would support faculty and research universities and we revisit these recommendations now at a critical moment in the election campaign.<sup>1</sup>

### Institutional Funding Stability

1. Government has the opportunity to strategically invest in universities at a time when they will best fulfill the public mission as engines of economic **recovery**, cultural and social **innovation**, and green **transformation**. Commit to sector stability by restructuring the funding model, assert the primacy of public funding to universities and concomitantly reduce overreliance on precarious employment and international student tuition.
2. Provide loans or emergency transfers to help institutions facing revenue shortfalls.

### Graduate and Undergraduate Student Financial Supports

3. Supporting graduate students is critical for the successful mission of universities as engines of **recovery**, **innovation**, and **transformation**. Now is the time to invest in the graduate scholarship program by following through on the fifty-million-dollar government commitment and expanding it to include non-STEM disciplines.
4. Incentivize enrollment, strengthen student choice by offering a full suite of academic programming, and minimize student debt by: enhancing scholarships and bursaries for students especially at the graduate level and in all disciplines (STEM and non-STEM); providing targeted funding for on-campus student employment for research and teaching assistantships; and targeted tuition grants for low- and middle-income students.

### Research Supports

5. **Transform** the Knowledge Development Fund into a broad-based provincial grant competition open to STEM and non-STEM disciplines.
6. Provide institutions with supports for essential US-based resources and supplies affected by fluctuating currency exchange rates, such as online textbooks, journals, software, and other licenses, as well as lab supplies and reagents for research and teaching needs.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cufa.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CUFA-BC-Submission-to-Select-Finance-Committee-2020.pdf>



# CUFA BC Party Platform Analysis: BC Election 2020

Confederation of University Faculty Associations of BC

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