

**SURVEY OF THE BRITISH COLUMBIA GENERAL PUBLIC:
KNOWLEDGE OF, AND PERCEPTIONS TOWARD, THE
BRITISH COLUMBIA POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM**

**Prepared for
The Advanced Education Council of British Columbia
and
The University Presidents' Council of British Columbia**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Background

The University Presidents' Council of BC (TUPC) and the Advanced Education Council of BC (AECBC) represent BC's public universities and the public college-institute sector respectively. Both councils communicate with post-secondary institutions in other provinces; with the BC Ministry of Education, Skills and Training; and with the individuals and organizations comprising the British Columbia general public. TUPC and AECBC jointly commissioned a survey of the BC general public in late 1997 in order to assess public knowledge of the BC post-secondary education sector, and public attitudes toward such key education issues as post-secondary tuition levels, student access,

1.5 Public Knowledge of BC's Post-Secondary Education System

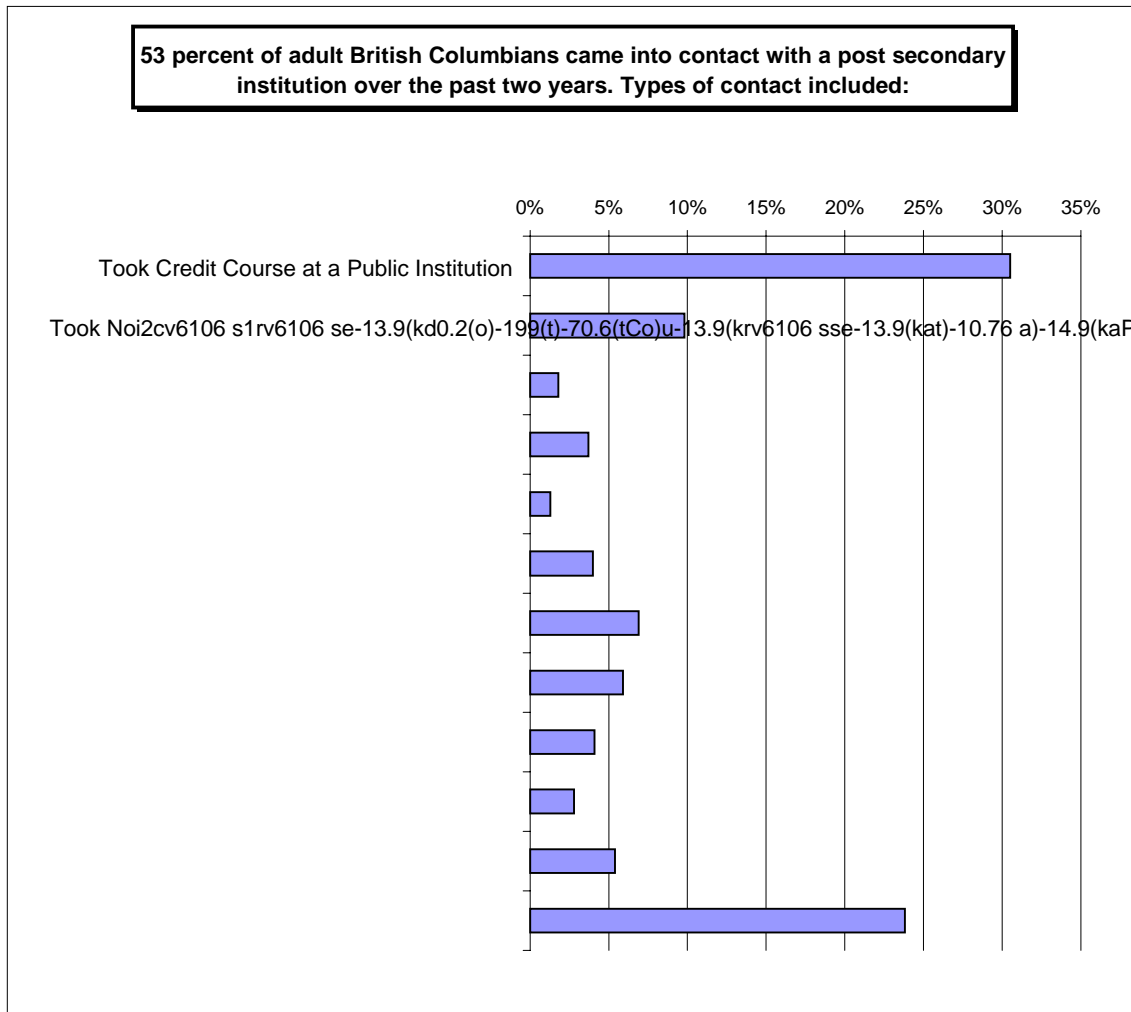
Knowledge of the BC public post-secondary system varies widely. Some BC adults are quite knowledgeable about the differing roles of BC's universities, university-colleges and colleges; about the cost of teaching in relation to other areas; and about historic changes in enrolment and government funding. Others showed a much lower level of knowledge of these issues. In general, there exists widespread public recognition that post-secondary institutions have accommodated more students in recent years, without corresponding government funding increases.

1.6 Public Perceptions Toward Selected Post-Secondary Education Issues

The BC public places a high priority on post-secondary education: it is viewed as the third highest priority for government funding, following health care and hospitals, and elementary and secondary education. Other financial and funding-related perceptions include general support for the current freeze on post-secondary tuition fees, and for the current proportion of post-secondary costs covered by student tuition. Post-secondary institutions are generally viewed as operating efficiently; there exists no consensus on the desirability of such possible cost-cutting strategies as limiting post-secondary enrolment, eliminating or reducing academic programs or services, or increasing student fees.

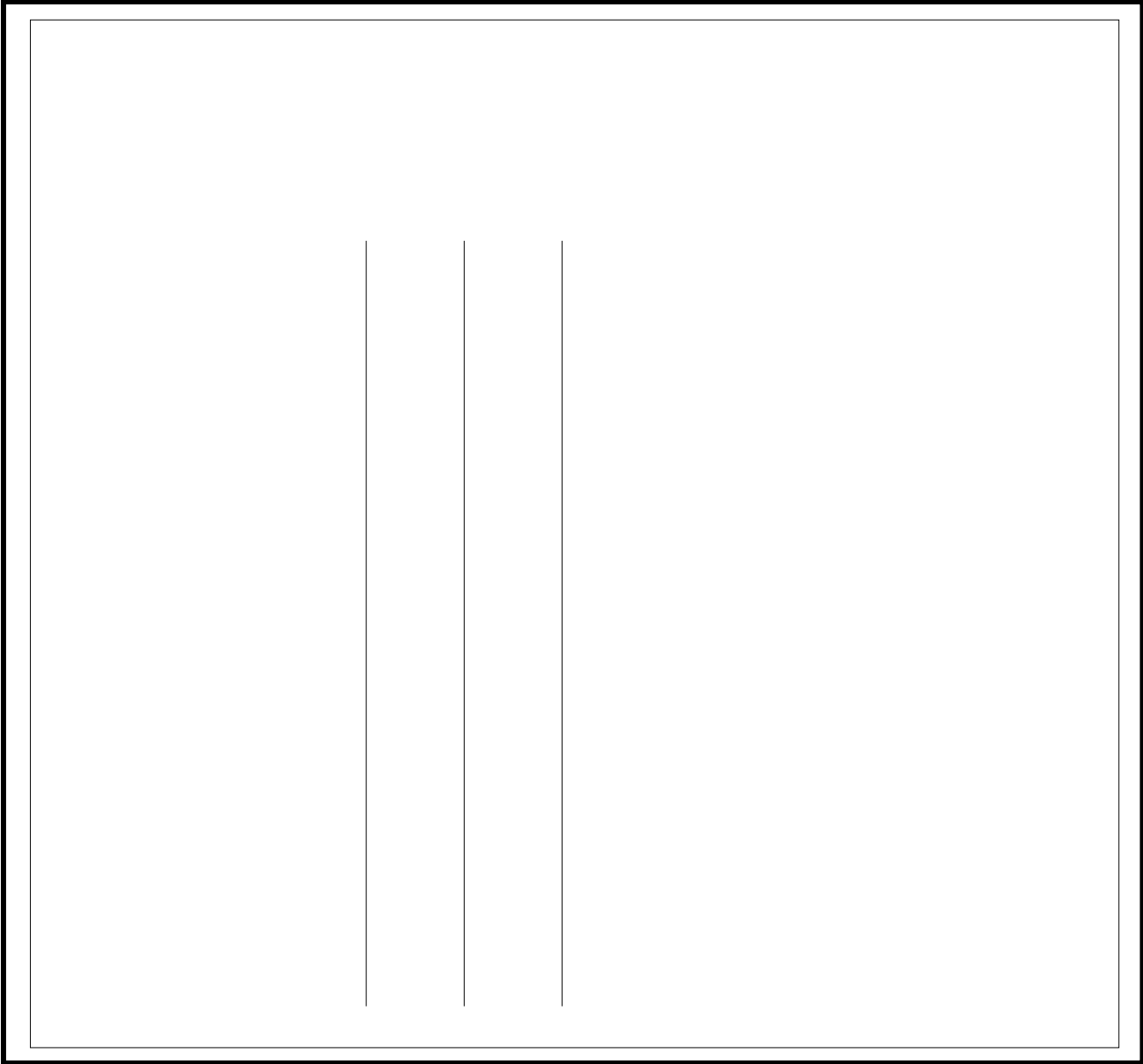
BC's public post-secondary institutions are seen by most as being of "high" or "very high" quality. BC adults equate "quality" with good instructors, a good learning environment/modern facilities, small classes, good student preparation, and a wide range of high quality and relevant programs. Universities are considered to be of higher quality than other institutions in terms of instructional and library/facility quality; colleges and institutes are viewed as being of higher quality with respect to appropriate class sizes and providing graduation

2. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT WITH BC'S POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

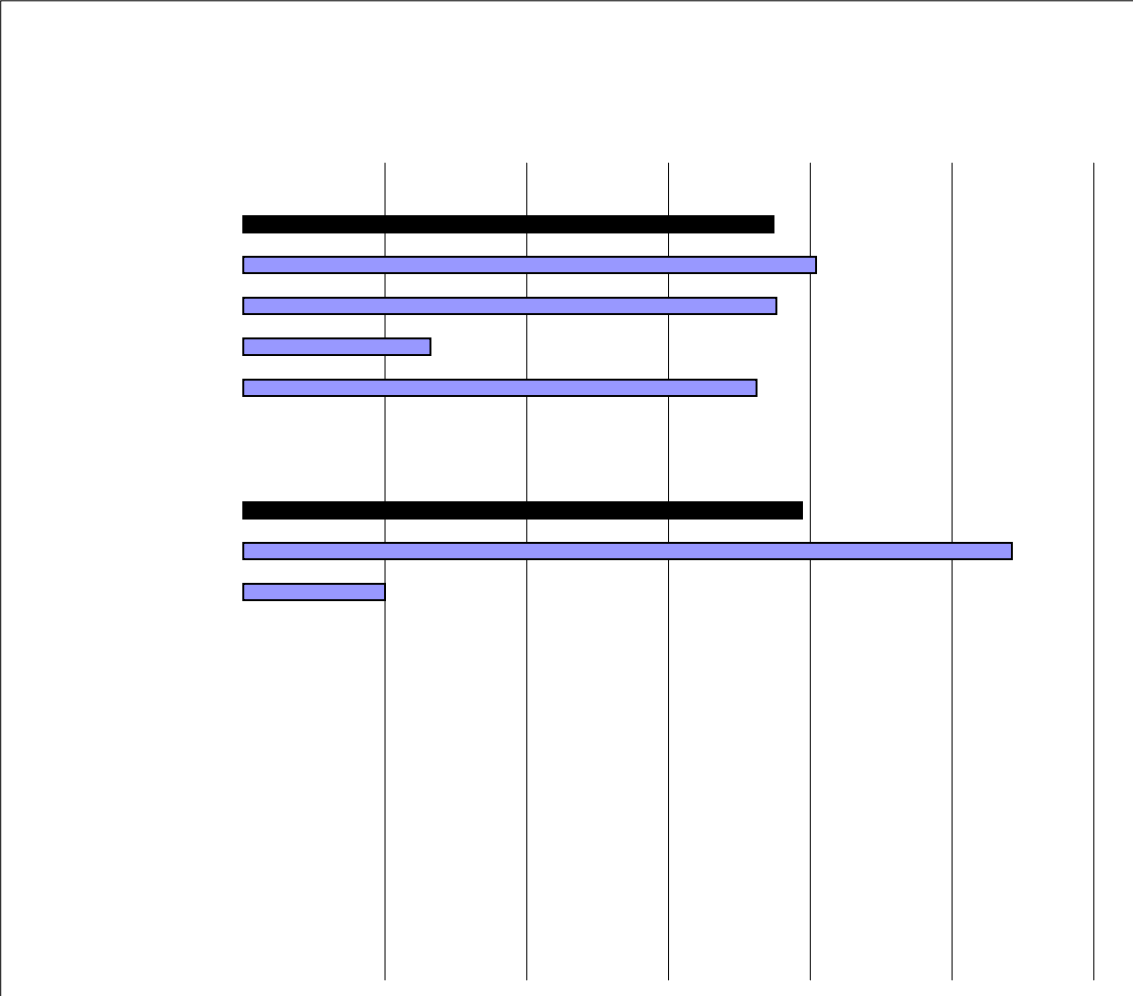


Over one-half (53 percent) of adults in British Columbia have been in contact with one or more of the Province's post-secondary institutions during the past two years. They enrolled in credit courses (31 percent) and non-credit courses (10 percent); they attended musical and theatrical performances (4 percent), public lectures (4 percent), sporting events (1 percent) and other events (7 percent); and they used such institutional services as advising and support services (6 percent), the library (4 percent), and athletic and recreational facilities (3 percent). Twenty-four percent had various other forms of contact or involvement with post-secondary institutions. Five percent reported having been employed by a post-secondary institution (public or private) at some time during the previous two years.

Involvement with BC's post-secondary institutions is highest in Northern BC, among adults aged 18 to 29 years old, and among those who have earned university degrees.



Recollection of key media issues showed substantial regional variation. The APEC protest appears to have made only a small impression in Northern BC, while the SFU harassment case was much more dominant in the Lower Mainland than in other regions. Recollection of media coverage related to tuition and funding levels was much more consistent throughout all areas of the Province. Respondents with higher levels of education and higher incomes were more likely than others to recall media coverage of post-secondary issues.



4. PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE OF BC'S POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

Public knowledge of BC's post-secondary education system was measured in four areas: the differing roles of public universities, university-colleges and colleges; the percentage of institutional spending allocated to the teaching function; changes in post-secondary enrolment levels over the past five years; and changes in government grants to the postsecondary,cs; and changtchan

- BC's colleges are widely (and correctly) viewed as providers of technical training (86 percent). Less than one-third of the public associate colleges with professional schools, undergraduate

4.3 Changes in BC Post-Secondary Enrolment and Funding Over the Past Five Years

The public is much more knowledgeable about changing post-secondary enrolment levels. Almost three-quarters of respondents (73 percent) correctly stated that post-secondary enrolment has increased over the past five years. (Actual full-time equivalent or FTE enrolment in the university and college-institute sectors combined has risen about 15 percent since 1992/93.) Knowledge of changing government funding to BC's post-secondary institutions is more sporadic. Since 1992/93, total provincial government grants to BC's public post-secondary institutions have increased about 12 percent in actual dollars, but only 2 percent in constant (inflation-adjusted) dollars. However, 52

Over one-half (55 percent) of British Columbia adults believe that at about 18% of total costs, post-secondary student tuition contributes “about the right proportion” to the costs of post-secondary education. The remainder are almost evenly split between those stating that tuition is too high (22

5.2 Educational and Institutional Quality

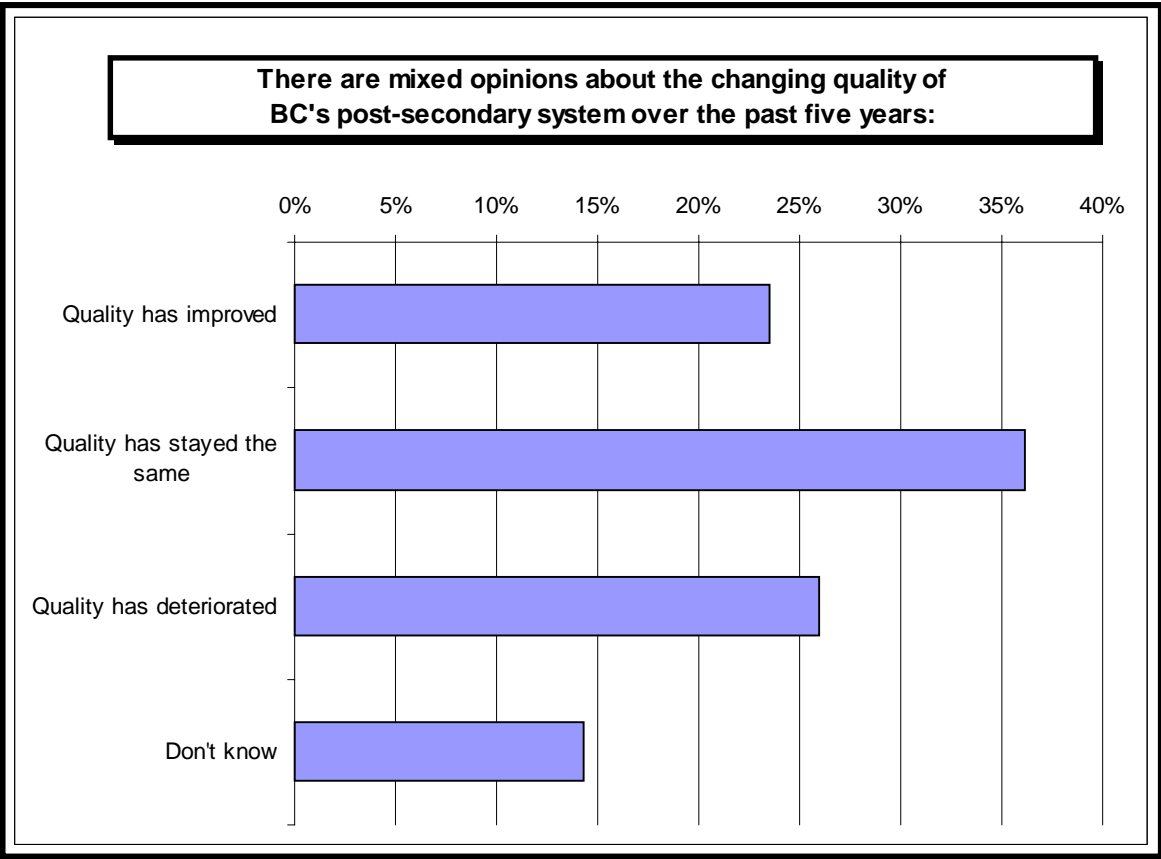
The majority of respondents define “quality” in post-secondary education in terms related to instruction and academic programs.

In terms of instruction, the public associates post-secondary “quality” with teachers (19 percent), modern facilities (4 percent), and the learning/teaching environment, small classes, good [student] preparation, professionalism and student oriented teachers (each at about 2 percent). Respondents also cited the quality, range and relevance of programs; the employability and quality of graduates;

<u>Type of Institution</u>					<u>Mean*</u>
BC colleges	54.6%	8.4%	63.0%	17.1%	2.85
BC university-colleges	52.8%	9.5%	62.3%	24.1%	2.94
BC universities	55.8%	25.7%	81.5%	10.1%	3.19
BC institutes	47.3%	25.3%	72.6%	16.7%	3.17
BC private institutions	26.8%	8.0%	34.8%	38.2%	2.60

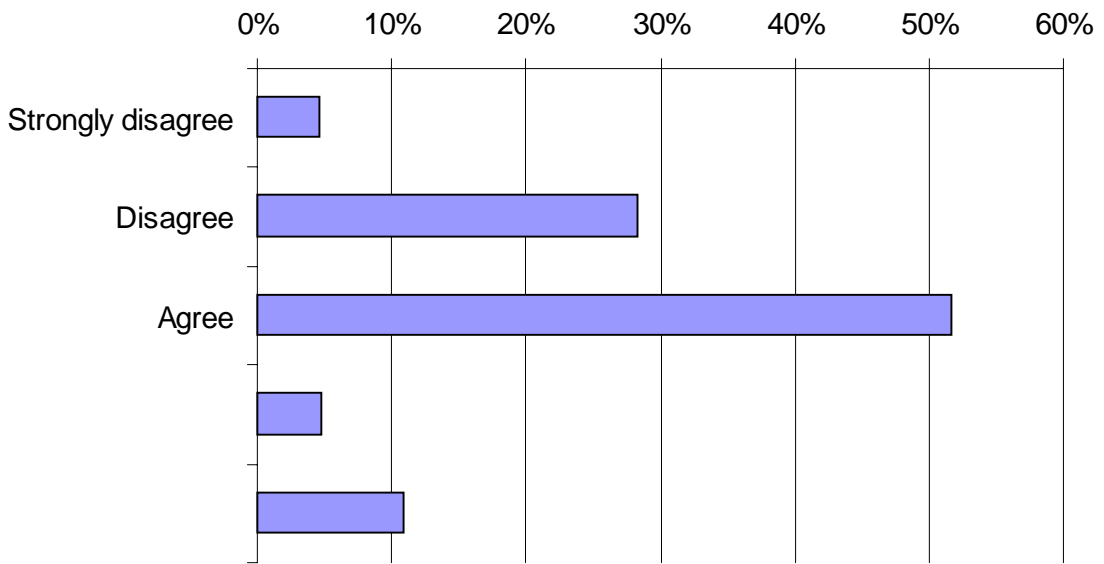
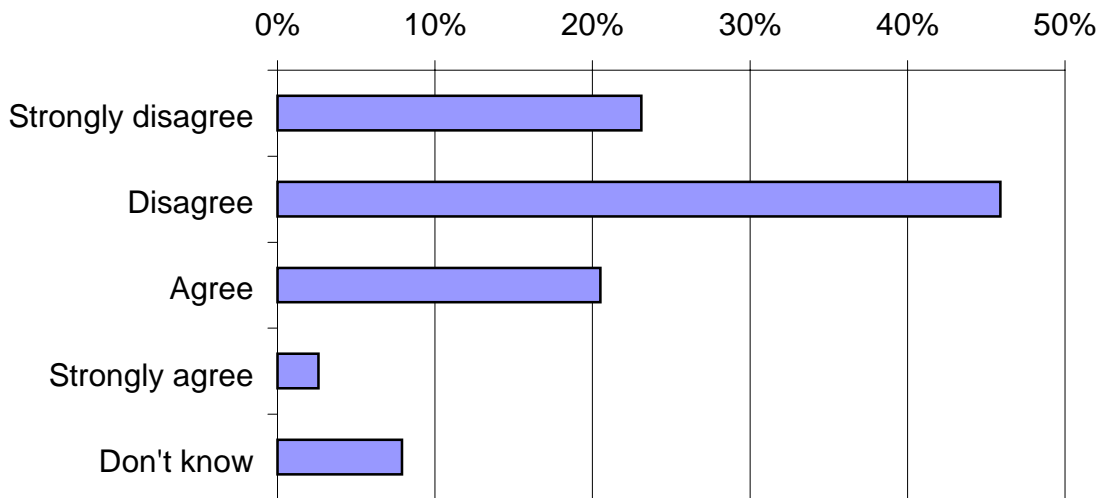
BC's public post-secondary institutions are generally considered to be of high quality. Colleges and university-colleges are viewed as having "high" or "very high" quality by about 63 percent of the public; BC's public universities by about 82 percent of the public; and BC's institutes by 73 percent of the public. By comparison, private training institutions were rated as having "high" or "very high" quality by only 35 percent of the general public. Many respondents indicated they didn't know about the quality of BC's public post-secondary institutions (from a low of 10 percent of the public for universities, to a high of 24 percent for university-colleges).

Only a minority of the public consider universities and other institutions to be similar with respect to instruction, class sizes, equipment, and graduate skill level. Universities are generally seen as being better in the areas of instruction and equipment, while other institutions receive higher ratings for appropriate class sizes and graduate skill level.



Over one-third of all respondents (36 percent) believe the quality of BC's post-secondary education system has not changed over the past five years; about one-fourth believe it has improved in quality and about one-fourth believe quality has deteriorated. Fourteen percent did not know whether quality had changed. In Northern BC, a greater percentage of respondents believed post-secondary education quality had improved than was the case in other regions.

Courses taught through correspondence, via computer networks, or on TV, are the same quality as those taught in campus classrooms:

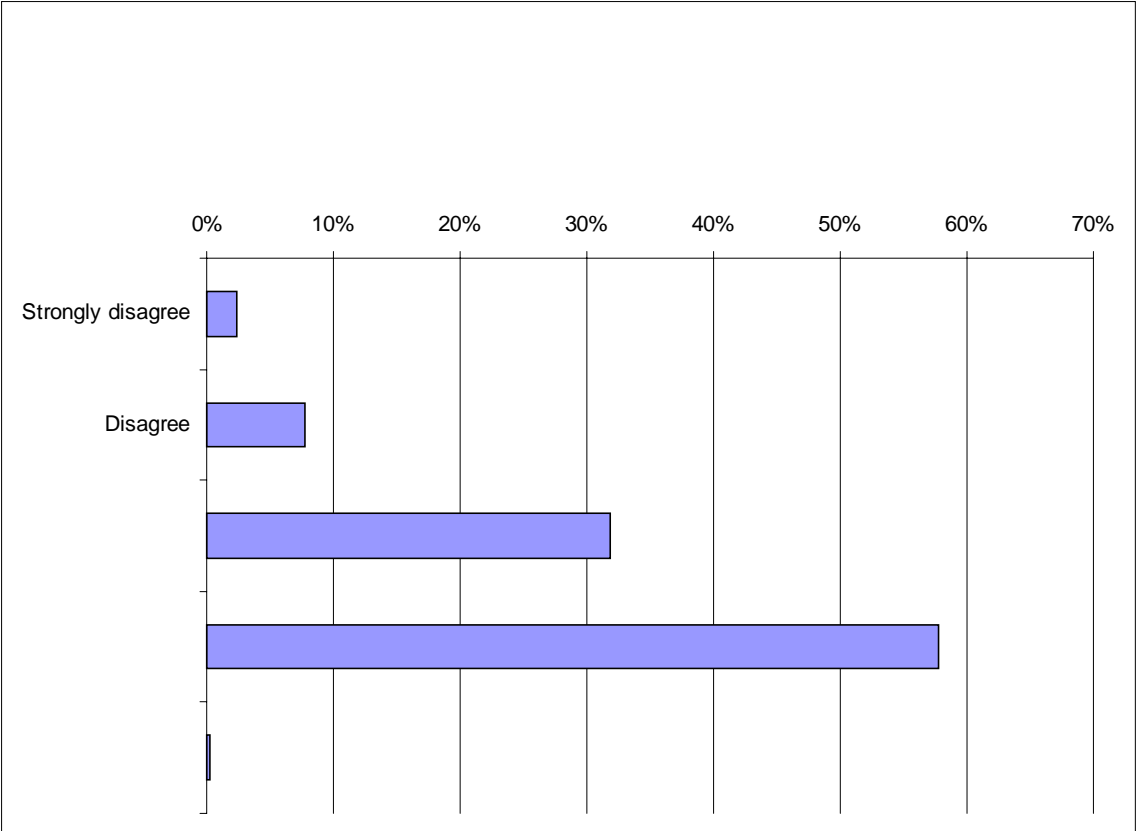


Two other quality-related questions are of particular interest within post-secondary institutions. The first is that post-secondary institutions are being encouraged to increase the number of courses delivered through "alternative" means (e.g. correspondence, and via computer and other media). However, over two-thirds of the public believe that such courses are of inferior quality to those offered in a conventional classroom setting. The second issue is that a majority (67 percent) believe that post-secondary institutions are adapting to the changing demands of the job market. (The minority view – that they are not – is reflected in several of the comments directed by respondents toward college and university presidents.)

5.3 Student Access

About two-thirds of the BC public consider access to BC's post-secondary institutions to be either

And 90 percent believe that “everyone who is qualified should have access to post-secondary education, regardless of their income”. The overall thrust of public opinion appears to be that (most) hard working students can qualify for access to the post-secondary system, and that having done so, space for them should be reasonably assured.



5.4 The Economic and Social Benefits of the Public Post-Secondary Education System

Virtually every survey respondent (well over 90 percent) believed that BC's post-secondary education system generated positive social and economic benefits for the province. In terms of economic benefits, respondents cited such factors as a skilled workforce (16 percent), increased employment (11 percent), and general economic benefits (7 percent), in addition to such things as better quality jobs, global competitiveness, and increased tax revenue from [employed] graduates. Identified social benefits included a better educated population (10 percent), general social and human benefits (9 percent), and such other benefits as prevention of the "brain drain", the enrichment of people, and

- It provides opportunities to lots of people. Not only people who live in BC but other countries. It brings a lot of income into BC. It provides us with the location to stay in BC and get educated here.
- Through education we are going to form a more active community and a better society. This will increase and better our economy but decrease the need to spend on social welfare.
- Post-secondary education systems benefit British Columbia by providing students with training for jobs, giving students personal and communication skills, helping students deal with real-life problems and issues. It also gives you an example of the work you will have to do and the discipline you will need for life.
-

- I would advise him/her to be open to the students' needs, be flexible, be aware of modern trends, be open to suggestions, have the courage of your convictions, and to involve parents.
- Try to make adjustments to the entrance standards. There are so many students who fall through the cracks. The academic

APPENDIX 1: PROJECT ADMINISTRATION, FIELDWORK AND SAMPLE INFORMATION

1. Steering Committee

- Ms. Kathleen Bigsby, Advanced Education Council of British Columbia
- Mr. Chris Conway, University of Victoria
- Ms. Paula Martin, University of British Columbia
- Mr. Lee Owen, Advanced Education Council of British Columbia

2. Consultant

- R.A. Malatest and Associates Ltd.
- Participation with steering committee in instrument design; development of sampling methodology; field testing and fieldwork; data post-coding; data entry and data set production; preparation of top line report

3. Fieldwork Details

- Fieldwork dates November 23, 1997 to December 18, 1997
- Calling times Mondays to Thursdays (6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.); Saturdays (10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.); Sundays (1:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.); limited calling and callbacks Mondays to Thursdays (1:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.)
- Survey administered in English, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Punjabi and German

4. Sample Summary

Region	Actual Sample n	Actual Sample %	Estimated Population %	Ratio of Percentages	Adjusted Ratio (1)	Weighted Sample n (2)	Sampling Error at 95% (3)
Lower Mainland	340	44.68%	55.7%	1.25	1.00	340	5.3%
Vancouver Island	145	19.05%	19.5%	1.02	0.82	119	8.1%
Interior/Southeast BC	150	19.71%	16.5%	0.84	0.67	101	8.0%
Northern BC	126	16.56%	8.3%	0.50	0.40	51	8.7%
Total	761	100.00%	100.0%			610	4.0%

- Notes:
1. All ratios were adjusted downward to achieve a Lower Mainland base ratio of 1.0.
 2. Rounded to nearest integer value.
 3. Sampling errors for each region apply only to analyses conducted for that region; for the entire weighted sample, the sampling error is 4.0%.

AECBC/TUPC

Survey of the B.C. General Public:

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm calling on behalf of the Advanced Education Council of B.C. Our firm, R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. has been contracted to conduct a survey on their behalf.

We are calling to obtain your opinions about, and attitudes towards the post-secondary education system in B.C. While participation is completely voluntary, your answers are important. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and will be used only for statistical purposes.

May I do the survey with you at this time?

We are required to fill certain quotas in terms of region of B.C., age and gender of the respondent. Therefore, could you please tell me into which of the following age categories you fall?

- Age:
1. 18 to 29 years
 2. 30 to 44 years
 3. 45 to 64 years
 4. 65+ years

(DO NOT ASK) Gender: 1. Male 2. Female

Could we please confirm the first three digits of your postal code? ____ ____ ____

Region of B.C. will be automatically checked by the CATI as it is coded on the basis of the first three digits of the telephone number.

Thank you very much for your time, but we have filled our quota for your age category/region/gender!

A. Knowledge/Awareness Questions

The first set of questions on the survey is to measure public awareness of the post-secondary education system in B.C. Please do not worry if you find you cannot answer some of them.

- A1. Thinking back over the past few months, can you remember any media coverage relating to post-secondary education generally, or to any college or university in particular?
- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Yes (GO TO A2) | 8. Don't Know/Unsure (GO TO A3) |
| 2. No (GO TO A3) | 9. No Response (GO TO A3) |

A2. If yes, what was the coverage about/what issue?

- A3. Have you had any contact with or been on the campus of a B.C. post-secondary institution over the past two years?
- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Yes (GO TO A4) | 8. Don't Know/Unsure (GO TO A5) |
| 2. No (GO TO A5) | 9. No Response (GO TO A5) |

A4. If yes, what kind of contact have you had with the institution(s)?
(SURVEYOR NOTE: DON'T READ ANSWERS ALOUD.)

- _____ 1. taken a credit course at a public university or college in the past two years
- _____ 2. taken a non-credit/general interest/continuing education course at a public university or college
- _____ 3. taken any courses offered by a private institution in the past two years
- 4. attended a music or theatre performance at a college or university in the past two years (can be both university events or events where other groups rent university facilities)
- 5. attended a sporting event at a college or university (can be both university events or events where other groups rent university facilities)
- 6. attended a public lecture at a college or university
- 7. used athletic/recreational facilities
- 8. used university, college or institute library
- 9. attended another community event at a college or university (e.g., open house, art show, science fair)
- 10. employed by post-secondary institution
- 11. used the employment, counselling or advising centre at a post-secondary institution
- 12. other _____ (please specify)
- 88. Don't Know/Unsure
- 99. No Response

A5. In this next question I have a list of things that post-secondary institutions do. For each could you please tell me whether you think this is something universities do, something university-colleges do or something that colleges do.

	Yes	No	Don't Know	No Response
a) <i>training people for specific technical careers and trades</i>				
i) Is this something universities do?	1	2	8	9
ii) Is this something university-colleges do?	1	2	8	9

	High funding priority	Medium funding priority	Low funding priority	Don't Know	No Response
a) highway construction and repair	1	2	3	8	9
b) environmental protection	1	2	3	8	9
c) elementary and secondary education	1	2	3	8	9
d) post-secondary education	1	2	3	8	9
e) health care and hospitals	1	2	3	8	9
f) social assistance and welfare programs	1	2	3	8	9
g) economic development programs	1	2	3	8	9

B5. How efficiently do you feel that B.C. post-secondary institutions use the funding available to them? Would you say they use the funding . . .

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Not efficiently at all | 8. Don't Know/Unsure |
| 2. Not very efficiently | 9. No Response |
| 3. Somewhat efficiently | |
| 4. Very efficiently | |

B6. On average students contribute 18% of the actual cost of their education through tuition. In your opinion is this proportion too high, too low, or about right?

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 1. Too high | 8. Don't Know/Unsure |
| 2. About right | 9. No Response |
| 3. Too low | |

B7. The provincial government has frozen post-secondary tuition at current levels for the next two years. How much do you agree or disagree with this tuition freeze? Would you say you . . .

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly disagree | 8. Don't Know/Unsure |
| 2. Disagree | 9. No Response |
| 3. Agree | |
| 4. Strongly agree | |

B8. With government budgets tight, universities and colleges may have to choose between limiting enrollment, eliminating programs of study, reducing services to students (e.g., counselling, library hours, computing equipment) or increasing fees. Which choice do you favour?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Limiting enrollment | 8. Don't Know/Unsure |
| 2. Eliminating programs of study | 9. No Response |
| 3. Reducing services to students | |
| 4. Increasing fees | |

E. Other Issues

F3. What is your current occupation?

- 1. Employed by PSE system
- 2. Employed by K-12 system
- 3. Managerial
- 4. Professional and technical
- 5. Clerical
- 6. Sales
- 7. Construction
- 8. Processing, machining, material handling and other crafts
- 9. Agriculture and resource-based (e.g. fishing, forestry, mining, etc.)
- 10. Transportation
- 11. Human Service Industry
- 12. Business Service Industry
- 13. Full-time PSE student
- 14. Other _____(please specify)
- 88. Don't Know/Unsure
- 99. No Response

F4. Into which category does your total pre-tax 1996 household income fall?

- 1. Less than \$20,000
- 2. \$20,000 to \$29,999
- 3. \$30,000 to \$39,999
- 4. \$40,000 to \$49,999
- 5. \$50,000 to \$74,999
- 6. \$75,000 to \$99,999
- 7. More than \$100,000
- 8. Don't Know/Unsure
- 9. No Response

G. General Comments

G1. If there was one piece of advice you could give the president of a university or college, what would it be?
