



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Spending on Private Career Colleges amidst plans to lessen public funding for post-secondaries has Alberta Students concerned and seeking answers.

EDMONTON, AB – The absence of Advanced Education in headlines since Thursday may have you believe post-secondaries were among the many stakeholders who were left with much to desire in Budget 2024. Amidst the list of Advanced Education budget highlights were expected investments in specific labour force programs, a small mental health allocation, and infrastructure projects on a handful of campuses. But there was one item – more than triple the cost of all others in the Advanced Education highlights – that could not be missed: \$391M for student aid and private career colleges support.

ASEC would like clarity on how student aid and private career colleges (PCCs) warrant existing as a combined budget item and why the latter is being funded by the public purse at all. Student aid, which was a stand-alone item in last year's budget, is forecasted to land at \$314M for the current year while the department's business plan states only \$182M is dedicated to student aid in the 2024-2025 budget. With the balance of the combined line item at a whopping \$209M, students are seeking transparency as to how those funds are being allocated and the government's plans for its new and quietly established department dedicated to PCCs.

"This amount of public dollars being directed towards private career colleges is unacceptable under any circumstances, but is especially disheartening in a bare-minimum budget which does not support our publicly funded institutions to keep up with basic student needs at the current pace of change."

Celia Sutton, ASEC Chair

The fiscal plan released Thursday celebrates reducing the amount by which post-secondaries in Alberta are supported by the provincial government. Noting by 2026-2027 own-source revenue (consisting of tuition, fees, and private sources) will rise to 58% from the current 53%. Students remain grateful for the 2% domestic tuition cap announced in Budget 2023 which appears to be unchanged. However, with that revenue stream restricted in growth, students are fearful about rising mandatory non-instructional fees and the quality of their education should an institution be unable to meet the substantial own-source revenue expectations.

Students across the province continue to be vocal about the compounding effects of the affordability crisis and lack of mental health support on campus with minimal government support. These existing gaps add to the concern in seeing such a large expense go towards programs with little to no regulation and no mandated student representation which could risk the reputation of Alberta's post-secondaries as a whole. When the government has framed their reduction in post-secondary funding as value for taxpayers, students can't help but wonder how spending on PCCs is a best-use of these diminished resources, fearing it could be a first step in a long-term plan to privatize advanced education.

The Alberta Students' Executive Council (ASEC) represents more than 90,000 college, polytechnic, and university students from 15 member associations across Alberta on Treaty 6, 7, and 8 territory.

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