

Building B.C.'s Future: A Labour-Ready, Sustainable Post-Secondary System

*A submission from Okanagan College to Don Avison,
For inclusion in the 2026 Review of British Columbia's Post-Secondary System*

Executive Summary

For several decades, public colleges in British Columbia have evolved to meet the needs of society. While much has changed, our core focus and values have remained consistent. Colleges enable individuals to develop knowledge, skills, and capabilities over their lifetimes. We support inclusive labour market participation and economic growth, and we strengthen communities through our local engagement and collaboration.

The purpose of our submission to this review is to outline concrete system opportunities for change. The recommendations are not framed as a choice between "spend more" or "cut more." Some are cost-neutral and enable agility, clarity, and cost savings, while others will require upfront investment to unlock long-term efficiencies.

Taken together, the recommendations contained here call for deliberate, system-level action that moves beyond incremental adjustment and creates a sustainable, responsive post-secondary system that is the core engine for talent in our province's economic and social future.

Recommendations:

| Opportunities for the post-secondary system | |
|--|--|
| <u>Establish a Provincial Talent Strategy</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set provincial skills competency targets in key sectors • Establish a clear, consistent, competency-oriented data framework • Track the progress of PSIs to deliver relevant skills competency education • Define roles and responsibilities in building and sustaining talent |
| <u>Shift to Learner-Centeredness as core culture in post-secondary education</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make lifelong learning core business for post-secondary institutions, and a provincial priority • Adopt "anyone, anywhere, anytime" and "just for me, just enough, just in time" as design principles to complement existing models • Focus quality assurance on learner outcomes, including competency acquisition, progression, employment and equity of success |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p><u>Shape a more cooperative system: structure, mandates, and operations</u></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify and differentiate mandates to reduce head-to-head competition between institutions • Combine the governing legislation for all post-secondary institutions in B.C. • Incentivize shared services and collaborative models, both administrative and academic |
| <p>Opportunities for B.C.'s public colleges</p> | |
| <p><u>Build stronger connections with industry</u></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement ongoing, sector-based tables where employers and colleges co-design pathways and curriculum linked to <i>Look West</i> • Use joint analysis of labour market and competency data to identify emerging competency clusters to guide college programming • Share responsibility and risk for talent development, with employers contributing placements, mentors, equipment access and financial co-investment |
| <p><u>Stabilize colleges by modernizing their freedom to operate</u></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a strong public-interest and accountability lens, while revisiting regulatory and legislative operating constraints • Pair structural reforms and shared service initiatives with enabling financial and legislative frameworks, recognizing that some high-impact changes require upfront investment and flexibility to realize long-term savings and outcomes |

Bold action does not mean acting rashly. It means acting coherently and at the right scale, guided by a clear skills strategy, robust evidence, and a commitment to learners and the public interest.

This review is our moment to turn insight into action, and set the course for a stronger, more agile and future-ready post-secondary system for British Columbia. We are ready.



Dr. Neil Fassina
President
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1. Introduction and context

For several decades, public colleges in British Columbia have evolved to meet the needs of society. While much has changed, our core focus and values have remained consistent. Colleges enable individuals to develop knowledge, skills, and capabilities over their lifetimes. We support inclusive labour market participation and economic growth, and we strengthen communities through our local engagement and collaboration. These value propositions do not disappear even in the face of rapid technological changes, demographic swings, and policy shifts; rather, they become even more salient and require colleges to adapt more effectively and more quickly.

British Columbia's public post-secondary system has been examined numerous times over several decades, with remarkably consistent findings, aspirations, and challenges: the province needs a collaborative and cooperative system that is regionally responsive to support labour market needs, economic growth, equity, and lifelong learning through accessible, affordable, and relevant high-quality education. And yet, despite numerous reviews, many structural and cultural barriers remain unresolved.

Grounded in the *Look West*¹ economic strategy, the current review examines the structure of the post-secondary system, its cost base and operational sustainability, and its alignment with a rapidly changing social, technological, and economic environment. Unlike previous studies, this review is taking place amid significant fiscal and labour market pressures, where institutional insolvencies are a credible risk. It recognizes that long-term sustainability cannot be achieved by simply increasing funding, treating money alone as the solution risks masking deeper structural and governance problems and postponing difficult but necessary decisions for future generations.

The purpose of our submission to this review is to outline concrete system opportunities for change. The recommendations are not framed as a choice between "spend more" or "cut more." Some are cost-neutral and enable agility and new opportunities for revenue generation (e.g., legislative changes), while others will require upfront investment to unlock long-term operational efficiencies and expenditure savings (e.g., building shared digital infrastructure).

Taken together, these recommendations call for deliberate, system-level action that moves beyond incremental adjustment and creates a sustainable, responsive post-secondary system that is the core engine for talent in our province's economic and social future.

2. Defining our goal and our impact: a Provincial Talent Strategy

Look West sets a 10-year economic direction that positions B.C. as "the economic engine of Canada," catalyzing major private-sector investments, and expanding seven key economic sectors. It emphasizes delivering on major projects faster, strengthening the workforce, and ensuring that British Columbians are first in line for new jobs.

Post-secondary must serve as B.C.'s core talent pipeline for *Look West* sectors and emerging industries and forms of work. Today, while there is a general understanding of our role in educating and preparing people for employment, we lack a unifying provincial talent or skills strategy, and a singular means to measure progress. Such a strategy would:

- **Set provincial skills competency targets in key sectors:** Aligned to *Look West* and the required competencies and talent volumes, indexed regionally and reflecting future-of-work contexts.
- **Establish a clear, consistent, competency-oriented data framework:** Map the B.C. Labour Market Outlook (framed in NOC codes) to real-time labour and competency information (job postings, sector consultations, regional economic data) to understand current and emerging competency demand and required talent volumes by region and provincially.
- **Track the progress of PSIs to deliver relevant skills competency education:** Using the data framework as a foundation, establish KPIs at the system, sector, regional and institutional levels, considering indicators such as participation, competency acquisition, employment, earnings in priority sectors, employer satisfaction, learner satisfaction, equity of access and success for under-represented groups.
- **Define roles and responsibilities in building and sustaining talent:** Identify the distinct roles and mandates of research universities, teaching universities, colleges, institutes, union-based trainers, and Indigenous and community-based providers in building and sustaining talent pipelines and closing current gaps, and align reporting accordingly.

Without a coordinated approach, institutions will continue to interpret provincial economic priorities independently. Unsurprisingly, this creates gaps in critical areas and a competency mismatch risk. Competency mismatch occurs when people acquire competencies through education that are not aligned to the career they seek or the jobs available. At the national level, the OECD reports Canada is already facing this challenge², and in B.C. there is evidence that the mismatch will continue if left unchecked: the 2025 B.C. Labour Market Outlook notes that 45% of all job openings requiring higher education in the next ten years require a college education. However, only about one-third of BC post-secondary students are enrolled in a college³.

A provincial talent strategy could move beyond general commitments to *labour-market relevance*, providing a concrete destination against which system structure, program portfolios, funding decisions, and accountability arrangements can be aligned. It would create a single, primary blueprint, and enable every institution to build to the same outcome, fitting the needs of the province and delivering a best-in-class talent pipeline for a thriving economy.

To be successful in the short and long term, the system requires a clear, shared understanding of where we stand relative to our goals. At present, information and data are fragmented, and much of it is not structured in ways that allow useful analysis and application. Shifting to a competency-oriented data framework would make it possible to see the detailed skills profiles that are in demand provincially and regionally, and to map educational offerings to those profiles.

This approach does not imply simply adding to the currently disjointed and burdensome reporting requirements for institutions (i.e., # of reports currently required) that tend to focus on historical and outdated assessments rather than questions of strategic importance. Rather, it is about a systematic

review of the data and analytics environment of the system, and the reorientation of reporting to align with provincial strategy.

Measurement may help stabilize the system without requiring new operating funding in three ways: by showing where resources are used well or poorly, and making adjustments accordingly; by illuminating where there is currently opportunity to reduce competition and foster collaboration (by revealing duplication and gaps); and by bringing to light where better support for under-represented groups will make positive impacts (by illuminating participation and outcome patterns). From this perspective, financial sustainability does not rely on adding funding to existing programs but instead requires reimagining and reshaping how our system operates to deliver clearly defined competency outcomes.

Ireland's 2025 National Skills Council⁴ offers a clear model of a centralized, demand-driven skills strategy supported by integrated labour-market data and industry leadership. By consolidating skills intelligence and aligning funding with current and projected future workforce needs, Ireland has reduced fragmentation among training providers and has improved system responsiveness.

3. Making the Shift: Learner-centeredness as core culture in post-secondary education

British Columbia's post-secondary system is currently organized around a shrinking segment of learners: fulltime students in early adulthood. Program structures assume in-person attendance during weekday business hours, while recruitment, campus life, and marketing remain oriented toward young adults.

This model underserves the very learners now critical to the province's economic and social resilience, including: working adults needing rapid upskilling or reskilling; Indigenous and first-generation learners facing entrenched access barriers; residents of rural and remote communities; learners balancing education with work, caregiving, or financial constraints; those requiring flexible or supported learning environments; individuals unable to meet conventional residency rules; and workers adapting to AI- and technology-driven labour market disruption.

The consequence is not simply inequity of access to post-secondary education, but a culture that is designed to meet the needs of the system and to maintain the status quo, rather than address the evolving needs of modern learners. A fundamental cultural shift toward true learner-centeredness would:

- Make lifelong learning core business for post-secondary institutions, and a provincial priority for the sector, with credentials and delivery designed for repeated engagement by learners over the course of their career, not just initial entry-to-practice instruction and supports.
- Adopt "anyone, anywhere, anytime" and "just-for-me, just-enough, just-in-time" design principles to complement existing traditional models, leveraging programs designed specifically for digital learning and/or hybrid delivery, and AI-assisted tools to extend reach and personalize learning while maintaining quality and equity.

- Focus quality assurance on learner outcomes, including competency acquisition, progression, employment, and equity of success, so that decisions about structure, funding, and tuition policies are informed by their real impacts on learners, not only by institutional needs.

Many aspects of this shift can be advanced without large new expenditures, by reorienting existing practices and policies; others, such as building high-quality digital platforms or expanding recognition of prior learning, will require upfront investments that to generate long-term gains in participation, completion, and efficiency.

4. Moving from “coopetition” to cooperation: structure, mandates, and operations

The current configuration of British Columbia’s post-secondary institutions is the product of decades of incremental growth, local advocacy, and siloed policy decisions rather than deliberate system design. As a result, institutions operate in a fragmented landscape in which mandates have blurred and there is overlap among research universities, teaching universities, colleges, institutes, the K-12 system, and government-funded training partners. This is particularly evident in trades, research, adult upgrading, and employment-focused programming.

In a resource-constrained environment institutions naturally compete for finite resources such as students, funding, partnerships, and projects. Cooperation occurs, but it is typically voluntary and project-by-project rather than embedded in system design and incentives. The result is a system built on “coopetition,” where the primary motivation is competition for finite resources, and cooperation occurs only when there are mutual benefits and available support.

Curriculum practices have compounded this fragmentation by encouraging the duplication of courses and credentials: institutions develop their own programming because there is no reason to leverage what already exists. Credits are instead retroactively negotiated for transfer equivalency, instead of being developed collaboratively at the start as shared provincial assets. Administrative and IT systems have likewise been replicated across institutions, creating parallel infrastructures that do not reliably interoperate and are increasingly unsustainable under constrained public funding.

Together, these dynamics have slowed modernization, weakened system coherence, and produced uneven access and outcomes for learners based on geography, despite the availability of technologies, including AI, that could enable more efficient, consistent, and equitable delivery across the province.

In a context where additional operating funding is not anticipated, stabilizing the system requires reshaping it to be more cooperative, focused, and efficient, if not through incentives and accountability, then through structural changes.

Key directions could include:

- **Clarifying and differentiating mandates** so institutions are not competing head-to-head in the same areas: research universities focus on advanced research, comprehensive arts and sciences programs, and specialized professional training at the undergraduate and graduate level; teaching universities on regional degrees and applied programs; colleges and

institutes on skilled trades, technical, applied, and vocational programming as well as applied research tied directly to local and provincial labour market and industry needs.

- **Combining the governing legislation for all post-secondary institutions** to create effective alignment of the contributions of research universities, special-purpose teaching universities, institutions, and colleges in a single legislative act. Through using a singular source of language, definitions, and details, institutions would gain a stronger understanding of where distinct and complementary roles are enabled within the system.
- **Incentivizing shared services and collaborative models**, both administrative and academic. Obstacles to shared services include institutional risk aversion, concerns about loss of local control, incompatible systems, and lack of clear governance for shared entities. These can be addressed through provincial facilitation and direction, clear service-level agreements, and transitional support that acknowledges upfront costs while aiming for long-term efficiencies (e.g., a provincial curriculum commons).

Shared collaborative models specific to digital infrastructure should focus on those systems that are likely to prevail beyond a deep integration of AI as well as those needed to enable a modernized learning environment. Today's intense focus on traditional ERPs may be tomorrow's sunk cost if ERPs do not adapt to the changing nature of learning as well as data structure and storage.

For non-digital infrastructure, one potential approach is to amplify the role of designated Centers of Excellence. In this model, institutions differentiate based on specific sectors of the economy that they support. For example, Okanagan College is aligned to six primary areas ("economic ecosystems"): aerospace and advanced manufacturing; allied health and health systems; business and entrepreneurship; engineering and advanced technologies; skilled trades; and food, beverage and tourism.

If targeted structural reforms are required in some regions or subsectors, or the creation of new entities is needed to maintain or improve access while strengthening operational resilience, government's approach should be deliberate and sequenced: start with mandate clarification and incentivized shared services; assess where deeper structural change is needed; and invest upfront where consolidation, federation, or entity creation (etc.) might credibly produce long-term savings and stronger capacity.

5. Building stronger connections between B.C.'s public colleges and industry

Public colleges in British Columbia exist to provide education and training that leads directly to employment, yet a persistent disconnect with industry limits their effectiveness. Many employers still operate on a "buy talent" model, expecting that graduates will simply be available when needed, rather than engaging to help "build talent" in partnership. This creates a structural gap between what is taught (it stays stagnant) and how work is evolving all the time. Importantly, this is relevant to *Look West* priority sectors where technologies, business models, and competency requirements are shifting rapidly.

Within B.C.'s current college system, existing mechanisms (such as program advisory committees, co-op education, and work-integrated learning frameworks) provide valuable input but are typically anchored to programs that already exist and occupations that are already defined. They are significantly less effective at surfacing emerging roles, cross-cutting competencies, or new combinations of skills that will be required for future work in areas like clean energy, advanced manufacturing, port logistics, tech and life sciences, and AI-enabled services.

At the same time, data flows between industry and colleges are often focused on immediate hiring pressures or broad projections, rather than on the specific competencies that underpin those needs, and the relevant labour market data. This results in confusion and potentially wasted resources at a time when we can ill-afford either.

Closing this gap is therefore essential to both economic alignment and system sustainability. Moving from consultation to genuine partnership would mean:

- Implement ongoing, sector-based tables where employers and colleges co-design pathways and curriculum linked to *Look West* sector plans, rather than reviewing curriculum after the fact.
- Using joint analysis of labour market and competency data to identify emerging competency clusters and to guide the creation, renewal, and sunseting of college programs.
- Sharing responsibility and risk for talent development, with employers contributing not only advice to colleges, but also placements, mentors, equipment access, and, where appropriate, financial co-investment in program development and delivery.

In this model, industry is not an external stakeholder but a *co-producer of talent*, and institutions are not simply suppliers of generic graduates but partners in building the workforce that *Look West* and the broader economy requires.

Perhaps most importantly, this effort would strengthen the relevance and perceived value of college education, attract greater numbers of B.C. learners into relevant and in-demand programs, and help ensure that structural and governance changes in the college system are informed by the realities of work rather than by institutional interests alone.

6. Stabilizing for the short- and long-term: Modernize colleges' freedom to operate

Stabilizing the system in the near-term and moving toward long-term sustainability requires addressing not only revenue levels and cost structures, but also the degree of freedom colleges have to operate their institutions as effective, accountable enterprises. Current policy and legislative constraints significantly limit that freedom, even when leaders have clear strategies to improve efficiency, diversify revenues, or invest in changes that would pay off over time.

Colleges also face a set of structural constraints that, taken together, make it difficult to manage institutions "like a business" while being asked to demonstrate business-like efficiency:

- Balanced-budget requirements and deficit restrictions mean institutions are generally prohibited from running even small, strategic deficits to invest in transformation, with any exception requiring the explicit permission of multiple ministers, regardless of institutional balance sheet strength or the quality of the business case.
- Inability to access credit markets directly limits the capacity to finance capital projects, technology upgrades, or consolidation and shared-service initiatives through borrowing that could be repaid from future savings or revenues.
- Extensive legislative and regulatory obligations impose high compliance burdens and constrain flexibility in areas such as staffing, program approvals, and partnership models, contributing to a risk-averse culture and reducing room for local innovation.

In combination, these factors leave colleges with the responsibility to meet performance targets, and stabilize and sustain their institutions, without many of the tools available to private organizations to manage risk, invest strategically, or adapt to changing conditions.

A realistic approach to near-term stabilization and long-term sustainability must therefore:

- Maintain a strong public-interest and accountability lens, but revisit the regulatory and legislative operating constraints on colleges where they prevent prudent, evidence-based action (for example, allowing tightly governed, time-limited strategic deficits linked to clear transformation plans, or providing access to pooled or centrally guaranteed borrowing for high-value investments) or prevent the usage of common business tools to manage through transition.
- Pair structural reforms and shared-service initiatives with enabling financial and legislative frameworks, recognizing that some high-impact changes require upfront investment and flexibility to realize long-term savings and improved outcomes.

In short, financial policy and operating rules should give colleges enough freedom to act as stewards of institutional and system sustainability, within a clear framework of public accountability, rather than locking them into a narrow, year-to-year balanced-budget logic that discourages the very transformations the sustainability agenda requires.

7. Conclusion: From recurring reviews to bold, sustained action

The central risk facing British Columbia's post-secondary system is not a lack of analysis or insight, but a pattern of responding to each new diagnosis with further review rather than decisive, system-level action. Incremental adjustments, such as small program changes, modest pilots, or limited governance tweaks, will not resolve the structural, financial, and cultural challenges outlined above, nor will they position the system to meet the scale of economic and societal change anticipated under *Look West*.

This paper points to a different approach: begin with a clear Provincial Talent Strategy aligned with *Look West* and define success in concrete, measurable terms. An integrated, competency-oriented data and KPI framework should be used to hold institutions accountable and to guide transparent

decisions on mandates, capacity, funding, and program portfolios. A commitment to learner centeredness is essential to increase participation in post-secondary education both for first-time learners, and for those returning to the system to upskill, reskill and continue a pathway of lifelong learning.

For colleges specifically, the relationship between institutions and industry must shift from episodic consultation to shared responsibility for talent development, with structured sector tables, co-designed programs, and joint use of data so that industry acts as a co-producer, and not just a consumer, of talent. These changes must be reinforced by action at the system, governance, and cultural levels: reducing duplication through clearer structures and mandates, modernizing governance and the College and Institute Act to enable timely public-interest decision-making, and embedding true learner-centredness as the foundation for design, delivery, and investment.

In the near term, stabilization can be achieved through high-impact, low-investment steps: clarifying institutional mandates, updating legislation and regulations to remove obvious barriers, strengthening system-level data and KPI governance, and formalizing sector-based talent partnerships. These measures require political will and coordination more than significant new funding, and they create the conditions for deeper reform.

Over the longer term, stability will depend on targeted, high-investment initiatives where the return is clear: selective structural reforms such as consolidations or federations with strong business cases; shared digital platforms and recognition-of-learning systems that support flexible, lifelong learning; and sustained investment in learner-centred, AI-enabled, future-oriented pedagogy.

Bold action does not mean acting rashly. It means acting coherently and at the right scale, guided by a clear skills strategy, robust evidence, and a commitment to learners and the public interest.

This review is our moment to turn insight into action, and set the course for a stronger, more agile and future-ready post-secondary system for British Columbia. We are ready.

Appendix 1: Okanagan College - overview

Short history

In 1963, the British Columbia Vocational School opened its doors welcomed students in Kelowna. Over the course of the next ten years, Okanagan College (“OC”) was formed through the advocacy and efforts of local community members, with campuses established in Penticton, Vernon and Salmon Arm. In 1980, offerings were expanded to include university transfer and a broader base of employment-focused programs. Keeping pace with the growing interior region population, Okanagan College was fast becoming the largest provider of skilled trades education outside the Lower Mainland, a distinction it continues to hold today.

During the 1980s and 90s, people from across the Okanagan-Shuswap worked hard to have the College recognized as a university. In 1992, its name was changed to Okanagan University College (“OUC”), and in 1995 the institution was granted permission to award select four-year degrees. However, a provincial decision that came into effect in 2005 dissolved OUC, dividing its assets between the newly created Okanagan College and UBC Okanagan (“UBCO”).

The modern Okanagan College continues to offer a wide range of applied degrees, diploma and certificate programs, while UBCO focuses on academic research, university studies and graduate degrees.

Okanagan College plays an essential role supporting the region’s growing economy. Specifically, OC is closely linked with employers in aerospace and advanced manufacturing, technology, construction and infrastructure, transportation, agriculture and agri-tech, tourism, health care and community services, business development and entrepreneurship.

By the numbers

- Over 19,000 unique students annually (headcount), and more than 63,000 alumni
- Approximately 1,100 total employees
- Four main campuses, serving 20+ communities in the B.C. interior region in-person and through flexible delivery
 - Enrolment by campus in 2024/25: Kelowna (50%); Vernon (10%); Penticton (7%); Salmon Arm (3%); Distance & Online (30%)
- Enrolment is growing on a year-over-year basis in Trades, Health and Technology programs
- OC’s Indigenous student population is growing year-over-year, as is the percentage of Gen Z students
- *More information:* [December 2025 Enrolment Report](#); [2024/25 OC Accountability Plan and Report](#)

Impact of federal changes to immigration policy

Since changes impacting international students were announced by Ottawa in 2024, OC has experienced a dramatic decrease in enrolment by learners from outside of Canada. New student enrolment dropped in Winter 2025 by approximately 70 per cent, and there was a further decline in Fall 2025.

In real numbers, the reduction and anticipated continued impact are as follows:

| | Fall 2024 (before federal changes) | Fall 2025 (actual) | Fall 2026 (planning assumption) | Fall 2027 (planning assumption) |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|--|--|
| International student enrolment | 2,010 | 1,450 | 850 | 250 |

*Headcount

**all programs, including Continuing Studies

***At term 'stable enrolment' date

The majority of the impact is to the Associate of Arts degree program and the Diploma in Business Administration program, as these were previously well attended by international students. Under new federal rules, graduates of these programs are no longer eligible for post-graduate work permits.

As a result of the declining enrolment, OC has taken steps to adjust its workforce and operations to align with lower student demand. This has resulted in workforce and operational reductions including the following examples:

- Early retirements: 34 employees accepted an early retirement incentive ("ERIP") package offered by the College in January 2025;
- This directly mitigated 17 layoffs and facilitated restructuring and realignments across several departments to generate efficiencies and improve student experiences;
- Instructional staff (faculty) impacts to both the OC School of Business, and the Arts and Foundational Programs portfolios; while layoffs were mitigated through early retirements in Business, three employees in Arts were impacted by the closure of OC's Modern Languages department; further impacts are anticipated for 2026;
- Reduction in number of employees and to the budget of the International Education department in November 2024, immediately following the federal government's decision to restrict post-graduate work permits to a limited list of college programs;
- Closure of OC satellite locations ("Learning Centres") in Revelstoke and Oliver.

Okanagan College - Growth and the path forward

Although the federal government's policy changes relating to international students have created emergent challenges for Okanagan College, there are many reasons to believe that long-term growth and sustainability is achievable.

In Kelowna, construction is well underway on a new OC Centre for Food, Wine and Tourism that is poised to become an international epicentre of culinary arts, beverage and hospitality training. Representing a provincial capital investment of over \$60M, the new facility will focus on quality learning and training that equips students to be successful in B.C.'s growing tourism and food production industries.

Earlier this fall, Okanagan College and KF Aerospace founder Barry Lapointe announced a new partnership at the Kelowna International Airport, that will see Lapointe's BPL Legacy Association contribute \$17M in funding to build a new, purpose-built training facility to expand access to Aircraft Maintenance Engineering and related programs. This initiative bolsters B.C.'s efforts to expand robotics, advanced manufacturing and maintenance, repair and overhaul ("MRO") sub-sectors within the province, creating an Aerospace Education Corridor in the Okanagan, with OC offering programming to students at the Vernon and Kelowna airports.

New student housing facilities, funded by the Province, are expanding access to post-secondary education for hundreds of students from all parts of the region and beyond. Housing in Salmon Arm, Vernon and Kelowna opened in Fall 2024, while a new building in Penticton will be operational by Fall 2026. A flexible occupancy approach means rooms are available to learners in shorter-duration programs such as Trades and vocational training, as well as students requiring full-year accommodation.

In 2026, the College will submit a joint proposal with Interior Health to the Province to establish a Medical Laboratory Technician ("MLT") and Medical Laboratory Assistant ("MLA") program at OC, the first step toward expanding allied health training in the interior region. Currently, MLT programs are only available in Burnaby and Prince George, a gap that contributes to ongoing shortages in medical labs in communities from Williams Lake to Osoyoos. OC's long-term vision includes growing program offerings in allied health, health care assistant and health administration, recognizing the specific needs of B.C.'s rural communities. Flexible program delivery and in-community options are key to establishing a pipeline for local (domestic) learners to be able to choose to train and work close to home. The recent partnership between Okanagan College and the Justice Institute of British Columbia making paramedic training available at OC's Vernon campus is an example of collaboration between PSIs to achieve this objective.

Region-wide, OC is the preferred provider of skilled trades education and training, partnering with companies and employers across multiple professions. Students gain foundational and apprenticeship opportunities and acquire the experience they need to build meaningful careers. Working in close partnership with school districts, the College provides an entry point for youth through various programs, including Try-A-Trade, Jill of All Trades, and Trades samplers.

OC's collaboration with industry associations and employers throughout the Okanagan-Shuswap is vital to sustaining progress on major infrastructure projects that support population growth, natural resources and major project investments by the federal and provincial governments.

At the same time, Okanagan College is on a ten-year journey to transform and modernize its operations, expanding access to learners and making it easier for more people to gain new skills, upskill and reskill. Since 2022, the College has advanced a range of new initiatives and strategies, including:

- Learning Framework, Program Health, Credential Mix review
- Indigenous Partnerships Framework
- Accessibility Plan
- Student Housing Plan
- Student Experience Strategy
- Comprehensive Digital Strategy
- Alumni Engagement Plan
- Flexible Workplace Policy
- Wellness for Students and Staff Plan
- Sustainable Delivery Model

For more information, visit: [OC's Inspire Strategic Plan | Okanagan College](#)

¹ *Look West: Jobs and Prosperity for a Stronger BC and Canada*. Government of British Columbia, 2025, <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/employment-business-and-economic-development/look-west-strategy/lookwest.pdf>

² OECD. *Survey of Adult Skills 2023: Canada*. OECD Publishing, 2023, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/en/publications/survey-of-adults-skills-2023-country-notes_ab4f6b8c-en/canada_5ecab9d9-en.html

³ *B.C. Labour Market Outlook: 2025 Edition*. WorkBC, Government of British Columbia, 15 Dec. 2025, <https://www.workbc.ca/sites/default/files/2025-10/B.C.%20Labour%20Market%20Outlook%20Report%202025.pdf>

⁴ *Skills Matter: Priorities to Shape Our Future Capabilities – National Skills Council Strategic Advice 2025*. National Skills Council, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, June 2025, https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/National_Skills_Council_Strategic_Advice_June_2025.pdf