
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2014AVED0073-001832
December 4, 2014

Ministry of Advanced Education
Ministry of Education

Adult upgrading courses supported by grants for low-income learners

VICTORIA – Improvements to upfront, non-repayable grants will support low-income students enrolling in post-secondary adult upgrading courses, including English as a Second Language (ESL).

These changes are in anticipation of increased demand for financial support following a number of changes to prioritize K-12 funding on those working toward a high school diploma while ensuring the equitable and sustainable delivery of other adult upgrading courses in post-secondary and K-12 sectors.

High school courses in the K-12 sector will remain tuition-free for anyone working toward an Adult Dogwood Diploma or for adults looking to take basic, introductory courses.

However, students with the means to do so will be expected to contribute to the cost of courses at post-secondary institutions. Beginning Jan. 1, 2015, public post-secondary institutions in British Columbia will be allowed to charge tuition fees for all adult upgrading courses, including ESL programs.

Consistent with this change, beginning May 1, 2015, the Ministry of Education will no longer provide funding to school districts for tuition-free upgrading courses for adults who already hold a high school diploma.

Starting April 1, 2015, the annual budget for Adult Upgrading Grants will increase 33% to \$7.6 million. The grants will cover all, or a portion, of the costs of tuition, textbooks, supplies, transportation and child care depending on the adult student's income.

Previously, students above the income threshold were not eligible for the grant. However, a more flexible approach means students who are 10% above the income threshold are eligible for a grant to cover half of their tuition.

Quotes:

Peter Fassbender, Minister of Education -

“If you are an adult, and you are looking to finish high school and get your diploma, nothing changes in the K-12 sector. Taxpayers will bear the entire cost, and you won't be charged tuition.”

“The changes accomplish three things. It refocuses K-12 funding on school-aged students and adults pursuing a high school degree. Second, this provides greater consistency and sustainability in how we deliver adult upgrading courses in the K-12 and postsecondary sectors.

And third, it improves adult upgrading grants to support those in need of assistance.”

“High school is free, but further upgrading is not. I think it is reasonable to expect adults who’ve already graduated to contribute to these costs.”

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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Keeping adult upgrading courses sustainable; supporting low-income students

Grants: Upfront, non-repayable grants are available for low-income students attending adult upgrading courses, including ESL, at public post-secondary institutions. Funding applications are available online at StudentAid BC or through public post-secondary institutions. Applications are made directly to the institution.

High school: The program changes will allow the Ministry of Education to refocus \$9 million toward its primary objectives: protecting and improving educational programs for school-aged students and adults working toward a B.C. Dogwood Diploma.

The ministry will continue to provide funding for the delivery of 26 basic, introductory courses. Districts report that graduated adults enrolled in these basic courses are often non-English speaking immigrants seeking a path to further training or better integration into the B.C. workforce.

There was no funding for graduated adults prior to 2008. School districts may continue to deliver upgrading courses to graduated adults on a cost-recovery basis.

In 2013-14, 58 school districts delivered 18,100 upgrading courses to 15,000 graduated adults and 31 districts delivered 6,800 basic, introductory courses to 6,000 graduated adults.

Post-secondary: In 2008, the Ministry of Advanced Education provided \$6.9 million in base funding to the public post-secondary system for tuition-free delivery of upgrading courses. Over the past six years, delivery costs have increased and institutions are indicating it is no longer sustainable to deliver these courses on a tuition-free basis.

ESL has been tuition-free only since April 1, 2012. This was made possible through funding from the Canada-BC Immigration Agreement. Since then, Citizenship and Immigration Canada announced it would move to a new model for the delivery of ESL training effective April 1, 2014, and it would no longer support the tuition-free policy at B.C. public post-secondary institutions.

In 2013-14, 18 public post-secondary institutions delivered adult upgrading courses to 25,000 students and 17 public post-secondary institutions delivered ESL to about 10,000 students.

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