



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Planning Committee
From: Cathryn Volkering Carlile
 General Manager, Community Services
Re: Adult Basic Education Fees

Date: August 22, 2016
File: 07-3000-01/2016-Vol
 01

Staff Recommendation

That a letter as attached be written to the Premier of British Columbia respectfully requesting that consideration be given to reinstating tuition-free status for BC adult students enrolled in Grade 10, 11 and 12 Adult Basic Education programs.

Cathryn Volkering Carlile
 General Manager, Community Services

Att. 3

REPORT CONCURRENCE		
ROUTED TO:	CONCURRENCE	CONCURRENCE OF GENERAL MANAGER
Intergovernmental Relations & Protocol Unit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
REVIEWED BY STAFF REPORT / AGENDA REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE	INITIALS: DW	APPROVED BY CAO

Staff Report

Origin

In September 2015 the Richmond Community Services Advisory Committee (RCSAC) sent a Communication Tool to Council regarding “Adult Basic Education Courses No Longer Free” (Attachment 1). As of May 2015, graduated adults were no longer able to take Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses free of charge to upgrade their education in order to qualify for post-secondary education or training. As the fee requirement may present a significant obstacle to those seeking to improve their earnings, particularly to low-income individuals and families including those served by RCSAC member agencies, the RCSAC advised Council to request that the Province reverse this policy change and to “explore alternatives” with the Richmond School Board.

At the November 3, 2015 Planning Committee Meeting, following discussion of the RCSAC Communication Tool regarding ABE courses, it was resolved:

That the matter be referred to staff and to the Council/School Board Liaison Committee and that information be provided on:

- (1) funding changes to the Adult Basic Education Program; and*
- (2) action taken by Richmond School District No. 38 to address funding changes to the Adult Basic Education Program; and report back to Planning Committee.*

This report supports Council’s 2014-2018 Term Goal #2 A Vibrant, Active and Connected City:

Continue the development and implementation of an excellent and accessible system of programs, services, and public spaces that reflect Richmond’s demographics, rich heritage, diverse needs, and unique opportunities, and that facilitate active, caring, and connected communities.

This report also supports the following Social Development Strategy actions:

Action 41 – Develop and maintain strong networks and communication channels with senior government partners to seek their policy and financial assistance in addressing Richmond social issues.

Action 41 – Participate in joint planning and networking initiatives with community partners (e.g. Richmond School District, Vancouver Coastal Health, Metro Vancouver, non-profit agencies), working collaboratively to address social development concerns in the community.

Findings of Fact

Adult Basic Education and Fee Requirements

Adult Basic Education (ABE) was established in the early 1960s to ensure that adults (18 years of age and over) have access to courses and skills training leading to basic literacy, employability, life management skills, high school graduation and eligibility for post-secondary education. As identified in the BC Ministry of Advanced Education ABE Articulation Handbook (2015/16 Edition):

These programs provide flexible learning opportunities for adult learners and are designed for the large number of British Columbians in need of basic skills or language training to participate fully in society and the economy.

Registration for ABE courses is open to students who (1) are working toward high school graduation, or (2) have already attained high school graduation, but are seeking to improve their grades or take pre-requisite courses to qualify for post-secondary programs. ABE courses are offered by both BC school districts and public post-secondary institutions, including on-line and distance education. Courses are categorized as Fundamental, Intermediate, Advanced, or Provincial Level and are offered in a number of disciplines, including English, Science, Mathematics, and Social Sciences as well as specialized programs such as Literacy Fundamentals, Computer Studies, Education and Career Planning, and Indigenous ABE.

A brief chronology of the history of fee requirements for ABE follows.¹

- In 1988, as recommended by the BC Royal Commission on Education, tuition fees for adult learners enrolled in ABE programs offered by school districts, who had not graduated, were abolished.
- In 1991, as recommended by the Provincial Literacy Advisory Committee, tuition fees for adult learners enrolled in ABE courses offered by school districts were abolished, regardless of graduation status.
- In 1995, as recommended by the BC Ministry of Education/Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour Joint Committee on ABE, ABE was also made tuition-free in public post-secondary institutions as well as through distance and online courses.
- In 2003, public post-secondary institutions were “given autonomy” to charge tuition fees for graduated students taking ABE, resulting in fees being re-introduced as the Province no longer covered the cost. Adult Literacy (fundamental English, Mathematics and Computer Studies courses) and employment preparation programs remained free.
- In 2008, in response to the Premiers’ Advisory Panel on Literacy recommendations, public post-secondary institutions as well as school district students were again given

¹ BC Ministry of Advanced Education, Adult Basic Education: A Guide to Upgrading in British Columbia’s Public Post-Secondary Institutions, An Articulation Handbook, 2015/16 Edition.

access to tuition-free ABE regardless of graduation status under the “Education Guarantee” program.

- In December 2014, the BC Minister of Education announced that graduated adults would be required to pay for ABE credits, applicable to all institutions. Adults without graduation status would still be exempt from payment.
- In January 2015, ABE tuition fees were reinstated for graduated students at public post-secondary institutions, up to a maximum tuition cost of \$1,600 per semester of full time studies.
- In May 2015, ABE tuition fees were also reinstated at school districts for graduated students enrolled in academic upgrading courses, although Adult Literacy courses were still available free-of-charge.

As indicated, both school district and public post-secondary institutions no longer receive provincial support to offer ABE courses free of charge to graduated adults, with the exception of school district Adult Literacy courses. School District 38 Continuing Education staff provided the following clarification.

BC Ministry of Education provides funding for:

1. *BC Adults who are non-graduated from secondary education*
2. *BC Adults who have graduated but are taking academic courses below Grade 10 level.*
3. *Under 19 year olds who are non-graduated from secondary education*
4. *Under 19 year olds who are graduated from secondary education*

Adults who have attained high school graduation, enrolled in Grade 10, 11 or 12 ABE courses, are now required to pay tuition fees.

Adult Upgrading Grant

Adult students meeting income eligibility criteria enrolled in ABE courses may apply for an Adult Upgrading Grant. This grant is only available for attendees of public post-secondary institutions. The Adult Upgrading Grant covers tuition, student fees, books, unsubsidized childcare and transportation. Students whose gross family income and other financial supports fall below designated levels are fully eligible. If income and other supports exceed the eligibility threshold by up to 10%, students are eligible to receive up to 50% of the tuition cost only.

Eligibility for the Adult Upgrading Grant is based on income thresholds scaled to family size. For a family of four, regardless of place of residence in BC, the income eligibility threshold for 2016/17 is \$44,866. In comparison, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives’ 2016 Metro Vancouver Living Wage for a family of four is \$75,130. Given the significant difference between the Adult Upgrading Grant income threshold and the 2016 Metro Vancouver Living Wage income, the cost of adult upgrading courses is likely to present a significant obstacle to enrollment for low-income earners, particularly those residing in Metro Vancouver.

Advocacy

In June 2015, the BC Teachers Federation (BCTF) published the results of an extensive study, “Adult Education in BC’s Public Schools: Lost Opportunities for Students, Employers, and Society”. The study was based on a survey of working and learning conditions completed by BCTF adult educators around the province. The report noted that the 2008 Provincial “Education Guarantee” had acted as an incentive to upgrading qualifications; graduated adults as a percentage of all adult ABE students increased from 18% in 2009/09 to 55.5% in 2014/15. Statistics Canada data demonstrating that completion of post-secondary education reduces unemployment, increases labour market participation and improves earnings is cited.

The data is further supported by the testimony of teachers in the field. As illustrated in an adult educator’s testimony in an April 30, 2015 Globe and Mail article,

... students, many working two or three low-paying jobs to put food on the table, were on track to finish their humanities and sciences requirements so they could move on to post-secondary education – for them, a crucial path out of poverty and into better jobs.

The study concluded that “it is imperative to support Adult Education as a poverty-reduction strategy”.

In April 2016, the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators (FPSE) issued a press release protesting that the Adult Upgrading Grant is considered taxable income, so those receiving a grant one year may be ineligible the next if the grant results in the recipient’s income exceeding the eligibility threshold. FPSE called on the Province to “fix the problem” by restoring free tuition for ABE. Furthermore, according to the FPSE, most ABE programs are not eligible for federal income tax credits.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has recently released a report, “Working Poverty in Metro Vancouver” (June 2016). Statistics Canada Tax Filer Data (2006 and 2012) indicates that Richmond has the highest percentage of working poverty in Metro Vancouver. One of the recommendations for the Provincial Government is to:

ADEQUATELY FUND TRAINING AND EDUCATION, and restore funding for tuition-free adult basic education so that the working poor can access more stable and better-paying jobs.

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, consisting of organizations from throughout BC, was formed to urge the Provincial Government to adopt a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Plan, including increased funding for and greater access to education as one of seven key components. As noted in a BC Poverty Reduction Coalition fact sheet (“Working together for a poverty free BC”),

Most poor people are working. Poverty in BC is a low wage story: only 3% are on welfare, but 10.7% live below the poverty line. Nearly half (43%) of BC’s poor children live in families where at least one parent has a full-time job.

On May 24, 2016 Council received a delegation from the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee, resulting in a resolution to advocate to the Province in support of such a Plan, including greater access to education as indicated above. This and similar resolutions will be reviewed at the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) Convention in September 2016.

The UBCM has previously forwarded a number of resolutions to the Province advocating for a provincial poverty reduction plan, most recently in 2015. The provincial response expressed that “there are only two ways to address poverty – by growing the economy and creating jobs, and by providing targeted supports for the individuals and families who need them”. The Province also indicated that support for communities participating in the provincial Community Poverty Reduction Strategies Initiative, piloting the development of “local solutions” in eight communities, would continue. As education is a provincial responsibility, it was not part of these local strategies. The UBCM had assisted the Province in administering this program but withdrew in October 2015, concluding that a provincial plan has the greatest potential to address poverty.

Analysis

As directed in the November 2015 Planning Committee referral, staff were requested for further information about ABE funding changes, and the Council/School Board Liaison Committee for information about relevant action taken by the Richmond School District. At the March 30, 2016 Council/School Board Liaison meeting, the RCSAC and the Richmond School District were requested to provide information about any further developments.

1. Community Service Agencies

The RCSAC requested information from member agencies about the client impact of ABE tuition fee re-instatement. Chimo Community Services Outreach and Advocacy Program staff provided the following comments:

Not sure if there is a lack of funding but there is definitely a lack of accessibility and awareness, particularly within the immigrant communities. The process to obtain subsidies (e.g. Adult Upgrading Grant, AUG) is not immediately clear and the paperwork can be daunting for most. The system is currently set up so that only well-informed and determined individuals who are keen to seek out these opportunities are able to obtain the financial resources they need, but the reality is that most people who are looking for adult basic education / ESL are not. Settlement services no longer serve naturalized citizens and that leaves a lot of citizens (who are really no better integrated) under the assumption that if they no longer qualify for settlement service then they don't get to attend free ESL classes or other basic education classes anymore.

There is lack of services in adult education, most of our clients have to pay for English classes, there are not that many to begin with. One of our clients is trying to finish his Grade 12 and we have been looking for some support for him just with basic math but there is nothing out there.

In addition, the RCSAC provided information to staff about the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators advocacy regarding the Adult Upgrading Grant outlined above.

The RCSAC has also advocated to Council for a Provincial Poverty Reduction Plan. In a presentation to Planning Committee in February 2016, the RCSAC presented a report, "Municipal Responses to Child and Youth Poverty". In addition to municipal roles, the RCSAC also advised Council to request that the Provincial Government adopt a BC Poverty Reduction Plan with targets and timelines. As proposed by the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and endorsed by Council (above), such a plan would include greater access to education. The RCSAC report was referred to staff for comment, and a staff report to Committee focusing on municipal actions is scheduled for the last quarter of 2016.

2. Richmond School District

In June 2016, the Richmond School District Continuing Education Department provided current ABE enrollment statistics to the Board of Education's Personnel and Finance Committee (Attachment 2). The number of graduated adults enrolled dropped from 84 (2014-2015 school year) to 40 (2015-2016 school year) after the fee requirements were introduced, a decline of over 50%. School district staff considered the elimination of Ministry funding to be the most likely cause of this decrease. Furthermore, the Adult Upgrading Grant is not available to School District students. The Richmond School District charges a total of \$550 per Grade 10, 11 and 12 ABE course.

In response to Council's request for information about Richmond School District actions to address ABE funding changes, staff conveyed that the School District has joined advocacy efforts of the BC School Superintendents' Association and the BC School Trustees Association. For example, in December 2014 the BC School Trustees Association wrote to the Ministry of Education expressing concern about the impact of ABE funding changes on vulnerable adult learners. In April 2016, the same organization passed a motion requesting that School Districts be approved to administer the Adult Upgrading Grant, now limited to public post-secondary institutions, noting that "many students have chosen not to pursue upgrading courses because of the associated fees".

3. Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Kwantlen Polytechnic University (KPU) (4 campuses, including Richmond) reported that student enrollment in ABE courses did not decline in 2015/2016. This contrast with Richmond School District declining enrollment may be due to the Adult Upgrading Grant being available to Public Post-Secondary Institution students only. While the number of students receiving the Adult Upgrading Grant is not available, KPU faculty indicated that there has been considerable uptake of the grant, with over \$400,000 administered since the tuition reinstatement. KPU also provides full tuition grants to those whose income exceeds the threshold by up to 10% (the Province funds up to 50%, with KPU providing the rest). Emergency funds are also available for registered students in need.

KPU charges approximately \$400 per ABE course, as well as a \$300 student fee. As indicated, the Adult Upgrading Grant will cover both student and registration fees for those eligible. For

those ineligible for the Adult Upgrading Grant , the cost of taking two Grade 10, 11 or 12 ABE courses at either Richmond School District, or KPU including KPU student fees, would be roughly equivalent.

4. Next Steps

As a range of sources consistently demonstrate the need for reinstatement of funding for graduated adults pursuing ABE at the Grade 10, 11 and 12 levels, staff recommend that a letter be sent to the Province, with copies to Federal counterparts, advocating for such change (Attachment 3). The consideration of Council's and other resolutions urging the Province to adopt a BC Poverty Reduction Plan at the 2016 UBCM Convention will again highlight the need for effective action to assist those with low income, including facilitating access to higher education. With respect to municipal roles supporting low income residents, staff will be reporting back with comments regarding the RCSAC report on Municipal Responses to Child and Youth Poverty in the 4th quarter of 2016. As ABE is not a municipal responsibility, it will not be addressed in the forthcoming report.

Financial Impact

None.


Conclusion

Given the notable drop in enrollment in ABE courses by graduated adults in Richmond School District programs and elsewhere in the province; the uptake of the Adult Upgrading Grant experienced by KPU; lack of access to the Adult Upgrading Grant by School District students; the significant discrepancy between Adult Upgrading Grant eligibility thresholds and the Metro Vancouver Living Wage; Statistics Canada Tax Filer data regarding working poverty; and RCSAC comments, as well as the documented effectiveness of education as a poverty-reduction strategy, staff recommend that a letter be sent to the Province respectfully requesting that tuition-free enrollment in ABE programs at the Grade 10, 11 and 12 levels offered by all publicly-funded institutions be reinstated for graduated adults. As ABE is not a municipal responsibility, no further action is recommended.



Lesley Sherlock
Planner 2
(604-276-4220)

- Att. 1: RCSAC Communication Tool, "Adult Basic Education Courses No Longer Free"
- 2: Richmond Continuing Education ABE Enrolment Figures
- 3: Draft Letter to the Premier of British Columbia regarding Adult Basic Education Fees



RCSAC | Richmond Community Services
Advisory Committee

To: Mayor Brodie and Councillors
 From: Daylene Marshall and Alex Nixon, Co-Chairs, RCSAC
 CC: Cathy Carlile and Lesley Sherlock
 Date: September 10, 2015
 Re: Adult Basic Education Courses No Longer Free

Issue	Potential impact	Agency or individuals affected	Suggested action
<p>The BC government advised school districts that effective May 1, 2015 they would no longer cover Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses for Grades 10, 11 and 12 for graduated adults. SD 38 now charges \$550 per course. For a graduated adult (from anywhere in the world) to upgrade in order to enrol in university/ college courses in sciences, engineering, nursing, etc. it will cost up to \$3000 per year. SD 38 Adult Education advises that from 2010-2014, they enrolled 793 graduated adults (avg 198/yr) or about 12% of the total ABE student head count. www.RichmondCE.ca</p>	<p>Richmond community services agencies deal with numerous low-income and/or immigrant clients that do not have the credentials to enter a Canadian university or college. In the past, agencies could counsel and assist clients to enrol in necessary grade school courses and they were free of charge. Now, low-income and/or immigrant adults must pay up to \$3000/year, which brings a substantial financial burden on clients and their families and in turn, a need for longer-term community services. The impact is community agencies will be requesting increased community grant funding from the City of Richmond to provide their services to an expanding client base.</p>	<p>Any Richmond Community Service Agency dealing with clients that are low-income, immigrant and/or refugee individuals and families.</p>	<p>That Richmond City Council take a position and advocate for Richmond community service agencies and urge the government to rollback the ABE directive for graduated adults by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing a letter to Premier Christy Clark and the minister of Education on their position; • Engaging and meeting with SD 38 Board of Education Trustees in the meantime to explore alternatives.



Report to the Personnel & Finance
Board of Education (Richmond)
PUBLIC

DATE: Monday, June 13, 2016

FROM: Michael Khoo, District Lead Administrator of Continuing Education

SUBJECT: Adult Secondary Graduation – Graduated Adults in Continuing Education

The purpose of this public report to Personnel & Finance PUBLIC is for information only. No further action is required at this time.

Background

In September 2008, the Ministry of Education completed the phase in of the Education Guarantee by providing funding for graduated adults who enrolled in Adult Secondary Graduation courses. Adult learners were able to enroll in Ministry courses tuition free through Continuing Education.

Education Guarantee Discontinued for Grade 10-12 Courses

In May 2015, the BC Ministry of Education discontinued funding Grade 10-12 courses for Graduated Adults. The BC Ministry of Education defines Graduated as anyone who has met secondary graduation requirement anywhere in the world. An “adult” learner is a student who turns 20 years old or older during the school year.

Since May 2015, Richmond Continuing Education has been charging \$550 per Grade 10-12 course for Graduated Adults. However, Graduated Adults who enroll in Foundation Literacy courses (pre-Grade 10 courses) continue to study tuition free. In Richmond, these courses are called Foundation Language Arts, or FLA courses.

In 2015-2016, most of the 40 Graduated Adults paid \$550 per Grade 10-12 course. Compared 2014-2015, there has been a decrease of 50% in the number of Graduated Adults enrolled. It is likely that the elimination of Ministry funding for Grade 10-12 courses is the main reason for this decrease.

Below are the # of school age students, adults and graduated adults enrolled for the past four years:

School Year	School-Age Students	Adult Students (Graduated Adults)	Total Headcount	Total FTE
2012-2013	291	1,460 (241)	1,751	266
2013-2014	181	1,454 (159)	1,635	246
2014-2015	112	1,390 (84)	1,502	219
2015-2016	102	1,092 (40)	1,194	219

August 22, 2016
File: 99-Community Services/2016-Vol 01

Community Services Division
Community Social Development
Telephone: 604-276-4000
Fax: 604-276-4132

The Honourable Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia
Office of the Premier
PO Box 9041 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Clark:

Re: Adult Basic Education Fee Reinstatement

At the regular City of Richmond Council meeting, held on September 26, 2016, Council considered a staff report and correspondence from the Richmond Community Services Advisory Committee (RCSAC) regarding the reinstatement of Adult Basic Education (ABE) fees for graduated adults enrolled in Grade 10, 11 and 12 courses. An excerpt from the Council minutes, as well as the associated report, has been attached for your reference.

As outlined in the attached report, evidence supporting the reinstatement of tuition-free status for all Adult Basic Education courses includes the drop in enrollment in ABE courses by graduated adults in School District programs; the significant discrepancy between Adult Upgrading Grant eligibility thresholds and the 2016 Metro Vancouver Living Wage; Statistics Canada Tax Filer data regarding working poverty; and the documented effectiveness of education as a poverty-reduction strategy.

Richmond City Council also passed a resolution at the regular City of Richmond meeting held on May 24, 2016 advocating that the Provincial Government develop and implement a BC Poverty Reduction Strategy, as previously conveyed by letter dated June 6, 2016. Facilitating access to education would constitute an essential component of any such Strategy.

Given the importance of education as means to reduce poverty and thereby improve quality of life, Council respectfully requests that consideration be given to the reinstatement of tuition-free status for BC adult students enrolled in Grade 10, 11 and 12 Adult Basic Education programs offered by all publicly-funded institutions.

Yours truly,

Malcolm D. Brodie
Mayor

MB:ls

pc: The Honourable Mike Bernier, Minister of Education and Member of the Legislative Assembly
The Honourable Stephanie Cadieux, Minister for Children and Family Development and Member of the Legislative Assembly
The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour and Member of Parliament
The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and Member of Parliament
Ms. Alice Wong, Member of Parliament for Richmond Centre
Mr. Joe Peschosolido, Member of Parliament for Steveston-Richmond East
The Honourable Linda Reid, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Richmond East and Speaker of the Legislature
The Honourable Teresa Wat, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Richmond Centre and Minister for International Trade and Minister Responsible for the Asia Pacific Strategy and Multiculturalism
Mr. John Yap, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Richmond-Steveston and Parliamentary Secretary for Liquor Reform Policy to the Minister of Small Business, Red Tape Reduction and Minister Responsible for the Liquor Distribution Branch
Mr. John Horgan, Leader of the Opposition and Member of the Legislative Assembly
Ms. Debbie Tablotney, Chairperson, Board of Education (Richmond)