**Briefing Note**

**SUBJECT: Support for Core and Capacity Funding for First Nations-Mandated Post-Secondary Institutes**

**TO: Union of BC Indian Chiefs**

**FROM: First Nations Education Steering Committee and the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association**

**DATE: September 27-29, 2021**

Immediate Action Required  Future Action Required  Information Only

**ISSUE**

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) are seeking support from First Nations Leadership, including the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), to call on the Provincial Government to recognize the unique and critical role of First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes through the provision of ongoing core funding and the development of legislation for these institutes. The Province is providing $4.75M in one-time, year-end funding to cover core expenses and support capacity-building for 2021-2022, but a commitment to ongoing funding is required immediately for these institutes to operate sustainably.

**Background**

First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes play a unique and critical role in First Nations post-secondary education and training in BC. They are established and controlled by a First Nation or group of First Nations, and provide relevant and responsive post-secondary programs that meet the needs of their students and communities. First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes support the inherent rights of First Nations to self-determination and self-government, including First Nations control of First Nations education. They play a key role in the revitalization of First Nations languages and cultures by providing access to accredited First Nations language and culture programming.

Despite this important work, First Nations-mandated institutes do not have access to ongoing core funding and are not recognized in provincial legislation as part of British Columbia’s post-secondary system. Recognition of the integral role of Indigenous-controlled post-secondary institutions in the province through the development of legislation and provision of core funding is a proposed action in the consultative draft of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA) Action Plan.

IAHLA and FNESC have long been advocating for the Provincial Government to recognize the role of these institutes through the provision of core funding, anchored in legislation. In July 2020, FNESC and IAHLA submitted a proposal for core funding to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training (AEST). The proposal requested $4M per year for core funding for ten institutes that meet criteria established by IAHLA and FNESC and another $750K per year in capacity-building funding for institutes that do not yet meet the criteria. In contrast, the Province provides over $2B annually to support the public post-secondary system; $4.75M is 0.2% of this amount. These funding amounts were requested as an interim approach for three years during which time a more comprehensive understanding of funding needs of First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes could be established and supported.

Following the proposal for core funding in 2020, FNESC and IAHLA have been working with AEST on this initiative. In March 2021, AEST provided one year of core and capacity building funding in the amount of $4.75M. This will temporarily meet the need for core funding for the 2021-22 fiscal year, but does not provide a long-term, sustainable solution, and First Nations-mandated institutes will continue to face significant financial challenges if funding is not secured for future years.

AEST is currently exploring changes to the Aboriginal Service Plan initiative, which provides annual funding to 11 public post-secondary institutions to support improvements to Indigenous learners’ experiences and outcomes. The Ministry is exploring changes to the initiative and may be expanding it to all 25 BC public post-secondary institutions in the 2022-23 fiscal year. FNESC and IAHLA have raised that it is inappropriate for additional funding to be committed public post-secondary institutions when First Nations-mandated institutes do not have ongoing core funding, as this would reinforce existing inequities in the post-secondary system.

**DISCUSSION**

Further action is required from the Province for First Nations-mandated institutes to operate sustainably and without risk of closure. The necessary steps are a commitment to providing core and capacity funding beyond 2021-22 and a recognition of the role of First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes, anchored in legislation to ensure that their funding and recognition is not subject to shifting political priorities.

Providing core and capacity funding to First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes is consistent with provincial commitments to implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which affirms that the establishment and operation of First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes is a human right (article 14), as well as commitments made in the Province’s 2012 *Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan*.

**CONCLUSION**

IAHLA and FNESC are seeking the support of First Nations leadership (through resolutions) to call on the Province to provide ongoing core and capacity funding to First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes and to work with FNESC and IAHLA to co-develop legislation that recognizes the unique and critical role of First Nations-mandated post-secondary institutes in the British Columbia post-secondary system and commits British Columbia to providing ongoing core funding.