

# *Moving Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Forward “Developing a Strategy”*

## SUMMARY

**Ministry of Advanced Education’s  
3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Aboriginal Post Secondary Education Forum  
March 16, 2006 – UBC First Nations House of Learning**

Garry Merkel, facilitator of this forum, prepared this document based on his understanding of what the delegates presented at the session. This represents the author’s views of what was presented and is not the result of any formal consultation process with relevant parties, therefore does not necessarily represent the views of all participants.



## **BACKGROUND:**

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

This document summarizes the Ministry of Advanced Education's 3<sup>rd</sup> annual forum on Aboriginal post-secondary education held on March 16, 2006 in the UBC First Nations House of Learning. Approximately 100 delegates attended the forum, including Aboriginal leadership organizations, British Columbia's public post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Coordinators, private Aboriginal Institutions, Aboriginal K-12 Education representatives, Band Education Coordinators, Aboriginal students, other provincial ministries and the federal government.

This forum began with introductory speeches by the Minister of Advanced Education, the Honourable Murray Coell, and Deputy Minister Moura Quayle. They presented the Ministry's progress over the last year and the Ministry's "**PROPOSED ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION STRATEGY**" which was the primary focus of discussion for the forum. Additional presentations were provided by Eric McMahon, Enhancement Agreement Coordinator, Ministry of Education and Christa Williams, Executive Director, First Nations Education Steering Committee, who discussed collaboration between Aboriginal communities and school districts under the K-12 Enhancement Agreements and their potential application in the post-secondary system. Forum attendees participated in two breakout sessions. The morning session focused on a discussion of the Draft Strategy Action items and in the afternoon, participants reflected on the Enhancement Planning process and its applicability in the post-secondary system.

Key recommendations on the planning process to develop the Strategy included:

- Provide more detail and commitment;
- Build trust through action as soon as possible;
- Increase the emphasis on socio-economic factors crucial to student success;
- Recognize the important role that Aboriginal institutions play and include them in the Strategy;
- Keep the process inclusive (students, community, government, industry, public and private institutions);
- Add a monitoring and evaluation component;
- Secure more financial support from the federal government;
- Report back on progress; and,
- Add a cultural component.

Key recommendations on the content of the Strategy included:

- Add more detail on timelines, milestones, measures, targets and resources;
- Increase the focus on the socio-economic factors of student success;
- Secure sustainable funding for Aboriginal education;

## **BACKGROUND:**

- Ensure Aboriginal representation on every provincial institution's governing bodies including but not limited to the board, senate, education councils and student councils;
- Require all provincial post-secondary institutions implement and track an Aboriginal action plan;
- Clearly define Aboriginal achievement/success to use as a benchmark for measuring progress;
- Aboriginal student and community needs must be at the heart of the Strategy with all other factors supporting those needs;
- Revise the Strategy to incorporate socio-economic factors of success; reflect the need for mentors and role models; promote stronger coordination and synergy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions; improve collaboration with industry; and improve and extend each institution's Aboriginal focus; and
- Work with the K-12 system to address the transition of students to post-secondary.

Participants were also asked to comment on one of the central components of the Strategy, the Aboriginal Post-Secondary - ***Enhancement Plans***. They recommended:

- Modify the description of the current process to reflect a partnership approach;
- Ensure that the process is inclusive but remains manageable;
- Adopt a staged approach to implementing this process using pilot projects to start;
- Building trust and relationships will result in the desired transformation;
- Formalize key relationships in agreements, e.g., MOUs;
- Provide support for communities to organize themselves to be effective participants;
- Ensure that Enhancement Plans are incorporated directly into each institution's plans such as the Strategic Plan, Presidents Report, institution and AVED Plan;
- Create realistic plans that focus on key priorities and measurable results;
- Use expert assistance for and target adequate resources to the planning process;
- Allow flexibility for variation between Enhancement Plans;
- Focus on opportunities and the future – not challenges and the past; and
- Ensure that the Enhancement Plans are monitored and updated regularly.

The Ministry stated its intentions to continue the discussion on the draft Strategy but also clearly heard the participants call for action. The Ministry recognizes the need to balance consultation with action as it moves the Draft Strategy forward to government.

## **BACKGROUND:**

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## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1:	Forum agenda
Attachment 2:	Panellist bios
Attachment 3:	Breakout group materials
Attachment 4:	Proposed Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy

## **BACKGROUND:**

This is a summary of the third in a series of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Forums focused on how to improve participation and success for Aboriginal learners in British Columbia. The first session was an *Open Space* forum in February of 2004 including over 140 key Aboriginal post-secondary education stakeholders. The second session was in March 2005 exploring the theme of “*Enhancing Communication & Partnerships – How Do We Work Together?*” This third session was held on March 16, 2006 at the First Nations House of Learning and focussed on the theme of “*Moving Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Forward – Developing a Strategy.*” The third forum’s agenda is included in Attachment 1.

This forum focussed on the first public review of a “**PROPOSED ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION STRATEGY**” prepared by the Ministry of Advanced Education (see Attachment 4). The Honourable Murray Coell, Minister of Advanced Education, provided a brief overview of the Ministry’s work over the last year and the government’s continued commitment to improving Aboriginal post secondary education in British Columbia. This was followed by a brief overview of the draft Strategy provided by Moura Quayle, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education. Participants then discussed (in breakouts) the proposed content of the Strategy following the format in Attachment 3. A summary of their comments is included in this report.

A panel of speakers (biographies included in Attachment 2) then discussed the enhancement plan process used in the K-12 system. The enhancement planning process is being considered as a primary building block within the proposed Strategy. Eric McMahon provided an overview of Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements based on his personal experience creating these agreements. Christa Williams then discussed Enhancement Agreement’s key success factors (participation and communication) from an Aboriginal perspective.

Participants then used the same partnership building techniques used in the K-12 Enhancement Agreement process to discuss (in breakout groups) their recommendations on the Enhancement Agreement process. Participants were requested to discuss then present one recommendation using the materials in Attachment 3. A summary of their primary recommendation plus their recommendations that were not presented are included in this report.

Verna Billy-Minnebarriet then provided a summary of the first discussion sessions, recommendations on the Strategy development process. Garry Merkel then facilitated an open plenary on: (1) thoughts on the overall process to finalize and implement the Strategy; and (2) what we have missed in terms of content and process. Summaries of these presentations and discussions are included in this report.

## THE STRATEGY –PLANNING PROCESS

This section of the report summarizes what the participants had to say about the proposed planning process to complete the “*PROPOSED ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION STRATEGY*”. While there was some mistrust about how the draft Strategy was developed and the commitment to continue the discussion process with a larger audience, very few (if any) participants expressed any concerns about the idea of developing this type of Strategy. However, participants generally did provide two distinct directions with respect to the planning process to complete the Strategy:

1. Several Aboriginal community representatives indicated that more work was needed on the Strategy; while
2. Several institution representatives indicated they want action now.

The Ministry of Advanced Education must find a balance to satisfy both views.

Those who supported continued work to finalize the Strategy provided the following direction on the specific things that needed to be addressed in further discussions.

- The Strategy needs to identify longer term actions with a strong focus on detail, (e.g., timelines, milestones, measures, targets and resources). There was confusion about how to interpret the Strategy. It is unclear as to who would be performing the actions of the Strategy or how those actions will be accomplished, which in turn creates apprehension about the expectation that these actions will be implemented. Many participants expressed this concern by stating that the Strategy was not transparent enough. Some participants suggested that the way to build trust is through demonstrated action, i.e., build it and they will come.
- All participants agreed that this is the time for action in some form. Some recommended moving ahead with the Enhancement Planning Process on a pilot basis while the final draft Strategy is being developed.
- The Green Report’s<sup>1</sup> recommendation had timelines, we need to have long-term planning/timelines that can be sustained over government changes.
- The Strategy needs to be expanded to better acknowledge the socio-economic factors that are crucial to Aboriginal student success.
- The 27 private Aboriginal institutions are largely ignored in Strategy and must be included in the planning process from this point forward.
- Strategy must stay inclusive, and communication among all stakeholders needs to remain strong. Continued work must be accomplished through a wide scale partnership including Bands, communities, Aboriginal institutes, non-Aboriginal institutes, Ministry of Advanced Education and others.

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<sup>1</sup> In the late 1980's, in response to knowledge that First Nations learners were severely underrepresented in the post-secondary system in British Columbia, a Provincial Advisory Committee on Post-Secondary Education for Native Learners was formed to develop a report for the then Ministry of Advanced Education, Training, and Technology. The final report, dated January 28, 1990, became known as the "Green Report"

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- The Strategy needs to be expanded to describe how it will be monitored and updated.
- There needs to be stronger coordination and synergy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions.
- There needs to be more/better coordination among and between provincial ministries/agencies around policies, programs and funding.
- Industry should be engaged during the development phase to achieve long-term collaboration and support, e.g., BC Hydro.
- Participants thanked the Ministry for hearing the recommendations at last year's forum and putting the recommendations and their progress towards achieving those recommendations into writing. This shows we are building relationships and this procedure should be followed with this forum and the Strategy.
- There is concern that there is not enough focus on passing down knowledge from ancestors – there is a cultural component missing from Strategy.
- Participants supported the Strategy in general, particularly the promise of additional funding and the idea of new performance measures that are based on success.
- The Strategy process must be appropriately funded including more financial support from the federal government.

## THE STRATEGY - CONTENT

This section of the report summarizes what the participants had to say about the content of the “***PROPOSED ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION STRATEGY***”. The primary concern that many participants expressed around content was the lack of detail (e.g., timelines, milestones, measures, targets and resources). While participants generally supported developing the Strategy, many translated this lack of detail into a lack of commitment. Participants expressed concern that there was not enough emphasis placed on the holistic perspective of student success.

All additional participant comments are organized by the 6 action items contained in the Strategy with some more general comments at the end.

### Action 1: Sustainable Funding through Enhancement Plans

Participants expressed a number of concerns about sustainable funding for Aboriginal education. There appears to be an underlying assumption that moving to Enhancement Plans will provide sustainable funding; however, the current Aboriginal Special Projects Funding is not enough and participants fear that the same thing could happen with Enhancement Plan funding. There was a lot of uncertainty expressed about where these funds would be coming from and a recommendation to be more assertive in the action and change the words from ‘seek’ to ‘obtain’ additional funding. Specific concerns that the participants expressed included:

- The current funding estimates of \$1,000 to \$1,500 per FTE are too low and should be more in the range of \$4,000-\$5,000 per FTE.
- The continuation of the Aboriginal Special Projects Fund.
- The FTE-based funding model does not meet outreach needs of institutions, particularly with smaller institutions that cannot gain the economies of scale but have the same service costs as larger institutions. The model does not allow an institution to target recruits to build up its Aboriginal student population.
- The focus on FTE as the base for funding needs to change. Some issues that the current FTE model does not properly address include: students don’t always self-declare; the full range of student services are still required regardless of the numbers; and quality programming is essential to quality education.
- There are very few Aboriginal graduate students and a separate funding model needs to be created for graduate students and programming. In fact, we should be exploring a separate Aboriginal student tuition model with reduced tuition fees for Aboriginal students. This must extend to those Aboriginal students who do not receive education funds from their community, specifically urban, non-status, and Métis. This model must recognize the full range of student needs and follow the student through his/her educational journey.
- The funding formula needs to be based on successful programs. We should focus on programming and access within post-secondary institutions. We are missing targeted capacity building within post-secondary institutions.

## THE STRATEGY - CONTENT

- Accountability measures must accompany funding both within the institution and within the community. If funding goes into base funding it will be lost. We need targeted guidelines for accountability and connected to specific actions. Funding should be for enhancement and not for services that institutions should already be providing. The use of these funds must be monitored closely.
- There need to be clear funding guidelines. Participants expressed concerns over how institutions will use funds and that the funds would not be used as intended.
- Participants suggested that this needs to be a cooperative effort and that the larger institutions cannot lead this process.
- More funding needs to be provided to support students in trades, preferably in partnership with industry, e.g., BC Hydro. Some funds need to be targeted to develop these partnerships.

### Action 2: Facilitate Aboriginal Representation on Institutional Governance Bodies

Participants generally agreed that Aboriginal representation on institutional governance bodies was important; however, there was debate over mandating this representation. While many participants felt that Aboriginal representation on governance bodies should be legislated, this was balanced with the concern that mandating only one Aboriginal representative could facilitate lack of real representation. This should be worked into each institution's policies with assistance and/or support from the Ministry of Advanced Education. Additional comments included:

- Part of the issue lies in understanding of the need for Aboriginal representation at the senior levels. We need a fundamental change in understanding of Aboriginal leadership at the institution level. The concept of Aboriginal control needs clarification and we need to develop a better common understanding of what this means and how to effectively accomplish it. Participants expressed frustration because this has been talked about for some time and they felt it was time for action.
- Having Aboriginal representation is equally important on the senate, education councils and student governing bodies.
- Different institutions have different governance structures so representation must allow for some variation. Committees that advise Boards may be more effective in some situations.
- The idea of non-Aboriginal representation on Aboriginal institution boards.
- The Aboriginal community should be involved in the selection of Aboriginal representatives.
- Participants also noted that while it is important to have Aboriginal representation in each institution's governance structures, faculty and students are more important when determining content of courses and programs. This means that

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we need stronger role models and mentors within faculties – something that must be addressed through the hiring and recruitment of faculty.

### Action 3: Develop a System-Wide Standard for Data Collection and Tracking

Participants feel that collection and tracking are necessary but expressed concerns. Historic Aboriginal experience with data tracking has not been positive, therefore we must carefully consider issues of privacy, trust, and utility. Specific comments included:

- Difficulty relying on self-identification data because it is impossible and inappropriate to force individuals to self-identify. The system must be redesigned to promote Aboriginal cultural identity; students may be more inclined to self-identify if they saw their culture reflected in an institution.
- We must maintain the ethical aspects of data tracking and consider issues of privacy. There is scepticism about the use of the Personal Education Number (PEN) because what applies to children does not apply to adults.

### Action 4: New Performance Measures focused on Aboriginal Achievement

Participants generally agree that new performance measures must be developed that focus on Aboriginal achievement. These measures must consider Aboriginal-centric models of success and expand beyond the more traditional measures such as graduation and academic performance. Specific comments included:

- Performance of institutions should be measured as part of a larger system of accountability. Some measures include the presence of Aboriginal faculty, the amount of culturally appropriate programming, and the presence of Aboriginal students.
- Graduation rates are only one means of measuring Aboriginal success and achievement. Other measures that should be explored include self-determination (individual goals); connection to culture and community; persistence while maintaining academic standards; and, students getting what they needed from a course, program and/or institution.
- Success must be celebrated incrementally through ceremonies as the student progresses. Each student who enters post-secondary is already a leader and must be treated accordingly.
- Participants strongly recommended that institutions should not minimize performance standards simply to increase graduation rates. This harms the institution, the student and the community.
- Performance measures need to start earlier and make high schools accountable for the direction they are providing Aboriginal students.

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### Action 5: Work with Federal Government to Enhance Support for Aboriginal Learners

Participants primarily focussed on the federal government from the perspective of providing more funding to support Aboriginal students and institutions; however, it was noted that the Strategy lacks detail on how we plan to collaborate with the federal government and how we can access more funding. Specific comments included:

- More funding needed for Inuit, Métis, off-reserve & urban Aboriginals.
- Graduate students should have access to separate funding, including SAGE.
- More federal funding is required for Aboriginal students in trades.
- Need to increase funding for Aboriginal Institutions.
- Needs to be a connection between Action 1 and Action 5 – funding needs to be there to support students.

### Action 6: Revise Aboriginal Policy Framework to Reflect Strategy

Participants generally agreed that the Aboriginal Policy Framework must be revised. Many participants felt the current APF was restricting in its language, while others felt the APF lacked necessary details. The policy framework should focus on providing core student support that leads to student success at every institution. The policy framework needs to be revised in partnership with Bands, communities, Aboriginal institutes and others. This revision to the Aboriginal Policy Framework must:

- Acknowledge socio-economic factors influencing success of students from childhood to adulthood;
- Reflect how to ensure implementation of the Strategy's actions;
- Take a more holistic approach considering external factors that influence student success, e.g., housing, daycare;
- Promote stronger coordination and synergy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions;
- Improve coordination among and between provincial ministries /agencies around policies, programs and funding;
- Improve collaboration with industry, e.g., BC Hydro;
- Increase the number of Aboriginal Coordinators to meet the needs of the growing Aboriginal population.

## THE STRATEGY - CONTENT

### Additional Concerns

- There is a disconnect between student and planning. The average age of a student is 30 so there is a marketing challenge because we are looking at a time gap between high-school and post-secondary enrolment. With this older student body we need to look at issues related to family, housing, ABE, upgrading, etc.
- Each institution should have an Aboriginal Plan and demonstrate how they are working to implement the Plan. There was some concern expressed about whether some institutions would create a plan.
- The Strategy must reflect the need for mentors and role models.
- The system needs to acknowledge under representation of Aboriginal students in a number of faculties, including engineering.
- We should also be encouraging younger students to attend post-secondary. We need a marketing campaign that shows mentors and stories of success.
- We need to indigenize institutions in terms of recruitment, qualifications and structural change (policy development, programs, services). We need a “system shift”. There are systemic barriers – it is a predominantly a “white curriculum”.
- We need innovative education programs to address issues as deep as poverty. We need to consider how students access funding and the barriers they face in this process, e.g., poor credit ratings.
- There should be strong incentives for institutions to ‘compete’ for Aboriginal students.
- Each institution should extend its Aboriginal focus across all faculties including Aboriginal awareness and cultural education for each faculty.
- There needs to be improved communication between instructors, support services, and funding sources (foster greater ownership of curriculum).
- We need to focus on student support and understand the socioeconomic issues facing learners. We should explore the Northern Advancement Program as a model.
- This system should include incentives for students who perform, e.g., loan forgiveness.
- There is a gap between training and jobs (particularly in the trades) – we need to find placements for students.
- We need to stop replicating programs and allow certain institutions to specialize in the delivery of certain programs. This includes the development of “feeder” (or bridging) programs.
- This needs to start in the home by supporting parents who can then empower their children. The K-12 plays a quasi parental role where we often have to rely on the K-12 system to “raise” students for the post-secondary system. We are talking about adults and parents but we must talk directly to them. However, this also

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needs to be tempered with the understanding that students are adults with responsibilities – not children in a K-12 system.

- There needs to be a specific action related to research and increasing research capacity to collect best practises – the heart of Aboriginal curriculum.
- SAGE should be a vehicle/embedded as a tool to bring students into the system.

## THE ENHANCEMENT PLANNING PROCESS

This section summarizes the participant's input on the proposal to use the Aboriginal Enhancement Planning Process for the post-secondary system. A similar process is used in the K-12 system and is a collaboration of all Aboriginal education partners (e.g., teachers, schools, school board, First Nations, Metis, Ministry of Education) within each school district.

Participants had mixed reactions to using the Enhancement Planning Process for the post-secondary system. Some felt that the K-12 Enhancement Agreements are not working for Aboriginal communities; however, most thought that it is a model worth exploring. Many communities are familiar with this model and many feel that it has provided an effective method of collaboration between Aboriginal communities and the broader education system. Others felt this process would be time consuming and costly.

The following is a summary of the groups that participants suggested be involved in the Enhancement Planning Processes. Note that the original discussion was framed to identify stakeholders; however, participants recommended changing the current language to use terms such "partners" or "collaborators" that are more appropriate for establishing a sense of collective ownership. Suggested partners for creating the plan are listed below; however, participants did not necessarily feel that every group had to be at the planning table for every step of the process (other methods could be used for engagement).

- Aboriginal communities must be at the centre of this process involving all groups within the community, e.g., parents, teachers, potential students, Elders, through a formal framework. Non-Aboriginal communities should also be involved.
- Bands, Tribal Councils, Metis associations and other Aboriginal governments.
- Professional Aboriginal people as mentors and advisors to the process.
- Local Aboriginal advisory committees from the community and surrounding post-secondary institutions.
- Measures should be taken to bring Aboriginal students together from across Canada to discuss how to consult with their communities. This could be organized through the Canadian Federation of Students.
- Other Aboriginal organizations, i.e., Friendship Centres, First Nations Education Steering Committee, Indigenous Adult & Higher Learning Association, Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agencies.
- Community education coordinators and post-secondary institution Aboriginal Coordinators.
- All education institutions including K-12 schools, colleges, university-colleges, universities, school districts and private institutions.
- Key individuals from each post-secondary education institution in the area including a member of the Board of Governors, president or delegate, senior administration, Dean/Director of Aboriginal Education, faculty, administrators, unions, Aboriginal faculty and staff, counsellors, and post-secondary First Nations

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Coordinators. Try to ensure that there is adequate representation from the key or targeting program areas.

- All relevant provincial and federal government departments and ministries including but not necessarily limited to: Human Resources Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Advanced Education and Ministry of Aboriginal Relations.
- Local employers.
- Potential funders and other supporters.

### How to develop an Enhancement Plan:

While most participants are experienced at planning, many were a bit at a disadvantage because they did not have direct experience with the Enhancement Planning Process. Therefore, many suggested launching pilot projects before introducing this model on a large scale; Working with a focus group to tailor the K-12 model to post-secondary system and using the Ministry of Advanced Education staff to provide guidelines and working models, pilot projects could be introduced across the province. The process would be iteratively revised and expanded as experience is gained from this starting point. It should be noted that while many participants expressed an interest in further exploring the Enhancement Plans, others felt this model was not applicable in the post-secondary system.

Participants recommended that the Enhancement Planning Process should incorporate the following guiding principles.

- Change the current language to use collaborative rather than enhancement terminology. This means changing orientation and resulting terminology, e.g., stakeholders versus partners, consult versus discuss.
- The first step is to create a cooperative planning environment. This begins with strong support by senior administration and adequate resources. These resources must be within the control of the planning table and the designated facilitator has to be provided with release time. Participants then need to agree on the planning process, which will differ for each Enhancement Plan.
- Participants were divided on who should drive the planning process. Many felt that communities should be the primary decision makers in the Enhancement Plans while others felt the planning process should be driven by the institution because funding will be supplied to the institutions. The institution would then collaborate with community stakeholders/collaborators to implement the Enhancement Plan. However, there were many contrary views that suggested that the process must be very inclusive (see previous list of partners) to ensure that all perspectives are brought to the table to create extended ownership of the final product.
- Participants stressed the need for good baseline data but also noted that a lot of the information required may not be available during the first planning cycle.

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This could be something that is identified as an activity in the first plan. The planning process must include activities to ensure that all partners are starting from a common knowledge base.

- The planning process needs to begin by defining common goals. These goals must be based on the collective's agreement on the definitions of Aboriginal success and Aboriginal service from the point of view of the individual, the institution and the community. This must be tempered with the institution's capacity.
- Focussing on building trust and relationships will result in the desired transformation within the planning area.
- Ideally, the process would define the relationship between the public and private post secondary institutions, government and the community and formalize this relationship in something structured like a Memorandum of Understanding. This provides a platform to build from. The ultimate goal (which should be captured in the MOU) should be to build a sense of engagement and ownership within the core group then extend this engagement and ownership to the broader planning table.
- The collaborative process will also have to extend between and within communities. This involves “teasing” out, “What is community?”, then looking for good examples and possible inspiration/models for collaboration. This means providing resources (expertise, funds) to communities so that they can organize themselves.
- The institution's Aboriginal Education Council or Aboriginal Liaison staff can be instrumental in helping to set up the process.
- This process will require a system to share best practices and teach proposal writing and facilitation skills.
- Developing the plan will require a multi-pronged approach including but not limited to: community surveys, focus groups, planning table, expert assistance, best practises research, etc.
- It is important to ensure that the planning process remain as open as possible and avoid creating agreements that limit who can be partners either by geographical regions or by Aboriginal Nation. This includes maintaining a special focus on the need to address representation for under-represented communities.
- The process must provide incentives to participate in the process and rewards for achieving results.
- The process must include a structured monitoring and evaluation process. It must take a “lifelong learning” approach where it focuses on ongoing growth and evolution as it gains experience.
- The planning tables need to focus on the 4 R's of Respect, Reciprocity, Relationships and Responsibilities.

## THE ENHANCEMENT PLANNING PROCESS

Participants also provided the following recommendations on the content of Enhancement Plans:

- These Enhancement Plans must be considered and/or incorporated directly into each institution's plans such as the Strategic Plan, President's Report, institution and other Advanced Education Plans. The Enhancement Plan must be adopted throughout the whole organization.
- To maintain momentum, the Enhancement Plan must focus on timely action and results. This involves creating a timeline with key milestones and "appropriate" resources. We can then figure out if/where enhancement plans fit in.
- A special focus must be placed on those who are excluded from post-secondary system, including those who must travel to attend school.
- It is important to maintain credibility, accreditation, and transferability.
- The Enhancement Plan should include a general plan with general goals and funding that is based on success with the ability to grow and transform with experience. However, this generality cannot extend to a complete lack of detail on implementation.
- The plan should be a long term plan (at least 20 years), i.e., create a vision of where we want to be in 2025 then determine how to get there.
- The Enhancement Plan needs to define and describe its methods of accountability. This should differ for each Enhancement Plan within a broader accountability framework.

### Key challenges

There are many challenges with implementing the Enhancement Planning Process. The relatively young nature of the process in the K-12 system, the lack of experience in the post-secondary system and the complexity of the Aboriginal educational environment in the post-secondary system all point to a staged implementation plan as discussed earlier. The following summarizes the key challenges that the participants identified:

- Establishing real inclusiveness is going to be a difficult task with the large number of players, clearly defining the roles of each player, plus the inherent difficulties associated in effectively communicating with complex communities.
- The number of partners and the size of the planning table might be too large to manage effectively.
- There may be potential challenges between existing Aboriginal Advisory Councils and the new Enhancement Agreement Councils. This (and other similar relationships) will have to be clearly defined by those groups at the beginning of the process.
- Participants expressed concern that this was simply process over substance. Without a substantial increase to available funds this becomes more of a process

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and paper exercise. However, others expressed an alternative view that the process itself will yield results through improved partnerships in each region.

- We do not have established methodologies to quantify needs of individual students nor do we have the necessary background information to properly inform the planning process in most areas.
- Not maintaining momentum and meeting agreed timelines because of inadequate funds or resources could compromise the entire process.
- It may be difficult to adapt the Enhancement Agreement model from K-12 to post-secondary system, especially given great disparity among institutions.
- The process must be simplified including using plain English and simpler concepts.
- It will be difficult to overcome the scepticism and maintain enough momentum (steady results) to demonstrate that the process will work.
- It will be difficult to manage the various perspectives and expectations, particularly in areas where there is a history of negative relationships. This will require expert facilitation and team building/group dynamic expertise.
- Individual needs will often be difficult to separate from community needs. This can be especially difficult in communities with high levels of key person dependency.
- Appropriate graduate programming and support for Aboriginal students in graduate studies is an ongoing challenge that this process may be able to address.
- The Enhancement Planning Process is only a starting point. It will require long-term commitment, engagement, support and growth to ensure success. Maintaining this over time may be difficult.
- It is critical that the money be channelled properly and accountability mechanisms be established. This includes having the planning table responsible for its own budget – something which may be difficult in the current financial management environments of the institutions and the province.
- Cultural barriers may prove to be difficult. Learning to hear each others voices, learning each other's behaviours (including the institution, government and community), plus challenging different levels of authority will be complex.
- Developing an plan development process that respects the government and institution's timelines, while providing a real voice to communities, will prove difficult
- With so many competing views it could be easy to establish goals that are beyond the ability of the institution to achieve or to not achieve consensus on a key set of goals. The process must establish goals that are relevant and attainable.

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- Logistical problems could be obstacles in some areas because of the lack of available time and resources, the sheer size of the area included and the potential complexity of the projects (and associated players) envisioned.
- The new Enhancement Planning Process cannot compromise existing access to new development dollars, e.g., Aboriginal Special Projects Funding; otherwise it will lose credibility from the start.
- The process must extend beyond simple educational planning and deal with the full needs of the Aboriginal student. This includes items such as housing, food, daycare, funding, leave for community events/emergencies, tutoring, study skills, extra-curricular activities, cultural events, etc.
- Aboriginal education is primarily about exploring best practices. Some institutions within the post-secondary mainstream are not set up to continually integrate best practices into their programming.
- Geographic planning areas may be very difficult to define. Catchments for colleges versus universities may be different. In the K-12 system the school district is much more defined. Post-secondary institutions also provide distance education which creates significant overlaps in operating areas.
- Where do bridging programs fit within this framework? They exist in a number of institutions and are often located in a completely different region than the target institutions.
- There was a general lack of trust expressed among many participants. They were wary of the allocation process and if this is the best way to spend any additional dollars; concern about how individuals were chosen to attend the forum; and, whether the commitment was truly there to follow through on this process.
- If this simply becomes a counting Aboriginal FTE exercise then it will fail - counting FTEs is not enhancement.

### How to identify priorities:

Participants provided the following direction on how to identify priorities within the Enhancement Planning Process.

- Conduct frequent assessments including surveys (student/faculty/community), annual reports, needs analysis, focus groups, discussion forums, and reviewing institutional student statistics to keep up on the changing landscape.
- Change our mindset – current priorities often stem from the negative and the past; however, they need to become more positive and future-oriented.
- Continuously look for areas of strength in the system and build on those.
- Recognize balance of accountability between institution and Ministry.

## THE ENHANCEMENT PLANNING PROCESS

- Develop ways to measure efficiency and effectiveness as a feedback loop into the priority setting process.
- Use various facilitation and planning techniques that allow the facilitator to keep track of all suggestions and help the group reduce these to the key priorities. This includes creating space for personal expectations to be discussed in the process. The idea is to start broad then narrow in on specific goals and objectives.
- Once priorities have been identified, those priorities must be ordered within the available budget. This may require modifying or deferring activities.

### How can we hold stakeholders (Partner Groups) accountable?

Participants strongly endorsed creating a process that is accountable, both within the Enhancement Planning Process itself and in the resulting Enhancement Plans. They recommended the following to achieve this accountability:

- Create a very disciplined and strong assessment process that has clear measures of success (Aboriginal specific).
- Ensure that the institutions have accountability mechanisms established to report to their partners.
- Formalize the accountability framework in a signed agreement.
- Use the indicators identified in the Enhancement Plan, e.g., Mission, Vision, Goals, Objectives, and report on these measures in reports.
- Establish measures to ensure that the partners with access to resources (dollars, human resources, political voice) are accountable to their community and or institution.

### Recommendations:

Each of the 13 breakout groups were asked to present one key recommendation on the proposed Enhancement Planning Process and Enhancement Plans. The following is a summary of those recommendations. The reader will note that there may be some overlap between the following and the summary of discussions outlined earlier in this report.

1. Use Aboriginal and collaboration language to create the Enhancement Plans, so that the document can be understood by students, institutions, and communities.
2. Provide greater financial support to the Enhancement Planning Process and the resulting plans.
3. Create a stable foundation before starting the Enhancement Planning Process. This should be done through a staged process using pilots then expanding with revisions and experience. Invite expression of interest for 5 pilot projects with a

## THE ENHANCEMENT PLANNING PROCESS

- 3-year window to be funded in multi-year plans by the Ministry of Advanced Education then build on successes.
4. Ensure flexibility in the overall process in terms of the design of the Enhancement Planning Process, the ability to adjust to local variations (communities, industry, rural, urban, etc.), the accountability measures, etc.
  5. Focus on opportunities and the future – not challenges and the past. Avoid being negative but also be realistic about how complex and consuming this will actually be. This process will require time, resources and shared authority and must be embarked upon with that understanding. All partners must have ‘staying power’ and the associated time, shared authority, and resources.
  6. Ensure that the Enhancement Planning Process includes all the necessary partners. This is determined through stakeholder discussions – not by invite.
  7. Include a special emphasis on engaging and helping to organize the Aboriginal communities to effectively participate in designing and conducting the planning process and implementing the resulting plans. This includes using experts to help the community envision its desired and realistic future at different time intervals then translating those visions into the required skill sets.
  8. Create Enhancement Plans that are vision oriented, practical and pragmatic with a strong focus on tangible outcomes/actions. Concrete timelines are essential as are quick student oriented results.
  9. Ensure that the Enhancement Plans address student services, student wellness, student involvement in the planning process, community and individual needs, and both urban and rural students.
  10. Need to empower Aboriginal students to obtain success and wellness by providing resources and services that support tangible and well thought out Enhancement Plans. This includes the need to define success from an Aboriginal student’s perspective – some items that might be considered include: sense of belonging; ability to sustain yourself; recognizing and sharing your gift; looking after yourself; and acquiring skills to serve your community.
  11. Incorporate an annual student and stakeholder evaluation of Enhancement Plans.
  12. Create an Enhancement Plan approval process that involves all major stakeholders (e.g., students, Aboriginal community, AVED, education council/senate).
  13. Priorities and goals should come from communities with a clear focus on meeting the needs of Aboriginal learners. This must be prefaced with the need to clearly identify and support communities. All the other stakeholders should support and facilitate these goals.
  14. This process must be “need” driven, starting with the student’s and community’s needs. At the core, each student must succeed in his/her own way. However, the ideal result would be that each student would succeed and go back to his/her communities with an appropriate skill set to help the community. In the end, it is more important that each student succeed regardless of their career path.

## **THE ENHANCEMENT PLANNING PROCESS**

15. The Enhancement Planning process needs to focus on accountability, respect, responsibility, relationships, reciprocity and transparency.
16. Create a process to identify who should be on Education Council as constituent community members then let the Education Council drive the Enhancement Planning process.
17. We need to focus on establishing trust and positive relationships in order to transform the system. If we have trust, funds can flow through the system and lead to action. This includes the Ministry establishing a transparent process which will create trust among the collaborators.
18. The planning vehicle or process must be tailor-made for the post-secondary system reflecting the unique needs and characteristics of the post-secondary learner. It cannot be merely imported from the Ministry of Education,

## **CONCLUSION:**

While this report has not gone through an extended discussion or approval process it does represent the input of various key individuals involved in Aboriginal post-secondary education throughout British Columbia. Their discussions focussed primarily on providing input to a “**PROPOSED ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION STRATEGY**” developed by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education.

The first forum provided many great ideas on how to improve Aboriginal education in British Columbia. The Ministry of Advanced Education, working with many Aboriginal groups, individuals and other education institutions, made a great deal of progress towards achieving most of the recommendations provided in the first Annual Forum. The second forum’s recommendations took a narrower focus around creating a much more structured framework to work within, and focussing on the long-term dimensions in each area of Aboriginal education. Many of these recommendations were implemented and we are now starting to see the results of this thinking in new Aboriginal education bodies and the Ministry’s proposed Strategy.

Some of the participants at this third forum were somewhat sceptical about the proposed Strategy. However, they supported going through the planning process to complete the Strategy and also provided a great deal of positive input into the Strategy. As the planning process unfolds the final **Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy** will represent a very positive collaborative step in the advancement of Aboriginal post-secondary education within British Columbia.

The recommendations made at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Forum will inform the revision of the draft Strategy. The New Relationship and Transformative Change Accord initiatives focus on building a stronger society within British Columbia through building a stronger future within First Nations communities. Education has been recognized as one of the primary building blocks for this new future and the **Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy** should provide a solid foundation for making Aboriginal post-secondary education the tool that it is hoped to be.

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**Ministry of Advanced Education's  
3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Aboriginal Post Secondary Education Forum**

*"Moving Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Forward – Developing a Strategy"*

**First Nations House of Learning (UBC)  
The Great Hall – Sty-Wet-Tan  
March 16, 2006**

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**8:30 - 9:00                      Coffee, Tea and Pastries Served**

**9:00 - 9:30                      Welcome and Opening Remarks**

- Welcome and Opening Prayer – Larry Grant, Musqueam First Nation, Dr. Richard Vedan
- Opening Remarks - Honourable Murray Coell, Minister of Advanced Education
- Facilitator Garry Merkel provides overview of the day's agenda and process

**9:30 – 9:50                      Presentation of Strategy**

- Moura Quayle, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education

**9:50-10:50                      Breakout Groups ( 5 groups)**

- This breakout session will give participants the opportunity to review and discuss the **content** of the Draft Strategy.

**11:05 – 12:05                      Panel**

- **Eric McMahon**, Enhancements Agreement Coordinator, Ministry of Education: Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements (K-12) Overview
- **Christa Williams**, Executive Director, First Nations Education Steering Committee: Collaboration, Participation and Communication, Aboriginal perspectives

**12:50 - 1:00                      Welcome to afternoon (Garry Merkel)**

**1:00 - 2:15                      Break-out sessions (Action 1:Enhancement Plans)**

- Thirteen groups of ten people engage in a facilitated consensus building process to discuss aspects of the enhancement planning **process**.

**2:30-3:15                      Reporting Back on Enhancement Plan process (feedback and recommendations)**

**3:15- 4:15                      Sharing of morning reflections on Strategy and open discussion of recommendations and concerns**

**4:15-4:30                      Closing remarks, Deborah Hull/Prayer, Rose Point**

**Elder Larry Grant**

A member of the Musqueam Nation and adjunct professor in the Faculty of Arts at UBC, Larry, a retired longshoreman and band councillor, teaches the Musqueam language to help spark a reawakening among young people about their culture. "This is a sophisticated language," he says, "I want young people to stand up and say 'I am Aboriginal and this is my language'- it's the product of a highly sophisticated society". Larry has been impressed that urban Aboriginals, even those from other parts of Canada, start to re-identify and re-connect with their culture as they become more confident in their language.

**Rose Point, Elder Advisor**

Rose Point, born of Sto:lo/Thompson descent, on Seabird Island Reserve. She lived at Seabird for twelve years, then went to St. Mary's residential school for seven years and graduated at age 19. She married into Musqueam in 1957, where she is still living. She has four sons Wayne, Jesse, Aaron and Stewart, and two grand children; Joshua and Linae, both age 12. She has held various jobs and positions in her life, first as a waitress and then at Coqualeetza Hospital. She worked at Musqueam Pre-school as a supervisor, as a Musqueam Cultural Coordinator, as a Musqueam Welfare Admin., VSB Child care worker, and is the Elder in residence at British Columbia Institute of Technology and First Nations House of Learning. She is currently a UBC student.

**Eric McMahon**

Eric has been involved in education for 31 years as a teacher in the UK and B.C., and as a school and district administrator in Burns Lake, Vernon, the Gulf Islands and the Cowichan Valley.

Eric has been seconded to the Ministry from SD#79 where he has been a Secondary Principal, District Principal for Aboriginal Programs, and Director of Adult and Continuing Education and Aboriginal Programs. He has also been responsible for Careers and Technology in the district. He has worked closely with seven First Nations communities and the Vancouver Island Métis in the development of their Enhancement Agreement (May, 2000).

In his work with the Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch he is responsible for coordinating Enhancement Agreements. This work involves working with school districts and their Aboriginal communities in completing and implementing their Enhancement Agreements.

Eric is married with five children. He lives on Saltspring Island.

**Christa Williams, Executive Director, First Nations Education Steering Committee**

Christa Williams is a member of the Nlaka'pamux Nation in Lytton, BC and she has been the Executive Director of the First Nations Education Steering Committee since 1993.

Christa's long-standing commitment to improving First Nations education has led to significant achievements provincially and nationally.

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is a non-profit, independent organization directed by a large board of First Nations community representatives. Under Christa's leadership, FNESC has grown to be an influential body supporting the development of high quality of education for Aboriginal students from kindergarten through post-secondary and adult education.

Christa was a leading force in the formation of the BC Aboriginal Education Partners Group, which brings together provincial level stakeholders to work together to improve the school success of Aboriginal learners. The Partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 1999 formalizing their commitment.

Christa is a negotiator on FNESC's Education Jurisdiction Negotiation Team. The team is establishing the legal and political structure for First Nations communities to exercise their authority for the education of on-reserve First Nations students.

At the national level, Christa is a representative on the National Indian Education Committee of the Assembly of First Nations. This body articulates national priorities in Aboriginal education.

Christa achieved a Bachelor of Science with Honours from Queen's University and she has since completed several business and public administration courses.

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## **BREAK-OUT SESSION: MORNING**

This breakout session will give participants the opportunity to review and discuss the **content** of the Draft Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Proposed actions:**
  - a. Do the proposed actions seem relevant and reasonable to you?  
Why/why not?**
  - b. What action is the most important to you and how would successful implementation of that action be facilitated?**
- 2. Have the key challenges faced by Aboriginal learners in the post-secondary system been identified and would this Strategy address those challenges?**
- 3. Are there other actions or changes to existing actions that you suggest?**
- 4. What milestones would you like to reach through the implementation of this Strategy and its actions?**
- 5. What are your key recommendations for the Draft Strategy?**

### **Facilitation of Morning Breakout**

The morning breakout of the forum is envisioned as a chance for each Forum participant to give their overall impressions of the proposed Strategy. The questions have been designed to allow the facilitator to keep the discussion at a higher level, rather than delving too far down into the implementation, administration and monitoring of the Strategy. While Forum participants will have every opportunity to raise questions and concerns, and to discuss individual actions, the group will be encouraged to avoid focussing too much time on any one area, such as the enhancement plans (a probable area of interest). It can be pointed out to the group that the afternoon session will give an opportunity for participants to more fully examine the enhancement plan process. The facilitator will guide the process so that each of the guiding questions elicits key recommendation from the group. The Facilitator can make the point to their group that participant's comments will become part of the Final Report for the forum and will be used to inform further development of the Strategy.

The notes from the morning breakout sessions will be kept by a recorder, who will keep track of participant points and the key recommendations. At the 10:50 break, the group recorders will meet with Sasha Hobbes, who will take their notes to begin developing a power point presentation to be shown at the end of the day.

# Facilitator Notes

## Afternoon Breakout Session

### **Purpose of Activity:**

Thirteen groups of 10 people will endeavour to consolidate recommendations through consensus-building decision-making. The MC will discuss *process and content* in the follow-up debriefing.

### **Duration of Activity:** 1 Hour 15 Minutes

Your role is to get your group to support one recommendation through managing diverse stakeholder interests, building trust and mutual respect.

#### TOOLS:

1. Break-Out Session Afternoon Questions
2. “Recommendation” diagram
3. Flip Chart

STEP 1: Choose a facilitator, Recorder and Presenter

STEP 2: Answer questions systematically –

- Questions 1-5 are used to generate dialogue (suggested time 40 minutes); and,
- “Challenges and Recommendations Questions” are the specific questions to be synthesized in to the Diagram for presentation (suggested time 30 minutes)

STEP 3: Recorder may summarize each issue/recommendation on the diagram

STEP 4: Consolidate recommendations into one aggregate recommendation

- While the diagram will capture the main challenges and recommendations, it is important that all the challenges and recommendations are recorded

STEP 5: If time permits, reflect on the follow-up reflection questions (see below)

STEP 6: Presenter will share group’s recommendation to forum participants after break (5 minutes)

Thank you!

*Follow-up reflection:*

What are the pros and cons of collaborative decision-making?

What skills/training would a facilitator need to make the Enhancement planning process possible in the Aboriginal Post Secondary system?

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## **BREAK-OUT SESSION: AFTERNOON**

Participants engage in a facilitated consensus building process to discuss aspects of the enhancement planning **process**.

The following questions are suggested for discussion before answering the “Challenges and Recommendations” questions:

- 1. The model of enhancement plans would require collaboration among stakeholders. Who would be the stakeholders?**
  - 2. How would a plan be developed? What kind of consultation process would be required?**
  - 3. What would be the key challenges faced in this collaborative process?**
  - 4. How would stakeholders identify priority areas and determine goals? How would various stakeholders’ expectations be managed?**
  - 5. How would stakeholders be held accountable and how would we determine if an enhancement plan was meeting its objectives?**
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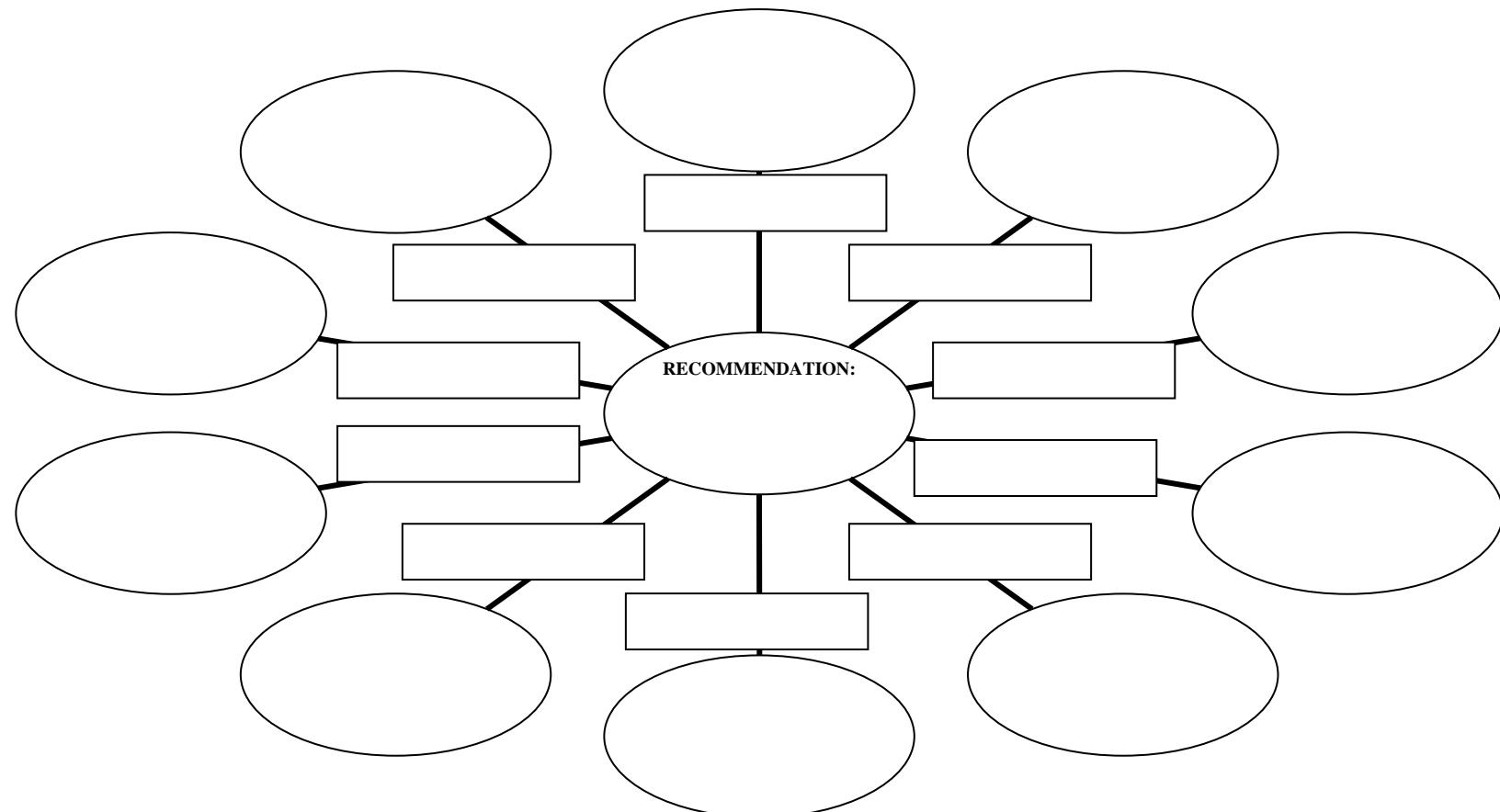
The following “Challenges and Recommendations” questions are to be answered after the above discussion:

**What would be the key challenges in using the enhancement planning process in the post-secondary system?**

**What would be your key recommendations to respond to these challenges?**

**Would the enhancement plan process be an appropriate model for the Aboriginal post-secondary education system? Why/Why not?**

**What are the key challenges that will be faced in the enhancement planning process and 1 recommendation for facilitating effective collaboration, plan development, and implementation?**



**PROPOSED  
ABORIGINAL  
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION  
STRATEGY**

***DISCUSSION DRAFT***

**MARCH 1, 2006**

# **PROPOSED ABORIGINAL<sup>2</sup>**

## **POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION STRATEGY**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

In March 2005, the Ministry of Advanced Education and other key parties signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training. The MOU committed the signatories to work collectively toward improved levels of participation and success for Aboriginal learners in post-secondary education and training in British Columbia. Signatories to the MOU include the Ministry, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, the First Nations Summit, the First Nations Education Steering Committee, the Metis Provincial Council of BC (now the Metis Nation of BC), the United Native Nations Society, The University Presidents' Council of BC, the BC College Presidents, the University College Presidents, and the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association.

In addition to this commitment, a number of other provincial and pan-Canadian initiatives have pointed to the need to improve Aboriginal post-secondary participation and success. For instance, the government of British Columbia is currently in the process of forging a new government-to-government relationship with Aboriginal people based on reconciliation, recognition and respect. It is hoped that this new relationship will reshape BC's social and economic landscape and create a more inclusive and prosperous future for All British Columbians. A key element of the new relationship is the need to "close the gap" in education levels for Aboriginal people.

The need to close the gap in post-secondary education was also identified as a priority at the November 2005 First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders' meeting in Kelowna. The federal government committed to engage with Aboriginal organizations and provinces and territories to determine how best to target funding, as well as to undertake a review to identify more initiatives that will help to close the overall post-secondary education gap.

The Province, the federal government, and the First Nations Leadership Council (consisting of the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs) also signed a Transformative Change Accord in Kelowna, the purpose of which is stated to be "to achieve the goals of closing the social and economic gap between First Nations and other British Columbians over the next 10 years, of reconciling Aboriginal rights and title with those of the Crown, and of establishing a new relationship based upon mutual respect and recognition." Again, post-secondary

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<sup>2</sup> The Ministry defines Aboriginal as a person who is one of the "Aboriginal peoples of Canada" (Indian, Inuit and Métis) as defined under Section 35 (2) of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. "Indian" includes status and non-status Indians.

education is recognized to be a key component of closing the gap, and a work plan is to be developed by

Western premiers have also indicated that they would like to develop a Western Canadian Aboriginal Training Strategy, in recognition of the fact that there are going to be significant skills gaps in the upcoming labour market and that Aboriginal people are highly under-represented in the labour market. Again, post-secondary education and training will be key to closing that gap.

While the Ministry of Advanced Education has undertaken various initiatives over the last couple of years to support Aboriginal participation and success in post-secondary education, there is still more work to do to ensure that post-secondary participation and completion rates for Aboriginal learners are on par with non-Aboriginal learners, and thereby “close the gap.” This paper outlines some of the key challenges and proposes a Strategy to address these challenges.

### **THE NEED FOR CHANGE:**

The Aboriginal population is growing at a faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population. For example, in 2001, Aboriginal people represented 4.4 percent of British Columbia’s population compared to just 2.8 percent of the population in 1996. It is now estimated that approximately 5 percent of British Columbia’s current population is Aboriginal – and this number keeps growing. Also, 50 percent of the Aboriginal population is under 25 years of age. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada predicts that in 2007, the Aboriginal workforce will be just shy of one million people in Canada, with young men and women under the age of 35 representing the bulk of that number. These are all significant statistics when considering British Columbia’s future labour pool.

Progress has been made in recent years in terms of the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in British Columbia’s public post-secondary system. Initiatives such as the Ministry’s Aboriginal Special Projects Fund (ASPF) program, which assists public post-secondary institutions in promoting relevant, quality educational programs and support activities for Aboriginal learners have made inroads in this area. However, recently published reports regarding the educational attainment of Aboriginal people indicate that only 4 out of 10 Aboriginal people in British Columbia complete a post-secondary credential, compared to 6 out of 10 non-Aboriginal students, and that Aboriginal people are particularly underrepresented in university level programs<sup>3</sup>. Also significant is the fact that grade 12 graduation rates for Aboriginal learners, although improving, are still significantly lower than the provincial average.

Unemployment rates for Aboriginal people are also significantly higher than for the non-Aboriginal population; however, when employment rates are compared between

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<sup>3</sup> “The Educational Attainment of Aboriginal Peoples; Part II – Post Secondary Completion”, BC Stats, Infoline Report, Issue 05-22, June 3, 2005.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with the same levels of education, many of the differences in labour market outcomes disappear<sup>4</sup>.

## ACHIEVEMENTS:

As noted above, while there is still much work to do in the area of Aboriginal post-secondary education, progress has been made over the last few years.

Based on Aboriginal headcount data, the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in public

post-secondary institutions is gradually increasing. In 2002/03 there were approximately 13,192 Aboriginal students in British Columbia's public post-secondary institutions representing 3.7 percent of the student population. In 2003/04, that number grew to 15,562<sup>5</sup> representing 4 percent of the student population. However, important to note is that approximately 40 percent of Aboriginal students in the post-secondary system are in developmental programs (primarily Adult Basic Education)<sup>6</sup>.

Progress to date can be at least partially being attributed to the following achievements:

- Almost all public post-secondary institutions employ at least one Aboriginal Education Coordinator who provides support services to Aboriginal learners;
- Several institutions have Aboriginal Advisory Councils, which provide a link to Aboriginal communities;
- Most public post-secondary institutions in British Columbia have incorporated Aboriginal perspectives into selected courses and offer targeted courses and programs for Aboriginal people;
- Several public post-secondary institutions have collaborated and entered into partnerships and/or affiliation agreements with Aboriginal communities and organizations, which reflect Aboriginal education and training priorities; and,
- Some institutions provide Aboriginal community-based delivery of programs and courses.

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<sup>4</sup> "Labour Market Characteristics of the Off-Reserve Aboriginal Population in British Columbia", BC Stats, Infoline Report, Issue 05-23, June 10, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal headcount data relies on self-declaration of Aboriginal status. Such data is collected in the Central Data Warehouse (CDW) from all but one public post-secondary institution. This data is then compared with K-12 records maintained by the Ministry of Education. Even with capturing Aboriginal status through both educational sectors, the post-secondary institutions report that the Aboriginal headcounts are understated.

<sup>6</sup> Developmental programs include courses that lead to a high school diploma as well as programs, which provide a range of services to assist students in their transition from secondary to post-secondary education.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES & BARRIERS:

To achieve the goal of Aboriginal learners attaining the same post-secondary education levels as the non-Aboriginal population, it is obviously important to understand the key challenges and barriers currently facing Aboriginal learners.

Several recent Ministry initiatives, including a province-wide review of Aboriginal post-secondary education, two Aboriginal post-secondary forums, a review of the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework, the signing of the MOU on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training, and Ministry discussions with key representatives of British Columbia's post-secondary institutions and key Aboriginal organizations shed light on the major challenges facing Aboriginal learners.

Major challenges influencing the participation and completion rates of Aboriginal learners in post-secondary education include:

- **K-12 to Post-Secondary Transition:** A significant percentage of the Aboriginal population does not complete high school or does not have the prerequisites for university-track and vocational training courses/programs (English 12, Math 12 and sciences).
- **Student Service Gaps:** There are considerable gaps in culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal post-secondary learners. These gaps directly correlate to Aboriginal participation, retention and overall success. If the appropriate support services and strategies are in place, the chances of Aboriginal learners staying and completing post-secondary education are much greater.
- **Aboriginal Programming:** While a recent study concluded that more Aboriginal programming is being developed, post-secondary institutions need to reflect Aboriginal culture, traditions and values in programming. The challenge requires sustaining existing programs, while also developing new programs.
- **Provincial Funding:** While the Ministry's ASPF<sup>7</sup> program has been beneficial, many key stakeholders, including representatives from British Columbia's public post-secondary institutions, have repeatedly indicated that the government should establish a new funding mechanism for Aboriginal post-secondary education that provides targeted sustainable funding at levels that recognize special requirements/needs of students, institutions, Aboriginal groups and communities.

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<sup>7</sup> ASPF provides limited short-term financial support to assist public post-secondary institutions in promoting relevant, quality educational programs and support activities for Aboriginal learners. The primary purpose of the ASPF program is to increase participation, success and retention rates for Aboriginal learners in British Columbia. Public post-secondary institutions apply for ASPF annually through the submission of proposals, which are then reviewed, assessed and awarded by AVED as long as the established funding criteria have been met. AVED's 2005/06 ASPF budget is \$1.8 million. A total of 36 projects have been funded this year.

- **Federal Funding:** While the federal government provides support through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and the University College Entrance Preparation Program to assist eligible First Nation students to access post-secondary education, stakeholders have repeatedly indicated that the current level of funding and limits on funding are increasingly a barrier to Aboriginal student participation.
- **Aboriginal Involvement in Governance Structures:** There is a lack of Aboriginal involvement in institutional and educational planning and decision-making process.
- **Discrimination:** Social, cultural and racial discrimination continues to persist, resulting in feelings of alienation and exclusion for Aboriginal learners.
- **Aboriginal Faculty and Staff:** Post-secondary institutions are primarily comprised of non-Aboriginal faculty and staff, many of whom have a limited understanding of Aboriginal culture, traditions and history and the different learning styles and needs of Aboriginal learners.
- **Geographic Barriers:** Most post-secondary institutions are located in populated areas. Aboriginal people in rural and remote communities have identified the need to access education in their communities and not leave for extended periods of study.

## **DEVELOPING A STRATEGY THAT ADDRESSES THE NEED:**

### **CONSULTATIONS TO DATE:**

#### **Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework (APF) Review and Consultations**

In 1995, Government approved the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework (APF) to increase access, participation, retention and success rates for Aboriginal learners. Since late 2003, Ministry staff has been in the process of revising and updating the APF to align it with government's current approach and strategic direction.

In November 2003, the Ministry released the initial draft APF for province-wide review to key external stakeholders including British Columbia's public post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal post-secondary education coordinators, Aboriginal K-12 education representatives and Aboriginal leadership organizations. The draft APF outlined the Ministry's approach to enhancing the post-secondary education and training opportunities for Aboriginal people. It also summarized a variety of strategies, which have been used successfully and effectively in partnership with public post-secondary institutions in British Columbia to promote education and training opportunities for Aboriginal people.

In general, comments covered the following key issues/themes:

- Need for targeted and enhanced funding for Aboriginal coordinators/staff and Aboriginal programming;
- Need to provide better linkages to the Ministry's Accountability Framework;
- Need to enhance data collection and information gathering regarding Aboriginal learners;
- Need to provide stronger and more prescriptive language, similar to the language used in the 1995 APF;
- Need to enhance pre-school to K-12 to post-secondary education to employment linkages;
- Need to provide more up-to-date and creative best practices; and,
- Need to emphasize the importance and value of Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary education.

### **February 2004 – 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Forum Regarding Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training**

On February 23, 2004, the Ministry held an all-day Open Space forum at the University of British Columbia's First Nations House of Learning, regarding issues and opportunities for the future of Aboriginal post-secondary education and training in British Columbia. The "Open Space" process involved participants setting the agenda by raising and discussing key issues that they felt addressed the forum's theme.

Over 130 education experts from across British Columbia participated in the forum. Participants included representatives from British Columbia's public post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Coordinators, Aboriginal institutions, Aboriginal K-12 education representatives, Aboriginal leadership organizations, Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement holders, Band Education Coordinators, the federal government and other provincial ministries.

In March 2004, the Ministry's consultant prepared a report summarizing the key issues and recommendations raised by forum participants. This report was provided to all forum participants and was put on the Ministry's website. The consultant's report identified the following key themes from the February 23, 2004 forum:

- Enhancing Internal and External Communication, Collaboration, and Information Sharing;
- Understanding K-12 and Post-secondary Linkages;
- Encouraging the Development and Delivery of Culturally Sensitive Aboriginal Programming;
- Promoting Aboriginal Student Support Services;
- Ensuring the Aboriginal Post-secondary Education and Training Policy Framework is Responsive to the Needs of Aboriginal People;

- Working Together on Accountability Measures that Reflect the Goals of Aboriginal Learners;
- Working Towards Resolutions for Funding Issues;
- Ensuring Aboriginal Post-secondary Graduates Proceed to Work;
- Recognizing that the Origin of Education Issues Relates Back to Parenting and Supportive Home Environments; and,
- Supporting Aboriginal-controlled Institutions.

In follow-up to the consultant's report, AVED prepared a Response Document, which summarizes the Ministry's responses to each of the theme areas identified above. The Response Document also outlined 20 actions that were either underway or would be undertaken by the Ministry over a 12-month period. More specifically, the actions were in response to issues related to communication/ collaboration, funding, K-12 to post-secondary transition, Aboriginal programming and services, and accountability.

### **March 2005 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Forum Regarding Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training**

On March 10, 2004 the Ministry held its 2<sup>nd</sup> annual forum on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education. The Forum included about 120 delegates representing Aboriginal leadership organizations, British Columbia's public post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Coordinators, Aboriginal institutions, Aboriginal K-12 education, Band Education Coordinators, Aboriginal students, and members from other provincial ministries and federal government departments.

The major issues raised by participants were the following:

- The education system currently does not recognize and appropriately accommodate the different requirements for urban versus rural education;
- While it is difficult to clearly define “culturally relevant” with respect to programming and services, there is general recognition that the education system needs to do more in terms of becoming more culturally relevant for the Aboriginal learner;
- Very few communities have experience and an adequate background in education administration, design and delivery;
- There is no clear accountability framework that makes the Aboriginal education system accountable to all of its respective constituents, e.g., provincial government, Aboriginal governments and communities, other institutions;
- The provincial education system generally needs to increase Aboriginal presence in all areas;
- Coordination needs to be improved in Aboriginal education; and,
- There is a general lack of understanding of the role that Aboriginal institutions that are not funded by the Province can and do play in Aboriginal education.

Participants provided recommendations to address these issues and categorized them as the following seven general goals:

1. Improve coordination between all relevant players within the provincial Aboriginal education system;
2. Increase Aboriginal presence in all areas of the provincial education system;
3. Improve the effectiveness of educators with respect to design and delivery of Aboriginal education within the provincial education system;
4. Improve funding levels (both provincial and federal);
5. Improve Aboriginal student success rates within the provincial education system;
6. Improve cultural relevance of programming and services for the Aboriginal learner within the provincial education system; and,
7. Improve accountability to all of the relevant players (e.g., provincial government, First Nations governments and communities, other institutions) of Aboriginal education within the provincial education system.

Workshops provided an opportunity for participants to outline objectives that work towards achieving these seven goals. Some examples of the objectives are:

- Have the province ensure that each institution has at least one Aboriginal member on its board of governors;
- Explore the idea of an Aboriginal full-time equivalent that is tied back to community accountability. This is expected to have funding implications because of the support and cultural relevance components;
- Establish a new funding mechanism for Aboriginal post-secondary education that provides targeted sustainable funding at levels that recognize special requirements/needs of students, institutions, Aboriginal groups and communities;
- Develop mechanisms to ensure that the Aboriginal community is involved in a partnership throughout the entire process of creating culturally relevant programming and services; and,
- Establish an Accountability Working Group that involves the key players that meets regularly to develop an Accountability Strategy. This group would create the first half of the accountability framework and assist each institution to create the second half relevant to their situation. The accountability framework must expand the focus from traditional performance measures to creating an effective process for ongoing and improved dialogue.

### **Review of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Programs, Services and Strategies & Review of Aboriginal Special Projects Funding**

In December 2004, the Ministry hired a consultant to review two interrelated topics: Aboriginal post-secondary education programs, services and strategies/best practices in British Columbia; and, the Ministry's ASPF Program.

The purpose of the review was to inform the Ministry and British Columbia's post-secondary education institutions about the status of Aboriginal post-secondary education in British Columbia, inform the Ministry's approach to ASPF, and identify any gaps and/or duplication of Aboriginal post-secondary education programs and services.

The Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Review Project (Aboriginal Review Project) involved a comprehensive combination of primary and secondary research methodology, including a literature review, and a review of ASPF program files, institutional surveys, key informant interviews and focus groups. Participants included a Project Advisory Committee, public post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Coordinators, individuals (faculty, staff, students and Elders), Aboriginal institutions and Aboriginal communities and organizations.

The review involved the participation of about 50 organizations and over 100 individuals, as well as the indirect participation of about 120 stakeholders at the Ministry's March 2005 forum on Aboriginal post-secondary education.

The final report for the Aboriginal Review Project highlighted 34 recommendations. Some key recommendations include the need to:

- Define a sustainable funding approach for Aboriginal post-secondary education;
- Develop a system-wide standard for data collection and tracking;
- Address key participation gaps in several program areas including trades, technology, commerce, economics and sciences as discussed in the report;
- Address the significant gaps in support services for Aboriginal learners;
- Facilitate Aboriginal representation on institutional governance bodies;
- Co-ordinate funding with the Federal Government; and,
- Review the structure, use and effect of the existing full-time equivalent funding to post-secondary institutions and the costs and utilization of such funding for Aboriginal programs and services.

## **PROPOSED STRATEGY:**

The Ministry's goal is to ensure that post-secondary participation and completion rates for Aboriginal learners are on par with non-Aboriginal learners. Building on the consultation that has been conducted to date, as well as the Aboriginal Review Project, the Ministry has developed a proposed Strategy to meet that goal. However, before finalizing any Strategy, further consultation needs to be done.

### **Guiding Principles**

The following key principles have guided the development of the proposed Strategy:

- **Access and Choice** – Provides Aboriginal learners with access to post-secondary education and training and choice in terms of programming, location and method of delivery (i.e., community-based).
- **Programming and Services** – Provides post-secondary education programming and services that are culturally appropriate and support the unique educational needs of Aboriginal people.
- **Strong Partnerships and Relationship Building** – Promotes long-term, self-sustaining partnerships in cooperation with public post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal communities/organizations and governments at all levels.
- **Aboriginal Representation** - Facilitates governance structures that are representative of and sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal people.
- **Cost Effectiveness & Accountability** - Cost efficiencies and value for money is ensured through the comprehensive evaluation and monitoring of outcomes.
- **Autonomy** – Maintains institutional autonomy in terms of program and service development and delivery.

### **Proposed Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy**

The proposed Strategy consists of six interconnected actions that build on initiatives undertaken to date by the Ministry, public post-secondary institutions, and Aboriginal communities:

1. Seek additional funding to establish a new sustainable and accountable funding mechanism for Aboriginal post-secondary education through the development of institutional Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plans;
2. Facilitate Aboriginal representation on institutional governance bodies;
3. Develop a system-wide standard for data collection and tracking;
4. Develop new performance measures focused on Aboriginal achievement;
5. Work with the federal government to enhance support for Aboriginal learners; and,
6. Revise the Aboriginal Policy Framework to reflect the Strategy.

**Action 1: Seek additional funding to establish a new sustainable and accountable funding mechanism for Aboriginal post-secondary education through the development of institutional Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plans**

As noted earlier, while the Ministry’s ASPF program has been beneficial, many key stakeholders have repeatedly indicated that the government should establish a new funding mechanism for Aboriginal post-secondary education that provides targeted sustainable funding at levels that recognize special requirements/needs of Aboriginal

learners. If we are to effect substantial change in the success of Aboriginal learners, a new approach must be taken.

Under this initiative, the Ministry would seek additional funding to provide to public post-secondary institutions specifically to deliver culturally appropriate programs and services to Aboriginal learners. An amount ranging from \$1,000 to \$1,500 per Aboriginal FTE might be appropriate. Funding would be provided based on the submission of a six-year Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plan, and would be based on the number of Aboriginal learners enrolled at the institution each year.

Partnerships would be key to the success of the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plan process. Public post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal communities/organizations and other key stakeholders such as school districts would jointly plan, develop and implement Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plans.<sup>8</sup> These plans would be a means for integrating culturally relevant learning opportunities into the instructional programs and services provided to Aboriginal learners, in order to help ensure continuous long-term improvement in their educational achievement.

This approach is modeled after the Ministry of Education's successful Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements process whereby School Districts and Aboriginal communities jointly develop and implement a “road map” for helping schools affect a shift in focus towards performance-oriented Aboriginal education based on educational outcomes.

Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plans would describe collective goals, objectives, strategies and performance measures/indicators, which address the specific needs of Aboriginal learners attending a particular post-secondary institution or living within the region served by the institution. The Ministry of Advanced Education would develop and provide guidelines for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plans, but the plans would reflect the priorities and strategies identified by the post-secondary institution, Aboriginal communities/organizations and other key stakeholders. For instance, an Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plan might include:

- Strategies to promote K-12 transition such as math/science/English initiatives and summer camps;
- Enhancing culturally appropriate programming;
- Improving student supports (e.g., Aboriginal coordinators, tutors, mentors, Elders in residence, gathering places, etc.); and,
- Supporting community-based initiatives, including partnering with Aboriginally-controlled post-secondary institutions to deliver programming in Aboriginal communities.

It is expected that it would take approximately 12 to 18 months for institutions to develop Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plans depending on the number of communities involved and the extent to which institutions and Aboriginal communities have a

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<sup>8</sup> Note: Institutions with Provincial mandates would work through their respective Aboriginal Advisory Councils when developing and implementing Enhancement Plans.

developed relationship. The Ministry would also seek funding to support some of the costs associated with developing the plans.

If there is agreement to proceed with this action and funding is secured, ASPF would be gradually phased out as institutions will have a source of funding to pilot and implement new approaches to Aboriginal programming and services, as laid out in their Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enhancement Plans.

**Action 2: Facilitate Aboriginal representation on institutional governance bodies**

A key recommendation coming out of the Ministry’s recent province-wide review of Aboriginal post-secondary education was the need for the Ministry to do more to ensure that there is Aboriginal representation on governing bodies and more broadly in institutional governance. Aboriginal representatives can help ensure that the interests and perspectives of Aboriginal learners and communities are reflected in a meaningful way in institutional planning, policies, practices, and programming.

To facilitate this, the Ministry would make amendments to the legislation governing public post-secondary institutions to reflect a requirement that government appoint Aboriginal representative(s) to Boards of Governors. This would not affect the total number of board members appointed by government, but would ensure that Aboriginal people are represented on institutional governing bodies.

**Action 3: Develop a system-wide standard for data collection and tracking**

Several recent Ministry initiatives/studies clearly confirm that there are inadequacies with current data gathering and tracking regarding Aboriginal programs and students – both at a system level as well as within institutions. Action in this area will increase the amount of accurate and reliable data, with which institutions, the Ministry and Aboriginal and other organizations can use to set strategic goals, develop strategies, measure progress and further inform policy making in this area.

A major challenge is the lack of statistical data on Aboriginal ancestry. Post-secondary institutions are limited in their ability to track Aboriginal enrolment and data collected given that this is dependent on student self-identification. Better statistical evidence on participation and completion rates of specific post-secondary programs will make policy-making more effective.

Therefore, the Ministry will make it a priority to work and consult with institutions and Aboriginal groups to develop effective system-wide Aboriginal post-secondary student tracking policies and procedures, including the use of K-12 Personal Education Number information to track students. This will include encouraging institutions to adopt a provincially standardized process and procedures to the extent possible, and making better use of the Ministry’s Central Data Warehouse.

**Action 4: Develop new performance measures focused on Aboriginal achievement**

The Ministry's Service Plan currently has a performance measure related to the number and percent of the public post-secondary student population that are Aboriginal. The current participation measure represents the actual number of Aboriginal students in the post-secondary system and their proportion relative to the total number of students enrolled, but does not measure Aboriginal learner success. This limits the ability of all stakeholders to assess whether current strategies are affecting the success of Aboriginal learners.

The Ministry would work with the post-secondary system and Aboriginal groups to develop performance measures to monitor progress on Aboriginal achievement (such as graduate rates, completion, retention, etc.). Again, the overall goal would be to eventually have Aboriginal learners attaining post-secondary achievement levels that are on par with non-Aboriginal learners.

**Action 5: Work with the federal government to enhance support for Aboriginal learners**

The federal government provides support to post-secondary institutions (primarily Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary institutions that do not receive funding from the Province) for the development and delivery of programs through the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). The federal government also provides support to eligible Indian and Inuit students through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and the University College Entrance Preparation Program to assist First Nation students with the cost of tuition fees, books and travel, and living allowances, when applicable. However, there has been no significant increase in federal funding for Aboriginal post-secondary educational support since 1994. The Ministry has heard through its consultations that this lack of funding is increasingly becoming a barrier to participation.

In addition to the level of funding, the maximum of one year of funding under the University and College Entrance Program, which funds prerequisites and/or supporting courses for students to attain the academic level required for entrance into a college or university program, including Adult Basic Education, is problematic given the lower high school graduation rates experienced by Aboriginal learners. As well, a minimum program length of one academic year under the Post-Secondary Student Support Program reduces options for Aboriginal students to take shorter programs such as entry level trades training. While student loans are an option for Aboriginal learners unable to secure sufficient federal funding, they may not be aware of this or may be more debt-averse than non-Aboriginal learners.

Aboriginal political and educational organizations as well as non-Aboriginal educational organizations have stated that lack of funding from the federal government is increasingly an issue for Aboriginal learners, which limits their ability to participate in and undertake post-secondary education. For example, the Assembly of First Nations found that First Nations students receive only enough funding to cover 48 percent of the estimated average cost per student per academic year.

Given the Aboriginal demographics cited earlier, this issue is compounded by a fast growing Aboriginal population.

The Ministry will continue to raise the federal funding issue in national discussions and at the Aboriginal MOU Partners table, with a goal of increasing federal funding support for Aboriginal students (both on and off reserve). This initiative is linked to and will also complement Action 1 of this Strategy.

**Action 6: Revise the Aboriginal Policy Framework to reflect the Strategy**

The final step would be to revise the Aboriginal Policy Framework to reflect the proposed Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Ministry believes that implementation of the actions cited in this paper would go a long way in terms of addressing the challenges facing Aboriginal learners in British Columbia's public post-secondary education system and meeting the goal of Aboriginal learners attaining the same post-secondary education participation and completion rates as the non-Aboriginal population.

We want to know what you think about the proposed Strategy. Please provide any written feedback to:

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