

25 March 2009



To: First Nations in British Columbia

From: The First Nations Education Steering Committee

Re: Considerations of INAC's Post-Secondary Education Program

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The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEsc) is distributing this communication to provide an update regarding a recently released National Audit of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's (INAC's) Post-Secondary Education Program, dated January 23, 2009. That audit highlights a number of critical issues which are important for all First Nations in BC and, overall, the auditors were unable to provide assurance that the program's management is adequate and effective in ensuring that the program is meeting its objectives.

Specifically, the audit raises serious concerns about the limited tracking of how the program funds are spent and associated difficulties in terms of program planning. The audit further suggests that reporting challenges make it difficult to determine that there is an equitable allocation of the funding regionally. The audit also raises concerns about the adequacy of existing funding levels, about the fairness and management of the current national funding allocation methodologies, as well as the program's guidelines and conditions.

In a letter to Minister Strahl (see attached), FNEsc has expressed its support for the audit report's call for better information, enhanced funding, revised conditions and guidelines, and improved reporting processes.

However, FNEsc has also strongly asserted the critical importance of involving First Nations in determining the most relevant allocation and accountability mechanisms. We have reiterated the audit report's recognition of the challenges associated with additional reporting from First Nations – especially given the onerous reporting responsibilities First Nations already face.

FNEsc has emphasized the importance of the PSSSP, UCEP, and ISSP programs to First Nations learners and communities, and we have called for our full involvement in any comprehensive review of this program.

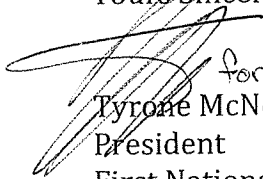
At this time, we are requesting that interested First Nations reiterate our position with INAC. ***Specifically, we would appreciate First Nations sending Band Council Resolutions to the FNEsc office supporting our response to Minister Strahl, and ideally highlighting the following points by April 30, 2009.*** FNEsc will then collect the BCRs and submit them collectively to the federal government.

First Nations Education Steering Committee Society

1. First Nations have a fiduciary right to post-secondary education, and INAC must maintain programs and services with adequate resourcing and policies that respect this right.
2. Any review of INAC's post-secondary education programming must be undertaken in full consultation with First Nations.
3. Any changes to INAC's post-secondary programming must be developed in collaboration with First Nations and must respect the unique priorities and processes that have been identified by and for First Nations in BC, as First Nations across the country have varying needs and perspectives.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. If you require any additional information, please feel free to contact Cici Sterritt at cicis@fnesc.ca. We look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely,



for
Tyrone McNeil
President

First Nations Education Steering Committee