



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA**

**NO HIGHER PRIORITY: ABORIGINAL POST-
SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CANADA**

**Report of the Standing Committee on
Aboriginal Affairs And Northern Development**

**Colin Mayes, MP
Chair**

**FEBRUARY 2007
39TH PARLIAMENT, 1ST SESSION**



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**Colin Mayes, MP
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**February 2007
39th PARLIAMENT, 1ST SESSION**

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

has the honour to present its

SIXTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada. After hearing evidence, the Committee agreed to report to the House as follows:

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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating Positive Outcomes

1. The Committee recommends that the Department, in collaboration with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders, develop a national database web site, accessible via the Internet, for the purpose of making information about successful programs and initiatives in Aboriginal post-secondary education widely available to Aboriginal organizations, communities, learners and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions;

that the database include information about successful initiatives developed by First Nations, Inuit and Métis segments of the Aboriginal population; and

that the Department ensure information about the database, and annual reports outlining its contents, are widely disseminated.

Student Funding

2. The Committee recommends that the 2% annual cap on spending increases for the Department's Post-Secondary Education Program be eliminated immediately;

that the Department's spending increases for PSE programming be based on actual costs associated with program components and not be subject to discretionary caps;

that the Department make it a priority to provide adequate funding under the PSE Program to every eligible First Nations and Inuit learner and put in place a plan to achieve that priority by the end of 2007, said plan to include implementation measures with clear target dates;

that the Department ensure financial assistance for eligible First Nations and Inuit learners under the Department's PSE program is based on actual costs incurred for tuition, travel and living expenses,

and indexed annually to reflect rises in both tuition costs and the cost of living; and

that the Department review the categories of eligible expenses under the PSE program in order to ensure that the real expenses routinely incurred by individual eligible First Nations and Inuit learners are covered. Such expenses may include, but are not limited to, child care, special needs, and special shelter. This review should occur immediately, and at regular intervals thereafter.

3. The Committee recommends that the Department's budget, in the 2007-2008 and ensuing fiscal years, be increased to reflect increased expenditures associated with providing more funding to more eligible First Nations and Inuit learners.

4. The Committee recommends that the Department take immediate steps, together with its regional offices and First Nations and Inuit administering organizations, to ascertain, by the end of 2007, the identities of eligible First Nations and Inuit learners who have been denied PSE funding owing to insufficient allocations;

that a special fund be established for the specific purpose of providing these learners with adequate PSE funding for one year, following which they would fall under the regular PSE regime we propose; and

that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development seek one-time special authority for this purpose.

Data Collection and Tracking

5. The Committee recommends that the Department's new policy and management frameworks outline specific measures, developed in close collaboration with First Nations and Inuit administering organizations and its regional offices, for gathering accurate information about the numbers of First Nations and Inuit learners eligible for as well as those applying for funding for each following academic year;

that the participation of First Nations and Inuit administering organizations in the development of these measures be financed by the Department;

that the measures developed include provisions for enhancing the information-gathering capacity of First Nations and Inuit communities and administering organizations; and

that the information-gathering measures outlined in the Department's policy and management frameworks be implemented by all regional offices.

6. The Committee recommends that the Department take immediate steps, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations with expertise in the area, such as the First Nations Statistical Institute, to establish and finance an information and tracking national PSE data base; and

that the Department and its regional offices ensure comprehensive information about the PSE data base, including privacy protection measures, is widely disseminated to First Nations and Inuit administering organizations and communities.

Allocation and Delivery of PSE Funding

7. The Committee recommends that the Department's new policy and management frameworks set out a precise methodology, developed in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations with expertise in the area, to be used by all regional offices in allocating and delivering PSE funds to First Nations and Inuit administering organizations;

that the Department ensure all administering organizations are made aware of its new policy and management frameworks, and any associated guidelines related to PSE allocation and delivery; and

that the Department, in collaboration with administering organizations, establish appropriate mechanisms to monitor the allocation and delivery of PSE funds.

Indian Studies Support Program

8. The Committee recommends that the Department's new policy and management frameworks outline specific measures, developed in collaboration with organizations representing Aboriginal and mainstream post-secondary institutions, for gathering accurate information on an annual basis about the actual funding needs of those institutions; and

that the Department take immediate steps, in collaboration with organizations representing Aboriginal and mainstream post-secondary institutions, to evaluate the adequacy of ISSP allocations overall, and develop a funding methodology for the ISSP that is based on the actual funding needs of Aboriginal and mainstream post-secondary institutions.

9. The Committee recommends that the Department take immediate steps to ensure ISSP funding is accessible to otherwise eligible post-secondary programs originating in Canada's territories.

Access to Post-Secondary Programming

10. The Committee recommends that the government enter into immediate consultations with NAAF and Métis, Non-Status and urban Aboriginal organizations, with a view to developing a collaborative plan aimed at providing more financial assistance, including eligibility and access under the PSE Program, to more Aboriginal post-secondary learners.

PROPOSALS

1. The Committee strongly urges the Department, in its current review of the ISSP, and in collaboration with organizations representing Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, to undertake a careful re-evaluation of current short-term funding practices overall, and its current position with respect to core funding in particular.

2. The Committee urges the federal Minister of Indian Affairs, departmental officials, and other federal departments and officials with responsibilities in the area of education, to ensure outstanding funding and accreditation issues affecting Aboriginal-controlled institutions are raised in any inter-governmental meetings on Aboriginal post-secondary education, or on post-secondary education more generally, and to urge provincial and territorial governments to address them.

3. The Committee encourages the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to work with Human Resources and Social Development Canada with a view to developing a co-ordinated approach toward Aboriginal post-secondary learners in vocational and skills training programs.

4. The Committee urges the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, in collaboration with Human Resources and

Social Development Canada and the First Nations Education Council, to work toward resolving the anomaly affecting First Nations learners enrolled in Québec vocational training programs.

GLOSSARY

AFN	Assembly of First Nations
AHRDA	Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements
CAP	Congress of Aboriginal Peoples
FNEC	First Nations Education Council
FNESC	First Nations Education Steering Committee
FNTI	First Nations Technical Institute
ISSP	Indian Studies Support Program
NAFC	National Association of Friendship Centres
NAAF	National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation
NAIIHL	National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning
NS	Nunavut Sivuniksavut
PAGC	Prince Albert Grand Council
PSE	Post-Secondary Education
PSEAP	Post-Secondary Educational Assistance Program
PSSSP	Post-Secondary Student Support Program
UCEP	University and College Entrance Program
UQAT	Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue

CHAIR'S FOREWORD

As Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, I am honoured to have participated in the Committee's study on Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada, and to present this report on the Committee's behalf.

Education is so important. We all hope our children will be able to have access to the best educational resources at all levels, resources that are affordable and suited to their needs and aspirations. To that end, we hope to minimize present obstacles and to prevent future ones. We believe Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians share these objectives. Over the course of its hearings, the Committee has learned that much progress has been made in improving opportunities and developing resources in Aboriginal post-secondary education. At the same time, much remains to be done.

It is rare to find unanimity on any topic in the realm of public policy. When it comes to Aboriginal education, however, the now overwhelming consensus view of experts and officials within and outside government, of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians alike, defies the rule. All agree, quite simply, that improving educational outcomes is absolutely critical to the future of individual Aboriginal learners, their families and children, their communities, and the broader Canadian society as a whole. The Committee agrees with Roberta Jamieson of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, who told the Committee that "[a]lthough certainly the task is daunting ... we must do what we can, in our time, in our generation".¹ We endorse the view of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, that "of all the matters that we work on, education is surely the one that we have to get right".²

Therein lies the challenge for us all. The cost of not meeting it is too high in too many lost opportunities for too many Aboriginal people, and for Canada. The Committee is convinced that it is possible, and essential, to meet the challenge, starting now. It is incumbent on all of us, moving forward, to ensure that Aboriginal Canadians have all the educational opportunities and all the resources necessary to enable them to realize their potential.

On behalf of the Committee, I want to express our thanks to the witnesses who appeared before us, frequently on very short notice, to share their experience and recommendations with us. We also commend those who made written submissions to assist the Committee in its process. Committee members acknowledge these contributions with gratitude.

¹ Evidence of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (hereinafter called *Evidence*), 24 October 2006.

² *Evidence*, 2 November 2006.

NO HIGHER PRIORITY: ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CANADA

When I talk to my chiefs and councils I say, we have students who are fourteen and fifteen years old, and we'll blink our eyes and they're going to be eighteen and nineteen and looking for post-secondary education.¹

**Keith Frame, Research Coordinator,
Prince Albert Grand Council**

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Committee's Decision and Process

In recognition of the urgent and ongoing need to address key issues related to the education of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people,² the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development decided, on 15 May 2006, to undertake a study of Aboriginal education in Canada. On 14 June 2006, following a series of general briefings by National Aboriginal Organizations and officials from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Committee further decided to focus its study on Aboriginal post-secondary education.

Accordingly, the Committee convened eight hearings in June, September and October 2006 to examine issues relevant to that topic, and now reports on its findings.

B. The Context

This committee last studied Aboriginal post-secondary education in 1989, when its predecessor, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, undertook a major review of changes introduced that year to the post-secondary program provided by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.³

The Committee is aware that the Department, together with the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit representatives, has been conducting a sweeping review of

¹ *Evidence*, 28 September 2006.

² Under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, the Aboriginal peoples of Canada include the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples. This Report refers to "First Nations people" rather than "Indians", unless the context requires otherwise. It uses the term "Aboriginal" to refer collectively to the three distinct peoples recognized in the Constitution.

³ Hereinafter called the Department. The June 1989 report of the Committee on Aboriginal Affairs is entitled *A Review of the Post-Secondary Student Assistance Program of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development*.

its education policies and programs, with a view to completing new policy and management frameworks by mid-2007. We also know that renewal of authorities for the Department's education programming must occur by the close of the 2007-2008 fiscal year. Committee members feel it is incumbent upon them, in their oversight role, to contribute to and influence these processes in a timely fashion.

The Committee acknowledges that all levels of Aboriginal learners' education are in need of reform. Policy-makers and social scientists appear to underscore, in particular, the necessity for improvements to K-12 systems for First Nations and Inuit students. Officials from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development confirmed to the Committee that at present "[t]he government's top priority is on K-12".⁴ The National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning takes the position, however, that one component of Aboriginal education should not be given precedence over others:

There is a significant but unusual discussion about whether government should focus on elementary and secondary education as opposed to post-secondary. This is not the type of discussion that occurs within mainstream when considering how to support the achievements of students. Federal government involvement in First Nations and Aboriginal post-secondary education should not be an either/or matter.⁵

Asked to share his views on this subject, Michael Mendelson of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy answered that "anything we can do to improve the educational outcomes would be a higher priority than almost anything I could think of in Canada ... do both, I would say".⁶

The Committee agrees that it ought not to be an either/or proposition. In focusing its initial study of Aboriginal education on the post-secondary component, we aim to dispel the notion that proven and promising initiatives in the area of Aboriginal post-secondary education are lacking. Successful practices and models that are underway in all regions should be acknowledged, supported and expanded. The Committee also aims to underscore some key areas of concern for Aboriginal learners and educators at the post-secondary level that are equally and urgently deserving of remedial measures.

⁴ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

⁵ Letter to the Committee from Trevor Lewis, Chair of the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning, dated 4 October 2006.

⁶ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

II. BACKGROUND

A. General

Education of Aboriginal learners is a matter of divided constitutional responsibility. In addition, not all Aboriginal learners have access to the same programs. Although education is, generally speaking, an area of provincial responsibility under the *Constitution Act, 1867* (section 93), “Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians” fall under federal jurisdiction (subsection 91(24)). The *Indian Act*, the principal vehicle for the exercise of this federal power, thus provides for the education of primary and secondary First Nations students who reside on reserve lands, whether the schooling takes place on- or off-reserve.⁷ Under federal policy, this education authority does not extend to registered or “status” First Nations students who reside off-reserve, Métis and “Non-Status Indian” students, who generally use provincial education programs in the same way as non-Aboriginal provincial residents.

The Department relies on statutory authority for funding First Nations learners at the primary and secondary levels. It views funding the post-secondary education of on- and off-reserve First Nations students and Inuit learners⁸ as a matter of social policy. Paul Leblanc, then-Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Socio-Economic Policy and Regional Operations, told the Committee that

[T]he *Indian Act* covers basic education [at] the elementary and secondary levels, but not post-secondary education. ... We consider program policies at the post-secondary level discretionary, as the result of government policies to support First Nations. ... Our interpretation is that there is nothing in the Act that requires a contribution at the post-secondary level, and that there is nothing in the Act that limits the possibility of contributing at the post-secondary level.⁹

Committee members recognize that First Nations people strongly disagree on this point, maintaining that “education at all levels is an inherent Aboriginal and Treaty right that is recognized in the Canadian Constitution”¹⁰. We acknowledge the fundamental nature of this longstanding disagreement, but are not in a position to resolve the substantive legal issue it raises.

⁷ R.S. 1985, c I-6, sections 114 to 122.

⁸ Since a 1939 ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada finding “Eskimos” to be “Indians” for purposes of subsection 91(24), the federal government has assumed responsibility for the Inuit (*Re Eskimo*, [1939] S.C.R. 104). However, the Inuit are not covered by the *Indian Act*.

⁹ *Evidence*, 5 June 2006.

¹⁰ Assembly of First Nations. “First Nation Perspectives on Post Secondary Education”, written submission to the Committee, dated 6 November 2006.

B. Summary History of the Department's Post-Secondary Education Program (PSE)

Until the 1940s, First Nations people enrolling in post-secondary institutions were required to surrender their status as "Indians". In the ensuing period, limited financial assistance was available to First Nations and Inuit students for post-secondary vocational and trades training. In 1968, the Department created a new vocational program which also provided direct financial assistance to the relatively low numbers of First Nations people and Inuit enrolled in universities or colleges.

The Department's post-secondary education programming for First Nations and Inuit students has evolved since its modest origins in 1968. Starting in 1977, the new Post-Secondary Educational Assistance Program (PSEAP) aimed to encourage greater numbers of First Nations and Inuit learners to attend post-secondary institutions. Under this program, initially administered by the Department, funding was made available to virtually all eligible students. Nine categories of expenses under the PSEAP included tuition, books, counselling, living expenses and travel, as well as special allowances under a number of headings. The PSEAP was reviewed between 1987 and 1989, during which time new interim guidelines took effect, including tying annual funding strictly to the amount allocated in the Main Estimates, and a system to prioritize applications in order to deal with deferrals. In 1989, the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) that remains in effect replaced and modified the PSEAP. These were the modifications considered by this committee's predecessor in 1989. Among other changes, the PSSSP reduced the categories of eligible expenses for which funding was available, and provided for deferral of applications that could not be accommodated within the budget.

The two other components of the Department's Post-Secondary Education Program are the University and College Entrance Program (UCEP) and the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). The UCEP was approved in 1983 to enable First Nations and Inuit learners lacking the necessary qualifications to gain admission to post-secondary programs to take part in preparatory programs offered by post-secondary institutions. The ISSP, created in 1989 to bring existing funding practices under one program, provides financial support to First Nations and other post-secondary institutions for developing programs that are tailored to First Nations and Inuit students.

The objectives, eligibility criteria and financial assistance limits for the three elements of the PSE Program are set out in the Department's *Post-Secondary Education National Program Guidelines*. They define "post-secondary education" as

A program of studies offered by a post-secondary institution that includes at least one academic year (as defined by the institution), and for which

completion of secondary school studies, or its equivalent as recognized by the post-secondary institution, is required.¹¹

Most student funding under the PSE Program is currently administered by First Nations and Inuit administrators. The PSE Program is not accessible to Métis and Non-Status First Nations learners.¹²

C. Some numbers

In focusing on planning for the future of Aboriginal post-secondary education, the Committee is acutely aware of present factors that influence that planning. A review of statistical and other information from a variety of sources provides a snapshot of some of these factors.¹³

1. Demographics

The Aboriginal population is growing significantly faster than the non-Aboriginal population. Departmental documents indicate that between 1971 and 2001, the Aboriginal population grew by 322%,¹⁴ while the non-Aboriginal population showed an increase of just 37%. They also suggest variation in rates of growth among different Aboriginal groups. The age structure of the Aboriginal population is accordingly younger than that of the rest of the Canadian population, with about 50% under 25 years of age, and over a third under age 14. According to one estimate, there are currently about 300,000 Aboriginal children and youth who could enter the labour force over the next 15 years. At the same time, we know the working population of Canada is aging, and that worker shortages are predicted. The Conference Board of Canada estimates a shortfall of about one million workers within 20 years.

¹¹ Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. *Post-Secondary Education National Program Guidelines*, November 2003, p. 7.

¹² These groups may apply to other funding sources that are either available to the general non-Aboriginal population, such as the Canada Student Loans program, or that target Aboriginal learners without reference to status, such as training support under federal Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements from Human Resources and Social Development Canada or the scholarship and bursary program of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation. These programs are also accessible to registered First Nations and Inuit learners.

¹³ The Committee looked at figures in documents prepared by or for the Department, those of Statistics Canada based on the 2001 Census, and those in a number of non-governmental sources. We acknowledge that precise numbers under the headings we include may differ slightly according to the source. However, within that margin, all appear to agree on the general picture.

¹⁴ For First Nations people, the increase is attributable, in part, to rapid growth in the "status Indian" population following Bill C-31 amendments to registration provisions in the *Indian Act* in 1985.

2. The Gap

Post-secondary enrolment rates among Aboriginal students have increased exponentially over recent decades,¹⁵ with a continuing increase in education attainment levels seen among all Aboriginal groups.¹⁶ This is particularly apparent in the non-university sector, where attainment levels approach parity with those of non-Aboriginal Canadians.¹⁷ However, the levels overall are not increasing as quickly among the Aboriginal population, resulting in a continuing gap. In 2001, 53.4% of non-Aboriginal people had post-secondary credentials (college, trade or university), versus 38% of Aboriginal learners with post-secondary training.¹⁸ From 1996-2001, it appears the gap in university attainment rose slightly. About 5% of registered First Nations people, 7% of both Métis and non-registered First Nations people, and 2% of Inuit had university degrees or certificates, compared with 18% among the non-Aboriginal population.

3. Post-secondary Funding

In 2005-2006, departmental expenditures on its PSE Program amounted to about \$305 million of the \$1.5 billion allocated to education overall.¹⁹ Most of these monies go to fund First Nations and Inuit students under the PSSSP and UCEP. Under program guidelines, ISSP funding may not exceed 12% of the Department's total PSE allocation. Funding for the PSE Program has been capped at 2% annual growth since 1996.

4. Students Funded

Departmental officials told the Committee that approximately 23,000 First Nations and Inuit learners received post-secondary financial assistance from the Department in 2004-2005, representing a nearly ten-fold increase from 1976

¹⁵ According to one report consulted, there has been a 700% increase in the number of First Nations students enrolled in post-secondary institutions in Canada since the 1970s, from 4,100 students to 26,000 in 2003. Junor, Sean and Alex Usher. *The Price of Knowledge 2004: Access and Student Finance in Canada*. Montreal: Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, Research Series, 2004, p. 61.
http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/uploadfiles/documents/research/Price_of_Knowledge-2004.pdf

¹⁶ See Statistics Canada. *2001 Census*. Catalogue Number 97F0011XCB01042.
<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/reference/2001stubssets/pdf/92-400-XIE02001.pdf>

¹⁷ Statistics Canada suggests that in 2001, 16% of Aboriginal Canadians of working age possessed a trade certificate, exceeding the percentage of the general population with similar credentials (13%). Similarly, the percentage of Aboriginal people with college diplomas (15%), was only slightly lower than that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (18%).

¹⁸ Submissions from the Assembly of First Nations place the gap in post-secondary graduation rates at 18%.

¹⁹ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

levels.²⁰ That figure represents an ongoing decline in the numbers of learners funded over recent years. Departmental documents show approximately 27,000 First Nations and Inuit students receiving assistance in 1995-1996, and a downward trend starting in 1999. They suggest that decreasing enrolment “may be partly due to the fact that the PSE Program operates on a fixed budget while tuition and other incidental costs generally increase”.²¹ In her 2004 report, the Auditor General cited an Assembly of First Nations report indicating that, as of 2000, about 9,500 First Nations people were unable to pursue post-secondary education owing to lack of federal funding.²²

D. Previous Reports on Aboriginal Post-secondary Education

Preparing for this study, Committee members became aware that scores of reports on Aboriginal education, including post-secondary education, have been released in recent decades by various Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups, academics, think tanks and governmental bodies. In our survey of numerous contemporary regional and national reports dealing with PSE, common themes and key issues emerged. Our summary overview gives an indication of subjects canvassed in just some of the work that has been done in the field. A fuller outline, and a list of reports consulted, can be found at Appendix B.

- The reports recognize increased rates of post-secondary educational attainment among First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners over the past 30 years, while also acknowledging significant remaining gaps with non-Aboriginal education levels, increased demands for funding under the Department’s PSE Program, and the pressing need to increase the high school completion rate of Aboriginal learners.
- Many reports describe financial, historical, academic, cultural, geographic and social barriers encountered by First Nations, Métis and Inuit students who want to go on to or to continue in post-secondary studies.
- Existing “best practices” to remove or mitigate barriers facing Aboriginal post-secondary learners are canvassed, while a number of regional and national reports point to areas for improving existing systems and expanding proven best practices.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. *Basic Departmental Data 2004*, p. 53.

²² Office of the Auditor General of Canada. *2004 Report of the Auditor General of Canada*. Chapter 5: “Indian and Northern Affairs Canada — Education Program and Post-Secondary Student Support”, Ottawa, 2004, par. 5.74.

- Studies outlining the personal characteristics of Aboriginal post-secondary learners point to factors distinguishing Aboriginal learners from their non-Aboriginal counterparts, such as age and family responsibilities, and differences among distinct segments of Aboriginal learner groups.
- Some reports outline the special challenges facing Aboriginal-controlled institutions relating primarily to unstable funding and lack of policy support.

The reports consulted have provided an instructive backdrop to the Committee's work. We noted, in particular, alongside descriptions of the undoubted challenges that Aboriginal post-secondary learners and educators face, descriptions of positive initiatives currently in place and of promising proposals to respond to those challenges. These appear to hold out promise for the future, justifying optimism about the long-term viability of Aboriginal post-secondary education, provided focused, timely interventions are made.

It must be added that the reports have also given Committee members a better appreciation of why Aboriginal people might see themselves as “studied to death” in some areas, and might experience frustration that, despite all the studies, the outstanding issues they document have still not been more effectively addressed. Gilbert Whiteduck of Québec's First Nations Education Council told us that the 2002 Minister's National Working Group on Education “concluded there were 6,000 reports on First Nations education in this country”.²³ In his view,

It is now time to stop studying the issue and take action, by developing specific programs. ... [W]e should really be thinking of the young people who no longer have any hope, and yet would like to make a positive contribution to Canadian society in their own culture.²⁴

III. WHAT THE COMMITTEE HEARD

The Committee's hearings, and the written submissions received, have enabled it to benefit from the input and insights of National Aboriginal Organizations, First Nations educators and administrators from many regions, Inuit organizations, educators and students. Witnesses raised a number of significant matters over the course of our meetings with them, generously sharing their varied perspectives about various aspects of Aboriginal post-secondary education. They told us of past and present successes, current projects, and hurdles that remain. In many respects, their evidence re-affirms and brings to life the “book-learning” outlined in the previous section and in Appendix B to this report.

²³ *Evidence*, 17 October 2006.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

A. Creating Positive Outcomes

[W]e've had many successes, both in programs that have been delivered and by the many young people who have returned to the community to take on some very important roles. We need to celebrate that...²⁵

**Gilbert Whiteduck, Senior Education Advisor,
First Nations Education Council**

Committee members believe it is important to highlight the reality, which often seems overlooked and unappreciated in the public discourse, that Aboriginal educational organizations, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal post-secondary institutions and educators across the country have made and continue to make great strides in identifying and meeting post-secondary educational needs specific to Aboriginal learners. During our hearings, we learned of just some of the successful models in place, and just some of the ongoing efforts to develop or enhance systems more fully responsive to those needs. We know they represent a small fraction of the hundreds of positive initiatives that are planned or operating across the country, some with lengthy histories of achievement.

Our witnesses told us of a range of noteworthy programs and projects.

- Since 1985, the Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program has offered Nunavut high school graduates culturally appropriate transitional programming. The NS Program has an 80% completion rate and a high employment record for its graduates.
- In Québec, the First Nations Education Council is putting in place the underpinnings of a college-level First Nations institute which it hopes to have operational by 2008.²⁶ The mainstream Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue in northern Québec offers a variety of programming to the region's First Nations and Inuit learners; plans for a First Nations Institution within the University are underway.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Committee members were pleased to learn, prior to the close of its hearings, that the federal government was to contribute \$730,800 to FNEC, including \$365,000 for a feasibility study with respect to a post-secondary institution of the CEGEP type. See Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. "Government of Canada Supports First Nations of Quebec with respect to Education", *News Release*, Ottawa, 26 October 2006.

²⁷ The Committee was equally pleased to learn that the federal and Québec governments would each be contributing \$3.8 million toward the construction of UQAT's First Nations Pavilion. See "Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones. « L'Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue aura un pavillon des Premières Nations », *Communiqué*, Mashteuiatsh, 26 October 2007; Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. "Canada's New Government Announces Over \$88 Million in Initiatives and Investments at Socio-Economic Forum in Quebec", *News Release*, Ottawa, 27 October 2007.

- The Prince Albert Grand Council in northern Saskatchewan carries out significant data-collection and tracking in relation to secondary and post-secondary learners and uses the results to enhance its policy formulation and decision-making.
- In British Columbia, the B.C. Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners Group comprises a broad-based partnership working collaboratively to identify key priorities for post-secondary Aboriginal students.
- The University of Winnipeg's Aboriginal Student Services Centre offers a home away from home and reduces adjustment difficulties for Aboriginal learners.
- The First Nations Technical Institute offers a variety of diploma, degree and certificate programs, uses various delivery methods to reduce barriers to PSE, and has a 90% employment rate for graduates.
- Membertou First Nation in Nova Scotia works to obtain commitments from mainstream post-secondary institutions to invest in the community and treats post-secondary education as a top priority, financing every applicant.

The Committee believes these initiatives and other significant achievements we learned of over the course of our hearings, more fully described in Appendix A to this report, provide valuable indicators of important advances in Aboriginal post-secondary education.

Committee members derived positive messages from the witnesses' evidence of their efforts to promote opportunities for post-secondary First Nations, Inuit and Métis learners. Probably the most fundamental has to do with the broader significance of the post-secondary achievement of every individual Aboriginal learner. This point was brought home by Morley Hanson, Coordinator of the Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program, who stressed the qualitative markers of success for NS students.

Most importantly, they've developed some strong positive attitudes about themselves as Inuit, and this is what we've found to be the most important impact of the program. Students move away from the program with increased pride in who they are, increased respect for their culture, their society, and their people. They develop confidence in themselves. They're enthusiastic and they're strongly committed to the future of Nunavut and to being involved in it.²⁸

²⁸ Evidence, 19 September 2006.

It was further underscored by Michael Mendelson of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

[E]very single Aboriginal student who gets into a post-secondary education institution is vitally important to Canada and to their communities, an incredible opportunity to make a contribution to our future.²⁹

A recurrent theme running through the testimony is that of partnership. Chief Nathan Matthew of the First Nations Education Steering Committee in British Columbia told us that in the view of his organization, “working together with major stakeholders is a positive thing”,³⁰ while Darren Googoo from Membertou spoke of the “need for a true partnership to exist between First Nations and institutions of higher learning”.³¹ The First Nations Technical Institute was established through partnerships; its submissions list the many accredited mainstream post-secondary institutions with which it partners in delivering its programs.³² The First Nations Education Council is currently developing partnerships to prepare for the launching of its First Nations institution.

The Committee heard evidence of the practical reality that outcomes are likely to improve when program design and delivery are responsive to the specific needs and capacities of diverse communities and individuals. As Gilbert Whiteduck told us, “the solutions are found with the community”.³³ This approach is exemplified by the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue’s delivery of a bachelor’s program directly to nine Cree communities over a seven year period, and by UQAT’s offering of English and French language programming to Inuit and First Nations students in the region. The First Nations Technical Institute’s attention to community delivery of programs is another example. The opening of the Aboriginal Student Services Centre at the University of Winnipeg acknowledges and aims to address the particular circumstances of Aboriginal learners within a large institution.

The testimony also made it clear that no single solution will meet the needs of all Aboriginal learners. Lise Bastien of Québec’s First Nations Education Council reminded the Committee that “[w]e must consider as many alternatives as possible in order to reach as many students as possible”.³⁴

Committee members find an important message in our witnesses’ forward-looking approach to outstanding issues. As Gilbert Whiteduck told us,

²⁹ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

³⁰ *Evidence*, 26 September 2006.

³¹ *Evidence*, 31 October 2006.

³² Letter to the Committee from Karihwakeron Tim Thompson, President and CAO of the First Nations Technical Institute, dated 5 October 2006.

³³ *Evidence*, 17 October 2006.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Our organization and the communities are prepared to work with INAC to move forward meaningfully, to find solutions that are going to work, to celebrate and keep talking about the positive, to keep looking forward, and not looking at what's lacking, but looking at the potential we need to draw upon.³⁵

Roberta Jamieson, President and CEO of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation expressed a similar determination, stating that “conversion of potential to success to achievement won’t just happen. It requires commitment, hard work, and a spirit that just won’t give up. It also requires that we work together...”³⁶ Peter Dinsdale, Executive Director of the National Association of Friendship Centres and the first in his family to complete high school, was equally focused.

I assure you that my child will go to some kind of post-secondary education. There will be a cultural achievement in my household. I think . . . that the best we can do is create a cultural achievement in every Aboriginal household across this country. Graduate that single Aboriginal woman in downtown Winnipeg, so that she has the expectation for her child. It’s no longer okay to have multi-generational high school dropouts. The expectation is that we finish school. The expectation is that we succeed in one area or another. I believe in all honesty that is how we are going to get to the source of the problems.³⁷

B. Continuing Challenges

Witnesses who accepted the Committee’s invitation to take part in its study of Aboriginal post-secondary education told us of many challenges that confront First Nations, Inuit and Métis learners. Based on the testimony we heard, Committee members have determined that, for purposes of this report, identified shortcomings in the Department’s current Post-Secondary Education Program demand the most immediate action. As the following review of evidence attests, these deficiencies have to do primarily, but not exclusively, with issues of student funding; related outstanding concerns in areas of data collection and tracking are also pressing. The situation of Aboriginal post-secondary institutions under the Indian Studies Support Program, the ongoing matter of broader access to post-secondary programming, and the particular area of skills training are other key issues that must be addressed.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

³⁷ *Evidence* 14 June 2006.

1. Post-Secondary Student Support Program

a. Student Funding

If our students struggle through their childhood to get to the point where they can go on to advanced training, advanced education, and then find that the resources aren't there for them to move on, the tragedy is so painful we simply cannot allow it to happen.³⁸

Roberta Jamieson, President and Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Within the Committee's time constraints, witness testimony under this heading dealt primarily with the issue of how First Nations students are faring under this component of the Department's PSE Program, which essentially includes the UCEP with respect to funding allocations. We noted the testimony of Nathan Obed of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.³⁹ urging a review of all PSE expenditures to ensure equal and effective access to funding for Inuit learners.⁴⁰ However, at this time, the Committee has insufficient information at its disposal to enable extensive comment on the circumstances and concerns specific to Inuit learners under the PSSSP.⁴¹

The Committee recognizes, and our witnesses confirmed, that in the context of Aboriginal post-secondary education, no single "barrier" factor operates in isolation from other circumstances relevant to each learner. Nevertheless, Committee members were struck by the consensus view, expressed by all those who addressed the matter, that inadequate funding under the PSSSP presents a critical and ongoing obstacle that hinders significant numbers of First Nations learners from taking advantage of post-secondary opportunities.

I've seen the wind taken out of so many sails when a kid who was excited last year comes to me and says, "I got through the school, and I'm done". A lot of factors go into getting into grade 12 in some of our communities. To go that far is pretty tough. I've been working with First Nations students for over twenty years. It's tough the first couple of times you see it, but what's even tougher is that you develop a thick skin. Sometimes when I leave a

³⁸ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

³⁹ NTI represents the interests of Inuit beneficiaries under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

⁴⁰ *Evidence*, 19 September 2006.

⁴¹ The Committee learned from Richard Budgell, Executive Coordinator of Post-Secondary Education of the Department's Education Branch, that Inuit post-secondary learners south of 60, as well as those who are no longer permanent residents of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, are also eligible for PSSSP funding. For those who reside in the NWT and Nunavut, such as those attending the NS Program, the territorial funding formula provides funding from the federal government for the expenditures of territorial governments, including expenditures on post-secondary education programs: *Evidence*, 19 October 2006. NS students receive funding from the Government of Nunavut's Financial Assistance for Nunavut Students program.

community that I fly into, I think about talking with that tough skin to five or six kids. I've had a heck of a lot of long plane rides.⁴²

Keith Frame, Research Coordinator Prince Albert Grand Council

To the Committee, the testimony we heard about the circumstances confronting First Nations learners and educators relates to the numbers, cited earlier in this report, showing that the pool of potential post-secondary learners is growing rapidly, that the Department's funding of PSE programs has been capped at a 2% annual increase since 1996, and that fewer First Nations learners are enrolling in post-secondary institutions. Our witnesses linked current declines in enrolment to the annual funding "cap" that has been in effect for a decade, and told the Committee about impacts experienced at the community level.

Summing up the situation for Québec First Nations communities, Gilbert Whiteduck of the First Nations Education Council told us that FNEC studies show decreased student enrolment over the past five or six years as a result of lack of funding support under the existing policy. In his view, the cap was put in place despite demographics showing a rapidly rising First Nations population and despite improvements in high school completion rates, with the result that funding "was just not there for a lot of our students".

[T]he program — and the policy that overlooks the program and that determines the level of funding — was not keeping pace with the realities of society, such as the rising cost of tuition ... and just the rising cost of living expenses and technology.

So the program has not kept pace, and our students are having a difficult time. A number of students often decide not to go because they just don't have the resources...⁴³

Keith Frame told us that enrolment figures for First Nations learners in the 28 communities of the Prince Albert Grand Council are also in decline over the last five to six years.

This means ... in some communities, when they get their budget for post-secondary education, it hasn't increased, but the desire to go to post-secondary has. The money is limited, and the opportunity has become limited for our youth.

... When we took a look at post-secondary students ... one of the critical factors in their world was the price index and how that relates to the cost of living. Generally, the costs of living are 29% higher now than they were in 1990. Also, [w]hat we found was that ... tuitions have increased on average by 8.1% a year, while inflation has increased by 1.9%. So the pot of money,

⁴² *Evidence*, 28 September 2006.

⁴³ *Evidence*, 17 October 2006.

the budget that's accessible to our students, has remained the same for a fair number of years. And within that post-secondary support you do get, things cost a lot more today than they did a number of years ago.⁴⁴

Nathan Matthew of the First Nations Education Steering Committee agreed that these factors are critical, stressing that actual tuition costs and “all the issues around what it costs to live: food, transportation, accommodation, and child care”⁴⁵ need to be taken into account. Dr. Mary Young, Director of the University of Winnipeg’s Aboriginal Students Services Centre, told us that “[o]ne of the major things that needs to change with post-secondary education is the money the students get. They still get \$675 a month to live on. I tried to live on that in 1973”.⁴⁶

Darren Googoo described the funding shortfall at Membertou.

Currently, my community receives an allocation of approximately \$12,200 to send one person to a post-secondary institution. When I started my job nine years ago, the amount of money we received ... was \$11,726 per student for post-secondary education.

... Unfortunately, our funding levels have been stabilized for the last ten years. While we’re still expected to send the same number of people to university, now we have to do it with a lot fewer dollars, and we haven’t been as successful as we need to be.

... [It costs] our community approximately \$16,700 to send one person to post-secondary ... we’re about 33% under funded on a per student basis. That makes it very difficult.⁴⁷

As we have noted elsewhere, Membertou, unlike many or most First Nations communities, has attained the capacity to make post-secondary education a priority and to finance every student who applies for post-secondary funding. Mr. Googoo believes that “most communities in Canada would make [post-secondary education] the top priority within their community if they had the funding”.⁴⁸

According to Roberta Jamieson “many of the students who come to [the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation] come despite being provided with some assistance through the Department. ... We have many who report to us and

⁴⁴ *Evidence*, 28 September 2006.

⁴⁵ *Evidence*, 26 September 2006.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Evidence*, 31 October 2006.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

demonstrate that either they have accessed inadequate funds or there has been no funding left”.⁴⁹

Our witnesses explained that an immediate consequence of inadequate funding is lengthening waiting lists of longer duration for unfunded students. According to Keith Frame, in just one community within the Prince Albert Grand Council, 67 students who applied for funding last year did not get it, and socio-economic conditions prevailing in the communities mean that parents are not in a position to take up the slack. Even if some new applicants are approved for funding,

there are still students who didn't get in ... We might have twenty from the year before and ten from the year before that. What happens is you get on the waiting list and as your time comes up you might get in, but some of the waiting lists are three, four, five, six years old.⁵⁰

Roberta Jamieson added that in 2004, “in my own community at Six Nations ... I had a full 400 students who were accepted for post-secondary ... who we could not fund”⁵¹. Darren Googoo told us that Membertou’s sister community, Eskasoni, “has funding for approximately eighty students per year. Routinely, they get applications of 120 to 150. They have to turn away forty to seventy students per year. That’s a difficult situation for that community”.⁵²

Committee members heard that for community administrators, another direct effect of inadequate funding is the necessity to reluctantly set priorities among too many applicants for too few dollars. As Darren Googoo put it, “It means that ... we have to begin to pick and choose which students go to university and which students don't. I don't like to be in the position where I have to tell people how to prioritize their dreams”.⁵³ Similarly, Keith Frame told us that

[I]t's usually difficult for those folks who do want ... to go into medicine or into dentistry...

A lot of our students are hoping to get into four-year programs, hoping to get into two-year programs. You have to set priorities. ... Can you afford to send someone to school for seven years and two kids for no years, or could you send two for four years and leave the one behind? Those are the decisions that take place.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

⁵⁰ *Evidence*, 28 September 2006.

⁵¹ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

⁵² *Evidence*, 31 October 2006.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Evidence*, 28 September 2006.

Participants in our study suggested they perceive the problem presented by greater numbers of Aboriginal learners unable to gain access to post-secondary education as pressing and growing. The Assembly of First Nations wrote that

Despite federal statistics consistently demonstrating attainment gaps, [DIAND] has failed to respond adequately to this education crisis — due largely to federal funding policy restrictions — resulting in an increasing number of First Nation students who are unable to achieve their academic goals.⁵⁵

Peter Dinsdale explained to the Committee that although he did not receive funding from his community for his first three years of university,

I don't think the issue is that my community doesn't want to support me; I think there are too many people ready to go. We have, what, 90% of kids ... not completing university right now? We want to pick that up. And if you want to pick that up immediately, give them money to go. We have kids on waiting lists who aren't able to go. We have kids who are ready, who have gone through the system, who have applied and been accepted, and who don't have the resources. ... Once the band turns them down, they might not go back. So that's part of the inclusiveness, making sure there's access and funding available.⁵⁶

To the Assembly of First Nations, the gap in educational attainment “cannot be ascribed to First Nation students failing within the system, but rather, the system failing First Nation students”. The organization is concerned that “based on current rates of attainment, it is expected that the PSE gap will worsen and that this will have growing consequences for the future of Canada’s economy”.⁵⁷

In her appearance before the Committee, Christine Cram, then-Acting Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Socio-Economic Policy and Regional Operations, told us about reports conducted in connection with the Department’s review of the PSE Program showing that “First Nations would like to see increased funding in the program to reflect increases in tuition fees and cost of living and increases in overall demand”.⁵⁸ When asked to comment on decreased enrolment in relation to population growth and the current 2% cap on funding, Ms. Cram acknowledged that “the value of that money over time ... is declining because costs are going up”, adding that “we would suspect the \$305 million we currently have for post-secondary education is probably insufficient. What we don’t know is how much would be [sufficient]”.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Assembly of First Nations. “First Nation Perspectives on Post Secondary Education”, written submission to the Committee, dated 6 November 2006.

⁵⁶ *Evidence*, 14 June 2006.

⁵⁷ Assembly of First Nations. “First Nation Perspectives on Post Secondary Education”, written submission to the Committee, dated 6 November 2006.

⁵⁸ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

b. Data Collection and Tracking about First Nations Learners

The Committee heard evidence from a number of witnesses on the subject of collecting data about and tracking First Nations post-secondary learners. Their testimony attested to the importance of accurate information-gathering in relation to the numbers and needs of these learners, as well as to the need for additional resources to enable it. The evidence also pointed to critical persistent gaps in information-gathering by the Department in this area. Based on what it heard, Committee members were able to appreciate the interaction between data collection and tracking and funding issues.

Nowhere was the direct link more apparent than in the evidence of departmental officials. Officials essentially confirmed to the Committee that deficiencies in collection of accurate data by the Department, as identified in the Auditor General's 2004 report, remain problematic. Christine Cram told us that the Department is aware "that qualified applicants are currently turned down by some First Nations because of a shortage of funding in the First Nation's post-secondary allocation in that year".⁶⁰ According to Ms. Cram, while the Department has information on spending, "we don't have any on the number of students whose request regarding post-secondary education could not be accepted".⁶¹ Richard Budgell, Executive Coordinator of Post-secondary Education in the Department's Education Branch, added that the Department simply does not collect information on the numbers of eligible students denied funding.

If that were to be collected, that would mean there would be another requirement ... to First Nations to collect that information and aggregate it and submit it. We're conscious ... about the burden ... that is put on First Nations. ... It has to be seriously considered whether this is information we feel we need regionally, nationally, on a First Nations level...⁶²

Ms. Cram acknowledged that for the Department, not having a grasp on accurate numbers in the specific category of eligible, unfunded students, has significant implications for planning.

[T]o determine how much money we need, we have to know what the demand is. For the time being, the information we have is inaccurate. So we cannot say whether we need double \$300 million or how much is available to us. We will have to get that information before we can forecast the needs.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Ms. Cram informed the Committee that this matter is under review as part of the Department's current framework renewal process. That process is to be completed by June 2007.

In other evidence heard by the Committee, witnesses' appreciation of the local, regional and national value of data collection and tracking, for funding and other purposes, was apparent. Nathan Matthew told us that the B.C. Aboriginal Post-secondary Education and Training Partners are working on collecting data about post-secondary Aboriginal learners in the province because "[w]e don't believe we have enough information to make appropriate decisions. We want to collect information on a research basis about how our kids are doing and make decisions based on that".⁶⁴ According to Chief Matthew,

[W]e have to get real in terms of the numbers we're dealing with. We have an idea about how many students aren't getting access to post-secondary education just because of funding. They're eligible, but they're not getting in. We don't have any research tools to tell us the real numbers on that. I think we have to develop those and make sure First Nations are involved with the collection of information.

We need to be tracking students: how are we doing prior to the students getting to post-secondary education? A lot of the problems we're having in terms of success are predictable. If they're not on an academic math or English track that allows them to get into a post-secondary program, an academic program, what kind of expectation are we giving our students? ... I think we have to make sure we have a good information base about the students we're dealing with and not depend on Statistics Canada or anything like that and make some guesses five years after the fact. That I think is a real challenge.⁶⁵

For Keith Frame, collecting precise community-level data and tracking it provide important tools that enable the Prince Albert Grand Council to identify and plan for learners' and communities' needs. The Assembly of First Nations addressed the matter of resources required to undertake data-gathering and tracking. In its view,

Increased financial support is needed to properly assess the success of students and to conduct the necessary research for policy development. Post-secondary funding needs to include administration funding for data collection and analysis, the tracking of students and the technology to do so.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Evidence*, 26 September 2006.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Chief Matthew also told the Committee about collaborative data-collection and tracking processes underway with provincial and other partners in B.C.'s K-12 systems, both on- and off-reserve.

⁶⁶ Assembly of First Nations. "First Nation Perspectives on Post Secondary Education", written submission to the Committee, dated 6 November 2006.

Similarly, the First Nations Education Council takes the position that “[c]ommunities need to be provided with funding support to allow them to better track the students they fund and to more effectively work in collaboration with mainstream institutions”.⁶⁷

Roberta Jamieson told the Committee about the tracking of learners in the health area that the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation conducted in 2005-2006.

[W]e have a statistical profile of our applicants with respect to gender, Aboriginal affiliation, province, residence, scholarships, educational level, barriers they’ve encountered, supports they need to be successful, how they feel about our service, employment prospects, who they’re working with, whether they’re working in their field of study, whether they’re working in the communities, record of volunteer work, and whether they’re working for the government.⁶⁸

Ms. Jamieson stressed that this form of tracking is “critical and vital, and “should be readily available right across the country”.⁶⁹

In discussing his census data-based report on *Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada* with Committee members, Michael Mendelson described data collection as crucial in this relatively new area of research, and invited other researchers to undertake more extensive studies. This is in keeping with actions outlined in the report as preliminary to improved educational outcomes.⁷⁰

c. Allocation and Delivery of Post-Secondary Student Support Program Funding

Committee members understand that no single aspect of the PSSSP can be considered in isolation from its other facets. Another interconnected issue raised during the Committee’s inquiry was the basic question of how PSSSP funding is allocated. Not surprisingly, it, too, presents significant information-gathering and tracking issues.

In written submissions accompanying their appearance, the First Nations Education Council cited a departmental document outlining the evolution of the PSSSP funding delivery system. It explains that, prior to 1992, budgeting was based

⁶⁷ First Nations Education Council. “First Nations Post-secondary Education”, written submission to the Committee, dated 17 October 2006.

⁶⁸ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* NAAF is currently expanding its tracking to include learners in all funded post-secondary fields.

⁷⁰ Mendelson, Michael. *Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada*, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, July 2006. Accessible at <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/595ENG%2Epdf>

on a regional estimate of needs. However, “between 1992 and 1997, PSSSP funding became part of each region’s block funding arrangements — essentially the link between eligible student populations and level of funding was lost”.⁷¹ According to Gilbert Whiteduck, communities were then “given envelopes to work within; if they ran out of money, then there was a priority list of who would have access. ... It made it very challenging”.⁷²

Richard Budgell elaborated on how the current delivery system works: PSSSP funding is distributed to the Department’s regional offices, and by these offices to First Nations and Inuit administering organizations, typically the communities. Different regions use different calculations for distribution of funds, using a population basis of one form or another. According to Mr. Budgell, the “terms and conditions of the program and the nature of the funding instruments to First Nations do not require that this funding be spent only on post-secondary”.

The funding instruments with First Nations don’t operate that way ... If the First Nation finds that they ... have more post-secondary funding available than there is demand for, the First Nation has the capacity to transfer that amount of money into other of its priorities.⁷³

Mr. Budgell was unable to tell Committee members how often monies allocated for PSSSP are, in practice, spent on other community priorities such as infrastructure, or K-12 systems, because the Department does not collect the information or require that First Nations communities report on such re-allocations. Ms. Cram told us that “this is not a matter of misusing funds; it’s that, in order to be able to use post-secondary funds, an individual community has to have students it can fund. If it doesn’t have any, then it could use it for kindergarten to grade 12, or something like that”.⁷⁴ She added that “[t]here are not sufficient control measures, but we have not seen any cases of ineligible people receiving money. That problem does not exist. [A community that has responded] to all existing needs ... will not give the funds to someone who is ineligible”.⁷⁵

The Committee heard from Mr. Budgell that changes to the existing terms and conditions of the program could target PSSSP funding for exclusive use on that program, as is currently the practice for special education. As he acknowledged, the

⁷¹ First Nations Education Council. “First Nations Post-secondary Education”, written submission to the Committee, dated 17 October 2006, citing Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Departmental Audit and Evaluation Branch. *Evaluation of the Post-Secondary Education Program*, June 2005.

⁷² *Evidence*, 17 October 2006.

⁷³ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

fact that there are First Nations communities where the needs of eligible applicants exceed available PSSSP funds, is “obviously a problem”.⁷⁶

2. Other Key Issues

As we have indicated, the primary challenges witnesses raised before the Committee concerned student funding under the PSSSP and related issues. Nevertheless, participants in our study broached a number of additional matters that Committee members believe also warrant consideration in this report.

a. Indian Studies Support Program and Aboriginal-controlled PSE Institutions

[T]he development of First Nations post-secondary institutions, we believe, is the right way to go in terms of First Nations taking control and responsibility of post-secondary education, but there is very little support for that. So the rise of First Nations post-secondary institutions across the country is being limited...⁷⁷

Chief Nathan Matthew, First Nations Education Steering Committee

First Nations and Aboriginal controlled institutions operate on the edge of the post-secondary system in Canada...⁷⁸

First Nations Technical Institute

Although time constraints prevented the Committee from pursuing this topic as fully as it merits at this time, our study has enabled the Committee to gain some insight into the position of Aboriginal post-secondary institutions under the present ISSP program. According to the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning, there are currently 64 such institutes in Canada.⁷⁹ While highlighting the successes and proven benefits of these institutions for Aboriginal learners and their communities⁸⁰, our contributors expressed concern about the inadequate and unstable ISSP funding they currently receive.

⁷⁶ Ibid..

⁷⁷ *Evidence*, 26 September 2006.

⁷⁸ Letter to the Committee from Karihwakeron Tim Thompson, President and CAO of the First Nations Technical Institute, dated 5 October 2006.

⁷⁹ Letter to the Committee from Trevor Lewis, Chair of the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning, dated 4 October 2006.

⁸⁰ According to the NAIHL, these institutions “address the need for First Nations and Aboriginal professionals in our communities”, “have demonstrated high success rates in recruiting, retaining and graduating Aboriginal learners”, and are “also significant economic drivers in our communities through providing employment and other economic spin-offs”: Ibid.

The First Nations Technical Institute informed the Committee that ISSP funding of First Nations institutions in Ontario on the basis of annual proposals — which the Committee understands is the normal practice under PSE Program guidelines — has remained largely unchanged for a decade, with the result that

FNTI would require a 72% increase to its current allocation just to have the same spending power that it had a decade ago. A similar result would apply to other ISSP recipients.⁸¹

The FNTI identified as a “funding catch” the fact that, as ISSP funding is tied to PSSSP funding, an increased allocation to the ISSP would require subtracting from PSSSP monies. In the view of this organization, the federal approach to Aboriginal post-secondary institutions has “not changed to meet new and evolving demands”,⁸² while the NAIHL suggests that “Canada cannot continue to ignore the success”⁸³ achieved by them.

I attended an Aboriginal college more than 30 years ago. That college closed five years later. At least 50 young people used to graduate every year. That is an aberration. If this college were still operating in Québec, we would now have at least 30 times 50 youths with a college level diploma. I can tell you the socio-economic circumstances of our communities would be different.

Lise Bastien, Director, First Nations Education Council

Christine Cram of the Department of Indian Affairs told us that the ISSP provided some financial assistance to over 50 institutions in 2004-2005,⁸⁴ without specifying what percentages were “mainstream” versus Aboriginal-controlled.⁸⁵ According to Richard Budgell, ISSP expenditures were “about \$20 million in the past year ... considerably less than 12% of overall expenditures”,⁸⁶ i.e., the maximum percentage allowable under PSE Program guidelines. He added that, apart from core funding provided to the First Nations University of Canada in Saskatchewan, the Department hasn’t “come down with a decision about whether we would want to

⁸¹ Letter to the Committee from Karihwakeron Tim Thompson, President and CAO of the First Nations Technical Institute, dated 5 October 2006.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Letter to the Committee from Trevor Lewis, Chair of the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning, dated 4 October 2006.

⁸⁴ *Evidence*, 19 October, 2006.

⁸⁵ As was explained by the First Nations Technical Institute, this component of the PSE Program “originally funded many of the Native Studies and Native Access programs within mainstream colleges and universities, but over time has evolved to support Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institutions” as well: Letter to the Committee from Karihwakeron Tim Thompson, President and CAO of the First Nations Technical Institute, dated 5 October 2006.

⁸⁶ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

support operations for the expenses of [Aboriginal stand-alone] institutions. It's currently not permitted under the ISSP".⁸⁷

Committee members feel it is important to note that, in addition to concerns about ISSP funding, the NAIHL and the FNTI both stressed to the Committee that the absence of stable funding and formal recognition from the provinces also represent a major ongoing hurdle for Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary institutions.

Indigenous institutions are not eligible to receive operating grants, special grants, capital and infrastructure grants and research support like mainstream institutions. ... [M]ost operate on short-term funding grants. The lack of formal recognition of Indigenous institutions also means that they do not have the authority to grant provincially recognized certificates, diplomas and degrees.⁸⁸

As we learned, Aboriginal institutions must partner with mainstream institutions in order to provide learners with recognized credentials and retain eligibility for ISSP and other funding,⁸⁹ while the partnered institutions are able to count the students in the Aboriginal institutions' programs and receive corresponding grants. The NAIHL described this situation as untenable. In the AFN's submissions, "it appears that First Nation institutions are forced to pay double the cost to operate and deliver post-secondary programs".⁹⁰

b. Access to Post-secondary Programming

[W]hat about the non-status population in this country who cannot access some of those moneys because they don't hold a discretionary status card?⁹¹

Patrick Brazeau, National Chief, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples

We mentioned earlier in this report that the Department's post-secondary funding is not available to Métis learners or to First Nations learners without status under the *Indian Act*. At the same time, Committee members know, from our preparatory reading and the evidence we heard, that barriers to post-secondary educational attainment affect the entire spectrum of Aboriginal learners. We also

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Letter to the Committee from Trevor Lewis, Chair of the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning, dated 4 October 2006.

⁸⁹ Letter to the Committee from Karihwakeron Tim Thompson, President and CAO of the First Nations Technical Institute, dated 5 October 2006.

⁹⁰ Assembly of First Nations. "First Nation Perspectives on Post Secondary Education", written submission to the Committee, dated 6 November 2006.

⁹¹ *Evidence*, 12 June 2006.

know that the matter of broader access to PSE or equivalent programming has long been a source of concern for “non-reserve” Aboriginal groups. Evidence we heard confirmed that this remains the case. Witnesses discussing the access issue described it as raising concerns about justice and equity, and about current gaps in government policies.

Peter Dinsdale of the NAFC suggested to the Committee that “[i]f we’re serious about Aboriginal kids graduating from school”, the present needs of Aboriginal learners across the country other than “status Indians” must be considered too. In his view,

[T]he issue is one of both access and equity — access across the country and equity as to your legal status. If Bill C-31 defines me as an Indian, I have access; if the government decides I’m not an Indian, I don’t have access.⁹²

Anita Olsen-Harper of the Native Women’s Association of Canada agreed that the Department’s focus on registered First Nations people is a problem because “there are many people who have Aboriginal descent and may never ever have the hope of getting onto the registry rolls”.⁹³

Patrick Brazeau of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples invited the Committee to look into what he calls “the situation of discrimination in federal education programs for Aboriginal peoples [based on] arbitrary and irrelevant criteria such as status under the *Indian Act*”, which he places “at the core of the sad and unacceptable failure of current educational social policies, whether federal or provincial”.⁹⁴ CAP’s written submissions suggest that “neither the federal nor provincial governments want to accept any responsibility for funding, or otherwise dealing with the academic pursuits of off-reserve Aboriginal people”.⁹⁵ According to Chief Brazeau,

[W]hat happens with respect to the off-reserve population in this country ... is that they fall between the cracks. Our position is that we know the federal government has funding for education. We know provincial governments have funding for education. So I think it’s time that we be honest with ourselves in terms of who does what, how we can start a dialogue amongst ourselves...⁹⁶

⁹² *Evidence*, 14 June 2006. In 1985, Bill C-31 amended the criteria for registration as an “Indian” in the *Indian Act*.

⁹³ *Evidence*, 12 June 2006.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Congress of Aboriginal Peoples. “Notes for a Presentation on Aboriginal Education”, 12 June 2006, Annex 2, “Background on Post Secondary Education for Off-Reserve Aboriginal Peoples”, p. 4.

⁹⁶ *Evidence*, 12 June 2006.

Asked to comment on the matter of access with respect to Métis people, Allan MacDonald, Director General of the Department's Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, acknowledged that "there is no post-secondary program for Métis similar to those for First Nations", owing to the federal government's view of its primary responsibilities toward First Nations people and its resulting policy choices. Nor, according to Christine Cram, is the Department currently considering "expanding the eligibility criteria [of the Department's PSE Program] ... to include Métis". However, Mr. MacDonald explained, the federal government does provide indirect federal support to Métis learners. For example,

The federal government a number of years ago helped to capitalize the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, with about \$12 million. We know that Métis are heavy users of the bursaries and scholarships that institution grants.⁹⁷

The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement (AHRDA) program was also mentioned as a vehicle through which Métis students may gain access to post-secondary education. It is Committee members' understanding that these indirect supports are also available to non-status First Nations people, and for that matter to PSE Program-eligible learners.

Mr. MacDonald conceded that "[i]n no way does [the indirect support] compare with the scale and scope on which Indian Affairs works with First Nations".⁹⁸ Roberta Jamieson subsequently told the Committee that although the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, one of the sources cited by Mr. MacDonald, was able to make awards of \$2.8 million to 934 of 1,129 applicants in 2005-2006,

[T]he support requested was over \$8.6 million. We could only meet 32.5% of the amount requested. As well, despite increased education costs over nearly two decades, we are awarding now less per person than we were then.⁹⁹

c. Skills Training

Who is to say that an academic career is more valid than a strong career in the trades?¹⁰⁰

Anita Olsen-Harper, Native Women's Association of Canada

⁹⁷ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

¹⁰⁰ *Evidence*, 12 June 2006.

Committee members know from the reports and statistics we canvassed that, for many Aboriginal learners, post-secondary programming in the form of vocational and skills training represents an important, and potentially more attractive and accessible option. As Christine Cram from the Department reminded us, funding for “[t]rades training predominantly comes through the AHRDAs from Human Resources and Social Development Canada”. First Nations, Métis and Inuit post-secondary learners are eligible for funding through AHRDAs concluded with their respective organizations. Ms. Cram described it as a “very successful program”.¹⁰¹

With this in mind, the Committee heard from witnesses about the funding and delivery of post-secondary vocational or skills training programming, and about concerns associated with it. Some relate directly to funding to learners. Karen Schuyler of the Native Women’s Association of Canada told us that although she agrees the program is successful, “the dollars are never enough. There is a long waiting list in each of the communities for people to get into training”.¹⁰² According to Dr. Paulette Tremblay of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, “[t]here is very little funding through the [Department’s PSE] program for trades or programs where [learners] have to do upgrading because their education isn’t perhaps at the required level”.¹⁰³ On the question of access, National Chief Patrick Brazeau of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples told us that “[a]ccess to skills development is very uneven in this country, especially for non-reserve First Nations and Métis peoples outside the prairies”.¹⁰⁴

On a policy level, Chief Nathan Matthew pointed to the “division of labour” within the federal government in the area of trades training as problematic. In his view, the Department has little interest in trades training, and the fact that it falls largely under Human Resources and Social Development Canada, and not the Department, illustrates “the segmentation of responsibility of government to post-secondary education [leading to] fragmented programming”.

[I]t seems government doesn’t really talk; the departments don’t talk to one another or have a coordinated approach to supporting First Nations learners at the post-secondary level. ... [I]t’s a challenge to get those two bodies to work together, especially when it comes down to what happens in our community for provision of support.¹⁰⁵

Asked to comment on this matter, Lise Bastien of the First Nations Education Council told the Committee that

¹⁰¹ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

¹⁰² *Evidence*, 12 June 2006.

¹⁰³ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

¹⁰⁴ *Evidence*, 12 June 2006.

¹⁰⁵ *Evidence*, 26 September 2006.

[I]t's really important to have that discussion between different ministries, but we've been talking about this for a long time as First Nations to ministries, and it doesn't happen. We can't wait, if they don't want to talk to each other...¹⁰⁶

Richard Budgell of the Department's Education Branch told the Committee that "[t]he relationship between AHRDA funding and the Indian Affairs post-secondary funding is something that we think we have to work on to ensure there is no duplication. That way the funding utilized in First Nations and Inuit communities is optimal". He acknowledged that "[i]t's fair to say that there hasn't been [much communication between the departments on trades training]".¹⁰⁷

COMMITTEE'S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Canada today, no First Nation, Métis, or Inuit young person should be prevented from going on to post-secondary training or education because of lack of financial resources.¹⁰⁸

Robert Jamieson, President and Chief Executive Officer, National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

When we look at Aboriginal Canada today ... [n]o people should feel that this is their country more than us. Yet some Aboriginal people feel that they're being left behind. That's a dangerous road for Canada to go down.¹⁰⁹

Darren Googoo, Director of Education, Membertou First Nation

As we draw our report to a conclusion and formulate our recommendations, we are mindful as a committee that for the sake of individual Aboriginal learners and their communities, "of all the matters that we work on, education is surely the one that we have to get right".¹¹⁰ While the Committee's principal recommendations below reflect our focus on the Department's PSE Program, we end our study persuaded that the matters brought to our attention raise fundamental policy considerations about the future of post-secondary education for all Aboriginal learners. Committee members believe that our oversight role mandates us to address that future in our concluding comments to this report.

Witnesses told us, directly and indirectly, that we have reached a critical juncture when it comes to Aboriginal post-secondary education. We have learned,

¹⁰⁶ *Evidence*, 17 October 2006.

¹⁰⁷ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

¹⁰⁸ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

¹⁰⁹ *Evidence*, 31 October 2006.

¹¹⁰ *Evidence*, 2 November 2006.

on the one hand, about positive developments that inspire confidence for the future. The progress made by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders in developing post-secondary programming and delivering it to Aboriginal learners across the country with limited resources is more than commendable. Moreover, we heard that this determination produces results. On the other hand, our witnesses also told a cautionary tale about aspects of the current situation that may jeopardize the future of Aboriginal post-secondary education. They include past and ongoing under-funding for post-secondary learners under the PSSSP, gaps in key information for policy development purposes and the lack of equivalent access for Métis and non-registered First Nations learners.

As a committee, we want to honour the steps forward taken, while not shrinking from the hard truths we heard. One of the hardest of these truths is that right now, in Canada, it appears there are uncounted numbers of aspiring Aboriginal learners who are unable to gain access to the funding they need to enrol in post-secondary programs. Roberta Jamieson of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation estimates thousands of First Nations, Inuit and Métis learners are in that position.¹¹¹ In 2000, the Assembly of First Nations put the number of First Nations students alone who had been denied access to PSE funding at close to 10,000.¹¹² The Department has no estimate because it does not collect the information.

[W]hat makes it tough is when you recognize opportunity lost, when you see potential that's gone. What I mean by opportunity lost is having young individuals with strong minds, strong bodies, and full of ambition who don't need to be motivated because they're ready to go, but it's not there for them.

A student with a treaty number in Black Lake who gets a dental assistant diploma benefits everybody, not just the community of Black Lake. When a teacher gets a degree and starts teaching students, those students will disperse across the country. It's not the opportunity of Black Lake. It's not the opportunity of the Prince Albert Grand Council or Saskatchewan. It's the opportunity that's being lost for all of us.¹¹³

Keith Frame, Research Coordinator, Prince Albert Grand Council

Committee members find this scenario unacceptable. We believe the future costs to Canada of failing now to fully address the admittedly complex resource issues raised by growing backlogs of potential Aboriginal learners are likely to be unacceptably high and can only compound existing gaps. Furthermore, although our report deals mainly with funding needs under the Department's PSE Program, our belief in this respect applies equally to Métis and non-registered First Nations learners whose funding needs exceed available resources. Knowing, as we do, that post-secondary education is key for the employment and earnings success of

¹¹¹ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

¹¹² See note 22.

¹¹³ *Evidence*, 28 September 2006.

Aboriginal people, It is simply not in our interest as a society to allow lost educational and employment opportunities for the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population to be perpetuated by failing to come to grips with the extent of a solvable problem.

Why should Canada be interested in providing more resources? On the one hand, Canada's economy is facing frightening labour shortages in almost every field, and we know that. ... On the other hand, we know First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people nationally are Canada's fastest-growing sector of the population, facing themselves frightening unemployment, under-employment, poverty, and unrealized productivity and potential ... each set of problems provides a solution to the other problem. Instead of two problems, I believe we have two solutions.¹¹⁴

**Roberta Jamieson, President and Chief Executive Officer, National
Aboriginal Achievement Foundation**

Committee members have come to realize that actual government policies, however well intentioned, are not delivering on the promise of post-secondary education for Aboriginal learners. We believe that putting an end to this disconnect is a pressing concern for Canada. Achieving this objective will, in our view, require significant monetary investment now and in the years ahead to interrupt and reverse the present cycle of ever-increasing unmet need of First Nations and Inuit learners for financial assistance, and to put in place a sustainable system, based on solid data, that is tailored to present and future needs. As we've stated, the cost of not making that investment now will only be compounded in the future.

We know, however, as Roberta Jamieson reminded us, that although increased financial resources are essential, "problems won't be dealt with, nor potential liberated, if we just throw enough money at it".¹¹⁵ The Committee believes that government also needs to work in close collaboration with Aboriginal stakeholders in developing a comprehensive, long-term strategic approach to Aboriginal post-secondary education. Immediate measures to address present failings in existing systems in the short term need to be supplemented by the development of medium and long-term measures to ensure the cycle of disadvantage owing to inadequate financial resources is not repeated, and the potential of Aboriginal post-secondary learners is given every chance.

As Christine Cram acknowledged before the Committee,

[W]e need to do much better to ensure First Nations and Inuit children and youth have the academic footing to move on to post-secondary studies and have the skills to take advantage of the merging opportunities resulting from investments in resource development projects ... and the retirement of baby boomers.

¹¹⁴ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

All parties recognize that the status quo is not accomplishing the desired results on reserve and that better coordination and a stronger education system would properly equip learners to reach their potential.¹¹⁶

In this regard, Committee members find encouraging the commitment to long-term predictable funding for post-secondary education in the Minister of Finance's recent economic plan.¹¹⁷ This general commitment must extend to and encompass Aboriginal learners, educators and institutions.

As a committee, we are convinced that tackling the challenges presented by existing shortcomings in Aboriginal post-secondary education calls for a non-partisan, practical, forward-looking approach. It is in this spirit, and with this conviction, that we make the following recommendations.

Creating Positive Outcomes

As we have tried to stress in this report, there is much to celebrate in the many advances achieved by Aboriginal post-secondary learners, Aboriginal and mainstream educators and institutions across the country, all too often, as we know, against the odds. Their achievements bring a new and instructive perspective to bear on the "gloom and doom" that is all too common in the public discourse when it comes to Aboriginal matters. The Committee believes the positive outcomes realized to date should be made more widely known, including within the Aboriginal community itself. Although undoubtedly unique to the context in which each was developed, successful initiatives may nevertheless have a broader usefulness to other communities, learners, educators and institutions that are either engaged or wanting to become engaged in Aboriginal post-secondary education programs and projects. Non-Aboriginal educators and other Canadians could also benefit from making this information more broadly available. While we know some work has been done in this area, the Committee believes the information should be made more accessible using a more systematic approach. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

RECOMMENDATION 1

That the Department, in collaboration with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stakeholders, develop a national database web site, accessible via the Internet, for the purpose of making information about successful programs and initiatives in Aboriginal post-secondary education widely available to Aboriginal organizations, communities, learners and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions;

¹¹⁶ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

¹¹⁷ *Advantage Canada: An Economic Plan to Eliminate Canada's Net Debt and Further Reduce Taxes*, 23 November 2006. <http://www.fin.gc.ca/ec2006/pdf/plane.pdf>

that the database include information about successful initiatives developed by First Nations, Inuit and Métis segments of the Aboriginal population; and

that the Department ensure information about the database, and annual reports outlining its contents, are widely disseminated.

Student Funding¹¹⁸

Our witnesses told us in no uncertain terms that student funding is the first obstacle that needs to be tackled. Many made recommendations to that effect. The Committee notes with interest that in 1989, our predecessor committee heard from witnesses how newly introduced changes to financial assistance measures in the Department's PSE Program would result in the funding needs of growing numbers of eligible First Nations learners not being met, and increased deferrals. The Committee recommended that "the [PSSSP] program provide adequate funding to each eligible applicant in each year".¹¹⁹ From our 2006 vantage point, we know that in the intervening period, a spike in enrolments occurred in the immediately ensuing years in spite of 1989 modifications. We also know, however, that the 2% annual funding cap over the past decade, combined with the incremental rise in numbers of eligible learners, has taken and continues to take a heavy toll on First Nations learners and their communities, as evidenced by declining enrolments and lengthening waiting lists. It is this cycle that we believe must be interrupted.

Our goal, like that of our predecessor, is to make sure that no eligible First Nations or Inuit learner is denied adequate funding to pursue post-secondary education now or in the future. On the question of what constitutes "adequate" funding, our witnesses have told us, and our review of departmental and other sources supports the view, that per student funding under the PSE Program has not kept pace with rising costs in all areas. Committee members believe that shortfalls in financial assistance relative to actual costs incurred compromise the ability of First Nations and Inuit learners to successfully complete post-secondary programs.

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the 2% annual cap on spending increases for the Department's Post-Secondary Education Program be eliminated immediately;

¹¹⁸ Our recommendations under this heading do not refer to the PSSSP as the Department's current review of its PSE Program may result in renaming of its components.

¹¹⁹ *A Review of the Post-Secondary Student Assistance Program of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development*, June 1989, p. 62.

that the Department's spending increases for PSE programming be based on actual costs associated with program components and not be subject to discretionary caps;

that the Department make it a priority to provide adequate funding under the PSE Program to *every* eligible First Nations and Inuit learner and put in place a plan to achieve that priority by the end of 2007, said plan to include implementation measures with clear target dates;

that the Department ensure financial assistance for eligible First Nations and Inuit learners under the Department's PSE Program is based on actual costs incurred for tuition, travel and living expenses, and indexed annually to reflect rises in both tuition costs and the cost of living; and

that the Department review the categories of eligible expenses under the PSE Program in order to ensure that the real expenses routinely incurred by individual eligible First Nations and Inuit learners are covered. Such expenses may include, but are not limited to, child care, special needs, and special shelter. This review should occur immediately, and at regular intervals thereafter.

We know that the objective of adequate funding for every eligible First Nations and Inuit learner undoubtedly entails budgetary consequences for the government and the Department. However, as we have stated, a failure to invest in the future of First Nations and Inuit learners now would also undoubtedly entail immeasurable long-term costs. We are also concerned that increased PSE allocations should not "rob Peter to pay Paul" by diverting funding from other essential departmental programs. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

RECOMMENDATION 3

That the Department's budget, in the 2007-2008 and ensuing fiscal years, be increased to reflect increased expenditures associated with providing more funding to more eligible First Nations and Inuit learners.

As a committee, we have a particular concern about the numbers of eligible First Nations and Inuit learners who are on waiting lists for PSE funding right now. Although we do not yet know with any certainty what those numbers are, we believe that, having made it successfully to the threshold of post-secondary learning, they should not be kept waiting any longer. We believe immediate measures are required to address the existing "backlog" of eligible students who have thus far been unable to obtain financial assistance. In the opinion of Committee members,

they merit special consideration by the Department, and its immediate direct intervention. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

RECOMMENDATION 4

That the Department take immediate steps, together with its regional offices and First Nations and Inuit administering organizations, to ascertain, by the end of 2007, the identities of eligible First Nations and Inuit learners who have been denied PSE funding owing to insufficient allocations;

that a special fund be established for the specific purpose of providing these learners with adequate PSE funding for one year, following which they would fall under the regular PSE regime we propose; and

that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development seek one-time special authority for this purpose.

Data Collection and Tracking

In 1989, the then-Minister of Indian Affairs told the Committee on Aboriginal Affairs that despite the newly “fixed” PSE budget, “with proper data, forecasting of student demand would be more accurate and deferrals could be eliminated altogether”.¹²⁰ The key importance of data is underscored throughout that committee’s report, and in its recommendations. Nearly 20 years later, departmental officials told us they remain handicapped in this respect because they do not collect information about the numbers of eligible students who are denied funding under the PSE Program, and are thus unable to forecast budgetary needs with any accuracy. A number of sources consulted by the Committee, from the Auditor General’s 2004 report to the Department’s in-house evaluation of its PSE Program in 2005, highlight the unresolved data challenges facing the Department.

Committee members believe that to be effective, planning, programming and budgeting for Aboriginal post-secondary education must be based on information that is as accurate and as comprehensive as possible. In our opinion, if the Department’s objective of improving its delivery of post-secondary programming to First Nations and Inuit learners is to be achieved, it simply has to do a better job of connecting the dots between the numbers of eligible learners and allocation of funds. In order to ensure funds earmarked annually for the PSE Program are sufficient to meet actual needs, and program needs are forecast accurately, the Committee recommends:

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 29.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That the Department's new policy and management frameworks outline specific measures, developed in close collaboration with First Nations and Inuit administering organizations and its regional offices, for gathering accurate information about the numbers of First Nations and Inuit learners eligible for as well as those applying for funding for each following academic year;

that the participation of First Nations and Inuit administering organizations in the development of these measures be financed by the Department;

that the measures developed include provisions for enhancing the information-gathering capacity of First Nations and Inuit communities and administering organizations; and

that the information-gathering measures outlined in the Department's policy and management frameworks be implemented by all regional offices.

Our witnesses indicated to us that keeping track of post-secondary learners is increasingly critical for planning and policy development purposes, and to enable administering organizations and communities to work more effectively with post-secondary institutions. We are mindful of the view expressed in Michael Mendelson's recent Caledon Institute report, that

Despite ... financial and policy challenges, getting good data and keeping track of our progress is the only way to ensure that educational progress for Canada's Aboriginal peoples is really being achieved. The cost, while doubtless significant, will be small relative to the costs and the implications for the future of this country of allowing the education system to continue failing Aboriginal people.¹²¹

Committee members believe that although tracking this vital information could be done by administering organizations at the community level or at the tribal council level, not all communities or tribal councils currently dispose of the financial or human resources to undertake additional administrative tasks. As a committee, we feel there is also a planning advantage to creating a national facility for gathering information about and tracking post-secondary learners. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

¹²¹ Mendelson, Michael. *Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada*, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, July 2006, p. 40. Accessible at <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/595ENG%2Epdf>

RECOMMENDATION 6

That the Department take immediate steps, in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations with expertise in the area, such as the First Nations Statistical Institute, to establish and finance an information and tracking national PSE database; and

that the Department and its regional offices ensure comprehensive information about the PSE database, including privacy protection measures, is widely disseminated to First Nations and Inuit administering organizations and communities.

Allocation and Delivery of PSE Funding

For Committee members, the testimony of officials on this matter raised questions about the Department's current scheme for allocating and delivering PSSSP funding. We heard that regional offices use different calculations for distribution of funds to administering organizations, that some communities receive more PSSSP dollars than they require for the numbers of eligible applicants in a given year, while others obtain insufficient monies in a given year to fund their eligible learners. In addition, the Department has not collected information in this area so as to determine which communities are in a "deficit" or a "surplus" position, and to institute corrective measures accordingly.

Officials have told us that the Department's current review of options for a "re-engineered" PSE Program includes looking at "new delivery models", to be developed with First Nations and Inuit learners and educators, as well as service providers and administering organizations. We know there is a range of possible delivery methods that might be considered in examining current shortcomings. However, the Committee hesitates to impose any one model on the parties during their ongoing review of options.

Committee members believe re-establishing the link between eligible student populations and funding levels and ensuring more efficient delivery of funds to every eligible learner are important. In this respect, we are of the view that existing deficiencies in current allocation methods need to be remedied on the basis of criteria that are consistent and predictable for all concerned. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

RECOMMENDATION 7

That the Department's new policy and management frameworks set out a precise methodology, developed in collaboration with Aboriginal organizations with expertise in the area, to be used by

all regional offices in allocating and delivering PSE funds to First Nations and Inuit administering organizations;

that the Department ensure all administering organizations are made aware of its new policy and management frameworks, and any associated guidelines related to PSE allocation and delivery; and

that the Department, in collaboration with administering organizations, establish appropriate mechanisms to monitor the allocation and delivery of PSE funds.

Other Key Issues

As we indicated earlier, the Committee has, over the course of its hearings, gained some understanding of the ISSP component of the Department's PSE Program. Witnesses told us of their long-standing concerns related to what they perceive as limited access to PSE or equivalent programming. The Committee also heard some evidence of inadequate funding of and access to vocational and skills training programs for post-secondary Aboriginal learners. Nevertheless, we have concluded that without additional information, the Committee is not in a position at this time to offer comments or recommendations as detailed as we would like on these important issues.

There are, however, specific matters related to the three issues that we believe it is important to address now.

Indian Studies Support Program

The first issue we wish to deal with under this heading concerns an apparent data deficiency within the Department about the overall allocation of funds to the ISSP. Committee members believe this lack of data has implications for planning and policy development purposes. In our view, the Department needs to track its ISSP allocations much more closely in order to be able to evaluate whether they are meeting the actual needs of Aboriginal and mainstream post-secondary institutions, and to make any necessary adjustments to the ceiling. Therefore the Committee recommends:

RECOMMENDATION 8

That the Department's new policy and management frameworks outline specific measures, developed in collaboration with organizations representing Aboriginal and mainstream post-secondary institutions, for gathering accurate information on an

annual basis about the actual funding needs of those institutions; and

that the Department take immediate steps, in collaboration with organizations representing Aboriginal and mainstream post-secondary institutions, to evaluate the adequacy of ISSP allocations overall, and develop a funding methodology for the ISSP that is based on the actual funding needs of Aboriginal and mainstream post-secondary institutions.

The second issue concerns the apparent gap in ISSP processes for programs originating in Canada's territories, such as the Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program. Spokespersons for NS told us the Program has not had access to ISSP funding that might mitigate its chronically precarious financial position.¹²² As the Committee subsequently learned from departmental officials, this anomalous situation has arisen because Nunavut post-secondary learners are funded by the Government of Nunavut directly rather than under the PSSSP to which ISSP funding allocations to the provinces are linked. That is, although the NS Program is theoretically eligible to apply, based on its programming — and in light of its track record of success — there has been no ISSP allocation to Nunavut from which to draw funding. Richard Budgell undertook to meet with NS personnel to seek a resolution to this matter,¹²³ and indicated the Department also needed to address the broader issue of access to ISSP dollars north of 60°. The Committee believes this process hurdle needs to be fixed as quickly as possible in order to ensure territorial post-secondary programs are not penalized. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

RECOMMENDATION 9

That the Department take immediate steps to ensure ISSP funding is accessible to otherwise eligible post-secondary programs originating in Canada's territories.

The third matter that deserves comment has to do with our understanding that ISSP funding is essentially short-term and project-based. We are concerned that these features of the program may compromise long-term planning and program development by both Aboriginal and mainstream institutions.

We have already noted departmental officials' testimony that the Department has not decided whether it wishes to support the operations of other Aboriginal-controlled institutions. This is a matter that Committee members feel deserves close scrutiny. We cannot emphasize enough the established importance of these

¹²² *Evidence*, 19 September 2006. Written submission to the Committee from Morley Hanson, Co-ordinator of the NS Program, dated 25 October 2006.

¹²³ *Evidence*, 19 October 2006.

institutions and of Aboriginal programming for post-secondary learners. The successes of Aboriginal-controlled institutions should be acknowledged by government, supported and built upon. In our view, government's objective should be to put in place measures that strengthen and promote the long-term viability of these key institutions for the future of Aboriginal post-secondary education. We therefore strongly urge the Department, in its current review of the ISSP, and in collaboration with organizations representing Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, to undertake a careful re-evaluation of current short-term funding practices overall, and its current position with respect to core funding in particular.

Finally, Committee members know that many challenges facing Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary institutions relate to matters within provincial-territorial jurisdiction over education. This raises the question of whether the federal government has a role to play in these matters. We think it does.

From our preliminary reading, we know that the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada has made Aboriginal education, including post-secondary education, a priority, and hopes to work with the Minister of Indian Affairs and the federal government to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal learners.¹²⁴ A number of provincial advanced education ministries are planning or have in place Aboriginal-specific policies. Budget 2006 and the recent economic plan committed the federal government to work with the provinces to put in place long-term arrangements to support post-secondary education and training.¹²⁵ The economic plan noted that governments must collaborate to meet the challenges of post-secondary education, and pointed to the federal role in this regard.

In our view, outstanding funding and accreditation issues affecting Aboriginal-controlled institutions, while strictly within provincial jurisdiction, are legitimate topics for discussion and ought to be addressed in any inter-governmental meetings on Aboriginal post-secondary education, or on post-secondary education more generally. We therefore urge the federal Minister of Indian Affairs, departmental officials, and other federal departments and officials with responsibilities in the area, to ensure these issues are raised in any such meetings, and to urge provincial and territorial governments to address them.

Access to Post-secondary Programming

As a committee, we have great concern that the full range of financial assistance that is available to some First Nations and Inuit learners under the

¹²⁴ Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. "Backgrounder On The CMEC Aboriginal Education Action Plan", July 2005; *Press Release*. "Ministers of Education Renew Their Commitment to Aboriginal Education", Yellowknife, 8 March 2006.

¹²⁵ See Department of Finance Canada. Budget 2006. *Restoring Fiscal Balance in Canada: Focusing on Priorities — Canada's New Government, Turning a New Leaf*, p. 64; *Advantage Canada: An Economic Plan to Eliminate Canada's Net Debt and Further Reduce Taxes*, 23 November 2006, p. 51.

Department's PSE Program is not currently accessible by non-registered First Nations, Métis and other learners. During our hearings, it was suggested to us that a national PSE fund for off-reserve First Nations and Métis people was called for, with unconditional federal investment and inducements for provincial/territorial and private contributions,¹²⁶ to redress what is viewed by those without access as a long-standing inequity in federal Aboriginal policy.

Committee members believe it is in everyone's interest that no Aboriginal post-secondary learners fall between the cracks of that policy. We have noted elsewhere that the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, widely recognized as a key provider of financial assistance to Aboriginal post-secondary learners, was able to fund less than 35% of funding requested in 2005-2006, and awarded less per person than it had nearly 20 years ago. For the Committee, this begs the question of how to improve NAAF's support so that it more closely coincides with the actual funding needs of non-status First Nations, Métis and other Aboriginal learners who are not eligible for the Department's PSE programs. The evidence with respect to its present funding capacity suggests that current demands leave considerable room for increased support.

Committee members believe that NAAF's concrete proposals for achieving that support merit close consideration by the Department and other interested government departments. In this light, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 10

That the government enter into immediate consultations with NAAF and Métis, Non-Status and urban Aboriginal organizations, with a view to developing a collaborative plan aimed at providing more financial assistance, including eligibility and access under the PSE Program, to more Aboriginal post-secondary learners.

Skills Training

Committee members learned of two matters under this heading that call for immediate comment. We heard of apparent communication gaps between the Department, which funds the PSE Program, and Human Resources and Social Development Canada, which is largely responsible for funding trades training for all Aboriginal post-secondary learners through AHRDAs. Witnesses told us of the resulting lack of a coordinated approach toward affected post-secondary learners. This seems unfortunate.

¹²⁶ *Evidence*, 12 June 2006.

We know from the reports we studied, from articles in the daily press and other sources that Canada is facing severe labour shortages across the board in the coming decades, including in the skilled trades. We recall the Conference Board of Canada's estimate of a shortfall of a million workers over 20 years. It strikes us that in this light, the need for efficiency in the delivery of programs related to vocational and skills training for the fastest growing population in the country becomes increasingly critical.

Committee members noted with interest a recent comment by the Department's Deputy Minister to the effect that "the challenge for us as officials and for ministers will be to make sure that the pieces of economic development, what we do, what HRSDC does, fit together."¹²⁷ With this in mind, we encourage the Department to work with Human Resources and Social Development Canada with a view to developing a coordinated approach toward Aboriginal post-secondary learners in vocational and skills training programs.

The second matter the Committee wants to address concerns the fact that First Nations students enrolled in vocational training in Québec are not eligible for PSSSP funding. This is the case because the training takes place at the high school level rather than at the post-secondary level, as is the case elsewhere. It was pointed out to us that this anomalous situation results in Québec students from border regions being funded for attending vocational programs in Ontario, while those further from the border are not funded for attending Québec programs. We urge the Department, in collaboration with HRSDC and the First Nations Education Council, to work toward resolving the anomaly affecting First Nations learners enrolled in Québec vocational training programs.

CLOSING REMARKS

In closing, the Committee thinks it important to restate both a fundamental belief and an over-riding concern. The belief we underscore, as we have attempted to do throughout this report, is that the post-secondary education of Aboriginal youth who aspire to it is a matter of the highest priority for Canada. Our over-riding concern is that Aboriginal youth not be deprived of post-secondary opportunities because of a failure to respond to that priority. In the words of Roberta Jamieson,

The bold mandate that we have is to encourage, empower, inspire, and provide assistance so that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youths can convert their tremendous potential, their aspirations, and their dreams into solid achievement and brighter futures. We make it possible for them to contribute their gifts to their communities, to Canada, and to the world.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ *Evidence*, 28 November 2006.

¹²⁸ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Nunavut

The Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program is a unique Ottawa-based facility established in 1985 by the land claim organization representing Inuit of the eastern Arctic. Here 22 high school graduates from what is now the Territory of Nunavut, beneficiaries under the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement*, are selected each year from a much broader pool of applicants to attend an eight-month program aimed at preparing them for further post-secondary education or for employment in Nunavut. Originally intended to train fieldworkers to keep remote communities informed about land claim negotiations, the NS Program has subsequently become a general transition year program. Courses centred on Inuit history, culture, politics and land claims issues, as well as language training, are accredited through Algonquin College. A second year program for up to 10 students is focused on preparation for university.

Nunavut Sivuniksavut means “Our land is our future”. The NS Program is clearly a dynamic one that has achieved much over the 22 years of its existence, including an 80% completion rate. Morley Hanson, Co-ordinator of the NS Program, told the Committee that according to a 2005 survey of 180 of 270 Inuit graduates that have benefited from the program since its inception, “40% were working within government, either federal, territorial or municipal; 19% were working in the private sector; 15% were furthering their studies in post-secondary education; and another 19% were working for Inuit organizations. ... [O]nly four were unemployed”¹.

These results are all the more remarkable when one considers the Nunavut context, where, according to Natan Obed of Nunavut Tunngavik, Inc., “[t]he very idea of the importance of education is a new one to Inuit. ... We’re talking about a transformation of societal values and the idea of how you live your life ... this is an emerging concept, that southern-based education is relevant to their lives”².

Mr. Hanson also indicated that when it comes to post-secondary education, “it takes a critical mass of young people to develop the idea that going on to university and college is a possibility, for young people who are coming up through the public high school system in Nunavut to realize that there are other young people progressing, and that this becomes a natural path to take. Right now it’s not a natural path”³.

¹ *Evidence*, 19 September 2006.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

The Committee believes that the NS Program is paving the way toward making that path natural for Nunavut learners. Our conclusion is based, not only on the program's impressive quantitative results, but on the significant qualitative markers described by Mr. Hanson of the program's value to Inuit learners and to Nunavut society, with the result that the program has "garnered a high degree of support within Nunavut society"⁴.

Québec

The Committee learned of projects planned or in place that promise to expand the possibilities open to post-secondary Aboriginal learners in Québec.

Lise Bastien, Director, and Gilbert Whiteduck, Senior Education Advisor of the First Nations Education Council, told us about an important current FNEC project involving the establishment of a First Nations institution to deliver CEGEP, i.e., college-level⁵, post-secondary programs to First Nations students, starting in 2008. The programs would initially be offered in partnership with mainstream institutions having accreditation authority, with full First Nations jurisdiction over the programs the objective within 10 years. Mme Bastien stressed the significance of such an institution for the development of First Nations people, and the sense of community ownership it would engender. In her view, "[w]hat is most important is a strong connection with the community"⁶.

FNEC is already involved in some post-secondary programming, with a Certificate in Leadership program that is open to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, as well as a Micro computer program. Both are delivered directly to the communities by videoconference, in partnership with mainstream post-secondary institutions.⁷

Edith Cloutier, the Anishinabe Chair of the Board of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue in northern Québec, told us that UQAT offers First Nations and Inuit students from the region a variety of certificate and degree programs in English and French, both in the communities and at the Val D'Or campus⁸, and has issued over 150 certificates to date to Inuit, Cree, and Algonquin learners⁹. Committee members noted, in particular, UQAT's approach to community-based programming described by Mme Johanne Jean, the President of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ CEGEP stands for Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel. The CEGEP system is a pan Québec network of community colleges.

⁶ *Evidence*, 17 October 2006.

⁷ First Nations Education Council. "First Nations Post-secondary Education", written submission to the Committee, dated 17 October 2006.

⁸ Programs are offered in management, early childhood education, primary and secondary school teaching, and social work.

⁹ *Evidence*, 17 October 2006.

UQAT, in which teaching and support personnel visit individual communities on a rota basis to deliver programs.

Gordon Blackned, representing the Cree School Board in northern Québec, expressed support for the UQAT initiative, viewing the establishment of institutions closer to Cree territory as a means of reversing poor post-secondary success rates of Cree learners who have previously had to travel to distant locations to pursue post-secondary education. The Cree School Board is itself submitting a proposal to the governments for a Cree CEGEP, hoping to work with an existing CEGEP in the region on a satellite basis. It recently opened a vocational training centre provided by Québec.

In addition to existing programming, Mme Cloutier and Mme Jean informed us that UQAT is planning a First Nations Pavilion within the University, with a view to eventual First Nations control of the institution.

Saskatchewan

Keith Frame, Research Co-ordinator for the Prince Albert Grand Council in northern Saskatchewan, gave the Committee strong evidence of the importance of comprehensive community-based data gathering and tracking in the education sphere. PAGC uses community surveys to build on baseline data from a variety of governmental sources such as Statistics Canada and Sask Trends Monitor. The monitoring of demographic changes and educational results over time at the K-12 and post-secondary levels, as well as labour market figures, gives the PAGC key information and enables key connections about system improvements or declines.

Ultimately, the information assists the PAGC to determine where and what decisions are called for in the interests of the community. In this respect, Mr. Frame spoke of the need “to look at the numbers honestly, look at the situation of what’s taking place and the needs at the community level”. PAGC asks “what is the data that will help drive policy and help drive decision-making”¹⁰.

As Mr. Frame explained to the Committee, it is not only important to gather information about learners that receive funding.

I’m interested in those students who didn’t get funding: How many were there? I’m interested in waiting lists: Who’s making up that waiting list? Male, female, kids, no kids? How long have they been on that waiting list? What types of programs have you been asking for? Those are some of things we’re looking at, to be able to gather some of that information.¹¹

¹⁰ *Evidence*, 28 September 2006.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Nova Scotia

Darren Googoo, Director of Education for Sydney's Membertou First Nation, told the Committee of his conviction that there is a "need for a true partnership to exist between First Nations and institutions of higher learning"¹². He described the partnerships developed between his community and regional mainstream institutions as a reflection of the fact that Membertou, a "First Nations anomaly", has achieved a financial position enabling it to "bring more to the table than just tuition dollars. ... We have the ability to go to universities and say we want to buy programs"¹³. Mr. Googoo told us that the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Nova Scotia Community College has been important in promoting post-secondary education in Membertou.

By signing that MOU with the community college and asking them to invest in our people, to invest in the First Nations councillor, to invest in different things and to come and do some public education in our community around the need for post-secondary education, it has paid dividends in a very big way for our community.¹⁴

Membertou is currently preparing to sign a second MOU, with Cape Breton University, that also asks the university to invest in Membertou members, not "just because they're First Nation, we want them to hire people because they're good qualified candidates. In order for that to happen our students need to get to post-secondary education"¹⁵. Membertou has identified four areas of specialization in relation to current community needs, and is working with Cape Breton University toward the development of a baccalaureate in community studies that looks at the four target streams.

Committee members also learned that Membertou has an education constitution and that its largest funding envelope goes toward education. As a community, Membertou has decided that post-secondary education is a priority in light of its long-term objective, which "is no longer a job for everyone, it's a quality of life job for everyone, and for a lot of people that means having access to post-secondary education". As a result, "every single student who applies for funding for post-secondary is going to be funded. If it means that we as a community dig into our own coffers to make that a reality, we know as a community that is a worthwhile investment"¹⁶.

¹² *Evidence*, 31 October 2006.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

British Columbia

Chief Nathan Matthew of British Columbia's First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Leadership Council told the Committee of the progress that has been made in developing broad partnerships to address issues related to Aboriginal PSE in that province. He described the work of the recently formed B.C. Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners group¹⁷ as a collaborative process that involves identifying areas for positive interventions, with the first priority being student support, and a further focus on the need for improved data-gathering as the basis for decision-making. Chief Matthew also told us about FNEESC "working toward" research that includes quality assurance work as well as handbooks on post-secondary best practices.

On a matter of great significance to Aboriginal people, Chief Matthew suggested that "[m]any things can be done to preserve culture and a sense of identity and esteem for First Nations learners in a post-secondary environment"¹⁸, and described innovative thinking taking place around that objective at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops. The Committee also noted Chief Matthew's point that every PSE institution in the province has an Aboriginal counsellor on staff.

Another positive initiative mentioned by Chief Matthew was a "post-secondary education committee", which has no stable funding, in which First Nations people "come together to think for ourselves about what's good for our learners in post-secondary institutions ... knowing that it's important for us to represent ourselves, to develop our own institutions, but to develop our interests in public institutions and to represent ourselves there in the sense that we're the only ones who can talk about culture and we're the best ones to talk about the interests of our own learners"¹⁹.

Manitoba

Dr. Mary Young, Director of the recently-opened Aboriginal Students Services Centre at the University of Winnipeg, spoke of the importance of the Centre to the post-secondary careers of Aboriginal students:

Today we have a beautiful centre. That centre is a home away from home for many students. If we didn't have that centre we would lose many Aboriginal students, because they don't stay. They have to have a connection to the university; they have to have a connection with the staff and faculty. We still struggle with alienation. We still struggle with a sense of belonging. We still struggle with fear of failure. ... Those are very real

¹⁷ The group includes representatives from on- and off-reserve First Nations and Métis organizations, federal and provincial governments and the mainstream post-secondary sector.

¹⁸ *Evidence*, 26 September 2006.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

issues. If we can't handle those things, we will not graduate from university.²⁰

Dr. Young also told the Committee of a precedent-setting 2005 “partnering” between the University and an Aboriginal organization, the Southeast Resource Development Council representing 9 Manitoba First Nations communities²¹, in relation to the opening of the University’s Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre.

The recent addition of indigenous knowledge courses by the University of Winnipeg is seen by Dr. Young as an important, legitimizing influence: “When we have courses like indigenous knowledge and indigenous science, we’re telling Aboriginal students — and all students — that those courses are important, significant. That will help us collaborate with one another”²².

First Nations Technical Institute

In written submissions, Karihwakeron Tim Thompson, President and Chief Administrative Officer, advised the Committee of the First Nations Technical Institute’s 1985 beginnings as a result of partnerships among the Tyendinaga Mohawk Council, the FNTI Board, the Department of Indian Affairs and the Ontario Minister of Education and Training. The FNTI’s approaches to Aboriginal post-secondary education over the years include alternative delivery methods such as intensive course offerings, use of video-conferencing technology and community delivery of programming. Mr. Thompson suggests that, “[b]y taking education to the people, we have removed one barrier to access. By changing the delivery schedule we have removed another. Our final step is to create active, participatory learning environments with learning content which responds to the cultural and socio-economic needs of our learners”²³.

Mr. Thompson indicates international recognition for its programming has led to FNTI’s involvement with a range of Indigenous nations, governments and industry abroad. FNTI has an annual enrolment averaging about 300 Aboriginal students from across Canada in diploma, degree and certificate programs, a record of over 2,000 graduates since its inception, and a 90% employment rate for graduates.

The Committee noted that FNTI is also active at the elementary and secondary school levels as well as in the community-based research, and makes significant contributions to the regional economy.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Formerly the Southeast Tribal Council.

²² *Evidence*, 26 September 2006.

²³ Letter to the Committee from Karihwakeron Tim Thompson, President and CAO of the First Nations Technical Institute, dated 5 October 2006.

National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Roberta Jamieson, NAAF's Chief Executive Officer, described to the Committee the organization's role as the largest non-governmental funding body for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis post-secondary students across Canada. In the 2005-2006 fiscal year, NAAF awarded \$2.8 million in scholarships and bursaries to 934 Aboriginal learners in post-secondary programs such as social science, education, business, law and science, health career fields and fine arts or cultural projects. Total awards since NAAF was created amount to \$23.5 million. Ms. Jamieson spoke of NAAF as

much more than another competitor for the federal dollar. We've demonstrated that we improve the return on investment in education of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth. We get results for the money. We nurture, support, encourage, and do all the things that investors do to realize return on their investments. We're able to use federal money as leverage to bring in more from the private sector ... and to mix that with provincial investment and even individuals who support the foundation. We're also fully accountable. We demonstrate outcomes, concrete results for the money spent. ... By the end of this year, the foundation will have given to more than 6,000 recipients over our life. Since 1999, 30% of our students have been in their final year of study each year, so that tells you they're graduating.²⁴

NAAF has also acted on its recognition of the critical importance, for planning purposes, of monitoring key information about the Aboriginal learners it funds by expanding its tracking program to include learners in all funded post-secondary fields.

National Association of Friendship Centres

Peter Dinsdale, Executive Director of the NAFC, gave the Committee the important message that the organization is accessible to "all of Canada's Aboriginal peoples — First Nation, Métis, and Inuit — irrespective of political or legal definitions, through really basic bread-and-butter services every day"²⁵, as evidenced by a one-year tally of 757,000 client contacts for all purposes through 117 centres.

Although the NAFC is a multi-purpose, multi-service organization, it does have some involvement in education, including adult literacy and upgrading, and the development of alternative schools "aimed at giving Aboriginal people who have already dropped out of school an opportunity to get back into education and finish school"²⁶. Friendship centres also serve as the first point of contact and referral for Aboriginal people moving to urban centres, a key factor for post-secondary learners experiencing geographic and cultural isolation from home communities.

²⁴ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

²⁵ *Evidence*, 14 June 2006.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

The Committee found interesting Mr. Dinsdale's suggestion that NAFC "could also be a delivery partner in terms of post-secondary education, accessing students in urban areas where you might not have access now"²⁷.

²⁷ Ibid.

REPORTS CONSULTED BY THE COMMITTEE

Reports' Findings

Recognition of the pressing need to increase the high school completion rate of Aboriginal learners was underscored particularly in Michael Mendelson's report on *Aboriginal Peoples and Postsecondary Education in Canada*¹. Before the Committee, the author reiterated his conclusion, based on census data,² that "if we want to get parity in post-secondary education, the only way we're going to get there is through kindergarten to grade 12 ... by getting more kids graduating from high school. Otherwise the pool of students who can get into post-secondary is simply too small"³.

Reports identify a number of barriers encountered by Aboriginal learners at the post-secondary level. They include historical distrust of mainstream education systems or lack of familiarity with them, whether owing to the legacy of the residential school system and assimilationist policies, or to other cultural factors; economic hardship for First Nations learners due to insufficient funding under the Department's PSE program, and for Métis and Non-Status learners who must rely on other sources; inadequate academic preparation to meet post-secondary institutions' admission requirements; cultural isolation owing to under-representation of Aboriginal perspectives and values in post-secondary institutions and programs; geographic dislocation resulting from the need to relocate from more remote areas to urban centres; social barriers related to factors such as discrimination, poverty and family responsibilities; and personal factors, such as poor self-esteem or poor health.

Some existing "best practices" to remove or mitigate barriers identified in the literature are: creation of Aboriginal educational institutions; enhanced Aboriginal control of education and Aboriginal participation in post-secondary institutions' planning bodies and curriculum development; targeted access programs offering transition and guidance to Aboriginal learners so as to improve success rates; community-based delivery of programs; Aboriginal-specific support services; and partnerships between mainstream and Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, and between Aboriginal communities and mainstream institutions.

¹ Caledon Institute of Social Policy, July 2006.

² The author's report and his evidence in Committee noted limitations inherent in the census data, including the fact that many Aboriginal people do not complete census forms. He urged other researchers to investigate the aggregate data more deeply.

³ *Evidence*, 24 October 2006.

Reports suggest areas for improvements, and for expansion of proven existing practice. There is acknowledgement, for instance, of the need to address funding concerns and allocation methodologies related to the Department's PSE program; enhance student recruitment and First Nations, Métis and Inuit-specific support services; increase Aboriginal faculty and staff; expand transition or bridging and mentor programs; develop more specialized programs; avoid a one-size-fits-all approach; promote apprenticeship; improve data collection and tracking. Recommendations to tackle these and other matters cover a wide range of forward-looking policy and practical considerations. Proposals focusing on funding limitations are prominent among them.

Various studies outline the personal characteristics of Aboriginal post-secondary learners. The findings suggest that Aboriginal learners tend on average to be older than their non-Aboriginal counterparts upon enrolment in and completion of post-secondary programs. They may also take longer to complete programs. Many have family responsibilities; many are single parents. Aboriginal women pursuing post-secondary education outnumber Aboriginal men by a wide margin and have higher levels of educational attainment. A greater percentage of Aboriginal men have trades certification. Aboriginal post-secondary learners are more likely to attend college than university. There is under-representation of Aboriginal people in areas such as the sciences and health-related fields of study. Levels of educational attainment among Aboriginal learners differ according to region, and according to segment of the Aboriginal population, with Métis and non-registered First Nations people achieving higher levels than registered First Nations people and Inuit.

Some reports address the unstable circumstances of Aboriginal-controlled institutions. They point out that virtually all are without authority to grant provincially-recognized certificates and diplomas. Ineligible to receive direct operating grants from the provinces on the same basis as mainstream institutions, Aboriginal-controlled institutions must partner with the mainstream ones in order for their students to receive approved post-secondary credentials. The importance of addressing long-term funding needs is stressed, in light of the importance of these institutions to Aboriginal post-secondary education.

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APPENDIX C LIST OF WITNESSES

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
BC First Nations Leadership Council Nathan Matthew, Senior Advisor and Negotiator, Education	26/09/2006	17
Caledon Institute of Social Policy Michael Mendelson, Policy analyst	24/10/2006	21
Cree School Board Gordon Blackned, Chairman	17/10/2006	19
Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Richard Budgell, Executive Coordinator of Post-Secondary Education, Education Branch Christine Cram, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Socio-Economic Policy and Regional Operations Allan MacDonald, Director General, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians Mary Tobin Oates, Senior Advisor, Inuit Relations Secretariat	19/10/2006	20
First Nations Education Council, Quebec Lise Bastien, Director, First Nations Education Council Gilbert Whiteduck, Senior Education Advisor	17/10/2006	19
Membertou First Nation Darren GooGoo, Director of Education	31/10/2006	22
National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation Roberta Jamieson, President and Chief Executive Officer Paulette Tremblay, Director, Post-Secondary Education	24/10/2006	21
Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program Tommy Akulukjuk Alumni Murray Angus, Instructor Mishael Gordon, Student Morley Hanson, Coordinator Jackie Price, Instructor David Sevkoak, Instructor Juanita Taylor, Board of Directors	19/09/2006	14
Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated Joanasie Akumalik, Director, Government & Public Relations Natan Obed, Director, Department of Social and Cultural Development Laurie Pelly, Legal Counsel	19/09/2006	14

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Prince Albert Grand Council Keith Frame, Research Coordinator	28/09/2006	18
Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue Edith Cloutier, Chairman of the Board Johanne Jean, President	17/10/2006	19
University of Winnipeg Mary Young, Director, Aboriginal Students Services Centre	26/09/2006	17

APPENDIX D LIST OF BRIEFS

Organizations and Individuals

Assembly of First Nations

Caledon Institute of Social Policy

Congress of Aboriginal Peoples

First Nations Education Council, Quebec

First Nations Technical Institute

National Association of Friendship Centres

National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning

Native Women's Association of Canada

Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program

Prince Albert Grand Council

Smith-Spencer, Kimberly

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings ([Nos. 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 31, 32 and 34](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Colin Mayes, MP
Chair

