

Dechinta

March 15, 2018

To The Honourable Alfred Moses, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment:

**RE: Governance of Postsecondary Education Institutions in the NWT:
Response to the GNWT Discussion Paper**

Please find attached Dechinta's response to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment's discussion paper, *Governance of Postsecondary Education Institutions in the NWT : Better Ways Forward*.

At the direction of your Department over the last six years, our not-for-profit organization and charity has produced both a draft Dechinta Bush University Act, and a Sustainable Business Plan, which details the impact that a 5 million dollar a year funding agreement would have on jobs creation in all regions of the NWT, while also closing the divide for Indigenous citizens and women.

As an Indigenous man from the NWT, I grew up living between Norman Wells and Yellowknife. In 1997, I eventually took a job on an oil speculation crew operating west of Tulita. The racism I experienced on the job site compelled me as a mature student to give university a shot. For the first time in my life, I realized that I was intelligent and that it was the school system that was failing us. Now I am a tenured university professor.

I work for Dechinta and my community because I have seen how it transforms students' lives and futures. Good post-secondary education must be designed to support and foster Indigenous brilliance. Good post-secondary education saves Indigenous lives and builds nations. Dechinta provides opportunities to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students that are not available anywhere else in the country.

The best policy options are always the options that are backed by research and evidence. These options must also aim to support our commitments to reconciliation by supporting Indigenous-led post-secondary education initiative. They must provide our student with an educational model that promotes individual and collective self-determination. This is what Dechinta does

and why it works. You have the evidence to prove it and a long waiting list of students waiting to participate in our radically innovative programming. These students want to build the future of the north.

We have been working – blood, sweat and tears for nine years because our youth deserve the best future possible. They deserve an education system that was design-built for them and their children, not a colonial model that tries to ‘decolonize’ without fundamentally changing the governance and/or structure of education in the north.

We have spent considerable time and resources to respond to the Department’s directives in the spirit of partnership and cooperation. Dechinta wants to work with the GNWT to have the highest quality, most accountable, well-governed land-based university in the north - a leading example for Canada and the world.

All best-practices both in Canada and internationally are, or are currently moving towards a publically funded Indigenous education sector of post-secondary. Here in the NWT we are uniquely positioned to have a competitive university rooted in the unique cultures and knowledge of the north that will attract students from all around the world. Augustana University, in Camrose Alberta, had a small university. It brought over 40M a year to the local economy. Imagine what a robust arctic, Indigenous-led university based in the NWT can do?

With Dechinta you have a northern-built university program that is accredited and subject to the process and quality assurance committees of two major Canadian universities. At my home institution of UBC, we have worked for over three years to develop and approve another 16 Dechinta. These course offerings were approved by Senate last week.

Quality assurance is key, which is why we have made it central to our governance. We urge you to explore innovative and best-practice options to publically fund Dechinta and our existing university programming.

Minister Moses, we believe that you have the power to make this happen and that you can ensure that your department prioritizes evidence-based, well-researched policy in Indigenous education. With Dechinta you have an evidence-based investment supported by the GNWT and private and public sectors because it works.

The NWT/Denendeh is a unique jurisdiction. Dechinta, with your support and your political will, can be transformed into a self-determining university rooted in Indigenous culture and knowledge, for everyone.

We attach the following policy discussion paper and are waiting to work with your team to support policy options that serve northern students and their families.

Mashi Cho,



Dr. Glen Coulthard, on behalf of the Dechinta Board of Directors



**BETTER WAYS FORWARD:
ESTABLISHING A LEGACY OF POST-SECONDARY EXCELLENCE IN THE NWT**

**DECHINTA BUSH UNIVERSITY CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND LEARNING
RESPONSE TO
GOVERNMENT OF NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
GOVERNANCE OF POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE NWT
DISCUSSION PAPER**

Executive Summary

Since 2009, Dechinta Bush University Centre for Research and Learning has been working to establish a public Indigenous university in the NWT, open to everyone. Using a rigorous land-based pedagogy and a community-centred approach to curriculum development, Dechinta provides the ONLY post-secondary education (PSE) programming in the NWT that meets the quality assurance standards of our university partners and their respective quality assurance committees.

Currently, the GNWT expends huge amounts of public money in a college system that is, by default, an arm of the GNWT itself. In *Governance of Postsecondary Education in the NWT*, the GNWT details four Pillars of a Sustainable Post-Secondary System. They are: institutional recognition, internal and external quality assurance and good governance. Currently, a majority of programs at the college funded by the GNWT do not have external quality assurance. The GNWT has a duty to protect both public investments and students in all iterations of its postsecondary education system.

As detailed in the discussion paper, the future of NWT PSE requires significant work to develop a new postsecondary Education Act (Act). The GNWT details that the new Act “be forward thinking”, yet the content of the discussion paper does not mention the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), or make reference to the extensive body of research and best practices in Indigenous education, include any Indigenous perspectives or policy options, refer to case studies from other jurisdictions or refer to policy work on Indigenous post-secondary education investment and outcomes.

Rather than lay out robust pathways for effective investments in education that meet the mandate of the GNWT, the discussion paper entrenches the unaccountable status quo while both *limiting and separating Indigenous controlled and led education to a private sector of Indigenous institutions*. These separate Indigenous institutions, which are “indigenous governed and receive their mandates from Indigenous people,” are to be privately funded. Given the lack of private capital available in the NWT, and the often-insurmountable financial barriers Indigenous and northern students face, the proposed policy pathways



ignore the GNWT's legal responsibilities to protect treaty rights and the public government's clear responsibility with respect to providing quality public education. Best practice policy is constantly evolving in the direction that recognizes the leadership and expertise of Indigenous peoples as central to building a robust public post-secondary system. Indigenous leadership and expertise must not be purposefully separated and privatized from the public system as the discussion paper suggests.

All post-secondary education in the NWT should be rooted in the TRC Calls to Action and Indigenous education best practices. [Link to: <http://nctr.ca/reports2.php>]

Given the unique jurisdictional opportunities of the NWT, Dechinta is calling on the GNWT to develop a robust discussion paper, policy options and resulting draft Act that capitalizes on the post-secondary landscape of the NWT, on that is rooted in evidence and highest quality policy research and analysis.

Within the following response paper, policy options are detailed that would create pathways towards a public post-secondary system that utilizes Indigenous governance models, knowledge and expertise. Central to these policy options should be the proven approaches that have been and are being adopted by jurisdictions, many of which have minority Indigenous populations.

It is both economically and socially responsible that the GNWT, with a 50/50 Indigenous non-Indigenous population be a leader this this area.

This response details the best practices for PSE institutions, specifically focusing on the unique opportunity for Indigenous post-secondary education, and the proven outcomes of such investments for the public good.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action and UNDRIP

The GNWT mandate makes a commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Calls to Action. All and any policy options for changes to the Education Act should embody these commitments. Current programming at Dechinta aligns and delivers on the TRC Calls to Action in a measurable way. Dechinta's program's are *already* university accredited, meeting quality assurance standards, and are Indigenous-led in a variety of NWT regions. The TRC Calls to Action detail specific responsibilities that the GNWT has committed to and must consider while developing policy recommendations that will frame the future of PSE in the NWT and the important next steps in ensuring that legislative change embodies and enacts pathways that support and realize the TRC.

Along with the federal government, the GNWT has a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that PSE options in the NWT meet or exceed the goals in the TRC. Policy options that define a

pathway for Dechinta to evolve into a publically funded Indigenous University should be presented.

Specific to the discussion on PSE are TRC calls to action 10 and 11 under Education which detail:

10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

- i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
- ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
- iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
- iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
- v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
- vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
- vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

11. We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.

Further, UNDRIP asserts:

Article 14

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.

It is within the context of (a) the GNWT's commitments to reconciliation and implementing the recommendations of the TRC, and (b) the proclaimed federal and international commitment to institutionalize the UNDRIP that the GNWT develop policy options that respond to and support these fundamental developments within the context of PSE implementation in the NWT.

GNWT Fiscal Accountability and Student Responsibility in Post-Secondary Education

The approach as recommended in the discussion paper is both fiscally and socially irresponsible. Not only do the constraints and parameters of the proposed PSE system set up northern students for failure, but the current unchecked monopoly that continues without quality assurance or peer-reviewed assessment creates ongoing disadvantages to the potential growth in the GNWT economy.

Ongoing investments that are not evidence based or outcome contingent create a culture of waste, compliance and accountability. Moreover, this negligence is a disservice to current and future labor market needs of northern residents, the significant detail of which is laid out in the GNWT's own Skills4Success plan.

This archaic arrangement is a disadvantage to northern students who attend programs that do not have the highest quality assurance standards. Student mobility to other jurisdictions is compromised, and instead of being recognized as a leader, the NWT breeds a reputation of lowering the bar. This does a disservice to our students, communities and economy.



Dechinta is proposing a fiscally responsible and accountable pathway to a publically funded Dechinta university, rooted in Indigenous knowledge and values to ensure that all northern students have access to the highest quality post-secondary education possible.

With existing programs already approved by quality assurance and expanding, and student demand rising, Dechinta offers a cutting-edge option for the future labour market of the NWT.

Program Development and Approval

Currently, the Minister's role in relation to PSE is specific to program approval. Programs of study at Aurora College are established/approved by the Minister. This opens up both quality assurance issues for students and transparency and accountability issues for the GNWT. A robust program development and approval process would ensure that an independent third party provide analysis and expertise for program approval. To ensure student mobility and government accountability, all PSE institutions, including Aurora College, must be subject to the same rigorous program approval and quality assurance.

Quality Assurance Reviews

The lack of a reputable and well-established quality control and assessment regime for PSE in the NWT informs the ongoing development of Dechinta partnerships with leading Canadian universities. Dechinta partner universities accredit Dechinta's own curriculum. This ensures quality control and oversight, by both established academic curriculum committees, senates, boards of governors, as well as the third-party quality assurance councils of our partner jurisdictions.

Establishing a quality assurance council is costly. Following other emerging university jurisdictions, partnership or the contracting out of quality assurance is critical. To ensure both accountability and quality assurance, the process must be separate from the ministry should the ministry continue to be the principal delivery body of PSE.

Evidence-based policy in Indigenous Post Secondary Education

Evidence based best practices in Indigenous education, both nationally and globally, demonstrate that Indigenous control of Indigenous education that is open and accessible to everyone offers the highest return on investment. As UNDRIP details, relevant Indigenous education, in content, pedagogy, and governance is both an inherent right, Treaty right and human right.

The economic evidence for such public investments is indisputable, for example, in New Zealand, which has a publically funded Indigenous post-secondary system.

Pathways to Post-Secondary Excellence

Current evidence-based policy in Indigenous post-secondary education is exemplified by the evolution of Indigenous education in other jurisdictions. The GNWT does not have to repeat, as currently suggested, the policy pathways of other jurisdictions *eventually* leading to best practice.

The publically responsible policy option is to create pathways that begin with the best practice and push the evolution further. The current GNWT discussion paper argues for the status quo. The policy options presented by the GNWT are expensive, and do not offer economic evaluation of innovative hybrid-partnership models.

Dechinta calls on the GNWT to take bold steps to ensuring that the GNWT is the leading jurisdiction in post-secondary education.

Dechinta holds a unique position in the NWT post-secondary education sector as it is a not-for-profit organization and charity that offers accredited university programming. An organization that is governed by public statute both territorially and federally by the CRA and community membership, with the support of First Nations governments using primarily public funding.

Since its inception, Dechinta has been advocating for the establishment of a university in the NWT that responds specifically not only to the needs of the labor market, but the needs of student communities and families. The widely-shared Northern University Field School and Blachford Trust document elicited territory-wide and national feedback. Research into the barriers facing northern students, Indigenous, Métis and Inuvialuit students resulted in the creation of a framework designed to remove barriers and enhance success. This framework governs Dechinta Bush University Centre for Research and Learning' pedagogical practice.

Since 2008, Dechinta has been actively engaging with both the GNWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) regarding the need for fundamental change in the *Education Act*, quality assurance, investment, evaluation and assessment, return in investment and research. Central to these efforts have been the need for core funding and legislative recognition for Dechinta.

At the request of the GNWT ECE, Dechinta produced a draft *Dechinta University Act*, first in 2013 then again in 2017. This draft Act details an Indigenous bicameral university governance system with significant powers vested in Elders, communities, students and professors. The goal is to create a university that exercises academic freedom and operates independent of government while having deep accountability to students, communities and families within an Indigenous governance framework.

Considering the unique operating environment of the Northwest Territories and our specific history of colonization, residential school and ongoing social challenges resulting



from this complex reality, the Northwest Territories requires a customized and evidence-based university option. The policy options must be robust.

Any legislative change in PSE must promote investment and innovation. In the current GNWT discussion paper, all public university options have been written off as costly, without any cost benefit analysis. Moreover, we are concerned that the viable policy options available to the GNWT regarding both the recognition of Dechinta and existing programs have been omitted along with case studies of best practices in Indigenous education.

Skills4Success, the comprehensive 10-year strategy of the GNWT to address labor market needs through training details that “2015-2030 80% of NWT jobs will require post-secondary education”. Given the labor market focus of this government, it is essential that the policy options detailed and the resulting Act correlate with robust return on investment research to ensure the GNWT meets Skills4Success targets.

The Dechinta Bush University Plan 2015-2020 details the impact of 5M a year in funding. Creating 158 jobs in total with 153 jobs outside of Yellowknife, this Business Plan focuses on robust knowledge economic growth through Indigenous employment in the regions while catalyzing training opportunities so northern people can fill higher paying jobs. The plan also details the complex social, cultural, physical and mental health impacts of investing in a sector where Indigenous well-being, knowledge and success are the principal metric.

Pathways to the Creation of a Postsecondary Education Institution

The GNWT discussion paper put forward 4 limited pathways to the creation of a postsecondary education institution. Dechinta offers further pathways for the creation of a post-secondary institution in the NWT based on best practices in the evolving sector of Indigenous post-secondary education both nationally and globally. Given the unique operating environment and the needs of potential students, such an evidence-based approach is suitable.

Additional pathways:

- From a private not-for-profit institution to a public university
- The creation of a University by an Act of Government is response to specific needs, particularity in the early development of jurisdictions
- Partnerships between existing Universities with jurisdictions that are developing Universities, which eventually become under an Act independent public universities
- From an Private Indigenous Institute to a publically funded Indigenous Institute
- The Aboriginal Governments of the NWT drawdown post-secondary Education powers through self-government and create an Public NWT Indigenous University, governed by Indigenous People, open to everyone

Pathway 1: from Private Institution to Publically Funded Degree Granting Institution

Ontario's recent legislation of their *Indigenous Institutes Act* recognized Indigenous Institutes as a fundamental pillar of post-secondary education in Ontario. The GNWT position paper notes that "the proposed legislation many include specific category for Ingenious Institutions. These would be private institutes and outside of the publicly funded post-secondary system." However, in Ontario, the recent recognition of the importance of the Indigenous Institutes also came with a 54M public investment. This investment is the start of an ongoing negotiation to ensure the sustainability of these institutes through public funding. In terms of public funding, the Minister can make a regulation prescribing the Indigenous Institutes that shall receive regular and ongoing operating funding from the Government of Ontario for the purposes of providing post-secondary education and training.

Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017

As presented by the Indigenous Institutes Consortium, there were several notable factors that have contributed to this paradigm shift in Indigenous post-secondary recognition and partnership in Ontario:

- Political Leadership and effective bureaucratic support (internal government politicians who wanted to make a difference) resulted in legislation being both drafted to Royal Ascension in six months, resulting in the *Indigenous Institutes Act*.
- A wave of positive disruption nationally to the 'status quo' on Indigenous issues and opportunities.
- Both politicians and bureaucrats truly understanding the valuable function of Indigenous-lead and governed education as being critical to all of society

- Effective collaboration and relationship building between government and Indigenous Institutes and providers. ¹

These two examples of many illustrate the evolving nature of the relationships between Indigenous education and the state. Partnerships, collaboration and disruptive thinking are common themes in these success stories.

Pathway 2: The Creation of a University by an Act of Government

In Canada, historically many universities were created by a small group of active citizens or public and private groups devoted to the future of their communities and regions. Such was the case with the creation of the University of Alberta (1906).² These creations were often a response to a gap in the education system or as a response to limited ideological options of existing institutions. McMaster (1887), for instance, is a public university with Baptist and service roots that has a private charter yet publicly funded.³

Many of these examples share an articulated mission to enhance the long-term development of human capacity and innovation in their respective regions. University colleges were also created in response to the limited options and ideologies of existing regional colleges, such as Dalhousie University (1818).

Thus, the creation of universities historically share common characteristics:

- Small populations in emerging and developing jurisdictions.
- Sought to offer an alternative to existing college options, providing choice in a changing political landscape.
- As a recognition of the establishment of a university being funded to enhance human development and economic stability or a region.

Pathway 3: From a Public Not-For-Profit Institution/institute to a Public University

Globally, there are important examples to consider in the field of Indigenous post-secondary education. The first is the New Zealand example of the Indigenous tertiary education sector, or [wānanga](#). Born out the creation of *O-Tāwhao Marae* community movement which emerged as a response to lack of access to relevant and safe cultural learning for Maori students at local colleges, Te Wānanga in New Zealand/Aotearoa started as an occupation and assertion in Indigenous education, which eventually led to a publically funded legislated space for Maori post-secondary institutions, alongside universities, polytechnics and teacher's colleges.⁴

¹ Mosquito, Rosie and Jean-Guy Prechette. (2018)

² Wallace, Robert Charles. (1933), 14.

³ Johnston, Charles, M. (2015)

⁴ Durie, Mason. (2009).

The largest Wānanga, Te Wānanga of Aotearoa grew rapidly from 3,127 students in 2000 to 66,756 students in 2004 – thus becoming the largest post-secondary institution in New Zealand. Notably, at the height of enrollment, 52% of students were non-Indigenous. From 1983 to 2003, Maori participation in post-secondary rose 148%.⁵

The Maori launched a court case against the Crown arguing that they had failed to make adequate investments in the Wānanga system, resulting in a 168M court settlement that resulted in capital investment in Wānanga. The well documented social, health, mental health, cultural and language impacts of these bold policy movements to 1) legally recognize and 2) publically fund the unique, Indigenous focused curriculum and governance of these institutions has resulted in a “transformation” of Maori participation in the New Zealand economy.⁶

Pathway 4: Partnerships between existing universities with jurisdictions that are developing universities, which eventually become an Act for an independent public university

In Canada, historically the development of partnerships between jurisdictions with established universities and those without such institutions has been a common practice. For example, The University of British Columbia was established first as a partnership with the Vancouver High School and McGill University. Furthermore, the ratification of the First Nations University of Canada, federated through the University of Regina, created a space for an independent-self governing and accountable Indigenous university while working in partnership with existing university infrastructure and systems.

The Policy Lessons of Dechinta: Why Indigenous Evidence-based Best Practice Matters:

Dechinta is a crucial place for knowledge transfer, teaching, learning, and critical cutting edge research.

Leanne Simpson explains that in Anishinaabe philosophy and pedagogy, it is important to learn “from and with the land.”⁷ While “field schools” have been common in western scientific pedagogical models, there is a growing recognition of the importance of land engaged research and educational programming in the ongoing political, social and cultural contexts leading to decolonization and reconciliation. Leading scholars recognize that Indigenous knowledge cannot be taught solely within a western institutional framework. For example, Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows highlights the importance of land-based contextual learning in relation to Indigenous, and more broadly, Canadian, legal traditions. He writes: “Indigenous legal reasoning is often related to the land. In fact, understanding how Indigenous peoples practice law as a land-based activity is required to

⁵ Ibid. p. 5

⁶ Lattimore, et al. (2003)

⁷ Simpson, Leanne. (2014)

appreciate Canada's Constitution. Indigenous law is an important source of authority for all Canadians... walls can hide important legal resources."⁸

In a similar vein, Indigenous legal scholar Val Napoleon asks about the relationship between land and the law. "How, then, do people in oral societies record their laws? The law of the Tłı̨chǫ Nation is recorded in the place names...From listening to the name of a site, a Tłı̨chǫ person is able to learn what happened at that place, who was involved, how it was resolved or dealt with, and what was important in the event, and how this information applies to his or her own behavior."⁹ The research and transmission of this knowledge cannot take place without engaging in land-based activities. Dechinta's innovative teaching and research environment is crucial for the development of these land-based educational strategies.

For Indigenous peoples, the land offers us a way of relating with, knowing, experiencing, and translating knowledge about the world; and often these ways of knowing can inform practices (political, economic, pedagogical) which offer alternatives to the social relationships that currently threaten to erase or destroy our senses of land and place. It is our contention that this relational understanding of land – along with the cultural practices that sustain it - is what grounds and informs many northern Indigenous perspectives regarding political and economic development and ought to be central to their education.¹⁰ At its core, such a land-based approach to post-secondary education takes Indigenous cultural knowledge, practices, and confidence to be a key element of Indigenous educational success, wellness, and achievement.

Conclusion

Given the uniqueness of the NWT, Dechinta suggests additional institutional pathways in recognition of demonstrated best practices in Indigenous post-secondary education; pathways that build and develop the established relationships that Dechinta already has with leading universities in Canada.

Dechinta calls on the GNWT to provides policy options that will result in measurable change directly related to the GNWT's Skills4Success initiative, ensuring that the NWT population will not only be able to participate in the future economy, but will lead northern development in support of a healthy population.

Dechinta's goal is to achieve a policy and legislative outcome that centres the needs of NWT students to have equitable opportunities to pursue land-based post-secondary education and remain in the NWT for their university education. Dechinta's goal is not to be prescriptive, but to continue to push for a publically funded Dechinta as a choice for learners.

⁸ Burrows, John. (2016)

⁹ Napoleon, Val. (2013)

¹⁰ Coulthard, Glen. (2014)

Dechinta calls on the GNWT to investigate and implement evidence-based best practices and policy directives in Indigenous and northern education to ensure a legislative pathway for Dechinta to become both an NWT accredited and publicly funded university in the NWT.

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