



IAESC

Indigenous Advanced
Education & Skills Council

Outcome Document:

Indigenous Institutes Dialogue on
Issues, Priorities, and Challenges of the Indigenous Institutes Pillar
and the Role of the
Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council, April 8, 9, 2021.

May 2021





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Executive Summary

On April 8 and 9, 2021 the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) invited Indigenous Institutes, their chosen representatives, and respective communities to a dialogue. The topic of the dialogue focused on the Indigenous Institutes pillar and related issues, priorities, and challenges, as well as the role of IAESC in supporting and responding to those.

Seven (7) representatives of IAESC joined by 23 representatives from six (6) Indigenous Institutes participated in the session.

With consent of all representatives, the proceedings of the dialogue session were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were shared with Indigenous Institutes. A qualitative analysis was used to identify patterns and themes in the transcriptions. A qualitative analysis is a pattern-making tool to sort through and synthesize large amounts of information. The resulting findings and observations, as IAESC understands them, are summarized in this document.

Dialogues are an essential part of IAESC's consultative process. Through dialogue, IAESC solicits direction including information and knowledge from Indigenous Institutes, and the Nations and communities they serve.

Findings

The participating Indigenous Institutes identified the following issues, priorities, and challenges.

Textbox 1 (one): Issues, Priorities, Challenges List

1. Funding
 - a. Program Funding/Program Development
 - b. Life-Long Learning
 - c. Capacity-Building
 - d. Quality Assurance
2. Accreditation, Recognition, and Regulatory Bodies
3. Learner Interests
4. Skilled Trades and Training Landscape
5. Protection of Indigenous Knowledge
6. Micro-credentials
7. Pillar Development

Indigenous Institutes identified 100% of these issues, priorities, and challenges as pillar-wide issues affecting all institutes.

1. Funding

Indigenous Institutes described funding as unpredictable, short-term, insufficient, unstable, and precarious. Indigenous Institutes stated that funding issues impact Indigenous Institutes at multiple levels, including overall sustainability, program development, long-term planning, capacity-building, learner supports, and quality assurance.

Indigenous Institutes stated that Annual Transfer Payment Agreements (TPA) create obstacles to long-term planning efforts, including the development of programs. Indigenous Institutes expressed a desire to replace TPAs with predictable and stable funding agreements.

Funding models and formulas, Indigenous Institutes stated, must match the uniqueness of the Indigenous Institutes pillar. Indigenous Institutes stated that there is a need for a new funding mechanism that matches the community-based, life-long learning models of Indigenous Institutes, supporting them to provide the best possible education and truly support their learners and communities.

Indigenous Institutes stated that the pillar is facing capacity issues, notably a lack in human resources. With funding levels largely remaining the same, hiring more personnel constitutes a challenge. Similarly, Indigenous Institutes do not have the capacity to engage in quality assurance processes and are required to hire consultants.

In sum, Indigenous Institutes stated that in order to effectively develop programs, build capacity, and grow as institutions, they require stable, sufficient, and sustained funding, provided through a funding model that responds to the pillar's life-long learning model.

2. Accreditation, Recognition, and Regulatory Bodies

A major challenge, Indigenous Institutes stated, is the lack of recognition of Indigenous Institute credentials by other postsecondary institutions. This negatively affects learner mobility. Removing barriers and protecting learner interests, Indigenous Institutes stated, calls for well-developed transfer pathways and articulation agreements. It also entails recognizing the value of Indigenous Institute credentials in the postsecondary education sector.

3. Learner Interests

Indigenous Institutes stated that learner mobility is a critical issue and underscored the importance of breaking down transferability and accessibility barriers for Indigenous learners. Alongside the development of learner pathways, Indigenous Institutes stated that

there is a simultaneous need to raise awareness of the education, and the value of that education, provided by the Indigenous Institutes pillar.

4. Skilled Trades and Training Landscape

Indigenous Institutes stated that there is a need to develop the skilled trades and training landscape for the Indigenous Institutes pillar. Indigenous Institutes offer credentials that span across the Ontario Qualifications Framework (OQF), ranging from postsecondary education to trades and apprenticeship training. However, the skilled trades and training landscape remains underdeveloped for Indigenous Institutes. Indigenous Institutes also spoke of systemic barriers in this area, particularly when it comes to obtaining Training Delivery Agent (TDA) status.

5. Protection of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous Institutes stated that there is an expectation of Indigenous Institutes who are developing programs to allow access and freely share material across the postsecondary education sector. Such expectations are problematic. There is a need for the Indigenous Institutes pillar to consider how Indigenous knowledge can be protected.

6. Micro-credentials

Indigenous Institutes stated an interest in offering micro-credentials in the future. However, they do not know how micro-credentials are going to be funded, nor the process through which it is decided whether a micro-credential falls under the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) or the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development (MLTSD).

7. Pillar Development

Indigenous Institutes stated that all the described issues, priorities, and challenges affect the whole Indigenous Institutes pillar. Addressing these areas, Indigenous Institutes stated, requires a collaborative effort, involving the Indigenous Institutes and the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC).

Roles of the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council

In response to the described issues, challenges, and priorities, Indigenous Institutes stated that the role of the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) could include:

1. Funding

Indigenous Institutes stated that one major role for the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) could be to communicate funding and capacity issues to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU). Second, in communicating the inadequacy of the current funding model to MCU, IAESC could highlight the need for a different funding

model. Third, IAESC would have a role in working out the connection between program funding and IAESC's quality assurance process with the MCU.

2. Accreditation, Recognition, and Regulatory Bodies

The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC), Indigenous Institutes stated, could have a role in communicating and working with accrediting, regulatory, and professional bodies to ensure transferability. Similarly, IAESC could assume a role in advocacy for Indigenous Institute credentials, educating others on the quality and value of education provided by the Indigenous Institutes pillar. Indigenous Institutes further stated that IAESC could have a role in connecting institutes with similar programming to allow for the potential of block transfers.

3. Learner Interests

Indigenous Institutes stated that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) could have a role in raising awareness and advocating for learner interests. Protecting learner interests, Indigenous Institutes stated, is embedded in IAESC's mandate and flows from its quality assurance standards.

4. Skilled Trades and Training Landscape

Indigenous Institutes stated that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) could assume a supporting role in developing the skilled trades and training landscape for the Indigenous Institutes pillar. Doing so, Indigenous Institutes stated, might include convening and facilitating conversations with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) and the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development (MLTSD).

5. Protection of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous Institutes stated that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) could have a role in convening conversations on intellectual property and the protection of Indigenous Knowledge and knowledge systems. The second role identified by Indigenous Institutes was in research, for example IAESC could engage in collaborative research to support the protection of Indigenous Knowledge (among other areas).

6. Micro-credentials

Indigenous Institutes stated that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) could have a role in supporting the development of micro-credentials for the pillar. This, Indigenous Institutes suggested, could include convening dialogues on micro-credentials with Indigenous Institutes, as well as facilitating conversations with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU).

7. Pillar Development

The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council's (IAESC)'s overarching role, Indigenous Institutes stated, lies "in helping grow that pillar and build that pillar" (Representative 4, April 8).¹ Supporting the development of the Indigenous Institutes pillar, Indigenous Institutes stated, is realized most profoundly through IAESC's quality assurance mandate.

IAESC's Observations

Of particular interest is the collective agreement among Indigenous Institutes that 100% of the stated issues, challenges, and priorities are pillar-wide issues. The development of a sustainable funding model, ensuring transferability, protecting learner interests, opening up the skilled trades and training landscape, protecting Indigenous Knowledge, and offering micro-credentials are priorities for the entire Indigenous Institutes pillar. IAESC may support the position that addressing and realizing these priorities would spur pillar-wide growth and development.

Funding Challenges

Funding challenges experienced by Indigenous Institutes, constitute a major priority and concern for the Indigenous Institutes pillar.

Indigenous Institutes expressed the need for clarification on how new programs are funded, and whether this process connects to IAESC's quality assurance process. There is a need to work with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) on the process through which new programs are being funded. IAESC's quality assurance processes require information on financial stability and viability from Indigenous Institutes, and as such IAESC has a role in reviewing the financial stability and viability of independent programs, pursuant to the standards and benchmarks that have been set for quality assurance. Indigenous Institutes want to deliver independent programs and it is the role of IAESC to support these efforts. Yet, there is no clear pathway from program development to quality assurance and funding approval. This creates a barrier to growing and developing the Indigenous Institutes pillar.

Indigenous Institutes require sufficient and sustained funding to grow and develop. Indigenous Institutes require long-term funding agreements to provide them with some certainty and predictability. Knowing whether funding will be available and how much is required to plan for the future. Without the ability to plan ahead, the growth and development of Indigenous Institutes, and thus the pillar as a whole, will be stunted.

¹ To protect the confidentiality of the dialogue process and its participants, identifying information is omitted and quotations are anonymized. Indigenous Institute representatives are identified by number only.

IAESC understands that a priority for the Indigenous Institutes pillar is the development of a new funding model. IAESC is in agreement with Indigenous Institutes that a move away from Annual Transfer Payment Agreements (TPA) is necessary for the development of the Indigenous Institutes pillar. A new long-term funding model that delivers sufficient and sustained funding, and that matches the Indigenous Institutes pillar's community-based, life-long learning model, would be an appropriate alternative.

Recognition Challenges

It is evident from what was stated by Indigenous Institutes that the lack of recognition of Indigenous Institute credentials by other postsecondary institutions constitutes a major challenge. The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council agrees with Indigenous Institutes that learner mobility must be ensured. This requires a two-pronged approach.

1. The value of Indigenous Institute credentials has to be communicated to and recognized by other postsecondary education institutions. There is a need then to raise awareness and engage in advocacy in this area.
2. Confronting recognition challenges calls for well-developed transfer pathways and articulation agreements. The idea of block transfers among Indigenous Institutes might be among the steps for a promising way forward.

Areas for Development

It is evident from what Indigenous Institutes stated that there are two broad areas that need to be clarified and worked out for the Indigenous Institutes pillar:

1. The Skilled Trades and Training Landscape.
2. Micro-credentials.

Indigenous Institutes need clear pathways to navigate both landscapes.

Roles of IAESC

The Indigenous Institutes stated that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) may have a role in:

- Funding;
- Accreditation, Recognition, Regulatory Bodies;
- Learner Interests;
- Skilled Trades and Training;
- Protection of Indigenous Knowledge;
- Micro-credentials; and,
- Pillar Development.

Indigenous Institutes described the roles IAESC could take in the above areas in several ways. Indigenous Institutes described and stated IAESC as having an “advisory” role; “advocacy” role; “collaborator” role; “consultation” role; “convener” role; “facilitator” role; “influencer” role; “issue communicator” role; and “support” role.

Many of the roles identified by Indigenous Institutes in the above areas point to an overarching support role for IAESC. The role is connected to IAESC’s quality assurance mandate. The mandate touches many of the issues, priorities, and challenges discussed above. Put differently, IAESC’s mandate extends to other areas not narrowly defined as quality assurance, but more broadly as pillar support. IAESC’s quality assurance work then is essential to the growth of individual institutes and the growth of the pillar. Continuing this work provides ongoing support to develop the pillar.

Background

In April 2021, the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) invited Indigenous Institutes, their chosen representatives, and respective communities to participate in a dialogue held over two days, on April 8 and April 9.

The dialogue focused on the Indigenous Institutes pillar and related issues, priorities, and challenges, and the role of IAESC in supporting and responding to those.

On the first day of the dialogue, April 8, Indigenous Institute representatives discussed issues, priorities, and challenges of the Indigenous Institutes pillar.

On the second day of the dialogue, April 9, Indigenous Institute representatives discussed ways in which issues, priorities, and challenges could be addressed, including the role of IAESC. IAESC posed the following two (2) guiding questions to Indigenous Institutes to facilitate discussion:

1. Of the issues discussed yesterday, what issues do you think affect the entire Indigenous Institutes pillar, rather than a single institute?
2. What role do you want the Council to play in resolving the issues that affect the entire Indigenous Institutes pillar and that have not been resolved since the passage of the *Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017*? How do you want the Council to work with you in resolving these issues?

Seven (7) IAESC representatives participated in the dialogue. 23 representatives from the following six (6) Indigenous Institutes participated in the dialogue:

- Anishinabek Educational Institute
- First Nations Technical Institute
- Seven Generations Education Institute
- Shingwauk Kimoomaage Gamig
- Six Nations Polytechnic
- Kenjgewin Teg

The Dialogue Process

Why do we meet in dialogue?

A dialogue is a part of the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC)'s consultative process and provides the following elements:

- Development of evidence-based research;
- Dialogue with Indigenous Institutes and communities, including the development of outcome documents; and,
- Engagement with experts in Indigenous education, knowledge, and language.

Through a dialogue, IAESC obtains information, direction, and knowledge from the Indigenous Institutes representatives.

A dialogue is an open and ongoing participatory process between representatives from IAESC and the Indigenous Institutes, which includes students, teaching and learning staff, community members, and knowledge keepers.

A dialogue supports the development, implementation, and integrity of quality assurance for the Indigenous Institutes pillar. IAESC's consultative process aims to build consensus on issues affecting Indigenous Institutes as a pillar. As a non-political, arm's-length, Indigenous-governed and controlled organization, a dialogue supports IAESC to develop an Indigenous quality assurance process that responds to Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being. The dialogue process supports the interests of learners and Indigenous Institutes. A dialogue aligns with the principles articulated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007*.

Method

The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) conducts and draws on evidence-based research and analytic processes to support Indigenous Institutes, Indigenous learners, and Indigenous communities.

This outcomes document is prepared through a robust qualitative analytic process.² IAESC's process includes the following steps.

² A qualitative analysis is a tool to conduct a detailed examination of complex information to determine its salient features. Put differently, a qualitative analysis is a pattern-making tool to sort through and synthesize

Data Collection:

1. The dialogue is recorded with the consent of all Indigenous Institute representatives.
2. A transcription is made of the recording. In total, 37 pages of raw transcripts were collected (16 pages on April 8 and 21 pages on April 9).

Data Analysis:

3. The transcripts are uploaded to the qualitative research software called ATLAS.ti.
4. IAESC researchers code the data/transcripts.³ Each researcher codes independently from one another to ensure objectivity. Each transcript is coded twice (once by each researcher) to ensure accuracy.
5. The analysis follows an iterative and inductive approach, allowing for patterns, themes, and categories to emerge from the dialogue transcript. This process is like solving a puzzle without a template and a bottom-up approach that ensures the researcher's own interpretations are not imposed. The analysis is generated from the data itself (i.e., the statements of Indigenous Institute representatives).

Confidentiality and Protection of Indigenous Knowledge

This outcome document provides a high-level summary of statements and findings that emerged from the dialogue. Representative quotations are added to exemplify larger themes and in the Indigenous Institute representatives' own words. To protect the confidentiality of the dialogue process and its participants, identifying information is omitted. None of the quotations are attributed to individuals or their respective Indigenous Institute directly. For reference, Indigenous Institute representatives are identified by number only. Numbers were randomly assigned.

large amounts of information. Engaging in an analytic process includes sifting through data units (e.g., word choices, sentences, short paragraphs,) through a series of coding cycles to achieve abstraction and emergent themes. The result are certain outcomes, expressed through a presentation of salient findings. For a comprehensive overview, see for example: Saldana, Jonny. (2011). *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research*. Oxford University.

³ Often referred to as the first step in qualitative analysis, coding is an exploratory analytic process through which patterns and themes emerge. Saldana (2015) explained that a "code" in qualitative research refers to "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute" (3) to a portion of language-based text (such as transcripts), auditory material (such as spoken word), or visuals. A code captures, for example, the content of a passage, paragraph, or sentence in a transcript. "[C]oding is the strategy that moves data from diffuse and messy text to organized ideas about what is going on" (Richards and Morse 2013:167).

The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) is committed to the protection of Indigenous knowledge. All information shared with IAESC through a dialogue is treated as protected Indigenous knowledge and can only be used or disclosed by IAESC with written consent from a dialogue participant. Examples of Indigenous knowledge may include worldviews, knowledge, knowledge keeping and sharing, ways of knowing, doing, and being, teachings, protocols, ceremony, cultures, languages, principles and values, and traditions of Indigenous communities.

Findings

The dialogue focused on the Indigenous Institutes pillar and related issues, priorities, and challenges, as well as the role of the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) in supporting and responding to those.

This section outlines the findings that our research produced. What follows is a presentation of facts synthesized from the research data. The section is thematically organized and outlines several themes that emerged from the dialogue. The themes should not be read as discrete categories, but rather as relational and interconnected.

A basic analysis of the coding structure – outlining which codes were applied and how often – reveals the frequency with which certain themes, topics, or subject matters were raised and discussed by Indigenous Institutes. This helps in the production of a high-level thematic overview and provides some insight into the importance of certain subject matters to Indigenous Institutes.

For this dialogue, the following picture presents itself.

Figure one (1): Dialogue Code/Theme Frequencies

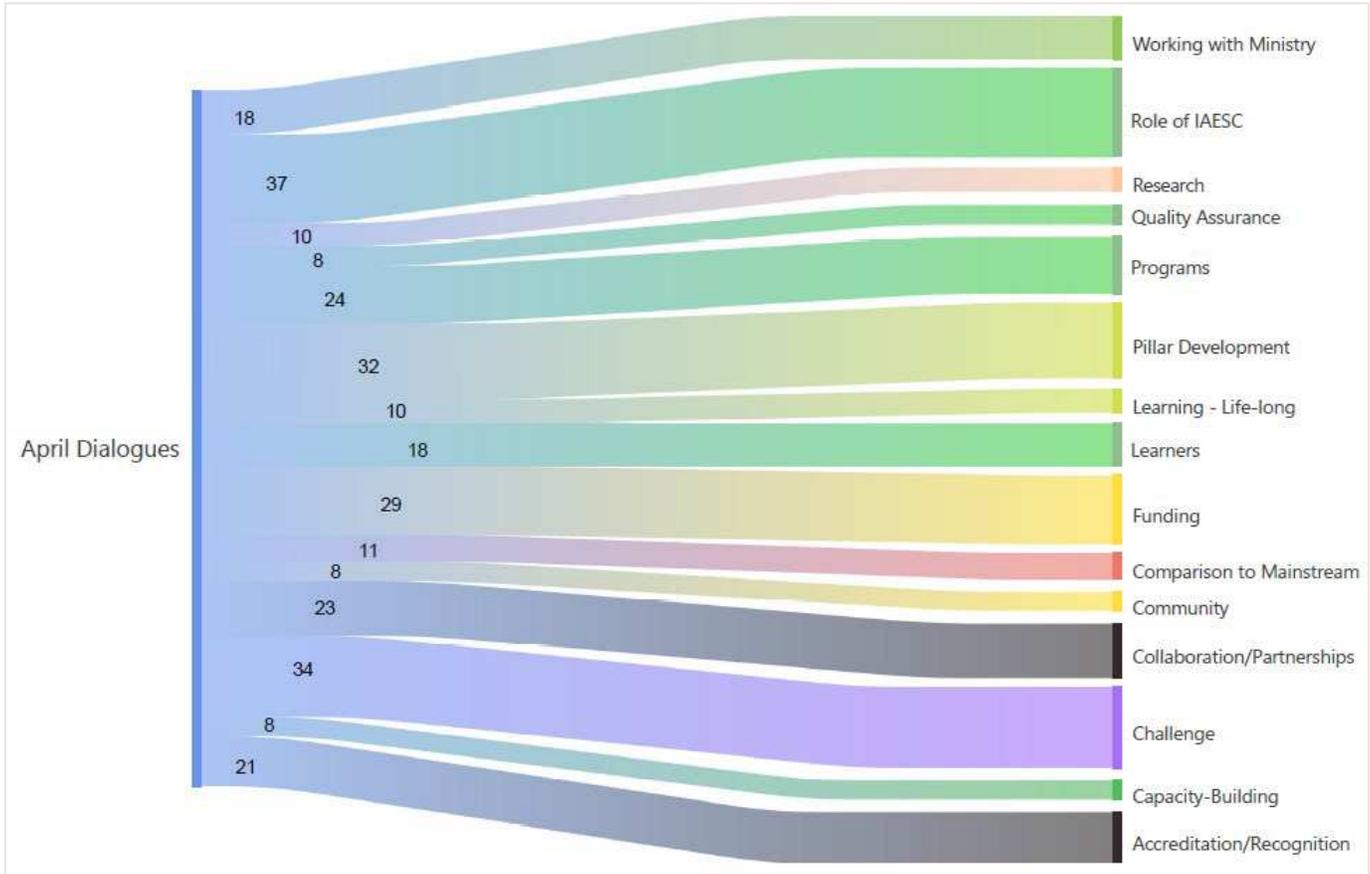


Figure one (1) shows the top 15 most frequently applied codes (51 distinct codes were applied in total), including the frequency with which they were applied. Each of these codes represents a theme or subject matter. For example, Indigenous Institutes spoke to the role of IAESC 37 times (Code: "Role of IAESC"), constituting the predominant subject matter of this dialogue. This is followed by 34 instances in which Indigenous Institutes spoke about challenges (Code: "Challenge") faced by their respective institute, or the Indigenous Institutes pillar as a whole – the second most prevalent subject matter of this dialogue. It is within or connected to this theme that one finds most of the issues, priorities, and challenges as raised by Indigenous Institutes.

Several of these themes or subject matters appeared in relation to one another. The code "Challenge" was often applied in connection with the codes "Funding", "Accreditation/Recognition", and "Capacity-Building". When Indigenous Institutes spoke of challenges faced by institutes or the pillar, the above areas were highlighted as the most challenging.

A definition of each of these 15 codes, including a description of when they are applied, can be found in the appendix ([Appendix A: Code List](#)).

What follows is a thematic overview of what Indigenous Institutes stated during the dialogue, beginning with the issues, priorities, and challenges put forth by Indigenous Institutes. This is followed by a discussion of the role of IAESC, as identified by Indigenous Institutes, in responding to those issues, priorities, and challenges.

What is shared in this outcome document is not exhaustive. For the sake of brevity and readability, not everything could be included. What is presented below represents the main findings and key messages that were shared throughout the dialogue.

Issues, Priorities, Challenges

Indigenous Institutes identified the following issues, priorities, and challenges (see textbox two (2)). They are listed according to the frequency with which they were brought up by Indigenous Institutes, starting with the most frequently discussed.

Our analysis showed that “Pillar Development” is the one exception on this list. Neither solely issue, priority, nor challenge, pillar development emerged as an overarching theme that threaded through the other items on the list. Indigenous Institutes diagnosed all issues, priorities, and challenges on this list as pillar-wide issues, priorities, and challenges, and furthermore, pointed toward the need for a pillar-wide strategy in addressing those. Pillar development will be discussed last – not because it was discussed the least, but because it functioned as a theme in which much of the other discussions were grounded.

Textbox Two (2): Issues, Priorities, Challenges List

1. Funding
 - a. Program Funding/Program Development
 - b. Life-Long Learning
 - c. Capacity-Building
 - d. Quality Assurance
2. Accreditation, Recognition, and Regulatory Bodies
3. Learner Interests
4. Skilled Trades and Training Landscape
5. Protection of Indigenous Knowledge
6. Micro-credentials
7. Pillar Development

These issues are not confined to individual Indigenous Institutes but span the whole Indigenous Institutes pillar. On the second day of the dialogue, the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) posed the following question to Indigenous Institutes:

“Of the issues discussed yesterday, what issues do you think affect the entire Indigenous Institutes pillar, rather than a single institute?”

There was consensus among respondents to the question. 100% of respondents (a response was provided by every Indigenous Institute present on this day) stated that *all* of these issues were pillar-wide issues. Indigenous Institutes stated that while institutes may prioritize certain issues over others, all issues that were addressed affect the entire pillar.

For example, “I think they are all sector-wide issues and not single-institute issues”, one Indigenous Institute representative stated (Representative 23, April 9). “I think that a lot of what was shared yesterday and again this morning affects all of the institutes. ...everybody’s at different stages but everybody has very similar, common issues and challenges...” stated another (Representative 1, April 9). “I agree. The scope—everything that’s on the list I think ... impacts all of our institutions” another Indigenous Institute representative agreed (Representative 15, April 9).

Funding

Indigenous Institutes described funding as unpredictable, short-term, insufficient, unstable, and precarious.

Indigenous Institutes shared that funding issues impact Indigenous Institutes at multiple levels, including overall sustainability, program development, long-term planning, capacity-building, learner supports, and quality assurance.

Indigenous Institutes stated that while there is some flexibility in current operating grants, the grants themselves are simply not big enough to allow for much leeway in the re-allocation of funds. For example, as one Indigenous Institute representative put it, “the operating grants ... are flexible and open and it’s up for our discretion as to how we use those. But it’s, again, it’s like, okay, so you know there’s [a] finite number of resources” (Representative 23, April 8). The next day, the same Indigenous Institute representative shared the following sentiment.

[Y]ou know we’ve been efficient in really using what resources we are allocated ... we don’t really have an experience to say, well this is what it would truly cost if we were to do it properly, and to have it funded properly. And if we had the resourcing behind it to develop a wonderful program and course, we don’t even have that experience. We make do with what we’re given, to put it bluntly. (Representative 23, April 9)

Indigenous Institutes expressed a desire to replace Annual Transfer Payment Agreements (TPA). It was stated that the short-term nature of annual funding agreements constitutes an obstacle to long-term planning efforts. “[T]he fact that it’s year by year does not really speak to the intention ... of what we were trying to do” one Indigenous Institute representative shared (Representative 23, April 9). Reminding us of the intent of the *Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017*, this Indigenous Institute representative further remarked that it was time to revisit and move beyond those initial funding conversations.

Some Indigenous Institutes also expressed concern that certain funding avenues available to the rest of the postsecondary education sector are unavailable to them, including (minor and major) capital funding. For example, “as an Indigenous institution we do not have access to the capital, either infrastructure or even the infrastructure loan program in the province that colleges and universities do”, one Indigenous Institute representative explained (Representative 18, April 8).

Indigenous Institutes stated that when the college and university sectors developed, there were initial investments to spur their growth. Indigenous Institutes expressed the sentiment that the Indigenous Institutes pillar seemed to be treated differently, that the same funding boost to support initial growth is not provided to the pillar. As one Indigenous Institute representative put it,

I was reflecting about community colleges and how they developed in the sixties, I think it was 1967. And you know, that was a formal process and there was funding attached to that whole sector development. And you know, here we are as IIs [Indigenous Institutes] and we’ve been around for twenty, some of us thirty-plus years. And you know we’re still, we’re still at that funding door, knocking on the door still to fund Indigenous education in the way that it needs to be funded. (Representative 23, April 8)

Program Development/Program Funding

Indigenous Institutes spoke about uncertainty and unpredictability of funding in relation to program development. Indigenous Institutes raised the issue that there exists a fundamental inability to predict whether funding would be made available for new programs. This profoundly limits Indigenous Institutes in their ability to securely plan and develop programs. As one Indigenous Institute representative put it, “just like every other II [Indigenous Institute] here on the call, you know, we do have plans and visions for our new program development. But ... ideas don’t really mean too much without resources” (Representative 23, April 8).

Indigenous Institutes also spoke about their uncertainty regarding the process through which program funding would be made available. Indigenous Institutes stated that there is a need to clarify with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) how new programs are funded and whether this funding mechanism connects to the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC)’s quality assurance process.

Furthermore, given the short-term nature of the current funding model, Indigenous Institutes stated that they were concerned about the sustainability of programs. For example, “[a]re we ensuring that we’re, you know, funding them [the programs] so that they’re sustainable

and not just one-offs?" one Indigenous Institute representative asked (Representative 9, April 8). What is required, the same representative explained, is "financial stability and sustainability for the programs, any programs, to be developed" (Representative 9, April 8).

Indigenous Institutes also raised the point that program development costs for Indigenous Institutes may not be the same as average program development costs in the university or college sector. The reason for this is that the process for program development may look substantially different than in the mainstream sector. Referring to \$90,000 as an example of what it might cost to develop a course in the mainstream, one Indigenous Institute representative noted the following.

So, it just kind of makes me wonder, okay, so some work has been done in terms of when new courses are developed, or new programs, this is the number or the benchmark that is typically used to do that [\$90,000]. So, it just leaves me wondering, okay, what about for us as Indigenous Institutes that are developing Indigenous courses, content, language, and engaging community and all of those kinds of costs. It's like, I really don't have a clear idea of what our course cost is. You know, what's our version of the ninety-thousand-dollar benchmark as just an approximation or a proxy? (Representative 23, April 9)

Indigenous Institutes raised concerns about funding levels potentially being tied to enrolment numbers, pointing out that "funding models can be a bit precarious, and so when we're launching a program and submitting a proposal forward and we have smaller enrolment numbers those teach-out plans can be difficult for, you know, for a smaller enrolment program" (Representative 21, April 8).

Life-Long Learning

Funding models and formulas, Indigenous Institutes stated, must match the uniqueness of the Indigenous Institutes pillar.

Indigenous Institutes reiterated that they are community-based institutions that embrace a life-long learning model. Indeed, life-long learning, Indigenous Institutes stated, is one of the main aspects that makes the pillar unique, setting it apart from the education provided in the university and college sectors. "[W]hat Indigenous Institutes are about, is lifelong learning", one Indigenous Institute representative told us (Representative 23, April 9). This means, "we're not pigeonholed into ... what we've come to know and understand as PSE [Postsecondary education]. We are much broader than that because that's what our communities want and expect from us" (Representative 23, April 9). Agreeing with the above sentiment, another Indigenous Institute representative similarly explained, "lifelong

learning ... that's really, really an important piece of what all the institutes do. I mean, if we didn't do those things, basically, we're just small, mainstream institutes, you know? ...Why we're different is because of, you know, we're owned by communities, and we're governed by communities, and we rely on knowledge keepers" (Representative 4, April 9).

Indigenous Institutes pointed out that current funding models and formulas do not match the life-long learning approach of Indigenous Institutes. There is a need, Indigenous Institutes stated, for a new funding mechanism that sets Indigenous Institutes apart, recognizing the distinctive "holistic, lifelong" (Representative 4, April 9) education provided by the Indigenous Institutes pillar. As one Indigenous Institute representative put it, "I really believe, and I've said this for a long time, that there needs to be some type of ... funding mechanism that helps set us apart—as a sector, you know, that there's x amount of dollars for lifelong learning, for the inclusion of language, culture. Like it shouldn't be something that is a negotiable thing" (Representative 4, April 9).

Another Indigenous Institute representative agreed, also highlighting the difficulty in having the uniqueness of the Indigenous Institutes pillar recognized and understood.

But what it really boils down to, I think, is matching the funding ...the funding conversation, a funding formula, that really goes towards the lifelong learning aspect of what we do. And I think that's the crux of the challenge. But we don't—ministries can't grapple with that yet so we're kind of disrupting the system in asking the question, well how does this work, how do we do trades, how do we do postsec [Postsecondary education], how do we do this as institutes because we're not a college, we're not just a university, we're not just one thing, we're all of these things. And I think that's what's posing, I guess, our greatest challenge. (Representative 23, April 9)

Capacity-Building

Indigenous Institutes stated that the Indigenous Institutes pillar is facing capacity issues, notably a lack in human resources. Indigenous Institutes expressed that they face difficulties in meeting personnel shortages due to funding being limited and unpredictable.

One Indigenous Institute representative explained their situation as follows. "[O]ne of the other challenges we're facing right now is Human Resources. I think I heard [my colleague] mention it, about building capacity of certainly our current staff ... until additional funding resources are available, we tend to add on to current positions some responsibilities to get the work started" (Representative 13, April 8).

Developing programs, another Indigenous Institute representative explained, is fundamentally “linked to recruitment and capacity and stable funding” (Representative 20, April 8). Sharing the same sentiment, another Indigenous Institute representative added, “I will reinforce, you know, the whole issue around capacity building, stable funding, all of that. I mean, those are recurring challenges and priorities for us” (Representative 15, April 8).

Quality Assurance

Indigenous Institutes mentioned quality assurance as another challenge in connection with capacity-issues. Indigenous Institutes stated that they do not have the capacity to engage in quality assurance processes without additional funding. For example, there might be a need to hire consultants or additional staff to engage in this work, which Indigenous Institutes have difficulties paying for.

Accreditation, Recognition, and Regulatory Bodies

Indigenous Institutes raised a set of challenges related to accreditation, recognition, and regulatory bodies.

A major challenge, Indigenous Institutes stated, is the lack of recognition of Indigenous Institute credentials by other postsecondary institutions. As one Indigenous Institute representative plainly put it, “our major challenge is credential recognition within PSEs [postsecondary education institutions] across Canada” (Representative 16, April 8). What Indigenous Institutes face, the same Indigenous Institute representative asserted, was tantamount to “cognitive imperialism within the sector” (Representative 16, April 8).

Indigenous Institutes stated that confronting recognition challenges calls for well-developed transfer pathways and articulation agreements so that there are “clear entry and exit points across the sector for the programming” that Indigenous Institutes offer (Representative 7, April 9). In addition, the same Indigenous Institute representative added,

[W]hen you dig down a little bit deeper some of the things that we’ve been focusing on, and I’m sure others who are involved in these projects, is getting the rest of the sector ready and able to understand what we’re doing. And [being] able to really remove some of those barriers that we’re all very aware of in terms of recognizing the programming and work that we’re already engaged in. (ibid)

Indigenous Institutes raised the issue of regulatory bodies, indicating that support was needed in this area. For example, as one Indigenous Institute representative put it, “what I had on my list really was around the regulatory bodies and the importance of making sure

our programs are supported with that piece, and through that regulatory piece” (Representative 1, April 8).

One Indigenous Institute representative stated that it is a goal of Indigenous Institutes to eventually accredit their own programs.

I think essential for the pillar is, for our institutes, to build and develop and credential our own programs. I think that is the absolute goal of this, and has been for a long time. You know, not that I’m speaking for other institutes, but I know for [our institute] for thirty-plus years that was its goal. And to kind of be at this stage is really exciting for, not only myself who’s been a long-time employee [at this institute], but for the visions of our leadership, our Chiefs and our Elders who have set this goal way back in the mid 1980s, and here we are looking at it, and it’s become a reality. (Representative 4, April 8)

Learner Interests

Indigenous Institutes connected challenges around accreditation, recognition, and regulatory bodies to learner interests, particularly learner mobility.

Indigenous Institutes stated that learner mobility was a very important issue, underscoring the importance of breaking down transferability and accessibility barriers for Indigenous learners. Part of the solution, Indigenous Institutes stated, requires the further development of pathways for learners. However, resources for pathway development are limited. One Indigenous Institute representative explained it as follows.

I don’t hear too many conversations about what we call Pathways, but I guess on the college side it’s called academic upgrading. ... there’s a finite number of resources but how are we to grow our pillar when, you know, we want to make some of these services a core part of what we do? Pathways is really the Pathways to PSE [postsecondary education], right? So if only thirty percent of our Indigenous learners in our communities have the OSSD [Ontario Secondary School Diploma] and can gain access to the programs of postsecondary then that means seventy percent of our learners need to be in Pathways. (Representative 23, April 8)

One Indigenous Institute representative shared the idea of “block transfer agreements” (Representative 7, April 8) as a potential avenue to support student mobility.

Alongside the development of learner pathways, Indigenous Institutes stated, is a simultaneous need to raise awareness of the education provided by the Indigenous Institutes

pillar. This requires engagement with “the rest of the sector to help them understand [the] kind of the programming that we’re doing” (Representative 7, April 9).

Skilled Trades and Training Landscape

Indigenous Institutes stated that there is a need to develop the skilled trades and training landscape for the Indigenous Institutes pillar. There “seems to be no strategy around the trades”, one Indigenous Institute representative remarked (Representative 15, April 8).

Indigenous Institutes stated that they offer credentials that span across the Ontario Qualifications Framework (OQF), ranging from postsecondary education to trades and apprenticeship training. However, they explained that the skilled trades and training landscape remains underdeveloped for Indigenous Institutes. As one Indigenous Institute representative put it,

I’ll just put on the table, reinforce again the whole trades training area. We didn’t get to that when we did the co-creation piece ... So that’s a big void for us, ... we have to look at lifelong learning for our communities that we serve, and it’s not just PSE [postsecondary education]. So, it’s very critical as [another representative] also pointed out yesterday, about the pathways. (Representative 15, April 9)⁴

Indigenous Institutes spoke of systemic barriers in the skilled trades and training landscape. For example, one Indigenous Institute representative shared the following experience: “We... got our TDA [Training Deliver Agent status],⁵ and there’s a lot of systemic barriers too that are popping up with regards to how things are being dealt with in the Ministry with their process and procedures, and how it’s really disadvantaging the IIs [Indigenous Institutes] in that way too” (Representative 19, April 9).

Protection of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous Institutes stated that there is a need for the Indigenous Institutes pillar to consider how Indigenous knowledge is protected and shared.

⁴ In referring to “the co-creation piece”, the above Indigenous Institute representative is making reference to the Policy Co-Creation Table that resulted in the *Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017*. When the Act was passed, certain areas were left unaddressed and shelved to be dealt with at a later point. One of these outstanding areas, as the above representative notes, is the Skilled Trades and Training Landscape.

⁵ Training Delivery Agents (TDAs) are organizations (colleges and non-colleges) that deliver training and support to apprentices. Receiving TDA status means that an organization has been approved to deliver training and support to apprentices.

One Indigenous Institute representative spoke to current considerations at their institute, sharing that “one thing that we’ve had a lot of discussion about, and [another representative] brought this up, about the intellectual property and the set up of our IK [Indigenous Knowledge] repository” (Representative 1, April 8). It is important to ensure “access for students” and also “look after” and “protect ... the knowledge that we are collecting” (ibid).

Similarly, “as we create new credentials and new programs”, another Indigenous Institute representative noted, “intellectual property development and Indigenous Knowledge” are going to become a big issue (Representative 23, April 8).

Indigenous Institutes expressed concern that there is an expectation of Indigenous Institutes who are developing programs to allow access and freely share material across the postsecondary education sector. Such expectations, Indigenous Institutes expressed, are problematic. One Indigenous Institute representative provided the following example.

We’ve been talking a lot about this idea of what we do with the intellectual property piece. You know, ... we’ve been involved in a number of projects through ONCAT [Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer], a new one with eCampus. And specifically, with eCampus when, you know, we’ll be funded to develop courses as part of a broader project and part of the expectation with eCampus is that the programming that we develop, there’s an expectation that it’s shared widely across the sector. And so, you know, I think there’s some work that needs to be done in ensuring that the rest of the sector understands that some of the work that we’ve been developing can’t be shared widely. In fact, it could be, you know, detrimental to what we’re really doing here, right? And, so it does bring up that broader question of how we protect the knowledge and knowledge systems that are inherent in the programming that we’re currently offering, or planning to offer. (Representative 7, April 9)

To begin to address this issue, the same Indigenous Institute representative provided the following suggestion: “having a broader conversation across, well internally with this part of the pillar, but also across the sector about the importance of that [the protection of Indigenous Knowledge] and having kind of, a collective approach to how we protect and disseminate” (Representative 7, April 9). Echoing this sentiment, another Indigenous Institute representative put forth the following suggestion: “I’d like to see an II [Indigenous Institute] specific research and ethics framework” (Representative 16, April 9). Similarly, another Indigenous Institute representative suggested the possibility of “collaborative” research on “the matter of Indigenous knowledge and intellectual property”, involving the Indigenous Institutes and the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC).

Micro-credentials

Indigenous Institutes stated an interest in offering micro-credentials in the future but pointed out that there was a need for clarification in this area.

For example, one Indigenous Institute representative shared that “our First Nations really look at these micro-credentials to onboard employees right away because, as everybody probably knows, there’s a lot of initiatives on our communities. And if they’re going to be part of this economic recovery, they’re going to need micro-credentials” (Representative 4, April 9). However, the same Indigenous Institute representative noted, “the processes around micro-credentials”, including eligibility criteria for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), and simply knowing whether a micro-credential falls under postsecondary education or within the skilled trades and training landscape, remain unclear (ibid).

Another Indigenous Institute representative expressed a similar sentiment.

When we were participating in the micro-credential forum with eCampusOntario, I had specifically asked, where does the Ministry of Labour [Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development], where do those courses land, you know, like—and they didn’t have an answer, you know, in terms of if it’s a micro-credential that’s trade-based or under that ministry, they really couldn’t tell me whether or not MCU [Ministry of Colleges and Universities] would even fund it or look at it, or how that’s going to roll out. It’s so brand-new that we just don’t want to, we just don’t want to assume that MCU is going to accredit, or look at, or consider. (Representative 18, April 9)

In sum, Indigenous Institutes stated that there needs to be clarification in which ways the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development is involved (MLTSD), what their relationship is to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU), and how micro-credentials are going to be funded.

Pillar Development

Indigenous Institutes identified all the described issues, priorities, and challenges (funding; accreditation, recognition, and regulatory bodies; learner interests; skilled trades and training landscape; protection of Indigenous Knowledge; Micro-credentials) as affecting the whole Indigenous Institutes pillar.

Because these issues, priorities, and challenges affect the whole pillar, Indigenous Institutes stated, they also require a pillar-wide response. Addressing these areas, Indigenous Institutes suggested, requires a collaborative effort. Indigenous Institutes spoke about the

need for a pillar-wide or “broader approach” (Representative 7, April 9) to growth and development, one that goes beyond individual Indigenous Institutes. Indigenous Institutes suggested that there is a need for a guiding framework or strategic plan that is flexible enough to balance individual institute’s sovereignties and independence, but that can also drive the Indigenous Institutes pillar forward.

One Indigenous Institute representative shared the following thoughts.

[T]hose are some of the bigger issues that I’m really thinking about as we move towards, you know, that milestone of what we’ve all, like [another representative] said, that we’ve been working for, for so long. To create our own credentials based on our own Indigenous knowledges and worldview, and ... how the sector’s going to support us in all of this great work ahead. ... We’re all ready and eager to go on it, ... we’re just waiting to be released to run our races. And we’re just wondering is... it every institute for themselves? Or is this a sector approach, or is there certain things that will be sector-collaborative, collaboratively approached – those are sort of the ... questions that I have and that we at [our Indigenous Institute] have sort of explored at an initial level so far. (Representative 23, April 8)

Sharing their own opinion on the matter, the same Indigenous Institute representative added: “I think we’re still in need of an overall sort of guiding framework ... for the sector to be developed in a strategic way (Representative 23, April 8). Another Indigenous Institute representative agreed with this sentiment: “I think everyone’s put it pretty succinctly, especially [Representative 23] with that discussion around connecting institutions and connecting across the broader sector” (Representative 7, April 8).

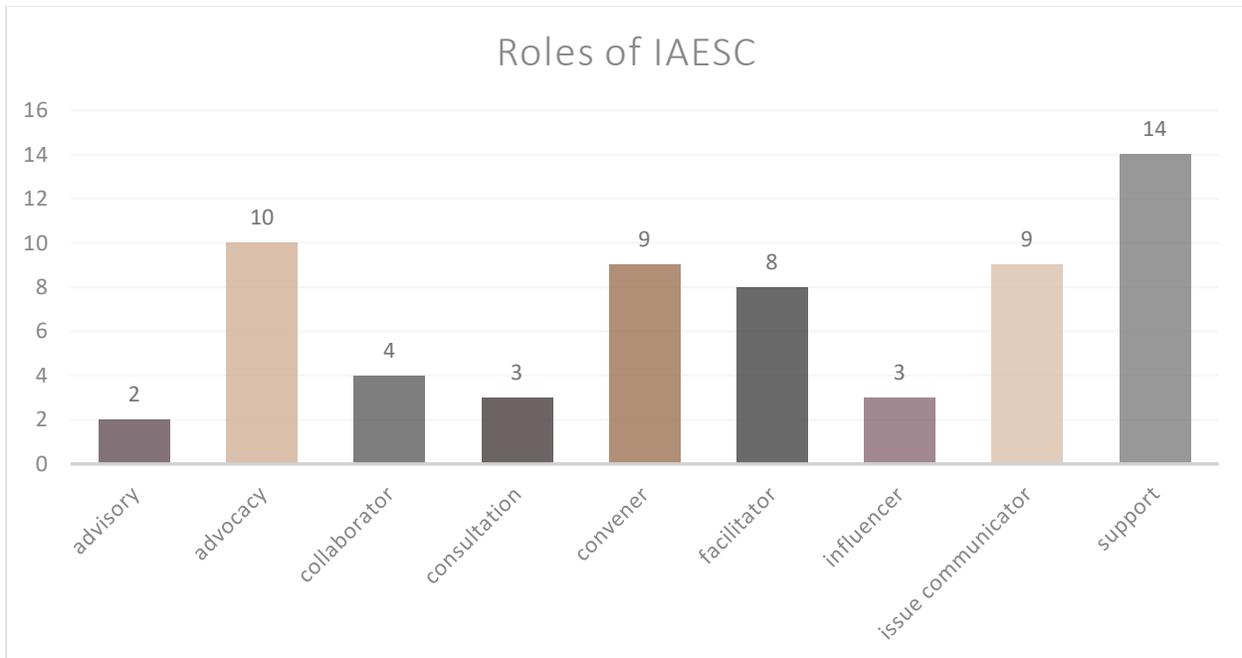
In alignment with the other representatives, one Indigenous Institute representative provided the following positive outlook: “I’m not going to be naive and think that there’s not going to be a bump in the road here and there and as we go through some of these processes in building the pillar. But, you know, I think we have the people on this call and people ... in the other institutes ... that can really help support each other in doing this” (Representative 4, April 8).

Roles of the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council

Indigenous Institutes identified “a number of roles” (Representative 4, April 9) that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) could take in response to the described issues, challenges, and priorities. Indigenous Institutes described these roles in several ways. Figure two (2) provides an overview of the descriptions used by Indigenous Institutes to describe the roles of IAESC. It also shows how often certain descriptions were

used by Indigenous Institutes. For example, Indigenous Institutes described IAESC as taking a “support” role 14 times.

Figure Two (2): Roles of IAESC



While figure two (2) provides an overview of the different roles that Indigenous Institutes identified for IAESC, including the emphasis they placed on each, it does not provide an overview of how these roles are connected.

Figure three (3) provides such a visualization. Our analysis shows the different roles Indigenous Institutes stated for IAESC, including the connections Indigenous Institutes drew among them. Some of the roles were stated alongside each other (visualized by black arrows pointing to example quotations), some of the roles were associated with each other and used synonymously by Indigenous Institutes (visualized by red arrows), other roles were identified as being a part of or subsumed within another role.

For example, some of the roles that were used synonymously or interchangeably are as follows. When Indigenous Institutes spoke of IAESC having an “advocacy” role, the descriptions “influencer” and “issue communicator” were used synonymously with “advocacy”. This suggests that Indigenous Institutes identify the communication of issues as an advocacy role. Raising awareness and communicating issues to particular stakeholders would then also constitute an “influencer” role. Placed into context, this might mean that communicating funding issues that impede the development of the Indigenous Institutes

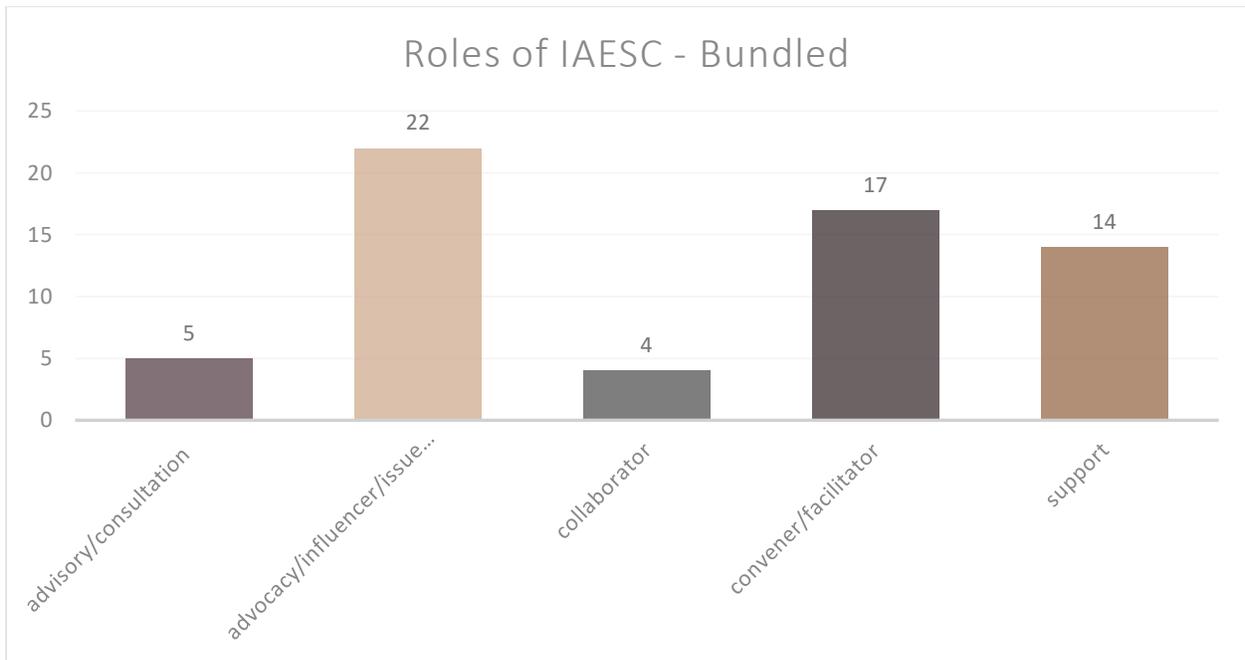
pillar to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU), would be advocating for the pillar and (potentially) influence future directions.

In addition to being synonymous with “issue communicator” and “advocacy”, Indigenous Institutes also connected the “influencer” role to IAESC’s “support” role. This connection is visualized through a green arrow. “Issue communicator” and “support” roles were not used synonymously. Rather, Indigenous Institutes talked about the “support” role as containing the role of “issue communicator”. Because “issue communicator” is also associated with “advocacy” and “influencer”, this whole bundle then becomes a part of IAESC’s “support” role. Adding to the above example, this means that communicating funding issues to the MCU (which means advocating for the pillar; exerting influence on issues that affect the pillar) also means supporting the pillar.

Taken together, IAESC’s potential roles as identified by Indigenous Institutes are highly interrelated, woven together like a web.

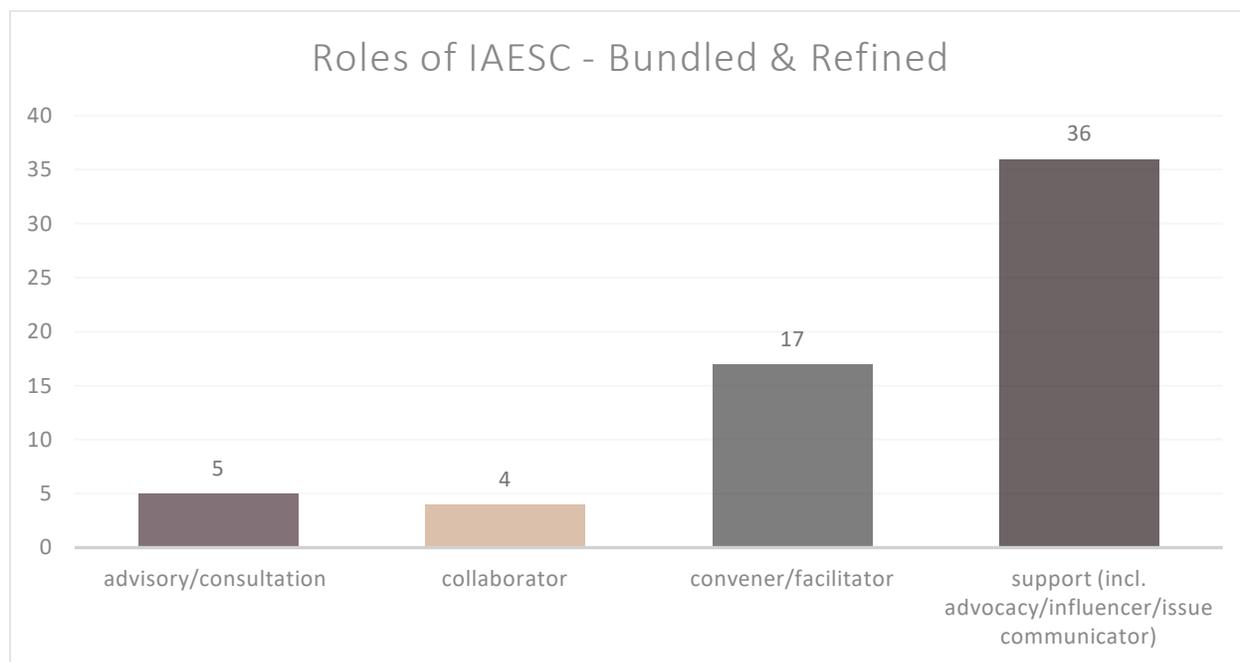
If one accounts for the connections among roles as visualized above, bundling those that Indigenous Institutes associated with each other (e.g., “Influencer” + “advocacy” + “issue communicator”; “advisory” + “consultation”; “convener” + “facilitator”), the following picture presents itself (see figure four (4)).

Figure four (4): Roles of IAESC – Bundled



This picture can be refined even further. Because Indigenous Institutes identified “issue communicator” as part of IAESC’s “support role”, and because “issue communicator” is synonymous with the “advocacy” and “influencer” role, then the bundle “advocacy/influencer/issue communicator” can be represented as a large part of IAESC’s “support role”. Doing so presents the following picture (see figure five (5)).

Figure five (5): Roles of IAESC – Bundled & Refined



Our analysis, visualized in figure five (5), shows that Indigenous Institutes identify IAESC’s support role as its predominant role. A large part of this support role entails communicating issues, priorities, and challenges faced by the Indigenous Institutes pillar to appropriate stakeholders. For example, advocating for the interests of learners or communication funding issues to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) would mean supporting Indigenous Institutes and the pillar as a whole.

Responding to Indigenous Institute Issues, Priorities, and Challenges

Indigenous Institutes provided suggestions on how the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) might respond to the issues, priorities, and challenges that they had identified. Indigenous Institutes stated that IAESC could have a role in each of the areas. For example, as one Indigenous Institute representative put it, “I think all of the things that are listed there are definitely areas that the Council can support the sector” (Representative 4, April 9).

The following chart provides a breakdown of the roles stated by Indigenous Institutes within each area of concern:

Chart One (1): Area-Specific Roles of IAESC

Issue, Priority, Challenge	Roles of IAESC
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communicating funding and capacity issues to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) ○ Advocating for a different funding model ○ Working with MCU to clarify relationship between IAESC's program approval and program funding
Accreditation, Recognition, and Regulatory Bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communicating and working with accrediting, regulatory, and professional bodies ○ Advocating for Indigenous Institute credentials ○ Supporting transferability (e.g., block transfers)
Learner Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Raising awareness of learner interests and engaging in advocacy for learners ○ Protecting learner interests through quality assurance standards
Skilled Trades and Training Landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Convening conversations between Ministry of Labour and Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) and the MCU to develop the trades and training landscape for Indigenous Institutes
Protection of Indigenous Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Convening conversations on protection of Indigenous knowledge ○ Collaborating on research
Micro-credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Convening discussions and dialogues on micro-credentials ○ Facilitating conversations with the MCU and the MLTSD
Pillar Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supporting the pillar through IAESC's quality assurance mandate

Funding

A major role, Indigenous Institutes stated, could be for the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) to communicate funding and capacity issues experienced by the Indigenous Institutes pillar (discussed above) to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU). For example, “the conversations ... that the Council will have with MCU is really

important on our behalf for sure” (Representative 4, April 9), one Indigenous Institute representative stated.

As previously discussed, Indigenous Institutes stated that the current funding model is inadequate for the Indigenous Institute pillar. Indigenous Institutes suggested that IAESC could have a role in advocating for a different funding model – one that corresponds to the uniqueness of the Indigenous Institutes pillar and the education it provides. There is a role, one Indigenous Institute representative stated, “for the Council to help MCU ... understand that” (Representative 4, April 9).

Indigenous Institutes also suggested that IAESC could have a role in working out the connection between program funding and IAESC’s quality assurance process for independent programs. The same Indigenous Institute representative as quoted above shared the following:

I think where the Council can really help us with ... would be, you know, if the Council approves one of our standalone programs, what does that mean in terms of timeframe? Because, you know, it’s going to take time to build those programs, to, you know, you may have demand, a real big demand, say maybe the first year. But that may drop off the second year, come back the third year. How is that – if the Council could help support the pillar in terms of that funding, that timeline, you know ... Because if you have twenty students one year interested in it and only five the next year what does that look like in terms of the funding? (Representative 4, April 9)

Working out the funding process, Indigenous Institutes suggested, was “something where the Council can maybe help facilitate ... for the institutes and for the pillar” (Representative 4, April 9).

Accreditation, Recognition, and Regulatory Bodies

Indigenous Institutes suggested there is a role for the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) in supporting Indigenous Institutes in their program development by liaising and communicating with accrediting and regulatory bodies.

Part of this role, Indigenous Institutes stated, entails communicating and bringing awareness to the value and uniqueness of Indigenous Institute programming. One Indigenous Institute representative explained it as follows.

[T]he challenge that we’ll have once we start, when we’re creating our own programs is that link and support with external governing bodies ... there’s a bit of a balancing act between regulatory bodies and looking at Indigenous worldviews and ensuring

that our programs are grounded in that. And I think there's going to be some challenges with balancing those types of things in order to grow the pillar ... So I think, you know, for us, in helping grow that pillar and build that pillar, I think the Council really plays a key role in kind of bridging those types of things. (Representative 4, April 8)

To confront the lack of recognition of Indigenous Institute credentials, Indigenous Institutes suggested that IAESC could have a role in raising awareness, raising acceptance, and educating regulatory and professional bodies on the work that Indigenous Institutes are doing. As one Indigenous Institute representative put it, "I think one thing that the Council can assist with, because it is a drain on our resources and also student mobility, is the advocacy around credential recognition" (Representative 16, April 8).

Indigenous Institutes also noted that this advocacy and communication role could go beyond regulatory and professional bodies, extending to the postsecondary education sector as a whole. As one Indigenous Institute representative put it, IAESC might have a role in "signalling the role and the value of the credentials that we're going to create ... to the broader Ontario postsecondary sector" (Representative 23, April 8).

Indigenous Institutes stated that there is a need to ensure and support transferability. Confronting recognition challenges and supporting student mobility, Indigenous Institutes stated, calls for well-developed transfer pathways. Indigenous Institute representatives suggested that IAESC could support work in this area by supporting block transfers. This might entail convening conversations or facilitate connections between Indigenous Institutes whose programs closely align.

Learner Interests

Indigenous Institutes stated that confronting recognition and transferability challenges directly connects to learner interests. Indigenous Institutes suggested that there could be a role for the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) in raising awareness of issues that impact learners (transferability and recognition challenges being among those) and engage in advocacy on their behalf.

Indigenous Institutes also stated that protecting learner interests lies in articulating and prioritizing learner protection pieces through quality assurance. IAESC's role, Indigenous Institutes stated, could be to amplify learner protection pieces across the Indigenous Institutes pillar, threading learner interests throughout its quality assurance standards.

For example, as one Indigenous Institute representative put it,

[W]hen I think about the role of the Council in terms of, you know, as it relates to quality assurance, I think what it means for I guess us, [at our Indigenous Institute], is really providing support I guess at that—I don't want to say a technical level, but more of that practical level that really speaks to things like student protections that we've already talked about. So, our sector has to have a strong foundation for our students to know that they're going to be protected in any program that they may choose to enrol at in any of our institutes. So, I'll just take the current situation in Northern Ontario of Laurentian University. So, you know, students are very unhappy and displeased with the current situation because there's so much uncertainty there. I mean, I'm hopeful things will work out, I don't really know what the end result will be. But I think that situation really just highlights the need for student protections in the sector, in our particular sector, in Indigenous Institutes. (Representative 23, April 9)

Another Indigenous Institute representative put it in remarkably similar terms:

[L]ooking to the quality assurance standards and the framework that's been proposed and the way that we look across the sector just, you know, having the Council, you know, look at the different ways we can protect student mobility and the way that we're framing the accreditation standards and the credential and student mobility. And so, just ensuring that we have the student at the forefront when they navigate through the different systems that they might interact with. And taking into account those student protection standards that, you know, are across multiple levels of credential framework and multiple levels of organizations. So, looking at IIs [Indigenous Institutes], colleges, universities. And having advocacy there ... just an awareness again to say that this is a priority and that ... we're touching on this through the quality assurance framework that's been proposed. ... But that to me is really the forefront of, you know, where I see a lot of advocacy and awareness work to be done for students. (Representative 21, April 9)

Skilled Trades and Training Landscape

Indigenous Institutes suggested that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) could have a support role in relation to skilled trades and training. While Indigenous Institutes acknowledged that IAESC does not have a role in quality assuring apprenticeship programs, Indigenous Institutes inquired whether support could nonetheless be provided. Conversations need to be had, Indigenous Institutes stated, between IAESC, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU), and the Ministry of Labour, Training, and Skills Development (MLTSD) to develop the skilled trades and training landscape for the Indigenous Institutes pillar. IAESC's role might be to convene and facilitate such conversations.

Protection of Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous Institutes stated that Indigenous Knowledge and knowledge systems inherent to Indigenous Institute programs need to be protected. There is a need to examine how this can be accomplished. Indigenous Institutes identified the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) as perhaps having a role in convening conversations on issues of intellectual property and the protection of Indigenous Knowledge. As one Indigenous Institute representative put it,

I don't know if there's some value in, I guess, one: having a broader conversation across, well internally with this part of the pillar, but also across the sector about the importance of that and having kind of, a collective approach to how we protect and disseminate... I know there's probably a lot to learn from [another institute's] experience and their research centre and their experience in incorporating that knowledge and knowledge systems in their programming. ... I think there's probably an opportunity for the Council to coordinate some of those discussions internally, externally, but also with coordinating that collection piece, I guess. (Representative 7, April 9)

Indigenous Institutes also suggested that IAESC may have a role in engaging in collaborative research with them. This could include the creation of publications to communicate the uniqueness of the Indigenous Institutes pillar, including the importance of protecting Indigenous Knowledge, to the rest of the postsecondary education sector.

One Indigenous Institute representative made this suggestion as follows. "[T]he matter of Indigenous knowledge and intellectual property, we've put it together ... under 'potential research function' with the Council that maybe the institutes could partner with and so we could be collaborative in that way" (Representative 15, April 8). Another Indigenous Institute representative put it in the following way.

I was thinking last night and it's funny you mentioned research because I was thinking about the program development piece, communicating the value of Indigenous Institutes and credential recognition across the postsecondary system. And I was thinking of research on the Council's part. And maybe, like, if the institutes consented, could do some publications around... centred around some of the research that they would do with the institutes to be able to communicate that to the larger sector. (Representative 6, April 9)

Micro-credentials

Indigenous Institutes stated that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) could have a role “in supporting the pillar in terms of ... micro-credentials” (Representative 4, April 9). There is a need for clarification, Indigenous Institutes stated, on how micro-credentials are going to be funded, including clarification on the relationship between the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU). A support role for IAESC in this area may include liaising with the MCU and the MLTSD, as well as a convening conversation and dialogues on micro-credentials.

Pillar Development

The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council’s (IAESC) overarching role, Indigenous Institutes stated, lies in “supporting the pillar” (Representative 4, April 9). “[W]ay back when the Council was brought up and having this body, everyone agreed that this was vital to the growth of the pillar, the growth of every institute”, the same Indigenous Institute representative remarked (ibid).

The main avenue through which IAESC provides this support, Indigenous Institutes stated, is through its quality assurance mandate. In the words of one Indigenous Institute representative, “[s]o, for us, you know, the support from the Council is absolutely key in helping move our programs and our institute and, you know, not to make it sound selfish, but for all institutes, I think it’s key” (Representative 4, April 8).

Another Indigenous Institute representative stated that IAESC’s quality assurance mandate touches many other areas, notably, many of the issues, priorities, and challenges discussed above. Put differently, IAESC’s mandate naturally extends to other areas not narrowly defined as quality assurance:

In terms of the convener roles and facilitator roles that the Council could have, I do agree that there is that role for the Council to have. But I’m also thinking it’s, I think it’s good to also have it specific to, as I guess it relates to the quality assurance of our credentials, of our credit recognition and our credentials recognition. And I think that in itself naturally expands to many conversations. But I think if we always keep it centred and tied to quality assurance and the credentials we are creating and developing as it relates to funding, as it relates to network, networks in the sector. I think as long as we can always tie it back to the core work of what the Council was created to do, I think those will fall nicely into facilitator or convener type of conversations with multiple stakeholders. (Representative 23, April 9)

Indigenous Institutes offered a practical suggestion in relation to the quality assurance process, namely for IAESC to assume a consulting or advising role to assist Indigenous Institutes who are facing capacity issues to develop their application packages for quality assurance.

One Indigenous Institute representative put it as follows.

[W]hen I was going through the organizational review and—just the steps that we need to get there. I'm thinking that we would have to hire a consultant to bring us through that process, and then just wondering if that's something that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council would consider doing for all of the institutes. So, there's somebody who's specializing in bringing—kind of walking through, with [our institute], that this is what you need to do, almost like a checklist? But somebody who's familiar with the process so it builds our capacity at the same time, and then just goes to another institute and does the same type of work there. (Representative 1, Day 1)

IAESC's Observations

Of particular interest is the collective agreement among Indigenous Institutes that 100% of the stated issues, challenges, and priorities are pillar-wide issues. The development of a sustainable funding model, ensuring transferability, protecting learner interests, opening up the skilled trades and training landscape, protecting Indigenous Knowledge, and offering micro-credentials are priorities for the entire Indigenous Institutes pillar. IAESC may support the position that addressing and realizing these priorities would spur pillar-wide growth and development.

Funding Challenges

Our analysis shows that of the issues, priorities, and challenges discussed, funding emerged as the biggest challenge identified by Indigenous Institute representatives. It shows up in the data as one of the most spoken of topics, and it comes up repeatedly in connection to multiple other areas: for example, as something that impedes program developments; as a roadblock to the growth and development of the pillar; as a hindrance to providing the full range of support services Indigenous Institutes would like to provide for their learners; as an area in which the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) is asked to provide support. Funding, then, threads through many (if not most) of the issues and challenges experienced by Indigenous Institutes, and it also constitutes a major priority for the Indigenous Institutes pillar.

Indigenous Institutes stated that the short-term nature of annual funding agreements constitutes an obstacle to long-term planning efforts. Indigenous Institutes are unable to predict whether and how much program funding will be provided in the future. The lack of certainty impacts Indigenous Institute plans for program development. Similarly, Indigenous Institutes are facing capacity issues, particularly in human resources, that are difficult to address under the current funding model. There exists a shortage of personnel and recruitment can prove challenging when funding is limited and unpredictable. It is essential that funding be made available to support “capacity-building within the institution” (Representative 9, April 8) and the pillar as a whole.

Our findings mirror those of the most recent Auditor General Report (2020), in which the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario found that “[e]ffectiveness of Indigenous programs and services is limited by uncertainty in funding” (3). The report explains that short-term funding agreements (specifically, those for three years or less), limit Indigenous communities and service providers “in their ability to retain staff, plan long-term, and use the funds received effectively” (ibid).

Indigenous Institutes expressed the need for clarification on how new programs are funded, and whether this process connects to IAESC's quality assurance process. There is a need to work with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) on the process through which new programs are being funded. IAESC's quality assurance processes require information on financial stability and viability from Indigenous Institutes, and as such IAESC has a role in reviewing the financial stability and viability of independent programs, pursuant to the standards and benchmarks that have been set for quality assurance. Indigenous Institutes want to deliver independent programs and it is the role of IAESC to support these efforts. Yet, there is no clear pathway from program development to quality assurance and funding approval. Knowing how programs are funded is essential for Indigenous Institutes to properly plan and develop their programming. However, whether program funding is triggered by, or even connected to, IAESC program approvals has not yet been clarified. Furthermore, how funding levels are set (for example, whether they are related to enrolment numbers) has not yet been worked out either. This creates a barrier to growing and developing the Indigenous Institutes pillar.

Indigenous Institutes require sufficient and sustained funding to grow and develop. Indigenous Institutes require long-term funding agreements to provide them with some certainty and predictability. Knowing whether funding will be available and how much is required to plan for the future. Without the ability to plan ahead, the growth and development of Indigenous Institutes, and thus the pillar as a whole, will be stunted.

IAESC understands that a priority for the Indigenous Institutes pillar is the development of a new funding model. As community-based institutions that embrace a life-long learning model, Indigenous Institutes are not well served by the current funding structure. IAESC is in agreement with Indigenous Institutes that a move away from Annual Transfer Payment Agreements (TPA) is necessary for the development of the Indigenous Institutes pillar.

Recognition Challenges

It is evident from what was stated by Indigenous Institutes that the lack of recognition of Indigenous Institute credentials by other postsecondary institutions constitutes a major challenge. The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council agrees with Indigenous Institutes that learner mobility must be ensured. This requires a two-pronged approach.

1. The value of Indigenous Institute credentials has to be communicated to and recognized by other postsecondary education institutions. There is a need then to raise awareness and engage in advocacy in this area. Doing so is essential to protect learner interests.
2. Confronting recognition challenges calls for well-developed transfer pathways and articulation agreements. The idea of block transfers among Indigenous Institutes might

be among the steps for a promising way forward. The Ontario Council on Articulation and Transfer (ONCAT) defines a block transfer as “[a]dvanced standing for a group of credits or courses at one institution based on their equivalence to a defined set of course or program learning outcomes at another institution. Block credit enables students to enter a program at a receiving institution at an advanced level” (ONCAT 2021:n.p.). Block transfer agreements between institutions would be one way to enable learners and Indigenous Institutes to promote and achieve transferability and mobility.

Areas for Development

It is evident from what Indigenous Institutes stated that there are two broad areas that need to be clarified and worked out for the Indigenous Institutes pillar:

1. The Skilled Trades and Training Landscape.
2. Micro-credentials.

Indigenous Institutes need clear pathways to navigate both landscapes.

Roles of IAESC

The Indigenous Institutes stated that the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) may have a role in:

- Funding;
- Accreditation, Recognition, Regulatory Bodies;
- Learner Interests;
- Skilled Trades and Training;
- Protection of Indigenous Knowledge;
- Micro-credentials; and,
- Pillar Development.

Indigenous Institutes described the roles IAESC could take in the above areas in several ways. Indigenous Institutes described and stated IAESC as having an “advisory” role; “advocacy” role; “collaborator” role; “consultation” role; “convener” role; “facilitator” role; “influencer” role; “issue communicator” role; and “support” role.

Many of the roles identified by Indigenous Institutes in the above areas point to an overarching support role for IAESC. Our analysis shows that IAESC’s “support” role emerges as the predominant overarching role as imagined by Indigenous Institutes.

The role is connected to IAESC's quality assurance mandate. Indigenous Institute representatives shared a common understanding that IAESC's overarching role lies in supporting the growth and development of the Indigenous Institutes pillar overall. The main avenue through which IAESC provides this support, is through its quality assurance mandate.

For example, protecting learner interests is inscribed within IAESC's quality assurance mandate and processes. Protecting learner interests is made central in IAESC's quality assurance framework, featured prominently, for example, in its standards and benchmarks (see, in particular, standard three (3)) for the Bachelor's and Bachelors' with Honours degree programs.

IAESC's quality assurance mandate touches many of the issues, priorities, and challenges discussed above. Put differently, IAESC's mandate extends to other areas not narrowly defined as quality assurance, but more broadly as pillar support. IAESC's quality assurance work then is essential to the growth of individual institutes and the growth of the pillar. Continuing this work provides ongoing support to develop the pillar.

Conclusion

The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC)'s approach to quality assurance is directed by the worldviews, needs, and priorities of Indigenous communities in this region of Turtle Island. It is through ongoing dialogues that IAESC continues to learn about those needs and priorities as they unfold.

In this dialogue, Indigenous Institutes identified several issues, priorities, and challenges faced by the Indigenous Institutes pillar:

Textbox 3 (three): Issues, Priorities, Challenges List

1. Funding
 - a. Program Funding/Program Development
 - b. Life-Long Learning
 - c. Capacity-Building
 - d. Quality Assurance
2. Accreditation, Recognition, and Regulatory Bodies
3. Learner Interests
4. Skilled Trades and Training Landscape
5. Protection of Indigenous Knowledge
6. Micro-credentials
7. Pillar Development

Indigenous Institutes stated that IAESC could have a role in all of these areas.

Many of the conversations in this dialogue revolved around collaboration and cooperation between Indigenous Institutes and IAESC, as well as IAESC communicating pillar-wide issues of importance to relevant stakeholders. It is important to note that IAESC and Indigenous Institutes also reiterated their mutual independence, underscoring that Indigenous Institutes and IAESC exist at arm's-length from one another. IAESC is an independent, non-political, Indigenous-controlled and governed not-for-profit corporation. IAESC respects the autonomy and independence of Indigenous Institutes and the sovereignty of the communities and Nations they serve. IAESC does not represent or speak for Indigenous Institutes. If IAESC communicates pillar-wide issues to stakeholders, it is on the basis of its quality assurance mandate. IAESC and Indigenous Institutes agreed that the independence of all parties needs to be respected and upheld.

Looking Ahead

The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) is looking forward to future dialogues and sustained conversations about issues of relevance to the Indigenous Institutes pillar.

The issues, priorities, and challenges brought forth by Indigenous Institutes demand continued conversations and engagement. Looking toward the growth and development of the pillar must include continued engagement with these matters. One Indigenous Institute representative shared the following words: “I said many times in the past, I think the Council is an absolute key in helping support the institutes in moving the pillar forward” (Representative 4, April 8). IAESC takes these words as well as the suggestions and potential roles identified by Indigenous Institutes seriously.

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Appendix A: Code List

Code		Description
Accreditation/Recognition		This code is used when a participant speaks to accreditation or recognition of an Institute/organization/program/credential etc.
Capacity-Building		This code is used to describe any activities related to expanding the capacity of Indigenous Institutes to deliver programs, including construction of facilities, applications for funding, hiring, and on-boarding of personnel.
Challenge		This code is used when participants speak to challenges/difficulties/hurdles for the Institute or the Pillar.
Collaboration/Partnerships		This code is used when participants refer to collaborations and partnerships with other Institutes, PSET or community institutions, groups, etc.
Community		This code is used to refer to education priorities, visions, and experiences of Indigenous communities (named communities, like Attawapiskat First Nation; the community of Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island and beyond: "the community;" or an abstract idea of community as place of origin and locus of identity: "from community"). See also code "Northern Ontario."
Comparison to Mainstream		This code is used when participants compare the pillar to the mainstream (e.g., in terms of funding structure, etc.).
Funding		This code is used when participants are referring to funding issues.
Learners*	Learner - Access	This code is used to refer to the ability of learners to access programs at Indigenous Institutes or to measures taken by Indigenous Institutes to promote access to their programming. This code may relate to issues such as student debt, commuting distance, broadband internet etc.

Learner - Experiences of	This code is used to refer to learners' experiences with education systems or their background growing and living in community.
Learner - Gifts of	This code is used to describe the experiences, knowledge, and know-how that learners bring with them, contrary to the western notion of learners as "empty vessels."
Learner - Identity of	This code is used to refer to the learner's understanding of their identity as a citizen or member of a First Nation, Inuit, or Métis community or the learner's journey to recovering or growing their sense of personal identity during their learning journey.
Learner - Impact of Education on	This code is used when a participant makes a connection between education (e.g., the value of) and learners.
Learner - In the Interest of	This code is used when a participant speaks to doing something in the interest of learners.
Learner - Mobility	This code is used to describe the ability of the learner to navigate different educational and employment pathways (see also Learner - Access; Transferability; Learner - Pathways; and Pathways - Employment).
Learner - Pathways	This code is used to describe the idea of pathways or specific pathways currently available or under development for learners at Indigenous Institutes (see also Pathways - Employment). See Shifting the Landscape: https://www.confederationcollege.ca/sites/default/files/images/oncat_shifting_the_landscape_final_for_publication_june_2018.pdf
Learner - Success of	This code is used to describe examples of learner success (this may include employment, further study, holistic growth, etc.).
Learner - Supports for	This code is used to describe the range of supports that Indigenous Institutes currently offer to learners or that learners may require. Sometimes referred to as "wrap-around supports."

	Learner - Well-Being of	This code is used to refer to the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical well-being of learners or programs that promote well-being. Sometimes linked to the concept of mino-bimaadziwin ("living the good life" in Anishinaabemowin).
	Learning - Life-long	This code is used to refer to the idea of the learning journey as being one that is continuous, as well as the range of educational programs and pathways that Indigenous Institutes provide to facilitate life-long learning.
	Pillar Development	This code is used when participants speak to the development of the pillar (- likely coded alongside challenges or vision for the future).
Programs*	Programs - Costs	This code is used to refer to the costs of running or developing programs, including personnel salaries.
	Programs - Development of	This code is used to refer to development process for new programs at Indigenous Institutes, including internal proposals, approvals, quality assurance, and funding applications.
	Programs - Indigenous Institutes'	This code is used to refer to programs currently delivered by Indigenous Institutes.
	Programs - Online	This code is used to refer to programs delivered online by Indigenous Institutes, which may include synchronous or asynchronous delivery options.
	Programs - Stand-alone	This code is used when a participant refers to stand-alone programs.
	Programs - Structure of	This code is used to describe how programs are structured into learning units over time (e.g., courses in a semester).
Quality Assurance*	Quality Assurance	This code is used when participants refer to quality assurance.
	Quality Assurance - Costs	This code is used to refer to any costs associated with quality assurance processes or with building capacity to engage in quality assurance processes.

	Quality Assurance - Experience with	This code is used to refer to Indigenous Institutes' current or past experiences engaging with quality assurance processes, such as WINHEC's or PEQAB's.
	Quality Assurance - Internal	This code is used when a participant explains their internal review or quality assurance process.
	Quality Assurance - Process	This code is used to refer to the stages, steps, or general process involved in any quality assurance review, whether IAESC's or another organizations.
	Quality Assurance - Trends	This code is used to refer to new trends in the quality assurance landscape, such as the involvement of learners in quality assurance processes or the idea of "quality enhancement."
Research		This code is used when participants speak to research activities/needs.
Role of IAESC		This code is used when participants speak to the role of the Council.
Working with Ministry		This code is used when participants refer to current, planned, or desired discussions that IAESC, Indigenous Institutes, or the Indigenous Institutes pillar may hold with the Ministry (or Ministries) to support the capacity building of the Indigenous Institutes pillar, encompassing issues such as stable funding and recognition, among others.

*This code contains several sub-codes as listed in the column to the right.