

External Review of the Department of Indigenous Education Faculty of Education, University of Victoria

January 22-23, 2024

Submitted by:

Dwayne Donald, University of Alberta

Alexandra D'Arcy, University of Victoria

Executive Summary

In our evaluation of the Indigenous Education Department (IED) at the University of Victoria, we recognize its significant influence and impact in the field of Indigenous Language Revitalization (ILR) at the local, provincial, national, and international levels. It is clear that the IED's leadership and service in the field of ILR has significantly enhanced the institutional reputation of the University. Indigenous community members of all ages and diverse communities have very high regard for the support and guidance provided by IED faculty and staff in the efforts to revitalize their languages. One W̱SÁNEĆ community Elder described the ILR programs offered by the IED as 'world changing.'

The department faces staffing shortages which has impacted its ability to sustain its programs effectively. IED is at a critical turning point because it cannot carry on doing what it currently does within existing institutional structures and with the current staff and faculty complements. While we commend the department's successes, we recommend strategic changes to ensure its long-term sustainability, including program restructuring and the creation of an ILR-focused institute. We stress the importance of collaborative action between the IED, the Faculty of Education and UVic administration to address these challenges effectively.

The University of Victoria has earned an admirable local, provincial, national, and international reputation as an institution that strongly supports Indigenous peoples and communities in their efforts to revitalize their languages. *This reputation should not be taken lightly or for granted by the institution.*

The visionary foundational work that was done to create what became the Indigenous Education Department is inspiring and institutionally transformative. It is clear that the IED faculty and staff feel a strong responsibility to protect the vision and carry on with the transformational work. However, they are critically aware that their ability to fulfill their responsibilities in the necessary ways is now delicately dependent on their University of Victoria and Faculty of Education colleagues also wishing to protect the vision and carry on the work of the IED.

There is a strong imperative in the IED to be responsive to community needs. The result has been a rapid expansion in program offerings, from certificates to degrees to bespoke community programming. All of this work is urgently needed. However, the IED is too small to continue this pace of offerings. We recommend that the IED immediately review their planned offerings over the next five years with an eye to what can reasonably be discontinued or paused such that the health and well-being of unit members is not at risk.

The IED's impact in ILR is significant, and its ongoing contributions deserve recognition. However, deeper engagement with contextual nuances is essential for a comprehensive review. We emphasize

the need for continued reflection and relationship-building to enhance program offerings. Despite time constraints during our external review, we recognize the IED's commitment to instructional leadership rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. While our understanding remains less deep than ideal, we highlight key themes and issues for consideration.

I. Recommendations for the IED

1. If additional, new resources cannot be provided to the IED (see recommendations II.3-5), the unit must revisit all programming and decide what programs must be either paused or discontinued.
2. Until there is growth in the faculty complement, especially in the research stream, the IED should cease offering PhD programming and supports.
3. Eliminate the MA stream in the Masters of Indigenous Language Revitalization (MILR) program and develop clear guidelines to delimit the scope of the projects in the MEd stream.
4. Dissolve the MILR Advisory Committee and refocus governance of the MILR within the IED.

II. Recommendations that go beyond the IED

1. Senior administration at UVic and within the Faculty of Education undertake an inquiry process to better understand the complex health and wellness challenges that IED faculty, sessionals, and staff face by virtue of the IRL work they do.
2. Maintain the IED as a separate unit within the Faculty of Education.
3. Add capacity through dedicated IED faculty, both teaching and research stream, and add staff, as the faculty complement grows.
4. Create a shared understanding and vision for a sustainable future for the ILR programs that can and will be offered by the IED, and that is responsive to shifts in faculty and staff complements in the unit.
5. IED faculty and staff meet with the Dean of Education to reconceptualize the role that the unit holds in relation to the Indigenous-specific teaching and research contributions provided by the Faculty.
6. Create an ILR-focused institute at UVic.