

1. BACKGROUND

On October 13, the Government of Québec government announced its new tuition model for students from outside Québec, under which, starting in fall 2024, a minimum tuition will be set for all non-Québec students enrolled in undergraduate programs and in Masters professional programs. Canadian students from outside Quebec (CNRQ) will see their tuition fees almost double, from \$8,992 to around \$17,000, while the rate for international students will be higher.

The new tuition model means that Québec universities, regardless of the language in which they operate, will no longer be competitive with universities in the rest of Canada. Except for a few specific programs, such as life sciences, management and law, there is little or no disparity between the tuition fees paid by Québécois studying in the rest of Canada and those paid by Canadian students in Québec. It's also worth noting that these tuition fees are often highest in Québec.

With the introduction of higher tuition, many Canadian students who would have chosen to study here will opt for universities in other provinces. Québec will be weakened by this change, cutting itself off from an essential pool of skilled labour and foregoing the considerable economic contribution made by these students; Ontario will be the big winner.

By becoming the only province that refuses to fund students from other Canadian provinces, Québec could also expose itself to retaliatory measures that would jeopardize the ability of Québec students to study elsewhere in Canada. Québec would lose out, since student mobility is one of the driving forces behind our capacity for innovation.

We also recognize that French remains under threat in Québec, particularly in Montreal, and reaffirm that all universities are the government's natural allies in the protection, promotion and influence of French in Québec and elsewhere in the world.

We are deeply convinced of the importance of protecting the French language. However, we believe that it is better to help students from outside Québec adopt French culture and language when they arrive here, rather than exclude them from the outset through prohibitive tuition policies. On the contrary, we must open our doors to these people and invest in equipping them with the tools and knowledge they need to succeed and thrive in Québec society. This is consistent with the Québec government's desire to attract the best talent, as their contribution will help ensure our continued prosperity.

2. FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES

The claim that the government will strengthen French-language higher education by transferring funds from English-language to French-language universities is based on flawed calculations. Instead of adequately funding Québec universities, the government is setting up a system whereby funding for French-language universities becomes somehow dependent on the ability of English-language universities to recruit Canadian and international students. In fact, as the government has announced its intention to reduce this recruitment, it is actually taking away the English-language universities' ability to do so.

For Bishop's University, its very survival is at stake. As for Concordia and McGill universities, the combined losses are estimated at over \$100 million a year according to conservative scenarios, not to mention the devastating consequences for the Québec economy.

3. PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS TO THE NEW PRICING MODEL

Québec's English-language universities are committed to increasing the linguistic and cultural integration of their students who do not speak French. As part of this commitment, they will deploy a full range of new initiatives to promote the French language and a better understanding of Québec society.

Among these new initiatives, Concordia and McGill universities, in recognition of Montreal's linguistic diversity, are committed to introducing mandatory French-as-a-second-language courses and activities within three years, with a view to effectively supporting the professional integration of students within the city.

In collaboration with the Government of Québec, English-language universities are also committed to substantially increasing the offering of French-as-a-second-language courses for Canadian students from outside Quebec and international students who do not speak French, and to creating new incentives for learning French.

These initiatives are designed to strengthen the mastery of the French language through various strategic axes, including:

- increasing the number of French-as-a-second-language courses on offer, adapted to the different levels of language proficiency and professionalization pathways of students, enabling coherent and effective progression in their learning;
- more opportunities for internships and co-op placements in French, offering professional experience and immersion in the Québec workplace;
- the provision of targeted services and activities that accelerate the development of language skills and facilitate professional integration in French;
- the development of specific initiatives to prepare students to pass professional exams, thus ensuring a smooth transition to professional life;
- the organization of activities to promote Québec culture, including an enhanced course offering, for an enriched understanding of the realities of our society.

While the goal is ambitious, it reflects a firm resolve: to ensure that at least 40% of non-French-speaking students enrolled in undergraduate programs reach level 6 of the Échelle québécoise, equivalent to level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, by the time they graduate.

To help achieve this goal, English-language universities, with the collaboration of the Québec government, will introduce considerable incentives, such as scholarships to reward students who succeed in officially certifying this level of French proficiency.

In order to make these initiatives a reality, we propose that the pricing model be modified as follows:

- **Canadian students from outside Quebec (CNRQ):** tuition is maintained at current levels (basic fee of \$2,881 and forfaitaire of \$6,111, subject to indexation for 2024-2025).
- **International students:** as this measure has a negative impact on all universities, regardless of the language in which they conduct their activities, we propose that the implementation of alternative solutions to balance university funding be discussed in collaboration with the Bureau de coopération interuniversitaire and the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, to ensure that these solutions are sustainable and equitable for the entire network.

4. CONCLUSION

We firmly believe that universities have a fundamental responsibility to contribute to the dynamism and vitality of the communities in which they operate. English-language universities are particularly recognized for their contribution to Québec's social fabric, as well as to its reputation nationally and internationally.

With the initiatives proposed above, we believe that English-language universities can contribute further to strengthening French in Montreal and Québec, while maintaining the international influence and attractiveness of our province. As Québec universities, we want to be a vehicle for deeper engagement with our society for our students from outside Québec.

We remain confident in our ability to implement, together, innovative solutions to our shared challenges, while recognizing the major role that all Québec universities play in our intellectual, social, cultural and economic development, to the benefit of all Québec citizens.