

Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages

Federal Support for French or Bilingual Post-Secondary Institutions in a Minority Situation

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Summary

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) is pleased to submit this brief for the study, *Federal Support for French or Bilingual Post-Secondary Institutions in a Minority Situation*, undertaken by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages. As the national voice of academic staff across Canada, CAUT recommends federal government action and leadership in Francophone and bilingual post-secondary education to ensure the vitality of Canada's Francophone minority communities. CAUT recommends the following specific actions:

- Develop a national strategy with the provinces and territories that provides adequate, stable federal funding to ensure more affordable high quality post-secondary education and greater research;
- Support and provide incentives for Francophone researchers and students to encourage academic pursuits in French; and,
- Improve data collection and analysis on working and studying in French at post-secondary institutions.

Introduction

The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) represents more than 72,000 teachers, librarians, researchers, general staff and other academic professionals in 125 Canadian post-secondary institutions including universities, colleges and polytechnics. CAUT works in the public interest to improve the quality and accessibility of Canada's post-secondary education.

In cities and communities across the country, universities and colleges are anchor institutions that support the cultural, social, and economic development of communities. Nationally, Canada's post-secondary education system drives our prosperity, underpins our democracy, and develops solutions to existing and future challenges.

For Francophone minority communities, post-secondary institutions are critical. The educational missions of universities and colleges are intertwined with a commitment to retain a connection with the historic Francophone communities in the region and the preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of archival and cultural material in those communities.

Francophone and bilingual post-secondary institutions provide community infrastructure, and education and training in French, enabling graduates to work and serve in French in diverse careers. Ensuring opportunities for French-language post-secondary education is crucial to creating a pipeline for Francophone talent in Canada's workforce.

The Impact of Public Underfunding on Francophone Post-Secondary Education

CAUT is pleased to see this government and this committee hear the concerns from the community about the need to protect access to Francophone higher education.

As the members of this committee are aware, Laurentian University received insolvency protection under the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA) on February 1, 2021, making it the first time a publicly-funded university has declared and been granted insolvency protection. The result of this process led to significant cuts to programs and staff at Canada's only bilingual and tricultural university. Sixty-nine academic programs were eliminated (58 undergraduate and 11 graduate programs), with almost half of the affected undergraduate programs taught in French. Among the French-language programs cut were politics, economics, engineering (chemical, mechanical, mining), environmental studies, education (intermédiaire/supérieur), mathematics, and midwifery.

French programs in a minority context, as well as French as a second language courses, are increasingly threatened as they are deemed "unprofitable" in an environment of course prioritization processes that identify factors such as smaller class sizes as a rationale for cuts.

Enhanced public funding for post-secondary education can support smaller departments and ensure equitable choice and high-quality education.

Budget 2021's commitment of additional funding to ensure the vitality of minority official language post-secondary institutions is a step in the right direction. The federal government must work with provinces to ensure this funding is not left on the table, and mechanisms should be explored to allow institutions to access the funds directly, as in the case of the federal

Post-Secondary Institutions Strategic Investment Fund.

CAUT also welcomes this government's recommendation to strengthen the educational continuum from early childhood to post-secondary levels in the minority language, as outlined in the 2021 blueprint *Towards a Substantive Equality of Official Languages in Canada* ahead of the modernization of the *Official Languages Act*. We hope this leads to the legal protection of access to the full range of post-secondary programs in French across the country.

Investing in the Public Post-Secondary Education Model

The increase in federal funding through the Official Languages program, while critical, is not enough to counter the threats to Francophone and bilingual post-secondary education resulting from the long-term erosion of public funding at Canadian universities and colleges. CAUT has [highlighted](#) the need for the federal government to work with the provinces and territories to develop a national strategy to ensure affordable, accessible high-quality post-secondary education, with increased, predictable and transparent federal transfers.

Public spending on post-secondary education in Canada has not kept pace with enrolment over the past several decades. In 1990, just over 80 per cent of university operating funding came from public funding. As of 2018, that figure had plummeted to about 47 per cent. With years of declining government funding in real terms, institutions are increasing student tuition fees and class sizes, reducing programs, cutting jobs, and reducing research capacity. One consequence is that about a third of academic appointments are now non-tenure and non-tenure-track, with less focus on research and service.

University and college libraries, vital for the thriving of French in a minority context, are also underfunded. Budget cuts at libraries disproportionately impact the purchasing of materials in French in Francophone minority contexts. For instance, faculty warned in 2018 that 98 per cent of the library budget at Laurentian University was allocated for English materials, leaving just 2 per cent for those in French. Students complain they are unable to find articles in French. It is important to consider that if the numbers of students and research professors dwindle, so will the numbers of library loans and references—and vice-

versa which will only continue to erode the vitality of Francophone education.¹

The last federal top-up to the transfer to the provinces for post-secondary education was in 2008. Work must be done now to reach an agreement with the provinces to protect public post-secondary education.

Support for Francophone Research

ACFAS, in its new [report on research](#) in French, identified four types of challenges for research in French in minority communities. These challenges concern: 1) the on-campus support offered to French-speaking researchers; 2) access to resources for realizing research; 3) the dissemination of knowledge in French; and 4) the evaluation and valorization of research done in French and of that concerning Francophone communities.

These challenges mean that Francophone academics shoulder a greater workload and effort that goes largely unrecognized. They are often called upon to take on extra tasks, such as managing translation requests and arranging for interpretation, communications and representations. CAUT's policy recommends that post-secondary institutions recognize the additional workload this represents for some members of their staff.

CAUT members report that even if research is conducted in French, projects may need to be translated in order to obtain grant funding and to navigate the ethics approval process required for conducting research. There is often no availability of writing resources for grant applications, and applications for funding in French are often misunderstood by external reading committees. It is difficult to form research groups in French, and presentations to university colleagues on the research often must be delivered in English.²

Publications in French may be devalued in comparison to English publications, as there is a more limited choice of journals in French. Depending on the field of research, Francophone academics tend to publish in English to ensure a greater impact factor of their work and leverage favour for funding applications. Some publish only in English to make sure they are understood.

Even if postgraduate students write their theses in French, they must often publish their papers in English to make a name for themselves in their

research field. One important area for improvement would be the protection of programs that promote the distribution of research in French, recognizing the serious lack of specialized journals in French in some fields.³

According to information gathered by Vincent Larivière, the Canada Research Chair in the Transformations of Scholarly Communication, at Université de Montréal, only 0.5 per cent of Quebec researchers' articles in international journals in 2014 were in French in the field of natural and medical sciences, and just 9.4 per cent in the social sciences and humanities. This data points to a 14.3 per cent decrease since 1980 for papers written in French in the natural and medical sciences, and a 25.6 per cent drop for the social sciences and humanities.⁴ Larivière states: "University rankings only take into account the number of articles published in the most prestigious journals, and these are all in English."

The focus on rankings and metrics means that many post-secondary institutions give less weight to scholarly publications in French when making decisions about hiring, tenure and promotion. A publication should not be regarded as less significant solely on the basis of the language in which it is written. Since English is the international language for academic publishing, this puts Francophones in a difficult bind in a profession where bibliometrics determine career prospects. CAUT policy is that academic publications in French must be recognized and accorded the same status as publications in English. Since Francophone academic staff are held to the same standards (teaching/research/community service) as their English-speaking peers, working, publishing and communicating in French should under no circumstances adversely affect their careers.⁵

CAUT echoes a number of recommendations to the federal government in the ACFAS report on research challenges, including:

- Invest in scholarly communications in French, including open access, open educational resources in French; and,
- Enhance policies and practices of Tri-Councils to ensure a fair evaluation and valuation of research in French.

Incentivize Francophone Students to Study Their Language in Minority Contexts

Due to limited course and program options in particular fields of study, Francophone students in minority language environments are often forced into English-language classes to complete their post-secondary education.

The House Official Languages Committee has already heard clear testimony from a number of witnesses that a lack of French post-secondary education opportunities discourages K-12 students from studying in French and undermines the French education continuum.⁶

As the 2012 Ontario report on the State of French-Language Postsecondary Education in Central-Southwestern Ontario asked: "What is the impact of this almost non-existent offer of postsecondary programs in French? The answer is rather simple: No access, no future. In other words, for the Francophone community, it is slow death. And for society as a whole, it is an incredibly sad missed opportunity."⁷

Access to Francophone and bilingual post-secondary institutions is crucial to ensuring that minority language-speaking students can complete their studies fully in French. This access is also crucial to the larger community of minority French-language speakers in ensuring there are Francophone service-providers in key sectors like education, health care, and civil service. The expert panel may wish to think of the upstream needs for French language educational opportunities in order to ensure a stable Francophone workforce.

The federal government already provides special bursaries to Anglophone students studying in French. Bursaries could be available specifically for Francophones who choose to continue their education in French, including at the post-graduate level. This will assist in ending the vicious circle of low enrolment reducing course offerings, further suppressing enrolment.

Improve data collection on Francophone education and work

Statistics Canada, through the Census and other surveys (e.g. on students and labour force), could better track those who are using French as a primary language at work, or who are studying in French. It would also be beneficial to track in which academic programs these students are enrolled. Improved data collection and dissemination would assist in tracking the health of Francophone post-secondary education in Canada. Moreover, this data could assist with labour-market analysis and determining the level of community services available to minority language speakers in particular communities.

Conclusion

The Canadian Association of University Teachers is pleased to have the opportunity to submit this brief for consideration of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. We have highlighted the crucial role of public funding for post-secondary education, especially in Francophone minority contexts. Further, we have offered ideas for how the federal government can support Francophone students and research. We believe these are all essential elements to safeguard our post-secondary education system, and help avoid a devastating situation like the one that occurred at Laurentian University. Our members remain available as witnesses to the committee to further discuss the role of federal leadership in ensuring French post-secondary teaching and research is adequately supported in order to ensure the vitality of our country's Francophonie.

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1. CAUT Francophones' Committee, [Report to Council on CAUT's Third Francophones' Conference](#), 4, March 2018.
 2. CAUT Francophones' Committee, [Report to Council on CAUT's Third Francophones' Conference](#), p3, March 2018.
 3. CAUT Francophones' Committee, [Report to Council on CAUT's Third Francophones' Conference](#), p3, March 2018.
 4. "The Dominant Language of Science" *Bulletin* (65:2) CAUT 2018.
 5. CAUT Policy on [Recognition of the Value of Disseminating Research in the French Language](#), November 2013.
 6. Report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, 42.1, [Respect for Language Rights in Ontario: An Issue for All of Canada](#), p 15, June 2019.
 7. Ontario Office of the French Languages Services Commissioner "Investigation Report - The State of French-Language Postsecondary Education in Central-Southwestern Ontario: No access, no future," p.2., June 2012.