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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 38 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the committee is meeting on the study of the federal support for French-language or bilingual post-secondary institutions in a minority situation.

I would like to outline a few rules to follow. I remind you that members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. I also remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the Chair. Should any technical challenges arise, please raise your hand and we can correct the situation immediately.

[English]

I would like to remind all participants and attendees that you cannot take photos or screen captures.

[Translation]

First of all, a housekeeping matter before we begin hearing the witnesses. Members of the committee, the budget for this study has been emailed to you, and you have all received a copy. The budget amounts to \$2,350. I would like to know whether there are any objections to our adopting the budget for this study.

That's done then. Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chair and colleagues.

We will now welcome our witnesses for the first hour, and I would like to offer them a warm welcome.

We have Denis Prud'homme, who is Rector and Vice-Chancellor of the Université de Moncton, and Pierre-Yves Mocuais, who is Dean and Executive Chief Officer of Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta.

Gentleman, each of you will have five minutes for your opening statement. I normally use cards to warn you when you have one minute left or that your time is up.

Without further ado, I yield the floor to you, Mr. Prud'homme, for five minutes.

Mr. Denis Prud'homme (Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Université de Moncton): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the members of the committee for inviting me to take part in the deliberations of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

The Université de Moncton has three campuses in high-density Acadian regions in New Brunswick, in Edmundston, Shippagan and Moncton.

Our mandate is to facilitate access to post-secondary education for Acadians. Our mission as a non-specialized university is to offer a range of training programs that meet the needs of professionals in all francophone minority communities. The good news is that 87% of our graduates work in New Brunswick, which is a clear indication that the ability to study in one's language in one's own community plays an important role in the vitality of francophone minority communities.

With respect to the financial situation of the Université de Moncton, 75% of our funding comes from the Government of New Brunswick, 23% from tuition fees, which are determined by enrolment, and 2% from the profits our services generate.

It is important to note that New Brunswick government funding has risen on average by 0.7% over the past 10 years, as a result of which we have had to raise tuition fees by 24% over the past 3 years in order to balance our budget. This increase may have an impact on access to post-secondary education given the socioeconomic situation and educational level of Acadians and francophones in New Brunswick.

The student body still includes first-generation students. Of their total number, 70% have graduated from New Brunswick secondary schools, 7% are students from elsewhere in Canada and 23% are foreign francophone students.

We receive between 3,000 and 4,000 applications from foreign students every year. We accept approximately 1,500 of those applications but enrol barely 200 in September. That's mainly attributable to the tuition fees charged for international francophone students, which are nearly double those of Canadian students.

We need help because, like any business, we have to absorb the annual rise in operating costs due to pay increases and inflation, which amount to \$2 million or \$3 million, all in a context of declining demographics. We know New Brunswick's population is aging.

To balance our budget, our administration, like previous administrations, has had to make budget cuts of 2% to 3% across the board over the past 10 years. As a result, our budget has declined by more than \$25 million during that period. This isn't a black Monday for the Université de Moncton, but it has been 10 years of darkness. If changes are not made, more dark years will follow.

The budget reductions take the form of cuts in the positions of professors who are not replaced and voluntary retirements. This is starting to have a major impact on our ability to offer high-quality programs, provide support to our students and offer them services. Consequently, the Université de Moncton is facing real financial risk. Although we have met our financial responsibilities so we can ensure the university's short-term survival, our long-term financial vitality is not guaranteed because we are facing a structural deficit. Our declining revenues prevent us from covering the expenses incurred in providing support for the various programs.

Even though we are introducing strategies for making efficiency gains, we are at a point where we have to make tougher choices such as cutting certain programs and services, postponing infrastructure maintenance and reducing both scientific and cultural activities on our campuses.

In fact, we are asking the federal government to introduce positive measures to support the development and vitality of the francophone communities.

We propose that the post-secondary educational institutions of the francophone minority communities, including the Université de Moncton, be granted financial support in addition to that provided for existing programs and that it become permanent in order to support their activities.

Project funding cannot be the only solution. Other solutions could include: a permanent subsidy annually indexed to the rate of inflation and a major trust fund like those granted for older English-language universities, which may use those funds to supplement inadequate operating capital. One example of a trust fund is that granted to the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities, the CIRLM, where the government has invested \$10 million. The Institute uses the interest from its fund to finance its activities.

- (1540)

We obviously need scholarships for Canadian and even international students so we can lower their tuition fees to the same level as those of New Brunswick students.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Prud'homme.

Mr. Mocquais, you now have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais (Dean and Executive Chief Officer, Campus Saint-Jean, University of Alberta): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks as well to the members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages for inviting me to appear before the committee.

Campus Saint-Jean was founded in 1908. It is an integral part of the University of Alberta, has been a faculty of that institution since 1977 and plays a fundamental and growing role in Alberta and in western and northern Canada. The campus is the only French-language institution west of Winnipeg that offers a broad range of college-level programs at the baccalaureate level and in graduate-level business administration, the humanities and social sciences, education, the natural and physical sciences, nursing, speech therapy and engineering.

Campus Saint-Jean thus plays a fundamental role in maintaining the vitality of the francophone minority community. In many respects, it is the cultural hub of the traditional French-language community in Alberta and the entire west, as well as the growing communities of new francophone immigrants and young students from French immersion programs wishing to pursue their education in French in a country whose linguistic duality they largely consider a fact and essential to their future.

In the 1976 agreement signed by the Province of Alberta, the University of Alberta and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the owners of Collège Saint-Jean, the three parties, with the sponsorship of the Government of Canada, undertook to provide funding to ensure the continued existence and growth of Campus Saint-Jean.

Since the 2000s, however, the campus has experienced permanent and growing financial instability. Whether the situation arose in 2003, when transfers were frozen under the official languages in education program, or OLEP, as the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, asserted in its presentation to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, or in 2009, as noted in the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the fact remains that the situation of Campus Saint-Jean is nevertheless critical.

There are at least four reasons for this situation.

The first is the quota the University of Alberta sets for Campus Saint-Jean. Although the quota is currently 575 full-time equivalents, we now have 750, and an actual head count shows that we have more than 1,000 students. The quota thus imposes a limit on us because it reduces our operating budget.

The second reason is the dilly-dallying over federal-provincial agreements, which are always too late in materializing. For example, the last Alberta-Canada agreement was signed two years late. Although federal funding represents approximately 30% of Campus Saint-Jean's operating budget, the University of Alberta authorizes the institution to hire contract personnel only, not professors, to fill tenure-track positions on the federal portion of its budget.

The third reason is changes in federal funding. Since 2003 or 2009, depending on the analysis you accept, that funding has been shifted from providing support for core programs to special projects, as my colleague Denis Prud'homme previously mentioned. While this funding is definitely appealing, it also causes growing imbalances that jeopardize the institution and its operation. As a result, the federal government has stated in its action plan that it wishes to support the training and retention of teachers in francophone schools and French immersion programs. Campus Saint-Jean, of course, welcomes this, but while it expands its master's training programs in three regions of Alberta—Calgary, Red Deer and Grande Prairie—thanks to this targeted funding, it is required to hire contract personnel at the very moment it finds itself having to reduce its overall course offerings and is unable to replace permanent professors, who either retire or are hired by other universities. As a result, Campus Saint-Jean's faculty has declined from 33 to 28 professors in the past two years, whereas we would have between 42 and 45 if we had a normal-sized faculty.

The fourth reason is the province's obligation to provide matching funding. With regard to programming, the Alberta government feels it has already done enough by contributing to initial core funding and therefore contributes nothing to matching funding and has refused for some time now to pay anything for infrastructure.

• (1545)

In closing, if I may, I would say my main concern is the crucial issue of international francophone students, particularly from Africa, who are particularly hard hit by this situation.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mocquais.

Since time passes quickly when you only have five minutes, I would ask you please to send us a brief. You may forward it to the clerk this week.

Members of the committee will now ask you questions. I will therefore yield the floor first to our Vice-Chair, Mr. Blaney, who may share his time with another member of the committee.

Mr. Blaney, go ahead for six minutes.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since I arrived late, I haven't had a chance to test my microphone. I'd like to make sure with the clerk that there are no sound problems on my end.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Nancy Vohl): It's good.

The Chair: Excellent.

• (1550)

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome our two guests.

Mr. Prud'homme and Mr. Mocquais, I'm tempted to say you are both favourites of the committee. I'm speaking on behalf of its members here. Why? Because you are the spokespersons of two flagships of the Canadian francophonie. I of course want to tell

you that we think you occupy in a very important position because you play an extremely important role in the Atlantic region and the provinces.

Mr. Chair, you mentioned that I might share my time, and that's indeed the case. I'm going to yield the floor to my colleague Joël Godin, who has a question for Mr. Mocquais.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Mocquais, I had the privilege of speaking to members of the Association des universitaires de la Faculté Saint-Jean, at the University Alberta, who told me about their sad situation. What you said in your statement is consistent with what they told me, that there is strong demand but that those students don't have access to the French-language courses that would enable them to complete their programs in that language.

Is that correct, Mr. Mocquais?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: That's correct, Mr. Godin.

For lack of funding, we are increasingly forced to ask students, especially at the postgraduate level, to take courses in English in other faculties at the university.

That's hardly a problem for traditional francophone students and students from immersion schools. However, it's not the case of students from francophone regions of Africa or Haiti, as was true of some students in my class last semester. Since they can't take those courses because their English isn't necessarily very good, their course options are thus limited.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Mocquais.

I'd like to ask you a brief final question before yielding to my colleague.

Aren't you required under Canada's *Official Languages Act* to offer French-language programs, from A to Z, at the post-secondary level?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: From what I understand of the present act, that's not the case. The act applies from kindergarten to grade 12. At the post-secondary level, however, we have to ensure that most, though not necessarily all, courses are offered in French.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Mocquais.

I now yield the floor to my colleague, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Mocquais, we recently heard from the representative of Laurentian University and agency representatives. People seem to realize that what's essential for our communities is having truly strong and independent institutions. Since Campus Saint-Jean is part of the University of Alberta, federal funding, for example, flows through the university.

Do you think Campus Saint-Jean should be an independent university, given that money is so important? With that status, you would obviously have the recognition and a more independent hand in managing your funds. As the saying goes, you'd have "both hands on the wheel".

Wouldn't that reflect the wishes of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate when they ceded the campus to the University of Alberta?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Mr. Blaney, I can't tell you what the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were thinking at the time. However, I can say that there are two ways to view the matter. On the one hand, you can say that Campus Saint-Jean could definitely do more if it were more independent. On the other hand, its attachment to one of the major research universities in Canada is an undeniable asset that attracts to our institution very high-calibre professors, who enter a francophone faculty but within a large research university currently ranked as one of the best in the world.

Considering those two ways of viewing the matter, it seems to me complete independence wouldn't necessarily be the best solution. However, more independence is something we might consider.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you. That's at least clear.

Mr. Prud'homme, you mentioned in your statement that you would like to have permanent federal government financial support. I'm pleased to inform you that it is the wish of our leader, Erin O'Toole, to secure stable funding for post-secondary institutions in minority language communities.

One thing I find somewhat shocking—and I was previously part of the government—is that budgets aren't indexed. For example, you mentioned a provincial-level increase of 0.7%.

Have there been any federal increases since the OLEP freeze? What do you think will happen now? How do you go about looking for additional funding so you can remain flexible and not charge excessively high tuition fees?

• (1555)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Prud'homme.

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: The OLEP contributions have varied from \$6.5 million to \$7 million a year over the past 5 years. The only way to soften the blow of non-indexing for inflation is to increase the number of students.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

Thank you very much, Mr. Prud'homme.

Mr. Arseneault will ask the next questions.

Go ahead for six minutes, Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Prud'homme and Mr. Mocquais, thank you for the honour of your presence here today. For us, you are symbols of the resistance. I feel I'm looking at the covers of the Asterix albums, at those characters that resist the invader again and again, the invader in this instance being the dominant language of North America.

Mr. Prud'homme, I'll get right down to brass tacks. What is the annual budget of the Université de Moncton?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: As I mentioned, the current budget is about \$120 million. As I also said, it has declined by slightly more than \$25 million over the past 10 years as a result of annual cuts of \$2 million to \$3 million, depending on the year.

Mr. René Arseneault: Are those cuts made by the province?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: They aren't made by the province. They're simply the result of higher expenses due to inflation, annual salary increases and infrastructure maintenance.

Mr. René Arseneault: When you say the budget is approximately \$120 million, is that for the three New Brunswick campuses?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: Yes, I'm still talking about the three campuses.

Mr. René Arseneault: Fine.

Of the total funding for the three campuses, 75% comes from the Province of New Brunswick. Is that in fact what you said?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. René Arseneault: Does that 75% envelope include the federal contribution from OLEP or other programs?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: No, the OLEP portion represents 5% of our funding. That funding is allocated to special projects, which must be carried out and which contribute to the Université de Moncton's activities. It may be used to promote student recruitment or to develop French-language research. These are the types of projects that are implemented with federal government support. We can't use that funding to pay our operating costs.

Mr. René Arseneault: All right. I see.

Could you explain to me how the bilateral agreements reached between New Brunswick and the federal government work?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: Just as my colleague from Campus Saint-Jean mentioned, it's always hard to collect the provincial half of the 50-50 federal-provincial funding.

For two years now, the provincial government has refused to make the \$2.5 million per year contribution that was included in the letter of agreement negotiated between the government and the Université de Moncton. I had to exercise pressure to get the funding released, and that reduced the deficit substantially.

If the government had stuck to its position not to release the funding, that would have put us in a tenuous financial position. The provincial government assumes that its contribution is included in its operating budget or core grant. It's not considered as additional funding.

Mr. René Arseneault: I'm not sure I understand what you're saying. That \$2.5 million was the amount granted for last year. Is that correct?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: It was for the past two years.

Mr. René Arseneault: The Higgs government in New Brunswick refused to pay the \$2.5 million contribution it was required to make under the federal-provincial agreements. Is that correct?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: That's correct.

Mr. René Arseneault: Did that money come from the province's coffers or from the federal government via the province?

• (1600)

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: It was an additional contribution from the province.

Mr. René Arseneault: I see.

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: We get the federal contribution regularly, but the provincial government is normally required to add its share. It's that share that it refused to release on the ground that it was included in its core grant.

Mr. René Arseneault: Once again I'm going to ask you the question that we put to officials last week.

Is the federal share paid directly by Ottawa to the university, or does it have to go through the province?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: The federal share goes through the province, with the exception of the portion that goes to the Consortium national de formation en santé, or CNFS. For that program, it goes through a third party and is paid directly to the university.

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Prud'homme, we have just witnessed some unfortunate events involving Laurentian University. I'm an alumnus of the Université de Moncton. As you said earlier, 87% of students stay in the province. We contribute to the economy, and it's incredible.

The changes that have occurred in the past two generations as a result of the university are very important to me and to the entire community.

How can we make sure the Université de Moncton has a balanced budget in future?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: There's no secret there: we have to adjust our spending based on revenues, and the only way to increase our revenues is to raise the number of students.

International recruitment is one of our strategies. We're currently recruiting the maximum number of students in New Brunswick.

Some 35% of high school graduates attend the Université de Moncton, 30% go to community college, and another 30% stop studying after high school.

The only solution is to recruit more Canadian and international students and to lower tuition fees for those students.

Mr. René Arseneault: Have you managed to discuss recruitment strategies with provincial representatives?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: We've done that. At the province's request, we submitted a scholarship plan designed to reduce tuition fees over a 10-year period, which would let us admit approximately 150 more students every year and thus approach our objective of admitting 1,000 more students in the next four years and being able to absorb the increased costs.

I will close by saying that, if the measures we are introducing don't have the desired effect, it's only a matter of time before what happened at Laurentian University happens at the Université de Moncton.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Prud'homme and Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Mocquais from the University of Alberta.

Mr. Mocquais, when Ms. Risbud, the president of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, or ACFA, appeared before the committee, she explained that \$8 million was to be transferred under a federal-provincial agreement and to be used to renovate the Lacerte and McMahon pavilions. According to Ms. Risbud, the province has not yet released its \$4 million share of the funding.

Has that funding been released or is the province still refusing to do so? If the province is refusing to release the money, what justifying arguments has it advanced?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: No, Mr. Beaulieu, that money was never released. Consequently, the federal share has not been transferred either. The agreement was reached two years ago, but we've received nothing to date.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Nothing at all has been paid, and no action has been taken. Nothing's moving. Is that correct?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Nothing's moving, I'm taking action and the ACFA is as well. I find it harder, and this is related to the questions that were previously raised, by Mr. Blaney in particular. My ability to interact with the provincial government is somewhat limited because that's a prerogative of the president of the University of Alberta.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd like to discuss an aspect that always surprises me.

Frédéric Lacroix, who is a researcher, appeared before the committee last week. He said that Campus Saint-Jean receives 0.37% of the budget intended for universities, whereas francophones represent 2% of the population of Alberta. As a result, Alberta's francophone institutions are 81% underfunded.

Do you think that reflects the actual situation?

• (1605)

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: I'm not very familiar with those figures, but I can tell you that underfunding is a fact, if only because, when you consider funding a minority educational institution, you have to understand that there are additional costs.

Just to give you an example, all the faculties of the University of Alberta rely on central services intended for the faculties. We're required to provide those services in French, of course, and that entails additional costs that aren't covered by our current budget. We spend roughly \$250,000 on translation a year and have no budget line for that kind of expense.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would note that the Alberta government and western Canada are often inclined to blame Quebec or to accuse Quebecers of being intolerant, among other things, when Quebec's English-language universities receive two or three times as much funding as anglophones' demographic weight from the Quebec government and four or five times as much as their demographic weight from the federal government.

I think they're quite wrong to do so. However, it seems we don't often hear the arguments I just mentioned, which means we should find a way to put more pressure on the Alberta government and all provincial governments in English Canada.

You said the University of Alberta required you to hire only contract staff, not new permanent professors. I didn't really understand that.

Could you tell us a little more about it?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Unlike my colleague from the Université de Moncton, where the federal share makes up only 5% or 6% of its budget, it constitutes roughly 30% of the budget of Campus Saint-Jean. However, in accordance with its accounting practices, which are associated with the Province of Alberta, the University of Alberta doesn't allow us to use that federal budget to hire permanent teaching staff. Consequently, we can only hire staff to fill tenure-track positions using the provincial share, which makes up slightly less than 70% of our total budget.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: All right. I understand.

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: In other words, we can only hire contract personnel. The problem is that you don't design programs or maintain research programs relying solely on contract staff.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The situation's quite desperate.

Mr. Prud'homme, you say you're losing ground because the government doesn't index its funding to account for cost-of-living and salary increases. That causes problems as a result of the challenges associated with demographics and the assimilation rate, which is ultimately lower than elsewhere, in Alberta and the other provinces.

Do you think a change has to come in order to secure the future of the Université de Moncton, or do you feel the longer-term future nevertheless looks pretty good?

The Chair: Mr. Prud'homme, I would ask you to answer that in 10 seconds.

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: Yes, a change is needed. We'll try to make administrative efficiency gains, particularly through centralization. We want the campuses to share more courses and the courses perhaps to be offered as well by postsecondary educational institutions and other provinces.

We need a draconian change if we want to ensure the university's long-term financial survival and vitality.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Prud'homme.

We now move on to the next round of questions.

Mr. Boulerice, go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair

Mr. Mocquais and Mr. Prud'homme, thank you for being with us today.

Mr. Prud'homme, what you said was very interesting. At the same time, however, I found it quite disturbing. You mentioned 10 years of darkness, cuts, a poor financial position and pressure to increase tuition fees. You even concluded the second last round of questions by saying that it was merely a matter of time before what happened at Laurentian University occurred at the Université de Moncton. I think that would be absolutely disastrous for the region. I see Mr. Arseneault is nodding.

Apart from the option of recruiting more Quebec, Canadian and international students, is there anything the federal government could do, under OLEP, for example, to prevent that?

Perhaps that program wouldn't even be enough.

• (1610)

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: One of the recommendations I made in my remarks was that, in order to avoid that situation, we need to secure a permanent, minimum monetary contribution that could be indexed to inflation. That would help address increasing annual costs, at least in part. We're unable to offset those costs by increasing the number of students because of declining demographics and the difficulty we have attracting international students, whose tuition fees are twice those of New Brunswick students.

For international students, we could try tuition reduction scholarships, for example, which would lower their tuition fees to a level equivalent to those of New Brunswick students. That would be more attractive. As I mentioned, there's no shortage of admission applications, since we receive 3,000 to 4,000 applications from international students every year. The francophone world is interested in the Université de Moncton, and part of our role is also to open our doors to fellow francophones. Unfortunately, however, the cost barrier prevents many admitted students from actually enrolling at the Université de Moncton.

Consequently, we need to establish a scholarship program for students and secure a core contribution. That would help ease the pressure on students caused by tuition fees.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I see.

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: We used to have some flexibility on tuition costs since ours were the lowest in the Atlantic provinces. In the last three years, however, they've risen to the average level of tuition fees, and francophone students now have the option of studying elsewhere since we no longer have the monetary advantage that retained them. That may tempt a number of francophone students to pursue a postsecondary education elsewhere.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Mocquais, I'll continue along the same lines.

Considering what happened at Laurentian University, do you think it's just a matter of time before it also happens at Campus Saint-Jean?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: That's my fear. However, it's another matter whether the University of Alberta, which enjoys a sound reputation, would want to find itself in the same situation and be criticized for abandoning an institution such as Campus Saint-Jean or one of its faculties. Paradoxically, that, in a way, is its best protection.

In other words, if Campus Saint-Jean were alone, what Mr. Prud'homme said would be the path it would take. All francophone universities outside Quebec are in that situation, which is a major concern.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Mocquais, I'd like to clarify a point that Mr. Beaulieu earlier asked you about.

I'm always surprised by administrative absurdities. For example, if you have a \$20 bill in your left pocket, you can use it to hire a tenured professor, but if that same \$20 bill is in your right pocket, you have to use it solely to hire a contract lecturer. Mr. Blaney mentioned Gallic villages at the start of the meeting, and I feel as though we're in an insane asylum.

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: I won't speak to that, but I must say the situation is extremely odd. Here's another example. The Alberta government has prohibited the University of Alberta from using its reserve fund. As a result, I have to cut courses and can't replace five of the professors whose positions I want to fill, while also creating programs outside Edmonton. The situation is somewhat absurd.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: You're having trouble recruiting professors, you're limited as to the number of students you can admit, and you're unable to expand your programs. Don't you feel you've been pushed into a corner?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Obviously. That's absolutely correct. That's why we have to get ourselves out of this situation, not one institution at a time, but all of us together. That's precisely what ACUFC proposed in the brief that it submitted to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages and that I referred to earlier.

● (1615)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Boulerice and Mr. Mocquais.

Since we absolutely have to stop at 4:30 p.m., we have four rounds of questions left. Mr. Williamson and Mr. Lefebvre will have five minutes each. They will be followed by Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Boulerice for two and a half minutes each.

Go ahead, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will be sharing my time with Mr. Dalton for the last two minutes.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. John Williamson: I'm a member from New Brunswick, and I think it's very important that the francophones of our province be able to protect their French language and culture.

Mr. Prud'homme, can you tell us about the importance of postsecondary institutions if we want to strengthen that protection?

What would be the consequences for the francophone and Acadian communities of New Brunswick if students didn't have the opportunity to study in French in our province?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: We'd see students leaving for Quebec, in particular, and a decline in the number of graduates returning to New Brunswick to contribute to the province's economy and professional labour needs.

The Université de Moncton can play a major francizing role. I think we can contribute to official language objectives and enhance bilingualism, particularly among anglophones.

We've also proposed projects designed to increase our capacity to take in students who are in immersion at the secondary level and who could continue in French at the postsecondary level.

Mr. John Williamson: So there would be economic and cultural consequences for the province.

The committee has previously heard that universities such as the Université de Moncton are facing many financial challenges.

Do you think your situation is representative of those of anglophone postsecondary educational institutions in New Brunswick?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: Generally speaking, I would say no. Many of my colleagues who are presidents of English-language universities have trust funds at their disposal that enable them to offset their annual deficits and feel less pressure to make cuts in order to balance their budgets.

The Université de Moncton was founded in 1963 and is thus relatively new. The financial capacity of Acadians is perhaps more limited than that of their anglophone fellow citizens.

Mr. John Williamson: Are you talking about tuition fees or alumni donations?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: I'm talking about the ability of graduates to contribute to trust funds that are reserved for operating funding. The Université de Moncton has approximately \$100 million in trust funds, but 99% of those funds are allocated to scholarships for students.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you very much.

In the course of another committee study, we heard that the Université de Moncton was having problems maintaining its facilities.

Can you tell us more about that? How do the Université de Moncton's facilities compare to those of the anglophone universities in New Brunswick?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: We can't compare ourselves to the anglophone universities. When we're forced to make cuts in the range of 3% and sometimes 4%, one of the priorities that's definitely neglected is preventive maintenance of and improvements to the quality of our facilities and infrastructure. We are limited to emergencies, such as repairs to a leaking roof, for example. We therefore can't invest in improvements to the quality of training for our students.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you very much, Mr. Prud'homme.

That was my final question, Mr. Chair. I yield the floor to Mr. Dalton.

The Chair: That leaves exactly one minute for you, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Mocquais, I'm going to ask you some questions, and you may answer them in writing later on if we run short of time.

Campus Saint-Jean is very important to my family and me. As Ms. Risbud said, my sisters attended the institution, and my father's family was there during the 1940s. That educational institution is important for the vitality of francophones and francophiles in western Canada, in British Columbia, where I'm a member.

The number of students there rose from 500 to 900 in five years. That represents an impressive 80% increase. Perhaps you can tell the committee how you managed to do that.

I know that cuts have also been made at the University of Alberta. Was it the university's decision to make those cuts?

Ms. Risbud also said there've been no increases in federal funding since 2009. Is that true?

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dalton. A minute passes by very quickly. I even let you go beyond the minute just to hear your questions.

Pardon me, but I must turn the floor over to Mr. Lefebvre for the next five minutes.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'm going to yield my time to my colleague René Arseneault since he yielded his to me when my friends from Laurentian University and my community were here.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Prud'homme, I believe the infrastructure of campuses of the Université de Moncton, in New Brunswick, can accommodate up to 8,000 students. Is that correct?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: Yes. We currently have nearly 5,000 students, but we have the capacity for nearly 8,000.

Mr. René Arseneault: That's interesting. So an easy solution that wouldn't incur further costs would involve foreign students. Earlier you said you receive 3,000 to 4,000 applications from foreign students every year. I want to draw parallel to that subject before I turn to Mr. Mocquais.

Earlier you said that 85% to 87% of people who had studied at the Université de Moncton subsequently remained in New Brunswick. Consequently, through our university, we help retain our educated young people.

Do you have any statistics on foreign students who choose New Brunswick?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: Some 30% to 33% of foreign students later remain in New Brunswick. Unfortunately, 50% of those students leave New Brunswick after three to five years. One of the difficulties we've observed is their limited knowledge of English as a second language. That's why we'll be introducing strategies to assist them in improving their knowledge of English as a second language from the moment they arrive and during their initial years of study. This will help them improve their hiring opportunities and promote their integration into New Brunswick.

Mr. René Arseneault: In any event, the Université de Moncton could become an incredible asset for our province by attracting newcomers. We want a lot of them and—

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: With respect to infrastructure, what we need in the short term is an upgrade to our technological instruments so we can simultaneously offer in-person and distance learning. By harmonizing that capability across our three campuses, we could also share courses and cooperate more with other francophone minority universities.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mocquais, the president of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, Ms. Risbud, came to see us a while ago to discuss quotas, by which I mean provincial funding based on quotas set by Alberta.

From what I could understand, Alberta allows specific quotas for admitting students to the university and grants funding based solely on those quotas, without considering College Saint-Jean's infrastructure or its actual ability to accommodate students.

Was my understanding correct?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Yes and no. The province gives the university a quota, and the university sets quotas for the faculties.

As for infrastructure, Campus Saint-Jean's infrastructure hasn't been renovated in 20 years, apart from the science laboratories, which recently were completely renovated in response to efforts that I had made.

We have the same problem as Mr. Prud'homme. At this point, it's essential that we develop Campus Saint-Jean's digital infrastructure and emphasize what we call smart rooms, rooms equipped with digital technologies offering access simultaneously to students on site and those outside the Edmonton campus.

That's where our capacity is extremely limited. It's what the \$8 million we discussed earlier was for.

• (1625)

Mr. René Arseneault: I thought the Alberta government funded only 70% of the quotas.

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Yes and no. We receive funding for a quota 575 full-time students, but we actually admit 750.

Mr. René Arseneault: They're funded by the Alberta government.

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: They aren't funded at all, except for a portion of their registration fees.

Mr. René Arseneault: That's fine, thank you. I have very little time.

I was with you a year ago when our friend and former colleague Randy Boissonnault announced that the federal government would be granting approximately \$3 million to renovate one or two complexes. The Province of Alberta was also supposed to participate.

What's the situation today?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: That's the \$8 million we discussed earlier. We were supposed to get \$3.7 million from the federal government, which was confirmed to me, and the rest was to come from the provincial government, but it hasn't arrived. We've received nothing, zero.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Mocquais.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

When I yielded my time to Mr. Arseneault, what I meant to say was that he had given me a chance to put questions to the representatives of the Coalition nord-ontarienne pour une université de langue française, of the University of Sudbury and Laurentian University. I misspoke and therefore wanted to clarify that for my colleagues.

The Chair: All right, duly noted. Thank you.

Mr. Beaulieu, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My first question is for both witnesses.

Do you receive money from Quebec?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: No.

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: No.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So you don't receive money from foundations or the government.

Have you filed any applications?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: The only existing program involves interprovincial applications for research projects, and it has relatively little funding.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Perhaps we should take a look at what's being offered because there seems to be a new willingness on Quebec's part to take on a greater role in supporting the Canadian and North American francophonie.

Mr. Mocquais, I was going to ask you what the best solution would be, but I can see you're really in a very difficult position: the provincial government doesn't want to make its contribution despite the grants the federal government has proposed.

Do you see any way out of that situation, or do you think a massive mobilization effort will be necessary to make this government take action?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Yes, it will take a massive mobilization.

I also think the present principle of complete symmetry between francophone institutions outside Quebec and anglophone institutions in Quebec will have to be reconsidered. Francophone institutions outside Quebec are in a pitiful state compared to anglophone institutions in Quebec because the Quebec government supports its own anglophone universities. So all that should be reconsidered.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Definitely. Federal contributions to anglophone university infrastructures are nevertheless substantial. That's probably the case for francophone institutions too. We're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars here. I think it could be allocated in a way—

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: At Campus Saint-Jean, I haven't seen any of that for 20 years, except for the science labs. So let's be realistic.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Prud'homme, what do you think is the best solution for Université de Moncton?

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: I'll say it again. It's to have permanent annual funding that is indexed to inflation, in addition to existing programs. That's the only way we'll be able to maintain the financial health of our institutions and contribute to the vitality of francophone communities outside Quebec.

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: I fully agree with my colleague.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Prud'homme and Mr. Mocquais.

Mr. Boulerice gets to ask the last questions.

You have two and a half minutes, Mr. Boulerice.

• (1630)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Prud'homme, I would just like some clarification. You spoke earlier about a language institute that had received \$10 million from the federal government, but I didn't catch the full name.

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: It's called the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities. I don't know what year it was in, but it got a lump sum of \$10 million that was placed in a trust fund, and the centre operates on the interest generated from this trust fund.

So one of the options would be for the government to create a trust fund for the activities of these universities, but to restrict withdrawals to the interest generated.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: That's interesting.

Mr. Mocquais, you said that there are \$3.7 million from the federal government just sitting there because the provincial government refuses to make its contribution.

Do you think that at some point the principle of matching funding could be ended so that you could at least get your hands on the federal government money?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Correct. That's one of the desirable options, meaning that the money does not necessarily have to go through the provincial government, nor that matching funding be required systematically.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Mocquais, you mentioned the change made to federal funding. It used to provide funding for core programs, whereas now it provides funding for special projects. This has been devastating, and has caused some horrendous situations in the community sector.

I understand that you think the system should return to funding for core programs. This would make things simpler, wouldn't it?

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Absolutely. I won't repeat Mr. Prud'homme's exact words, but as far as we are concerned, I agree with what he said. Regular, permanent, indexed funding that truly takes local circumstances into account, is what's needed.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: All right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Boulerice.

That's all the time we have to ask the witnesses questions.

On behalf of the committee members, I'd like to thank the witnesses for their contributions to this study. I'd like to remind everyone that we had with us today Mr. Denis Prud'homme, Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Université de Moncton, and Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais, Dean and Chief Executive Officer of Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta.

Thank you, gentlemen. I look forward to meeting you in person again.

Mr. Denis Prud'homme: Thank you.

Mr. Pierre-Yves Mocquais: Thank you very much.

The Chair: *We're going to suspend the meeting to give the next guests the time to join us virtually.*

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: The meeting is resumed.

I'm going to repeat the instructions for the witnesses who have just joined us.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), the committee is meeting on the study of the federal support for French-language or bilingual post-secondary institutions in a minority situation.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting.

A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the Chair. Should any technical challenges arise, please advise the Chair so that we can deal with them quickly.

• (1640)

[*English*]

The last thing I would like to remind all participants and attendees of is that you cannot take photos or screen captures.

[*Translation*]

We would now like to welcome the witnesses for this second hour of our meeting.

We have Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy, President of the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens. We also have two representatives from Université de l'Ontario français, Ms. Dyane Adam, Chair, Board of Governors, and Mr. Denis Berthiaume, Vice-President Academic and Research.

You have five minutes each for your statement. I will tell you when you have a minute left, and when your speaking time is over.

Let's begin without further ado.

Ms. Vinet-Roy, you have five minutes for your statement.

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy (President, Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking you for having invited the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens to take part in this study.

I am here today as the president of the AEFO, a francophone union that has approximately 12,000 members and that represents Ontario elementary and high school teachers in both Catholic and public high schools, in addition to professional and support staff at various francophone workplaces.

The AEFO is interested in French-language post-secondary education in Ontario from two different standpoints.

Firstly, as a stakeholder in francophone Ontario, the AEFO strongly believes that francophone post-secondary educational institutions are essential to provide an education continuum that will enable our students to be educated entirely in French right up until they enter the labour market.

In addition to promoting equitable program offerings in French, the French-language minority post-secondary environment would do well to operate on the principle of management by and for francophones. This would make them the linchpins of governance for their educational institutions. It's essential not only to make sure that these educational institutions are accessible, but also that they support the creation of knowledge within minority language communities by focusing on research.

Then, as a key player in the Franco-Ontarian school system, the AEFO wants sound post-secondary education programs for the training of a skilled workforce, particularly among its members. Undergraduate programs provide students for faculties of education and enable future teachers of mathematics, science, history, French, and other subjects to acquire the required core knowledge. If programs like these are abandoned, there will eventually be serious repercussions on our schools.

The AEFO and the school board associations worked together in the fall of 2020 to develop an overview of qualified teacher shortages in our French-language schools and to find solutions to the problem. One thing is clear, and that is that the shortages stem in large part from decisions on the structure of programs, and the number of places available, in faculties of education. French-language schools in Ontario need approximately 940 new teachers per year, whereas the faculties of education are graduating an average of only 480, because of the limited funding they are receiving.

French-language faculties of education that do not receive special funding to offset the smaller numbers and the resulting higher costs, have had to stop offering certain programs, leading to school boards no longer having access to qualified teachers in certain fields.

Based on the analyses produced by the group in connection with its work last fall, the estimates show that if no action is taken, more than 2,500 unqualified people will be assigned teaching tasks in Franco-Ontarian schools by 2025, and will account for nearly one-quarter of total staff. When that happens, it will no longer be possible to speak about equivalent program availability in the minority language, as guaranteed by section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In February 2021, the working group I just mentioned presented a report to the Minister of Education that contained 37 recommendations, some of which were directly relevant to program funding.

Among other things, it recommended funding for the measures required to ensure the annual availability of an additional 520 certified teachers. This could involve adding places in faculties of education with teacher education programs in French.

It further recommends targeted funding for faculties of education for a teacher education program in French so that they can develop programs in several sections for all levels, as well as technology training, and that these programs be available virtually in all parts of the province, with due regard to the realities of the Franco-Ontarian education context.

It also recommends targeted funding to ensure course offerings in all intermediate and senior level methodology subjects, in technology education, and for small class courses.

The final recommendation is for funding to provide incentives for people who need to, or who are willing to, complete their teacher training in remote areas.

The working group partners are still impatiently waiting for a response to the report from the Ontario government. We hope that the proposals will be acted upon and the necessary funding provided.

To conclude, French-language education, from early childhood to post-secondary, is essential to the survival of francophone minority communities because it contributes to their preservation and development.

Thank you very much for your time.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much Ms. Vinet-Roy.

We'll now move on to Ms. Dyane Adam, the Chair of the Université de l'Ontario français Board of Governors.

You have five minutes, Ms. Adam.

Ms. Dyane Adam (Chair, Board of Governors, Université de l'Ontario français): I'd like to thank you, Mr. Chair, the co-chairs and other members of the committee for having invited us today to contribute to your work on federal support for minority French-language post-secondary educational institutions.

As the time allowed for the opening address is five minutes, I will go straight to the crux of the matter. You won't be surprised to hear that I'll be focusing on funding. It will no doubt resemble what you may have heard already from some of my colleagues at other universities. I can assure you, however, that we did not consult one another.

To begin with, I'd like to underscore the key and essential role played by the federal government over the past few years, through the Minister of Official Languages, in the establishment of the first autonomous French-language university in Ontario. The joint funding agreement between Ontario and the federal government to get the project off the ground is what really got things moving for the Université de l'Ontario français, the UOF. The federal government will provide its share of the funding for the first four years and the province will contribute an equivalent amount for the four subsequent years.

The UOF is not the first minority language post-secondary institution in Ontario or elsewhere in Canada to receive significant one-time support from the federal government. This also occurred when the French-language colleges and boards were established in Ontario. This kind of financial support, while significant, is based on a strategy of providing ad hoc project funding. In fact, under the federal official languages program, most of the contribution agreements between the provincial and federal governments for the post-secondary sector, call for investments by both for a limited period of time.

Over the longer term, however, in order to make sure that francophone minority community universities or colleges are sustainable, this kind of funding is limited or even inadequate. The federal government needs to broaden its field of action and commit itself to providing stable and recurring operational funding to such institutions.

Of course, minority community post-secondary educational institutions are, in each of their respective provinces, part of a larger ecosystem whose financial base is established as a function of the majority language population. Overall, it is a funding logic based essentially on numbers: number of students, number of programs and size of the institution. Economies of scale in the large institutions of the majority help to maintain acceptable levels of stability and funding for these universities and colleges in Canada. However, for francophone minority communities, the undifferentiated application of this kind of funding formula for their institutions condemns them to instability and financial vulnerability.

We mustn't forget that these institutions, which serve a small population base, nevertheless must offer a sufficiently broad range of programs to meet the various workforce needs of their community and society. By diversifying its programs, these universities will have to offer programs in which fewer students generate less revenue. In such situations, core funding cannot be calculated in the same manner as it is for English-language universities. Separate support funds are required to allow them to fulfil their specific and unique mandates.

• (1650)

The Chair: Ms. Adam, could you raise your microphone a little higher please? There's a bit of noise that's making it hard for our interpreters to understand what you're saying.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Okay.

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half to finish your comments.

Ms. Dyane Adam: I'm going to talk specifically about Ontario.

For decades, the province has, in its University funding formula, recognized the additional costs tied to services and programs in the minority language. This takes the form of a special funding envelope for bilingualism and French-language education.

Although this special form of funding has not grown substantially for several years, the province nevertheless hands out a total of approximately \$87 million per year to francophone minority post-secondary systems to enhance core funding for these institutions. The federal contribution to this core funding is currently approximately \$14 million, which represents only 16% of the funds.

We are therefore a long way from a situation in which there is an equal contribution from the two levels of government. The fact is that an additional \$29 million per year should be provided by the federal government to match current investment by the province, in recognition of this additional funding cost for francophone minority universities.

I'll conclude by saying that I have come to the same conclusion as Rector Prud'homme. The federal government really needs to develop an ongoing separate program to provide financial support to francophone minority post-secondary educational institutions. The program requires two components, the current one, which provide startup funds or one-time funding, and a new component that would provide genuine permanent core funding for the institutions.

Thank you for listening.

The Chair: Thank you very much for finishing on time.

Mr. Blaney now, for the next six minutes.

One moment please, because the clerk wants to say something.

The Clerk: Mr. Chair, the interpreters are still having trouble hearing Ms. Adam.

Could you suspend the meeting for a moment so that we can do another sound test?

The Chair: Okay.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1650) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1655)

The Chair: We are resuming the meeting.

We have reached the point at which committee members can ask the witnesses questions. The first is Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Blaney, you have the floor for six minutes.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to make the best possible use of my time. I'll begin with Ms. Adam and then move on to Ms. Vinet-Roy.

Ms. Adam, I'll begin by congratulating you. The Université de l'Ontario français has finally become a reality. When you last appeared before our committee, or at least at one of your recent appearances, we were at a critical phase and you emphasized the importance of this university. We are delighted about the outcome, and about the fact that the solution for the funding was worked out by the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

We're talking about money, of course, which is crucial. You and Mr. Prud'homme both mentioned that stable permanent federal funding was required rather than one-time funding.

I also heard you mention startup and permanent funding. There are also infrastructures, which are important to universities, particularly for a new institution. I'd like to hear from you on that score.

How do you see this permanent contribution by the federal government, particularly as it relates to the Université de l'Ontario français?

Ms. Dyane Adam: The Université de l'Ontario français Now has startup funding spread over an eight-year period. Surprisingly, we are already in the third year. We have therefore nearly reached the second stage of the funding process.

For the startup funding, infrastructure funds remain one-time. However, it might be possible to decide during the second phase to allocate part of the permanent ongoing funding to infrastructure maintenance. That, in fact, is one of the major problems. I think that the startup funding should remain, because we have time-limited projects, and that the other funding phase should also begin.

Hon. Steven Blaney: We understand that the provinces fund their universities, but do you feel the federal government has a role to play in stable and ongoing funding for post-secondary educational institutions?

And do you believe that an asymmetrical approach should be adopted for francophone universities outside Quebec, in comparison to anglophone universities in Quebec, which are perhaps in a different reality?

I don't know whether you really want to get into that.

Ms. Dyane Adam: I'll put on my former Commissioner of Official Languages hat. I've always preferred to think that the local context needs to be factored in. I believe a witness mentioned that earlier. What I can say is that there are anglophone communities in Quebec that do not have the same level of services as Montreal's anglophone community. Similarly, the situation is not the same everywhere for francophone communities outside Quebec.

• (1700)

Hon. Steven Blaney: So the principles are the same, but the approach needs to be tailored to the realities of the communities. Thank you.

Ms. Vinet-Roy, my first question is very straightforward. You only represent teachers at francophone schools. What about the French teachers who teach in French immersion schools. Are they part of your organization?

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: No, they are not part of our organization.

In Ontario, we have four teachers' unions. We, as we said, represent teachers in French-language elementary and secondary schools in Ontario, both Catholic and public. There are French immersion teachers from elementary and secondary schools who are represented by the Catholic schools' union. As for the anglophone public system, there are two distinct unions, one for the high schools and another for the elementary schools.

Hon. Steven Blaney: You represent 12,000 members, which is a lot.

You said that a significant shortage is expected in education. You're asking for steps to be taken to ensure that there will be an additional 520 certified teachers every year. Otherwise, by 2025, one-quarter of teachers will not be certified.

Can the federal government play a role in ensuring that there will be enough new certified teachers every year?

You also mentioned a constitutional obligation. Did you consider that the federal government has a legal and moral obligation to provide more financial support for the education of these teachers, if it is to fulfil its constitutional obligations? Does that reflect your thinking on this?

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: Yes, definitely.

The federal government is responsible for assuring that educational systems in both official languages have comparable services, resources and course offerings. The concept of equity is often applied, but not necessarily that of equality. Ms. Adam referred earlier to this by pointing out that in some regions, it might be more expensive to have some services in French at identical or comparable levels to those in the English-language system. I'm speaking about Ontario here, but generally speaking, francophone communities vary from one location to another. Some communities are smaller, more isolated or more spread out than others.

The federal government definitely has a responsibility with respect to the two official languages. It's definitely possible for provincial governments to be unable to do everything all the time. It all depends on circumstances and available resources. It's an important responsibility, at least in terms of support. This vitality definitely needs to be protected and strengthened. Everything hinges on education systems and school communities. After all, a school is much more than a physical location.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Okay. So—

The Chair: Excuse me for interrupting, Mr. Blaney. I've just looked at how much time we have left. We need to end the meeting at 5:30 p.m. Rather than six minutes, let's take seven minutes each and we won't have another round of questions.

Hon. Steven Blaney: In that case, I'm going to share my speaking time.

The Chair: All right. You have a minute and a half left.

Who are you going to share this time with?

Hon. Steven Blaney: I'll share it with Mr. Dalton.

The Chair: Okay.

Over to you, Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you very much for this additional time.

Ms. Vinet-Roy, I used to be a high school teacher. I know there is competition for French second language teachers and immersion teachers. You said that 480 teachers a year were being trained, when we need 940 new teachers every year. Can you tell us more about this competition?

Also, does the federal government give money to help finance French teacher education? Are there any programs like that?

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: Funding is not necessarily part of my area of expertise. Perhaps Ms. Adam could answer that better than I.

We feel that the federal government could do more to support what the provincial government is doing, or to compensate for what it is not doing. We are aware of this potential competition between the two school systems. I, for example, when I began my education, my two teaching methodology areas were French as a first language and French as a second language. I began my career in French as a second language teacher, and then began teaching in francophone minority settings. There has always been competition. This competition is dangerous because there is a risk of losing teachers who truly care about French.

There's a big difference between the immersion program and French-language minority education. I'm not saying that one is better than the other, but there are noteworthy differences in terms of francophone identity-building and cultural transmission. It's much more than simply language, literature and things like that. It's much broader.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vinet-Roy.

Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

We'll go to Ms. Lalonde now, for the next seven minutes.

You could also share your time. Don't forget to mention who your questions are for.

Go ahead, Ms. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will be sharing my speaking time with my colleague from Sudbury, Mr. Lefebvre.

I'd like to begin by wishing you all a good afternoon. Thanks for being here. It's a pleasure to welcome you to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I have only a few minutes, so I'll get to my questions right away.

Ms. Adam, I'd like to hear what you have to say about the federal-provincial funding agreements for education, which in my view is a matter of provincial jurisdiction.

How do you see things working out in the future if the federal government funding were to become permanent?

Federal funding is one thing, but as we've heard from other participants, the provincial government was not providing its contribution, and had completely disengaged. This happened in Alberta, and also in New Brunswick in some respects.

Ms. Dyane Adam: As you know, I am in Ontario. I spoke to you about the province's most recent funding for the operating budgets of post-secondary educational institutions. These funds are added to the core funding received by all the other universities.

I believe that we are way ahead in Ontario because the province has for several decades recognized that there are indeed additional costs and the province has already covered some of these. Has it done enough? Not at all. But in my opinion, compared to the other provinces, it's the best model for everyone to follow.

Nevertheless, at the moment, the federal government is not paying its fair share compared to what the province is giving.

I think that our colleagues have told us what we need. The federal government must recognize that the status of French, and of official language minority communities, varies enormously from one part of the country to another. The provincial government commitments to these minority communities also vary.

But as the federal government has a quasi-constitutional responsibility for the long-term continuity of official language communities across the country, it must provide the funds needed to keep these communities viable and able to rely on strong institutions, across Canada.

The federal government is investing in all kinds of areas, including in the economy and companies. But it must also consider official language communities as part of the Canadian fabric. That is fundamental. I believe that the federal government has a primary responsibility and I therefore expect leadership from it.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Ms. Adam, you are very familiar with the current situation at Laurentian University.

What do you think of the idea of a Francophone post-secondary network for Ontario? Do you think that the Université de l'Ontario français would have a role to play in a network like this? What would that mean?

Ms. Dyane Adam: As you know, Ms. Lalonde, when you were the Ontario Minister of Francophone Affairs, the planning board for a French-language university in Ontario tabled a structural document that provided an overview of what the Université de l'Ontario français would look like, and also sketched out a network of small Ontario francophone teaching institutions. These of course included the University of Sudbury, Saint Paul University, Dominican University College and the Université de Hearst.

At the time, these small universities already wanted to join together to share some resources, whether digital or otherwise, but nothing further has happened there yet, because the UOF is still in the implementation phase.

However, Université Hearst and Laurentian University have been working closely together since the establishment of the UOF. My colleague Denis Berthiaume could tell us more about that. These two universities have been working very effectively together and have been thinking about different ways of doing so, not only for programs but resources too.

So it can be done, but these educational institutions would have to reach a substantial critical mass for the network to be a strong one.

• (1710)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you.

I'll leave the rest of my speaking time to Mr. Lefebvre. He will probably want to add something on this subject.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: How much time is left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have two minutes, Mr. Lefebvre.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Adam, the witnesses told us that when the federal government got involved in the process and enhanced the funding, the provinces would frequently shirk their responsibilities and reduce their financial contribution. They would tell themselves that since the federal government was providing the funding, they could reduce theirs or even stop contributing altogether and spend their money elsewhere on other things they have in mind.

Could you tell us in 30 seconds, Ms. Adam, how we could do something about that?

Ms. Dyane Adam: I can't say that this is the case in Ontario, because Ontario has been putting more on the table than the federal government in terms of core funding. And there's nothing recent about this, because it has been like that through several different governments.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: In view of the increase announced in the 2020-2021 federal budget, do you think the province will increase its contribution, keep it where it is, or perhaps reduce it?

Ms. Dyane Adam: I think that whatever happens will be the outcome of a negotiation process. Let's be clear about the fact that universities and colleges have enormous needs, in Ontario and elsewhere.

Although I have worked with the provincial government to ensure that there would be a funding agreement with the federal government, I can't speak on the province's behalf.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you very much.

Ms. Vinet-Roy, I hope everything is going well in Timmins. You are in Timmins, are you not?

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: Not at the moment, but I was there not too long ago.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Okay. I'd nevertheless like to send my best wishes to the people of Timmins.

I'd like to thank you, and all members of the Association who taught my wife and I and who will no doubt teach my children.

I have a question for you about the importance of education and our future teachers, as well as about the cuts that were made at Laurentian University. We continually hear about the shortage of teachers. We're looking for them all the time and we're not finding them. Even here in Sudbury, it's difficult to track them down.

If there is no change in the situation, what short- and long-term problems will it cause?

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: As we said earlier, if things don't change, the shortage of teachers will continue to get worse and the problems will pile up. Things aren't going to level out because there is a growing number of students in several Ontario regions. There have been times when the demographics changed, but then the number of students started rising again, and staff were needed to deal with them.

There are problems already. For example, some teacher education programs are no longer being offered, like the intermediate senior certificate. This creates a very problematic gap in specialized areas of education, which are essential at the secondary level.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vinet-Roy.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I agree with you, Ms. Vinet-Roy. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Beaulieu, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll begin by thanking our witnesses.

My first question is for Ms. Vinet-Roy.

Ms. Vinet-Roy, you seem to be saying that the underfunding of Ontario schools has truly become chronic and that it's because of the funding structure.

Could you tell us a little more about that?

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: It's sometimes possible to obtain funding by other means. For example, we often obtain funds from the Department of Canadian heritage, sometimes by hiring new staff via immigration. There are collaboration initiatives, but these are always through special projects

Is your question mainly for post-secondary education, or do you want to know about the other levels of education too?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'd say mainly the other levels, because you're an elementary and secondary specialist.

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: Okay. I just wanted to clarify that.

There really is a problem insofar as over a period of several years now, funds have been cut here and there, drying up a little bit, and the problems have been escalating. We have therefore been trying to do more with less for a number of years now. Even though the general impression is that millions and billions of dollars are being spent, it's not necessarily the case.

The pandemic hasn't helped improve the situation, but for many years now, we in the world of education are being expected to do more with less. This exhausts and undermines our resources, because children have an increasing number of specific needs that need to be dealt with.

We need resources that are up-to-date, and I don't mean only technology. If we want minority community education to continue, then as I mentioned earlier, we need to give due regard to the importance of identity-building, and to the specific context and very special mission of French-language education, which goes well beyond subject matter and teaching methodology.

I would also mention cultural aspects and family engagement. The vitality of our communities in many Ontario communities depends largely on schools. This requires special resources which, as I mentioned earlier, sometimes cost more in isolated communities like Timmins, Hearst, some of the smaller communities in Eastern Ontario, or in the southern part of the province. This has to be taken into account, and flexibility is required.

• (1715)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: As you mentioned, education is crucial for the linguistic vitality of Franco-Ontarians. This raises questions about the Ontario government's willingness to contribute to the vitality of Franco-Ontarians.

I've often heard it said that immersion schools were schools for assimilation, because many francophones attend them and end up in an anglophone setting.

Wouldn't it be better to begin by making sure that schools designed by and for francophones are adequately funded to meet demand and grow before placing such an emphasis on immersion schools?

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: I don't want to be judgmental about immersion schools or immersion programs, because bilingualism is important in Canada. It's one of our country's and our province's values.

Do people opt for immersion programs because French-language schools don't have the courses they would like because of a funding shortfall? That's definitely possible. It's sometimes a matter of competition, which we discussed earlier.

Is it because children know that, sooner or later, after elementary and high school, they won't have access to the programs they want in French and decide that it might be best to go towards the anglophone side of things to have a direct path to the post-secondary system? That too is a problem. The connection is important.

With everything being done at the elementary and secondary levels, it's worth pausing to ask what the outcome will be without a logical next step or learning continuum in French at the post-secondary level with as many programs as possible, on the basis of which families can make the required decisions about what career their children wish to pursue, and whether they will leave their region. So there is an exodus as a result of the education system, not to mention the rural exodus, which hasn't been helping.

So once again, it's important to consider the big picture. We need to make sure that the Ontario education system in French-language

minority settings, provides services and courses that are as dynamic and diverse as possible. They should also be equivalent to what's available in English. If the French side of things doesn't look as good, then there is a risk of motivating families and children to move to the English-language system.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Ms. Vinet-Roy.

Ms. Adam, Frédéric Lacroix, a researcher who was at the last meeting of this committee, said that Ontario francophones, who represent 4.7% of the population, receive 3% of the provincial budget for their post-secondary education, in comparison to anglophones in Quebec, who account for 8% of the population and receive 30% of the budget for their post-secondary education.

What do you think is the reason for the chronic underfunding of post-secondary educational institutions for Ontario francophones?

Ms. Dyane Adam: There are several reasons.

The main reason is probably that in French Ontario, we don't have the institutional maturity of post-secondary educational institutions in Quebec, where three major English-language universities and several CEGEPs have been established for a long time. In Ontario, we are still in the process of creating the first autonomous French-language University.

There has been significant investment over many years in the English-language system in Quebec, whereas here the story is very different. We haven't followed the same path or the same trajectory.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Not only that, but when we look at the history, we can see that under Ontario's Regulation 17, French schools had been prohibited in the province.

How to explain the fact that the budget allotted by the government of Ontario to Francophone post-secondary educational institutions is still below the demographic weight of francophones in the province?

Ms. Dyane Adam: If you look at university funding across the country, Ontario is the province that provides the least core funding to post-secondary educational institutions. I think it's around 25%. It's the province with the lowest funding for post-secondary education, including French-language universities.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Basically, you want permanent funding from the federal government because if the government of Ontario and the other provincial governments wanted to provide equitable funding to francophone post-secondary institutions, this obligation would not exist. Is that right?

• (1720)

Ms. Dyane Adam: No. I believe the federal government also has an obligation to do so, like the provinces.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're saying that the federal government is not providing enough funding to post-secondary educational institutions compared to Ontario. You mentioned a contribution of 16%.

What are you referring to?

Ms. Dyane Adam: If I had some nice charts I could perhaps give you a better explanation of what I am talking about.

Everyone was talking about core funding for all the universities, which is often related to student numbers. I'm talking about English-language, bilingual and Francophone universities.

Ontario, unlike the other provinces represented by my colleagues around the table, and by the witnesses you've met, acknowledged two decades ago that more money should be given to universities that offered programs in French, whether the universities were bilingual or francophone. That meant recognition that they had additional costs to deal with. In this envelope, Ontario is currently providing approximately...

The Chair: Ms. Adam, excuse me for interrupting, but your speaking time is up.

Mr. Boulerice gets to ask the final questions.

You have seven minutes, Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here with us.

My first question is for Ms. Vinet-Roy.

The Rector of the Université de Moncton and the Dean of Campus Saint-Jean spoke to us about a leveling off or a virtual freeze on the official languages program in education.

Is that what you have found over the past few years, Ms. Vinet-Roy?

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: As I was saying earlier, we were able to develop a number of special projects with support from Canadian Heritage. This was in partnership with others for the program I spoke about for teachers becoming available through the immigration process. The project was conducted jointly with the Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes, the ADFO, with the Éducatrices et éducateurs francophones du Manitoba, the ÉFM, and with the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the CTF. Some projects with the CTF were through Canadian Heritage.

We're doing what we can with what we've got. This approach is still working, but once again were being offered one-time assistance that is not always long term. The assistance that has been received is intended to address a very specific situation, but we need more stable long-term funding that would enable us to find creative solutions for supporting the various French-language communities within the school communities.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: A few weeks ago, I met a number of witnesses from a francophone school board—I can't remember its exact name—and they were talking about how stagnant funding could affect the appeal of programs, particularly in terms of cultural and sports activities.

They told me, first of all, that there was a clear increase in enrollment. However, when students had a choice, they would sometimes change their mind and go to an anglophone high school where there

might be more sports or other activities, like theatre, which they might find more appealing.

Are you finding the same thing in Ontario?

Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy: I varies from one community to another, depending on the activities and services on offer, because there's more to going to school in Ontario than just teaching a curriculum, given our very specific mission.

So we have noticed this change in direction, which is gradual. We lose students, sometimes in grade 7, grade 8, or after grade 6 in Ontario, because students are getting ready to enter the intermediate and senior divisions, depending on the system. And we might also lose some before the end of high school. We lose some students in grade 11 or grade 12, before graduation, because young people head towards programs available in their language, choose otherwise, or else they enter the labour market directly.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Ms. Vinet-Roy.

Ms. Adam, I really liked your earlier crystal clear comment to the effect that the federal government had a quasi-constitutional responsibility for ensuring the continuity of francophone communities, not only everywhere in Canada, but also in dynamic institutions like education, which is clearly the backbone of these communities.

You also said that the circumstances in Ontario were different. I got the impression that I was hearing the opposite of what I heard earlier from Campus Saint-Jean, which is that the federal government was coming up short compared to what the province was providing.

Did you mention \$21 million? Is that what I heard?

Ms. Dyane Adam: The amount is \$29 million.

Our funding structure is obviously different than the one for Campus Saint-Jean.

The province acknowledged that the costs were higher, which is a step forward compared to others. Because the federal government invests very little in the core operations of universities, there is a shortfall on the federal side.

I'm not saying that this amount is enough. The Ontario francophone network truly needs to be consolidated, as we can see from what has been happening in Sudbury, and also with respect to what we are building.

I think that it's essential to find a formula. The formula for additional funding in Ontario could be used as an example. I'm not saying that it's perfect, because it was developed at least 20 years ago. But it's nevertheless a starting point.

● (1725)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Earlier on, you were somewhat critical about the logic of funding based on numbers, which I call accounting logic, and which doesn't factor in the context of official language minority communities. These don't have the same economies of scale and there are fewer people.

MP riding offices, for example, receive additional funds if they are bigger than average and the population is larger than for most of the other ridings. Adjustments are made.

How do you think adjustments like this could be made to deal with the challenges tied to cultural aspects, and to minority and linguistic contexts?

Ms. Dyane Adam: I believe that an adjustment is needed. I'm very familiar with the formula that was used in Ontario. There were additional costs required for the French program offerings, ranging from translation expenses to the provision of parallel services like cultural events. They were not all classroom related, as Ms. Vinet-Roy was saying earlier.

It's a rather sophisticated formula.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: It was detailed.

Ms. Dyane Adam: It was certainly detailed. Today, it's just an amount of money, with everything in the same basket. There is no longer any analysis. It's truly obsolete and we need to come up with a new methodology.

The ACUFC is very interested in this because it's conducting research in French, and putting out publications in French. There are some libraries that need to be maintained in French. There are several aspects to doing that. The French factor generates all kinds of costs. Everything is more expensive in French in terms of content when we are in a minority setting.

Exhaustive studies are therefore needed. I think that the federal government should commission this study, and it could even be conducted jointly with the Association. After that, discussions about funding could begin.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: There's one minute left, Ms. Adam.

Congratulations on the progress made with the Université de l'Ontario français over the past three years. We're very proud of it and we wish you good luck for the future. We will try to help you as much as possible.

I have one final question. Things are not going well at Laurentian University. There may be a rescue operation at the University of Sudbury, but nothing is certain yet.

What will be the repercussions for francophone Ontario and post-secondary education if there is progress in your region, but a decline in other northern regions of the province?

I have the impression that we're getting contradictory messages.

Ms. Dyane Adam: In my view, it's a seismic shock not only at the provincial level but country-wide. This is the first time it's happened and I think that the universities, whether anglophone or francophone, are trying to figure out what it means. I've heard it said that there were some universities at the moment that were feeling vulnerable.

A lot of questions are being raised. We're in a knowledge economy. We need to ask whether universities are being funded at a high enough level to fulfil their role in society. We also need to ask just how much the federal government needs to get involved, particularly in terms of official language minority communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Adam.

Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

The round of questions is over.

On behalf of the members of the committee, I'd like to thank the witnesses for having accepted our invitation to appear before the committee. Their contribution to the study's impact is extremely important to us.

Today we heard from Ms. Anne Vinet-Roy of the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, and Ms. Dyane Adam and Mr. Denis Berthiaume of the Université de l'Ontario français, respectively Chair of the Board of Governors and Vice-President Academic and Research.

I'd like to remind the members of the committee that next Thursday will be our final meeting for this study. The six witnesses have already confirmed their participation.

I'd also like to thank the committee members for their customary cooperation.

I'd also like to thank the technical team, the clerk and the analysts.

The meeting is adjourned.

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