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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid





## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Thursday, February 10, 2022

• (1100)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting number five of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either “floor”, “English” or “French”. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately, and we will ensure that interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings. The “raise hand” feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or alert the chair.

Please follow all the health guidelines and the protocols.

I wanted to bring a few things to members' notice before we begin hearing from the witnesses. First of all, I'll remind you that the deadline for the prioritized witness list for the study of the differential outcomes is Friday, February 18. All parties should submit witness lists to the clerk by Friday, February 18.

Second, I'll remind all participants, including members, that a hard-wired connection rather than Wi-Fi is preferred for all the committee meetings. Please ensure that your CPU is not overburdened and not many tabs are open. If you can, please try to use a hard-wired connection rather than a Wi-Fi connection.

In regard to the minister's appearances next week, on Tuesday the minister will provide a briefing on current and projected processing timelines and acceptance rates. That's the meeting we will have on Tuesday.

Is it the will of the committee to allocate 10 minutes for the minister to provide opening remarks for this important briefing? It would be just the minister giving opening remarks. Are there any comments from the members?

**Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** I think the standard has been five minutes.

**The Chair:** They have requested it because the minister would like to go through a few things in his opening remarks. If members are okay, we can do that.

Go ahead, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I feel we should keep it at five minutes. If the Minister wants to elaborate further on various things, he can do it when we ask him questions. If we give him 10 minutes, that will take away from our own time to ask questions. So I'd prefer that we stick to five minutes.

In any case, when we ask him questions, he can go into whatever details he wishes.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

I'm sorry, Mr. Seeback. Were you saying something? Did I cut you off?

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** It's okay.

I agree with Mr. Duceppe. This should be five minutes to allow for more questions. I think it's a more productive use of the committee's time for members to be able to ask questions.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

Go ahead, Madam Falk.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Thank you, Chair. I'll elaborate on MP Seeback's comments.

I would invite the minister to provide his opening remarks to us, so that if more than five minutes are needed for what he has to say, we would have that in advance anyway. He can shorten his remarks to be within the five minutes.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Falk.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** I would concur with those who express the view that we should stay within the five minutes for the minister, and as well for the question-and-answer component. Hopefully we can also, as best as we can, have the minister's and officials' responses adhere to approximately the same length of time that was used to pose the question.

As committee members, as you can imagine, we only get those very limited opportunities to ask questions of the ministers and officials. If the answers are long and drawn-out, it means we won't have the opportunity to follow up with additional questions. I think it's really important that we stick with the time and also adhere, as best we can, to approximately the same time for the answer as for the question that was posed.

• (1105)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Go ahead, Ms. Lalonde.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

This is just for my own understanding of this conversation. We're asking the minister to have five minutes less because we want to have more time for asking questions.

Ultimately, what I want to propose is this: Could we invite him to stay five minutes more?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Lalonde.

Go ahead, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** What I'm seeing right now is we're wasting time that we should be spending with the witnesses, who have taken the time to appear before us today. I believe the majority of committee members have asked that the Minister's remarks be limited to five minutes. That's pretty clear. I would stop the discussion there. If we have to take it to a vote, so be it, it will be resolved quickly, but we have witnesses with us today who want to contribute to this important study.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Based on the discussion, I think the majority of the members are in favour of five minutes for the opening remarks. I'll have a discussion with the clerk. We will try to see the best way to accommodate that.

I have one last point before we go to our witnesses. The minister has also confirmed that he's available to appear on the estimates on Thursday, March 3, 2022. I will work with Madam Clerk. Before the next meeting, we will give an overview of the calendar to all members.

With that, I would like to resume our study on the recruitment and acceptance rate of foreign students.

It is my pleasure to welcome the witnesses and to thank them for appearing before the committee today.

In this panel we have Madame Carole St. Laurent, associate vice-president, international, Kwantlen Polytechnic University; Mr. Paulin Mulatris, professor, Université de l'Ontario français; and Madam Pirita Mattola, manager, International Student and Study Abroad Centre, University of Saskatchewan.

Just for the benefit of the witnesses, before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like a regular committee meeting. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

The witnesses will all have five minutes for their opening remarks. I will be showing colour cards—a beige card for a one-minute warning and a 30-second warning, and a red card showing that your time is up. Please try to see these cards on the screen. This is for the benefit of all the members as well as all the witnesses.

Once again, I would like to welcome our witnesses. We will begin our discussion with five minutes for opening remarks, followed by rounds of questioning.

We will start with Madame Carole St. Laurent, associate vice-president, international, from Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin.

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent (Associate Vice-President, International, Kwantlen Polytechnic University):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm not sure exactly what was expected, but I can speak to our international student population at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

We are a university of approximately 20,000 students, about 6,000 of whom are international students coming from 60-some different countries. They're very important to our institution and very important to our entire community in the Lower Mainland.

During the COVID period in particular, we noticed significant delays in study permit approvals, which put institutions at risk in their sustainable enrolment planning. Of course, this really affected the plans of the students to come to Canada. Some took the risk and started their studies in their home country without a study permit approval, and thanks to all the changes that occurred this year, the flexibility within that portfolio was very much appreciated by all institutions. We're hoping to see that a version of it is going to continue.

What I'm referring to in particular is the post-graduation work permit program and the flexibility that was brought to that particular program so that students are able to study more than 50% of their program outside of Canada.

I will leave it at that for my opening remarks. We're hoping that these changes will continue in the future given. I will point out the importance of the international student population to the community in western Canada, particularly in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland area.

Thank you for this opportunity.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** We will proceed to our next witness, Mr. Paulin Mulatris.

Mr. Mulatris, the floor is yours. Please begin. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris (Professor, Université de l'Ontario français):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all the committee members.

This issue is very important to me because of its ramifications in terms of Canada's linguistic duality, francophone post-secondary institutions in minority settings, and fair and equal access to education for francophones. In my opinion, all of these factors contribute to establishing Canada's role in building an inclusive society, both at home and abroad.

To give you a sense of the numbers at the Université de l'Ontario français (UOF), this year, our refusal rate for study permits was 65% to 70%. That includes the 30% of applications left unanswered.

In the vast majority of cases, the primary reason for refusal was that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is not convinced that the student will return to their country once they have completed their studies. To me, the primary reason for refusal raises the question of dual intent, but also judgment of intentions. Study permit applications are treated like immigration applications. This begs the question, are decisions based on immigration criteria, academic performance, or financial conditions being met?

If these applications are treated as immigration cases, then two reports by the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne should be taken into account, because this has to do with strengthening the French fact in Canada. I can talk more about that in the question period. French-speaking Africa has the largest pool of francophones in the world, with 70% of francophones. All the studies confirm that. So we're talking about fairness with respect to linguistic duality considerations here.

The second most frequent reason for refusal is lack of financial guarantees. However, in most cases, applicants provide bank guarantees, shares or deeds, for example, and sometimes they pay part of their tuition fees upfront. There seems to be a disparity here in the criteria related to student provenance. Compared to students who come from China or India, French-speaking Africa is seen or perceived as a continent that yields poor students, so they are seen to represent a risk to Canadian society.

If immigration legislation has evolved, we have to wonder if the criteria for granting study permits contain traces of social, economic or racial exclusion factors, which were prevailing principles prior to 1967 in immigration legislation. So it's very important that we reflect on this issue.

I'd also like to point out a disparity to some extent in terms of the distribution of application processing centres. For example, all applicants from French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa are directed to the processing centre in Dakar. That centre serves a vast area that includes twenty-odd countries with very young populations. This inevitably results in bottlenecks, and it probably leads to biases in processing applications, as well as automatic refusals with no proper, consistent analysis of applications and significant processing de-

lays. Statistics on the number of students granted study permits show that, even among French-speaking African countries, not everyone from any of those countries has the same chance of being accepted.

• (1115)

[*English*]

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Stephanie Bond):** I apologize for interrupting. This is the clerk in the room.

I'm sorry, but we've lost the feed to your camera. Can you ensure your camera is on?

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** Is it back now? Sorry.

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk:** Yes, thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Please proceed.

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

If I may, I would like to add something related to Canada's socio-cultural role in the world. French-speaking Africa is currently going through periods of fundamental socio-political change. Students are true ambassadors of Canadian culture, and they are being called upon to play a key role in this time of transition. Canada should not deprive itself of the major contribution it can make through individuals who have its own values at heart.

I will be able to go into greater detail about these things if there is a question period. Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Mulatris.

We will now proceed to our third witness for this panel, Madame Pirita Mattola, manager, international student and study abroad centre, University of Saskatchewan.

You may please begin. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Pirita Mattola (Manager, International Student and Study Abroad Centre, University of Saskatchewan):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

The University of Saskatchewan is part of a diverse post-secondary system that attracts international students to Canada. We recognize the tremendous value that students bring by contributing to Canada's culture, to our economy and to the richness of our education system. Canada's investments in international students can build mutually beneficial lifelong relations and result in long-term investments back into the Canadian economy and local communities. These reciprocal benefits should be kept in mind when making policy decisions and in thinking of how Canada can best support this special group of temporary residents.

During the pandemic, we have greatly appreciated the responsiveness of the federal government and IRCC in finding flexible ad hoc solutions and supporting our international students. As a designated learning institution, we have also appreciated the opportunities to engage in discussions with federal decision-makers through our province and other representative bodies. Knowledge sharing is vital for understanding the practical consequences of policy decisions, and we hope that this dialogue can continue in the future as well.

When it comes to our international students and the factors that impact their desire or ability to study in Canada, I would like to highlight the importance of post-graduate work permit eligibility, students' ability to gain work experience in Canada and study permit processing-related concerns. I would like to start by sharing some of the challenges that our province has encountered.

Saskatchewan has had one of the highest provincial study permit refusal rates for new study permit applicants, at least since 2013. As an example, in 2019, 64% of Saskatchewan-bound study permit applicants outside of Canada were refused, which was a much higher rate than in many other provinces. We are working to understand the factors that are affecting our students' approval rates.

In addition to delays, we know that post-graduate work permit eligibility remains a key driver for why some international students choose Canada over another country that can offer comparable programs. In an era of growing global competition in the international education sector, these linkages between students' short-term and long-term goals should not be ignored.

Currently, one of the challenges our students are facing is uncertainty about how remotely completed studies during the pandemic will impact the length of their future post-graduate work permit. Another concern is the hour restriction on study permit holders that limits off-campus work eligibility to 20 hours per week during an academic term. This puts international students in an unequal position compared to their Canadian peers and increases the risk of financial hardship, particularly at a time of record-high inflation. Easing this hour restriction on off-campus employment and improving access to co-op work permits are some considerations that could help level the playing field between domestic and international students and perhaps result in an easier transition to the workforce after their graduation.

In the case of Saskatchewan, considering that we have a fairly high percentage of rural population and an aging demographic, international students' entrepreneurialism and their keen interest in business ownership can also help sustain and grow the provincial economy in the long term. For this reason, international student-specific pathways to permanent residency should also be a priority to help retain talent where it is developed.

In the past, there may have been a perception that higher education in Canada is an inelastic good, meaning that cost increases or complex immigration requirements will not have a significant impact on global demand. The appeal of the country and quality education have been sufficient in attracting international students here. In the future, however, the regionalization of international education, increasing global competition and geopolitical factors may have an impact on Canada as an international education destination.

What can be done collectively to prepare Canada for this changing environment? From a practitioner's perspective, I would suggest that we give careful consideration to having flexible and expedited study permit pathways and building strong two-way relations with international students, who make significant contributions to our economy and society from the moment they arrive in our country.

Thank you very much.

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we will proceed to our rounds of questioning. The first round is six minutes for each questioner.

We will start with Mr Redekopp. Please begin. You have six minutes.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Thank you very much, and thanks to all the witnesses for being here today. Your testimonies are very helpful.

I want to speak to Ms. Mattola. It's great to see the University of Saskatchewan here. My colleagues will get to know the U of S very well, as my colleagues on the environment committee did in the last Parliament.

Earlier this week, the Bangladeshi high commissioner was at this committee. He spoke about the very strong economic ties between Saskatchewan and his country, Bangladesh. His message was quite simple. It was that he wants Bangladesh to be included in the student direct stream so that post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan could benefit from an exchange of knowledge and economic activity, and he specifically mentioned the U of S and Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

Ms. Mattola, can you tell me how the presence of international students expands economic activity in Saskatchewan, particularly for my constituents in Saskatoon West?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned, our international students are highly motivated and very entrepreneurial. Their interest in business ownership, whether it is in taking over existing businesses or starting their own businesses, is very high. They often also come from more collectivist cultures, so there is a very strong community orientation in the way they operate also outside of their academics and our campus community.

Going to your remarks on Bangladesh, it is one of our top five largest source countries, so we would certainly be happy to see more Bangladeshi students in our community and on our campuses.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** On the idea of including them in the student direct stream, would it be helpful to the University of Saskatchewan if they were in that same stream?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** Absolutely. It's an easier process for students and allows students who are recruited to be converted in a more efficient manner.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** That's great.

Switching gears a bit, Ms. Mattola, I want to get your perspective on the rejection rates. You spoke of that, and that it's an issue. We've heard that even in the granting of student visas for individuals coming to Canada, there is some bias and racism built into the system.

Student direct stream countries in Asia, such as China and India, have quite high acceptance rates by IRCC, while francophone student direct stream countries from Africa, such as Senegal and Morocco, have quite low acceptance rates.

As an English-speaking institution, what is the University of Saskatchewan's experience on dealing with applicants in terms of students coming from former British colonies in Asia versus the French colonies in Africa?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** I would agree that we are certainly seeing better approval rates for applicants coming from Asian countries than from several African countries, and I don't always know why this is.

At times it has been incomplete applications or issues with document translations. Of course, we have a very capable and multilingual team here, so French doesn't pose issues per se. However, in the case of some other countries, if documents are not in English, of course this could cause some delays and then might have a snowball effect on them. They might have to defer their studies and maybe consider other options as well if they can't begin their programs in a timely manner.

• (1125)

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** To go a little further on that, you mentioned that Saskatchewan is a smaller centre. It's quite rural in its nature. Does that pose any issues in terms of recruiting students? Have you noticed any differences? Is it more difficult to get students to come to the University of Saskatchewan, and do you have any recommendations on what could be done to improve that?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** Our campuses are in the larger cities of Saskatchewan, so I'm not sure if we necessarily encounter the same issues that maybe some regional colleges in Saskatchewan do.

In Saskatchewan, access to transportation and public transportation for international students, who don't always have drivers licences, might not be the same as it is in some other provinces. Those are some very common issues that we don't often think of, as we live in this environment and are used to driving around. That could be an example of a small issue that becomes a big issue for an international student if they are in a rural community. It's something that we could think collaboratively about to make Saskatchewan more accessible to international students as a whole.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** If we think of Saskatoon versus Toronto, we see that Saskatoon is a lot smaller. Does that impose trouble, or do students seem just as interested in coming to Saskatoon as they would to, say, Vancouver or Toronto?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** We offer many things that bigger centres don't necessarily offer. We have a bit over 3,000 international students. The quality of service that we can provide is very high, and the student community is very strong.

In some ways, for international students moving from halfway across the world, a medium-sized city such as Saskatoon can be less intimidating and more easily accessible in some ways, and making connections in the Prairies is fairly easy. Anyone who has lived in the Prairies knows that the Prairie people are quite friendly, so it's very easy for—

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** I have one last quick question for you.

You talked about the transition to permanent residency. Do you have any quick suggestions or ideas we should look at?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** Provincially, I think the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program for permanent residency as well as the Pathways program for students and access to work and employment opportunities during their studies would definitely make students' transition to the workforce and life after graduation easier.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Lalonde, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

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

My questions are mainly for Mr. Mulatris.

Good morning, Mr. Mulatris. We're pleased to have you with us.

The Université de l'Ontario français has been waging quite a battle since day one. I'm very grateful that you are here today. In keeping with its mandate, it's a francophone university designed by and for francophones.

First, in your view, what do francophone international students from Africa bring to Canada's francophone community?

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** I believe I spoke about it very briefly, but I can talk about it again.

African students play a huge role in strengthening the French fact in Canada in the francophone minority setting in general, but also in Quebec. Studies by the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne clearly show that colleges and universities help strengthen the French fact in Canada. Universities therefore play a key role in this regard.

Does that answer your question?

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Yes.

I'm also a firm believer in the role you are talking about. As part of this study, we strongly believe in finding ways to meet our objectives and improve the situation for African students, who are subject to high refusal rates.

Do you have any suggestions to help us better fulfill our mandate?

• (1130)

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** I was a bit vague and very brief in my opening remarks, but I believe it's all there.

The first thing we need to do is clarify the criteria for granting these students study permits. They end up being obstacles the students can't overcome even when they meet all the conditions.

The other thing I mentioned is assessment of dual intent in analyzing applications. When students apply, I believe that the criteria go beyond academics to immigration matters. It's true that recruitment looks at plans after graduation and employment, but that should be made clear when they interview the students. In the questionnaire, students are asked if they intend to stay in Canada after their studies. So if a student—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. Can you please move your microphone up a little? I think we're having some issues.

Thank you. You may please proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** So as I was saying, students are asked on the questionnaire if they intend to stay in Canada after their studies. If a student has the misfortune to check that box, their chances of getting a visa are nil, because then they are suspected of dual content: the authorities believe that they really do not intend to study in Canada, and they want to stay in Canada. In my opinion, they are asking ambiguous questions to applicants who want to come study in Canada. Things like this need to be made clearer.

Another thing to consider are the bottlenecks in processing centres. We know that the largest pool of francophones in the world is in Africa. When all those applications are directed to a single country, inevitably that leads to delays. It's not the visa officers' fault, but the sheer number of applications coming in sometimes results in superficial and mechanical processing of applications. I am vice-president of studies and research at UOF, so I've noticed it in a number of items students have sent to us: the responses are automated.

I'm going to describe a case to you to show you what can happen. A set of twins who enrolled with us had wealthy parents. One twin got his visa, but the other one didn't get a study permit for conflicting reasons. However, their data was identical and the parents had proof of financial sufficiency. In a case like this, I wonder what the refusal was based on. Their applications went through different processing centres and each agent had a different interpretation. Therefore, in my view, the criteria used in a case like this are not objective. You need to have a closer look at this, because it can have real consequences.

I have one more thing I wanted to mention. An article in *Le Devoir* says that French speaking African countries are not at all on a level playing field. More students get visas in certain countries, and that is leading to discrimination against African countries when it comes to access to visas. We have to wonder what criteria are being used to give some countries more visas than others. Do the criteria vary from country to country? What is the determining factor in the decision?

I wouldn't want to interfere with decisions founded on administrative policies, but this raises some fundamental ethical issues. The same criteria should be used for everyone. It has to be fair.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** I agree with you: it's very important that the same criteria be used.

You've given us some examples and I would like to go back to one point. We have 30 seconds left, so I'll be quick.

You pointed out that students who checked the box to indicate that they might stay in Canada were rejected. Of the students who applied to the institution you represent, were all those who checked the box rejected?

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** Most students who spoke to us after they were rejected said they had not realized they had checked the box. Whenever that box is checked, that student is suspected of intending to stay on after their studies. They suspect that their primary intent is not to study here, but to immigrate to Canada.

So that is a leading question on the questionnaire.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Sorry for interrupting. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have six minutes. You can start.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us today on this extremely important study. We want to move quickly with recommendations to initiate changes without delay, so that we can implement them before the fall 2022 academic year begins.

Mr. Mulatris, I listened carefully to you. What you've told us is very intriguing. We are realizing from the testimony given before this committee in the past two weeks now that study permit applicants from French-speaking Africa are definitely discriminated against.

I'd like you to tell the committee of the resulting impact on your institution.



• (1135)

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** For us, a newly established institution, there has been a major impact. For example, this year's refusal rate was almost 75%. Add to that the fact that, as my colleague from Saskatchewan pointed out, courses were done virtually, which delayed the process. Many applicants, about 30%, never even got a response. We sent emails to our candidates to see what was happening, and 30% of them said they had never received any response from the application processing centre. We therefore assumed they had been rejected.

You also have to understand that, when students apply for a study permit, generally they wait to hear back before they decide to enroll at a university. This is detrimental to them, if you consider that they wait several months and miss out on their academic year because the response arrives maybe three, four or five months later, after courses have begun. It also tarnishes Canada's brand image abroad. That's something else to consider.

To conclude my answer, I would say that the repercussions for an institution like ours are huge, and they will stay that way until this problem is taken seriously.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Mulatris.

We must find solutions. We have no choice, we need to make some changes happen. We understand that IRCC is not being very transparent. As you said, sometimes the student doesn't understand why they have been rejected and it's not explained to them either. That will need to be addressed first.

Last Thursday, we heard testimony from Thibault Camara, of Le Québec c'est nous aussi. I really enjoyed his testimony, because he gave us specific proposals. One thing he said was that creating an immigration ombudsperson position could change things.

I would like to hear your opinion on that.

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** I totally agree with that idea. I think it's important to have a second set of eyes on it to get to know who these individuals seeking study permits are. I hope that your committee's study will help you understand who the applicants are. It would help if what you find out is consistent with the responses given and the acceptance and refusal rates. You could also get to know the individuals who process applications, as you pointed out. It's important to put an ombudsperson in place to find out exactly what's happening in that respect.

I have another suggestion, but I know that budgets are limited. In my opinion, it's hard to imagine that a processing centre like the Dakar office receiving all applications would be able to serve almost 75% of the continent. That is simply impossible. So that needs to be addressed despite the limited budget. That would provide more time to properly analyze applications.

I'm not saying we should let individuals who do not meet the criteria come to Canada. However, the criteria must be fair and objective.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** So we would kill two birds with one stone. It would help international students while making the process more transparent. These IRCC activities would become less opaque than they are now.

Thank you, Mr. Martin.

**Ms. St. Laurent,** you're telling us that students have started distance education. Is that correct? So you're letting them start their courses without a permit?

Some witnesses described terrible situations where young people had to pay the fees but were subsequently refused. Do you reimburse the fees in those cases? What do you do?

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** We don't reimburse students because they're still getting an education. We tell them that if they start their studies before they get their permit, they will have to pay their tuition no matter what. That's a risk they take. That said, they still get an education, and they can graduate.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I understand. They won't simply be reimbursed.

As I understand it, IRCC's delays are ridiculous and put these students in a horrible situation. If IRCC did its job and met the deadlines, these students would not be in such a situation.

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** I fully agree.

It must be said that students are willing to start their studies remotely, but they want to be assured that they will be able to come to Canada later.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I would like to point out that we have witnesses with us today who represent institutions outside Quebec. One member of this committee implied that the Government of Quebec was perhaps part of the problem of delays. From what I understand, that's not true. The problem is with IRCC.

• (1140)

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** Absolutely. For us, that's the case.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I'd like to hear from the other witnesses.

**Ms. Mattola,** I didn't ask you that question. Do you agree that the problem is really with IRCC, and not with the provincial governments?

[English]

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** That would be our stance as well.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much.

Thank you very much to the witnesses. I hope I'll have time to ask you more questions later.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes. Please proceed.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for your presentations today.

I would like to first go to Mr. Mulatris with a question on one of the issues that surfaced in this study, although some of us knew of it even before the study. The student direct stream requires the applicant to hold a \$10,000 government bond, which can be cashed out later, while the new Nigeria student express program requires the applicant to have the equivalent of \$30,000 in their account for six months, which of course, as you can see, is much more onerous not only in amount, but in the way the money has to be held.

By having this significant difference for different applicants from different countries, do you think this is a gatekeeper to keep people out and that doing it is discriminatory?

[Translation]

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** I think it may be discriminatory, but I would go in another direction. For the time being, it hasn't yet been proven that these students, who come from French-speaking Africa, for example, are from poor families. No studies show this. These are middle-class families who can afford to pay for their children's education, as other people from elsewhere would.

With respect to your question, there is certainly a huge difference between \$30,000 and \$10,000. Some universities charge an application fee. At UOF, it's \$1,000. At the Université de Hearst, I believe it's around \$5,000, but I'm not sure. We'd have to check that. Whatever the case may be, these fees must not be prohibitive. We just need to make sure that when parents are paying that kind of money for their child, they are guaranteed that the child will get a visa, because life goes on after that. Sometimes money is paid, but at the end of the day it doesn't lead to a study permit. That puts these people in very difficult situations, and in order to get refunds, they have to go through additional procedures.

To come back to my answer, I would say that it hasn't yet been proven with certainty that the issue of money is necessarily the barrier to obtaining a study permit. A study would have to establish this. In this respect, I would like to see an ombud.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes, but there is a fundamental question: Why would there be a discrepancy between countries? Why apply \$10,000 to some countries and \$30,000 to others? What possible explanation could there be for this significant difference?

The other issue, of course, that's worth pointing out is with the approval rates. What we have heard from other witnesses is that for francophone African applicants, the approval rate is 26%, so there's a significant rejection rate. Even after you have met the requirements, you are still rejected.

You're right. It's not necessarily about the question of whether you're a wealthy applicant or not. Regardless, why is there a discrepancy? That is the issue I'm trying to get at, and having that differential treatment, to me, is concerning.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** That's the question I would look at. I totally agree with you. I think it's a fundamental question. Why do these differences exist? Why are the criteria different for countries on the

same continent? That defies any fair approach. Criteria like this shouldn't be applied, because they're discriminatory, in my opinion.

You mentioned Nigeria, but we also need to look at the linguistic borders within the continent.

According to the studies that have been conducted, fewer study permits are granted to students from French-speaking African countries than to those from English-speaking African countries. In my opinion, this is something that should be considered. The linguistic borders also exist in this regard.

If a \$30,000 deposit is required, it's even more discriminatory. Since the operating principles are already opaque and discriminatory, it becomes even more serious, in my opinion.

• (1145)

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I'd like to turn to the issue around dual intent. That has been a major, major issue, and you've touched on that as well. I mean, isn't it contradictory for IRCC to put dual intent forward and then reject people on the very basis to which...they say that they're interested in staying in Canada?

Some of the witnesses from previous panels actually suggested that the government should get rid of this dual intent component. What's your suggestion with respect to that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** That's what I think, too.

In my view, the contradiction lies at another level. All international students who graduate in Canada receive a letter asking them if they intend to obtain a work permit related to their degree. Whether we like it or not, this is something that already exists.

Why ask them if we know these students can stay in Canada? I think this is a really inappropriate way to exclude them.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I'd like to ask the same question of the other witnesses. Do you think the government should get rid of the dual intent component, and is it contradictory?

Let me go first to the University of Saskatchewan, to Ms. Mattola.

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** I agree. I think students who are honest are being punished. In a way, if you lie you'll be rewarded. I think it sends the message that we are looking at them from a very transactional perspective: Don't you dare to dream and stay in Canada after you graduate.

I'll leave it there.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We will now go to our second round of questioning. Ms. Falk and Mr. Dhaliwal will have four minutes each. Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Ms. Kwan will have two minutes each.

Ms. Falk, you have four minutes. Please proceed.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming today to share their testimony.

Ms. Mattola, you said something very interesting at the beginning that I wanted to make a point of agreeing with. You mentioned that knowledge sharing is "vital for understanding the practical consequences of policy decisions". Just looking at where we are today in Canada, I think it's just so imperative that there's always that form of dialogue open, because tangible things can happen because of policy.

You mentioned that Saskatchewan has one of the highest rates of refusals for provincial study permits and that you are working on understanding the factors that are affecting the student approval rates. Has there been any headway in understanding why this is?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** We have been working with the provincial government, the Ministry of Advanced Education, to look into the numbers a bit more, and to have some institutional data as well.

This is just my opinion at the moment—there's no hard data—but some of it has to do with, again, the student direct streams and where the applicants are coming from. Depending on what your largest source countries of international students are, it could affect different institutions in different ways.

The other question I have had in my mind, going back to the significant role that individual immigration officers play in assessing applications, is bias in decision-making, whether it's regarding the applicants or the destination as well. I know that we are a less-known international education destination and province. Sometimes there's unawareness of what Saskatchewan can offer. I've wondered if that has played a role in decision-making at times as well.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** In your own opinion, would you say that there may be unique commonalities among applicants looking to study in Saskatchewan who are refused?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** Unique considerations?

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** I mean commonalities among the applicants.

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** I think there are regional differences between where larger institutions get their international students from. That may have something to do with why Saskatchewan numbers look the way they do. I'm not sure, again, if that explains all of it.

Hopefully in the future, as markets diversify and students come from other places as well, we'll see a positive trend with the approval rates.

• (1150)

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** I have one more thing regarding this. Does the U of S track data on refusal rates for students looking to study at the U of S? Are you tracking that specifically?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** We do have some data. Our data actually looks a lot better in some ways for initial applicants and renewals.

As an institution, I wouldn't say that we are in a bad position in any way. Again, I do recognize that there are many other designated learning institutions in the province that may be smaller. That comes with unique challenges as well in this kind of province.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Yes, for sure.

You had mentioned about having strong two-way relations with international students. What does that look like? Is that in reference to prior to recruitment versus post-graduate or is it throughout the whole process that there are those two-way relations?

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** I would go back to what I said again about transactional relations and really recognizing that students could and should be able to contribute to the workforce a little bit more during their studies. It could help with their integration and long-term success. Eventually it could help the entire country and our province—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up.

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Wonderful. Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you will have four minutes for your round of questioning. You can proceed, please.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Thank you.

Madam Chair, recently I had the opportunity to tour KPU in my constituency. It's the only polytechnic university in Canada, so I'm very proud of the work and the leadership that KPU provides.

Madam Chair, when we look at the numbers, 30% international student enrolment at KPU seems to be very high. I would like to know from Madame St. Laurent what some of the reasons are that international students are attracted to KPU instead of other traditional post-secondary institutions in Canada.

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** Thank you so much for your question.

KPU has developed a good relationship in some countries in particular. Because of the population that we're seeing in the Lower Mainland, it is attractive for international students—particularly from India—to come to Canada.

The strong linkages with industry and employment is something that students seek.

Again, we have some of the smaller classes. As far as a university goes, you don't see many universities where you have a maximum class size of 30 students. It's more like something in a college set-up or a rural area.

The small class size, the integration into the community and the hands-on experience are very attractive for students. All students have either a co-op experience or some type of not only academic, but also hands-on experience to better prepare them for their jobs.

Most students get jobs. More than 90% of students get jobs in their area of study. That's really important to international students.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Madam Chair, the other thing I'm hearing on the doorsteps is that international students are taking spots from the local students.

Is that true?

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** I'm sorry, are you asking if some international students are taking the place of domestic students?

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** That's correct.

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** That's something that, as an institution, we need to ensure does not happen.

We're seeing our domestic population gradually decrease. We're replacing that with international students, but by no means are we to displace any domestic students for international students.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** IRCC has used analytical and artificial intelligence in processing TRV applications, particularly from India, as you mentioned.

To your knowledge, have the international students from India been affected by IRCC's use of data analytics to try to get temporary visas to study in Canada?

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** It was really interesting, because some of them, when we....

Are you talking about when they introduced the two-step process?

• (1155)

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Yes.

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** That was the other thing that was very strange. Typically, if you are approved in the first step, it's pretty much assured that, unless something goes unreasonably wrong, you'll be approved in the second step. Then, going back to some of the previous comments, it was about dual intent, and they were saying, "You're not approved because of this dual intent", which makes absolutely no sense. It had a serious impact on our students, and not just from India but from across the globe. They were given approval in that first step but not in the second step.

We do have a pretty significant approval rate for Indian students, in excess of 80%, but there are really significant delays in the approval process, which is significantly impacting the future of these students.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have two minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. St. Laurent, I just want to make sure I understood correctly. In the last intervention, you told us that you don't reimburse international students who started their term and whose study permit was subsequently refused, because they had in fact taken courses.

I'll ask you a \$10,000 question. Is their degree valid at that point?

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** Yes, the degree is still valid.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you for the answer.

That's fantastic. I just wanted to make sure. It's important to clarify this type of thing, because people might interpret it differently.

Mr. Multaris, have you heard of the Chinook software?

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** I've vaguely heard of it.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** This software was implemented in 2018, and I'd like to know whether you've seen a difference in the refusal rate among your international students, particularly students from French-speaking Africa.

Have you noticed a higher refusal rate since 2018?

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** The Université de l'Ontario français has only existed since this fall, so I can't go back to 2018.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Ms. St. Laurent, can you answer my question?

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** I'm sorry, I don't know anything about it.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Ms. Mattola, does the Chinook software mean anything to you?

[*English*]

**Ms. Pirita Mattola:** No. I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay.

This lack of knowledge shows us the opaqueness around the IRCC's Chinook software. It was put in place in 2018, and we don't know how it works. Since its implementation, there's been a difference in the refusal rates of students from certain countries. Mr. Dhaliwal was talking about this earlier, and this is an example of the harm that artificial intelligence can do.

Mr. Mulatris, can external factors influence decisions leading to the refusal of students from certain countries?

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** Could you clarify the question?

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I'm talking about external factors.

Could red flags be raised because of the socio-economic or political situation, for instance?

**Mr. Paulin Mulatris:** I personally think so. That's why I said earlier that an in-depth study is needed.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, but your time is up.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much, everyone.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will now end our round of questioning with Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have two minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'd like to go to Ms. St. Laurent, if I may, please.

On the same question around dual intent, would you suggest that IRCC get rid of this provision?

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** Absolutely. I've attended many events where Global Affairs was present, as well as IRCC. Global Affairs talks about, and all of us in all our presentations talk about, the opportunities for international students. Once they've completed their program, they can work in their area of study, and that is a really big attraction for students. This is why many of them want to come to Canada. It doesn't mean they're not going to go back; it is just a great opportunity for students to come here to be educated and to understand Canadian industries.

However, if they mention that in their application, they get denied. It makes absolutely zero sense to me that one part of the federal government is investing a lot of dollars in giving that message to students, and then on the other side we have IRCC saying that if you include that and are stating a dual intent, your permit will be refused. It's confusing to us as Canadians, so you can well imagine what international audiences say: "Well, get your story straight. What do you want from us? What are you asking us?"

• (1200)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

The next question I would ask quickly is this: For the students who started their study remotely and then later on are rejected, once they are rejected they cannot continue their studies remotely. Is that correct?

**Ms. Carole St. Laurent:** No, that's not correct. They can continue their studies, for sure, and that's the point we were making.

Again, a very small percentage of students were denied; it's a handful. In 6,000 students [*Inaudible—Editor*]

However, they can absolutely continue. We are providing the courses, their programs, online, so they can complete their programs online in their home country.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I think that's unique to your institution.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan. The time is up.

With that, I thank all the witnesses for appearing before the committee, for your time and for providing your important input to this study.

If for any reason you were not able to bring something to the members' attention, you can always send written submissions to the

clerk of the committee and those submissions will be circulated to all the members.

With that, our panel comes to an end. I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes so that the sound checks can be done for the second panel.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1203)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting to order.

I will take the opportunity to thank all the witnesses for appearing before the committee. Thanks for your time today.

In this panel, we have with us Mr. Luc Bussi eres, rector of Hearst University; Yan Cimon, deputy vice rector of external and international affairs and health, and director of international affairs and la Francophonie, Universit e Laval; and Alain-S ebastien Malette, associate vice-president, international, University of Ottawa.

Welcome to all the witnesses. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we will proceed to the round of questioning.

For the benefit of all the witnesses, before we begin, there are a few points I would like to bring to your attention.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like at a regular committee meeting. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute. For your opening remarks as well as during the round of questioning, I'll give you a one-minute warning, a 30-second warning and a red card to show that the time is up, so please watch for these cards.

With that, we will go to Mr. Luc Bussi eres, rector of Hearst University.

Mr. Bussi eres, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please proceed.

• (1205)

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Bussi eres (Rector, Hearst University):** Madam Chair, vice-chairs and committee members, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss a very important matter.

The Universit e de Hearst has a completely francophone mandate. It has been around for 70 years and is on its way to achieving full autonomy this year, after being affiliated with Laurentian University in Sudbury since 1963. Our university is small, very small, but we have three campuses in northeastern Ontario, in Hearst, Kapuskasing and Timmins.

Our mandate was initially regional, but since 2014, we have reorganized our service offering according to an original model that now allows us to recruit throughout the Francophonie.

As a result, 70% of our total student base now comes from abroad. In 2013, that percentage used to be zero. So we are demonstrating that it's possible to attract international francophone students to a region, in an English-speaking province. Everyone will agree that, for an environment like ours, this is an important, necessary and decisive contribution to the vitality of our francophone communities and our university.

Post-secondary education in French in Canada is attractive. This interest hasn't wavered, particularly in the case of French-speaking Africa, and it suggests that the number of study permit applications will continue to grow significantly.

Since 2014, our experience with the international recruitment process has taught us that, in order to welcome 100 students a year, we had to make four or five times as many offers of admission, and that's after personal contact with twice as many applicants, about 1,000 applicants. So we're dealing with a large volume of cases, and that's true for all institutions. As a result, this is especially true for IRCC officers.

It therefore seems inevitable to us that the current way of working needs to be reformed. It's necessary if we are to meet the rapidly growing demand. It's also necessary for efficiency reasons to properly screen these applications, both for IRCC and for the institutions. Finally, it's necessary to restore the credibility of our system. The current refusal rates for applicants from French-speaking Africa are difficult to explain.

I'll now give you an idea of the situation for a small organization like ours.

We have processed close to 4,000 applications since 2014, but this phenomenon really exploded starting in 2018. Of these applications, 70% come from West Africa, 7% from Maghreb countries, and 23% from the rest of Africa. In the end, almost 400 people enrolled with us after they obtained their study permit.

Although we have a large number of applicants to process, the graduation results for this clientele are excellent and currently range from 85% to 90%. These numbers indicate that the effort put into the system from IRCC to our institution are really worth it, especially when you consider that almost all of our graduates apply for post-graduation work permits in Canada, and almost all of them get them. Of these, about half found employment in northern Ontario and the other half found employment elsewhere in Ontario and Quebec.

In conclusion, I would like to add that considerable energy and money is currently being invested, and rightly so, in the current study permit application system. However, we think it is crucial that the system be reformed to take into account the growing interest in studying in French in Canada and to ensure a better level of confidence in the process. Indeed, this process must not be undermined by abnormally high refusal rates for applicants from French-speaking Africa or because the process seems unclear as to the criteria to be met—I'm thinking, for example, of the dual intent

test—or the reasons given to applicants to justify refusing them a permit.

IRCC is responsible for reforming the current system. However, we think that francophone universities could contribute, since they have been serving and working with this clientele for many years.

Thank you very much.

• (1210)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bussières.

We will now proceed to Mr. Cimon. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please proceed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yan Cimon (Deputy Vice Rector of External and International Affairs and Health, Director of International Affairs and La Francophonie, Université Laval):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Members of the committee, dear colleagues and interested parties, thank you for giving Université Laval the opportunity to contribute to your work on the recruitment and acceptance rates of international students, including francophones from African countries.

It must be said that Université Laval is a resolutely international university that is committed to supporting its community, the leaders of tomorrow, in carrying out projects and to affirming its commitment to meeting the major challenges of our society. In that sense, Université Laval is the first French-language university in the Americas, and it has been in existence for more than 350 years. We are resolutely forward-looking and have been actively developing our international sector for several decades now.

The International Affairs and La Francophonie Department is mandated to increase international recruitment, develop and strengthen strategic international partnerships, and integrate cohorts of scholarship students and partner institutions. As such, we attract international students from 132 countries, who represent 15% of our student population. Two-thirds of our international students come directly from French-speaking places. These students represent the majority of students in some programs and are an important part of the high-level talent needed to keep us on the cutting edge of research in the world. Laval's international graduates are literally changing the world through their leadership in their communities.

I will give you an overview of the situation. Our university recruits a majority of francophone international students. Our main recruitment pools are France and sub-Saharan Africa, both of which account for one-third of international students. Moreover, 11% of francophone international students come from North Africa. In total, 42% of our international students come from the African continent, and since the fall of 2012, the African contingent on campus has more than doubled.

However, we have some challenges that remain significant. Despite the importance of the African continent for francophone universities, it's clear that we have to deal with major problems. The first paradox is that Africa represents the future of the francophone sector, but Africans have great difficulty coming to study in Canada and may be tempted to go elsewhere. For example, in the case of Africa, enrolment growth is less than admissions growth. At Université Laval, only 32% of African applicants who were admitted following a very rigorous process accepted their offer of admission, for reasons related to the study permit, of course.

For French students, the percentage is 70%. That means that a typical African student who has a file allowing them to be admitted to a Canadian university and who wants to come to Canada will not be able to enrol with us. Because Canada is known for the quality of its universities, we do attract the best talent from around the world. In this context, we need to give them the tools they need to develop and thrive. Many international students from French-speaking places, especially those from Africa, don't have access to the same opportunities to help them develop their full potential as students from English-speaking places.

I will now address the second challenge. The francophone and anglophone sectors do not have the same recruitment pools, so there is a significant imbalance between the two sectors. For example, in Quebec, in francophone universities, 29% of international students come from Africa. That percentage is 33% for my institution—when we look at all the international students enrolled—but it's only 8% for anglophone universities. For their part, English-language universities have 50% of their students from Asia, while Asia generates only 10% of international students for the francophone sector.

The third challenge is that it is very difficult for Africans to obtain a study permit. Only a third of African students who are admitted to our university are able to complete their enrolment because of problems related to various and important reasons for refusal. The IRCC data show us, for example, that financial factors and factors related to the actual purpose of the study project are important. For our university, that represents 1,000 students a year. So it's a net loss, not just for Canadian universities and the education sector in Canada, but also for research, because we don't have enough talent. We're at a bit of a disadvantage there. For our Quebec City region, the economic impact of international students is \$150 million a year.

- (1215)

The solutions we are proposing include revising the criteria for selecting students; improving the transparency of processes; reducing processing times; increasing access to quality services; improving access to biometric data collection centres; allowing more flexibility on the evidence used for financial criteria; developing a distinctive brand such as the Canadian Bureau for International Education initiative; and, most importantly, stop wasting talent and damaging Canada's reputation in Africa.

Canada must help the world and Africa by providing access to quality university education that changes lives and transforms societies.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Cimon.

We will now proceed to our third witness, Mr. Malette, associate vice-president, international, representing the University of Ottawa.

Please proceed. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette (Associate Vice-President, International, University of Ottawa):** Madam Chair, we begin by paying tribute to the Algonquin people, the traditional guardians of the land where the University of Ottawa buildings are located. We recognize their long-standing sacred connection to this unceded territory.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, I'm very pleased to be here today on behalf of the University of Ottawa to discuss an issue that is crucial, not only for Canadian post-secondary institutions, but also for the communities they serve across Canada.

[English]

My remarks today will be in French and English and will focus on four areas: a view of the global student mobility landscape, a discussion on the vital importance of Africa, the University of Ottawa view and considerations for the future.

As to the global landscape for international student mobility, there is no doubt that Canada has been a tremendous success story these past years. The numbers are clear to this effect, and we wish to thank the Government of Canada for important policy decisions that contributed to this, like, for example, poststudy work rights and implementation of the student direct stream, or SDS.

Previous testimony given to this committee has also rightly referred to international student mobility as being the gold rush of this era. We cannot stress the importance of this enough. A 2019 study by Choudaha estimated that the global economic impact of international students in 2016 was roughly \$300 billion U.S. It is therefore not surprising to see all the competition from countries and their higher education institutions.

Previous testimony to the committee has also alluded to the competition from many of the main destination countries that we all know: the U.K., France, the U.S. and Australia. However, the competition is also coming from non-traditional destinations, namely China, Russia, Malaysia and India. These countries also have their global ambitions, with national and international education strategies and targets. There are many contributing factors to this: financial, geopolitical positioning and soft power, research, rankings, national immigration policies and building a skilled workforce.

[Translation]

With respect to Africa, the data on international mobility are clear for Canadian institutions, and they demonstrate the critical importance of China and India. However, there are profound changes taking place in these regions that could affect the future mobility of international students in Canada. Therefore, Africa is a continent of growing importance. The demographics are clear on that. More than half of the world's projected population growth by 2050 will be in Africa, and the impact on the Francophonie will also be profound. According to an article by the BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation, entitled "Why the future of French is African", published in April 2019, the proportion of francophones in the world living in sub-Saharan Africa could increase from 44% to 85% by 2050. That's the reality. We understand the significant competition that countries and their institutions have.

[English]

As to the University of Ottawa, in the fall of 2021, we had close to 10,000 international students. We are tremendously proud of these students, who contribute to our vibrant university community, enhance our research efforts, pedagogy and financial viability, and help preserve our unique bilingual character. A significant proportion of these students, roughly 40%, are from Africa, especially French Africa, and from various regions within French Africa, northern Africa, western Africa and central Africa. We are very proud of this and of the contributions that these students are making to ensure the sustainability of the Franco-Ontarian community that we serve. However, this has not come without significant challenges, heartache and frustrations, especially with regard to the study permit process.

• (1220)

[Translation]

Previous testimony, which we strongly support, has put into context the difficulties facing international students from certain regions, including the different regions of Africa. These include a much higher refusal rate than in other feeder markets, often lengthy processing times and subjective and inconsistent reasons for refusals, such as the dual intent test, for example.

[English]

The University of Ottawa wholeheartedly supports the work of this committee. We are committed to working with stakeholders, including IRCC and others, to identify solutions that will allow Canada to remain a premier study destination on the global stage. This will benefit all Canadian communities. There is a raft of measures that could be taken to improve this, including, to name a few, reviewing subjective assessment criteria such as dual intent to ensure that it is aligned with our immigration policy for highly qualified personnel, implementing a guaranteed turnaround time for processing applications and expanding the SDS program to more countries and to important hubs such as Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon, to name a few.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Malette.

With that, the opening remarks come to an end, and we will now proceed to our round of questioning.

For today, the round of questioning will start with Mr. Seeback. You will have six minutes. Please proceed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Bussi eres.

[English]

In your testimony today, you said that the system needs to be reformed. I'd love to hear your thoughts on what reforms that you think.... We've heard a lot of ideas from others in this committee. I'd welcome your suggestions as well on the reforms you'd like to see.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Bussi eres:** Thank you for your question.

I would like to come back to some of the words used. There has been a lot of talk about opaqueness, lack of transparency and confusing criteria. In this future reform, we need more transparency. Everyone has to know the criteria, which must be really listed, explained and defined. The documentation must also be as clear as possible. All of that is understood here, but since it's being received in another culture, in another context, we have to ask ourselves whether sufficient efforts have been made in this respect.

I'll give you an example. In the documentation that students provide, they may include a letter of motivation, in addition to the completed form. In it, they may say things that could harm their own file, because what they have to say is not clearly stated. It's not a question of language or of being lost in translation.

In terms of intent, do they have to say what they want to do after their studies? Do they have to say there's a chance they'll stay? Does that put them at a disadvantage?

People are trained to help them, they are regulated immigration advisors, and they themselves no longer know what to say about this dual intent test. Do you have to talk about your intentions in a letter of motivation that should help clarify the issue a little?

As far as consistency is concerned, we need to untangle what we're talking about. Others have talked about this. There seems to be a contradiction between the facts and Canada's stated desire to be a welcoming country, an immigrant country and all that.

Currently, we receive international students. About a third of them come to Canada for a second university degree. The others are at the undergraduate level. They spend three, four or five years with us. They are then integrated, trained, and ready to work, and they would be asked to leave to perhaps come back later. This issue of dual intent is really counterproductive.



There is one more thing I want to say about reform. Several people have mentioned the famous embassy in Dakar, which handles a very large number of files. Is it provided with sufficient resources? Reference was also made to the software or the Chinook program. What I've heard about it isn't reassuring either, but it's not clear either. There is concern without evidence, apart from the very high refusal rates we see.

Those are several things that need to be fixed. I think it could help reform the system.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Cimon, I ask you the same question, but also if you have any different suggestions from the ones that we just heard.

• (1225)

[Translation]

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** Thank you very much.

I'd like to add the importance of presenting students who want to come here with a consistent national message about the desire to immigrate and the desire to study. I'd also add that it's important that the infrastructure be there to serve us. I'm thinking, for example, of biometric fingerprinting services, which are geographically easy to access for international students from Asia, but very difficult to access for international students from Africa.

[English]

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Mr. Malette, I ask you the same question as well.

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette:** I would reinforce what my colleagues have been saying. As I mentioned at the end of my speech, subjective assessment criteria, such as dual intent, need to be reviewed thoroughly. Also, implement guaranteed turnaround times and, as I said, expand the student direct stream to other countries in Africa, not just Morocco and Senegal.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** I'll ask each of you to answer this question as well. Have you ever had the opportunity to raise any of these concerns and recommendations with the government? My understanding is that these rejection rates, which are a big problem, have accelerated to much higher levels from 2015 to present. Have you had the chance to raise your concerns with the government about these issues?

[Translation]

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** Université Laval does this through its communication channels. We also do this through our network of advisors. Every time we get the chance, we talk about it to elected officials and local leaders.

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette:** Our answer is the same as that of my colleague from Université Laval.

I would also like to mention that each fall, we meet with many ambassadors from French-speaking Africa and high commissioners from English-speaking Africa. The same complaints keep coming back from one embassy to another and from high commissioner to high commissioner. This problem is well known.

**Mr. Luc Bussi eres:** I have nothing to add to what has been said.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. El-Khoury. I understand that he will be sharing his time with Mr. Long. I will give a warning at three minutes.

Mr. El-Khoury, you have three minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Fay al El-Khoury (Laval—Les  les, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to welcome our witnesses.

My first question will be for Mr. Cimon.

Mr. Cimon, can you tell us about the importance of francophone foreign students in francophone minority communities? How does an institution like yours support students in successfully establishing themselves in those small communities?

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** We have a variety of scholarship programs for international students. Those programs enable us to work both on attracting students and on helping them succeed, as it is very important for an international student we attract to our institution to be able to succeed and to have optimal conditions for graduating.

We also have tools to help them integrate into the community, including various activities and various partnerships with businesses and groups in the region. We also foster relationships with partner universities.

We have implemented a set of mechanisms that enable us to help students become very active and succeed in our communities.

**Mr. Fay al El-Khoury:** [Technical difficulties] you find the integration process with those communities?

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** I'm sorry, but I don't understand your question.

**Mr. Fay al El-Khoury:** Do the measures you are implementing to help students integrate into francophone communities have an impact on those students' adjustment and integration rates?

• (1230)

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** We look at the situation of students who go through our programs and our mechanisms. We are seeing that students who visited Canada tend to acclimatize more easily. The retention rate for those students is much higher than for other students. That is very encouraging for us. For other students, we also have mechanisms that help them socialize more with the local student community. I would point out that, in our region, institutions and organizations of an economic nature are actively working on seducing and hiring international students.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Thank you, Mr. Cimon.

Mr. Bussières, are you seeing a lot of former students settle in the region? What can we do to keep foreign students in francophone minority communities after graduation?

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** Thank you for the question.

We are seeing an excellent retention rate of students after they complete their studies. I was saying that about 50% of them find a job in northern Ontario, where they were not expected. Many people are wondering how we are managing to welcome people in small northern communities, in regions that are pretty ethnically homogenous.

People are doing well in that respect. Our strategy consists in welcoming them and helping them complete their studies, but also in helping them integrate into the community, remain in good mental health and maintain a sense of well-being. They have [*technical difficulties*] stayed on, even though they were doubtful in the beginning.

Some of them arrive in January, when it is -40°C. They tell themselves they could never survive in that environment, but, a few years later, they want to settle in the region, and they begin to adopt our habits and wear half open coats in the winter.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. Thank you.

Ms. Lalonde, you have two minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** I would like to thank all the witnesses, Mr. Malette, Mr. Cimon and Mr. Bussières, for being here.

Mr. Bussières, you have provided us with pretty exceptional numbers.

How does an institution like yours support students in successfully establishing themselves in the small community of Hearst, where you live?

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** Thank you for the question, Mrs. Lalonde.

We have deployed significant resources. I must admit that, when we began recruiting internationally, in 2014, we were hoping to get results, but never to the extent of the results we have had. Now, 70% of our clientele is from abroad, almost exclusively from Africa. So we have had to come up with solutions as we went along, and one of them was to use our own students to provide mentorship. That way, we established a model where every newly arrived students is paired with someone else, who is also an African student, although that is not always the case. So the new student is mentored throughout their first year of studies and beyond that, if they want. So truly individual guidance is provided. In a small institution, we have about 300 students, more than 200 of whom come from Africa. A new family has been created, with new solutions for a new situation.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** What a great story! I am always impressed by this kind of stuff.

In your presentation, you said you would like to have more collaboration.

Could you briefly explain that to me, Mr. Bussières?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Ms. Lalonde. Your time is up. Maybe you can go back to that in the second round.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I thank the witnesses who are joining us today to participate in this extremely important study, which is especially close to my heart.

We are here to find solutions, as I told the previous witness panel, and we want to do that quickly because we want to be ready for the fall 2022 semester. That is why this study is a priority today. We must identify problems to be able to resolve them.

Mr. Cimon, you talked about one aspect of the problem in your presentation when you said that refusal rates for foreign students differed between anglophone institutions and francophone institutions.

Do you think that speaking French can be a negative factor, or does a combination of several factors explain this?

• (1235)

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** Our internal data does not indicate that language is a factor. What it does show is that there are difficulties related to intention, to the financial ability to undertake studies and to file presentation. That costs us about 1,000 African students per year. So those are students who cannot access the rigorous programs they are admitted into through processes that are also very rigorous. That is a significant loss for Quebec and for Canada.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Cimon.

Mr. Bussières, I will turn to you. You actually made me laugh earlier. Thank you for making me smile. That rarely happens to us in committees.

We are trying to find solutions, as I said before. We really want to change things. Since the beginning of the study, we have heard about the possibility of creating a position of immigration ombudsman. I don't know whether you have heard about that.

I will then ask Mr. Malette to answer the same question.

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** Yes, I have heard about it, including during the committee's early meetings on the topic. It is pretty easy to find consensus on that issue. The way I see it is that it would provide an additional outside perspective with an interest in respecting various types of fairness. We understand that this is a complex situation and that the IRCC could be overwhelmed by an increase in demand, as we are on our end. We are part of the problem, in a way. We manage a lot of files and we encourage many people to apply for a study permit. We then hope to get a return.

Earlier, I raised issues involving clarity, transparency and so on. If there was an ombudsman, someone would have a more objective perspective and could remind us, as a country, of our duties in that respect.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

Mr. Malette, go ahead.

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette:** I have not heard about the creation of an ombudsman position at the immigration department. That said, like my colleague, I believe that anything that can bring more clarity and transparency is essential. We will welcome any action toward achieving that.

As it has been said, we should not underestimate those students' impact on our communities and our universities. Those students are vital to our university's and of our community's survival.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Cimon, you said there was a discrepancy between the number of students admitted to Université Laval and the number of people who end up enrolling.

Are students who enrol in Université Laval but are refused by the IRCC after their enrolment given a refund if the semester has already begun?

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** International students who don't receive their study permit cannot continue their studies or come to Canada to do so.

I will give you an example. At Université Laval, the study permit approval rate for sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa varies between 20% and 29%. By comparison, 98% of French students have their application approved, but 66% of French students can enrol in the university.

For students from francophone Africa, the main challenge is that a number of them are extremely talented and have records that would be the envy of many educational institutions around the world, but we cannot welcome them, even if they have been admitted. We cannot welcome them because they have not obtained their study permit.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** If I have understood correctly, delays in IRCC processing result in those students going through terrible and unimaginable situations.

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** There are two aspects to what you are saying.

First, there are delays, which are indeed difficult to tolerate. Second, there are refusals, which are significant and are unfortunately often poorly documented.

It should be said that refusals related to financial evidence, for instance, would be easy to modulate. The financial requirement could be modulated based on a laboratory research assistant contract, for example, or based on the applicants' potential income as Canadians.

International students in Canada have the option to work a few hours a week. That should be considered in analyses of their financial resources.

• (1240)

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Bussières, you talked about the lack of transparency.

Do you think the department's lack of transparency is currently the biggest problem?

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** Seen from the perspective of institutions like ours and of the people we are trying to serve, the applicants, that is the biggest problem. It is difficult to find solutions when we don't understand what the root of the problem is.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes. Please proceed.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

I'd like to build on the question that Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe asked about students who have been admitted. During the pandemic period, the IRCC determined that because of the processing delays, the students could start their studies abroad virtually and then afterwards could come to Canada to complete their studies.

Regarding those students who started their studies and later their applications were rejected, have you had that experience at your institution? In those instances, were those students able to complete their study virtually or have they had to stop?

Maybe I can start with Mr. Cimon.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** Thank you.

At Université Laval, students who were denied their study permits as a result of the pandemic had already begun studying online. Université Laval has ways for students to continue their studies online so that they can earn credits and graduate.

One key reason why students choose our Canadian universities, and Université Laval in particular, is obviously the experience of attending classes, living on campus, socializing and networking with international and Canadian students.

These aspects are very appealing online, but not for all international students. A number of international students want the campus experience. International students who are working professionals in their home countries want the online experience.

You could say that there are different categories of students. There are those who are looking for an online experience and those who are looking for an in-person experience.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** What I'm interested in knowing is whether or not the option for people to complete their study is there. What I'm hearing from you is yes, so I'll go to the other two witnesses to see whether or not their institutions offer the same.

I will go to Mr. Bussières first.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** In our case, we didn't want to go down that road. Given the small size of our institution, we weren't able to ensure an online course offering that would have made it possible for students to complete their program afterwards.

Our specialty is normally in-person courses for small groups of 25 people whom we work with for four years. We weren't in a position to go down that road and ensure a service offering afterwards.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Malette, go ahead.

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette:** Again, we've adapted our offering to allow online and in-person presence. If you look at Africa, most of our students from French Africa are at the undergraduate level, which means a four-year degree, and those who started during the pandemic are probably finishing their second year online. There comes a point where we are definitely concerned about them coming to Canada and accessing the poststudy work rights and ultimately that experience. We are concerned about that, yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** One thing we know is that IRCC offers a student direct stream that requires the applicant to hold to a \$10,000 government bond for admission, but the government also introduced the Nigeria express program, which requires students to have \$30,000 in their account for six months. There's a significant difference in that approach.

Do you think that's fair? Should the government harmonize this process so that all students from all countries are treated the same, and not have this differential approach?

I'll start with Mr. Cimon and then go down the same line as I did previously.

• (1245)

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** Our position is that any barrier that stops students from coming to Canada should be removed, and the treatment of those international students should be consistent across the board. For example, there is no justification for why an international student who wants to come to Canada and originates from Africa would have more constraints than someone coming from an emerging country in Asia, for example. We have tremendous success rates with African students in how they succeed in our programs, and we have a great alumni network that can testify to that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Bussières, go ahead, on the same question, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** It's also hard for us to understand this type of discrepancy and to see this double standard. For us, this is unacceptable. I'll stop there.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Go ahead, Mr. Malette.

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette:** I agree with my colleagues. I also think the SDS, which was a welcome addition for Morocco and Senegal, should definitely be looked at for other major African countries. We're talking about Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon. I definitely think this needs to be rethought.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Nigeria has been put on a fast-track stream, but there is a \$30,000 requirement, not a \$10,000 requirement, relative to other countries. Do you think that's right or should that be changed?

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette:** I think that should be changed. Nigeria is going to be a very important country for a lot of universities. We're talking a lot about the French universities, but for the English universities this is going to be a critical market for the future.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

Dual intent has been brought up a few times at this committee. I believe Mr. Malette brought this up, and I'd like to hear from each witness. The issue right now with dual intent is that most international students are being rejected by IRCC because IRCC is saying they won't return home. I'd like to hear from each one of the witnesses about what kind of review is needed or what they would recommend that needs to be changed within dual intent.

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette:** Perhaps I can start with that.

These students are absolutely vital to us. These are highly qualified, super bright students, and they're essential to our communities and to our sustainability. I do think subjective criteria such as dual intent need to be rethought profoundly and looked at in the optics of our immigration policy for highly qualified people.

We have anecdotes of this all the time. I look at our office. We have super bright students in our office who are just finishing their engineering degree, and they get a job within a couple of months. I think this is an absolutely vital and essential element that we need to profoundly review.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** I agree with my colleague.

When we look at this issue, we can see that foreign students, such as African students—since this is the topic of today's discussion—who come to study often have opportunities to settle here. They often have many opportunities.

For example, our area has a labour shortage and our unemployment rate is far below the provincial average. Businesses need this highly skilled workforce.

Above all, it's important to help these students come and study here, to access an education in Canada and to take advantage of economic opportunities. It's necessary to simplify, if not eliminate, this duality related to the dual intent criterion, which hurts Canada, its image and our recruitment efforts. It's costly in terms of resources for our government authorities.

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** I completely agree with what has just been said.

I just want to outline the situation in northern Ontario in terms of how this issue is viewed in our communities, such as Hearst, Kapuskasing, Timmins and so on.

Not too long ago, when we started taking in international students, people would ask me whether I thought that these students would stay. I would tell them that I didn't know, since we were just starting to work with them. As I said earlier, over time, we saw that almost all of them applied for a post-graduation work permit and almost all of them obtained one. That's the best news for us. Consider the demographic decline and the labour shortage.

In any case, as I said, for Canada and for northern Ontario, the students whom we take in and who stay constitute an extremely significant added value. If they leave Canada and return home with their Canadian education, they'll be our best ambassadors for the country and for our area.

This benefits everyone. I don't see the point of maintaining this strange dual intent criterion, which I think is counterproductive in every way.

• (1250)

[English]

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you for those answers. I want to follow up on a question my colleague Mr. Seebach asked. He asked if you had followed up or brought this up with any government officials or with IRCC at all.

Can you elaborate a little bit more on who exactly you contacted, and if there was any reply at all? If there was some type of reply, what kind of reply was it? That's for each of the witnesses.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** In terms of Université Laval, we're in contact with our local elected officials at all levels, including the federal, provincial and municipal levels. We also work with people in the departments. In addition, we work with economic organizations in our area.

To help us with this process, we created a regional higher education hub where 20 industry and higher education partners are brought together, including partners from the health care sector and the information technology sector, to try to find solutions.

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** At Hearst University, we didn't do much soliciting.

As I said, we've been in the sector mainly since 2018. We try to reach out to IRCC and get answers through our regulated consultants.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kayabaga.

Ms. Kayabaga, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[Translation]

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** I want to thank our witnesses for being here today.

My questions will focus on immigration and ways to increase francophone immigration across Canada.

Mr. Bussières, I want to start by congratulating you on your great story.

You spoke about 2018 figures. It's now 2022. Do you have any idea what the situation will be in 2022?

You also told us that you must submit a very high volume of admissions offers to get enough students to enrol—you said 400 students. Do you think that this large volume of admission offers affects processing times?

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** Yes, it certainly has an impact. A small institution like ours receives about 1,000 applications a year. When we process the applications, we sometimes find that some files are incomplete. We then ask the people to complete them. Once the files are completed, the university offers the people admission, after which they can apply for their study permit. The university offers to provide them with the assistance of regulated Canadian immigration consultants, or RCICs. These consultants are allowed to help them directly. The university isn't allowed to do so.

The people then enter into the IRCC system and apply. There are deadlines, and the process unfolds.

To get 100 people to register, we must provide 400 to 500 offers of admission, after reviewing about 1,000 files. I can imagine how this could clog up the system at institutions such as Université Laval or the University of Ottawa, for example. That's why I was talking about the strong interest in studying in French in Canada, and certainly in English as well. This interest will continue.

The issue right now is that the high refusal rate brings the whole system into disrepute and makes it ineffective. It isn't lack of interest that makes it ineffective. There's a great deal of interest, which is the ironic part. As my colleague from Université Laval said earlier, a high refusal rate in a university like his can result in a loss of 1,000 enrolments a year, a loss that shouldn't have occurred. At our level, the loss is less significant. However, it's just as significant on a pro rata basis.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you for that answer.

In a way, it also answers my question about a high refusal rate creating a bottleneck on both sides. If other institutions had the same idea as you, it would have the same result. We all really want to increase francophone immigration to Canada, but you can understand that the increase contributes to the bottlenecks.

Can you give us any advice that might help to solve that problem? I would also then like to hear Mr. Malette's comments.

• (1255)

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** I feel that our efficiency would increase if the criteria were clearer. That would prevent people from entering the system without really knowing what is involved and without knowing the rules of the game.

We also have the dual intent issue. Today, we have not talked a lot about the reasons given for refusals. Sometimes, people share them with us. Sometimes it's dual intent and sometimes it's financial. Some decide to appeal and to submit a second application. What may happen then, when the reason for refusal was dual intent and the financial issue was not a problem in the first application, is that the financial issue is given as the reason in the second application and dual intent is no longer a problem. So there is such a perception of confusion, of inconsistency, that it causes problems in terms of the efficiency of the entire system.

We process a lot of files, but we could perhaps filter many of those files before they even enter the system, if people were more familiar with the rules.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Mr. Malette, if it is possible for you to comment in 30 seconds, I would like you to do so.

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette:** My opinion is the same as our colleague's. I am also just as sensitive to the reality in the trenches.

Like all institutions, we receive so many applications from French-speaking Africa that we have to find a way to work together to remove the blockage and work collectively so that we can accept more applications. That is essential.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I have one last question for Mr. Cimon

Mr. Cimon, you stated that the majority of French-speaking students come from Africa. I was going to ask you about your plans to work with IRCC, but my time is up.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** The time is up. Thank you.

We will proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes, and then we will end our round of questioning with Ms. Kwan for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Bussières, you just brought up the reasons for the refusals. They are sometimes difficult to understand.

I am going to try to cut to the chase, if I can put it like that. At a committee meeting last week, one witness—not to mention any names but it was Mr. Normand—came right out and told us that applications were refused because a course of study in French outside Quebec was not legitimate.

When I heard that, I fell off my chair. Maybe you did too.

Have you ever had to deal with cases like that?

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** People do not always give the reasons for the refusals, but they do sometimes. I have never heard that reason but, yes, if I thought that it could be true, it would give me the shivers. I have talked to people I call immigration rules consultants. We have three of them in our little team. They have told me that they have heard rumours along those lines.

We tell the applicants that they have to explain why they want to do their studies in French outside Quebec. Our suggestion to them is that they say that, of course, they want to study in French, but they also want to develop their skills in English. When they come from Africa, our students often speak several languages, but English may not be one of them. So we ask them to explain that in the cover letters they have to write.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Bussières.

Mr. Cimon, in previous meetings, the committee has learned that some international scholarship recipients have been refused a study permit for financial reasons. That also made me fall off my chair.

Have you heard that too? If so, are there any solutions?

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** That has certainly happened. One solution would be for a scholarship to be considered proof that a student has the financial resources needed to come to study in Canada. It's not only scholarships; we must also make sure that research assistantships and laboratory work can also be considered proof that a student has sufficient financial resources.

After all, those assistantships often paid from the grants that the researchers receive. Those resources come from the government and they provide the students with very good contracts.

• (1300)

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much.

I am going to take the 10 seconds I have left to thank you all. I feel that your testimony will make a major contribution to the report that will be written at the end of this study.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have two and a half minutes, and then the panel will come to an end.

Go ahead, please.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

One of the issues that surfaced in this study from the other witnesses, based on an internal report done by IRCC, the Pollara report, was that there were attitudes of discrimination towards certain communities—and certainly to a great extent the African community. The government also proceeded to bring forward an artificial intelligence system, the Chinook system, whereby it would process these applications. Do you have any concerns that the Chinook AI system would have embedded within it potentially discriminatory or differential attitudes and would inject stereotyping into the processing? If so, what do you think should be done? Other witnesses have called for the Chinook system to be halted and for processing to be undertaken through a completely independent assessment.

Let me start with Mr. Cimon on this and then go down the line.

**Mr. Yan Cimon:** We do not have evidence in our data of what you are referring to, but what we see is that students from Africa, whether from north Africa or from sub-Saharan Africa, have seen their acceptance rates dwindle since 2012. We haven't seen such similar trends for students from France, for example, or from the rest of Europe, the United States or Oceania. The system we would like to have is a system that works. Whether it's Chinook or another system, we would like a system that's efficient, that's transparent and that helps students to get to their goal of getting a Canadian degree.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I want to get to the other witnesses for a quick answer.

Mr. Malette.

**Mr. Alain-Sébastien Malette:** I also have no evidence on that.

I do have a couple of points. If you're going to see an increase in volume of demand for [*Inaudible—Editor*], then either the resources come physically in terms of people, or you have to implement a solution that's technology driven, but you definitely have to ensure that the solution is objective and treats all people fairly.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Bussières.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Bussières:** Behind an application like Chinook, there are algorithms and there is someone entering the data. Someone puts in the criteria and we need to know what they are. The problem is not that the criteria exist, it is rather that we do not know whether they are biased or not.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

With that, our round of questioning comes to an end.

On behalf of all the members of this committee, I really want to thank all three witnesses for their time and their important input as we continue our study on this topic.

If there is anything the witnesses feel they want to bring to the committee's notice, but because of the time were not able to discuss today, they can always send a written submission to the clerk of the committee and it will be circulated to all members. We will duly consider that as we continue the study and get to the stage of drafting our report.

Once again, thanks a lot for appearing before the committee.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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