

BRIEF PRESENTED TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA
IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS 2016 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

By
THE ASSOCIATION DES COLLÈGES ET UNIVERSITÉS
DE LA FRANCOPHONIE CANADIENNE (ACUFC)

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Association des collèges et universités
de la francophonie canadienne
223 Main Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1S 1C4

Resource person:
Jocelyne Lalonde
Executive Director
jolalonde@acufc.ca
Tel.: (613) 244-7837, extension 103

Introduction

The Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC) and its members warmly welcome the new Government of Canada. Like the majority of Canadians, the ACUFC has said yes to a government that promotes real change, that is committed to youth and that is calling for collaborative efforts. Without losing sight of the importance of having a responsible financial plan, this government has committed to investing in economic growth and job creation and ensuring the prosperity of our country. As a unifying force for francophone minority communities, the ACUFC is prepared to make a significant contribution to the success of the new government's approach.

Established on 1 April 2015, the ACUFC resulted from the merger of the Consortium national de formation en santé (CNFS) and the Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne (AUFC), two organizations known for their many initiatives in the field of French-language postsecondary education over the past 15 years. The ACUFC represents 20 postsecondary institutions from the Canadian francophonie that offer more than 900 programs of study in French. These francophone or bilingual colleges and universities are located in French-language minority communities in Canada, i.e., outside of Quebec. Education is a direct contributor to the development of these communities. It is important for young people from francophone minority communities to have access to a French-language education continuum from early childhood to the postsecondary level. The ACUFC is intended to be the last link in the continuum, but the first defender of French-language postsecondary education in Canada.

The ACUFC's mission is clearly in sync with the priorities of the new Government of Canada. The latter has committed to promoting the vitality of francophone minority communities and encouraging the use of both official languages. ACUFC member institutions are pillars in their communities, contributing to the development of human capital and to the cultural and economic growth of these communities and Canada as a whole. The colleges and universities of the Canadian francophonie train the workforce of tomorrow while ensuring the dynamism and resilience of communities and ultimately, the future prosperity of our country.

From the outset, the ACUFC adopted a series of priorities aimed at increasing the accessibility of French-language postsecondary education. Obviously these priorities are consistent with the pre-budget positioning of Universities Canada and Colleges and Institutes Canada.

- The ACUFC therefore recommends that the Government of Canada promote greater access to postsecondary education in French by:
 - investing more in programs that are adapted to community realities, particularly in the areas of health and justice;
 - supporting the enrolment and integration of francophile students in ACUFC member institutions by establishing an immersion scholarship program for postsecondary education in French;
 - establishing an interprovincial mobility program for students of the Canadian francophonie; and

- supporting experiential learning for students from ACUFC member institutions.

Training in the areas of health and justice

Access to health and justice services in French is a fundamental challenge for vulnerable francophone minority communities.

Since its creation in 2003, the CNFS has been making its mark in terms of French training for health and social services professionals seeking to meet the needs of francophone minority communities. The CNFS is now under the auspices of the ACUFC, although it has retained its corporate identity and business model.

The CNFS encompasses 11 colleges and universities offering French-language study programs in various health disciplines, as well as 6 regional partners that facilitate access to these programs. Since 2003 CNFS member institutions have accepted nearly 11,000 students in 100 French-language health programs supported by the CNFS, including 66 new programs. Over 5,000 graduates of these programs are now health professionals able to provide services in French in minority francophone communities in Canada. Over the years, the CNFS has benefited greatly from the support of Health Canada, and that support continues through the Roadmap for Official Languages 2013–2018: Education, Immigration, Communities.

Access to justice in the official language of the person subject to the legal proceedings can only contribute to the development of francophone minority communities. Recent judgments, including *R. v. Munkonda*, confirm the need for bilingual human resources in the field of justice. The ACUFC has set for itself the objectives of increasing access to French-language training in the field of justice and promoting the vitality of the Canadian francophonie through an increased supply of legal services in both official languages. Nine ACUFC members, including law schools and community college justice and police training programs, are active participants in the Réseau national de formation en justice (RNFJ), which was established in February 2014. This network consists of ACUFC member and non-member postsecondary teaching institutions, community organizations, programs offering on-the-job training for justice professionals and jurilinguistic centres that develop the necessary tools for providing legal services in both official languages.

Despite the resounding success of the CNFS and progress in the field of justice, there are still not enough professionals capable of providing service in French in these two areas to meet the needs of francophone minority communities.

- The ACUFC therefore recommends that the Government of Canada invest more in training programs adapted to community realities in the areas of health and justice.

Postsecondary French immersion

Linguistic duality remains a key component of the Canadian identity and a core value of our society. The resounding success of French immersion is part of the long tradition of linguistic duality in Canada. In today's knowledge society, the ability to speak both official languages is all

the more relevant. It opens invaluable doors for young Canadians, helping them to secure enviable positions in the labour market, whether in Canada or abroad. And it is this highly skilled and bilingual workforce that gives Canada a competitive edge in an uncertain economic environment.

When it comes to French immersion, ACUFC member institutions are no neophytes. Thanks to their intensive recruitment campaigns, each year they accept more than 5,500 young people from secondary school immersion programs. To ensure the retention and engagement of this clientele, they make an effort to invest in coaching and additional programs in French. In the last three years, meanwhile, support from Canadian Heritage has enabled the ACUFC to provide scholarships to encourage young people from secondary school immersion programs to pursue postsecondary studies in French.

However, if we consider the fact that more than 350,000 young people per year take immersion courses in Canada, there is much to do at the postsecondary level to realize the significant potential of language immersion. Young people often have to abandon their studies in their second language because there are far fewer immersion programs at the postsecondary level than at the primary and secondary levels. It is therefore not surprising that in its June 2015 report entitled *Aiming Higher: Increasing bilingualism of our Canadian youth*, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, chaired by Senator Claudette Tardif, recommended that the Government of Canada acknowledge the importance of continued language learning after secondary school by helping colleges and universities develop more official-language programs and by allocating the necessary resources to them.

- The ACUFC proposes that the Government of Canada support the enrolment and integration of francophile students into ACUFC postsecondary institutions through the establishment of a long-term scholarship program for young people from secondary school immersion programs who are willing to pursue their studies in their second language at the postsecondary level.

Interprovincial mobility of students

Postsecondary students who opt to study in another province quickly learn about the diversity of Canada and the accompanying challenges and opportunities. This experience allows students to better understand the historical development of our country and the values that characterize it. Students' development of intercultural skills and adaptability brings a net benefit to the employers of today and tomorrow.

While the international mobility of students obviously remains a priority issue, ACUFC member institutions quickly realized that interprovincial student mobility could be used to strengthen Canadian identity and unity while promoting linguistic duality and the learning of a second language. In recent years, the ACUFC has worked with the governments of Quebec and New Brunswick to establish a temporary scholarship program to encourage half-semester exchanges between students from Quebec universities and ACUFC member universities.

Until such time as governments make additional investments in a scholarship program, the mobility of students from the Canadian francophonie will represent a major challenge.

- Recognizing that such exchanges have a positive impact on francophone colleges and universities, as well as francophone communities across the country, the ACUFC recommends that the Government of Canada, through Canadian Heritage, support a long-term program for the interprovincial mobility of students from the Canadian francophonie.

Experiential learning

ACUFC college and university members work with businesses of all sizes in search of a bilingual workforce. Whether they be large companies in urban centres or small and medium enterprises in francophone minority communities, employers rely on ACUFC member institutions to prepare young people for the future and improve their employability. These establishments are invariably the best placed to ensure consistency between the postsecondary education offered and the needs of employers and communities. To that end, they work hard to increase experiential learning opportunities, either through internships or co-op programs.

Through their interactions with local businesses, students gain valuable practical experience that prepares them for a smooth transition to the labour market. Postsecondary students' problem-solving abilities, communication skills, leadership and analytical capabilities are among the general skills most sought by employers. The students are directly involved in the knowledge transfer process, placing their skills at the disposal of the companies that host them. The resulting pollination of ideas benefits local communities, regions and ultimately, Canada as a whole. It is therefore not surprising that leading organizations like the Canadian Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives recognize the real added value of students and researchers in the workplace.

It appears that more than half of Canadian students, in all disciplines combined, take advantage of experiential learning opportunities during their undergraduate studies. Despite that rate, the fact remains that demand outstrips supply, including among ACUFC member institutions.

- To enhance the experiential learning of students and researchers from its member institutions, the ACUFC recommends that the Government of Canada invest in incentives to enable companies of all sizes that are seeking bilingual workers to recoup part of the salaries they pay to ACUFC member institution co-op students and interns.