



Consortium national de formation en santé (CNFS) and Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne (AUFC)

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Introduction

Two years ago already, the Consortium national de formation en santé (CNFS) and the Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne (AUF) came together to adopt a joint leadership model that has enabled us to work more closely together on French-language post-secondary education and research outside Quebec. Next year, we plan to expand this alliance by uniting to form a new association, which will be named the *Association des collèges et des universités de la francophonie canadienne* and will be officially formed as of April 1, 2015.

This new strategic alliance will speak with one voice. At its heart will be the same common goals of improving the offer of quality French-language post-secondary education in Francophone minority communities and of contributing to the vitality and growth of the country's Francophone minority communities. Although the Canadian economy is growing stronger and the Government of Canada is even predicting a budget surplus in 2015, it must be noted that Francophone minority communities are especially vulnerable to demographic and economic challenges. Our members have no intention of standing idly by. As economic, social and cultural drivers of these communities, they are ready to increase their involvement.

For the next budget, the CNFS and the AUF propose three separate recommendations on **learning by experience, internationalization and national academic mobility**.

Learning by experience

In its consultation paper on science and technology published in early 2014, the Government of Canada was the first to acknowledge the research excellence present in post-secondary education. Canada's upcoming five-year science, technology and innovation strategy, expected in the fall of 2014, will want to leverage the strength of this sector, which, in good years and bad years alike, helps to produce a highly qualified, skilled and innovative workforce. The tendency of university researchers to collaborate with the industry is well known, and colleges already stand out for their assistance in the marketing of small and medium enterprises' new technologies, products and processes. Nonetheless, to ensure that Canada can become even more innovative, closer ties must be fostered among partners, and researchers and students must be given opportunities to gain the business experience that will enable them to find real solutions to private-sector issues.

Learning by experience does more than just promote the sharing of ideas. According to a survey conducted in 2013 by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE), major employers believe that internships are extremely useful in helping to meet work experience requirements and that they serve as springboards toward young people's first professional jobs. It is therefore not surprising that the Standing Committee on Finance itself, in its June 2014 report, *Youth Employment in Canada: Challenges and Potential Solutions*, recommended that the Government of Canada continue to invest in internships, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

In its last three budgets, the Government of Canada increased its investments in order to increase the number of internships, and it must continue its support in this area, paying specific attention to the needs of Francophone minority communities. Creating more internship opportunities in these communities will both facilitate the retention of graduates and will lead to promising ideas for job creation.

To increase the value of learning by experience for our students and researchers, we recommend that the Government of Canada support the establishment of a professional in-company internship program for post-secondary institutions in Canadian Francophone minority communities.

Internationalization

In today's age of globalization, it is the internationalization of our post-secondary education system that will enable us to train tomorrow's leaders — men and women who will be open to pluralism and multilingualism. These leaders, having rubbed shoulders with international students on campus or completed some of their studies abroad, will be open to inter-cultural relations and thus better prepared to play key roles in our global society.

Canada's Francophone post-secondary institutions have been quick to adopt internationalization and to use it to benefit our communities, which are in significant need of immigrants. To counter the aging of the population, the youth exodus and the shortages in the specialized workforce in our communities, our members are turning to immigration and economic integration of international students. These students, from all four corners of the world, are ideal candidates to settle in Francophone minority communities.

Recruiting international students is not the only way our member colleges and universities contribute to internationalization. Over the years, our members have signed a number of agreements with international post-secondary institutions that have paved the way for professor and student exchanges and led to the establishment of numerous partnerships with international researchers. They have also created solid international collaborative networks, notably in Africa and the Middle East, to help train professionals in these areas, thus contributing not only to the growth of local communities, but also to global economic development.

In an increasingly competitive global market, Canada does not want to fall behind in international education. For this reason, in early 2014, it set out *Canada's International Education Strategy*, a new five-year action plan. At a time when other developed and developing countries are increasing their international profiles by investing in internationalization, the Government of Canada must be able to depend on the support of all its partners, including the country's Francophone colleges and universities, to implement its new strategy, whose primary objective is to double the number of international students in Canada by 2022. Our members certainly support this laudable objective, but also want to help achieve two other goals set out in the strategy: to highlight Canada's French-language strengths and to increase Canada's share of the international Francophone student market.

Now that Canada has an action plan on international education, it is time for strategic investment. The recent creation of the Jubilee and Nelson Mandela scholarship programs is a step in the right direction. Because international education is a significant economic driver for Francophone minority communities, it would be wise to consider a bi-directional international mobility program targeting Canada's Francophone colleges and universities. Such a program would enable Canadian professors, students and researchers to benefit from international internships and offer the best and brightest international students scholarships or research grants. This would give Canada's Francophone colleges and universities a higher profile in international Francophone markets and facilitate the establishment of partnerships with Francophone institutions in developing countries.

Our members are also prepared to contribute to Canada's efforts to promote sustainable economic development in the world's Francophone countries by establishing inter-institutional collaborations with developing Francophone countries in Africa and the Middle East. These collaborations could help to train professionals (for example, instructors or medical personnel) on-site or remotely, or help institutions in developing countries to design their teaching programs.

To ensure that Francophone minority communities can fully benefit from the trend toward post-secondary education internationalization under Canada's new international education strategy, the CNFS and the AUFC recommend that the Government of Canada implement a bi-directional international mobility program targeted to Canada's Francophone post-secondary institutions in minority communities and support the creation of collaborations between these institutions and international Francophone institutions.

National academic mobility

National academic mobility is another way to support the growth of Canada's Francophone institutions and the vitality of the communities we serve. Our experience over the years speaks for itself. The AUFC is participating in an inter-provincial student mobility project with the support of the governments of Canada, Quebec and New Brunswick. Moreover, the Quebec Secretariat of Canadian inter-governmental affairs has made the implementation of a student mobility program between Quebec and other provinces one of the main initiatives of its 2012-2017 action plan. From the beginning, the ultimate goal was to go beyond the actual project and to establish a national academic mobility program.

To create greater synergy among French-language institutions, including those in Quebec, the current student mobility project should be expanded to include professors and researchers, which would help to foster collaboration among inter-university, multi-disciplinary and inter-professional research teams. This expansion would enable smaller universities to benefit from professor exchanges with larger institutions to improve their ability to offer certain courses. It would have the further benefit of promoting Canadian identity and unity by exposing participants to different Francophone environments in Canada.

In recognition of the positive effects that academic exchanges would have on the Francophone college and university community as well as on Francophone communities throughout the country, the CNFS and the AUFC recommend that the Government of Canada support a national academic mobility program for the professors, researchers and students of Canada's French-language post-secondary institutions.

Statement of recommendations

The CNFS and the AUFC submit the following three recommendations for consideration in the 2015 federal budget:

That the Government of Canada support the establishment of a professional in-company internship program for students and researchers from post-secondary institutions in Canadian Francophone minority communities.

That the Government of Canada implement a bi-directional international mobility program targeted to Canada's Francophone post-secondary institutions in minority communities and support the creation of collaborations between these institutions and international Francophone institutions.

That the Government of Canada support a national academic mobility program for the professors, researchers and students of Canada's French-language post-secondary institutions.

About the CNFS and the AUFC

The CNFS is a pan-Canadian group of eleven colleges and universities, six regional partners and a National Secretariat. It helps to improve the active offer of French-language health and social services in Francophone minority communities by training Francophone and bilingual professionals and through research related to this training and to the health needs of these communities.

The AUFC is made up of fourteen universities located in seven provinces outside Quebec. It works to improve the quality and expand French-language university learning, teaching and research, by coordinating its members and representing their joint interests in Canada and abroad.