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• (0815)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 93 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 20, 2023, the committee is commencing its study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary education.

I won't read all the instructions since, after two or three years, everyone knows the drill. However, a brief reminder for Mr. Cormier, who is attending the meeting remotely: Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name, and keep your microphone on mute when you are not speaking.

I would like to welcome the witnesses. From the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, we have Martin Normand, director, strategic research and international relations, who is attending the meeting in person; and from the famed Université de Moncton, we have Gabriel Cormier, vice-president, administration and human resources, who is participating in the meeting by videoconference.

Mr. Normand, you are a regular with this committee, but I believe this is the first time that Mr. Cormier has appeared before us.

Consequently, Mr. Cormier, I'm going to explain to you how we proceed. All witnesses have five minutes for opening statements. I am very strict about speaking time because that leaves more time for the members to ask questions. There will be two rounds of questions.

Mr. Normand, you have the floor for exactly five minutes.

Mr. Martin Normand (Director, Strategic Research and International Relations, Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne): Thank you very much.

Under the new amendments to the Official Languages Act, the federal government is responsible for taking action to ensure the presence of strong post-secondary institutions in francophone minority communities across the country.

The preamble to the Official Languages Act now states that the federal government is committed to enhancing the vitality and supporting the development of French linguistic minority communities. That commitment is restated in new subsection 41(1) of the act.

The preamble also acknowledges the importance of protecting and promoting the presence of strong institutions that serve those minorities. It is also important to note new subsection 41(3) of the act, under which the federal government commits to advancing opportunities for members of French linguistic minority communities to pursue quality learning in their own language throughout their lives, including from early childhood to post-secondary education. Subsection 41(6) even provides that education is one of the essential sectors for enhancing the vitality of French linguistic minority communities.

These commitments echo concerns expressed by various stakeholders, particularly during the États généraux sur le postsecondaire en contexte francophone minoritaire, which we organized in partnership with the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. On the one hand, the precarious state of francophone post-secondary education is a concern for francophone minority communities, which need to be able to rely on strong and agile institutions. On the other hand, post-secondary institutions want to expand their program and service offerings for their local and international clientele. For that reason, there is an urgent need to clarify the federal government's commitments.

Our first recommendation is that the Treasury Board Secretariat expedite the production of future regulations for the implementation of part VII of the Official Languages Act in order to provide a clear indication of what the federal government's new obligations are and to clarify the role the government will play in the francophone minority post-secondary sector.

Those indications will help define the federal government's ability to act in the post-secondary sector, including its funding. Post-secondary institutions need permanent support in order to develop over the long term as strong institutions that are there for francophone communities.

The funding announced in the action plan for official languages 2023-28 in support of the post-secondary sector are welcome and will help offset the underfunding of minority language post-secondary institutions, as the federal government has stated in the action plan. However, that funding does not meet expectations. As the government itself states in the action plan, efforts are needed to further support the sector in the long term.

Given these circumstances, our second recommendation is that the federal government create permanent funding of \$80 million a year to support post-secondary educational institutions in official language minority communities.

The Liberal Party of Canada promised that funding during the 2021 election campaign, but it has yet to materialize. The main political parties across Canada had also committed to supporting the post-secondary sector during that campaign. A permanent, fully funded program would send a clear signal as to the federal government's intention to perform its proper role in sustaining post-secondary institutions while respecting provincial jurisdictions. It has become clear that greater collaboration among actors in the post-secondary sector seems necessary. However, existing collaborative mechanisms among the federal government, the provinces and territories regarding education and the francophonie have no mandate to address post-secondary education issues or are simply not interested in doing so.

Consequently, our third recommendation is that the federal government support the creation of a collaborative structure that brings together representatives of Canadian Heritage, other federal departments, provincial and territorial governments responsible for post-secondary education, post-secondary institutions and other sector stakeholders.

This collaborative effort will help increase awareness among the authorities involved in francophone post-secondary-level issues and assist in better coordinating actions in support of post-secondary education by the various orders of government in a manner consistent with each party's areas of jurisdiction.

Clear indications that the Official Languages Act is being implemented, comprehensive funding and intergovernmental collaboration will help consolidate the institutions and make them more agile and attractive so that they are in a better position to recruit and retain a local and international clientele. A comprehensive range of additional measures should be considered on a co-operative and collaborative basis once all these pieces have been put in place. Thank you.

Thank you.

● (0820)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Normand. You stayed within your allotted speaking time. You even took less time.

Mr. Cormier, welcome, for the first time, to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I have no conflict of interest here, but Mr. Cormier comes from my alma mater. Both of my university degrees are from the Université de Moncton.

Mr. Cormier, you have five minutes.

Mr. Gabriel Cormier (Vice-President, Administration and Human Resources, Université de Moncton): Thank you.

Good morning, everyone. Thank you very much for this opportunity to appear before you today.

I'm going to provide you with some background on the Université de Moncton. The Université de Moncton is the biggest French-language university outside Quebec. It is based in Moncton and has campuses in Edmundston and Shippagan, New Brunswick. We have slightly more than 5,300 full-time students, 35% of whom are international students.

Our institution is the only francophone university in New Brunswick; it has a general education mission and offers university training in many, highly varied fields such as drama, nursing science, engineering, French-language common law and others. It has 135 undergraduate programs, 46 master's programs and 8 doctoral programs. It also offers French second language training, summer immersion camps for high school students and many training programs in English and French.

As it is the only francophone university in New Brunswick, its mission is to provide access to a post-secondary education in French for the Acadian population in the Canadian and international francophonie. Access to French-language post-secondary training is thus a very important factor in guaranteeing the survival of French in minority communities.

The general education mission of the Université de Moncton entails significant financial challenges. We have many programs but low registration. Annual funding received from the Department of Canadian Heritage through the official languages in education program is approximately \$4.9 million. That amount hasn't changed since 2002. While it made up approximately 5.5% of the university's revenues in 2002, it now represents 2.5%. With salaries and costs rising since 2002, we are facing increasing costs. We will have to cut either our services or our scholarships.

Stable and predictable funding is very important for the university. However, it's extremely important that the funding we receive be indexed so we can maintain the same level of service as we provided in 2002. Based on annual indexing since 2002, the \$4.9 million we still receive should be \$7.9 million in 2024; that's a shortfall of \$3 million.

We also receive annual grants from the Consortium national de formation en santé. That funding, which has been stable since 2009, will be increased starting next year.

In 2022, we also received a significant grant of \$18.5 million over 3 years for modernization purposes. That major grant enabled the university to make some investments that we had previously been unable to make for lack of funding. We also receive special grant funding for additional projects such as updating our community rooms, developing specialized programs and modernizing our classrooms.

Our priority is to offer French-language training to the entire public. Most of our graduates are able to work in both of Canada's official languages. We have the highest graduate retention rate, for both Canadian and international students, among all New Brunswick universities. Access to French-language post-secondary training vastly increases students' opportunities to work in French and the chances that our language will survive. We also cooperate with other institutions, such as the Université Sainte-Anne, with which we share faculty development training courses.

Federal investments help us maintain competitive tuition fees and offer high-quality training. However that funding should be indexed. Special programs are absolutely welcome, but stable basic funding would enable us to improve long-term financial planning.

Our infrastructure is another major challenge. Deferred maintenance at the Université de Moncton represents \$136.5 million over the next 10 years; that's nearly equal to our annual budget. Most of the university's buildings were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s and are now in need of major renovations. We have to improve our buildings' energy efficiency and climate resilience, but that requires planning and significant investment.

To sum up, it is very important for us to have stable funding, which must be indexed because it hasn't been since 2002. I would also mention that infrastructure needs are becoming increasingly acute for the Université de Moncton.

Thank you.

• (0825)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

We will begin the first round of questions. Each of the political parties will have six minutes.

Colleagues, please use the timer on your cell phones because I will be very strict on time. I want us to be able to have a second round of questions.

We will begin with the first vice-chair of the committee, Joël Godin, who represents the Conservative Party.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us.

Mr. Cormier and Mr. Normand, you are here at 8:15 this Thursday morning. Two early risers, and that's all to your credit.

I'm going to start with Mr. Normand.

I believe you were here not long ago, Mr. Normand, when you mentioned regulations. Yesterday the Minister of Official Languages announced that the future regulations implementing part VII of the Official Languages Act would be made over the next 18 months.

As the President of the Treasury Board told the committee, you have to allow between two and a half to three years, which once again puts us in that same production window. If you add 18 months to the year already wasted since the act received royal assent, you come up with a timeline of two and a half years.

Are you hoping those regulations mean gains for your institutions? If so, what kind of gains are you hoping for?

Mr. Martin Normand: Thank you for that question.

We expect a great deal from the regulations to implement part VII of the Official Languages Act, particularly because we expected certain amendments to the bill that ultimately didn't make it into the final version of the act. We hope the regulations will clarify some of the federal government's new obligations.

We think that the interaction between federal and provincial jurisdictions isn't clear enough in the Official Languages Act. Confusion arises when the federal government announces that it wants to take action in areas of provincial jurisdiction, whereas, further on, the act provides that the provinces take precedence in the way language regimes must be implemented in Canada. We believe there are conflicting interpretations here. We know that post-secondary education is an exclusive provincial jurisdiction. However, the act specifically states that post-secondary education is a key sector where the federal government must act.

The regulations must clarify how the federal government can intervene in areas of provincial jurisdiction without that causing new conflicts. We want the federal share of responsibility to be clearly delineated.

Mr. Joël Godin: Has your association been consulted as part of the Treasury Board's regulation drafting process?

• (0830)

Mr. Martin Normand: Not yet. As far as I know, there has been no consultation on those regulations to date. We hope to be invited when it happens. Don't worry, we'll be ready.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you very much.

What you're saying indirectly is that Bill C-13, which has officially become law, doesn't necessarily meet the needs of your institutions. You don't feel better equipped to protect the French language. Let's be honest: French is the more vulnerable language.

Do you agree with that statement?

Mr. Martin Normand: I would qualify it slightly. There are significant keys for us here. This is the first time the post-secondary sector has been mentioned in the Official Languages Act, but there are flaws in the regulations that must be corrected to ensure that our expectations of the act are actually met in the post-secondary sector.

Mr. Joël Godin: In your opening remarks, you talked about creating a structure including the provincial government and other stakeholders.

I think that may not be necessary. We have other tools we can use to move forward in a more pragmatic way.

Do you sincerely believe that an additional structure won't complicate and delay efforts to put tools in place to help make you more effective in promoting French and halting its decline?

Mr. Martin Normand: On the contrary, we think a structure is absolutely necessary at this stage, precisely to prevent conflicting interpretations and priorities regarding the post-secondary sector. If there were more federal-provincial collaboration, we wouldn't find ourselves, for example, with budgets announced by the federal government to support post-secondary education that contradict either the provinces' internal processes or priorities established within the provinces for their own post-secondary sector. We need a space where we can have that collaboration to prevent conflicting jurisdictions and priorities, which then would help avoid competing budgets being inappropriately spent by either party.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Normand, I'd like to hear your opinion based on the fact that your institutions are situated at one end of the education continuum. We know there are two clienteles: students who are in Canada's present system and immigrant students.

Do you think that enough Canadians are interested in pursuing their education in French, from one end of the continuum to the other, that you can establish a clientele large enough to make you effective and, ultimately, profitable because that generates funding? Can anything else be done to stimulate the Canadian incubator system?

Mr. Martin Normand: It's kind of the chicken-and-the-egg paradox in this case. We think that a significant pool of students attends our schools, from kindergarten to grade 12, but what happens at the post-secondary level? The pool is there. The challenge is to retain students and to make institutions attractive enough for potential students to decide that studying at the post-secondary level in French is a plan or an effective option.

If we want to take action in this area and make post-secondary education as attractive as possible for francophones in the francophone systems, we have to make sure those systems can offer the programs students are looking for. There are fewer science, technology, engineering and mathematics programs in our institutional system because it's very costly to offer them. We have to be able to support our institutions in offering the programs that the student clientele request.

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

I've unfortunately run out of time. I apologize to Mr. Cormier. I would have liked to ask him similar questions about immigration, but I'm going to yield to my colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin. Mr. Cormier will have his turn.

Mr. Drouin, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks as well to the witnesses who are with us.

Mr. Normand, you rarely appear before this committee. You're like the Commissioner, if I may say so.

I'm especially interested in francophone research. I've spoken at length with Rémi Quirion, the chief scientist of Quebec. It's often said that francophones occupy an important position in research, but research published in French is in decline. Some francophones even publish in English.

Do your members have access to federal government research programs and funding? Could you provide us with some details on that? If you don't have the information with you, perhaps you could forward it to me later.

Mr. Martin Normand: Thank you for your question.

French-language research—creation, publication, dissemination and popularization—is a hot topic in the public discourse and in the academic community in Canada. French is on the decline around the world. Last fall, I attended the *Semaine mondiale de la Francophonie scientifique* in Quebec City, and we discussed it for a week. So it's a shared challenge in the francophone space.

Our members in particular face additional challenges. The research granting councils in Canada often have practices and programs that are better suited to large research institutions that have extensive research infrastructure and well-established research traditions. Consequently, it's hard for researchers at our small institutions to be competitive in the major competitions. We've also observed linguistic and institutional prejudices in the peer review of grant applications within granting councils. Efforts are being made to correct those prejudices, but much remains to be done on that score.

I encourage you to read the report that the Standing Committee on Science and Research prepared last year on French-language scientific research and publication in Canada. It contains a host of recommendations that are consistent with what the various actors are demanding. However, the government's response to that report was very disappointing. It more or less denied the issues that the actors sought to bring to light. Many aspects of that report could be developed to address the concerns raised by those actors as a whole.

● (0835)

Mr. Francis Drouin: It may be assumed that, when students choose a post-secondary institution, those who want to enrol in a doctoral program or conduct research probably lean toward a well-known institution, but is there room for smaller institutions? Could we have more collaboration to promote the research ecosystem? I'm thinking of institutions in the north, for example, which often experience an exodus of students to southern institutions that may be more financially sound or better known.

Do you think this discussion occurs at smaller institutions?

Mr. Martin Normand: It does. We know there are very few postgraduate study programs in our institutional system, and that's a challenge. The University of Ottawa obviously has many. The Université de Moncton has a fairly significant number as well, but, otherwise, postgraduate study programs are very rare, and that undermines our researchers' competitiveness when they file grant applications.

Our association's strategy committee met yesterday. For many months now, it has been discussing interinstitutional collaborative projects, and the master's and doctoral programs offered are one of the priorities our members have raised to ensure we can train and retain leading researchers across the country.

Mr. Francis Drouin: You no doubt followed the debate on the whole issue of funding for the Université de l'Ontario français a few years ago. I had stated that I was opposed to the idea of the federal government being the sole funder of the Université de l'Ontario français unless the province committed to making a contribution. The reason for that is simple: In both education and health, the federal government makes transfers and the provinces shirk their responsibilities. They simply take the funding that's transferred to them and invest it in areas other than health and education, where it should normally go. So we're back to square one, and our institutions ultimately pay the price.

I won't cite the act that you mentioned, but how can we make sure the federal government has provincial partners so that some form of stable funding can be made available to our francophone institutions?

Mr. Martin Normand: Our third recommendation is that an interprovincial collaborative structure be established that I think would serve the purpose of forging ties between the federal government and the provincial ministries of post-secondary education. As you know, certain funding structures, such as the official languages in education program, or OLEP, flow through the ministries of education, not the provincial ministries of post-secondary education. As a result, if we established a structure with the provincial ministries of post-secondary education, we could build a tradition of co-operation and collaboration.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I want to thank you enormously for your contribution to the research, Mr. Normand; I know that you did your doctorate in French.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Thank you, Mr. Normand.

The next round of questions is for the Bloc Québécois and the second vice-chair of the committee, Mr. Beaulieu.

The floor is yours for six minutes.

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

I also want to thank the witnesses.

First, we observe one thing from the various research studies: Minority French-language post-secondary institutions have for many years, and probably forever, suffered chronic underfunding. Do you agree?

Essentially, from what I understand, the provincial governments other than Quebec underfund francophone universities, to put it politely, and the federal government compensates for this with official languages support programs, ordinarily. Do you agree that there is chronic underfunding? What effects does that have today? Does the federal compensation make up for the loss?

• (0840)

Mr. Martin Normand: In fact, the share of university and college budgets made up of public funding has been gradually declining for a least 15 or 20 years, so there has been a reduction in public funding generally. That is what explains why our institutions are looking for new funding sources that would enable them to maintain their level of service. With public funding of universities continuing to shrink, ways have to be found to enable francophone institutions to offer services comparable to their anglophone counterparts.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You are avoiding my question a bit. You say there is less public funding everywhere, so you are excusing provincial governments for underfunding francophone universities.

Mr. Martin Normand: No, I was getting there.

Unlike their anglophone counterparts, francophone institutions have additional missions that are not always recognized in provincial governments' funding formulas. As a result, our members are in discussions with their provincial governments about ways of recognizing that additional work. I am sure my colleague from the Université de Moncton sees this every day, and could tell you about it better than I can. There are definitely extra functions that have to be recognized in the funding formulas.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Right.

In one of the recommendations made by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, I saw that they criticized the requirement for a provincial contribution as a universal and necessary prerequisite for the federal contribution.

Are there provincial governments that refuse to make that contribution, and are therefore refusing the federal contribution?

Mr. Martin Normand: It is a little more complicated than that. For our institutions to have access to federal funding, sometimes the provincial governments ask them to draw on the resources they already have, and then calculate the provincial contribution. That mechanism therefore does not always have a lever effect, where the additional money from the province is on top of what the federal government is proposing.

What we have to understand, and this is where the intergovernmental coordination structure is important, is that the envelopes announced by the federal government do not always match a province's budget cycle. It is therefore difficult to imagine how a province could predict the amount of additional contributions for post-secondary education, outside the cycle, and match them as they are supposed to do.

That is why coordination is an important mechanism.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In Quebec, for example, we see that the Quebec government overfunds anglophone universities as compared to their demographic weight, while outside Quebec the opposite is true.

Do you not think it is a bit weird that in Quebec, the government supports anglophone universities almost exclusively, under the official languages support programs?

Mr. Martin Normand: I admit that I do not have the figures at hand regarding funding for anglophone universities in Quebec, so I cannot tell you what that funding looks like, but I will rely on your reading of the figures.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You mentioned that the funding structure in the federal research funds relates to anglophone universities. According to the most recent figures, 37% of federal research funds in Quebec went to those universities. It may be the same in New Brunswick. The disparity experienced by francophones outside Quebec might be explained by the fact that preference is given to the big universities.

How could that be changed, structurally, to allow for better funding of francophone universities outside Quebec and enable Quebec to allocate the funding more equitably? I am asking for your opinion about the part relating to outside Quebec, not the part about Quebec.

• (0845)

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: In my opinion, we have to acknowledge that a small university does not necessarily have access to all funding sources and major research laboratories.

As my colleague said, research is mainly done in English, and it is very difficult for us to do our research in French. There are real disadvantages. If you publish an article in French, the impact, or reach, of the research is not the same. English is increasingly winning out in terms of—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier. I am sorry to interrupt you, but speaking time is already up. You will have an opportunity to tell us more when you answer other questions.

The last questions in this round will be from the New Democrat member.

Ms. Ashton, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome the witnesses.

The goal of our report is to make recommendations to the federal government.

Mr. Normand and Mr. Cormier, you have been clear in stating that the government needed to honour its promise by granting stable base funding of \$80 million per year.

Mr. Normand, why is the \$80 million per year important? Why is it important to have stable base funding?

Mr. Martin Normand: Thank you for those questions.

I am going to speak on behalf of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne and my colleague Mr. Cormier will be able to talk more specifically about the situation in Moncton.

The report of the national dialogue published by the Association a year and a half ago included more than 30 recommendations. There are structural problems in the post-secondary sector in Canada and they have to be overcome, including through interinstitution collaboration. For that to happen, funding sources have to be found to support and sustain collaboration initiatives and address certain challenges. There are also structural problems relating to the fact that our institutions are smaller and are not able to achieve the same economies of scale as the large institutions. We want to make the institutions more attractive, but we also see that our student clientele's needs and expectations are changing. They want new programs and new types of services, and that is how our institutions can become more attractive. We must therefore find a way of meeting the needs of the Canadian clientele so they will choose to study in our institutions.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Normand, what do the members of the Association think about the fact that the promise to grant \$80 million in funding per year has not been honoured in 2024? There is an action plan and we know what needs to be done.

Mr. Martin Normand: I will not deny that there has been some disappointment at seeing that the promise has not been fulfilled. In the national dialogue that was held, we made our needs and expectations clear. We pinned a lot of hope on the federal government's new obligations regarding post-secondary education as set out in the Official Languages Act.

We hope that the actions taken are going to make it possible to fulfill the ambitions of the communities and institutions, but also of legislators.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Mr. Cormier, why is stable base funding important for your university?

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: This type of funding certainly allows for better financial planning. Ordinarily this takes place in five-year cycles. In the immediate future, we are in a position of uncertainty and we are wondering what funding there will be next year. As I said earlier, \$4.9 million was fine in 2002, but in 2024 the same amount means that we will hire fewer instructors to teach French courses. A \$1,000 scholarship offered to a student in 2002 was more attractive than a scholarship of the same value in 2024.

We have to make cuts and make tough choices for our institution. We need to have stable funding, but it also has to be indexed to the cost of living. Costs and wages are rising. In New Brunswick, our electricity bill rose by 10% recently. This \$80 million in funding would be extremely important, in that it would enable us to build up the base, plan our long-term needs, and invest properly in training.

• (0850)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Mr. Normand, you talked about supporting programs that are in high demand and meet an important need. We have heard about the labour shortage several times at this committee, particularly when it comes to instruction in French and to French immersion.

Should supporting institutions that offer instruction in French in order to train more teachers be a priority for the federal government? We are going to need them.

Mr. Martin Normand: That is an interesting question that is somewhat like the one that the member before you raised about the continuum.

Post-secondary education is at the top of the continuum, but it trains the people who are needed to fill all the other parts. You mention professors, but we also have to think about teachers' aides and all the other occupations that a school may have. We also have to think about early childhood educators if we are going to be able to offer parents that kind of choice.

Our postsecondary sector has to become sufficiently agile and attractive that we can bring in students who will fill positions all along this education continuum.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Cormier, do you have something to add?

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: I agree that this is extremely important in the field of education.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

We are going to start our second round of questions with Mr. Généreux, for the Conservatives.

The floor is yours for five minutes, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses.

Mr. Normand, you talked about structural challenges that were no longer working today. What are they, exactly? How did we get into this kind of mess when it comes to structure?

Mr. Martin Normand: In some areas of the postsecondary sector, and whether for financial, administrative or political reasons, institutions indeed do not always have the resources that would enable them to respond promptly to program requests coming from the community.

A gap may develop between the community's expectations and what the post-secondary institutions are offering, and that may encourage some young people who are looking for very specific programs to simply continue their education in English. If we are unable to make the institutions more attractive and enable them to adapt the programs they offer to the needs, it is difficult for them to respond properly to the attrition we are seeing throughout the education continuum.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Is this just a question of money?

Mr. Martin Normand: No, that is not it.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: What are the other factors involved, the ones not related to money?

I am going to come back to the question Mr. Godin asked you, about the possibility of a new committee, or a new structure, to be set up by the federal government to force the provinces to talk to you in order to make sure there is a complete continuum. If we leave the question of money aside, what are the other factors you, and possibly we, would have some control over?

To be clear: You know what the future holds for us when it comes to Canada's finances. There are factors that have to be taken into account. For the last eight years, we have been told that all the problems had been solved, everything was doing fine, everybody had been given money and everybody was happy. To all appearances, however, that is not the case. Everybody is not happy. The structural problems you allude to have been dismissed. They have not been taken into account. Money was simply given out in the hope that everything would right itself, but everything has not righted itself.

• (0855)

Mr. Martin Normand: Precisely, if we want to be more effective in the post-secondary sector, there has to be better intergovernmental coordination and better coordination with the actors on the ground to make sure that what each of them is doing is as effective as possible.

I will give you an example. Everyone is calling for greater collaboration among our institutions in order to offer a broader range of programs, in the most locations possible, everywhere in Canada. In order to do that, provincial governments have to talk to one another to promote collaboration among the institutions in the various provinces.

The federal government can play a leadership role in order to make sure the spaces exist, so the discussions take place among the provincial governments. The initiative and knowledge the federal government has, with what our institutions know, would make what each of them does as effective as possible in the context.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Normand, I have been here for several years, and for all that time we have been told that the federal government gives the provinces money, but there is no accountability. I am talking about the money paid to the provinces for education, of whatever kind. There is no accountability. In fact, we are not able to find out whether the provinces have actually spent that money on education.

I agree entirely about coordination, but will that really solve all the problems? Personally, I doubt it. However, I would be prepared to put this in place to see whether it is possible. Again, the provinces have to be genuinely persuaded that it can work. Again, I am sure that it is not just a question of money. I think we have the evidence of this.

There has to be a will on the part of all of the actors, and unfortunately I am not sure that all of the provinces have the same potential will as the federal government might have.

In any event, that is my view.

The Chair: Thank you for your comments, Mr. Généreux.

Thank you, Mr. Normand.

Mr. Samson, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would ask all members of the committee to give their unanimous consent to allow me the right to use all the rest of the time, because I have a lot of questions to ask. I would very much like their support.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you for being with us today, Mr. Cormier.

The information that Mr. Normand and you have provided causes me considerable concern. There are good things and there are more complex things. I am going to try to raise all the points quickly and I will ask for more information, if necessary.

Before entering this room, the first thing I asked myself was: What are the provinces doing when it comes to francophone education, what is the relationship between the post-secondary institutions and the provinces in this regard? The word "equitable" does not mean "equal". Listening to people here, it seems obvious to me that the provinces do not understand that.

I was the executive director of the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial de la Nouvelle-Écosse and I probably said the same thing 50,000 times to get people to understand that the word "equitable" does not mean "equal". That really has to change.

Mr. Normand raised a point in connection with my question regarding the provincial and federal governments. What are the provinces doing and what is their contribution to francophone education? We know that the provinces also do it in every other field. They are given money and then they take that money and invest it elsewhere, wherever they want. As my colleague said, accountability is an important issue.

I like the idea of creating a structure, a consortium. There already is one, the Table nationale sur l'éducation, which serves as a connecting thread. I have participated in that table, which works extremely well. However, there needs to be the same kind of consortium for the post-secondary sector also. That consortium gives people of goodwill who want to see progress on this issue a chance to discuss it.

Mr. Cormier, do you think that creating a structure, a consortium, is a good idea? Even though Mr. Normand said it, that does not mean it is a good idea.

Personally, I think it is, but I want to hear your opinion about it.

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: I think it is a good idea to have a round table so that we can discuss certain subjects with one another and move forward on implementing the new act.

• (0900)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you. You gave a very good answer.

My second point is this.

I heard that since 2002, the funding received from the Department of Canadian Heritage has stayed at \$4.9 million. I am amazed.

I think that is unacceptable. What efforts are being made by post-secondary institutions across Canada for francophones? Is there a strong voice speaking for them? That is what is needed. From 2002 to today, all governments have had responsibility for this funding. It is unacceptable on the part of any government.

You agree that it is unacceptable, of course.

I heard some things that were said and they have left my ears ringing. In the past, a person who did research might have done it in English because there was a wider audience. Now, you are telling me that if I do research in English, I will get more funding. Surely you jest! Explain that to me, please. Did I understand correctly?

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: I can't point to a specific research program, but there is more chance of getting funding because research in English has greater reach.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

As you know, I am an alumnus and proud student of the Université de Moncton. I am amazed to see that foreign students represent only 35% of your students, that being the Canadian average. Well done for that!

The funding is needed because there is no commitment from the province to provide it. That is obvious. I believe a consortium might do a lot to help us.

Do the foreign students who study at your institution then stay in New Brunswick? Do they stay in the Atlantic region? Do they contribute to the economy? Are they needed?

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: We have the highest retention rate. Of all the universities in New Brunswick, it is our francophones who stay in our communities. Certainly there are fewer of them than Canadians, but it is still a high rate. They stay, they make their contribution, they work in our businesses and they make up for the lack of growth in the labour force.

Mr. Darrell Samson: What do you think is the effect of this funding shortfall on the post-secondary programs available in French in Canada?

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: We have to make choices. We cannot necessarily offer every program. They have to be limited in some cases. The number of scholarships has to be reduced and some people have to be offered less. So there are choices to be made in this regard.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It is exactly like in the public schools. That is why additional funding is needed. The people on the ground in the provinces also have to understand that equity is not equality.

Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Beaulieu, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Normand, you talked about a coordination structure. We know that at the moment, funding is provided through federal-provincial agreements.

Is the way that the federal-provincial agreements are negotiated at present good enough? How would a coordination structure improve things?

Mr. Martin Normand: For example, the official languages in education program—the OLEP has changed its name, but it is still called that—is negotiated with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, the CMEC. The people at that table are the ministers of education, not the ministers of post-secondary education. Often, our members are worried that the voice of the post-secondary sector is not being heard around the table when negotiations take place.

In some provinces, it may be the same minister, but in several provinces there are ministers who have these different portfolios. That is why we think a separate table bringing together the ministers of post-secondary education would mean the right actors were around the table to negotiate the parts of the agreements that relate to post-secondary education.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Much is said about a fund for French-language post-secondary education. It would be a permanent, rather than project-by-project, support program.

Can you tell us more about that? Do you think that project-by-project funding would be more effective for research funds than a possible fund for French-language post-secondary education?

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: We need long-term, stable base funding. That is what is important. Of course the additional projects help us a lot, but what we need is to bump up our base funding so we can improve our planning and make choices about our programs. That takes time. Increasing the stable base funding would let us make better choices in future.

• (0905)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Normand, the last time you testified before the committee, you explained how the new Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, rules in force since January concerning international students might hurt francophone universities and francophone communities. You also recommended that francophones wanting to study outside Quebec be considered by IRCC to be a priority cohort, as is the case for students in master's or doctorate programs.

Do you have any new information to give us on that subject? Do you have other recommendations to make to us?

Mr. Martin Normand: By March 31, 2024, all the provinces had set up their systems for distributing provincial attestation letters and allocating funding to the post-secondary institutions. The fact is that most of our institutions are satisfied with their share. Most of the provinces' decisions set a priority on post-secondary institutions, but it's unusual to have to rely on trust and chance to ensure that post-secondary institutions have access to enough attestation letters.

All this uncertainty has led many institutions to believe that this year, the number of applications for admission will not be as high as in previous years. There was a three-month period during which

applications for permits were not processed by IRCC. This three-month period gave students enough time to consider studying elsewhere, including in Quebec. That meant that when the ceiling was announced, Quebec was ready to welcome foreign students almost immediately because it already had a system in place. That was all to the good for Quebec, but that province does compete with our institutions. For example, students who may have been considering both the Université de Moncton and the Université de Montréal may, owing to the uncertainty, have opted for the latter.

The concern is that all these changes might affect the number of applications for September 2024.

Ms. Niki Ashton: That's rather worrisome.

Mr. Cormier, can you tell us how this announcement affected you and give us recommendations with respect to the foreign students you would like to accept?

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: I fully agree with my colleague that we will be penalized because Quebec already had a system in place. In my budget for next year, I expect to lose 130 foreign students, which represents \$2 million per year over a four-year period. That's a significant amount for Université de Moncton. It creates an enormous amount of uncertainty over the decision-making process. Will there be as many permits next year?

The fact that Quebec already had a system in place is worrisome for us. As I mentioned, 35% of our students come from abroad, and they contribute to New Brunswick. The ceiling is having a major impact.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier.

Mr. Généreux and Mr. Dalton have the floor now for the next three minutes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Normand, I'd like my proposal for a summit on francophone education in Canada to be recorded. I have proposed it before.

I am reiterating my proposal to organize a Canada-wide meeting with all stakeholders as quickly as possible, to deal with this matter for once and for all.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): I'd like to thank the witnesses.

Mr. Normand, can you expand upon the importance of foreign students in terms of funding for programs at post-secondary educational institutions?

Mr. Martin Normand: My Université de Moncton colleague mentioned the loss of revenue that may result from the ceiling this year. Our institutions have a smaller pool of clients. Some programs are also very expensive. For an institution to be able to offer some of these programs, larger cohorts are needed.

While it's true that international students provide additional revenue, they also, as students enrolled in our programs, help make it possible to offer these programs in the first place. Without them, our institutions might not be able to offer a full range of programs.

Not only that, but in addition to the programs and courses they attend in our institutions, these students have a direct impact on their community. While studying, they may have part-time jobs in the community. After graduating, many remain, as Mr. Cormier mentioned earlier. They therefore contribute to the francophone communities ecosystem.

• (0910)

Mr. Marc Dalton: What's the overall percentage of foreign students?

Mr. Martin Normand: For the 22 institutions in our network, there are approximately 12,000 foreign students, accounting for 30% of the total.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Have the numbers for foreign students and all students remained stable? If not, how have they been changing?

Mr. Martin Normand: I won't try to hide the fact that the number of foreign students has increased rather rapidly over the past few years. As institutions within the Canadian francophonie have not been receiving foreign students for all that long, they've been making up for lost time for about 10 years now.

Only seven or eight years ago, some institutions had virtually no foreign students. They have therefore been attracting more foreign students to catch up to the number being received by institutions of the English-speaking majority.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you.

I believe I have only five or six seconds of speaking time remaining.

The Chair: Yes, approximately.

Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

I'm strict with speaking time because it enables members to comment more often.

Mr. Serré, you have three minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Normand and Mr. Cormier.

I have several questions.

Mr. Normand, could you send the committee details about your third recommendation, on structure? As Mr. Samson mentioned, there is in fact something about elementary and secondary education, but there's no coordination.

My first question, regarding the responsibilities of the provinces, is for Mr. Cormier.

I was born in Ontario. Without federal intervention, the Université de l'Ontario français would not exist. As for the University of Sudbury, the federal government contributed \$1.9 million towards the creation of a university by and for francophones. It provided 100% of the funds, with nothing received from the province.

Can you explain the role of New Brunswick in terms of contributions?

The last I heard, a francophone from New Brunswick is still a citizen of the province. What is the province's responsibility and role with respect to education in French?

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: Our funding model is very simple. If funding was at a certain level last year, it would be increased by a specified percentage this year.

As we mentioned in connection with special programs, where a provincial contribution is to be provided for a special project linked to official languages in education, the province considers this to have already been included in our core funding. We therefore don't receive any additional funds for special official languages projects.

Mr. Marc Serré: What do you think the federal government should do to ensure that provinces like New Brunswick shoulder their responsibilities?

Mr. Gabriel Cormier: I believe that when there is a special project, there should be an additional contribution from the province.

Recognition of the Université de Moncton's general mission is also required. Providing a wide range of programs in French for everyone costs more.

French-language education is extremely important.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Normand, I have 30 seconds of speaking time left.

What should the federal government do to ensure that the provinces shoulder their responsibilities to their francophone citizens?

Mr. Martin Normand: I think Mr. Cormier put it very well.

However, I would add that the federal government also has responsibilities, which it is not necessarily addressing at this time. It needs to acknowledge its new obligations under the Official Languages Act.

The Chair: Thank you very much, dear witnesses.

As the chair, I'm going to exercise my privilege to ask a question that is somewhat related to Mr. Généreux's and Mr. Samson's questions.

The action plan for official languages mentions the federal government's memorandum of understanding with the Council of Ministers of Education. This MOU has provisions on transparency and accountability. Have these provisions been implemented? Is it a useful implement?

In other words, I'm asking you whether the transparency and accountability provisions in the MOU are worth the trouble. Are they being applied? If they need to be improved, how to go about it? Are they effective?

Then, I'd like you to provide us with some numbers. Between 2002 and 2024, nothing happened. How have provincial contributions to post-secondary institutions fluctuated between 2002 and 2024, in places like Moncton, for example?

Have investments kept up with the cost of living? Have the provinces contributed more? These are, after all, their post-secondary institutions. It's all very well to talk about what the federal government does, but it's also important to discuss the provinces. How have they met their responsibilities to their educational institutions?

We'd like to know what these numbers are, because they would be helpful when the time comes for us to make our recommendations.

Mr. Cormier and Mr. Normand, you won't have time to answer these questions today, but I would appreciate it if you could send us your answers in writing.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

• (0915)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I'd like to add something to what you requested. Would it be possible for Mr. Normand to provide us with information about the changing numbers of foreign students in each educational institution, since 2002?

What I'd like to know is whether the increased number of students is directly related to funding. I think it is, but I would like information about it, if possible.

The Chair: Okay.

On that note, we are going to briefly suspend the meeting to welcome the next group of witnesses.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for all the information they provided. There were lots of useful questions and it was very interesting. We expect to receive the additional information we asked them to provide in writing.

• (0915)

(Pause)

• (0920)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We are now beginning the second hour of this very interesting meeting on the heated issue of funding for francophone post-secondary institutions.

We'll begin with Dr. Jacques Frémont, president and vice-chancellor of the University of Ottawa.

Welcome. I think this is the first time you've appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

After that, we'll hear from Mr. Emmanuel Aito, dean of the University of Regina's Cité universitaire francophone.

Mr. Aito, while this may be the first time you've appeared in person, we've previously met.

Lastly, we will hear from Mr. Patrick Arseneault, executive director of Collège nordique francophone, who is attending the meeting virtually. He's probably a distant cousin of mine.

For those of you who are not regulars, you each have five minutes for an opening address. If you keep it shorter than that, it would allow everyone to ask more questions over the next hour.

Dr. Frémont, you have the floor for five minutes.

Dr. Jacques Frémont (President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Ottawa): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for inviting me today to give you my thoughts about the important study you have undertaken on funding for francophone post-secondary institutions.

I'd like to begin with two facts.

The first is that post-secondary institutions serving official language minority communities are in difficult if not dire straits. The second is that our institutions have for far too long been squeezed by the federal and provincial governments tossing the ball back and forth.

We are asking the federal government to fully assume its role as the defender of official languages and official language minority communities.

I'd like to say a few words about the University of Ottawa. We are the largest French and English bilingual University in Canada and the world, or at least we believe this to be the case. This year, we welcomed more than 49,000 students to our campus. Of these, 15,000 were enrolled in French-language programs. That's a significant number. We take pride in offering the largest number of university programs in French outside Quebec. Not only that, but over 80% of francophone university students in Ontario attend the University of Ottawa. That is indicative of our influence in the province of Ontario.

We offer university programs in French in every field in order to provide support to discrete and isolated francophone communities, whether in medicine, health, law or social work, not to mention engineering, natural sciences and, more recently, pharmaceutical sciences. It's extremely wide-ranging.

Even so, we are in a difficult financial position because of the chronic underfunding of our francophone mission. Last year, as you may be aware, the Ontario government established an expert panel to examine the financial viability of post-secondary institutions. In a brief to the expert panel, we clearly demonstrated that for every francophone student enrolled at the University of Ottawa, we receive approximately \$3,000 less than other francophone or bilingual post-secondary institutions in the province. We further reported a shortfall of over \$50 million a year for our francophone mission.

In its report, the expert panel mentioned our chronic underfunding, as well as underfunding for the whole network of Ontario francophone institutions. The Ontario government acted on all but one of the expert panel's recommendations, the one on funding for Ontario's francophone and bilingual institutions.

The province's strategy seems to be very straightforward: don't provide enough funding to meet the needs of the francophone post-secondary system and ask the federal government to make up the difference. Once again, we are being squeezed by the federal government and the Ontario government. That was four months ago.

What is the federal government's current role?

Allow me to try and answer that question. For over 25 years, despite the ranting of politicians who say that the federal government shouldn't intervene in provincial areas of jurisdiction, the federal government has been funding the post-secondary sector directly. For example, Health Canada provides millions of dollars to our university to help us train health professionals to ensure that there will be qualified workers in francophone communities across Canada. The Department of Justice does the same to ensure training for bilingual lawyers so that francophones have access to legal services in their language.

These direct interventions are of course made on grounds that the federal government has jurisdiction in matters like justice and health. We would also argue that the federal government has the same level of jurisdiction to protect Canada's linguistic minorities. Likewise, Parliament recognized this fact when it modernized the Official Languages Act last year. The importance of the education continuum is now enshrined in that act. It means that parliamentarians have acknowledged that the federal government needs to fully assume its role in support of official language minority communities. As is the case for health and justice, there is nothing to prevent the federal government from providing direct financial support to post-secondary institutions.

The matching provincial funds required by the federal government are, as we know, not always in evidence. That's the problem everyone is aware of, Mr. Chair, but no one wants to mention it.

• (0925)

The Chair: Indeed.

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Sometimes the province requires us to pay its share ourselves. The new federal initiatives are useful, laudable and important, but the financial stability of our institutions is equally important, even though chronic underfunding remains the norm.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Frémont. Thank you also for being so frank. You'll be able to provide additional information in response to other questions.

Mr. Aito, the floor is now yours for five minutes.

Mr. Emmanuel Aito (Dean, la Cité universitaire francophone, University of Regina): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

La Cité universitaire francophone was jointly conceived by the University of Regina and Saskatchewan's francophone community. It was the outcome of a merger of the former University of Regina French department and the Institut français. La Cité has become the hub of French-language programming, research and services at the University of Regina and throughout the province.

La Cité's mission is to meet the university-level educational needs of Saskatchewan francophones, whatever their first language may be. Our goal is to provide a diversified university education as well as research opportunities into the challenges faced by francophones in a minority setting, by providing an inclusive francophone environment focused on university excellence.

La Cité is part of a network of 22 post-secondary institutions that offer training in French in minority settings, and it also plays a central role in Saskatchewan's francophone community.

The final report of the États généraux sur le postsecondaire francophone, organized in 2022 by the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, provides a good starting point to gain an understanding of the challenges, shortcomings and realities of post-secondary education in Canada.

We work closely with Saskatchewan's francophone community. For example, in partnership with several community organizations, including the Conseil des écoles fransaskoises, la Cité researchers have been studying the process of maintaining Saskatchewan's francophone linguistic and cultural heritage. In conjunction with the Société historique de la Saskatchewan, a researcher is currently working on establishing a Fransaskois archival centre, as well as a quantitative, qualitative and cartographic inventory of Fransaskois archival materials deposited by individuals, families, public organizations and religious congregations. Another researcher is working in collaboration with the Association jeunesse fransaskoise with a view to evaluating the impact of that organization's activities on identity building and strengthening linguistic security for Fransaskois young people.

Thanks to funding received from the federal government, our programs include doctoral and master's programs as well as a variety of undergraduate and certificate programs.

We also have partnerships with other faculties when la Cité doesn't have the required expertise and resources. For example, the faculty of social work is negotiating the establishment of a bilingual bachelor's program in social work. Also under discussion is the establishment of a centre for African and migratory studies, which has developed new agreements with some 20 universities throughout Africa. We are also working on establishing an experiential mobility and learning program in the francophone community.

We are grateful for the funding provided to renovate community spaces, including classrooms, exam rooms and administrative areas, as well as for upgrading technology and pedagogy. These areas are being made available to the francophone community, thus strengthening our mutual ties.

Year after year, some 12,000 users, meaning students as well as members of the community and our own university, benefit from the services available at our various spaces for lectures, workshops, seminars, meetings and other events.

I'd like to reiterate that la Cité universitaire owes its existence to a partnership with both levels of government, which provides them with the tools needed to meet the needs of Saskatchewan's francophone community, in terms of broadening access to post-secondary education in French, especially at the university level.

Although there has been recent progress thanks to the University of Regina's commitment and management, we are still facing numerous challenges stemming from decades of underfunding and inaction to address the realities and challenges faced by francophone post-secondary institutions and minority communities. This underfunding has led to less diversified education.

In addition to these challenges, we face other barriers, such as the failure to promote post-secondary education in French and people's lack of familiarity with it. Even today, we have to combat the tendency to underestimate the benefits of a post-secondary education in French, because it is a minority language. We also have to deal with shortcomings in terms of educational resources, student services and limited research opportunities.

• (0930)

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, Mr. Aito.

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: In that case, I'll come back to this topic later.

The Chair: You'll be able to do so, Mr. Aito. I'm sorry, but this thankless task of mine is designed to give everyone a chance to speak. I will nevertheless allow you to finish what you were saying.

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: In closing, I'd like to thank the committee for having invited me. On behalf of the University of Regina and la Cité universitaire francophone, I'd like to express my thanks for the funding and support we've been receiving from the federal government in recent years. I also want to emphasize that it must continue.

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

Mr. Arsenault, it's over to you now for no more than five minutes.

Mr. Patrick Arsenault (Executive Director, Collège nordique francophone): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of Collège nordique francophone in Yellowknife, I'd like to thank you for this opportunity to speak to you.

My name is Patrick Arsenault, the executive director of the college, and I'm speaking to you from Chief Drygeese Territory.

Were it not for the Collège nordique, there wouldn't be any post-secondary French-language education north of the 60th parallel. Without federal government support we wouldn't be able to increase our capacity to better serve our local francophones and others who come to join us here. We are solidly rooted in our community and are keen to promote our northern identity. Our college was created by and for the community.

Federal funding allows us to respond to demand and to build student confidence in taking advantage of what's available in French in the Northwest Territories at the post-secondary level. The funding comes mainly through two programs: support funding for post-secondary studies and bilateral agreements for minority-language education. We also receive funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, to teach English to newcomers. At the moment, despite our efforts, allophone and francophone immigrants to the three territories have no available options to learn French or to improve it for immigration purposes.

In 2023, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of allophone NWT parents wishing to enroll their children in a French school. And yet

these parents still do not have access to French-language courses, a state of affairs that would appear to be inconsistent with the new 2023–2028 action plan for official languages. We worked hard with IRCC to develop a model that might fill this gap, and we are hoping that funds will soon become available to rapidly implement the project.

There are 11 official languages in the Northwest Territories and we are one of the five members of the Canadian federation that has French as an official language. As a result of our expertise in language teaching and our commitment to reconciliation, we have partnerships with the indigenous nations of our region for teaching two of the nine official indigenous languages.

We also developed French and English adaptive learning resources for newcomers by adding indigenous cultural referents and learning modules for indigenous languages.

For post-secondary education, federal funding is our only real vehicle for development. In 2022–2023, we had 645 students in our credit and non-credit courses. However, beyond these numbers, it's extremely important to take their impact into account. For us, just one trained person can create a new service that was not there before in some very important fields, such as early childhood. Here, everyone can have an impact commensurate with their ambitions and talents.

In 2018, we developed our first multi-year business plan even though there were no programs to which we could submit it; we nevertheless forged ahead to demonstrate not only our rigorous and detailed planning, but also the potential of French-language training in the Northwest Territories. We were pleased when, in 2021, the federal government announced additional funding for post-secondary education, making our plan eligible for funding. It really made a difference, and it is still doing so.

To conclude, I would like to point out three major challenges for us. We have to make sure that French-language programs become available for immigration in the three territories; the funds need to be permanent for post-secondary education in French, with separate categories for elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels; lastly, a financial commitment mechanism specifically for our institution needs to be looked into, in collaboration with the territories, so that the funds made available to minority-language learners can achieve their goal.

Thank you for your attention.

• (0935)

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

We are now going to begin the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes to ask questions and hear what the witnesses have to say.

We'll begin with the first vice-chair of the committee.

Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

I'm delighted, Dr. Frémont, to meet the president of the University of Ottawa, where my son is a student, and very happy to be there.

I have an existential question to ask the three witnesses: How will the new Official Languages Act provide you with more tools and enable you to be more effective?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: The new act says that it will provide us with more instruments, but we get the impression that—

Mr. Joël Godin: Do you think the tool box is empty?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: However, it's obvious that these measures are not being implemented. I note that one of the first significant actions taken by the federal government was Minister Miller's announcement on francophone and foreign students. Let's just say that the new Official Languages Act and its consultation principle have been sidelined. The imposition of a single regime in Canada for both francophone and anglophone institutions has placed francophone institutions outside of Quebec at a clear disadvantage.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Dr. Frémont.

Mr. Aito, what's your point of view on this?

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: Yes, likewise, we are impatiently waiting for proposals to appear, by which I mean concrete ones. We're waiting.

Mr. Joël Godin: What it means is that it's going to take two and a half years.

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: Exactly.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Aito.

What do you think, Mr. Arsenault?

Mr. Patrick Arsenault: I agree with my colleagues. I think that the most important thing will be to take steps in order to be in a position to receive multi-year, predictable and stable funding. That's what will really make a difference.

Mr. Joël Godin: And in particular for this funding to be indexed, of course.

Dr. Frémont, I have a statistical question for you. How did funding fluctuate for francophone students at your institution between 2002 and 2024?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: I can't go back as far as 2002, but I can cover the period from about 2010 to the present day. The grant—which is calculated in accordance with a formula that we still don't understand—shows a shortfall of \$3,000 a year compared to Laurentian University, and \$4,000 compared to Glendon College. I don't have an answer for the Université de l'Ontario français.

So this shortfall represents a deficit, because the grant isn't indexed. With system costs rising by approximately 3% per year in the good years and more like 4% to 5% now, we have gone completely off the rails. When I mentioned a \$50 million deficit, it comes directly out of our pockets, because it's money that we put on the table to carry out our francophone mission without receiving any compensation. I believe that according to our most recent calculations, the deficit this year will be approximately \$78 million.

Mr. Joël Godin: Dr. Frémont, you said you were spending money on this mission. Where are you getting it from?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: It's from our overall operating budget, meaning that there is in fact a grant. But it's money that the university would have spent otherwise, for example on research, and we did an internal realignment.

Mr. Joël Godin: So it has a negative impact on development—

Dr. Jacques Frémont: It weakens the whole institution.

Mr. Joël Godin: Okay. Are foreign students a possible solution? They certainly generate additional funds.

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Let's look at Ontario, because I can only speak to that province. Tuition fees have been frozen for approximately four years now. We are now in the fifth year. Transfer payments have also been frozen. Tuition fees from foreign students were our only saving grace. We experienced a steady increase in francophone foreign students. For the past five or six years, the number has been spiking upwards. There are lots of applications.

Mr. Joël Godin: So that's a potential solution.

Dr. Jacques Frémont: It was more than potential, it was a solution.

Mr. Joël Godin: Could it be described as a matter of survival?

● (0940)

Dr. Jacques Frémont: It was a matter of survival, but now, given the measures announced by Minister Miller, we are—

Mr. Joël Godin: You've just been shot in the foot.

Dr. Jacques Frémont: —at a loss, and don't know what's coming next.

Mr. Joël Godin: I have two minutes left.

Mr. Arsenault, you said that you had been in touch with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and that so far, IRCC has been providing money for training anglophones. But it hasn't been giving you any for francophones. Is that right?

Mr. Patrick Arsenault: That's right. Collège nordique francophone has to tell francophone immigrants who arrive that they have to take language training in English in order to pass our immigration tests, which are not available in French. We feel terrible every time it happens.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes indeed. I can understand why.

Isn't there something in the Official Languages Act to prevent that from happening?

Mr. Patrick Arsenault: We nevertheless managed to move things forward with IRCC, which is now somewhat receptive. We received funding this year to develop a French training prototype. However, when the time came to renegotiate funding for the September launch, we were told that there was no money left but that it might be available next year.

Mr. Joël Godin: The answer you got was "maybe".

So you're at the end of your tether. The University of Ottawa, the University of Regina, and you in the Northwest Territories have no more resources to promote and prevent the decline of French, but the government is not providing you with any tools. The Official Languages Act, which came into force in June 2023, has not in any concrete manner provided any instruments in the short term. You're hoping that this might change in the future. Have I understood you correctly?

Mr. Patrick Arsenault: That's it exactly.

IRCC is somewhat receptive, but there has been no real action. That means that we are in a better position than we were before, and it may take another year or two, but there's still a lot of work to do.

Mr. Joël Godin: So I understand that it's a matter of faith and that you trust the federal government. The official languages minister did in fact announce yesterday that the regulations would be tabled within 18 months, which happens to be two years and six months after the act came into force. Is that reasonable?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin, that's an excellent question, but we'll have to wait until the next round for an answer.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor now for six minutes.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their presentations this morning. You are moving us, we trust, towards a possible solution. You are the experts in the field and we greatly appreciate your contribution.

I'd also like to emphasize that I appreciate your acknowledgement of the fact that the federal government has contributed to francophone university and college infrastructures. Its funding has increased from \$2.2 billion five years ago, to \$4.1 billion today, which is almost double. And it's not only the universities that are benefitting. Early childhood education, as well as elementary, secondary and post-secondary education are also being supported. If we can work together closely in these various sectors, everyone will benefit. I take a great deal of pride in that.

Dr. Frémont, thank you and congratulations on your contribution to the largest francophone higher education institution. There has been high praise for the University of Ottawa. My uncle graduated in medicine from the University of Ottawa, and I even gave a short presentation there a few years back. The work you are doing with Ontario's francophone school boards has led to close relations with them and I believe that's the key to success. Congratulations on these efforts.

My question is for the three witnesses. Earlier on, Mr. Normand, representing the national level, spoke about a consortium, such as a national panel on post-secondary education. How do you feel about that?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: That's not an easy question. If it amounted to nothing more than a place to quibble and perhaps chew the fat, then I'm not sure it's a good idea. To be honest, there have been estates general on post-secondary education where everyone was consulted and able to state their points of view. The provincial governments were involved. The roadmap is there. Canadian Heritage

knows about it. Everyone was in the loop. We could hold another round and try to reach agreement, but that's not where the problem lies. The current problem is one of funding, not only for new initiatives, but also for intellectual infrastructures.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Dr. Frémont, with respect, the concept of equity and equality is fundamental. The provinces have no understanding of the concept at all.

Independent consultations were organized. If all the key players were to get together at an issue table, like the Table nationale sur l'éducation, then it might work. I have confidence in that, but I respect your point of view. It's not that you're against it, but...

• (0945)

Dr. Jacques Frémont: We intend to get involved.

As someone who began as a professor of constitutional law, I believe that what you might be referring to is "substantive equality". That's what we're talking about.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

Mr. Aito, I believe I also gave a presentation to graduates at your university a few years back.

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: That's right.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It was a virtual event. I try to get to every part of the country to share various experiences and ideas on education.

Without wishing to influence you in any way by my comments, what's your opinion about a national table on just post-secondary education?

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: An issue table on post-secondary education focussing on concrete policy implementation would be a very good idea.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

Mr. Arsenault, what do you think about it?

Mr. Patrick Arsenault: In fact, for the Collège nordique francophone, having been able to participate actively in Collèges and Instituts Canada, in the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences and, ultimately, in the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne provided us with a similar type of discussion forum. I believe that a centralized issue table could be beneficial.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I apologize for having influenced the decision of the other two witnesses, Dr. Frémont; that was not my intent.

Mr. Aito, I very much appreciated the point you raised, which was research focussed on francophone minorities. That, in my opinion, is the key. I heard a comment earlier to the effect that research conducted in English is treated much more seriously. Do you have any comments about that?

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: That's correct. What we established is a centre that focusses on research in minority communities. We subsidize this centre with federal funds. The only problem is that we can't have the support of our own university.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Aito.

Dr. Frémont, would you like to add anything?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: I just want to say that the University of Ottawa has twelve research chairs on the Canadian francophonie. They are entirely funded through the university's budget. I will also add that research is conducted entirely in French.

I think we have to distinguish between the three big research granting agencies, where there is indeed a challenge. Applying for funding in French, that gets complicated. To be pragmatic, researchers therefore prefer to apply in English, which is lamentable.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'm with you on that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Frémont.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'd like to make one last comment, Mr. Chair, and I thank you for your patience.

Someone mentioned that the FCFA produced a brief on post-secondary education. I'd like to make sure this report gets sent to the committee so we can look through it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

I have to leave the meeting soon, because I'm going to the House of Commons to table a committee report that deals specifically with francophone immigration. The committee's first vice-chair will replace me during my absence.

I now give the floor to the Bloc Québécois, more specifically to the second vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

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

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

I thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Frémont, you spoke earlier of a study which compared funding for francophone students and funding for anglophone students. Could you tell us a bit more about that?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: I will talk about the University of Ottawa. We have general grants, but we also have matching grants that, based on our understanding, come from money that Ontario receives from the federal government, to which Ontario adds its own money. It's on the level of the matching grants that there's an annual shortfall of 50 to 80 million dollars relative to what it costs us to offer our programs in French.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

As you know, there's a difference between what happens in Quebec and what happens outside Quebec. If we compare the demographic weight of anglophones and francophones, we see that in Quebec, compared to francophone universities, anglophone universities are overfunded by the government of Quebec, by the federal government and, above all, by federal research funds.

Several francophone organizations outside Quebec are asking for greater accountability and for grants and funding to be independent of provincial contributions, because their situation is the opposite. In other provinces, provincial governments seem to give less mon-

ey. The government of Quebec will oppose this, because it wants to have some latitude.

Do you think that an asymmetrical approach, which is the general direction taken in Bill C-13, could help us improve things? Francophone institutions outside Quebec, which have less weight, are asking for greater accountability in terms of the response from provincial governments.

• (0950)

Dr. Jacques Frémont: It seems obvious to me, if one is familiar with the Supreme Court of Canada's jurisprudence, that the asymmetrical approach is entirely acceptable and it works. Furthermore, it's my understanding that the revised version of the Official Languages Act does integrate some of that asymmetrical approach. Indeed, it's not the same thing for everyone: Minorities don't experience the same situations, depending on whether they are in Quebec or elsewhere in the country. I therefore think there's absolutely no problem with taking an asymmetrical approach.

What I do not understand about your question is the link with accountability and transparency. I admit that, for our part, we are looking at it from the outside. However, when public funds are spent, demanding accountability and transparency seems straightforward to me.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If organizations are asking for federal funding to be independent from amounts granted by provinces and territories, like in federal-provincial agreements, that already causes fewer problems in Quebec because the provincial government already overfunds anglophone universities. My question was more along those lines.

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Okay. I understand.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's good.

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Thank you.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I will move on to another subject, and I would like comments from all three witnesses on it. We hear that federal research granting agencies underfund francophone universities and post-secondary teaching institutions, and that the funding structure itself has to change to adapt better to small universities. What do you think?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: It's a real question. I come from a U15 Canada member university, a group of 15 Canadian universities conducting intensive research. Last year, we generated \$480 million in research funding. We are a big research machine.

The fact remains that research funding in Canada is essentially based on peer review. This grants greater and greater preference to research consortia involving big institutions and smaller institutions. Canada already has a hard time maintaining its international research competitiveness. It's clear that if Canada wants to use the same money and further spread out its funding, that leads to problems with the quality of the science. What's coming along behind that is the brain drain problem. The United States is extremely competitive. Europe is competitive. Every single year, we lose researchers who continue their research elsewhere, where there is more money. So, it's a very tricky situation.

I follow francophone institutions that conduct research, and often, it's almost survival research. That's where there could be more collaboration, but the same problem affects small anglophone institutions that don't have access to their share of research.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: How can we change the funding structure to further promote French-language post-secondary education?

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: The Cité universitaire francophone works like other faculties at the University of Regina. Our university is, of course, subject to institutional processes. Despite the obstacles we face in our institution, we encourage our professors and researchers to work in French, which is very difficult. Obstacles have to be overcome. Nonetheless, that's the policy we implemented.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): Mr. Beaulieu, your time is up. If someone wants to repeat your question, it is up to them.

Ms. Ashton, I now give you the floor for six minutes.

● (0955)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen of the panel, welcome.

As you know, the goal of this study is to implement recommendations and then submit them to the federal government.

During the first witness panel's appearance, and during your testimony, we heard several times that there is an essential need for stable core funding. Within the framework of the study, if you had to make one main recommendation or priority recommendations for this committee, do you think the funding issue should be the most important?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Thank you for the question.

It's clear that's the most important point for the University of Ottawa and the Canadian francophonie. We have to find a way to make the provinces accountable and ensure that the work is really being done and is going in the right direction to support not only special projects, but infrastructure as well. Indeed, supporting programs involves costs.

At our university, there are fewer francophone students. For programs offered entirely in French, groups have about 30 students instead of 60 or 70. That means they cost more, and so does maintaining them. I'm all in favour of collaboration, but establishing collaboration and implementing new projects, which the federal government is emphasizing more and more, that requires staff.

I will give you an example. We currently have 25 digital pedagogy specialists to support our French and English programs and courses. If we were to collaborate with other institutions, we would have to allow those institutions to access our digital pedagogy specialists. That means we would need more of them and we would have to manage those resources. So that involves costs. What I'm saying is that it's not just out-of-pocket costs, it's also infrastructure costs. Those are the types of costs that must be supported.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

Mr. Aito, do you think this recommendation should be the most important for this study?

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: Absolutely. Multiyear funding is much more predictable. It means being able to plan, which would be a very good idea. It's also important to note that costs are much higher in a minority context.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Of course.

Mr. Arsenault, I'd like to hear your point of view on the issue.

Mr. Patrick Arsenault: Like my colleagues, I think it's a matter of ensuring stable multiyear funding. However, we also need to find mechanisms for the federal government to be able to deal directly with institutions, or as directly as possible. Indeed, the fact that we have to go through our territorial government is cumbersome. It causes many delays and obstacles.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I see, thank you.

Mr. Frémont, you started your presentation by talking about programs you offer at the University of Ottawa. I would like to say that on a more personal level, in Manitoba, doctors who work in French studied at the University of Ottawa.

You say you need stable and adequate funding from the federal government. Can you explain the link between stable core funding and services, which are basically a matter of life and death and are available in French in my province thanks to the programs you offer?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: I'll give you an example. Recently, last September, we launched a French-language pharmaceutical science program to train front line pharmacists who will work all over Canada. There's no equivalent training in English. The federal government granted funding for this initiative, which was a good thing. Ontario was supposed to provide some, but it decided not to do so because we already got a grant.

However, the money granted by the federal government was to support the launch. We're talking here about a four-year program that will train people, one generation after another. The funds from the federal government at the start are not enough to maintain the program. In our business plan, we are stuck, so we're taking money from elsewhere in the university.

When I talk about stable funding for infrastructure, it's not just for getting the program started. It's also for developing it and turning out a hundred French-speaking front line pharmacists who will go work all over Canada.

For quite some time, we've been giving French-language training to doctors who will be game changers in Ontario and all over Canada. In this respect, funding is relatively okay, but as we were saying earlier, needs are changing. The needs of minorities are changing as well, and so are their expectations. These people have the right to access French-language services from pharmacists. Women have the right to give birth in French in Canada. It is therefore important for us to be able to offer our support, especially in areas where we are truly improving the quality of life for francophone communities.

That's where the infrastructure funding problem lies. Funding must go beyond the launch. The federal government gave us the ability to launch the pharmaceutical sciences program, but its medium and long-term survival must be ensured.

• (1000)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

Since I only have 10 seconds left, I thank all three witnesses for everything they shared with us.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

We will now move on to the second round.

Ms. Kusie, you have the floor.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here with us today.

I will share my time with my colleague from Quebec, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Aito, my father has two degrees from the University of Regina, but unfortunately none from the Cité universitaire francophone. He has a BA in mathematics and another in education. That's where he met my mother, who comes from Quebec, but whose family comes from the same riding of this committee's chair. That means they are Brayons, they are Acadians.

There is another interesting connection between the Conservative Party and the Franco-Saskatchewanian community. The father of our leader, Pierre Poilievre, is actually a member of a Franco-Saskatchewanian community. As for me, I have a connection with Saskatchewan, like all good Albertans, since I have at least two relatives from that province. That's also the case for our leader.

Since my father is a former University of Regina student, I would like to know more about students at the Cité universitaire francophone. Could you tell me exactly how many students come from Saskatchewan?

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: We don't necessarily keep count. We don't keep statistics like that. The Cité universitaire francophone serves the entire francophone community, irrespective of mother tongue.

We mainly teach students from other faculties, although we do have some of our own programs. The Cité has about 60 students that can call it their home, but we welcome about 1000 students from all over the University of Regina who come to follow French-language courses. We also work closely with other faculties, specif-

ically to offer a nursing science program with a bilingual option. We also work with the Faculty of Social Work, and we have agreements with other faculties. That way, we sponsor classes in science, mathematics, statistics and even in indigenization.

Our mission is therefore very specific. Usually, there is no francophone academic unit like the Cité within a mostly anglophone university. We say that it is an invention by the Franco-Saskatchewanian community, and that's why I call the Cité a product of our collective imagination. It's actually a close collaboration between the Franco-Saskatchewanian community and the University of Regina.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Aito.

Mr. Chair, I will hand it over to Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Ms. Kusie.

Mr. Frémont, with the subsidies the University of Ottawa receives, does it have a surplus or a deficit?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Right now we have a deficit.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Is it a large one?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Yes. We are one of the Ontario universities with a large deficit. We are working very hard to reduce it, but right now in Ontario, 12 of the 18 universities recognized by the government have a deficit.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Earlier you said that you were supposed to receive more money because of your francophone students. You mentioned \$3,000 per student.

• (1005)

Dr. Jacques Frémont: As part of the francophonie, we receive a special subsidy of \$3,000 per student.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: How much is that subsidy supposed to be?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: The comparable data we have suggest \$6,000 to \$7,000 per student.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So you could potentially get an additional \$3,000.

Dr. Jacques Frémont: We have a problem though. No one can explain the formula to us, or why things have ended up that way. The Wynne government was already aware of it. Since then, we have appealed to the government, but there has been no movement. Some years, our budget is balanced, but others it is not. It is getting tiring.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You said earlier that you have a shortfall of \$50 million. Is that correct?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Officially, yes. The real figure is closer to \$80 million, but regardless.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Let's say it is between \$50 million and \$80 million.

How does that compare with the shortfall for other programs, the infrastructure budget, or the overall budget?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Our operating budget is more than \$900 million, not including research funding.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): Mr. Frémont, I have to interrupt you, unfortunately; I have stretched the allotted time as much as possible.

Excuse me, Mr. Généreux. That is a good question. Perhaps Mr. Frémont will have the chance to answer it later on.

Mr. Marc Serré, from the Liberals, has the floor now. He will share his speaking time with Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

The federal government's \$4.1 billion in funding over five years has doubled since 2015. The Official Languages Act has been modernized for the first time in 50 years. We also had the strategic investment fund for post-secondary institutions, a program that supported infrastructure projects under which the University of Ottawa received several million dollars. Laurentian University also received \$25 million under that program.

Mr. Frémont, you also talked about health care, medicine, pharmacology and law. Thank goodness there is federal money for that as well. The Université de l'Ontario français received federal funding. The University of Sudbury received \$1.9 million in funding, entirely from federal coffers. By the way, thank you for your partnership with the University of Sudbury. In 2022, I also had the opportunity to announce \$5 million in funding for the Collège nordique francophone in Yellowknife, together with the head of the college, Patrick Arsenault.

I understand your frustration—

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): I'm sorry, Mr. Serré, but I have to interrupt you.

The bells are ringing for a vote in the House of Commons. Does the committee wish to continue the meeting?

Some members: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): Since everyone is in agreement, please continue, Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

Mr. Frémont, I understand your frustration. Ontario's underfunding of post-secondary institutions has been chronic in recent years. That is why they had to recruit foreign students, of which there are close to a million. Some people say the conditions that foreign students are facing in those institutions are like puppy mills.

In your requests today, you say the federal government should be responsible for programs in French.

What is the University of Ottawa's annual shortfall?

Further, if it were a federal responsibility, what would you say to the Quebec government, for instance, or to Ms. Smith from Alberta, who says she will bring in legislation to prevent the federal government from getting directly involved in post-secondary institutions and municipalities?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: As a former professor of constitutional law, I can tell you that this is not an issue for Quebec since they have a law preventing institutions from receiving funding directly

from the federal government, with the exception of funding bodies. That is good and it is clear that universities fall under provincial jurisdiction.

As to the francophone mission of francophone institutions, we suggest that you go ahead and intervene directly if necessary. You do that with the Consortium national de formation en santé, the national health training consortium, for instance.

You have to stop holding back. We saw that with what happened at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. People said universities were under provincial jurisdiction, and we asked the minister to set the institutions apart.

Mr. Marc Serré: How much would it cost the federal government annually to fully fund French-language programs?

• (1010)

Dr. Jacques Frémont: I am not saying the provinces should stop investing. What I am saying is that the federal government should be able to invest directly in minority-language institutions if necessary.

Mr. Marc Serré: Yes, but if you focus on the federal government, wouldn't that encourage the Ford government to withdraw even more in this regard?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: That is indeed the problem, and it is a challenge. On the other hand, I do not think the federal government would be unable to find a way to get the provinces to shoulder their responsibilities, for example, by designating people in good faith to negotiate.

Mr. Marc Serré: You have the floor, Mr. Drouin.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Frémont, I was a student at your university before you were in your current position and I remember that the Desmarais building and the faculty of social sciences did not exist. At that time, there was construction all over Ontario precisely because Mr. McGuinty's government had made the political choice to invest in our institutions.

I don't know if it will take another Black Thursday. I know infrastructure is needed right across Canada. Unfortunately, some governments do not understand the need to invest in our post-secondary institutions.

I tend to think that artificial intelligence will have a major impact since it will demand continuous training because jobs will disappear much too quickly.

I support you 100%. If it means mobilizing the Franco-Ontario community and francophone communities across the country once again to get our message out, we will do that. Perhaps that is what we will have to do.

Dr. Jacques Frémont: It is exhausting for people who have to constantly fight to prove that the Earth is round in this regard.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Precisely.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): You had 10 seconds left, Mr. Drouin.

The message was loud and clear.

Mr. Beaulieu has the floor now for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Something we haven't talked about is the idea that a university by and for francophones would be a good thing. When the Université de l'Ontario français was established, we saw that the University of Ottawa and other bilingual universities opposed it.

What are your thoughts on that, Mr. Frémont?

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Let me be clear. I have been the president and vice-chancellor of the University of Ottawa for eight years and we never opposed the creation of the Université de l'Ontario français. On the contrary, we have offered our assistance.

The “by and for” movement is entirely legitimate and necessary in Ontario. We recently announced a co-operation agreement with the University of Sudbury, specifically to pool our programs so twice the number of people could graduate.

In Ontario, the programs offered must be expanded in all regions. The University of Windsor, for instance, has needs in the fields of health care, social work and justice. We are starting to work with them to offer those one-year programs in French in order to train people who can work in French.

The key is expanding what is offered. The “by and for” movement helps expand what is offered. That is crucial.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Some people say that francophones tend to assimilate in bilingual institutions.

Dr. Jacques Frémont: We conducted an audit to see whether that was indeed the case and whether the University of Ottawa was in compliance with the French Language Services Act. We found that we were 98% in compliance. It was just in certain programs that the course sequence was off and an English course was needed to finish on time. That problem has since been corrected.

We are talking about a bilingual institution today, to be sure, but right now we have 250 undergraduate programs that are entirely in French and taught in French by francophones, with labs and placements in French.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's great.

Mr. Aito and Mr. Arsenault, in your requests did you ask for more universities “by and for” francophones?

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: Yes, absolutely. We rely a great deal on the co-operation we have developed with other institutions, which of course are not in Saskatchewan. So yes, we do support that approach in general.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): Thank you, Mr. Aito and Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton now has the floor for two and a half minutes. She will be the last speaker.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As we know, there is an affordability crisis in Canada right now. Young people right across the country are grappling with increasingly tough economic conditions. The challenges also include housing, food prices and career plans. It is increasingly expensive to get a post-secondary education.

Gentlemen, this study pertains to the funding of post-secondary institutions, but there can be no institutions without students. I would like to know what you would recommend to our students— young Canadians, young francophones and those who want to study in French—to deal with the affordability crisis. What could the federal government do to help them and make it possible for them to continue their studies with you?

● (1015)

Dr. Jacques Frémont: Thank you.

In my mind, funding is really the key. The important thing is not to break the education continuum of students who, after high school, decide to pursue their university education in English. In those cases, they would end up working in English and becoming detached from their sector.

Scholarship programs would be a good way to encourage students to study in French. There could also be scholarships for francophone immigrants settling in the region. Immigrants have the choice to become part of the anglophone network or the francophone community. So they could be encouraged to choose the francophone community and become part of it.

Ms. Niki Ashton: What do you think, Mr. Aito?

Mr. Emmanuel Aito: I would also say that scholarships and other forms of financial assistance are important. It is already impossible, especially in a minority context, not to provide assistance to our students.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Arsenault, you are from northern Canada, as am I. As we know, there is a real housing crisis there.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): Ms. Ashton, you have five seconds left.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Arsenault, do you have anything to add?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): Please answer very quickly, Mr. Arsenault. Otherwise, I will have to interrupt you.

Mr. Patrick Arsenault: Regarding affordability, students often have to leave the north and head to Ottawa, Toronto or Montreal. Those trips and housing are tremendously expensive, and families are separated. So we need to develop the programs we offer in the north to keep our people there.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): Thank you, Mr. Arsenault.

Thank you, gentlemen. May I remind you that if you have any information or documents to provide to help us in our study, you may send them to the clerk who will share the information with us.

I would also like to inform all committee members that the press conference that was scheduled for 10:30 has been postponed because our chair has unfortunately been unable to present the report.

In closing, I would note that, at the next meeting, we will be continuing our study of federal funding for minority-language post-secondary institutions.

Do the members of the committee wish to adjourn?

Some members: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin): Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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